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I'm Black and I'm Proud ... and Female: The Role of Gender and Black Consciousness for Black Female UCT Students in Social Movements in Cape Town.

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I'm Black and I'm Proud... and Female:
The Role of Gender and Black Consciousness for Black Female UCT
Students in Social Movements in Cape Town.

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Abstract

This study focuses on how gender roles and the Black identity affect Black women in present day social movements in Cape Town, South Africa. The goal of this project is to analyze how Black female students identify with the present day Black Consciousness Movement and their views on what roles women should engage in during social justice movements. Young Black women have forcefully been present in the current social movements such as Rhodes Must Fall and Fees Must Fall. These movements not only aim to tackle colonization, but also enforcing the inclusion of feminism and LGBTQ principles within the goals of the movements. The recent movement, Patriarchy Must Fall, puts an emphasize on ending gender inequality and Black women at the university have been engaging with the movements on the vision of an intersectional movement. Should the focus solely be on decolonization and then the violence towards gender and sexuality shall be left to question? Five Black female students express that this is not an option through personal narratives and through the utilization of their education at UCT. This study was conducted through methods of acquired conversations through snowballing at the University of Cape Town located in Rondebosch. These conversations are analyzed through the history of women's involvement in social justice movements globally, the response to gender roles in African culture, and the effects of the marginalization of race. The aim of this research paper is to better understand why it is necessary for Black women to demolish gender oppression along with white supremacy, while still finding support in the Black community and with each other.

Dedication

To My Women of Color Alliance
Who have helped me explore my Black and Gender Identity
I Plan to Offer the Same Assistance

AMANDLA! IZWE LETHU!

Acknowledgements

Thank you Colby College for funding this opportunity to study abroad in the beautiful and complex country of South Africa.

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Lastly, but not least, I want to give a large thanks to the Five Black Female UCT Students that have allotted time out of their busy schedule to meet with me. Your personal narratives have impacted me deeply and I stand in solidarity with intersectional efforts and consciousness. This project could have not been completed without your participation and I am forever grateful.

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Introduction

Statement of Intent:

This independent study project explores how Black women identify with Black Consciousness and their views on the roles of women in the current student led movements in Cape Town. I am specifically conducting my study at the University of Cape Town in Rondebosch, Cape Town. The objectives of this study are to analyze a small group of young Black female students through the exchange of personal narratives including how we personally view Black women within social movements and how we view ourselves. I am also interested in connecting the role of women on global contexts.

When I arrived in Cape Town, South Africa, I was instructed by the staff of the School of International Teaching (SIT) to research the student led protests that were occurring on campuses within the city. These student led groups included #RhodesMustFall at the University of Cape Town and #OpenStellenbosch at Stellenbosch University. As a class, we were able to learn more about #RMF through a guided tour given by Chumani Maxwele and #OpenStellenbosch through a week stay on Stellenbosch's campus. The students at the University of Cape Town were the first to strike the protest against institutional colonization in March 2015 by Maxwele throwing feces from Kylesha onto the Cecil Rhodes statue. Many campuses, including Rhodes University and the University of the Western Cape, joined in the struggle for liberation in academia and in the treatment of People of Color (POC) in these institutions. The goals of these movements include the abolishment of institutional racism, academic colonization, xenophobia, corruption of the police, outsourcing, gender policing, and most recently economic violence. Protests have moved to Parliament to eliminate the hiked fee increase of most institutions for the next academic year. I have analyzed this action as a method taken by academic institutions to eliminate the presence of POC on campus because of the recent demands for decolonization. On October 23, 2015, President Zuma has announced that proposed fee increases have been eliminated. The 0% increase is fantastic news, but there are still other issues that need to be addressed. As a Black female student, I have questioned what my role looks like in these student led movements in Post-Apartheid. Black women have had to demand a feminist valued movement on campus and in the media.

As articles are written about student movements, the prominent leaders on the cover are males. Internationally, this can be viewed in the Civil Rights Movement in the United

States. Yet, the current movement, Black Lives Matter, in the United States has changed the game by women making the headlines for being in the front lines against police brutality. Have women never been involved in these social movements? Of course they have involved. When rioting against racism, patriarchy falls hand in hand and it needs to be addressed simultaneously. Gender has played a major role for Black women in social movements through the policing of leadership roles and the lack of feminism visibility incorporated. When history is written, women are not individually recognized as much as men. This discourse must end and is beginning to in South Africa as starting in 1994, when organizations such as the African National Congress Woman's League (ANCWL) and the women of the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) demanded for representation in Parliament. This victory sets a precedent for the continuation of the inclusion of women in predominate male spheres. Yet, Black women are still finding it difficult to push against the gender norms. Therefore the study of how young Black women identify with social movements based on their race and gender are essential to analyzing how progressive South Africa is becoming through the goals of transformation.

With that said, I am personally invested in the conclusions, solutions, and questions that arise from having discussions with these five Black women. As a Black feminist, a title I have added on to my identity, I intend to be transparent in my analysis. It is very important to understand that these women are very diverse in what they academically specialize in, their lineage, their goals, and their consciousness. The fact that I am comparing such levels and layers of these multifaceted identities is hard to swallow and cannot be used simultaneously to grasp Black female student identities.

Structure of Paper:

The paper first introduces the five Black female UCT students that I have been able to share laughter and confusion with. It is important to introduce these Black women with their own personal identification. It is not only ethical, but it communicates that these women have agency. These quotes were directly dissected from the recorded conversations or emails between them and myself. Many times Black women are categorized into monocultures and I wanted to show how diverse Blackness is and has always been. As a Black woman, I cannot and will not speak on behalf of other Black women. What I do share before each personal

introduction is how I have met these women and what position(s) they hold on the campus community.

The reflection and analysis portion is separated into three categories: Black, Gender, and Social Movements. I noticed these categories throughout all my recorded conversations and decided to organize my paper within that structure. Within Black, the two subcategories are: What is Blackness? and Black Structures. Within Gender, the two subcategories are: Feminism and Gender Roles. Within Social Movements, the two subcategories are: #PatriarchyMustFall and Intersectionality. These subcategories parallel each other in each category. The reader is introduced to Blackness and Feminism, then can piece the two into #PatriarchyMustFall and question for themselves how these two liberation movements can work together. The findings and analysis is presented together because as the participants are quoted, there are many themes and issues that need to be addressed simultaneously. As the writer, I find that structure to be more beneficial for my thoughts and for the readers' ability to connect the literature review to the personal narratives.

The conclusion explores future research endeavors and readings. I have focused on the Black female student population at the University of Cape Town and I believe the next step would be either to incorporate the trans collective or the Black female population in the surrounding Black community in Cape Town.

Literary Review:

The Black Consciousness Movement

Steve Biko's "I Write What I Like", consists of numerous articles that were written (1969-1972) during Apartheid in South Africa. The title itself expresses defiance to the oppressive and violent system that specialized in censoring Black bodies. Even though the Chicago Press published this book in 1978, the major themes Biko explains are still relevant in present day South Africa and in other Black struggles worldwide. Is that a surprise? No. White supremacy continues to flourish and therefore there is still a need for Black Consciousness to rise up. Black Consciousness is paired with other themes such as White racism, White liberals, African culture, Black assimilation, and coexistence. These themes intermingle with each other throughout Biko's articles and it is very important to grasp each one. "I Write What I Like" guides the reader by introducing the change of consciousness with SASO all the

way to living proud or dying as a policed body. As professor Buhle Zuma expressed, “Biko has given us theory, but he does not tell us how to make change. That is our job”.

The Black Consciousness movement is not a singular movement. It is an ongoing liberation of Black bodies to separate themselves from the shackles of Whiteness and to begin to develop their identity as they see fit. In Apartheid South Africa, the moment the South African Students’ Organization (SASO) rejected interracial contact and decided “to crystalize the needs and aspirations of the non-white students and to seek to make known their grievances” (Biko 4), it served as a significant moment because it offered another option; a new consciousness. As the first president of SASO in 1968, Biko viewed this as long overdue and continued to monitor the feelings and progress of Black Students on Campuses in “Black Campuses and Current Feelings”. Rhodes Must Fall (#RMF) at the University of Cape Town is directly connected to Biko’s cry for Blacks to use their Blackness as a force to reject institutional racism. RMF also monitors the participation of white allies and/or white liberals in their spaces and in the struggle to decolonize education. Even though Biko emphasizes the unity of Black bodies, he also recognizes that entering Black Consciousness is an individual act. There are Blacks who have become the oppressor and are grateful to sit at the White man’s dinner table. Blackness is automatically dehumanized and to be “accepted” into White culture only continues to dehumanize Blacks. As the “father” of Black Consciousness, Biko explains to reverse this dehumanization, one must become Pro-Black, and that does not equate to Anti-White.

If white bodies identify themselves as White liberals, then they must understand their inherent privilege of being a part of the violent system against Blacks. Steve Biko is very skeptical of the White liberals because he questions why would they want to destroy a system that caters to them? Therefore, they serve as inaccurate spokespersons for Blacks and are not equipped to advise them on issues that continue to discriminate them. “The liberal must understand that the days of the Noble Savage are gone; that the blacks do not need to go-between in this struggle for their own emancipation. No true liberal should feel any resentment at the growth of black consciousness” (Biko 25). In the present day, White liberals who are asked to step down from the podium express arrogance and jump off the podium in a huff. They do not grasp that this is **not** their struggle and that the tradition of the “white man’s burden” is **extremely** protested. White bodies are connected to White racism. Biko successfully explains White racism to the POC readers who will be snapping their fingers and to the White readers who would feel slightly uncomfortable. For a physical

human body to harness so much power over other human bodies because of the color of the skin is sickening. Bodies are disposable and fragile, yet can cause so much harm because of social constructs that thrive within a society. It is a contradiction. Yet it is a reality and Black bodies can either assimilate or be destroyed.

