

**Negotiating whiteness: a discourse analysis of students'  
descriptions of their raced experiences at Rhodes  
University, Grahamstown,<sup>1</sup> South Africa.**

**Thesis submitted to the University of Cape Town in fulfilment of the  
requirements for the degree of Doctor of African Studies**

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## **Thesis Abstract**

Questions of the dominance of cultures of whiteness are pre-imminent issues in historically white South African universities. Even when historically white universities – such as Rhodes University, the site of study for this thesis – have a predominantly black student body post 1994, there are still reports of students experiencing such institutions as alienating and excluding due to the privileging of whiteness. This thesis draws on the significant role played by discourse in how the world is constructed and reconstructed, to better understand how whiteness may continue to be produced and reproduced in everyday interactions at a historically white South African university, and how some students may feel less at home than others within such institutions. The thesis seeks to answer the following research question: what discursive strategies do Rhodes University students use to describe their raced experiences, and what role do these strategies play in either reinforcing and or challenging a culture of whiteness? The thesis engages with and is informed by literature on whiteness as constitutive of both social aspects and phenotypical essence. Drawing primarily from discourse analysis tools, and from interviews with Rhodes University students completed between 2014 and 2015, the thesis argues that whiteness is far from being a zero-sum game of winners and losers. Rather, there are gradations of whiteness where speakers draw upon whatever capital (social, phenotypical or a combination of both) to attain the best possible outcome for themselves. The thesis therefore takes seriously the idea that whiteness is a social construct which can, through socialisation be acquired, lost and, in some cases, decanted partially into other vessels. Whiteness, the thesis argues, is ever incomplete and subject to change as the context changes in order to ensure that it remains associated with privilege, opportunity and power. If whiteness is not limited to white bodies only, as suggested by both the data and literature review, then it must be studied in relation to blackness as well. The interactional, inter-relational and inter-racial construction and use of whiteness both methodologically and conceptually is one of the key contributions to the field of whiteness studies made by this thesis. This open-ended, permanent work in progress approach to whiteness can be the beginning of conversations about race that are not necessarily bounded by phenotype or essence – especially in South Africa, where race and a fixation of rigid social categories continue to be a central part of how South Africans navigate and understand the world around them.

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## **Abbreviations:**

ANC:	African National Congress
BSM:	Black Student Movement
CCRRI:	Centre for Critical Research on Race and Identity
CRT:	Critical Race Theory
EFF:	Economic Freedom Fighters
MIP:	Minimum Initial Payment
nGAP:	New Generation of Academics Programme
Soudien Report:	Ministerial Committee on Progress Towards Transformation and Social Cohesion and the Elimination of Discrimination in Public Higher Education Institutions, named after Professor Crain Soudien who chaired the Committee
WITS:	University of the Witwatersrand
UCKAR:	University Currently Known as Rhodes
UCT:	University of Cape Town

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# Chapter I: Introduction and Background to the Study

## 1.1 Introduction

This thesis sets out to explore how and why it is that historically white South African higher education institutions continue to be experienced as alienating and exclusionary by some black students, despite the shift in student demographics and the existence of equity policies and antiracism campaigns within these institutions, and when almost everything about the institution points to being in support of transformation. Given that the demographics of these institutions have changed drastically since apartheid to accommodate a higher black student demographic, this thesis sets out to understand how do experiences of racism and alienation continue amongst students in the everyday as they attend classes and interact with each other? Many of the studies that explore institutional culture focus on university structures and processes at the institutional level. This study focuses on the less studied production and reproduction of whiteness at the individual discursive level. In particular, the thesis explores the way that individuals' descriptions of their raced experiences within the institution may challenge or reinforce cultures of whiteness.

The thesis used interviews conducted from 2014 to early 2015 with former Rhodes students; and where necessary and relevant, drew from the researcher's own experiences as a student at Rhodes University between 2003 and 2016. Drawing from Gee's discourse analysis as well as autoethnography where useful to buttress findings, the interviews were analysed to ascertain whether there are discursive strategies in participants' talk which may unbeknownst to the participants play a role in producing and reproducing institutional cultures of whiteness.

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce the study by way of highlighting some of the key issues in order to explore how it is that institutional cultures are produced and reproduced within historically white universities in the post-apartheid South African context.

The thesis draws on an extensive body of literature, which finds that since whiteness as a field and area of study is both influenced by and influences disparate disciplines, it is necessary to clearly set out how whiteness is approached in this study. In addition, the meaning and construction of whiteness are not only context specific, but there are also contestations of whiteness between groups that are constructed as white. Furthermore, additional intersectional positionalities such as gender and sexuality affect how whiteness is experienced. The thesis draws from several authors to set out how whiteness is conceptualised and expressed within ever-shifting boundaries of

society for this study such as (see for example Bashkow, 2006; Nyamnjoh, 2012, 2015b, 2015c, 2016, Nyamnjoh, 2015b, 2015c; Twine, 1997).

These works informed the position taken in this thesis that whiteness has aspects that are beyond phenotypical essence, and the presence of the white body, which allow the co-option of white and black alike into the privileging of whiteness due to the connection of whiteness with privilege, opportunity and power, and thus may be pursued, acquired and lost by both white and black bodies alike.

Approaching whiteness thus opens up the possibility of challenging and undermining the role that whiteness plays in racism and racial discrimination, by revealing its contradictions, ambiguities and contestations. If the power of a social system and its structures relies on obfuscation to exclude and marginalise, as suggested by critical studies, then this thesis explores the possibility of stretching the concept of whiteness (inclusive of its contradictions, contestations and ambiguities) to the point where whiteness collapses in on itself.

The thesis argues, therefore, that whiteness is a socially constructed identity that is pursued for its association with privilege, opportunity and power. If this is the case, then there is little reason as to why whiteness should escape redefinition and reconstruction in tune with changing social and political processes and structures.

## **1.2 Defining and studying race beyond essentialisms**

It is worth mentioning here, that there is a danger in any study on race when it further essentialises race by the way it is studied or approached in a project (Abramovitz, 2009; Garuba, 2012; Goga, 2008; Nyamnjoh, 2012; Sithole, 2012). Race, in this thesis, is understood to be a social construction centred around phenotypical essence which is then used to locate different types of racialised bodies in a racial hierarchy within racialised societies. That is, for example, physical features such as blonde hair, blue eyes and freckles have been socially constructed as white. These social constructions around phenotypical essence are in turn ascribed socially constructed values and characteristics, which inform the construction of a racial hierarchy (Lokko, 2000). Bodies are then given meaning and value by the society, and accordingly interpolated into the ascribed social hierarchies. This social construction around phenotypical essence, and the construction of racial hierarchy were created to justify slavery, colonialism and apartheid and other forms of racialised oppression and discrimination for the benefit of a few such as that discussed by Reilly (2016) on the racialisation of the poor in England in the contextual chapter that follows.

Beliefs about an essential nature belonging to people of different races are then connected as a means to justify exclusion and discrimination in relation to access to social goods. To limit the danger of essentialised notions about people this thesis uses the terms ‘whites’ and ‘blacks’ to refer to how people with certain phenotypical features are constructed and located in the racial hierarchy; for example, white people are grouped by their enjoyment of privileges that accrue to them by virtue of the value ascribed to their phenotypical features. Black people in comparison, are constructed and located structurally at a lower position within the racial hierarchy in comparison to whites for the purposes of analysis. This is purely used for the initial purposes of analysis. The two positions as the thesis will show, are not mutually exclusive with no complexity and no nuance to them.

This structural approach to race avoids essence – paying attention rather to how bodies are socialised, constructed, perceived and treated rather than assuming an essential, homogenous nature to groups. Using the example of what is constructed as ‘whites’ to further explain this, it has been argued by writers such as Hartigan Jr (1997) that whites will for example take individual actions as informed by their habitus that collectively places them at the top of the racial hierarchy. Thus it is that a neighbourhood watch organisation may be predominantly white not necessarily because members have consciously set out to be racially discriminatory or prejudiced (Lewis, 2004). Rather their racial habitus combined with their capital, historically informed, has led to the individuals making choices that collectively place them at the same schools, bars, neighbourhoods and so on to the exclusion of others (Lewis, 2004). This structural approach to race then – specifically whiteness – means that the reproduction of social relations also need not be consciously done (Lewis, 2004; Swartz, 1997). Such an approach also argues that different contexts provide different opportunities for those who have the requisite habitus and capital valued in a place. Thus, in the example provided above about the neighbourhood watch, there may be a few black people who have acquired some elements valued in whiteness such as wealth, social and cultural capital to be part of the neighbourhood watch. These blacks may be considered white in the sense that they have some aspects of whiteness valued in neighbourhood context as argued by Twine (1997), whose work is further discussed in chapter three. However, this does not preclude feeling alienated and excluded by these self-same blacks when those who are white claim more social goods on the basis of being phenotypically white. Whiteness – like blackness is thus not a zero-sum game but rather a game of gradations as discussed further in chapter three, and as this thesis ultimately argues.

### **1.3 Defining and studying whiteness**

Studies on whiteness clearly set out that whiteness, like any other social identity, is socially constructed. However, much of the literature explores the meaning and construction of whiteness by drawing largely on white peoples' constructions of whiteness. In addition, whiteness studies in South Africa have been critiqued for taking for granted the features or characteristics of whiteness from earlier studies (Goga, 2008). The danger of this is that whiteness is rendered fixed, stable and homogenous rather than socially constructed and contested like any other social identity. Whiteness is to some degree reified and placed centre stage with little disruption of what is already known about its power and pervasiveness (Goga, 2008; Ratele, 2007). Furthermore, there is a danger of reducing who can and cannot contribute to the meaning of whiteness to the purview of whites only when the study draws primarily from white bodies. There are insights into whiteness that may be lost through not including the ethnographic eye that black experiences may contribute to the meaning of whiteness – although these insights on their own do not mean the meaning of whiteness is beyond improving upon (hooks, 1997; Nyamnjoh, 2012).

In the post-apartheid South African context whiteness is particularly worth exploring beyond the white body only given that colonialism, as stated by Nyamnjoh and Page (2002: 608) was more than just the struggle over land. It was also a struggle over the mind, and thus meaning. As whiteness has historically defined the other, while placing itself above the gaze of the constructed other, the post-apartheid period provides an important opportunity to take into account the politics of gazing back through co-construction of whiteness. For this reason, unlike many studies of whiteness which draw predominantly on white participants this thesis draws on both black and white experiences at the same time to explore how whiteness is being produced, reproduced and being constructed in the post-apartheid context.

#### **1.3.1 Moving beyond racial binaries**

Black bodies and black construction of whiteness in many of the studies on whiteness are often interpreted or drawn from as the voices of the marginalised or oppressed as survivors or victims within a society that privileges whiteness. White people within whiteness studies are, in comparison, located primarily as either being oppressors or benefactors of whiteness – particularly within earlier whiteness studies research. Different types of bodies are indeed interpellated into different positions within racialised societies criminalising, for example black bodies while they inhere white bodies with automatic trust. However what is less studied are the aspects of whiteness that do not need white bodies to be present – that is, how whiteness may be produced and

reproduced beyond the white body, and acquired and used by bodies that are not necessarily white (see Bashkow, 2006).

The work of authors such as Bashkow (2006), Nyamnjoh and Page (2002) and Twine (1997) argue that whiteness is not only about phenotypical essence (as similarly argued in this thesis). Rather these aforementioned works provide insights into how whiteness has social aspects which may to some extent be acquired and lost by white and black bodies alike. Historically, the empire mobilised the social aspects of whiteness to shore up and support the privileging of whiteness as captured in Macaulay's minute on education (Macaulay, 1835). In order to bolster the power of the empire, Macaulay suggested producing British Indians who through their education (i.e. socialisation), would defend British interests against their fellow Indian natives who had not been socialised white. Indeed, this point is further explored by Nyamnjoh (2016) who, in his book, *#RhodesMustFall*, explores the contestations of social identities as a means of analysing the student protests that have rocked South Africa since 2015. While much of whiteness studies research focuses on how white people protect white privilege, it is however also interesting that a study by Nyamnjoh and Page (2002) reveals that whiteness is valued and will be invested in by black parents and youth due to its association with privilege, opportunity and power. Whiteness then cannot be defined and approached as only being within the purview of white bodies; it should indeed be defined to inform us how whiteness is produced and reproduced. Whiteness then, when taking into account its social aspects, does not need the presence of the white body and is thus not easily reducible to phenotypical essence. Rather, this thesis argues that greater attention needs be paid to how whiteness is produced and reproduced in ways that are about limiting access to power, privilege and opportunity by both white and black bodies alike. This is extensively discussed and argued in chapter three.

### **1.3.2 Whiteness beyond the white body**

Authors such as Dyer (1997) and Burton (2009) note that those who are not phenotypically white may be granted some access to white privilege in the event that they acquire the requisite whitely ways or white capital. That is, there are aspects of whiteness that may be acquired such as speaking English, the sports and music that one listens to, the type of accent with which one speaks English, the type of clothes that one wears for example (see Yon, 2000). Research indicates that those students who have a sense of what is expected in how one engages the classroom material, or the teacher are more likely to be rewarded, and thus succeed academically within historically white universities. Thus some aspects of whiteness may be acquired, or in the case of poor whites lost (see Kruger, 2016). The work of authors such as Twine (1997) in 'Brown Skinned White Girls', as

well as Bashkow (2006) and Burton (2009), are critical to this thesis in terms of how whiteness may continue to exist and be reproduced even when white bodies are not present. It is worth noting that the acquisition and investment in whiteness (i.e. whitely ways) is not a desire to be white. Rather it is a recognition of the value that is placed in whiteness in a racialised society. What may be desired and invested in rather is the association of whiteness with privilege, opportunities and power. Burton for example notes that the use of a more English accent is used by some of his non-white participants as they have experienced getting better service over the telephone. Similarly it has been noted by Dyer (1997) that those who have more phenotypically white features are considered more attractive than those who have features further away from what is perceived to epitomise whiteness. Whiteness in this sense may differentially award access to some resources while excluding access to others dependent on how close to whiteness the individual or group is. Even amongst whites whiteness is differentially awarded and experienced as informed by class and gender (Moon, 1999). For this reason, whiteness in this thesis is taken to be a social construction based on phenotypical features. However, given that those who have acquired white social and cultural capital may be awarded some white privileges, there is also no reason that whiteness cannot also be defined by access to power, privilege and opportunities rather than exclusively by phenotypical features.

Whiteness as highlighted above is constitutive of a social construct around phenotypical features – specific physical features associated with those of European descent. Given that whiteness is both a social construct and biological essence, exclusion may lie in exclusion on the basis of lack of biological markers of whiteness. That is, in interracial contact where black students have cultural and social and economic capital associated with whiteness, there are moments of exclusion on the basis of not having whiteness as biological essence. Part of the problem is not so much that we have different constructed races but what matters is rather that these have become perceived as fixed when they need not be (see Bashkow, 2006). Every society has some ethnocentrism, and constructs the other in order to construct self. Race plays a similar role; and can be more fluid and less bound to racial boundaries (Bashkow, 2006). In a study of how the Orokaiva construct whitemen Bashkow (2006) finds that Orokaiva black racial identity is based upon the construction of the white other. White racial identity similarly uses blackness to construct itself. However, what differentiates the Orokaiva whitemen identity from the white racial identity is the willingness to apply the label white to those who are not phenotypically white (Bashkow, 2006). Part of the reason that white people may not be willing to do this is the investment in white racial identity as pure – to loosen the grip on biological essence would mean losing part of the purity of white racial identity connected to biological essence. It would also mean loss of the justification for white

supremacy; and the benefits that came with it as discussed below. However notably there is also a danger in denying the real experiences of exclusion based on biological essence. This is to deny an aspect of whiteness – both are part of whiteness. People at times choose to highlight those aspects of whiteness (social construction or biological essence) that best suit them at that particular moment (Bashkow, 2006).

### **1.3.3 Whiteness and changing social relations:**

The racial lines were once legally demarcated through apartheid legislation. However post-1994 youth are in some ways redefining racial boundaries (see Dolby, 2001; Walker, 2005). Similar to Twine (1997), extramural activities and interests allow friendships and acquaintances to be formed across racial boundaries within South African schools that were not possible before. In addition, there is an increasing number of black students that have attended former model C and private schools that have historically been exclusively white. This has allowed these young people to acquire white social and cultural capital such as not only speaking English with some proficiency, but specifically with the more valued white middle class accent. In addition, for many first or second generation white South African youths to sit next to someone who is not white, many of the older white discourses which protected whiteness during apartheid are arguably challenged within these now multiracial schools. While the literature correctly points out that many of the legacies of apartheid and colonialism continue after apartheid such as racial inequality, it is also necessary to explore how the construction and negotiation of racial boundaries and identities may have shifted. This is not to argue that South Africa is now a post-racial society but rather to argue that continual analysis of racial constructions is necessary to enhance our understanding of how racial discrimination and racism are produced and reproduced. This is particularly necessary given that for many white South Africans racism and racial discrimination is part of the past rather than continuing post-apartheid (Steyn, 2005; Steyn & Foster, 2008).

### **1.4 The site of the study: Rhodes University**

In order to explore how and why it is that historically white institutions continue to be experienced as alienating and exclusionary by some, the thesis used the site of the historically white university currently known as Rhodes (UCKAR). The university is located in the Eastern Cape – one of the poorest provinces of South Africa. Rhodes University as a historically white university has been referred to as ‘Oxford in the bush’. The university was established using the funds provided by the estate of the British imperialist, Cecil John Rhodes, from whom the university still retains its name (albeit uncertainly for now in the wake of student protests calling for a name change as part of the student protests against the institutional culture of historically white institutions).

Rhodes University continues, much like its heyday before and after independence from Britain, to be an island of privilege together with the wealthier section of Grahamstown in which the university is located and where its many white residents live and work, together with the growing but still limited number of socially mobile black residents. The majority of the black residents (predominantly black African and coloured) continue to reside on the fringes of the town – geographically, socially and economically. Rhodes University then is not only associated with wealth, privilege and opportunity in connection to the wealthier white inhabitants of the town, but also in connection to its establishment being funded by the bequests of Cecil John Rhodes trust and later the prestigious Rhodes scholarships to Oxford University.

#### **1.4.1 Why Rhodes University?**

In as much as the university is historically connected to the spread of empire, it has in later years constructed itself as always having been a fairly liberal university caught in the racially exclusionary and laws and policies of the state at the time (see Buckland & Neville, 2004). Furthermore, being connected to struggle icon Nelson Mandela has in the post-apartheid context blackwashed the prestigious Rhodes scholarship. Given the history of the institution, and the connection of the Rhodes scholarship to Mandela, as well the university's attested commitment to anti-racism this university was picked as the site of study. It is worth noting that Rhodes University serves as site to explore how whiteness may be produced and reproduced in ways that inform alienating and exclusionary institutional cultures. However, the findings of the research have implications beyond Rhodes University specifically for other historically white universities.