Black assimilation into the dominant white culture has been and continues to be a survival skill. Biko's article "Some African Cultural Concepts" was prepared for many black organizations in 1971, such as the Interdenominational Association of African Ministers of Religion and the Association for the Educational and Cultural Development of the African People. He flawlessly communicates to a large group of African bodies from different sectors how African culture has been trapped by colonization and how it has taken a new form. Assimilation into this Anglo-Boer culture since 1652 has recreated values of man, wealth, property, and community, but it has not been obliterated. African culture has had to blend into the White norm, but through traditions and the mere existence of African bodies it has created a strong spiritual essence that flows between and through Black bodies. "The defiant message "say it loud! I'm black and I'm proud!". This is fast becoming our modern culture. A culture of defiance, self assertion and group pride and solidarity" (Biko 46). A culture can only become defiant if there is a strong opposition. White supremacy can be viewed as a blessing. African culture can create a modern culture that is stronger and more confident than the previous. Biko immensely believes in the contribution of Africa to the world, the power of humanity.

Steve Biko excites my mind as a Black student and I connect with his conclusions easily because of my lived experiences. But as a Black female student, I cannot help but notice how strong patriarchy is looped between his words. Where do Black woman fit in the Black Consciousness movement? Black LGBT? When Biko speaks on the coexistence of White and Black, he uses the term "man". Man has been used to include both sexes, problematic, but Biko does not illustrate that message. If he wants Blacks "to start examining why it is necessary for [Blacks] to think collectively about a problem we never created" (Biko 87), then he needs to be inclusive on whom "we" is. This issue is currently occurring with RMF and when an SIT student, Justice Namaste, asked Chumani Maxwele on a tour of the UCT campus about the inclusion of women in the movement, he diverted the question. He explained that the focus is on decolonization and then other issues within the Black community can be addressed. As a predominant male leader of the movement, his answer was convenient. What Biko and Maxwele missed is that sex and gender also need to be

liberated to end decolonization. Readers who swallow Biko's work word for word will unconsciously spread patriarchy throughout POC's movements. It is evident that these hierarchal structures have infiltrated movements in favor of liberation and must be tackled.

Biko can be described as a humanist and this title would hold true for his beliefs and visions for South Africa. He is Pro Black and not Anti White. Many may gain the understandings of the two binaries, Black and White, but what pulled me in was his calling for the POC to unify against white supremacy. "The importance of black solidarity to the various segments of the black community must not be understated ... We are all oppressed by the same system" (Biko 52). As I have expressed this statement to college students in the United States and in South Africa, I receive different responses depending on the misunderstandings and lack of trust for different ethnicities. This is what white supremacy drools for. If Blacks, ethnicities with such diversity, cannot unite then can we coexist as a race? Steve Biko asks us to be our own "gate keepers" and therefore coexistence can be pliable. It begins with becoming conscious of your identity as a human being without bondage and systematic violence.

The Role of Gender in Social Movements

Social movements are necessary when the government or institutions do not provide the people with the necessities to live a humane life. It is then time to enforce social change. Large groupings, activist and/or organizations, focus on specific issues and resist against the violation of civil rights. South Africa's university students have currently taken up protest against their educational institutions because of the inflated fee increases, along with other issues such as institutional decolonization. As articles are written about student movements such as Rhodes Must Fall (RMF) and Open Stellenbosch, the prominent leaders are categorized as determined males. Internationally, this can be echoed in the Civil Rights Movement in the United States. Yet, the current movement, Black Lives Matter, has changed the game by women making the headliners for fighting against police brutality. Have women never been centrally involved in these social movements? Of course they have been involved and they been leaders! When rioting against racism, patriarchy falls hand in hand and it needs to be addressed simultaneously. Gender has played a major role in social movements through the policing of leadership roles, the need to visibly incorporate feminism, and the increased presence of women in government positions. When history is written, women are not

individually recognized as much as men. This discourse must end and this is what my research aim to look analyze the progress of women visability.

The Civil Rights Movement is a prime example of how gender roles play out in social movements. Strong African American male leaders, Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X, are predominant figures that are taught in U.S. classrooms. Traditional male masculine leadership is set as the norm for social change. Greene focuses on how African American women have negotiated their different leadership styles within the Civil Rights Movement. African American women took leadership roles not only through the “behind the scenes” work, but also as leaders of organizations. This “behind the scenes” work includes canvassing, organizing protest, funding events, childcare, healthcare, and providing one’s body in support of protest and rallies. In Greene’s article *What’s Sex Got To Do with It: Gender and the New Black Freedom Movement Scholarship*, she uses Ella Baker to dismantle the traditional role of women. Greene (2006) explains how “Baker criticized the sexism within the Black freedom movement, describing women as the “backbone” of the movement and reminding young radicals that “when demonstrations took place and when the community acted, usually it was some women who came to the fore”” (p.13). Women are more than supportive actors; they can play the leading role too. Baker is an influential leader during the 1960s that responded to youth participation with the creation of The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). Even though women should not be forced to be “backbones” of the movement, this position is more important because it strengthens the foundation and helps “groom” the next generation of leadership. Unlike Baker’s method of leadership, having an amplified masculine male voice as the head of leadership can make “ordinary people” feel as if they have to rely on an individual instead of their own ideas. Which poses as a problem because this charismatic leader can spread corruption and produce Black bodies that do not create their own destiny.

Traditional male leadership is expressed and taught globally through the holy text: The Bible. Gender roles are continually being accepted and translated through patriarchal forums. If the Bible is interpreted literally, then men have the historical evidence to justify their roles as the head of the household. But the “original” writers of the holy text also have to be questioned in the justification for patriarchy. Examples of how this literature translates into South African society is the emphasis of the headship of the husband in marriage, praising a male figure, the minor role of women in sacred rituals, and in socio political concerns (Bekker p.2). Bekker also expresses how the Bible also communicates shared

responsibility and mutuality. Mutuality is hard to achieve when there are already sexist structures set up in the household and in the church. Individuals, who partake in movements such as the Black Consciousness Movement, will bring religious interpretations into the struggle to change social inequalities. The majority of pastors and priests are male, yet women outnumber men two to one (Greene p.167). Women are able to develop organizational skills and gain experience in community outreach, which perfectly correlates to the designated role of women in social movements. Yet, the ambitious preacher who continues to spread the masculine gospel should not automatically assume top leadership positions.

Traditional gender roles that are practiced in the household will also transfer into social movements. Both genders interchange the position of the head of the household depending on the location of residence. A woman in a rural area, such as Tshabo, can be the head of the household, while her husband works in East London to financially support the family. But as these roles become interchangeable, it is important that the South African government provide women with the rights to own property, financial access to family funds, and the ability to have custody rights to the children. The Recognition of Customary Act affords women rights to land that they never had before and the Matrimonial Property Act ensures equality between the two spouses regarding community status and their financial position, (Bekker p.6) “Old order rights” have been replaced with “New order rights” that would afford any spouse or partner to obtain security. Practices such as polygamy and *lobolo* challenge these new Acts and are foreign to the white monogamous culture that has spread since colonization in 1652. In *How Equal is Equal*, Bekker discusses how these practices challenge the right to a marriage based on equality. *Lobolo* is “the property in cash or in kind... which a prospective husband or the head of his family undertakes to give to the head of the prospective wife’s family in consideration of a customary marriage” (Bekker p.6). This has been expressed as either a cash exchange for the control of a woman or a guarantee that the Zulu woman will be treated well by her husband and his extended family. *Lobolo* has socially been viewed as an inferior role for women, but I argue that only women can define how *lobolo* affects their role in the household. Only women can define what role they want to play in activism against white supremacy. One way of disrupting white supremacy is continuing the practice of *lobolo* and keeping it relevant in modern society.

Social justice activism in Argentina has been connected to the rise of women in legislative positions. Female bodies in government seats are crucial to the incorporation of

feminist concepts into laws. These women legislators increasingly gain education and experiences on gender issues and therefore can increase the laws that advocate for equal pay, accessible healthcare, and police repression. A ripple effect of feminist change is occurring because of the involvement of women in social movements. Marco (2009) expresses how “Various women’s organizations and feminist organizations are increasingly better known and more widely recognized, as is the participation of women in emergent social movements at the end of the 1990s and the turbulent beginnings of the new millennium” (p.45).

Argentina is not the only country that has had legislative and executive positions increasingly filled by educated women. Women residing in South Africa have forced their inclusion into Parliament through consistent conferences and the creation of women based organizations. Women were already advocating for equality in unions, in households, and in healthcare.

As Apartheid was crumbling and a new Constitution was being drafted, it was important for women to be involved in the process of creating rights that would effect how gender would be policed in future society. These organizations included the African National Congress Woman’s League (ANCWL) and the women of the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU). In 1991, these women demanded affirmative action regulations to ensure that at least one third of the ANC seats were held by women (Meer 2010). This demand was overruled by the ANC because some believed that “there were few women of leadership quality, and that women must prove themselves” (Meer 2010). Of course this angered the ANCWL and they rebutted with collecting over a million signatures from women in support of gender liberation. For the first democratic elections in 1994, the ANC was victorious and 101 seats of the 400 in the national assembly were resigned for women. Therefore women have also been victorious in the fight for political representation. Even though the opposition of the male gender pushed female members to accomplish higher achievements, the support of males would have been preferred. Many members from COSATU and the Women’s National Coalition (WNC) have left to Parliament positions and leadership has been pulled from grassroots organizations that focused on issues only pertaining to women: sexual abuse, abortion rights, domestic violence, childcare, and contraceptives. Gender roles in government positions have forced women to focus on national or local issues. Without the full support of men in these positions, women in Argentina, South Africa, and around the globe struggle with engaging in both political and personal gender issues.

Steve Biko's *I Write What I Like* (1978) urges Black bodies, including all people of color (POC), to reject white supremacy and to create a society, movements, and identity on their own terms. Yet, his literature does not include vocabulary that is inclusive of women. Many argue that obviously POC women are a part of the Black Consciousness Movement, but the lack of recognition of gender reflects the lack in female POC representation in movements. In the United States during the 1960s, Black women were stuck in between the Civil Rights movement and the Women's liberation movement. Black women were either too Black for the women's liberation that were dominated by white "feminist" or too female for the Civil Rights agenda that was dominated by "natural" Black male leaders. South Africa poses the same dilemma in the Anti Apartheid movement and current student movements on campus. Meer explains how these mainstream movements were interested in women's involvement for the quota, but were not interested in them taking leadership roles. This was expressed through the heavy workload placed onto woman at home and in the workplace. Acting as an activist for social, political, and economic issues leave women vulnerable, physically and emotionally, to unsafe environments because of this inferiority complex placed onto them. Female bodies being placed in the forefront of movements can potentially be violent. It is important therefore for feminism to be stated as a priority for the physical and emotional safety of female bodies. In #OpenStellenbosch, this has definitely been a concern for the objectives of the movement. Feminism has been included because women and men should equally be represented in the struggle for liberation. But students do not feel comfortable with the term because of the misunderstanding of an anti-male presence or a focus on only white female oppression. Not that these assumptions and/or accusations are not valid, but these misunderstandings have no space in these student led movements. They have switched the term to "womanism" to remove the negative stigmas connected to modern feminism. To continue to reject these negative stigmas, men need to take active roles in not speaking for women in all spaces and take on responsibility in traditionally female tasks. "[If] we both go out to work, but when we get home it is my time to rest and my wife's time to carry on working, I don't think the struggle will go on", expressed a male trade unionists when asked if women's roles at home were exploitative (Meer 2010). The struggle for social change will not progress if gender is not viewed as fluid and flexible.

How women personally identify with the term "feminism" will affect how they interact within social movements and with other women. In *New Wave or Second Stage? Attitudes of College Women Toward Feminism*, Renzetti conducts a study on the apparent

lack of feminist consciousness and support of female students on American campuses. Through T tests and surveys she held the study at St. Johns University, a predominant white and Catholic institution. Her results were that female students who were juniors/seniors, who held traditional majors (humanities), and experienced personal sex and gender discrimination held more feminist ideas. She concluded that most respondents are aware of gender equality and gender roles, yet they are hesitant to identify as feminist. Due to many perceptions of feminism, positive and negative, women turn to individualism instead of a group to achieve feminist goals. The expectation of POC to be in solidarity is as ridiculous as expecting all women to have solidarity. Not only did its applicant pools limit this study, but also it continues the assumption that feminism is only a white space. Many POC have been wary of joining feminist groups because of exclusion of issues that pertain to them. Greene critically informs readers ways that patriarchy and white supremacy collectively enforce white women's privilege and Black women's subordination. In movements such as #RhodesMustFall, Black woman can connect better with each other than with white women because of the shared experiences of personal racial and sex discrimination. Therefore, these women are more likely to be hyper aware of discrimination of gender. Shared personal experiences play a huge factor in how women unite to destroy the shackles that are placed on their gender identity. Individuality is a reality and connects to the theory of Darwinism. The idea that women will be able to survive by stepping on the feet of other women is concerning. Women as a collective can accomplish large achievements, as women of South Africa have proved during and after Apartheid. Renzetti reassures that negative images of feminism were not the collective reason for the lack of participation, but it still poses as an issue for women globally when deciding to join women's liberation movements. Gender in social justice movements does not only focus on the female and male binary. Within this binary, there are micro channels that focus on how women connect with each other and what actions they decide to put into action.

As a Black female student and a Black feminist, gender plays a huge role in educational, social, political, economical, and personal spaces. The violence against women in all of these spaces proves that gender equality needs to be legalized and socialized. Social movements will continue to occur in a white supremacist society. The struggle for liberation and transformation won't progress if a woman cannot lead a crowd to protest against government injustices. As these writers navigate through different countries and the feminist ideas that reside there, there cannot be one conclusive statement on how gender plays out in

social movements. Patriarchy is a Westernized term that not all women and men can connect with even though those systems are dominating many spheres of power. As human bodies in academia, it is essential to grasp one's positionality in gendered discussions. Once gender is free to be fluid and flexible, individuals will gain more space to think for themselves, as Greene hints to.

Methodology

I used the methods of emailing Black women from the current movements through snowballing for my interviews. My advisor, Koni Benson, provided me with a foundation of women to speak with and then the conversations began rolling from there. I had previously tried to contact Black women involved in #PatriarchyMustFall on the social media website, Facebook, but I did not receive any replies. Emma Arogundade, a faculty member of SIT, had sent me an event that was created by #PatriarchyMustFall and I used that as a platform to message these women. When messaging these Black women, it was very important for me to be very transparent on my academic agenda and my positionality. Both Koni and Emma assured me that if I communicate that from the beginning with these women and express how I am personally invested in this project, which I very much am, then I will be able to have these conversations. On my campus, Colby College, I am the co-president of the Women of Color Alliance (WOCA) and I am very much interested in strategies and personal experiences of these women attending universities in Cape Town. I want to empower the Women of Color (WOC) at my academic institution and I want to bring back tools from how Black women here relate and survive in the BCM and gender policing in South Africa. The email varied depending on who gave me the contact, but it looked like this:

Good evening!

Thank you for responding to the email! I have been having a difficult time securing potential wonderful women to have wonderful conversations with ha ha. Koni has recently gained the title "Aaliyah's advisor" and I am grateful to have her as a resource. I am interested in having conversations with Black women reflecting on how gender roles and Black Consciousness relating to the current social movements aka #RMF #OpenStellenbosch #ProtestandPass and the list goes on. Obviously I can have these conversations with women back home, but it is important for me personally to exchange ideas and observations with Black women here. Even though I may share gender and race (maybe sexuality) with these women, my nationality is not shared. I am American and I am aware of my privilege and postionality. I am also aware that South Africa's and the United States share very similar social justice

issues. I wanna talk about these issues and decided to turn my personal interest to benefit me by writing about them for an academic grade. Even then, that is problematic. I would love to know what you think and if you would be keen to have these conversations with me. What is your identity (in any way you define identity)? Looking forward to hearing from you,

As I was writing my ISP proposal, I was worried that I would not be able to talk with UCT students because of the protest occurring on campus and in Cape Town and the upcoming exams. I knew that I was not a priority and decided to switch my focus to young, preferably 20s, Black women in the Rondebosch area. I was going to randomly approach women on Main Road near the shopping centers. I was able to attract Black women already because of my mint green braid extensions. My focus group changed back to students during my Board Review session when my academic advisor, Ismail, assured me that I would be able to speak to students through connections with my advisor.

My goal was to interview at least seven women, but with the given time and given circumstances of the exam period of UCT, I was not able to reach that goal. Nevertheless, my five interviews provided more than enough diverse responses. I intentionally interviewed Black women who are aware of Steve Biko and the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM). I assumed that the circles that these women socially navigate through would include other females that share the same interest and/or knowledge. My assumption was correct and I was able to contact women who were aware of the BCM, whether involved with the movements or not.

During these interviews, these women and I participated in guided conversations¹. I believe guided conversations are more beneficial than pre set questions because it will allow for the interviewee and I to begin a relationship and to foster an open atmosphere. The strengths of using this methods allows for an “honest” interaction between two human beings. Honest being that both the interviewer and the interviewee are having a dialogue where each party is receiving knowledge. Kvale in “InterViews”, specifically the section “The Interview Conversation”, expresses that the interview is a based on human interaction and mutual interest between two partners that will engage in an evolving dialogue, which have to take into consideration on the positionality of each individual in the “lived worlds” (Kvale 125). Our “lived worlds” have similarities, but of course many difference and I want to

¹ See Appendix A

acknowledge that. I want my interviewees to also gain knowledge on my methods and strategies of bringing awareness to the violence against POC bodies in the United States. This guided conversation shall be symbiotic. The women had complete control over the location and time of the meeting. I have met these women on campus and at student residences. I wanted to make sure that they were comfortable and I could become acquainted with the university property. These conversations were recorded through the program, QuickTime, and will be deleted before arrival to the United States. I had previously been taught in my ethnography class that transcribing and interview is the best method to ethically represent participants. I was taught a new method during an SIT workshop on how to transcribe effectively within an allotted time period. I decided to still transcribe my interviews whole because these intellectual Black women were sharing such vital information that I could have not summarized.