#### **1.4.2 Rhodes University and whiteness**

Rhodes University due to its connection and association with Oxford University has been informed by English speaking whiteness; however it is worth noting here that there are many meanings of whiteness even within this group as sexuality, gender, wealth and access to different forms of capital valued within the institution mean that people define and experience whiteness differently as shall be further highlighted below.

One of the areas of interest of this thesis is how whiteness is given meaning and, as a result, being produced and reproduced in post-apartheid South Africa. This question is particularly worth asking given that historically white universities such Rhodes University have transformed significantly since 1994 in their student demographics.

Rhodes University in particular at the time of undertaking this study the demographics had changed with over 60% black students in total. During the 2015 students' protest against the privileging of whiteness in their institutions across South Africa, Rhodes University had at the time its second black vice-chancellor, Professor Sizwe Mabizela. In addition, there were programmes in place to include black students from disadvantaged backgrounds who did not receive the requisite university credits. This implied that whiteness was no longer being produced and reproduced in the same way as under apartheid. Yet despite these efforts a students' movement popularly referred to as hashtag *Rbodessomwhite* arose within Rhodes University to lambaste the university for privileging whiteness to the exclusion and marginalisation of the non-white students.

### **1.5 Transformation and institutional culture**

In February 2008, a video came into the public domain that showed four white Afrikaner students at the University of the Free State forcing a group of elderly black cleaning staff, to 'eat food into which one of the students had apparently urinated' (Ministerial Committee on Transformation and Social Cohesion, 2008: 9) The video led to the establishment of a Ministerial Committee, chaired by Cape Town University Professor, Crain Soudien, on Progress Towards Transformation and Social Cohesion and the Elimination of Discrimination in Public Higher Education Institutions (Soudien Report) to 'investigate discrimination in public higher education institutions, with a particular focus on racism and to make appropriate recommendations to combat discrimination and to promote social cohesion' (Soudien Report, 2008: 120).

The Soudien Report highlighted the pervasiveness of discriminatory and exclusionary practices and processes within South African higher education institutions and that institutional activities such as 'learning, teaching, curriculum, language, residence-life and governance' were found to be informed by what the report referred to as white supremacy (Soudien Report, 2008: 14, 50). This reference to an ideology of white supremacy was defined in the report as the misconception 'that the best of what it means to be a human being is represented by their [i.e. white people's] lifestyles, desires and aspirations' (Soudien Report, 2008: 14). In this thesis, white supremacy is often referred to as the privileging of whiteness where one group's ways of being, seeing, understanding the world are valued and constructed as the norm to the exclusion and marginalisation of all others. The prevalence of this ideology of white supremacy which makes it worthy of study, and ultimately necessary to challenge, is that black staff and students at historically white universities 'are denied the opportunity – either through a lack of access to opportunities or due to outright discrimination – to realise their full potential' (Soudien Report, 2008: 14). These issues appear to still affect higher

education institutions as the recent collection of black academics' experiences suggests (see Khunou, Phaswana, Khoza-Shangase & Canham, 2019). For this reason it still remains an issue worthy of study.

Similarly, a recent study using Rhodes University as a case study has found that historically white institutions in South Africa continue to struggle to attain and retain black staff and students (particularly at postgraduate, senior academic and management levels) due to the pervasiveness of the ideology of white supremacy within institutions (see Booii, Vincent & Liccardo, 2017; Soudien Report, 2008).

### **1.6 Discourse and institutional culture**

Institutional structures and processes (i.e. institutional culture) cannot be produced and reproduced without individuals. In particular it is assumed that discourse plays a critical role in the production and reproduction of institutional practices and processes, as it is through discourse that meaning, value and the purpose for which institutional buildings exist and are created and used (Gee, 1999, 2011). In a sense discourse helps to order the world – determining how people should behave, speak, and how the institutional space and its materials are to be arranged, used and why (Gee, 1999, 2011). In addition, it has been noted that the way that people talk does significant work in the reproduction of existing social relations (Dijk, 1992; Gee, 1999, 2011; Hill, 2008).

When one uses the word 'classroom', for example, one would expect the room to be organised with the chairs and tables lined up to face the front of the room where the teacher – who is located as fountain of knowledge – will stand (see Gee, 2011). The purpose of the room becomes the distribution of information. The arrangement of the room and the roles to be assumed, as well the expectations of the different roles are informed by what Gee (1999; 2011) refers to as the cultural models of the society in which the institution is located, and which it is meant to serve. These cultural models are not universal but are group specific as informed by the history and experiences of a group. In the case of this research project the cultural models are modelled after the group constructed as racially white and by the privileging of whiteness to the exclusion and marginalisation of other groups' ways of seeing, being and understanding the world.

For this reason programmes which were envisioned to provide academic support and skills development at historically white universities such as Rhodes University's Extended Studies Programme (Extended Studies Unit, 2009) for students who do not have the requisite entrance

points for university have been experienced as stigmatising and alienating by some black students. In regards to academic staff, programmes meant to increase the number of black academics – such as Rhodes Accelerated Development Programme (Rhodes University Staff Development Policy, 2014) have also been questioned in regards to producing staff who align and reproduce the existing institutional culture in the way staff teach, research and engage within the institutional space (Booi, Vincent, & Liccardo, 2017b; see also Hlengwa, 2015). Historically white universities such as Rhodes University have been accused of having a preference for those who hold the cultural and social capital to navigate the institution (Booi, Vincent & Liccardo, 2017b; see also Hlengwa, 2015), that is, black academics and students who can fit into, and thus assumedly reproduce the prevailing institutional culture informed by white supremacy.

### **1.7 Whiteness and socialisation**

Part of the reason that an institutional culture informed by whiteness has remained pervasive is what the literature refers to as the invisibility of whiteness. Rather than an assumed characteristic or feature of whiteness, in this thesis this refers specifically to how the process of being socialised over time allows whiteness to be perceived as a universal norm. That is, from an early age children learn from their various caregivers what it means to be white (Sullivan, 2006). Early socialisation into the group ‘white’ (including ways of being, seeing and understanding the world) naturalises the privileging of whiteness through a process that Bourdieu refers to as genesis amnesia, provided by a child’s care givers from the parents, extended family members and school teachers, for example, until being at the top of the racial hierarchy becomes as ingrained as one’s personality or an unconscious habit. (see Frankenberg, 1994; Sullivan, 2006).

Yet the process is not limited to those who have phenotypical features constructed as white only nor for that matter is socialisation a closed process of perfection as the thesis will show in its analysis chapters five, six and seven. Blackness (used here in the inclusive sense to refer to all who are not constructed and treated as belonging to the top of the racial hierarchy in racialised society) similarly is acquired through the process of socialisation.

### **1.8 Focus of the study**

Several studies that explore the structural means through which institutional cultures of whiteness are produced and reproduced, and thereby leading to feelings of exclusion and alienation by some black students, often have a macro-level focus tracing exclusion and exclusion, and privileging of whiteness to wider issues of racial inequality, socio-economic constraints, access to the capital valued within historically white universities and limited leadership and commitment to push the

transformation agenda, for example. Instead, this thesis focuses on the nexus between the local and macro, and reveals a constant interplay between discourse at the local Rhodes level (small d) and Discourse at the macro-level (big D). This difference between discourse (small d) and Discourse (big D) is discussed in greater detail in chapter three.

### **1.8 1. Discourse and subtle racism**

Research into whiteness suggests that one of the most insidious sites which create exclusion and alienation, and the production and reproduction of whiteness is the discursive (Frankenberg, 1994; Pierce, et al., 1977; Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000; Steyn, 2005; Steyn & Foster, 2008; WingSue, 2010). Racism and racial discrimination are no longer overt, and thus easily disrupted such as the use of racial epithets. Rather covert or subtle racism is often preformed in for example what Pierce et al. (1977) penned as everyday micro-aggressions – defined as ‘subtle insults (verbal, nonverbal, and/or visual) directed toward people of colour, often automatically or unconsciously’ and, at the discursive level, may include for example comments such as:

‘When I [a White person] talk about those Blacks, I really wasn't talking about you.’, ‘You [a Black person] are not like the rest of them. You're different.’, ‘If only there were more of them [Black people] like you [a Black person].’ and ‘I don't think of you [a Black person] as Black’(Solórzano et al., 2000: 60–61).

The subtle nature of this form of racism means that these cumulative, mini-assaults are often not investigated because they are more difficult to explain or for that matter prove.

Having experienced a subtle covert form of racism, the complainants’ protestations are construed as overly sensitive, or for that matter, of having misunderstood the intentions of the person who had made the offensive speech. Part of the reason for not hearing or understanding the complainants’ protestations – particularly within historically white institutions is not only because of the subtle nature of racism today, but because of the “cognitive habit, history, and culture [of those socialised white] unable to hear the range of relevant voices and grapple with what reasonably might be said in the voice of discrimination's victims” (Davis, 1989 [1576] in Solozarno et al., 2000: 61)

This thesis is concerned with how these subtle, covert forms of exclusion and alienation may be produced because they continue to be the least understood and yet possibly most pernicious forms of exclusion and alienation, because they cannot be as easily proved and challenged as the larger

macrostructures which produce and reproduce whiteness. Using Gee's (1999; 2011) discourse analysis, the thesis analyses how students describe their raced experiences rather than the content per se, and takes the position that the context of the discourse has larger social implications which the analyst must consider. No discourse takes place in a vacuum but is intricately connected to larger social issues and arrangements, which the speaker is located within. Through the process of socialisation, followed by what Bourdieu refers to as *genesis amnesia*, the speaker often reveals what he or she thinks about pressing social issues and current social arrangements (i.e whether they are legitimate, illegitimate or their causes).

In addition, as has been pointed out by discourse analysts such as Gee (1999, 2011) and Wetherell (2003), the speakers are often not aware of the wider social implications of their words – not the content per se but how accounts of experiences are constructed. In addition, the process of socialisation means that one may be racially discriminatory or imply support of racial inequality without consciously intending to. In order to explain, the thesis draws heavily on the work of Bourdieu and Sullivan which is discussed extensively in chapter three.

### **1.9 Research question and research objectives**

The thesis question was: what discursive strategies do former Rhodes university students use to describe their raced experiences, and do these discursive strategies either reinforce or challenge a culture of whiteness.

The term '*strategies*' is used within this thesis to refer to the unconscious ways in which habitus informs and guides individual action towards the best possible outcome made in light of the position of the speaker's group, and the speaker's access to quantity and composition of capital. In regard to the position of the speaker's group, apartheid defined and supported white identity through legal frameworks, political power and violence. As these were removed with the end of apartheid, post-apartheid white identity has undergone some shifts (Matthews, 2011; Nuttall, 2001; Steyn, 2005). In particular there is the concern of how to legitimate South African belonging as whites when it can no longer overtly be based on white racial superiority (Matthews, 2011; Nuttall, 2001). This negotiation must also be navigated with concerns about whiteness being associated with historically unearned privilege and oppression. To overtly and completely denounce the privileging of whiteness within Rhodes would mean undermining the opportunities and privileges that would ultimately be gained by attaining a degree from Rhodes University rather than at one of the historically black universities. Intersectional positionality such as gender and access to

capital also affected how students construct whiteness and understand whiteness in postapartheid South Africa as people do not experience whiteness in the same way.

### **1.9.1 Constructions of whiteness**

The various factors that whites need to navigate meant that white students did not construct and navigate race the same way within their narratives as will be revealed in chapters five and six. Similarly, there was contestation around the construction and navigation of race in the black students' narratives as well. Black identity in South Africa has similarly undergone shifts as the political and legal institutions to police racial boundaries have been removed. Those social aspects of whiteness are thus possible to acquire and invest in across the white racial boundary as black students attend multiracial schools, and grow up in predominantly white neighbourhoods, for example. Black identity, nonetheless, is still connected to marginalisation and oppression, and experiences of such in spaces where whiteness is privileged – despite the rising black middle class. There is, as pointed out by Nyamnjoh (2016) the careful negotiation and navigation of who is black enough while facing the need to successfully navigate and negotiate institutions that privilege whiteness in order to attain the valued Rhodes University degree.

Similar to the white students, attending Rhodes University means there has to be an investment in a degree at Rhodes University and the opportunities, privileges and power the degree will provide rather than a degree from one of the historically black universities. The factors mentioned above explain how and why students (white and black) were not homogenous. Rather, the thesis argued that the careful negotiation and navigation by white and black students alike can be explained as being due to whiteness being a socially constructed identity that is pursued for association with privilege and opportunity. This negotiation as the several factors mentioned highlight is not in a vacuum but in light of the speaker's group location and larger discourse within South African society about race and changing social relations. The thesis therefore ultimately argues, as mentioned previously, that whiteness is a socially constructed identity that is pursued for its association with power, opportunity and privilege. There is little reason why whiteness should escape redefinition and reconstruction in tune with changing social relations, social mobility and interracial dynamics.

### **1.9.2 Data findings**

The findings revealed by the research questions are discussed under the appropriate heading in each of the various chapters into which this thesis is divided. Chapters V, VI and VII may be consulted for analyses of the findings.

In broad terms, the analysis revealed common concerns for both black and white to negotiate the issue of belonging in South Africa, a country in which race plays a large role. In addition, there is a common concern for pursuit of access to social goods of which whiteness is often associated with access to privilege, opportunity and power. Rather than a zero-sum game then, whiteness was revealed as a game of gradations where each individual using whatever habitus and capital they hold attempts to claim more whiteness and thus more access to social goods.

### **1.10 Location of the thesis study**

Unlike much research which explores whiteness along racialised lines associated simply with oppression and blackness with marginalisation, and never the twain shall meet, this thesis sought to explore how whiteness is produced and reproduced in the context at the time; And also sought to explore how whiteness is being produced and reproduced in a context where essentialised racial boundaries are no longer as strictly in place as they once were in South Africa. By beginning initially with looking at the data across both white and black students with no assumption upon how white and black bodies construct whiteness, this thesis hoped to contribute to how the privileging of whiteness is being produced and reproduced in post-apartheid South Africa. While there has been increasing awareness of the need to nuance whiteness studies both within South Africa and beyond, what has been less researched is how this nuance needs to be extended to the way that whiteness is studied (i.e a focus only on white participants or a focus only on black participants). Much of the literature locating oneself within whiteness studies has largely drawn upon white bodies only (nuance notwithstanding) or black bodies' survival or marginalisation within whiteness.

Little attention is paid to how black bodies may co-produce and reproduce whiteness – for the same reason that many whites do – an investment in the privilege, opportunity and power associated with whiteness. More importantly, as noted by Bourdieu (1990; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; see also Swartz, 1997) to enter a game – even when one wishes to object to the game itself and the rules of the game – requires the acknowledgement that the game is worth playing and playing by the rules of the game. Thus, whiteness continues to be privileged in postapartheid South Africa because of its association with privilege, opportunity and power. It is thus a game worth playing – even though many recognise that it is an unfair game, and many pursue to change it. One cannot change a game if one is not recognised as player nor had the skills as a player to begin with. Thus, to challenge whiteness within Rhodes University requires the pursuit and acquisition

of some of the skills acknowledged and rewarded within Rhodes University. Whiteness is thus produced and reproduced – albeit inadvertently in the discursive strategies used by the students.

This study differs from many of the whiteness studies produced in North American literature which dominates whiteness studies. Unlike the United States where whites hold political power, this thesis contributes to whiteness studies by revealing how the privileging of whiteness may occur beyond phenotypical essence only. As noted by studies which are located more broadly within race studies, race in post-apartheid South Africa has become more nuanced – particularly amongst the youth. These studies are rather concerned with shifting racial constructions in South Africa more generally.

### **1.10.1 Contestations and debates within whiteness studies**

It is also worth noting that the debate continues to be about whether whiteness studies are a separate field of study or whether they may be located as part of race studies. On the one hand there are those that argue that there is a discernible shift from previous race studies work out of which the focus on whiteness arises. For others, however, this discernible shift does not necessarily indicate nor necessitate a break from race studies as a field. Rather there is a sense within this aforementioned position that insights from race studies may be drawn upon to garner insights into whiteness.

Whiteness studies in South Africa draw much of their insights on whiteness from the North American literature, particularly literature that points the characteristics or features of whiteness, albeit to add nuance to whiteness within the context of South Africa. This work is critical to underscoring the ever-shifting boundaries of whiteness, and to understanding how whiteness is constructed in post-apartheid South Africa. However, like in North American literature, white people are the main focus for drawing insights into whiteness. Whites are usually predominantly oppressors and black people predominantly survivors and victims of marginalisation providing little of Roos's (2016) search for contradictory complexity in understanding how the privileging of whiteness is produced and reproduced. Research in whiteness as was challenged by Ratele (2007) needs to tell us a little more than what we already know about whiteness.

Although there is a plethora of research on white people in South Africa, works which locate themselves clearly as whiteness studies, however, may be differentiated by a predominant focus on drawing from white constructions, productions and reproductions and meanings of whiteness. This body of work draws on the North American literature on whiteness when the focus on whites begins to be noticed by some as a field of its own distinct from race studies in the 1990s. One of

the seminal texts that arguably establishes this in South Africa is Melissa Steyn's *Whiteness just isn't what it used to be*. Written not long after whiteness studies had started to truly take off in North America, it is against this backdrop of growth and establishment of whiteness studies in North America that South African whiteness studies grows. It is for this reason that Abramovitz (2009) and Goga (2008) critique early South Africa whiteness studies research of rendering whiteness fixed and stable – despite many aims to do the exact opposite.

### **1.10.2 South African whiteness studies**

Similar to those in North America, South African studies reflect contestation and debate about the boundaries of whiteness and race studies. Authors may distinguish their work from other work that focuses on white people such as settler studies or race studies or, alternatively, on whiteness located more broadly within race studies, creating some contestation as to what should be included or excluded as part of research on whiteness. That said, this thesis located itself explicitly within what has been referred to as whiteness studies, recognising the shift in the 1990s led by the North American literature and its context due to a need to focus on how the dominant group in racialised societies construct, produce and reproduce whiteness as part of the larger system of racism. Academic studies are moving away from the focus on blacks as the key to understanding racism and racial exclusion to a greater focus on the role played by the dominant group (i.e whites).

Being located within whiteness studies bears with it its own dangers due to the politics of the shift from black as the key to understanding racism and racial discrimination. Specifically, while the term whiteness does not refer to whites as a group specifically, much of the research has continued to draw from white peoples' constructions and meanings of whiteness, and how white people produce and reproduce whiteness. The thesis thus faced the challenge of being located within what appears to be a discernible shift in how racism and racial discrimination are understood and studied with regard to whiteness (inclusive of white ideology, white discourse etc.) but also being faced with its limitations and essentialisms – in particular how whiteness may be rendered fixed and stable due to the way whiteness is studied. The thesis thus contributes to the field of whiteness studies by exploring how whiteness may be studied within what has demarcated by some as a field distinguishable from race studies and settler studies.