The part of my identity that can express “power at play” is my nationality: American. Even though these Black women will be able to connect with my Blackness and my gender, my privilege as an American can create a barrier. I have the economic support to travel to another country to interview other Black women on social movements, when there are already Black women in the United States to interview. My bias as a Black female student also has an effect on my participants and on my paper. These conversations are not particularly new in terms of vocabulary and theory. I am advantaged in the sense I can articulate effectively with these Black women about intersectional oppression. How I relate to Black men can reflect in my paper. I will pay particular attention to how I represent Black men in this paper and how I communicate with these Black female students. My participants can be vulnerable to emotional cues based on their experiences with the current social movements and how society interacts with them based on their gender. How I incorporate my participants’ identities into my paper can also be harmful. Since my target participant pools are young Black females that are enrolled in university, their participation can be harmful to their student and activist identities. To protect these identities, I have used pseudonyms within my paper. I will not be sharing this academic paper with the South African community physically, but these Black women have the ability to share it with whomever. This academic paper will be shared on the SIT database and I cannot ensure its privacy on the Internet. But through my methods of anonymity, I am protecting the confidentiality of this paper. Agreeing to meet with me during exam period equates to the lost on potential study sessions. I have not taken their time for granted and I efficiently worked around their schedules through making

my time flexible. I negotiated informed consent by giving my participants a consent form to sign. My consent form is in English and that didn't cause any problems for my participants. I assumed that English was a part of their learned languages because academic lectures are taught in English at the University of Cape Town. I would have had my consent form translated in isiXhosa or any other language that was desired by my participants.

The limitations of this study is the short time period, a month, to develop the themes of Blackness and Gender into the current student led social movements. Arriving in Cape Town in late August also places my understandings and movement within these social movements at a limited perspective. The extended exam period at the university has also influenced the women that could participate.

Introduction to Five Black Women²

Kerry: A young women originally from Durban who choose our meeting location at the Rhodes Memorial site on UCT campus. I found this not only ironic, but also beautiful to speak upon decolonization at a location that was created to praise Rhodes. She comes here to clear her mind.

“On the question of identity, being of South African Indian origin, this question still plagues me. I do identify as female and Indian. However, I feel that I am Black, because I believe everything in opposition (or everything that is other) to White is Black. I believe I am more South African than Indian. The Indianess in my identity is mostly what has been historically subscribed to me by virtue of my skin colour and societal understandings of race. To me it means having a unique history/heritage of sorts that adds interesting layers to who I am and gives me a different/unique/confusing position to other South Africans with regards to our history and present day politics. I do not subscribe to the South African Indian culture for various reasons, but I acknowledge it and am very selective about what to make inclusive in my identity.”

Naledi: During a study break, Naledi was able to join me in laughs and moments of confusion when it came to Black men. She offered me Oreos and I offered her apples.

“I identify as Xhosa young woman, however I am an African first before my tribe. I am a product of Christian and African values, which I try to live by on a day to day basis, those values are love and Ubuntu.”

Blossom: With big beautiful Afros, we conversed on a bench near the Molly Blackburn Gathering Hall. My questions left her speechless at moments, but those are the moments where we realized how complex these movements are.

² Pseudonyms were applied

“Identity? Black South African womyn!”

Spokazi: With the help of Kerry, I was able to find this young woman on her laptop in the food court. She answered every question with confidence and with a straight posture. After the interview we spent at least 2 hours giggling about what goes bumping in the night.

“I am a Black female in South Africa. I am heterosexual.”

Thuli: Luckily I was able to not only have conversation with Thuli, but also have an avocado filled lunch with her at my advisor’s home. As she spoke, you could tell she was reflecting on her own experiences as she answered my follow up questions.

“I grew up in Joburg, Johannesburg. My mom is from England, she is White, and my dad is from Swaziland, he is Black. I grew up in Joburg, Johannesburg. My mom is from England, she is White, and my dad is from Swaziland, he is Black... I think um, it is a complicated one, I guess you can say I am Biko Black in the sense of if the system you are living in is not operating according to you as the center then you’re Black. So you are of Colour and you are not White, then the space is not made to work for you so that’s what I understand Blackness to be... So in identifying as Black, also identifying as having Colourist privilege and also like my relationship to Whiteness means I have been brought up in a particular way where that often benefits me. Like I have forms of White cultural capital, you can call it that, I grew up in an English speaking home and so in terms of education I am a great candidate for complete assimilation in many ways. I suppose Blackness is a way of how those things aren’t really enough.

Research Findings and Analysis

BLACK

What is Blackness?

According to Biko, the father of the Black Consciousness Movement, Blackness is defined in the opposition of Whiteness. As a South African scholar, activist, and humanist during the struggle against Apartheid, he urged Black bodies to reject what White supremacy has enforced in African society and specifically in the African psyche. The awakening of Black Consciousness is very relevant in terms of Black students attending Predominant White Institutions (PWI) as they are surrounded by European architecture, White elitist culture, and an exclusionary education system. It is repulsing to gain the privilege, granted by a public institution that supports institutional racism, to prosper academically. Higher education forces students to question what land was purchased to build this beautiful campus? What historical

perspective are textbooks and lectures aimed to acknowledge? Most importantly it forces students to question their own identity on a new platform. Specifically these five Black women have risen to the occasion and have been creating spaces and forums, whether publicly or privately, to discuss academic, social, economical, political, and physical identities in relation to Blackness. But what is the foundation of Black identity? When asked to define Blackness, the Black women referred to their own personal experiences.

Black Female UCT Students Kerry and Thuli automatically related to the Blackness that Biko defined. Yet both women would not be prescribed as the Black identity of Apartheid South Africa. They acknowledge their cultural ancestry, but make it clear that any identity that is the opposition of Whiteness is Black. Even though Thuli can assimilate into White culture through her “White cultural capital” and her ability to speak fluid English, she will always be denied and categorized as other because of the color of her skin and the texture of her hair. As an Indian woman, Kerry stresses how Apartheid South Africa’s ruling of separating race into categories is a part of the divide and rule tactic. These categories include, Indian, Coloured, Black, and White. Biko agrees with the white regime’s need to create division within the Black community and explains why all classifications other than White, are Black.

1. We are oppressed by the same system.
2. That we are oppressed to varying degrees is a deliberate design to stratify us not only socially but also in terms of aspirations.
3. Therefore it is to be expected that in terms of the enemy’s plan there must be this suspicion and that if we are committed to the problem of emancipation to the same degree it is part of our duty to bring the attention of the black people the deliberateness of the enemy’s subjugation scheme.
4. That we should go on with our programme, attracting to it only committed people and not just those eager to see an equitable distribution of groups amongst our ranks. This is a game common amongst liberals. The one criterion that must govern all our action is commitment. (p.52)

This design is deliberate and these two women have found comfort in friendship with Black women and within Black communities on UCT campus. Interestingly, Black Female UCT Students Naledi, Blossom, and Spokazi do not define Blackness in relation to Biko. Which I connect to the fact that African bodies are automatically oppressed; therefore there isn’t any privilege to question in relation to Whiteness. The moment they are birthed into a White supremacist society, there is no need to explain their racial identity. These women identify as Xhosa and relate to Blackness in terms of skin color and what stigmas are communicated

because of the presence of melanin. Spokazi thinks “Blackness is more of an emotion, more of a presence than anything”. This presence is spoken in not only the physical sense, but also the implications that Black skin communicates to surrounding parties. Blossom shared her personal experience of walking into spaces where she was forced to be hyper aware of her skin color, her presence. Being Black places negative characteristics on her identity such as her assumed placement in a lower economic class. Black people have a disadvantage in presently possessing a strong economic capital because of the affirmative action policies aimed towards White bodies. To assume her economic class supports historical aggressions towards Blacks, but it completely ignores the complexities and diversity of the Black population. These micro aggressions towards Black bodies stem from pure ignorance based on skin color.

The pigmentation of the hypodermis cannot biologically, physically, and socially act as an indicator of race. In *Race Without Color* (1994), Jared Diamond begins his article with the statement, “Basing race on body chemistry makes no more sense than basing race on appearance-but at least you get to move the membership around” (p.125). Anthropologists have come to the realization that you cannot distinguish and categorize race based on what the eye objectively views. One scientific procedure would classify Xhosa people with Swedes rather than Nigerians when targeting a specific characteristic, antimalarial genes. He analyzes such procedures that use human characteristics that are not visible, such as disease resistance, digestion, fingerprints, and genes. These characteristics deify the groupings of humans according to skin color. They instead place humans in groups according to sexual selection, to enhance survival, and with groups that serve no purpose of all. Trying to categorize human bodies not only create a hierarchy, but also socially permits the discrimination towards certain bodies. With this evidence, I cannot attribute skin color to the definition of Blackness because race is a social construct. Yet, I know race translates into real experiences in today’s society. The experience of all social and structural oppression within a White supremacist society is what I would contribute to the definition of Blackness and all Black Female UCT Students would agree with and relate to those experiences.

Two terms that were continuously brought up during these conversations were “oppression” and “struggle”. Whether speaking upon the different shades of Blackness or the systems that are created against Black people, these words highlighted what it emotionally, mentally, and physically means to be Black. To be oppressed means that struggling is inevitable within these racial systems. Spokati expressed that being Black is a gift that many

people have not activated, but it may be because as Black people we are inhibited by the oppression that is placed upon us.

“[Blackness] allows for such hope and that for me would be Blackness if I had to think about it. It is a presence of a hope, a fight, a struggle. But not a struggle in the sense that we are all falling, but struggling to pick ourselves back up, to be to the place where we truly deserve.”

Black bodies deserve to reside in a society where they are able to emancipate themselves from the shackles that oppress them. I believe it begins with the awakening of the Black Consciousness or becoming “Woke”. As Black students, the awakening of this consciousness is more available to them in relation to their family members, peers, and young adults that have not been fortunate to gain access to theoretical race curriculums and literature. What Blackness translates to these five Black women may not translate to their peers back in the townships, suburban, and rural areas. How can this need of unlocking this psyche be expressed within the Black community? Thuli expresses how her family dynamics do not reflect the realities of racial dynamics.

“My parents brought us up with no sense of consciousness. Were just this random post race family and it took me a very long time to realize that I was just Black. It is hard, it is still hard to deal with those issues when you can’t actually bring them back to your parents.”

When Black Consciousness does not correlate with the systems and culture that these women have been raised with, it is an intense process to begin. During these conversations it was clear that these women are still analyzing and developing what the Black identity means in relation to their own bodies and personal values.

Black Systems

“Yes we are Black, yes we are all Black, yes we are all oppressed, but we are just more oppressed! We are oppressed by the system and our own people!”
- Naledi

In terms of Blackness, Naledi focused on the African systems that she continuously feels she is oppressed by as a woman. As a Xhosa woman, the men in her family have control over economic and traditional assets. She described that if she were to marry and have children, in the case of her husband’s death she wouldn’t traditionally be able to address the ancestors on

her own capacity because of her sex. Even though those are her children, she does not share the same ancestors with her kin. The men that are related to her husband will take on the duty to commence the ceremony, while she can handle other tasks such as cooking for the occasion. Another example that Naledi provided was that if her parents became deceased with no will, her brother who is currently eight years old would inherit the estate and decide how to distribute it. She is proud to identify as a Xhosa woman, an African woman, but these structures in her culture do not translate to a system that is based on values of equality.

Kerry also speaks upon her relationship with her Indian culture. In the last six months she had begun to analyze her parent's marriage. She describes her strong mother interacting with her father who can act patriarchal towards her. Even though she grew up not being pressured by her father to prescribe towards certain gender roles, she has family members who treasure boys over girls, believe in arranged marriages, and send males to school rather females. She knows that she should be having these conversations with her family, but she is still trying to understand.

What I believe to be the underlying question is how do I, as a Black woman, fit into my Black culture when my values aren't corresponding with my household, my culture, and my society? Because Blackness in the opposition to Whiteness, Black culture is usually compared to what it is not. But it is important to question how Blackness operates within itself. If these Black women do not want to continue to operate within their culture as the same agents, then do they take on the task of becoming the "educator" or do they leave Blackness altogether? "Do I then forfeit that for Blackness altogether? And if that is the case then the Blackness is technically only freeing the man and not the woman", expresses Naledi. Becoming the "educator" is not the responsibility of Black women. In terms of Black women, I am specifically speaking of "Woke" Black women. But if Black women want to have these conversations with Black men and their kin about these issues, then that is their choice too. This forum is spoken in terms of "educating" others within the institution and also with one's family that may be supporting them financially and emotionally. "Educating" must be placed in quotations because what methods of teaching are taught? What ideals are being brought into African households? Do these ideals correlate with the religious views that are practiced within the household?

Bekker (2007) studies a legal- anthropological perspective on the status of African women in South Africa. Even though he is in the Department of private law at the University of Pretoria, he finds space to give his misplaced opinions and generalizations on African

women and men. His research on factual rights of African women is more desired for this forum. What I found interesting was his connection to religious literature and cultural structures. Depending on which perspective of Christianity and the holy text are practiced, patriarchal structures can influence structures of the household. “In particular, the marriage formulary which emphasizes the headship of the husband in marriage, could also have contributed to the fact that patriarchy is regarded as alive and well in South Africa” (p.2). Naledi resides in a Christian Xhosa household and if her household translates the Bible in an unconscious patriarchal manner, then the discussion of gender equality will possess conflicts. When Kerry went with her male friend to a creamery to acquire dessert, her male friend decided that he was going to get a milkshake because eating ice cream is feminine. He explained “God made women to be this way and God made man to be this way”. His connection to femininity and ice cream can be in relation to the media representation of women eating ice cream when they are in a distressed mood. In terms of his religious response, he was able to incorporate faith to explain his choice of dessert. Religion is a part of the racial and gender politics because it contributes to the psyche of Black bodies. Gqola (2001) explains in her discourse on the Black Consciousness Movement that “Black Consciousness was highly critical of the role that Christianity had played in the subjugation and pacification of Black people and therefore sought to find an alternative to the mainstream white version of Christianity which had been used to justify first colonization and then Apartheid” (p.133). Having faith in a higher entity during moments of struggle is comforting. When a Black mother doesn’t know how she is going to provide food for her children, praying to God for strength and opportunity is not unusual. But the strength of religion, specifically Christianity, and its colonial history has no place in the current movements if they are not able to be flexible. With present day African systems that include patriarchal ideals and religious influences that may also perpetuate patriarchy, it has the possibility to separate the household depending on new feminist theories.

GENDER

Feminism

“We learned our feminism through hearing stuff, but it really didn’t make sense to me because it sounded so like over the place...I don’t understand what it means. I don’t think

there is a homogenous kind of meaning. But I do feel like I am becoming more conscious of gender issues.”- Kerry

“I can never compare my struggle to the white women’s struggle... I will follow our Black feminism because White women’s battle is different than us. Also they are fighting with the white man who has the power and the Black man doesn’t really have power. The reason Black men are oppressing us is because it is the only place where they can exert power. Now a White man can exert power from wherever he wants and the White woman just wants a share of that power. So me and the White women, I don’t think we are fighting the same-I just want a voice.”- Naledi

“There is a difference between a white woman and a Black woman, we don’t have the same struggles.”- Blossom

“We all have a theoretical idea of what feminism is, but in society it is very different and it’s kind of tricky for me to say I want to define it, where as it is not what I am seeing.”
-Spokazi

“White feminism or the neutral feminism sees these problems of gender construction and sex and then Black women are not included in that, because of that we have a Black feminism. But the problem is that the origin of that feminism is from a Western departure point.”
-Thuli

It is important, as the writer, to allow the space for each participant to be presented, especially in the section of feminism. By quoting each individual’s thought process on feminism (not to express it as static), I am able to grasp certain themes such as nonhomogeneous, struggle, Whiteness, White women, White men, Black feminism, Western influence, and women.

When asked what feminism is, I did not receive a conclusive answer. The fact that there is Black feminism stresses how the idea of feminism is not homogenous. In theory, the goal of feminism is gender equality and perpetuates women empowerment. If there isn’t gender equality, that must mean that one gender is oppressed based on the privilege of the other. Women struggle to fight against male privilege and together have worked with each other to advocate for structures such as equal pay and a safe workplace. Within this struggle there are other factors such as race, class, and religion that do not speak true to inclusion of all women. When Renzetti (1987) conducted a study on the apparent lack of feminist consciousness and support of female students on American campuses, it is not just about the class year or the major that were being studied by these women. It relates back to the different racial oppressions that are faced by the diverse women that are “included” in this

women's liberation. Not only do these five Black women need to advocate for decolonization because their livelihood depends on it, but also the liberation of women in society. Levels of oppression shouldn't be a competition, but Black women win this challenge in relation to White women. Kerry and Spokazi identify as not feminist. Naledi and Thuli identify as Black feminist. Blossom is still figuring out her stance on feminism. These women understand the benefits of feminism in theory, but they cannot accept the definition for verbatim when it is geared towards White women.

“White feminism” has become the term that is used in POC communities when speaking upon the feminist movement. It was not a surprise that the students of #OpenStellenbosch have decided to switch the term to “womanist” when referring to the intersectionality of the movement. Black women have created their own safe spaces and guided conversations to incorporate issues and concerns that relate to them. At my institution there are two feminist groups, Feminist Alliance and the Women of Color Alliance (WOCA). When the issue of body image is discussed in public forums on campus, anorexia and bulimia dominate the forum. But within Women of Color (WOC) spaces, body image is discussed in relation to obesity, a lack of or desire of body curvature, and in relation to health concerns such as diabetes and high blood pressure. These concerns can be interchangeable within both groups, but they are not simultaneously produced to the public, which is a PWI. The difference between the United States and South Africa is that Black Americans are the minority of the population. For a PWI, such as the University of Cape Town, to have White feminism as the dominant voice in a majority Black population is highly problematic. When a White female friend of Blossom wanted to attend a #PatriarchyMustFall meeting and Blossom was confused why her attendance was not permitted because obviously White women are affected by patriarchal structures. Black woman explained to her that this space was purely for Black women because as a group we have different struggles than her friend. In relation to Biko, he advocates the policing of White bodies and White allies into POC spaces. Black women are able to discuss gender inequality and connect it to their relationships with Black men. Naledi explains flawlessly the hierarchal structures of the gender/race binary. How White women relate to White men is different than how Black women relate to White men because of racial oppressive systems geared towards Blacks. Black women have been able to find comfort and empowerment within POC spaces to discuss these structures.