To avoid being caught in up in the politics of where the boundaries of race studies or whiteness studies or settler studies lie and how much one may borrow from the insight of one before they became located within another field, the thesis instead located itself with the field of whiteness studies for ease of locating the study. Thus clearly located with a specific corpus of literature and

common approach to study whiteness (discussed further in chapter three) the thesis could then contribute to how whiteness may be studied, approached and explored without rendering whiteness as stable and fixed (i.e. essentialised).

The literature used falls within what is recognised in the field as located specifically within the field of whiteness studies rather than drawing from what others have distinguished as being separate and distinct from race studies or settler studies. With an eye for extension in how whiteness studies are done, the thesis this does not close the possibility of whiteness studies drawing from other research labelled as settler studies and race studies. Rather by extending the boundaries within which whiteness studies research may be done, the thesis opens the possibility of whiteness being merely a turn in race studies as others seek to extend how whiteness is understood, approached and studied. It is worth noting here that there are studies that are seeking for the contradictory complexity sought by Roos (2016) in how whiteness is studied and approached. However much of the work is either not specifically located within whiteness studies per se while drawing on whiteness studies literature (Matthews, 2011; Nuttall, 2001; Seddon, 2014) and thus is bound up in the boundary debate, or locates itself explicitly within whiteness studies but continues to draw from predominantly white participants and thus bears the danger of assuming that the privileging of whiteness occurs in isolation within one structural position within racial hierarchy (see for example Kruger, 2016). It is worth noting that while research is seldom clearly demarcated as set out above, the discussion above, for ease of analysis in the context of the debate, focuses on the general trends across the debate and its contestations.

### **1.11 Thesis structure**

Chapter I provides an overview of the thesis including the thesis question, the context out of which the study developed and the scope and location of the study. The chapter also briefly highlights the findings and main thesis argument.

The second chapter provides the context in which the study was undertaken. In particular, chapter II discusses how and why the institution currently known as Rhodes University was created, and the way this informs the institutional culture of the institution post-1994. In addition, the chapter discusses the rate of transformation in South African higher education post 1994 which highlights the need for attending to institutional culture as part of the transformation agenda of the South African department of higher education.

In chapter III a review of whiteness studies literature reveals nuances of whiteness but also potentially myriad definitions and approaches to whiteness. This chapter importantly sets out how whiteness is approached in this study. The chapter draws from works such as that of Bashkow (2006), Hartigan Jr's (1997) inspired use of Strathern, Nyamnjoh's (2013, 2015a, 2015b) concept of conviviality and incompleteness in order to grapple with this. The thesis question requires a means to explain how and why speakers may inadvertently produce and reproduce unequal social relations and structures. Bourdieu's (1990, Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) concept of habitus, fields and games in regard to the unconscious reproduction of systems or structures of inequality in society was discussed. It is worth noting here that the terms 'systems' and 'structures' are used interchangeably.

Chapter IV sets out the methodological steps taken to answer the research question including data collection, participants, validity and reliability, and ethics. The chapter also discusses the method of analysis.

The first analysis chapter, chapter V revealed that participants' different ways of understanding the term 'raced' was not directly linked to race. Rather different types of capital including cultural, social and economic capital were found to be of paramount importance in terms of how successfully one was able to negotiate and navigate Rhodes University.

Chapter VI, the second analysis chapter, focused on the degree to which participants acknowledged the privileging of whiteness, and their own complicity in whiteness. The chapter argued that participants had sufficient self-reflexivity to know they could not avoid their own complicity in whiteness. However, participants at the same time sought to limit the extent to which they were complicit in whiteness in myriad ways. Using discursive strategies such as vesseling, this pointed out how whiteness may be acquired, lost and decanted elsewhere as a means to limit complicity in whiteness.

The final analysis chapter is chapter VII. The liberal identity continues to be produced through discursive moves such as the diversity discourse, comparison and ways that students dealt with the pressures of the privileging of whiteness within the institution. Themes such as Rhodes being a place of exclusivity, elitism and uniqueness where a specific type of whiteness – English middle-class – was also brought to the fore. The discursive moves and themes not only showed that each institution has its own particular historical identity which continues to affect bodies in

the present, but that the historical identity is also co-produced discursively by participants – albeit not necessarily consciously.

Chapter VIII concludes the thesis by highlighting the findings of the previous chapters. The thesis finds in this regard that systems of inequality and oppression are not simply reinforced or challenged in a one-dimensional or essentialised manner. Rather, the negotiation and navigation of interests leads discursive strategies which may both reinforce and challenge whiteness. That is, Roos's (2016) reference to the concept of contradictory complexity where systems of inequality and oppression may be consciously or unconsciously reproduced in small everyday ways through both complicity and challenge of the status quo.

The findings of the thesis also imply that race (including whiteness) provides an important foil for concerns of belonging in post-apartheid South Africa. Race in a sense is a political tool in talk to negotiate concerns such as who belongs within an institution, who holds power and who does not, and how much power some individuals believe others hold. At stake thus is not only who has power but the legitimacy of power or domination within the institutional space. Race as mentioned previously is thus not so much about biological (phenotypical) essence but continues to be an important resource for engaging the issue of who has what and on what grounds. Thus race, in particular whiteness, continues to be an important part of our racialised society because of its current usefulness in negotiating concerns for access to power, privilege and opportunity. Thus, its meanings, boundaries and constructions may always shift to suit the context and speaker at the time.

Lastly the concluding chapter recapitulate the findings, discusses the thesis' contribution to knowledge, and sets out the limitations of the study.

## **Chapter II: Rhodes University: A Culture of Whiteness**

### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter discusses the connection between race and education in South Africa in order to contextualise and understand how race – in particular the privileging of whiteness – is produced and/or reproduced post-apartheid in historically white higher education institutions such as Rhodes University. As the chosen site of study to explore the phenomenon is Rhodes University, this chapter also discusses Rhodes University's own stance on race and racial segregation within the higher education landscape pre-1994, and its location in the connection between education and race post-1994. Rhodes University was established in 1904 under the auspices of furthering British imperialism through moulding young men who as future leaders would know their duty to protect and promote the empire.

The contextual discussion undertaken in this chapter will also better enable the situating and answering of the thesis question: 'What discursive strategies do former Rhodes University students use to describe their raced experiences, and do these strategies either reinforce and or challenge the privileging of whiteness within the aforementioned institution?' Although the thesis question situates the study within Rhodes University, the insights have bearing beyond this institution as the phenomena of the ever-shifting boundaries of racial construction and its interests are not limited to Rhodes University only. Moreover, the privileging of whiteness within historically white South African universities is a challenge that faces all historically white South African universities rather than being limited to Rhodes University only. Rhodes University, therefore, potentially provides a means to glean insights beyond this specific site of study.

### **2.2 Whence from race, colonialism and education pre-apartheid?**

In 2003 the Rhodes Trust together with the Nelson Mandela Foundation established the Mandela Rhodes Foundation and created its prestigious Mandela Rhodes Scholarship (Maylam, 2005). The foundation and the scholarship connected the legacy of two men: the legacy of democracy, freedom and tolerance associated with Nelson Mandela and the other legacy, that of Cecil John Rhodes, a man who has been found to have been a racist white supremacist imperialist (Maylam, 2005). The creation of the scholarship was highly contested as the original Rhodes Scholarship was cited by reviewer of South African education history, John Reilly (2016: 116), as being the English '[e]mpire's most important educational organ ... [in] ... shaping the outlook and spiritual kinship of an ever growing body of men throughout the English speaking world' who would further the imperialist vision for land, cheap labour and ever-increasing capitalist state and

bourgeoisie interests (Nimocks,1968: 143–144 in Reilly, 2016: 116). The specific purpose of the Rhodes scholarship was to educate young men in the political, ideological, economic and social machinery of the imperial British state, and the duties it imposed on them as part of this machine (Reilly, 2016: 115–116). Specifically, the British state’s interests lay in:

1. Firstly, pushing anglicisation so that English whiteness had the most power rather than Afrikaner whiteness.
2. Secondly, the Anglicised education was also envisioned as being key to mobilising young white men in pursuing means to create and ensure the continued existence of an immobile cheap labour force for rising capitalists and statesmen such as Cecil John Rhodes (Reilly, 2016).

There was some contestation about the combining of the legacy of Cecil John Rhodes and Mandela at the time as the two were argued to stand for two very different positions in regard to freedom, racism and the future of Africa. Despite the history of racism and imperialism connected to Cecil John Rhodes, the money to be provided by the Rhodes Trust in conjunction with the Mandela Rhodes Foundation was argued to provide much needed funds for the development of postapartheid post-colonial education in South Africa. In particular the Rhodes Trust, it could be argued, would be putting money back into the people it had exploited during the colonial era through the prestigious Rhodes scholarship. Regardless of one’s opinion on the creation of the foundation, it would in some ways ensure that an exclusive network of Anglicised future leaders would be produced – regardless of their phenotypical features. Today the Mandela Rhodes Scholarship has within its alumni black people whom Cecil John Rhodes likely did not envision his scholarship assisting given his racist, white supremacist imperialist beliefs. This is not as surprising, as the willingness to adapt to promote the success of English whiteness does not preclude the extension of some privileges of whiteness beyond phenotypically white bodies when necessary (Nyamnjoh, 2016; Reilly, 2016). Although a racist and imperialist, Cecil John Rhodes, like many other capitalists and statesmen, had no qualms about extending, crossing and redefining social boundaries where necessary in order to further capitalist interests (see Reilly, 2016: 39, 250–254).

### **2.2.1 An education: learning from England, Ireland and India**

Race as a phenotypically bound, stable concept is misleading. Rather than being inherently bound to phenotypical features, race – including whiteness – has always been a flexible social construct

created to further and protect the interests of the few at the time. As the context changes, the boundaries and definition of race shift as well as the means to continue to further and protect the interests of the few.

The flexible boundaries of whiteness and racial construction are perhaps best explained through the use of race by the rising English bourgeoisie to describe and justify the exclusion of the poor working class in England in order to ensure a steady supply of cheap labour for rapidly industrialising England (Reilly, 2016: 39). By not considering structural or systemic causes of poverty, poverty could instead be 'attributed to notions of culture, behaviour and/or biology' in official state discourse (Reilly, 2016: 39). An example of this is worthy of quoting in full for the insights it provides about the construction of race, the extension of racial boundaries beyond phenotypical essence only:

In the countryside, the tribe consisted of vagrants, beggars, thieves, peddlers, showmen, harvestmen; in the city pickpockets, beggars, prostitutes, street traders, street performers, carmen, coachmen, water sailors. Each of these groups had its particular features, but all shared the same basic qualities: 'a greater development of the animal than of the intellectual or moral nature,' 'high cheek-bones and protruding jaws', a 'slang language,' 'lax ideas of property', 'general improvidence', 'repugnance to continuous labour', 'disregard of female honour', 'love of cruelty', 'pugnacity' and 'utter want of religion' (Himmelfarb, 1984: 325 in Reilly, 2016: 41).

One would be hard pressed to try and differentiate the above discourse from that used later in the British colonies. Or for that matter the construction of the Irish by the English bourgeoisie for the self-same imperialist capitalist interests by demonising the Irish from that used later in the colonies:

childish, emotionally unstable, ignorant, indolent, superstitious, primitive, dirty, 'vengeful' and 'violent' (Curtis, 1968: 52 in Reilly, 2016: 56).

It is worth noting that the state was married to the rising bourgeoisie educated at elite universities such as Oxford which had previously been the exclusive domain of the aristocratic class only (Reilly, 2016). As technology in England brought about an increasing industrial rather than traditional agriculturally based economy, there was a rising bourgeoisie benefiting from the

industrialisation. Industrialisation in turn brought about the need for a larger bureaucratic state than that which could be filled by the aristocrats alone, thereby necessitating the opening up of elite institutions such as Oxford. This rising bourgeoisie would be educated at institutions such as Oxford on statecraft and other means of becoming part of the gentlemanly elite. It is from this background that those such as Rhodes, Milner, Jameson and others of his ilk were created as statesmen and imperialists. It is from this same background and purpose for which the Rhodes Scholarship was created, and later on the institution of Rhodes University specifically.

In this link of education, racism and rising need for cheap labour in a rapidly industrialising England, state interests were elite bourgeoisie interests. The lessons learned from the construction of the poor working class in England, and later Ireland, to ensure a steady supply of labour would later be exported to the colonies (Reilly, 2016), this time creating an immobile cheap labour pool by basing the notion of race on pigmentation or phenotype (Reilly, 2016). By constructing race based on pigmentation rather than class in the colonies, this ensured an immobile cheap labour force for the bourgeoisie interests, first in farming and later on in mining. Those poor whites who were once constructed as a problematic race back in England would be encouraged to move to the colonies to strengthen the foothold of the English empire. Soon however, the British state started facing an increasing number of poor unskilled whites in South Africa who often worked beside poor unskilled working-class blacks in the mines especially.

There was increasing concern by the British state of the fraternisation between whites and blacks in the colonial, and later on apartheid state. It was feared that these together could potentially challenge the elite and their interests. As a solution to this there was a push to connect the notion of race to phenotype rather than class: the poor white working class would be elevated to a privileged position as was the case in not only South Africa but in many of the British colonies including, for example, Jamaica, United States of America and several African states. Through this use of phenotype rather than class, as had previously been the case in England, the poor working class (white and black) could be prevented from collaborating and realising their common oppression by the British, and later Afrikaans elites. The need to limit race to pigmentation (or phenotypical essence) was thus part of the need to diffuse rising fear of the elites that their economic and political interests and power could be overthrown by the poor (black and white).

The crossing, extension or redefining of social boundaries (including the idea of race) is also best illustrated by the lesson learned from the British experience in India on indirect rule. One of the most notable examples of the policy of indirect rule was through the use of education in the

colonies (Reilly, 2016). Of particular note in regard to this policy was Macaulay's Minute on Education (Reilly, 2016). The aforementioned minute denigrated and inferiorised all Indian knowledge and culture while constructing all things English as superior. With Indian knowledge and culture constructed and propagated amongst Indians as inferior, the British would then select the most promising Indians to buy into and invest in all things British. The ideological allure or promise was that one could whiten up to become part of the superior class and civilisation through this investment into all things English (see Nyamnjoh & Page, 2002; Nyamnjoh, 2016). The association of all things good and worth having as British is exemplified by Macaulay's (1952 in Reilly, 2016: 66) statement that through the acquisition of the English language 'one has access to intellectual wealth' and holds the language of the 'wisest nations'.

By undergoing a British education in elite institutions such as Oxford, one who was not phenotypically white (in this case chosen promising Indians) could be socialised into English in almost all aspects. However, the English socialisation was aimed at providing a means to rule on behalf of the British elite: acting as interlocutors and a buttress to colonial control (Macaulay, 1835; Reilly, 2016). This was necessary because the white population was often a numerical minority in the colonies, and therefore did not have the means to rely on only those who are phenotypically white to control the much larger local population (see Steyn, 2001). A few carefully chosen promising members of the Indian population (primarily men as statecraft was gendered) would be sent to institutions such as Oxford to be trained not necessarily just in statecraft – but statecraft for British interests (Reilly, 2016). Through socialisation the chosen members of the local population would be 'Indian in blood and colour but English in taste, in opinions, in morals and intellect' (Macaulay, 1952: 729 in Reilly, 2016). These British Indians, through their education at institutions such as Oxford, would become more English than the English. Or to put it more crudely in racial terms 'to be as white as any white' culturally with the exception of phenotype.

Yet the crossing, extension and shifting of the social boundaries were not completely boundless as shall be further explored in the following chapter on how whiteness is conceptualised in this thesis. Rather, crossing, extension and shifting of social boundaries were (as it arguably is even today) often done in a way that allows the interests of the elite to be preserved. Therein lies the contradiction within how race is constructed and used. Even today this contradiction of both the extension and limiting of the boundaries of race (including whiteness) continues. This is perhaps best illustrated by the fact that if one is to replace the words colonised with marginalised and imperialist with historically white in the following quote, it is not far from the state of exclusion and alienation as described in the Soudien Report (2008) discussed in the previous chapter: 'the

co-operation of the [marginalised] is secured through education in [historically white] institutions, while at the same time, this very class of [marginalised is] denied [full] access to the bourgeoisie franchise and reminded, whenever they chance to lift their heads or fail to bow at the appropriate moment, that they too, are “niggers” (Reilly,2016:67).

### **2.2.2 Contradictions, extensions and limitations in racial construction**

The above quote from Reilly (2016:67) on the limitations of Englishness highlights the contradiction pertaining to the construction and use of racial boundaries before, during and after apartheid. Even those to whom social privileges which they were previously denied are extended, there is always the possibility at all times of being unceremoniously reminded that they are indeed not part of the privileged social group. This contradiction as argued Reilly (2016) ensures the possibility of an ever-present servant class – even if the benefits are mostly psychological.

Another contradiction offered by socialisation is that once they are accepted within the new social boundary that once excluded them, the new conditionally accepted elite are not, in turn, beyond closing the doors into which they have been accepted as Reilly (2016) argues through the example of the bourgeoisie of England. Having attained access to what were previously aristocratic institutions only and having only recently acquired gentlemanly habitus and accoutrements of the gentry, this self-same bourgeoisie denied the working class social mobility by denying them the right to quality education. A quality education, which the bourgeoisie had just attained themselves – was denied to the working class out of a fear that this would diminish the unskilled labour needed for the many bourgeoisie-owned factories in a rapidly industrialising England. This background to the connection between education, race and elite interests is not only reminiscent of the relations and interest of the British state in colonial South Africa in the nineteenth century in regard to the native problem, but arguably no less pertinent and relevant as universities continue to be primarily filled by those who already have some access to economic capital.

There is reason to believe that those who succeed and successfully navigate historically white universities are those who have acquired the necessary social and cultural capital valued at the historically white universities (see Hlengwa, 2015). A few promising students from working class backgrounds are however also accepted – often to go through programmes such as the Extended Studies Programme (Idahosa, 2016: 26). Rather than merely being a means to provide additional academic support, however, Extended Studies Programmes are also arguably a means to coach the black poor working class in the cultural capital valued and rewarded within the institution (Hlengwa, 2015; Booi et al., 2017a). Institutions such as Rhodes University, once created to further

the interests of imperialism by being a training ground for future white leaders, today represents a tension between privilege and disadvantage.