There is this discourse that appeared throughout these conversation that questioned if women are empowering women outside of the meetings. Phrases such as “woman code”, “hate on”, “perpetuated by women”, “not very trusting of women”, and “I don’t have a lot of female friends”. In comparison to men, do women have a “women code”? Women are capable of perpetuating emotional and physical violence towards other women. Is it a competition within the female sex to gain the most power since they cannot extract that power from males? Specifically within the Black community, these five Black women comment on how women have interacted with them and what impact was established. Kerry expressed,

“I don’t have a lot of female friends mostly because of my experiences in the all girls school...I still have a lot of insecurities that block me from connecting and building deep connections with many girls. I have a few. So the female friends that I do have are good friendships and I realized that the friends, the female friends that I do have are very different from me. They are very powerful, they are very strong, and I realized that the women I do struggle with or feel uncomfortable around are the ones that actually reflect my own characteristics or fears.”

Thuli expressed, “I also was perpetuated by women in the high school environment”. Creating insecurities is the opposite of women empowerment and instead women gaining their empowerment from tearing the crowns off of other women. Naledi would respond to this issue, “I think it is time for Black women to stand together and put all the bullshit aside. We fight against each other”. As I have stated in the role of gender in social movements literary section, the expectation of POC to be in solidarity is as ridiculous as expecting all women to have solidarity. But it is not ridiculous for Black women to feel support from the Black community.

This Black community includes Black men. In terms of feminism, the differences on how Black men relate to White and Black women are discussed in many conversations. All five Black Female UCT Students are flaunting their natural hair textures, in comparison to other Black women that use chemical treatments to assimilate to the White standard of beauty. Naledi questions the contradictions of Black men dating White women when they have communicated to Black women to embrace their natural hair textures. “What is it about me as a Black woman that I do not have that the White woman has? Is it then my Blackness that makes me less attractive or is it then something else?” Specifically, men of the Pan African society have promoted the African standard of beauty to her. This is another form of insecurity that goes against women empowerment. White beauty is hyper normalized through

media, literature, social networks, and advertisement. As I walk into Clicks to find hair products for natural hair, either there is a very small section compared to the lengthy hair care aisle for “non-kinky” textures or most products are chemical treatments. Society communicates that Blackness is not beautiful and if Black men are placing Whiteness as the superior race, then they do not support Black feminism. If women are not held as equal agents within the women’s liberation movement, can feminism be used as a tool to advocate for decolonization? No, but Black feminism can.

Black feminism has been created in response to Western social constructions and explains why many of the Black Female UCT Students do not apply the literal definition to their lived experiences. When these Black women are engaging with Black men in conversations surrounding feminism and patriarchy, there are numerous misunderstandings in terms of the negative concept of women being “man haters”, assuming feminism is a homogenous definition that can be applied to all South African women, and that there is a certain vocabulary to be used in these gatherings. “[Black men] continue to say the wrong things according to some standard and I have a feeling that we’re operating to something that that is intended to clash when it is applied to us”, reveals Thuli. For example, Kerry described how her UCT peers are very articulate and they have the vocabulary to understand feminism, but the women in her personal life do not have the academic language but they are very much living their life according to Black feminist theory. When speaking and understanding these concepts, what interpretations are promoted? Thuli shared a chapter by Oyèrónké Oyěwùmí (1997) in her book The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses. Oyěwùmí explains in her chapter, *Visualizing the Body: Western Theories and African Subjects*, that Western theory is concerned and focused on the visual sense and apply it to interpretations of “the social body” or “the body politic”, while the rest of the world include and may prioritize other senses in interpreting the human body. Anthropology and its method of ethnography is inherently based on understanding “Other” cultures based on human interaction by the naked eye. In terms of feminist theory, women populating these areas have criticized many Western structures for having an androcentric focus on body politics. With that said, why are this feminist theory applied to African systems and societies? All Black Female UCT Students sense that there is a disconnection between their society and the politics of gender equality. After reading this chapter, Thuli

“Feel[s] like we are wrong to just try and apply a Western model because we barely have an understanding of what we had before that became fucked up. I feel like if we understood where our society comes from in a pre colonial way then we would understand the interaction with Western gender construction with our society.”

Diverting back to *Black Structures*, when Naledi questioned if she had to forfeit her Blackness altogether, Thuli provides an answer. Decolonization is not given priority to only race structures. The decolonization of gender needs to also be prioritized, especially for and by WOC. If we can understand as Black women the lens that have been applied to our academic language and our theory foundations, then we can truly have a Black feminism (or maybe replace or eliminate the term) that Black women and men can recognize.

How long do Black women have to unpack these gender concepts into African systems? As student led movements are focusing on social, economic, and mental decolonization, do Black women have the allotted time to reconstruct feminism into an ideal Black feminism? Spokazi believes that feminism is deviating from the true issue of decolonization. She also believes that nitpicking at these movements can deviate from the common goal and “we can worry about it later”. Spokazi is very dedicated to the equality of gender, but does not stand for the current feminism. Naledi would disagree. “If patriarchy is not addressed now, then it will be lost when the goal of colonization will be achieved. Women need to take advantage of it now, even though there is a chance of it dividing the movement”. The current movement can be compared to the Anti Apartheid movement in the 20th century. When a draft of a new Constitution was in process, women of the ANCWL and COSATU, with the support of numerous non-profit organizations, demanded inclusion in the finalization of the document along with seats in Parliament (Meer 2010). These groups were successful and women apart of #RMF, #FeesMustFall, and #PatriarchyMustFall have also been successful when demanding to be apart of the drafted demands for universities and future regulations in Parliament. Women must assert themselves in these spaces to be included in future accomplishments. Even though there are doubts about where feminism belongs in these current social movements, in the public sphere, and in the households, Black women are discovering what gender means to them and fighting to make it known. That is what matters.

Gender Roles

As these five Black Female UCT Students explore gender politics, gender roles have been discussed on the basis of a Black female's role in the social justice movements, the role of Black women in the household, and the role of women in modern society. Gender is a code that humans begin to decode from a young age. Whether that is when you are approached by the opposite sex with sexual intensions at a young age or when a parent demands that you complete a task that your fe/male sibling doesn't need to stress. Thuli and Kerry express this awakening in comparison to race.

“You have conversations with men about, with Black men, about gender and there is this resistance to acknowledge it as about race or anything that may mean something of the same weight as racism. I think the thing with gender is that you cannot live your life without being subjugated to gender in any way. It's in your domestic space, it's in the street, it's everywhere. So people who aren't “Woke” still know about sexism and still feel sexism.”
-Thuli

Gender is everywhere and like race, it is a social construct that is used to police and discriminate against human bodies. Key words that have been used in circulation by these women are “political”, “tool”, “weapon”, “submissive”, “masculine”, “feminine”, and “structure”. Kerry “think[s] that within Blackness, gender is one of the tools that is used to sort of structure, subjugate, demand, [and] to serve that white supremacy agenda”. I believe it also connects back to her comment in *What is Blackness?*, on the divide and conquer tactic towards POC. Gender has definitely within the Black community at university continues to act as a barrier between both sexes. If gender serves as a social construct then the gender roles that are created within them are also social constructs. With that said, gender roles can be demolished. Within Black Feminism, gender is an intersectional concept. This includes the non-cis heterosexual narrative of what it visually and mentally means to be a woman or male. When Kerry was explaining to her male friend, who stated that ice cream was feminine, that gender is not pre determined, she provided him with a metaphor.

“I remember we were looking at a vase, a cup, and like this thing was made to form a function but you can use it in different ways. Like you can attach different roles for it. I can put it on the table, I can put it in the cubbert, I can put different things, and so the function is that I put something in it right? But I can do different things to it, use it in different ways, put different things in it, the same way as a human being would work.”

When women's roles were questioned, Kerry and Spokazi declared the expected role to be submissive. Naledi and Blossom spoke upon specifically the culture at their household. Thuli spoke upon gender roles in relation to the social movements.

Kerry expresses how Indian culture forces a women to be very submissive. Even though she was able to enjoy certain privileges of not having to conform to these gender roles as she was growing up, her mother still perpetuated them onto her. She has “a very very deep fear of ending up submissive to men”. As explained earlier, she doesn’t surround herself with women who possess such traits. Spokazi understands that South Africa’s gender roles, in African culture, communicate that women should be submissive to men. The example she provided was the Venda culture and the tradition of women lying on their sides every time a man enters the room. Even though she admires that these women’s ability to be submissive, a trait that she does **not** retain, she translates it as an abuse of power.

“I think it’s an understanding of the balance of being respectful but not being undermined. I think that in a lot of gender situations, we want to respect the other or think that others should be respected of the other and end undermining or abusing the level of respect.”

The act of being submissive is seen as a negative trait to these two women. Which make sense in relation to their values grounded in gender equality. Respectability politics is shown through the desire to receive and give respect to men. If these women rather communicate in an assertive manner to the men, how is that visualized and contextualized to the older women in the culture? Do these women chastise their female elders on being submissive or do they change the culture with their next immediate kinship? Naledi grew up with non-traditional gender roles in her household. So when she was told that patriarchy must fall, she didn’t understand how the presence of men was suffocating or violent. She recently experienced how gender roles are active when a group of men at her residence were enforcing their opinions of her tribe and were physically overbearing. These men expected her to be submissive in conversation because “they knew” more about her tribe than she did. These roles aren’t only practiced at home, but are expressed in modern society. As Thuli communicated, “it is everywhere”.