While historically the best universities were a place for white people in South Africa, today there are black South Africans who are part of this privileged group. However there are still stories of exclusion in subtle forms of racism where norms and privileges of whiteness that are the product of history have not been completely eradicated (Hlengwa, 2015; Booie et al., 2017b; Jagarnath, 2015; Soudien Report, 2008; Fengu, 2018; Pitt, 2018) thus revealing the conditional extension of the privileges as was the case for British Indians. The construction of race as is apparent from the discussion in this section is thus not so much about phenotypical essence only but about social constructions in order to justify or negotiate interests at the time. Phenotype or physical features become the basis of race in order to preserve elite interests within the British colonies in South Africa so as to create and preserve an immobile pool of servants for agriculture and mining. Furthermore, the discussions in this section also clearly indicate that race has never been a constant – rather its construction changes per context, per the interests being pursued at the time.

The connection between higher education and race within South Africa lies within a tension of privilege and disadvantage, inclusion and exclusion for some as elucidated in the above section. The figure of Cecil Rhodes being rehabilitated through the connection to Mandela indicates that the extension or crossing of social boundaries with their concomitant contradiction is not a thing of the past. What is of interest in the post-apartheid context however is how race is being constructed and used post-apartheid. Moreover, how is the contradiction of both extending and limiting the privileges of whiteness being navigated? South Africa is filled with what appear to be instances incongruous to the default identities of race legally and politically constructed under apartheid (Dolby, 2001; Walker, 2005). Racial boundaries, which were once clearly demarcated and policed through legislation and politics, are now no longer easily delineated political and legal frameworks which provided a deceptive simplicity and stability to race.

Research by (Dolby, 2001) into post-apartheid constructions of race for example indicates that alongside apartheid constructions of race (i.e the notion of race being defined by physical features/phenotype), youth are at the same time redefining race using popular culture and other social interests and tastes rather than phenotypical essence only. There are, in a sense that Walker (2005: 42) refers to in her review of Dolby's work as 'crossovers in taste preferences' which not only allow, for example, alliances across racial categories but the reconfiguring of racial identities. In addition there is a rising black middle class in South Africa which for some opens up the

discussion as whether class is becoming more pertinent than race in South Africa in analysing inequality (Seekings & Nattrass, 2008; Seekings, 2008). Yet despite this, racial discrimination connected to the privileging of whiteness still exists in historically white South African higher education institutions. Race in South Africa then is not a simple affair post-apartheid – anymore than it was pre-apartheid and arguably in some cases during apartheid (see Carroll, 2003, on the case of Sandra Laing, a black woman with white parents). The complicated construction and use of race in South Africa post-apartheid is perhaps best illustrated when taking into account the response to the Marikana massacre by South African landless peoples' movement referred as Abahlali baseMjondolo. In an analysis of the Marikana massacre, the term 'black boer' was used by Abahlali baseMjondolo to refer to black elites who in their perception rule the country as if they were Afrikaner whites during the years of apartheid (Goebel, 2015: 173; see also Rodrigues, 2010). In line with this construction of race, black poor striking miners were shot down because their black bodies were criminalised by the now wealthy black political elite accused of having economic incentives to end the strike.

In her research on the intersection of race, place, gender and class Goebel (2015: 172) suggests that rather than discard race as a means of analysis in post-colonial post-apartheid South Africa 'it is more fruitful to consider how the poor are "raciali[s]ed" through new forms of exclusion in the post-apartheid' context. Thus, when we see practices of exclusion by the wealthy black elite, we can instead explain it as part of the process of racialisation. In this regard, Goebel (2015: 174) states: '[r]aciali[s]ation can occur even when elites and rulers, like the majority, are black. Racialisati[s]ion needs to be understood as a process of marginalization, not a case of membership in a given biological category upon which institutional processes act in an undifferentiated way'. Race as biological essence and social construct are thus bound together, and structural racism (including the privileging of whiteness) requires that we take into account both essence and social construct in an effort to understand how the students in this both may be bound by and transcend their racial boundaries.

This point is further illustrated by the work of Wright (1998) and Stolcke (1995) on the changing European discourse on race and culture. In their analysis of European discourse on race, the authors find that there are both old and new elements of racism. For Stolcke (1995: 1) for example the old is in the contradiction between organicist and voluntarist ideas of belonging, and the new is claiming that exclusion and limitation is natural because all cultures are inherently different and thus will have difficulty communicating. Racial differentiation through this process of binding the old and the new renders racial differentiation and exclusion as natural (Stolcke, 1995: 7).

By sharing the case of exclusion on ‘a trait shared by all humans alike rather than on unfitness allegedly intrinsic’ to specific groups, ‘cultural fundamentalism has a certain openness which leaves room for requiring those who are immigrants, if they wish to live in our midst to assimilate culturally’ (Stolcke, 1995: 7). Thus, exclusion in the case of whiteness in South Africa may be on the basis of not having the cultural capital to navigate whitely space which may be extended beyond phenotypical whiteness only. This allows a construction that all are equal within the whitely space as they can all acquire the capital with no questioning of the privileging of whiteness to begin with. As the old discourse starts to recede a little, race is socially constructed, and we are all the same as human beings. However, in as much there may be the discourse that all human beings are intrinsically equal as human beings, there is however a racialisation of differentiation in regard to who decides who has the requisite capital valued in a whitely space. The contradiction lies in that those black people who are successfully socialised white still carry the basis of their exclusion on their faces at the same time (Stolcke, 1995: 8).

This need to limit or exclude within whiteness and is not due to endowments of one particular racial group. Rather as argued by Stolcke (1995: 12) ‘[p]eople become ... entrenched and exclusive in contexts where there is domination and conflict. It is the configuration of socio-political structures and relationship both within and between groups that activates’ and shapes the means of differentiation. This is also echoed by Wright’s (1998) analysis of race across different sociopolitical contexts. Human beings, she argues, are constantly contesting and jostling for how the world is constructed and understood as this allows a means to produce and reproduce, a means to justify distribution of social goods. The power to construct meaning is not only pursued due to access to material goods but moreover the power to control meaning is itself pursued. Meaning making and reduction to essence thus may be used by an indigenous population in its efforts to claim and protect rights against a state, in as much as the self-same group may don Western clothes and acquire Western social signifiers when needs must for continued survival. In post-apartheid South Africa as old apartheid constructions and beliefs of white superiority as the basis of racial difference have receded, the question becomes how exclusion and limited access to power, privilege and opportunity associated with whiteness is being constructed and used today. This is of particular worth considering as white South African identity can no longer explicitly draw on white superiority in public. Reification of whiteness – that is limiting whiteness to a few – has to be made possible through other means even while race is admitted being a social construct.

## **2.3 Rhodes University**

The site of study, Rhodes University, has been described and constructed as a liberal University (Buckland & Neville, 2004; Greyling, 2007). What the history of the institution reveals, however, is a university which officially largely stayed silent on apartheid policies, and thus was complicit to apartheid segregation even when it did not need to (Greyling, 2007; Maylam, 2005, 2016). Rather than being apolitical the University is revealed to have comfortably fitted into white segregationist South Africa due to its imperialist leanings. This implies, as several other studies have indicated, that the past is not left in the past, but to some extent continues to be a part of how people construct and navigate the social world in the present (see for example Bonilla-Silva, 2002; Steyn, 2005, 2001). The past is also relevant in how institutional cultures are constructed and navigated (Goga, 2008, 2010). This section of the chapter discusses the history of Rhodes University as part of a larger imperialist agenda, and later at its complicity in apartheid racist policies. The section goes on to look at some of the post-apartheid challenges faced in higher education today when it comes to transformation, and how these are reflected at Rhodes University especially. What is revealed in the post-apartheid context is how race continues to be relevant as a basis of exclusion – albeit in less overt ways and sometimes across racial and within racial boundaries (Walker, 2005a, 2005) However there is also room for reconstituting whiteness beyond its mere biological essence (Bashkow, 2006). It is here that the focus of the thesis lies: where race is both everywhere and nowhere at the same time to use a term coined by Walker (2005a). This tension indicates that we need to be thinking of whiteness relationally as shall be argued in the following chapters depending upon how people adapt and deploy race as indicated (see also Bashkow, 2006).

### **2.3.1 Rhodes University and the connection to imperialism before 1994**

Rhodes university has been critiqued by some as a ‘colonial institution’ because the university was founded as ‘part of a great project – to bolster the British imperial connection’ (Maylam, 2005: 14). In order to garner financial and political support for the establishment of the University, it was proposed that the institution would posthumously serve the imperialist vision of Cecil John Rhodes for the spread of British colonial power and capitalism. To curry further political support in order to be recognised as a college, the proposed institution would also be in line with Milner’s Anglicisation policy.

Rather than being neutral the founding of Rhodes University in 1904, Grahamstown, Eastern Cape, South Africa was in line with the British High Commissioner, Milner’s Anglicisation policy (Maylam, 2005: 14–15). With the end of the Boer War, Milner feared a threat to British supremacy by the rise of the Dutch/Afrikaner cultural movement. Tensions existed between the two main

white groups in South Africa: English-speaking White South Africans and Afrikaans-speaking South Africans (Maylam, 2016; Steyn, 2001). While the two were concerned with the native problem, the tension between the two phenotypically white groups also revealed that they were rivals struggling for control, and construction of ideal whiteness in South Africa (Steyn, 2001).

In keeping with the style of an English education akin to Oxford and Cambridge, Milner hoped to firmly establish English culture and political control in South Africa through an institution such as Rhodes University (Maylam, 2005, 2016). For those who would help establish Rhodes University, it was similarly argued that the University would strengthen imperialist concerns and ideas in South Africa (Maylam, 2005, 2016, 2005). This was particularly important given that Afrikaners had established Victoria College, the future Stellenbosch University (Maylam, 2016: 23). Although Rhodes University's 'unofficial' centenary book authors (Buckland & Neville, 2004) would likely argue that the University had made the connection between Rhodes University and imperialism as a means of getting Rhodes's financial trust support only, the practice of segregationist policies well before it was legally necessary to do so reveal a less savoury reality.

Furthering the connection between empire and segregation, Rhodes University has also been referred to as 'Oxford in the bush' (Maylam, 2016), a term which for some hints to the extent to which the institution is out of place. That is, Rhodes as an ivory tower, arguably for some, 'lacking any kind of regional, national or continental identity as an institution located in Africa. On the other hand, there are those who have taken pride in what they perceive to have been adherence to the ethos and tradition of one of England's two most renowned elite universities' (Maylam, 2016: 22).

For Maylam (2016) there are three main similarities between Oxford and Rhodes University, which indicate the extent to which Rhodes University was established as part of a larger project of furthering imperialist ideas and interests in South Africa. These also provide context into Rhodes' identity with excellence. Firstly, both Rhodes University and Oxford were associated with furthering imperialist ideas and concerns. Many Oxford graduates, for example, then went on to hold senior posts which shaped imperial policies. Many of the Rhodes vice-chancellors were either Oxford or Cambridge graduates, and thus could replicate and further the imperialist agenda through the curriculum and running of the university. These ideas were specifically connected to economic, political and cultural interests which, in the process, inferiorised those who were not phenotypically white. The negotiations for the establishment of Rhodes University were specifically linked with the need to push the imperialist agenda in South Africa (Greyling, 2007; Maylam, 2005, 2016, 2005). Cecil John Rhodes, a white Englishman who became wealthy through

mining in South Africa, had sought to place all of Africa under British influence and control (Maylam, 2005). The imperialist University had been established to further this imperialist goal after his death (Maylam, 2005). Part of what had allowed Rhodes to establish his wealth in the country had been exploitation of black labour (Nyamnjoh, 2016; Maylam, 2005). See my #RhodesMustFall (2016) for further insights in this regard. It was this appeal to imperialism that would enable Rhodes University to be financially and politically well after Cecil John Rhodes's death in 1902. (Buckland & Neville, 2004; Maylam, 2016, 2017). It is also from Cecil John Rhodes that the University got its name as part of the need to appeal to the Rhodes Trust for financial support for establishment of the institution (Maylam, 2017).

The Mandela Rhodes scholarships has for many people been seen as part of this imperialist agenda (see Maylam, 2005). However, in the post-apartheid context the scholarship has been rehabilitated with the connection to the Mandela Foundation (Maylam, 2005). In addition, the terms of the scholarship, which were built on black exploitation, have been altered over the years to provide opportunities for black South Africans to study at Oxford. For many years Rhodes University celebrated its connection to Cecil John Rhodes and British imperialism. This was done through the celebration of the establishment of a white settlement in Rhodesia known as Founder's Day (12 September 1890) at Rhodes University (Maylam, 2016: 24), and lectures honouring Cecil Rhodes.

The second connection between Oxford and Rhodes University lay in the pre-eminence of the study of classics. 'At Oxford', states Maylam (2016: 27), 'the study of classical history and philosophy was for long the premier university course' (Maylam, 2016: 27). Rhodes, the man, also had a love for the classics and paid for, with money earned from foraging for diamonds in South Africa, book upon book of the classics to be translated. Rhodes University likewise placed preeminence on the classics as is apparent in the fact that the University had one English teacher in 1912, but a professor teaching Greek and a lecturer in the latter (Maylam, 2016: 28). Knowledge of the classics, particularly Latin and Greek, was what set the wealthy elite classes aside from the rest of society, as the lower classes would not have an education in the classics (Maylam, 2016: 27). Thus, the English culture celebrated at Rhodes was not only gendered but also classed and raced as it pointed to raced elitism. This elite ethos was also masculine in many ways. For example, men and women had to use separate entrances: men on the right and women on the left (see Ntshingana, 2014). Cecil John Rhodes himself had little time for women married instead, in a sense, to his vision of spreading imperialist control and power in Africa. Where there was time for socialising, it was often for enjoyment of sports and the company of young men full of healthful

vigour – key to the future of leading and spreading imperial power across the continent as envisioned by Rhodes and his ilk.

Ideas of nationhood, imperialism sport and masculinity were thus tightly bound not only for Rhodes and his ilk but similarly this also appeared to be the case for the institution which had decided to name itself after him (Buckland & Neville, 2004; Louise Vincent & Stevenson, 2010). For Vincent & Stevenson (2010: 290), for example, the experience of race and gender lies in the performance of masculinity: through rugby in South Africa which

came to be seen as a means of demonstrating the vigour of white South Africa. Its physicality provided players with the opportunity to prove their strength and masculinity and their willingness to put their bodies at risk for the sake of the nation. Young males could demonstrate, by playing rugby, their embodiment of qualities of ruggedness, endurance, forcefulness and determination.

This is a connection that was not lost on Cecil John Rhodes and his life goal of imperialism as sports and leadership are an important aspect for qualifying for the Mandela Rhodes Scholarship.

The culture of Rhodes University also copied Oxford in its gentility, frivolity and organised sports (Maylam, 2016; see for example Buckland & Neville, 2004). While there have been changes to Rhodes University over the years, the culture, purpose and ethos of the University continue to be experienced by some as white, male and elitist. Exclusive white English culture was thus not only in the curriculum but in the activities of students within the institution; and its identity.

### **2.3.2 Rhodes University in the apartheid higher education landscape**

As noted by Reddy (2004: 1011), higher education institutions during apartheid were expected to: 'legitimate, reproduce, and constitute, especially among the elites, identities and social relations of race and ethnicity'.

The policies of the apartheid government led to the establishment of 36 different higher education institutions (universities and technikons) run by eight different government departments by 1994 (Bunting, 2006: 35, 38). Of the 36 institutions ten universities and seven technikons were designated for black South Africans (African, coloured and Indian) (Bunting, 2006: 52). White

South Africans who were then, as now, a numerical minority similarly had exclusive use of 10 universities and seven technikons. The universities and technikons would be referred to respectively as historically disadvantaged institutions and historically advantaged institutions. Only two institutions, both of which are long distance catered for all races.

The terms 'historically advantaged' and 'historically disadvantaged' referred to the differential 'valuing of research as the defining characteristic of an institutional type versus teaching orientation or technological skills development' (Council of Higher Education, 2016: 43). In some ways this is about a difference between institutions that offer skills training and teaching, on the one hand, and research, on the other. Historically black universities have tended to be part of the former while historically white universities have tended to be part of the latter – a legacy of apartheid differentiation which continued post-apartheid (Council of Higher Education, 2016: 4344). These terms 'historically white' and 'historically black' point to the continued recognition of racial categories for the purpose of redress.

Historically white universities, all located within the Republic of South Africa, could be divided into historically white Afrikaans-medium universities and historically white English-medium universities (Bunting, 2006: 39, 40). Rhodes University was one of the four English-medium universities including the University of Cape Town, the University of Natal and the University of the Witwatersrand (Bunting, 2006: 42). These universities made use of the permits to admit black students, so that by '1990, 28% and by 1993, 38% of the students registered at these four universities were either African or coloured or Indian' (Bunting, 2006 43). The contribution by Rhodes University would arguably be the least due to the small size of the University, and its own segregationist policy during apartheid.

Research by leading historian Paul Maylam on Rhodes University from 1904–1970 revealed that the institution by 1959 had accepted only three applications by black students (including black African, Indian and coloured). Other research cite five cases of acceptance of black students by Rhodes university by 1959, although not all students decided to attend (Greyling, 2007: 49). Although all white English universities practised academic segregation, by 1930 most of the English-medium universities were accepting black students, albeit in limited numbers. The issue however was that Rhodes lagged exceedingly behind the other English-medium universities as time progressed (Greyling, 2007; Maylam, 2005). Natal, for example, had 181 black students in 1945 and would add enrolment for 35 black students with the opening of its medical school (Brookes, 1966 in Greyling, 2007: 74; 89, 83–84). Rhodes University from 1947–1959 only

accepted three of the 15 applications by black students. By the 1950s UCT and Wits had 500 black students between them.

Research looking into official Rhodes University Senate minutes, Council minutes and other University discourse reveals that discourse around academic autonomy allowed the University to largely appear to stay out of apartheid politics (Greyling, 2007; Maylam, 2005). This would allow Rhodes to not challenge the apartheid state on its segregationist policies even while it practised them for its own purposes of preserving white English elitism. International academic connections also ensured that the institution was able to pursue its own interests to some extent (Bunting, 2006: 44). It would be these self-same discourses of autonomy and international academia that would enable white English universities such as Rhodes to expect that they would be able to ‘carry on business as usual’ (Bunting, 2006: 44) when apartheid ended and the new democratic dispensation rolled in. Indeed, rather than merge with the historically black university of Fort Hare, the university saw its contribution to the new South Africa being rather to cede one of its campuses to the historically black institution (Buckland & Neville, 2004; Hall, 2015). Thus it could arguably be expected that the university could carry on with business as normal after 1994, albeit with no overtly racially discriminatory policies.

## **2.4 Rhodes University the liberal institution?**

No university can claim to be neutral, and this was particularly so for Rhodes University which claimed that its only position was academic autonomy during the apartheid years (Greyling, 2007). That is, the University claimed it was concerned with academic autonomy rather than segregation and freedom when the apartheid state passed the Extension of Higher Education Act, 1959 (Greyling, 2007; Maylam, 2005). While Rhodes University’s segregationist policies are traced to its lagging practices of exclusion for some (Greyling, 2007; Maylam, 2005, 2016) for Goga (2008, 2010) whiteness and exclusion lay in what was not said or paid attention to. Most telling of the silencing of racial exclusion and whiteness valued within the University according to Goga (2008: 44–45) is a quote by Ronald F. Currey in the book *Rhodes University 1904–1970*. This book was endorsed by the then Vice-Chancellor of Rhodes, J.M. Hyslop, and it states:

... the young Afrikaner coming as a student to Rhodes is every bit as welcome as the student who speaks English at home. It is important that that should be so; for it is in the universities that South Africa’s perennial and overriding problem of ‘race relations’. For it is there that young men and women of two [sic] traditions, so alike and yet so different ... have to work out for themselves

... how they are to live and work together, sanely, happily and fruitfully ...  
(Currey 1970: 180 in Goga, 2008: 44–45).

Here the institutional identity was defined by its silence on racial exclusion and racial dominance through its focus on the white Afrikaner race and the white English race being welcomed at Rhodes University as part of the process of winning the cultural war, that is Anglicisation of South Africa rather than giving way to Afrikaner influence.

However, of importance here is that there is a focus on dealing with the tension between Afrikaner and English white culture, thus silencing the issue of racial exclusion. Thus, the identity of the institution in subtle, covert ways in some sense continues to foster institutional racism. To not engage with it also allows to some extent the continued legitimisation and use of racial categories without actively challenging them.

During apartheid Rhodes' racial exclusion and racial dominance was also apparent in its not choosing to accept its first black applicant in 1933 despite the fact that the Extension of Higher Education Act had not yet been passed (Maylam, 2005: 16). The University chose not to accept an Indian student's application to the university on the grounds that it was not in a position to accept non-Europeans (Maylam, 2005: 16). Rhodes University thus chose to be in line with segregationist education policies before it was bound to do so by apartheid policies. It was the white superiority of the white South African that would lead sway rather than concerns for social justice as the university passed a resolution that it would not accept non-Europeans long before the passing of the Extension of Higher Education Act (Greyling, 2007; Maylam, 2005). In 1947, this no-admissions policy would change to admit black people only in exceptional circumstances (Maylam, 2005: 17): where the course was not available at Fort Hare (Native College for black Africans), and the black candidate had to find their own accommodation as the university would not place them in the whites-only residences (Greyling, 2007). In addition there was a concern about the lowering of academic standards, thus black students would be accepted only if they were graduates (Greyling, 2007). This discourse of standards would later re-emerge in post-apartheid when the new democratic state pushed for transformation in higher education institutions in order to bring socio-economic transformation of South African society (Vincent, Idahosa, & Msomi, 2017: 10).

When the Extension of Higher Education Act, 1959, was passed University of Cape Town (UCT) and University of Witwatersrand staff and students protested and petitioned against the forced academic segregation. In contrast Rhodes University was relatively quiet before the passing of the

Act (Greyling, 2007). What was protested however was the removal of the black Fort Hare institution from the control of Rhodes University to the apartheid state's Native Affairs Department with the passing of the Act in 1959. Over 1,000 University community members protested against the lack of consultation with Rhodes University in regard to the transfer and what was seen as interference in university autonomy (Maylam, 2005: 18). Rather than being against segregation then, Rhodes University officially set itself up as not making a political protest but rather being concerned with erosion of university autonomy. For Maylam (2005), while Rhodes University's official stance during the apartheid years was apolitical, '[i]t is better described as acquiescent and accommodating towards the apartheid state' (Maylam, 2005: 18).

Other moments that point to the segregationist position and identity of Rhodes University include the awarding of an honorary doctorate to C.R. Swart in 1962 and the decision of the University to not provide NUSAS black delegates accommodation on campus in 1967 (Maylam, 2005: 19). These moments further indicate Rhodes University's caution and acquiescence to segregation rather than vociferously challenging it as an institution. Lastly, there was the decision not to appoint Basil Moore despite Rhodes University students' protests on what was believed to be on grounds of his political beliefs. In particular, Moore had been the president of the non-racial, nonviolent University Christian Movement (Maylam, 2005: 20). For this reason one of the foremost historians on Rhodes University ultimately argues that the University was '[f]ounded as a university to promote "Englishness"' and further the British imperial project. Rhodes University for the first 65 years of its existence operated within, and conformed to, a social and political order based on racial discrimination. The University has generally projected an apolitical image. However an ostensibly apolitical stance can be seen as political in that it often implies 'acquiescence and tacit acceptance of the status quo' no different from claim value-free science (Maylam, 2005; see also

Nyamnjoh, 2015). Rather than a liberal institution having its agency limited by the structures of apartheid at the time, '[t]hese tendencies and episodes suggest institutional complicity in the South African racial order, rather than opposition to it' (Maylam, 2005: 21). The danger of not recognising this as part of the history of Rhodes University lies in that white dominance and privilege may continue through this silence. If it remains out of the official dominant story of Rhodes it cannot be engaged and challenged explicitly and overtly; with the concomitant forms that white privilege and white dominance take today post-apartheid (Goga, 2008, 2010; Vincent et al., 2017).

## **2.5 Continuing challenges and legacies of apartheid and Rhodes University after 1994**

South African higher education today is no longer the ‘fragmented, insular, elite and uneven apartheid inheritance’ it once was (Council of Higher Education, 2016: 5). The number of black students attending higher education has, for instance, increased as will be indicated below. However the apartheid ‘legacy continues to shape and influence the sector in many ways’ (Council of Higher Education, 2016: 5). The legacy continued not only through limited transformation but also in creating the need to consider apartheid racial identities post-apartheid.

### **2.5.1 Continuing challenges and legacies of apartheid**

In 2004 the CHE found that the higher education sector faced challenges in modernisation, transformation and integration (Council of Higher Education, 2016: 37). In regard to the first (modernisation) it had been found that the South African democratic state wanted to transform South African society and the higher education sector itself and bring it into line with new democratic principles (White Paper, 1997). There was also the desire to use education to develop South Africa economically and become a global player after years of being isolated as a result of the apartheid system. However, tensions exist between this desire to bring about a more equitable, transformed society and higher education institutions, and the development goals of the country (Badat, 2010; Council of Higher Education, 2016; Reddy, 2004). The CHE (2016: 22) describes the tension as follows: ‘The achievement of equity in a system that had been inherently inequitable by design, while at the same time bringing about the socio-economic development of a newly democratic society.’

The second challenge facing higher education (integration) is difficulty in overcoming ‘past fragmentation (different departments responsible for higher education, different national bodies for different sectors, different types of institution managed differently, and a split between education and training and between science and technology)’ (Council of Higher Education, 2016: 25). While historically black universities have several black staff members, students at historically black universities still face many challenges that include problems with student debt and a backlog in infrastructural funding (Council of Higher Education, 2016: 41 on Letseka & Maile, 2008). In comparison historically white universities such as Rhodes University had international academic connections and donors that meant that they did not face the same problems of a severe backlog in infrastructure and severe student debt. Traditional universities such as Rhodes University also contributed substantially to knowledge through research while historically black universities have tended to be teaching universities with limited contribution to research. In the world of knowledge production historically black universities are not as competitive as historically white universities.

The very business of universities and how they carried it out was racially skewed according to the essentialised racial categories of apartheid. Mergers would alleviate some of this structural inequality it was believed. However, Rhodes University chose to sacrifice its East London division to the historically black university of Fort Hare as mentioned above. Thus, the limited benefits of mergers would not be extended to the University and its institutional identity.

Thirdly, the CHE (2004) reported the desire to break with the ‘inequalities of the apartheid past’ and instead pursue ‘a transformed higher education system play[ing] a critical role in an emerging, non-racial, progressive democracy’ (Council of Higher Education, 2016: 22). The aim was thus not simply a numbers game of improving the number of black bodies within institutions at various levels of the institution but also an education system that engaged with the realities and challenges in Africa while becoming more competitive internationally at the same time (Council of Higher Education, 2016: 22). However, the focus on the numbers game would arguably continue well into 2015 when student protests arose across South Africa calling for decolonisation of African universities and engagement with institutional cultures that privileged whiteness.

Other challenges that faced the issue of transformation included low participation rates (see Badat, 2010: 8), participation rates that differed in comparison between black and white, insufficient state funding with increasing calls for free education, differentiation between historically advantaged institutions and historically disadvantaged institutions, disproportionate enrolment in the social sciences and humanities while science and technology still remained skewed with the sector needing to grow generally.

Aside from the mergers, quality assurance policies and interventions and bodies set up to implement the policies, there has been some success in terms of transformation. The racial demographic of the student body has changed significantly. For example, in 1993 black African students comprised 40% (191 000) of the student body overall in the higher education institutions. Black students (including black African, Indian and coloured) would be 52% of the student body in 1993 and made up 64.4% (514 370) in 2008 (CHE, 2004; DHET, 2009 in CHE in Badat, 2010: 5). In comparison to 2010 where Black African students made up 65% of the total students enrolled in higher education; by 2013 the percentage had reached 69% (CHE Vitalstatistics, 2015) (see table I). Coloured students had dropped from 7% to 6%; Indian students from 6% to 5%; and white students dropped from 21% to 18% (CHE Vitalstatistics, 2015).

Table I: Overall Headcount Enrolment: Proportional Comparison to Population Headcount by Race (2010–2015).

		<b>Black African</b>	<b>Coloured</b>	<b>Indian</b>	<b>White</b>
<b>2010</b>	<b>H.Edu</b>	595 963 (65%)	58 219 (7%)	54 537 (6%)	178 346 (21%)
	<b>Pop.</b>	40 346 (79%)	4 613 (9%)	1 276 (3%)	4 661 (9%)
<b>2011</b>	<b>H.Edu</b>	640 442 (67%)	59 312 (7%)	54 698 (6%)	177 365 (20%)
	<b>Pop.</b>	40 979 (79%)	4 665 (9%)	1 294(3%)	4 642 (9%)
<b>2012</b>	<b>H.Edu</b>	662 123 (68%)	58 692 (6%)	52 296 (6%)	172 654 (19%)
	<b>Pop.</b>	41 625 (79%)	4 716 (9%)	1 311 (2%)	4 622 (9%)
<b>2013</b>	<b>H.Edu</b>	679 800 (69%)	61 034 (6%)	53 787 (5%)	171 927 (18%)
	<b>Pop.</b>	43 3376 (80%)	4 766 (9%)	1 329 (3%)	4 602 (9%)
<b>2014</b>	<b>H.Edu</b>	679 800 (70%)	60 716 (6%)	53 611(5%)	166 172 (17%)
	<b>Pop.</b>	43 376 (80%)	4 783 (9%)	13 449(3%)	4 556 (9%)
<b>2015</b>	<b>H.Edu</b>	696 320 (70%)	62 186 (6%)	53 378 (6%)	161 739 (17%)
	<b>Pop.</b>	44 228 (80%)	4 833 (9%)	1362 (2%)	4 534 (8%)

(CHE VitalStats2015, 2017: 4) (H.Edu= Higher Education; Pop.=Population) (Headcount is in thousands)

While the headcount enrolments of black African students has risen, it is worth noting however that the headcount enrolment has been consistently lower than its population percentage (CHE VitalStats2015, 2017: 4). Similar patterns of a lag between enrolment and the percentage of the population are present in the Indian and Coloured community (CHE VitalStats2015, 2017: 4). Despite the drop in numbers of white students, it is worth noting that these numbers have been consistently been above the population percentage of the white community in South Africa (CHE VitalStats2015, 2017: 4) (see Table I). This points to the legacy of apartheid within higher education

institutions as well its socio-economic effects with poor students from rural schools (usually black African) not well represented within higher education institutions (Reddy, 2004b: 8).

*Table II: Headcount of Postgraduate Qualifications Awarded by Race and Gender (2010–2015)*

		<b>PG-Honours</b>	<b>Masters</b>	<b>Doctoral</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>2010</b>	<b>African</b>	14995	3550	542	19087
	<b>Coloured</b>	2501	496	81	3078
	<b>Indian</b>	1965	711	108	2784
	<b>White</b>	10298	3740	682	14720
	<b>Total</b>	30036	8618	1423	40077
	<b>Women</b>	189888	4171	595	23754
	<b>Men</b>	11048	4444	828	16320
<b>2015</b>	<b>African</b>	21491	5635	1233	28359
	<b>Coloured</b>	2393	635	121	3149
	<b>Indian</b>	2333	918	197	3448
	<b>White</b>	9853	4275	909	15034
	<b>Total</b>	36923	11936	2530	151389
	<b>Women</b>	23640	6062	1118	30820
	<b>Men</b>	13283	5874	1412	20569

CHE Vitalstats 2015:21 (Headcount is in thousands)

Similarly, while the number of black African postgraduates have increased, these numbers drop significantly at the highest level of academic qualification (see Table II). In 2010 for example, the number of Black African doctoral graduates was 542 thousand compared to the 682 thousand of white doctoral graduates. Coloured and Indian postgraduates, however, were the lowest with 81 thousand and 108 thousand postgraduates respectively. A look at undergraduates reveals similar patterns of racially skewed patterns of acquiring degrees with white graduates being the most

concentrated within degree qualification rather than the high numbers of diplomas and certificates attained by black African, Coloured and Indian students (see Table III below).

Table III: *Headcount of undergraduate qualifications awarded by race (2010–2015)*

		<b>Dip Cert</b>	<b>&amp; Degrees</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>2010</b>	<b>African</b>	43814	31386	75200
	<b>Coloured</b>	3129	4366	7495
	<b>Indian</b>	1135	4690	5825
	<b>White</b>	3466	20456	23922
	<b>Total</b>	52432	61 232	113664
	<b>Women</b>	34021	35514	69535
	<b>Men</b>	18 411	25 718	44129
<b>2015</b>	<b>African</b>	44247	54631	98878
	<b>Coloured</b>	2820	5914	8734
	<b>Indian</b>	1267	5690	6967
	<b>White</b>	3382	20925	24307
	<b>Total</b>	52418	87717	140135
	<b>Women</b>	31 996	53 589	85585
	<b>Men</b>	20422	34126	54548

CHE Vitalstats2015: 19 (Dip= Diploma; Cert= Certificates) (Headcount is in thousands)

A look at the statistics provided by the Centre for Higher Education (see Tables IV and V below) when this thesis began reveals that while the proportion of the staff at higher education institutions is predominantly black (black African, Indian, Coloured), a large proportion of this is concentrated in within the lower rungs of the institution. Senior management especially is not sufficiently

representative. Similar patterns are also present within academic positions despite increase of representation over the years. The tables presented within this chapter on higher education institutions in South Africa reveal that while transformation has made some inroads there are still areas that need much improvement. While some progress was made after 1994, the issue of institutional cultures and calls for decolonisation remained.

Instead there was a serious disjunction between policy and real life experiences, particularly in terms of 'learning, teaching, curriculum, language, residence- life and governance' (Govinder, Zondo, & Makgoba, 2013: 1). It is for this reason that transformation has been found to very slow within higher; and perhaps may have played a role in the simmering tensions that led to the 2015, 2016 student protests across South Africa (Maylam, 2017).

Institutional culture refers to 'the way things are done within an organisation specifically the traditions, customs, values, and shared understandings that underpin the decisions taken, the practices engaged in and those practices that are rewarded and supported' (Rhodes University Equity Policy, 2004: 4). This refers to both the tangible and intangible aspects of the University that allow them to be experienced in the everyday of people's lives as they share and pass through the institutional space (Louise Vincent, 2015, n.d.). While many black students are officially accepted and welcome by historically white universities, these universities are found to have alienating institutional cultures of whiteness that excluded some staff and students (usually black) while welcoming others (Khunou, Canham, Khoza-Shangase, & Phaswana, 2019).

This would include looking at the taken-for-granted institutional practices, attitudes, beliefs, traditions, customs and the very way of doing things within the institution. For Vincent (Vincent, n.d.; 2015) this would however have to take the material aspects of the University into account – the built environment (chairs, architecture, curtains, spaces, art works) at the level of symbolism – play a role in constituting the institutional culture and how included or at home people feel within a place. Such deep meaningful change would require both transformation at the level of equity, the discursive level and potentially, as pointed out by Vincent (2015), at the material level as well.

One of the reasons that transformation was not occurring as fast as expected was limited resources (Rhodes University Equity Policy, 2004). However, research also indicates resistance to change and transformation within universities despite the official discourse. Several studies reveal some acknowledgement of the need to change but within universities (staff and students) in the discourse (Goga, 2008, 2010; Seddon, 2014; Vincent et al., 2017; Walker, 2005b). However this is also

undermined in the same breath by placing racism as a black problem, or about an issue of loss of standards for example (Vincent et al., 2017). These are perceptions and discourses that needed to change and be challenged. Arguably the rate at which this transformation had been too slow and unsatisfactory, and perhaps was the spark for the 2015–2016 student protests in South Africa.

### **2.5.2 Rhodes University after 1994**

Resistance to transformation may lie not so much in overt acts but through not acting overtly and actively against injustice – a type of rhetorical silence on issues of race, and even whiteness itself, that is the purview of the privileged. For Goga (2008; 2010) silencing provides the impression of a unified story when there may in fact be opposing stories within a place and its people. Writing on the discursive silencing of the contestation of whiteness in the history of Rhodes University, Goga (2010) points out that the danger of silencing lies not in the denial of facts, history or what happened but hegemony. The danger and effectiveness of silencing in the post-apartheid context lies in appropriating the past, facts or situation in a way that subsumes the troublesome facts, history or situation as part of the hegemonic dominant tale. Rather they become part of the dominant tale but exist at its margins. This acts to silence the stories more so than had they been ignored or excluded altogether, because they become imbibed as part of the dominant sensemaking framework. Thus, they are denied their own sense making but become part of another. Commenting on how alternative critical stories of Rhodes were discursively silenced, Goga, (2010: 292–293) states that through ‘powerful, all-encompassing statements’, ‘all possible experiences may be reincorporated and made sense of within the overarching historical framework’. ‘This incorporation precludes the possibility of the numerous incidents and episodes illustrating’ the complicity with racial order by the university (Goga, 2010: 292-293).

Through this process, what is hidden is that Rhodes University has different alternative stories and cultures, which are subsumed within dominant hegemonic stories. The dominant legitimate stories may range from Rhodes as a place of academic excellence to Rhodes as a drinking society. What is common to them all is the subsuming of alternative experiences and stories of Rhodes, which are marginalised.