Blossom expresses how she was raised with learning the role of women in Xhosa culture. “I don’t even like cooking. The only reason why I am cooking is because I have a vagina”. She believes in fair play and women empowerment. So how does she communicate to her family that these gender roles are not conducive for her desired lifestyle? Spokazi was the only woman that mentioned she had these conversations with her family. Blossom does talk to her family about campus activity, but the conversations revolve around #FeesMustFall because her parents are affected by the heavy financial burden of paying her university tuition.

I have questioned if these gender roles benefit the woman as much as it benefits the man. Balancing respect should also equate to the balancing of benefits. Naledi expresses:

“We are constantly reminded that we need to make the Black man feel like a man, but the Black man is not constantly told to have the Black woman feel like a woman. We are taught to take care of the Black man, who is going to take care of us?”

This question also transfers to who will take care of women during these demanding issues of the protest? These five Black women have demonstrated that they turn to other Black women for support and guidance. There is this “I am independent and I don’t need a man” narrative that is spread throughout feminist empowerment circles, but that doesn’t mean women don’t want to be cared for and supported. Especially as South Africa’s youth battle colonization. Kerry expressed the gender dynamics between her friend’s relationship. She described this friend as strong and confident, but Kerry was frustrated that she took on a “domestic womanly role in the relationship”. Yet she also expressed how some of her other female friends expressed, “Like sometimes I want to spoil my man, I wanna wash the dishes or I want to be treated and what not”. There is this pressure for women to fit into one gender role. But can you be multifaceted when you advocate for independence and then do not apply that in personal relationships with men? Black men have used this discrepancy to challenge women on what they preach in meetings and in conversation compared to what values they practice in their romantic endeavors.

SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

“As women, we should always be assertive in ourselves. We shouldn’t always wait for someone to give us that room and I know for myself, I am someone who is very loud spoken and very assertive. I would not want anybody to give me that space for me to speak.”

-Spokazi

#PatriarchyMustFall

When hyper masculine men challenge Black women in current social movements, one method Black women use in response is adapting a masculine persona. Three out the five women described this method as “angry” and “aggressive”. They have observed women take on this new and sometimes unknown role of aggression towards Black men when speaking upon gender equality.

“In all honesty, it is very scary in the movement the way women speak about feminism and patriarchy and so forth because they are very like angry. Um I won't lie, I feel sorry for the guys because the women keep throwing it in their faces... The penny hasn't dropped for them yet and it doesn't help to get them to that place by doing it in a violent way and I do understand the pain that these women have experienced. So it's sort of like, I am not sure, I can't criticize openly because at the same time, it's their Black pain, it's their anger.”

-Kerry

“So you want these people to respect you but, but then you are telling them that their presence is violating and suffocating every time they try and make a point across. So are you then not provoking them to not give you the respect you want? And I am not defending the men saying that they need to be treated better or anything like that. I am just saying that it got me questioning this whole movement for women, are we actually advancing or are shooting ourselves in the foot with it and making men look at us like “these idiots, I am ignoring you” because girls were swearing at some point during the movement at the guys.”

-Naledi

“There is a lot of anger that is mixed with that cause it is not easy to explain your oppression, it is a violent process... I think it has gotten to a stage where women are too angry, well not too angry, but are bored of explaining.”

-Thuli

Policing how women interact with men are not only done by men, but also by women. Yet, these women understand that it is unfair to police how these women express their pain and suffering. To communicate to a Black male that gender has also oppressed their livelihoods is extremely frustrating. As Black women are expected to be strong leaders, they are also expected to uphold their femininity. What methods should female leaders embark on? Naledi says, “Maybe we should address a new way which is maybe a way of educating than attacking. Your tone remains calm and you are confident... You cannot deal with a man in his own playground, you actually have to bring him out of his playground and bring him into yours”. She continued to express that women have to use their strengths as women, such as emotion, and to use it as a weapon. Spokazi both agrees and disagrees:

“You need to educate, but also not force your personal opinions. Men are logical thinkers and as women we need to aware of the audience that we are presenting to. With men you need to be level headed, so we need to take the emotion out of it.”

Gqola addresses this policing of women in social movements through the Black Consciousness Movement beginning in the 1960s. In relation to leadership positions, she explains how Mamphela Ramphele expressed how women were expected to be “courageous, articulate” since activism required unwavering “self-confidence, eloquence and dedication to endless meetings and discussions” (p.139). When these women achieved these qualities, there

were acknowledged as “honorable men” by Black women. Yet this new title was unfair to Ramphela because it differentiated her from other women and instead socialized her into the status of being “one of the boys”, when in actuality she was fighting against a masculine dominated system. This perception has definitely morphed from “honorable men” to “dishonorable female”, in terms of my inquiries from a small sample size. The need to be aggressive towards males who undermine women is a technique that these Black women are questioning. The liberation of the female voice is extremely prioritized and I believe that there is disagreement on what that female voice looks and sounds like.

The roles that Black women should be engaging in the movements are acting as Chairs in meetings, asserting themselves in these spaces, leading the movements in the fore front, educating others, and working for the respect of others. These roles are what I have gathered from the collective conversations. What is interesting is the relationship to these roles with Black men and their conclusions. Kerry explained that “[men] feel like with feminist they just want to try and be like men and abandon their roles.” Also that “they always felt that women were trying to get them or hate them or just being haters.” Let’s also not forget that:

“Black feminist or women who are sewing seeds of poison and hatred and trying to turn sort of innocent men for their own agenda. Trying to make an innocent man look really bad by, meaning that someone, if you are having an innocent conversation, you are joking around or whatever or maybe you said something and it is completely taken out of context, suddenly you are labeled as patriarchal and violent.”- Kerry

Why does equality equal to women wanting to be like men? This idea is catered by not only a patriarchal society, but how the BCM was created and developed. On campuses, groups were created to exhibit their support for a non-Apartheid South Africa, such as SASAO, which was predominately men. If SASAO is being used as a blueprint on how Black students should organize against colonization, then Black male students will view leadership as a male dominated arena. If Black women want to have leadership positions then they must achieve that standard, therefore becoming “one of the boys”. Equality and unity cannot be a product of this masculine standard and is not what these women are fighting for. Yes, gender equality and unity of the Black population on campus and the Black community is a goal, but these Black women are focused on creating a new consciousness, a new standard of leadership.

Within #PatriarchyMustFall, the physical presence of the male body has created “suffocating” and “violent” environments.

“I, myself, become repulsed by any man because by virtue of his deep voice and his powerful demeanor, I am automatically scared sometimes. It scares me, I don’t know why, this is something to question where that fear comes from. Even though the most submissive guy, the most feminine guy, if he was then to raise his voice I would just be like...”- Kerry

“Every time they try to address the crowd they are told that their presence is suffocating, hyper masculinity is violating the space.”- Naledi

Thuli gives a new perspective by commenting on the mental welfare of Black men. “Like you can’t have a nonviolent conversation with a Black man who is like in pain and hurting and sleep deprived and traumatized and refusing to acknowledge that is the space he occupies.” I was able to have a conversation with a Black male at the Azania house and it was difficult for him to grasp how his body is inherently violent. Being born a certain sex cannot be controlled and he didn’t know how to navigate through this given identity in relation to Black women. He also pointed out the double standards that Black women have applied to him. He is too masculine during meetings and should regulate his vocal participation, but he should apply his hyper masculinity during in protest on Parliament property. He doesn’t know when he is write or wrong. He wants his Black sisters to teach him on these issues. It relates back to a Westernized theology that creates this space where everyone is trying to stay PC to a standard that has not been created to benefit African peoples. Thuli agrees, “we need to rewind a little bit to like just trying to create a space where everyone tries to not hurt everyone else and we use that as our consciousness.” These double standards that are present within this movement are controlling activism efforts. But are they really? Black men are restricted in overpowering spaces of the liberation of race, gender, class, sexuality, and is that such bad thing? Double standards are harmful when they have the ability to silence the pain of Black men.

“If you wanna speak about equal rights, you also have to speak about the men. Men have been completely removed from the equation and that is very tricky. We need to speak about the men that are raped and are hushed in society because that is still an issue, a violation of privacy.”- Spokazi

These double standards relate to gender roles, which relate to the strategy of continual gender oppression. Within the meetings at the Azania House (previously Avenue House) there has been miscommunication between both parties. Kerry expects Black men from the Pan African Association to come to these meetings with an understanding of what has been written in feminist forums, but her expectations were not fulfilled. I cannot speak for Black men who attend these meetings, but I have gathered that they want to be educated by these

women and be respected. Respect for each other's personal narratives, physical bodies, and personal emotions are request that should be applied within these spaces.

Intersectionality

“Therefore when we say Rhodes Must Fall we mean that patriarchy must fall, that white supremacy must fall, that all systematic oppression based on any power relations of difference must be destroyed at all costs. These are battles that we cannot fight alone.”
-The Salon, Volume 9

Are all students on board for an intersectional movement? Black feminist have completely given their talents and resources to make sure that is a reality. Blossom believes that Black feminist do a good job on removing and addressing oppression towards groups. One movement cannot prosper without the other unless “all are winning”. #RMF states within their statements and literature that they are an intersectional movement. It gives precedent for all other student led movements to also be formed on the foundation of intersectionality. On Johannesburg Workshop In Theory And Criticism (JWTC) website, The Salon, specifically volume 9, represents why #RMF is happening and where it is going. It is paramount to share what goals #RMF are striving to make concrete.