As part of transformation, Rhodes University has introduced several interventions: an Extended Studies Programme and a programme known as ‘growing one’s timber’ in order to attract young African academics (Buckland & Neville, 2004: 124). However, such programmes may be criticised for attracting and retaining black academics that fit comfortably within the institutional culture of the University. By doing so institutional cultures are not likely to be challenged to change as

Rhodes University lecturer, Amanda Hlengwa (2015), points out. In terms of teaching and learning, staff can complete a course that allows them to question their pedagogy and epistemology at the university. In addition, Rhodes University had community engagement programmes which allowed staff and students to engage with the wider Grahamstown community on issues facing the community. Yet despite these changes, the institution was still experienced by students and some staff as still predominantly privileging whiteness even as some changes such as those mentioned above were taking place.

### **2.5.3 Rhodes University and the 2015–2016 student protests**

The issue of the lag in transformational progress would be raised nationally by South African students at historically white universities in 2015. The #RhodesMustFall campaign (RMF) which spread nationally can be said to have started when a University of Cape Town (UCT) student, Chumani Maxwelel threw human excrement at the statue of Cecil John Rhodes on the UCT campus in March 2015. The action, he argued, represented a collective pain and disgust that some black students felt at having to daily traverse a campus which treasured colonial relics (Maylam, 2017: 293). The act would spark conversations around why it was still possible in an independent, democratic South Africa to still hold dear works and statues that celebrated people who had supported racial discrimination, colonialism and imperialism (Mbembe, 2015). More importantly, it also brought to the fore questions such as who and what was being unconsciously celebrated by the institution. As well it caused thinking about whom the institution appeared to ignore or, at least, be unaware of the sense of alienation, exclusion and pain brought to many black students as they walked under statues of people and actions that had in some way or another played a role in the policies that continue to affect them and their families in regard to racialised inequality.

The action of Chumani, and the questions raised by the #RhodesMustFall movement spread to Rhodes University, where students raised the issue of the name of the institution. Other issues raised at the time included staff and student demographic composition ratios, curriculum change, the institution's visual culture and ceremonies and traditions. These issues were fervently discussed across campus among staff and students with some supporting the movement and the issues raised, whereas some would later question the methods used by the movement to bring attention to those issues. The issues raised by students would be taken on and further spread by the Black Student Movement (BSM) which drew much inspiration from the writings of Steve Biko (Maylam, 2017: 293). Clashes with police and staff were for a period not uncommon as students of the BSM and their supporters (around 500 students) set up barricades and protests to get their issues heard and resolved.

Around the same time #RhodesMustFall began, at Rhodes University anonymously written posts were found stuck around various places on campus. The posts written soon dubbed #Rhodessowhite condemned the various ways in which whiteness was privileged at the institution. These posts detailed the humiliation, pain and anger that some students felt as they went about their daily lives on campus. One of the posts, for example, noted that to be white meant one could drink heavily and then come home to the residence and vomit all over the bathroom because one knew there was a black cleaning staff to clean up after them (John, 2015). The researcher, still a student at Rhodes at the time, remembers a post that raised the issue of cultural and racial bias where some staff and students could pronounce white associated names – but not black South African names. This movement, like the BSM and RMF gathered much support and organisation via Facebook, Twitter and other social media platforms, as much as there was also a backlash from less supportive corners. After years of what seemed like a relatively apolitical campus, the protests brought so much unrest that it brought one journalist to ask, '[i]s the race revolution is here' (John, 2015).

The importance of these movements in bringing to the fore the urgency for transformation at a much faster rate cannot be underestimated. Students were simply no longer willing to be taught material that was so far removed from the African reality and, more importantly, they were willing to put learning at a standstill if need be. As both a staff member and student, the researcher for this thesis has seen the effects of the protests in increased concern for decolonial knowledge, name changes, the recognition of black struggle icons and, increasingly, a changed curriculum as well.

Ultimately however, Rhodes University after much deliberation has for now kept the name. The reason for this has primarily been the worth of the brand name Rhodes University, as well as a concern for loss of financial support from several funders. In the interim, however, the term 'University Currently Known as Rhodes' is used by some to indicate that the matter is not closed (Maylam, 2017: 294).

In late 2015, there was a rise in student protests once again nationally in the form of the #FeesMustFall movement (Maylam, 2017: 296). Arising out of the University of Witwatersrand announcement of a 10.5% fee increase, members of RMF and others joined forces to protest the high cost of higher education (Maylam, 2017: 296). At Rhodes University, this was also joined by the specific concerns about having to pay half the university fees at the beginning of the year before one could register (known as Minimum Initial Payment (MIP)). In addition, students raised the recurring yet often ignored complaint that many students could not afford to pay for additional residence accommodation during short vacation periods. Added to that, they could not afford the

transport costs back home. Amongst these demands was also free education for all. In response to the nationwide student protests, as well as a march to parliament by students, the government decided not to allow a fee increase the following year. In addition, issues of increased funding for students would be looked at by the state.

The past year (2019) has seen little in the form of student protests at historically white institutions. This is not to say the issues that students raised have disappeared but rather the protests have begun important conversations about practically putting in place structures to support students, while also attempting to provide more relevant knowledge and knowledge production. It remains to be seen however whether there will be further calls depending on how fruitful the current conversations and changes are. This will particularly be worth keeping an eye on in 2020, since COVID-19 may allow more privileged students to fare better than their less well-off compatriots in terms of data, computers and just the safety and place to work as remote teaching resumes on some campuses.

In the interim one of the most significant ways in which the 2015–2016 protests have affected the institutions in terms of transformation is claimed by some staff and students to be an increase in a student demographic from historically poor working backgrounds. Informal conversations with some staff, students and business owners between December 2019 and February 2020 point to an increased number of students who are dependent on government aid, as well as increased students from the Eastern Cape – one of the poorest provinces of South Africa where Rhodes University is located. While walking on campus recently, the researcher noted that there seemed to be significantly many more black bodies than when she left the University in 2016. It would be of interest to see what the student demographic is this year of 2020 when the statistics are released by Rhodes University, and of course how this affects the institutional culture, if at all, in the future.

## **2.6 Conclusion**

A look at the transformation agenda of the higher education landscape including Rhodes University indicates that universities have far to go before they can be truly transformed. The lack of transformation may even be argued by some to have been simmering before finally being given a spark in 2015–2016. This chapter has briefly discussed the purpose of establishing Rhodes University as part of the Anglicisation policy against the feared influence of Afrikaner power in South Africa during colonialism. In addition, the chapter looked into the ways in which the Rhodes University has post-1994 constructed itself as always being a relatively liberal institution simply bound by the rules of the time. However, discourses of autonomy and simply being caught by the rules of the times have proven to be merely foils to cover up accepted policies of segregation and

racial discrimination. It would be of interest to learn if there are similar discourses almost 20 years after democracy by those who attended Rhodes that consciously and unconsciously act as a foil for keeping the privileging of whiteness in place continue.

By not allowing the complicity of Rhodes with segregationist and imperialist interest to form part of the dominant story of the University this allows Rhodes to some extent to be distanced from its colonial and apartheid past; only acknowledged in passing and therefore arguably largely remaining in place till more recently with the disturbance of the 2015–2016 student protests. By distancing Rhodes University from its colonial and apartheid past, the myriad ways that whiteness continues in the institutional space cannot but be challenged.

## **Chapter III: A Conceptual Discussion of How Whiteness is Defined and Approached in this Study**

### **3.1 Introduction**

A reading of the literature on whiteness studies reveals an emphasis on white people as the primary subject of focus, which is what is recognised in the literature as differentiating whiteness studies from race studies. While race studies focus on how racism affected black people, whiteness studies aim to better understand racism in society by focusing on the dominant group in society's constructed racial hierarchy (Giroux, 1997: 379–380).

There is a danger, however, of whiteness being conflated with white people, as there is a difference between white people and whiteness as an ideology that informs how social goods are distributed in society, and the social construction of a white identity (Bonilla-Silva, 2014; Frankenberg, 1994, 2004; Kruger, 2016; Steyn, 2001; Steyn & Foster, 2008; Teppo, 2011, 2004; Twine, 1997; West, 2009). A focus on white people as part of the agenda of whiteness studies implies that only white people are affected by whiteness, take part in whiteness and can provide information on whiteness. Whiteness studies arguably bear the danger of being essentialist and therefore reinforcing the privileging of white people rather than challenging the status quo (see Goga, 2008), even while the field acknowledges the dangers of essentialism. If whiteness studies are to avoid being essentialist themselves they will need to look beyond the phenotypically white body to enhance researchers' understanding of racism.

The construction of white identities and how they are characterised differs across historical, localised and spatial contexts (Frankenberg, 1994; Goga, 2008; Hartigan Jr, 1997; Twine, 1997), and the interests at the time (see Bashkow, 2006; John Hartigan Jr, 1997; Kruger, 2016; Reilly, 2016). When the different contexts and interests are considered together, information on whiteness appears chaotic, ever-evolving and ever-dependent on innumerable contextual possibilities and interests. This raises the question of how whiteness studies work can take into account both nuances of whiteness, on the one hand, and what has been referred to as the systemic approach to whiteness or collective habit of whiteness, on the other hand (see Applebaum, 2016; Hartigan Jr, 1997). This is particularly worth conceptualising in whiteness studies work as individuals may not necessarily be conscious that they are acting and speaking in ways that perpetuate whiteness as superior and the norm.

This chapter argues that to make sense of the ever-evolving, innumerable contextual possibilities of the materialisation of whiteness one needs to understand that the primary function of whiteness is ideological in that it appears to be a unitary whole but is as fragmented and contested as any other social identity (Goga, 2008). Through this discussion it becomes ever clearer that not only is whiteness a socially constructed identity that is pursued for its association with privilege, opportunity and power, but that there is also little reason as to why whiteness should escape redefinition and reconstruction in tune with changing social relations, social mobility and interracial dynamics. Thus whiteness is beyond simply the phenotypical features of the white body but rather its meaning may in part be made by both black and white bodies, informed by their relative positions to power, privilege and opportunity (Bashkow, 2006; Nyamnjoh & Page, 2002; Nyamnjoh, 2016; Twine, 1997).

The social construction of whiteness is highlighted through a discussion of how discursive tools in whiteness research vary across contexts and interests. However, in as much as it is generally recognised today that race is a social construct there is also a constant investment in whiteness as a biological construct by many white people. Beyond the tokenism of political correctness, few whites would accept the possibility that whiteness extends beyond the biological essence because this would mean loss of privilege, power and opportunities (Nyamnjoh, 2016). While white people have historically been willing to share the privileges of whiteness (voting in the Cape, the administration of the colonies and investment, however modest, in educating ‘the native’) in rare instances this was only as long as there was never any challenge to the superiority of whites (Nyamnjoh, 2016; Reilly, 2016). Black people can thus be partially accepted into whiteness if they are perceived as having accumulated sufficient elements associated with whiteness (Dyer, 1997: 71), such as wealth and access to exclusive schools and neighbourhoods that were the exclusive domain of whites only under apartheid (Nyamnjoh, 2016: 252). The freedoms of a democratic South Africa are thus only a reality for those few who have the means to acquire elements associated with, and valued within, whiteness. For the rest of the poor black South Africans unable to attain tenderpreneurships through political connections, for example, freedom as encompassed in the Constitution remains out of reach as their access to the networks of power are severely limited. For these poor with no access to powerful political connections in a country struggling with corruption, freedom as associated with the good life of whites (wealth, good schools, gated communities) remains an illusion, out of grasp. Thus it is that Winnie Madikizela Mandela was reported as scathingly referring to ‘black economic empowerment as ... [a] ... joke ... a white confidence measure made up by local white capitalists’ in collusion with their ‘malleable black’

partners, while ‘those who had struggled and had given blood were left with nothing’ (Naipaul, 2010 in Nyamnjoh, 2016: 252).

For those who have been partially accepted into and acquired some whiteness, this is a limitations game with space for only a few as whiteness is constructed and understood to be a valuable, limited commodity, thus the idea of the preservation of white purity and miscegenation during the colonial and apartheid eras. The value of whiteness therefore lay in its exclusivity; and investing in its exclusivity even for the new group that has recently been partly accepted into whiteness (see Reilly, 2016). In some ways those to whom some white privileges have been extended may be willing to block/limit entrance for others so that the fruits associated with whiteness (i.e. the good life) may continue to be enjoyed by a limited number (see Reilly, 2016). Whiteness in this sense is defined by, characterised by and dependent upon exclusivity – to be practised by every group and person to whom some white privileges may be extended.

The resultant claims of boundedness for exclusion and inclusion predictably foster strife and competition as each struggle to get the elements and boundaries that they want to be recognised for inclusion to the good life associated with whiteness, and as the basis for exclusion for others. To be clear this is not a desire to be phenotypically white but to have the privileges, power, opportunities and benefits associated with whiteness; the good life.

However, in a South Africa where whiteness is also associated with oppression and unearned privilege, the claim of whiteness, or whitening up as Nyamnjoh refers to it, requires a nimble<sup>1</sup> footed game. ‘[P]ower is not a permanent attribute of even the rich and privileged dictators of the world’, states Nyamnjoh (2016: 239), the game of whitening up in South Africa can be turned on its head to ‘yield results in which blacks and whites trade places in the game of social visibility, distinction and prestige’. Thus, in a South Africa where whiteness is also still associated negatively with unearned white privilege, and increasingly being critiqued within higher education institutions to decolonise South African education, those who have acquired some privileges of whiteness may turn against the very whites whose lifestyles or epitome of the good life they aspire to. Having internalised the game of exclusion and boundedness during colonialism and apartheid, black South African political leaders such as Julius Malema may paradoxically invite mostly unemployed black South African supporters to be ‘like the whites’ in comforts and consumption – to ‘whiten up’, as

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<sup>1</sup> Borrowed from the title ‘The nimbleness of being Fulani’ by Nyamnjoh (2013)

it were – he also particularly targeted Afrikaners in his game of exclusion by singing a struggle song

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that included the words ‘shoot the boer’ (Nyamnjoh, 2016: 241). Boers are white South Africans from Dutch, German or Huguenot descent who speak Afrikaans. These Boers considered themselves sufficiently indigenised to claim South Africa as their own – people or native sons and daughters of the soil to the exclusion of those they saw as outsiders, the English settlers and their government (Nyamnjoh, 2016: 241). Yet ironically people like Malema now claiming their own indigeneity would have been considered ‘a Bantu tribal migrant’ – an outsider or *makwerekwere*<sup>2</sup> in the British idea of belonging and citizenship in British South Africa’ (Nyamnjoh, 2016: 241).

The malleability of whiteness to include non-whites when it suits whiteness for the purposes of shoring up the power of a limited few is also exemplified in the construction of beauty. Black people who have features closer to the ideal of whiteness are more accepted into whiteness in the sense that they may be more positively viewed and treated than their darker brethren (Dyer, 1997). Part of the reason for this is that beauty in Africa, and for the Africa diaspora has never been fixed (Nyamnjoh & Fuh, 2014). The history of racism and slavery has informed the construction of members of the African diaspora such as Lena Horne, Diahann Carroll, Diana Ross, Whitney Houston and Denzel Washington, according to Dyer, (1997: 71–72) to be considered more attractive because they are perceived as having relatively Caucasian features, as well as some of the comforts, privilege and opportunities that come with being white. Thus nature or blood or phenotypical features are used to construct the identity and value of others (Nyamnjoh & Fuh, 2014).

In their analysis of the consumption and construction of hair by Africans, Nyamnjoh & Fuh (2014) similarly point to the malleability of identities in connection to race. While some, for example, may choose natural, virgin hair and its variant nuances in the chase for authentic African-ness where history has denigrated almost all things black, others may argue that the fight for freedom includes the right to fashion hair using what some perceive as the chase for whiteness in the use of weaves, hair relaxers and braids and other creative means to change the texture, style or fashioning of hair from its untouched, virgin state. Whatever the choice, however, what the work of Nyamnjoh & Fuh (2014: 54–55) points to is that identity construction is a permanent work in progress which in reality refuses to ‘be impoverished by dichotomies that overly simplify and freeze the

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<sup>2</sup> South African colloquialism for a foreigner of African descent which some South African nationals perceive as being competition for limited social goods in South Africa.

complexities and nuances’ of choice of identity construction and being constructed – whether it be natural or nurtured in terms of choice of hair construction, for example. Rather than being bound by strict

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dichotomies the authors astutely point out that identity construction in relation to race is in reality ‘more amenable to flexible, composite and negotiated personal and collective identities than they are to fixities and purities’ (Nyamnjoh & Fuh, 2014: 54–55) particularly for Africa and the African diaspora where

[p]erhaps schooled by repeated encounters with the violence of dominant ‘others’ or simply enlightened by the wisdom of centuries of intimate conversations across myriad divides and chasms, Africans have strategically cultivated a collective gaze that sees beyond appearances in their everyday understanding and articulation of reality. They have trained themselves to recognise and provide for the present absences and the absent presences of their lived and social worlds, bridging and providing for interdependence and conviviality between the apparently contradictory. They are just as keen on different gradations of nature and the natural as they are on human interactions and relationships with nature from multiple standpoints (Nyamnjoh & Fuh, 2014: 54–55).

Conviviality may be defined as recognition and provision for the fact or reality of being incomplete. If incompleteness is the normal order of things, natural or otherwise, conviviality invites us to celebrate and preserve incompleteness and mitigate the delusions of grandeur that come with ambitions and claims of completeness. Not only does conviviality encourage us to recognise our own incompleteness, it challenges us to be openminded and open-ended in our claims and articulations of identities, being and belonging. Conviviality encourages us to reach out, encounter and explore ways of enhancing or complementing ourselves with the added possibilities of potency brought our way by the incompleteness of others (human, natural, superhuman and supernatural alike), never as a ploy to becoming complete (an extravagant illusion ultimately), but to make us more efficacious in our relationships and sociality (Nyamnjoh, 2017: 262).

Or argued more succinctly by the same author ‘conviviality could be compared to “techniques”, defined as “traditions *and* efficacious action” available to “intimately interwoven” objects and

subjects to draw on in the process of identification through mutual production, shaping and transformation' (Warnier, 2009: 422–423 in Nyamnjoh, 2017: 262).

While whiteness is often understood in terms of dichotomies and purity, in reality examples such as Julius Malema who are more than happy to whiten up through consumption indicate that whiteness is flexible. It is possible to acquire, use whiteness determined by the access to power, opportunity and privilege they have, which in turn further informs additional growth of access to power, opportunity and privilege.

Additionally, 'it is worth noting however that identities are mostly a function of relationships of power; and individuals and communities often find themselves trapped in and by identities that have little or no resonance with how they live their lives and relate to others and the world around them' (Nyamnjoh & Fuh, 2014: 55). This is definitely the case when black bodies are associated with inferiority and criminalisation for example. However, it is similarly the case for how Malema essentialised and targeted white Afrikaners, and more recently in South African history, what has been referred to as white monopoly capital. Where once there was the construction and essentialisation of the *swart gevaar* (i.e black danger) , there is now the more narrow nationalistic, essentialism of African National Congress (ANC) and Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) amongst many other political parties, a politics themed with the danger of white monopoly capital – the *wit gevaar* (i.e white danger) – connected specifically to those perceived as being too close to whiteness and white people *à la* Winnie Mandela's denigration of those blacks she claims are manipulated by whites. 'Such coercive construction and use of identities' – whether in South African politics now, or during colonialism and apartheid – 'are at best aspirational in their political and ideological expectations of cohesion and solidarity around common values, but they are often in denial of the sociology and ethnography of everyday life that characterise those politics and ideologies of expectation they so clearly want to define and confine' (Nyamnjoh & Fuh, 2014: 55).

The choice in identity construction through shopping for those aspects of whiteness one desires while abandoning and essentialising others is a matter of the process of subjectification rather than complete and fixed individual identities.

Whiteness may often be understood in narrow, essentialised ways but features described through the various examples strongly suggest, as is argued in this chapter, that in some sense then whiteness is ultimately about gradations of inclusions and exclusions rather than fixed, dualistic and complete. Rather than attempt at a fixed definition of whiteness, and white

identities it would be more in tune with reality to consider incompleteness as the norm in contemplating and providing for identities as is suggested by how Africans both consume and are consumed by hair, and furthermore in the Julius Malema example where certain aspects of whiteness may be picked up or chosen by the imagined good- life-shopper (wealth, and life of consumerism); while rejecting and vilifying others for what may be perceived as being too close to whiteness. Or as Nyamnjoh (2016) highlights in regard to one of the challenges to the student movements from 2016 to 2018 – a case of not being black enough in what is constructed by some as the basis of legitimately belonging in post-apartheid South Africa.

The relevance of incompleteness to identity construction (i.e. subjectification) may be understood as ‘self-activation in a process of cultivation or domestication through relationships and interactions with social others’ (Nyamnjoh, 2017: 254). Like babies which may be considered incomplete, inadequate as their own people ‘acquire potency through social action and interaction. A baby that imbibes and embodies the ways of seeing, doing and being of the social contexts in which they are born and grow up, makes a strong case for inclusion and legitimisation through the relationships forged with others’ (Nyamnjoh, 2017: 254).

Human beings are social creatures who exist in ever-changing contexts. Survival alone, robbed of the possibility of complexity is an impossibility especially in an ever-connected world. In addition, studies by authors such as Bashkow (2006), Twine (1997) and many others, which will be discussed further below in the chapter, suggest that incompleteness could provide the possibility of ‘encountering and exploring ways of enhancing or complementing [society] with the added possibilities of potency brought [on] ... by the incompleteness of others to make [people] more efficacious in their relationships and sociality’ (Nyamnjoh, 2017: 253). Thus, there are benefits to the possibility of undermining whiteness through further examples of inclusion, and complexity rather than exclusivity only.

If the power of ideologies lies in their obfuscation, as argued by critical theory, then whiteness needs to be revealed as unfixed, unstable and fragmented as any other social identity. While a large portion of whiteness studies does this through providing nuances of whiteness *ad infinitum*, what is less discussed and focused upon in whiteness studies literature as one of the means to rob whiteness of its power is the argument ‘that incompleteness is the normal order of things, and that conviviality invites us to celebrate and preserve incompleteness and mitigate the delusions of grandeur that come with ambitions and claims of completeness’ (Nyamnjoh, 2017: 253). There is a possibility that the more this is done then the exclusivity of whiteness, the drawing of

exclusionary boundaries by each group that is extended some privileges of whiteness, is undermined.

Rather than being overwhelmed by the power and pervasiveness of whiteness when one reads yet another nuance to whiteness in what has been described as the third wave in whiteness studies, what is discussed in this chapter is theorisation of why and how the nuances can continue *ad infinitum*. Through the celebration of incompleteness as the normal order of things the chapter offers the possibility that the boundaries of whiteness may burst at the seams overwhelmed by the impossibility of exclusivity; and so robbing whiteness of some of its potency as the basis to claims of privilege, opportunity and power in racialised societies. Further drawing on the analogy and argument used by Nyamnjoh (2017: 255) on the concept of incompleteness:

Once disabused and saved along the lines suggested, the baby of western civilisation and modernity [i.e. whiteness as currently understood and approached in narrow, fixed dualistic lines as was as the belief in the superiority of all things white] would flourish by opening up and enriching its reality with African potentials derailed or caricatured by the orgy of coercive violence and impulse to monopolise humanity and the world's resources (Nyamnjoh, 2017: 255).

Rather than strict dichotomies of whiteness on the one hand, blackness on the other as the field of whiteness studies is often currently approached there is the possibility of more convivial relationships. This means moving beyond linear dualistic understandings of people, their bodies and the world they live in, as is often the approach of Western thought (Mbembe, 2003: 3 in Nyamnjoh, 2017: 257). Part of the challenge as a black female South African researcher (which is the positionality of the researcher for this thesis) is with how whiteness has been understood and approached particularly within whiteness studies. Whiteness studies are often locked within the strict dichotomies of white versus black; oppressor–victim; coloniser and colonised only – while not denying the benefits such studies bring and have brought to understanding intangible aspects of whiteness such as micro-aggressions and beyond. This is not to argue that we live in a postracial society where history and hierarchies do not exist and do not matter but that these not only matter but are ever shifting and thus continue to shape people and things in the world, what they can be used for across different contexts and relationships in complex, fluid and nuanced ways (Nyamnjoh, 2017) (see also Gupta, 2019; Kean, 2008; Lokko, 2019; Manqoyi, 2018). This offers the possibility of a world where '[a]nything can be anything. People and things adopt different

forms and manifest themselves differently according to context and necessity' at the time (Nyamnjoh, 2017: 256). However, context and necessity and relationships of power can and do shift over time so that bodies take on new meanings, uses and values as necessitated at the time. This enables an escape from an understanding within whiteness studies where black people are ever locked into the role of victim only – with little to no creativity when it comes to constructing and navigating the world around them – and surviving in a world where the privileging of whiteness is still dominant (see Manqoyi, 2018; Ratele, 2007).

Moreover, when they do contribute to knowledge production in the field it is only as victims. This is no different from the problematic way that Africa has often been constructed – as the basket case of the world offering little more than starving children with swollen bellies, perpetual war which offers perpetual images of dead bodies (Adichi, 2009; Wainaina, 2006). Or in some cases when anything from Africa is nothing more than victimhood that can be taken as positive it may include stereotypical exotic clichés such: as the beauty of the African sky and its dusty rolling hills, images of the noble savage (usually Zulu, Masai or Dogon), and how Africans have rhythm and music in their souls (Wainaina, 2006b). When whiteness is approached in ways that are dichotomous and fixed such as this, Africans in their complexities and nuances with varying creativeness are denied (see Gupta, 2019; Lokko, 2019). Africa, Africans and the African diaspora continue to be what the West made and makes it, rather than recognising human ingenuity and creativity to cross various social borders in a constantly shifting world where nothing is certain (Adichi, 2009; Kean, 2008; Nyamnjoh, 2018, 2017; Ratele, 2007). In such an alternative understanding of the world such as the latter, '[w]hen doubles mimic or parody in convincing ways, what reason is there to argue against a thing and its double being two sides of the same coin or cowny?' as pointed out by Nyamnjoh (2017: 256) when it comes to the acquisition, loss and use of aspects of whiteness. 'While surfaces (i.e. what bodies look like and therefore how they are constructed in different contexts) are obviously important and often suffice for many ends and purposes, delving beneath appearances and digging deep into the roots of things is critical for understanding eternally nuanced and ever-shifting complexities of being and becoming' when it comes to concepts such as whiteness (Nyamnjoh, 2017: 256). 'Digging deep makes impossibilities possible, just as it makes the possible impossible' (Nyamnjoh, 2017: 256), such as an African writer often being expected to write about, represent and understand nothing more of the world than the parochial location of being black and thus limited to African literature or leave behind Africanness for assimilation (Lokko, 2019), while whiteness has the key to universality – no parochialisation needed (Moon, 1999). Or worse whiteness is constructed as coming as an agent of help, sympathy, saviour racked with guilt and thus bound in navel-gazing essentialism – albeit

not necessarily intending to be (see Haffajee, 2013; Wainaina, 2006b). Instead what is argued here is that '[b]eing and becoming as works in progress require borrowings and enhancements to render them beautiful and acceptable ... Particular contexts challenge us in particular ways to heighten or lower the bar and threshold of acceptability and tolerability' (Nyamnjoh, 2017: 257) for all peoples. What is being offered in this chapter then is a call towards a conversation rather than conversion in studying whiteness where race does not bind what, who and how bodies do and use things – racial constructions included (Nyamnjoh, 2017: 262). What is argued for here is what it means to be a normal human being able to contribute, contest, challenge, use, adapt, adopt and move beyond and across artificial boundaries created by slavery, colonialism and apartheid while still taking into account how hierarchies may shape the options and decisions available at the time. This means taking into account 'interconnections, interrelationships, interdependence, collaboration, coproduction and compassion' (Nyamnjoh, 2017: 260) when they occur, and where '[s]ameness, commonalities and possibilities ad infinitum, mean that every-one can act and be acted upon, just as anything can be subject and object of action, making power and weakness nimblefooted, fluid and situational, and giving life more a character of flux and interdependence than permanence' (Nyamnjoh, 2017: 260).

This is not to argue that life together as human beings does not have any confrontations, contestations, hostility or even animosity. Rather conviviality recognises that confrontation and contestations are part of social life. However, rather than simply being out for themselves only, conviviality holds that human beings, in order to survive due to their incompleteness, need to balance and negotiate self-interests and the interests of others, and 'a careful balance of intimacy and distance in relationships between social categories and interests generated or informed by them' (Karner & Parker, 2011; Noble, 2013; Vigneswaran, 2013; Wessendorf, 2013; Williams & Stroud, 2013; Wise & Velayutham, 2014 in Nyamnjoh, 2017: 264).

Furthermore, the chapter discusses the need to also explicitly theorise the connection between nuance, particularity and the individual on one hand, and systemic whiteness and collective habit of whiteness on the other. While a connection is accepted as one of the key features of whiteness in the field (Applebaum, 2016), what is less readily available is a framework to understand how the two are connected. That is, not just accepting a connection between individual, local level on one hand, and the system, collective whiteness on the other, but providing a framework through which to understand how this is the case. It can be particularly difficult for people to understand how their individual actions reproduce existing social arrangements. In order to explain how individual actions may unconsciously contribute to the reproduction of in-egalitarian social arrangements,

and the connection between nuances, particularity, and the individual on one hand and systemic whiteness, collective habit of whiteness on the other hand, this chapter draws on Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and fields which will be discussed further below in the chapter.

### **3.1.1 Varying whiteness: varying discursive patterns and discursive strategies**

Whiteness literature reveals that the most prevalent form of talk used to engage with race is informed by colour-blind ideology. Colour-blind ideology provides 'filters' through which all new information about race is processed (Bonilla-Silva, 2014). The primary filters on race are the beliefs that racism has largely come to an end with the removal of legally and politically sanctioned racial discrimination, and that race as a result no longer plays a role in one's life chances (Bonilla-Silva, 2014). Despite a common colour-blind ideology providing people with 'explanations for both the causes and solutions to personal and social problems' (Lewis, 2004:632), and framing how people 'understand their social existence' (Lewis, 2004: 632) people do not use exactly the same discursive strategies and themes.

Bonilla-Silva's (2002) analysis of 'College Students' Social Attitudes and Detroit Area Study' (DAS) participants reveals a discourse that is divided along the themes of abstract liberalism, cultural rather biological reasoning, naturalisation and the claim that discrimination has virtually disappeared. These themes are combined with what Bonilla-Silva refers to as discursive tools, which may include:

- 1) avoiding direct racial language (no racial epithets)
- 2) rhetorical strategies or semantic moves including for example:
  - 'I am not prejudiced but ...'; 'some of my best friend are black ...'
  - 'I am not black so I don't know ...' but then continue to express racial views;
  - yes and no
  - anything but racism
- 3) projection: they are the racist ones
- 4) diminutives: 'It makes me a little angry' (Bonilla-Silva, 2002: 41)
- 5) almost total incoherence when incursion into forbidden issues is pushed which is characterised by the use of digressions, long pauses, repetition and self-correction (Bonilla-Silva, 2002: 41–63)

A consideration of other authors' work also adds several other tools such as silence (Potter,

2015), denial, personalising talk (Hill, 2008) and distancing strategies, amongst many others.

Discursive tools ‘can be mixed-up as the interlocutor sees fit’ (Bonilla-Silva, 2002: 62 on Wetherell & Potter, 1992). That means for example that, ‘respondents could use a diminutive (“I am a little bit upset with blacks ...”), followed by a projection (“... because they cry racism for everything even though they are the ones who are racist ...”), and balance out their statement with semantic moves at the end to land safely (“... and I am not being racial about this, it’s just that, I don’t know”) ...’ (Bonilla-Silva, 2002: 62).

A participant’s talk as suggested by the previous paragraph may therefore slip from one theme and tool to the next, dependent on their interests and context at the time of the utterance. Bonilla-Silva (2002) notes for instance that ‘younger, educated, middle class people are more likely than older, less educated, working class people to make full use of the resources of colour blind racism’ (Bonilla-Silva, 2002: 62). In North America, these students have grown up post the civil rights period so would have grown up to navigate the racial landscape more successfully through the colour-blind framework than older white respondents who would have grown up in the Jim Crow period. This does not however make the younger generation less racist – rather they simply rely on subtler tools of airing racialised views.

In addition, young, educated, middle class respondents who are about to enter the job market show similar use of semantic tools, styles or form to their older, less educated, working class counterparts in their crudeness and lack of rhetorical sophistication in Bonilla-Silva’s study. This suggests that interests are at play: ‘as whites enter the labo[u]r market, they feel entitled to vent their resentment in a relative straightforward manner’ (Bonilla-Silva, 2002: 62). It is reasonable therefore in a study of whiteness to not expect white participants to not use exactly the same discursive tools but rather to look at how whiteness is constructed within a spatial locality, context at the time of the interaction or utterance. While there might be patterns or tools that can be traced throughout different contexts and interests, such as the case with colour-blindness being found in South Africa (see Milazzo, 2015), there will generally always be particularities and nuances specific to context as well. There is always the possibility that each locality and spatiality has each its own patterns of white talk alongside individual interests *ad infinitum*.

### **3.1.2 White talk in South Africa**

Although there are mainly two white groups in South Africa, Afrikaans speaking and English speaking, it is white English-speaking South Africans that are the focus of the thesis. This interest is because the site of study is a white English-speaking university, whose identity has historically

been connected to preserving and reproducing white English culture. Before the end of apartheid, white English-speaking South Africans long held the metropole, especially England as the ideal of whiteness as they acted as brokers for colonial power within South Africa. Home, the 'ideal cultural heartland' (Steyn, 2005: 126) has always been elsewhere with other whites rather than South Africa where whites were a numerical, albeit extremely powerful, minority. The state legally sanctioned and protected white interests and white superiority through discriminatory policies and legislation. The loss of political power by white South Africans necessitated a new identity construction: what it means to be a white minority in the new South Africa. Much work has been dedicated to this reconstruction of the post-apartheid white identity, with Matthews (2011:12) ultimately concluding in alignment with Coetzee (1988: 11 in Matthews, 2011) that white South African identity is located in the awkward and uncomfortable space of 'no longer European, not yet African' (see for example Conway, 2016; Nuttall, 2001; Steyn, 2001; Steyn & Foster, 2008). This thesis explores the complexity of white identity in discourse beyond biological essence in the manner suggestive in the work of authors such as Bashkow (2006) and Twine (1997) with a focus however on the discursive or what has been referred to as white discourse, white talk, discursive tools or semantic moves.

The term 'white talk' refers to 'a resistant and flexible set of ideologically charged discursive strategies which attempt to perpetuate privilege into the new dispensation while paying careful attention to self-presentation' (Steyn, 2003: iii); 'a set of discursive practices that attempts to manage the intersectional positionality of white South Africans to their greatest advantage, given the changes in their position within the society' (Steyn, 2005: 120). White talk like Bonilla-Silva's colour-blindness is never fixed or still but ever shifting like white identities in South Africa.

In 'Repertoires for talking white: Resistant whiteness in Post-apartheid South Africa' (Steyn & Foster, 2008), a discourse analysis of two weekly columns published in 2000 in *The Sunday Times* reveals two repertoires of white talk: New South Africa Speak and White Ululation. The two rhetorics are played off against each other to present positive representations of whiteness while resisting transformation (Steyn & Foster, 2008: 25). A plaiting together of New South Africa Speak and White Ululation leads to a systematic ambivalence which allows 'the ideological function of the discourse to operate efficiently while at the same time rendering the position of the speaker/writer more difficult to pin down and critique. Moreover, the ambivalence enables positive self-presentation even as hard-nosed self-interest is being pursued' (Steyn & Foster, 2008: 27).

New South Africa Speak draws upon values such as democracy, social development, non-racialism and non-sexism, reconciliation, equality and freedom, which are shared in the New South Africa. White identity, as research by Matthews suggests, is in pursuit of a new white identity in a rejection of apartheid conservatism. It is the positive face before the racial view is presented akin to the 'I'm not prejudiced but ...'; 'some of my best friends are black' colour-blind rhetoric of Bonilla-Silva (2002) discussed above. By focusing on the new values of South Africa, it is shown that one is in line with the new democratic South Africa so has no underlying racism or racist intentions. Race is also not acknowledged as a factor in the new society except when drawing on other values of the New South Africa: fairness and non-discrimination. By doing this it is possible to view any affirmative action as reverse racism or contrary to the new values of the new South Africa. Similarly, blame is shared for human oppression and colonialism, and the effects of racism on the human psyche are equalised. This effectively works to wipe the slate clean in terms of the continuing effects of apartheid and colonialism, with a focus on individuality and meritocracy and thus preventing an analysis of white privilege and the need for transformation. White Ululation 'presents any change to the status quo as a threat to the established good that operates in the best interests of all' (Steyn & Foster, 2008: 35). When White Ululation is used with New South Africa Speak what is revealed at face value is either race neutral positions or ambivalence or reasonable objective criticisms of challenges in the new democratic South Africa. By not relying on racial language, and where it does mention race, it is only in connection to fairness and nondiscrimination. What Milazzo (2015) calls racial particularities are denied. So akin to what Milazzo (2015) notes that race works without race; Bonilla-Silva's (2014) 'racism without racists' in South Africa we have support of the values of the new South Africa embracing the end of apartheid while also bemoaning the drop of standards (rising crime, and corruption) since the end of apartheid, and introduction of policies that attempt to address racial inequality.