Our long-term goals include:

- Remove all statues and plaques on campus celebrating white supremacists.
- Rename buildings and roads from names commemorating only white people, to names of either black historical figures, or to names that contribute to this university taking seriously its African positionality.
- Replace artworks that exoticise the black experience (by white, predominantly male artists) which are presented without context, with artworks produced by young, black artists.
- Recognise that the history of those who built our university - enslaved and working class black people - has been erased through institutional culture. Pay more attention to historical sites of violence, such as the slave graves beneath the buildings in which we learn.
- Implement a curriculum which critically centres Africa and the subaltern. By this we mean treating African discourses as the point of departure - through addressing not only content, but languages and methodologies of education and learning - and only examining western traditions in so far as they are relevant to our own experience.
- Provide financial and research support to black academics and staff.
- Radically change the representation of black lecturers across faculties.
- Revise the limitations on access to senior positions for black academics. This includes interrogating the notion of "academic excellence" which is used to limit black academics and students' progression within the university.
- Increase the representation of black academics on the currently predominantly white, male decision making bodies which perpetuate institutional racism.

- Re-evaluate the standards by which research areas are decided - from areas that are lucrative and centre whiteness, to areas that are relevant to the lives of black people locally and on the continent.
- Introduce a curriculum and research scholarship linked to social justice and the experiences of black people.
- Adopt an admissions policy that explicitly uses race as a proxy for disadvantage, prioritising black applicants.
- Remove the NBT as a requirement for admission because it systematically disadvantages all students except those who attend Model C schools and private schools.
- Improve academic support programmes.
- Meaningfully interrogate why black students are most often at the brunt of academic exclusion.
- Develop an improved financial aid system.
- Radically reduce the currently extortionate fees.
- Improve facilities which deal with sexual assault, as well as facilities which help black students deal with the psychological trauma as a result of racism.
- Implement R10 000 pm minimum basic for UCT workers as a step towards a living wage, in the spirit of Marikana.
- Get rid of the Supplemented Living Level, which prescribes a poverty wage.
- Stop using the Consumer Price Index which ensures that wages never really increase, leaving workers in poverty.
- End outsourcing. The companies must go, the workers must stay.
- There should be no capitalist companies making profits at this public sector institution. Workers must know that their job is safe, has decent working conditions and ensures comfortable lives.
- Education for workers and their families must be free.
- Stop the victimisation and intimidation of workers. No worker must be penalised in any way for supporting and joining protest action, including strike action, at UCT.
- Workers must be able, without penalty of any kind, to refuse work that is a danger or hazard to their health and safety.
- Provide workers with access to services dealing with labour, family, housing issues.
- Provide workers with avenues through which to report and address experiences of racism, sexism and other forms of abuse. These avenues must assist in enforcing legal action against the perpetrator.

In solidarity,
The Rhodes Must Fall Movement

Issues of racism, classism, sexism, and ableism are all addressed within the academic framework of the University of Cape Town. Thuli has been involved in #RMF from the beginning and has been apart of the writing committee. She speaks upon how #RMF has claimed that they were an intersectional movement from the beginning.

“It very quickly became clear that a group of people, women were pretty much involved in getting things started largely, that there was this new word that was being thrown around and there was respect for what that meant in the space and there were like violent incidents, largely emotionally violent, but also even like the physical tension between men and women in the space and a lot of women and non gender binary and trans people left the movement but there was this ongoing conversation about intersectionality.”

Stating from the start that this movement was going to be intersectional insures that all human beings would be able to fight against their oppression. But of course it would not be a smooth transition from previous methods of protest on issues such as decolonization. The

inclusion of intersectionality made this movement feel like a home to Thuli and even though the number of members fluctuated, she felt the presence of respect in the room.

This began to change when new social movements were added on campus, such as #FeesMustFall and #PatriarchyMustFall. These movements in hindsight are also fighting for the same things as #RMF, but are specifically unpacking economic and gender oppression. Many new people took the space and the concept of intersectionality became muddled. “Right not everything is confused and as #FeesMustFall, they haven’t consolidated conversations or understandings on gender, on class, because it’s a new sort of movement. #RMF has been kept separate from it”, explains Kerry. Protest became “masculine exhibitions” (Thuli) and the platform for intersectionality became violent. Some of the culprits of this violence is by Black men and even Black men who were heavily involved in #RMF. Black Female UCT Students communicated that they “suddenly forget what the larger project is because this project looks larger.” On the participation of Black men in these movements, Blossom questions why they are involved if they aren’t on board for the liberation on all movements. “Then what are you fighting for? Just the liberation of Blackness? Which seems convenient.” Spokazi expresses that with #RMF and #FMF, gender is irrelevant because of the necessity to reach a common goal and that we need to stand for the greater good as Black people, and even as students. If intersectionality has been valued since feces was thrown on the Cecil John Rhodes statue, then gender must be relevant and Black people, including Black men, must also fight for all groups of marginalized peoples. Writing it in a journal and applying it on land are two different battles. The five Black women are pondering what these movements currently translate to and how as students can create a safe space.

Having to suddenly open your vision outside of the bubble that white supremacy has created for you is intense. Whether you are a humanities or an engineering major, these issues cause suffering and uneasiness. Naledi sorrowfully expressed, “I really want ignorance back, I just wanna be ignorant again.” Not only does she live these experiences that are shared through her peer’s personal narratives, but also she listens and digest these narratives.

“Someone is trying to shine the light and it is uncomfortable at first and scary and you get to the point of comfortability by sitting in the dark because it’s scary to start realizing that you were insulted or hurt when you didn’t know that you were being hurt or you were complacent about it cause you thought this was how it was.” – Kerry

Students on campus have dealt with this awakening, becoming “Woke”, by using recreational drugs. Naledi expressed to me how there are a lot of high people because of the depression and the only way to leave that state of mind is to be high and drunk at the same time. Also as students are fighting for this larger picture, they have realities of their own that they have to consider. Whether that is completing university for financial opportunities, to support their families, or to be able to still be a student within the community. Kerry reminds me “you know, you have to survive, you are still studying here, you are still in a studying space”. Even thought students that attend the University of Cape Town who are involved in these current movements are privileged because of the their availability to these academic resources, they are also disadvantaged because they are reminded how this systematic oppression has deliberately been designed for their downfall.

Conclusion

Throughout my independent study project I have asked many questions on the categories of Black, Gender, and Social Movement. I even have posed questions to the five Black female UCT students that I have been able to unpack these categories with. Even though these categories have been separated, it is essential to realize that they all relate directly to each other. There is this sense of community that has been shared between Black female activists on campus. There is also this desire to build that community to include Black men and then to include White allies. To become “Woke” is a difficult process and with a strong community built on intersectionality, that process can be supported. Blossom explains this terminology best. “The misconception of being “Woke” is that you are supposed to have the same opinion as everyone else. They expect you to be okay with everything. You can’t follow things blindly- that is not being “Woke”. “Woke” is about questioning what system and values have we, as Black bodies, have been operating on and how do we physically create a new consciousness on the terms of Blackness.

My literature review has introduced concepts on Black Consciousness, feminism, and social justice methods, but it has not been able to explain and communicate the new wave of consciousness that these five Black women have expressed. On terms of Biko, his consciousness has not focused on intersectional efforts in the progression and liberalization of Black bodies. A new consciousness has been uprooted and is separated from the Westernized theories that have been applied on African society. It does not focus on holding individuals to

this certain vocabulary or standard, but unpacking experiences of oppression based on the level of understanding provided. Thuli has begun to express this new consciousness, but it isn't finalized or stagnant.

Further studies for future research would be focused on the trans collective. “#TheTransCollective is a transfeminist movement which positions confronting toxic gender constructs as indispensable to the decolonization project within and beyond UCT. Politically, we are grounded in critical black theory, black consciousness and identity intersectionality (UCT: The TransCollective 2015). It would have been beneficial to speak upon gender other than binary constructions because that is also a reality for Black women on campus. Future research would also branch to Black women in the surrounding Black community. It would have been interesting to compare and contrast Black feminist consciousness. My Dream is to be Bold: Our Work to End Patriarchy published by Pambazuka Press would have acted as my foundation. It is a collection of Feminist Alternatives given by a diverse group of nineteen women that transcend nationalities and borders. These nineteen women conducted the processes of collecting these narratives ethically. They have interviewed each other and then created their portion of the book. Future research will be focused on only using literature that is written by the specific group of focus. Only the marginalized bodies can speak upon their own marginalization.

Appendix/Appendices

Appendix A- Interview Questions

**Subject to change based on the participant*

1. Where are you from?
2. How do you identify?
3. Are there nay issues or concerns that circulate within your friend group?
4. How would you define Blackness/Black Identity?
5. How would you define Feminism?
6. Are you a feminist?
7. How would you define Gender within Blackness?
8. What role does Gender and Blackness play in social movements?
9. Would you like to share anything that I haven't asked?

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Title of ISP/FSP: I'm Black and I'm Proud... and Female:
The Role of Gender and Black Consciousness for Black Female UCT Students in Social Movements
in Cape Town.

Program and Term/Year: South Africa: Multiculturalism and Human Rights Fall 2015

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