There is then, in South Africa, a particular brand of colour-blindness made possible by the specific historical contexts of South Africa. The discursive tools revealed do not directly echo those found by Bonilla-Silva in North America nor do similar studies which draw from his work (see for example Rodriguez in regard to the context of North America and Milazzo (2015) in regard to colour-blindness in South Africa). Steyn's study reveals the importance of context in the resources that become part of the rhetorical strategies. It is South African history, and the South African context specifically, that gives rise to the rhetorical strategies of white ululation and new South Africa speak. Thus, rhetorical strategies need not necessarily ever be exactly the same. Even where a society shares a common historical context, the local context and interests may mean particularities in discursive strategies that differ from previous studies undertaken within the same

historical context. In addition, discursive strategies or tools are revealed as not being used in isolation but rather through inextricable plaiting.

Steyn (2005: 127) describes white talk as only being white in the sense that it is ways of talking that are

concerned with preserving privilege, with maintaining, as far as possible, the status quo inherited from the era of institutionalized unequal power distribution, and with slowing down the rate of change toward a more substantively democratic, multicultural society within the country. These discourses are ‘white,’ moreover, in that they preserve this centered position through employing exclusionary tactics and strategies, and in that they are structured in negative sentiment toward the ‘other.’

As suggested by the variableness of discursive strategies discussed above, ways of speaking cannot be tied to one group only, any more than whiteness can be claimed to be a static identity (see for instance Ignatiev, 1995, on how the Irish became white). Rather, in as much as whitely ways such as tastes, lifestyle and languages associated with whiteness may be adopted, it is argued through the discussion of variableness of white discursive strategies, white ways of speaking may also travel or be acquired by non-whites.

There is little room for bodies as having the agency to become and do anything across the constructed racial categories in the pursuit; no acknowledgement of the creativity of how individuals are able to survive in a world where autonomy and dichotomy are simply not the reality. What is even more pertinent in regards to this thesis is the assumption that human beings are one dimensional, fitting neatly into the dichotomy of either oppressor or victim, pre-determined by race when human history of even the worst human atrocities such as World War II makes it clear that this is certainly not the case (see Arendt, 1963).

### **3.2 Conceptualising the connection: nuance and collective habit of whiteness**

Whiteness studies in South Africa and North America have revealed that there are innumerable contexts and interests that will create different types of white identity and white talk. In support of this, Dyer (1997: 40) states the construction of different types of white identity and white discourse can lead to ‘millions of engrossing attempts’ to define whiteness and its characteristics which constantly change per context and individual interest at the time yet still holding onto elements that remain the same. Similarly, a review of literature on white discursive strategies above reveals that white discourse may draw from different tools and styles influenced by innumerable

contexts and interests. In addition, white identity may be influenced by positionality such as class, gender and sexuality (Hartigan Jr, 1997; Kruger, 2016; Moon, 1999; Teppo, 2004; Twine, 1997).

### **3.2.1 Habitus: understanding the complicity between individual and systemic articulations of whiteness**

While whiteness studies work which focuses on providing nuance to whiteness enriches insights into whiteness, these nuances also arguably provide the grounds for arguments for individualism, and other distancing strategies which prevent the speaker from considering their own complicity or co-optation into whiteness. Other concerns that have been raised in race studies include the question of how do we know the intentions of the people whose utterances are interpreted as racist (see Hill, 2008). The question then becomes how can the connection between nuance, particularity, individual and private intentions on the one hand, be connected to the generalisable such as systemic whiteness and collective habit of whiteness on the other. Related and intricately tied to this are concerns raised by authors such as Jane Hill (2008) as to how does individual action or discourse which speakers may argue was not meant to be racist unconsciously perpetuate unequalitarian social arrangements. While whiteness studies literature often points to white complicity and co-option it is worth providing the theoretical scaffolding as to how the connection above is made rather than assuming that it is connected because other studies have said it is the case – particularly how individual actions or discourses may unconsciously reproduce unequalitarian social arrangements.

In this thesis, the conceptualisation of this connection is informed by Bourdieu's theory of habitus and fields. Habitus is defined as

a system of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles of the generation and structuring of practices and representations which can be objectively 'regulated' and 'regular' without in any way being the product of obedience to rules, objectively adapted to their goals without presupposing a conscious aiming at the ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary to attain them and, being all this collectively orchestrated without being the product of the orchestrating action of a conductor (Bourdieu, 2013: 72).

Through habitus it is possible for individuals to take actions/practices that perpetuate existing social arrangements without consciously aiming to do so or being aware that their actions are

reproducing existing social arrangements. The concept of habitus also enables the hypothesisation of how there is human agency within social structures – albeit limited; and how individual actions are also connected to the collective (i.e. society).

For Swartz (1997: 100) habitus is best described as ‘sets of dispositions that internalize in practical form what seems appropriate or possible in situations of challenge, constraints or opportunity ... choices do not derive directly from the objective situations in which they occur or from transcending rules, norms, patterns, and constraints that govern social life: rather they stem from practical dispositions that incorporate ambiguities and uncertainties that emerge from acting through space and time’. Habitus has also been defined by Bourdieu as ‘deeply interiorised master patterns’, ‘mental habit’, ‘mental and corporeal schemata of perceptions, appreciations, and actions’ (Swartz, 1997: 101). All these stress ‘the body as well as the cognitive basis of actions and to emphasise inventive as well as habituated forms of action’, and ‘evoke the idea of a set of deeply internalized master of dispositions that generate action’ (Swartz, 1997: 101). Put simply habitus may be likened to embodied practical knowledge or sense of the world such as driving a car or riding a bicycle. Rather than having received direct instruction or lessons on how to be white per se, the individual has acquired the practical knowledge from an almost osmotic process of socialisation from early childhood. Early socialisation, from one’s parents, teachers and any other adults in one’s life has unconsciously provided a sense of what it means to be white as deeply engrained as one’s personality or what Sullivan (2006) refers to as an unconscious habit.

Having been socialised as to what it means to be white, and have a sense of white superiority, whiteness as the norm the individual gets a habituated, embodied sense of what is possible, impossible, appropriate for a person within the social class or group that the individual is located in (Bourdieu, 1990, 2013). So as a child one learns what is possible, appropriate or impossible as a person of the working class, for example, or even the sexual division of labour within the familial space (Bourdieu, 2013). When a similar social situation or social interaction arises wherein the individual acquired their habitus, the individual’s habitus intersects with the objective, external situation or interaction and automatically prompts action (like getting into the car) based on what is possible, impossible or appropriate in that situation (Bourdieu, 2013; Hillier & Rooksby, 2005). The individual’s embodied set of dispositions (i.e. habitus) automatically prompts a sense of what is the best action to take given the risks and opportunities in the situation without necessarily consciously calculating the best action or ends desired. In this sense Bourdieu argues that individuals are strategists. Habitus then is both an internalisation of external structures as much as it is externalisation of internal structures (Bourdieu, 2013).

Habitus – embodied in the tastes, lifestyles, sayings and virtues held by the group – will differ according to the position in the social hierarchy (Bourdieu, 2013; Bourdieu & Loic Wacquant, 1992). Dispositions as internalised structures then structure or shape human action when faced with a similar or dissimilar set of circumstances. It is for this reason that habitus has been described as structured structure and structuring structure.

Despite human action being informed by external or objective structures through a process of internalisation to form habitus, human action is not mechanical and predetermined. Rather habitus is a type of embodied grammar, like grammar in linguistics: grammar provides the basic rules of what goes into the structure or pattern of sentences (Swartz, 1997: 102). Once the basic structures of sentences of language are grasped one can correctly form sentences using the same structure but for different situations. Thus, the situation prompts from within the individual what is the proper or appropriate way to respond based on the individual's own internalised grammar, and the external situation. Habitus is thus both partly a repetition of what happened before (established sentence structure) and partly inventive (forming the appropriate sentence for the situation) (Bourdieu, 2013). Similarly, Gee (1999) argues that discourse is both a product of what one has learned before, and when the situation calls for it, a modification of a discursive habitus.

Habitus is thus never static or close ended but always pregnant with the possibility of adjusting for the slightly new situation – albeit always in connection to the old habitus. Thus, a working-class person can learn a new accent through elocution lessons, such as the artist with the working-class background now finding himself amongst the wealthy members of society might wish to do. However, certain elements of his habitus such as what he considers comfort food may remain.

Individuals from the same social group or social class share similar habitus and take similar action which in turn allows the researcher to speak of a social class or social group (Bourdieu, 2013; Hillier & Rooksby, 2005). Social structures which create the working class are thus the product of many individuals individually and unconsciously taking actions which are similar as a result of the habitus, and capital that they hold (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Swartz, 1997). These individuals' actions are therefore both informed by society and their individual action in turn forms part of the society of the social group or social class as defined by their habitus and capital. Drawing on Sartre's (1976) notion of seriality, and Young's category of women, Lewis similarly (2004: 627) argues in regards to studying white people without essentialisms, that white people may be studied as a social collective by thinking of them as passive collectivities (series) rather than 'self-conscious,

mutually acknowledging collectivities (groups)'. A series (passive collective) is a 'social collective whose members are unified passively by the objects around which their actions are oriented and by the objectified results of the material effects of the actions of others' (Young, 1994: 724 in Lewis, 2004: 627). The group members are unified 'by their actions, which are organised around the same objects ... but not in a way that they must recognise or necessarily must consider'. A good example of a series thus explained is a 'collectivity of people standing together at a corner waiting for a bus stop ... Driving past every day [one] might start to think of them as the "6a.m. bus riders"' (Lewis, 2004: 627). What binds the people together as the '6am bus riders' is their action (waiting for the bus) which is organised around the same objects (the bus or bus schedule). For example, past racial exclusion and discrimination in the labour market has resulted in white people attaining the 'work experience' [(capital)] that they can draw on today to apply for promotions and better jobs and thus determining what they can and cannot do today (Lewis, 2004: 627). So white people as a social collective are bound 'through their similar relation to historic and present-day racial structures' (Lewis, 2004: 627). Through Lewis' insights it is then possible, for example, to explain how you may have a predominantly white group who are not consciously coming together because they are all white or because they consciously have a raced agenda. Rather this may be the 'result of whites' status as members of a passive social collectivity whose lives are shaped at least in part by the racialised social system in which they live and operate' (Lewis, 2004: 627; see also Sullivan, 2006).

The passing of time from the initial socialisation and acquisition of habitus to the moments when habitus interacts with the objective social structures of a similar situation allows what Bourdieu (2013: 79) calls '[g]enesis amnesia'. He elaborates that 'the unconscious', in this sense 'is never anything other than the forgetting of history which history itself produces by incorporating the objective structures it produces in the second nature of habitus' (Bourdieu, 2013: 78–79). The internalisation of objective social structures thus allows history (that moment before objective structures are to be internalised) to be forgotten through the process of acquiring habitus. Where once the sexual division of labour may have been out of necessity, today we have forgotten how necessity became a virtue (Bourdieu, 2013), for example. In an example provided by Bourdieu: a working-class person eats beans on toast originally out of necessity but over time will come to enjoy it. In another example, visiting art galleries and playing golf may be described as 'not something for us', but at its core this saying points to the working class not having the time to take part in leisurely and expensive pastimes because they have to work all the time to make ends meet. Bourdieu's habitus thus enables the explanation of how human action, including discourse unconsciously contributes to existing social arrangements.

### 3.2.2 Improvisation in habitus

Although habitus structures behaviours, and thus actions taken by actors in a society are informed by their internalised sense of what is possible given the power relations, previous similar experiences, and resources available to them, habitus is however not static and deterministic. Rather habitus is dynamic – its properties changing as the conditions and circumstances change (Hillier & Rooksby, 2005: 22). Where changes in power relations, the valued resources or capital do not meet with previous experiences the agents need to also adapt in order to attain the best possible outcome for themselves as they see fit. Whiteness in post-apartheid, post-colonial South Africa is no longer legally supported due to the end of both periods, and subsequent democratisation of society which has placed black South Africans in political power. As the game or field is no longer the same due to the change in context and power relations, agents (black and white) have entered a new game or field in post-apartheid South Africa, and have therefore experienced a clash or breakdown of their habitual responses. It is worth bearing in mind here, that the change in context will not be wholly and completely new but still connected in some ways to history. Thus, the change in circumstances and context can be slight but significant rather than wholly new and detached from what came before. On the other hand, however, it has also been argued that the ‘various geographical, economic, social and cultural shifts which people make or undergo during their lifetimes’ (Hillier & Rooksby, 2005: 13 on Sweetman, 2003) has meant that change or transformation in habitus has become more commonplace. Thus change and openness become more the norm than the exception as similarly argued by Nyamnjoh (2018).

In addition, it has been noted that given that actors or agents often hold different positionalities in society it might be more appropriate to think of multiple habituses in accordance with the positions held. Thus for example, citing Hillier and Rooksby (2005: 14), ‘a young woman may regard herself as a teenage daughter, a college friend, a rap fan, a tennis club member, a part-time work colleague in a public house and a lover, all identities embodying a different habitus, sense of place and feel for the game’. The possibility that actors are not bound inextricably in one single habitus but rather several interacting, evolving habituses opens the possibility for agents to move from one habitus to another, and moreover, to ‘develop new adaptive behaviours within a habitus’ (Hillier & Rooksby, 2005:14).

Given that whiteness is likely to shift its boundaries as the circumstances change, there is no reason that the boundaries of whiteness may not continue to adapt and change so that whiteness remains

a powerful, and valuable resource. It is particularly important that whiteness be bought into as a powerful resource and identity by the larger society, but at the same time remains the purview of those who argue that they have the most whiteness. Without this, whiteness loses its worth and therefore its prestige.

### 3.2.3 Fields

The habitus that the individual holds is carried into different fields in what Bourdieu refers to as homologies of field. Thus, if a person is part of the dominated class because the total volume and composition of their capital is the least in comparison to the dominant class in one field, there is a high likelihood that they will also be part of the dominated class in other fields. A field may be defined as a

network or configuration of, objective relations between positions. These positions are objectively defined in their existence and in their determinations they impose upon their occupants, agents or institutions, by their present and potential situations (*situs*) in the structure of the distribution of species of power (or capital) whose possession commands access to the specific profits that are at stake in the field, as well as by their objective relation other positions (domination, subordination, homologies etc.) (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 97).

A field is not real in a material sense like a geographical space, population group or institution, but rather refers to a 'spatial metaphor', or 'latent patterns of interest and struggle that shape the existence' of the aforementioned empirical realities (Swartz, 1997: 117,119). Fields are usually what the researcher thinks of or perceives as the struggle, and organisation and networks around a specific type of capital or combination thereof. For example, the economic field organised primarily around economic capital; academic field organised primarily around the struggle for cultural capital. Fields then are that which the researcher constructs and wishes to further explore due to what they have gathered are struggles, networks, competition around a particular type of capital. Agents in the field struggle not only for more capital, and thus more power and influence in the game, but there may be struggle over the boundaries of the field itself. That is, agents in the field who may not hold the correct composition of capital sought in the game (field) push for the recognition of a different form of capital to define the field.

Despite this challenge, however, these subversive agents still tacitly agree to the game by taking part in it. There may be no conscious decisions to play in the academic field; however, by simply taking part in the game the player has tacitly agreed that the stakes (i.e. the capital and power and influence that comes with the capital) and the field itself are worth competing over. Moreover, in order to be part of the field (or the game as Bourdieu likens field), one has to have the capital to enter the game and become a player. Capital is therefore not only the stake of the game but also plays the role of the ticket to the game which the player tacitly agrees is worth playing.

Bourdieu in his interview with collaborator Wacquant (1992: 98) explains this process of unconsciously agreeing to the tacit rules of the field or game by investing in the field or game thus:

players are taken in by the game, they oppose one another, sometimes ferociously, only to the extent that they concur in the belief (doxa) in the game and its stakes: they grant these recognition that escapes questioning, players agree by the mere act of playing, not by way of a 'contract', that the game is worth playing, that it is 'worth the candle', and this collusion is the very basis of the competition.

When the concept of field is applied to whiteness, student protests in South African higher education institutions have been around contesting whiteness as the necessary capital to succeed and feel at home in South Africa higher education institutions. Additionally, while whiteness may be both the capital needed to enter the field of Rhodes University, and the stake, it is also the site or field of contestation itself. While some students contest against the continuing use of whiteness as capital in historically white universities and couch this in racialised terms, some students contest the racialisation of the capital needed to navigate historically white universities successfully. There is then a contestation of how to define whiteness at play in the data.

### **3.2.4 Defining the term discursive strategy**

The term discursive strategy refers broadly to discursive patterns or moves used in discourse/ talk. The term discursive points to the turn to discourse to look at how people talk in order to build, contest and position themselves in the world around them, as defined by Gee (2011; 1999). The term strategy does not refer to 'conscious choice or rational calculation' but rather refers to ways of talking which are informed by 'practical knowledge' or 'sense of practice' that guide and inform 'complex manoeuvres of challenge, riposte, delay, aggression, retaliation and disdain' (Swartz, 1997: 100). Strategy then merely refers to ways of talking that have been guided by a discursive

habitus. Following Bourdieu, and as pointed out by Gee (1999), each social group or class talks in way that unconsciously points to and reproduces their social positioning as acquired through socialisation in the group as discussed above.

### **3.3 Studying whiteness beyond the white gaze**

The complexities and heterogeneity of whiteness is revealed through the various studies that point to the nuances of whiteness across different spatialities and locales (Steyn & Richard Ballard (eds), 2013; Steyn & van Zyl, 2001), and different white ethnicities and class (Kruger, 2016; Steyn, 2001, 2004; Teppo, 2011; Teppo, 2004), and gender (Frankenberg, 1994; Moon, 1999; West, 2009). Despite these highlighting how whiteness is fragmented and contested there is still a predominant focus on the white body as participant in much of whiteness studies literature.

#### **3.3.1 Fluidity of whiteness**

The findings of authors such as Dolby (2001), Seddon (2014) and Walker (2005) suggest that a dichotomous approach to studying race does not reflect the lived experiences of post-apartheid South African youth. The constructed divide between whiteness studies (predominantly focused on the dominant group) and race studies (predominantly focusing on black experiences of racism) is being challenged by the findings of Dolby (2001), Seddon (2014) and Walker (2005). While McKinney & Pletzen (2004) find that white South African students are ‘done’ with reflecting on apartheid, Seddon's (2014) paper clearly points to apartheid history fatigue and ignorance by both white and black students alike. Similarly studies into the changing demographics of historically white institutions by authors such as Dolby (2001) and Walker (2005) reveal that identities can no longer be ‘simply read off either from the official discourse or from colour and culture’ (Walker, 2005: 41). Students’ (black and white) constructions of post-apartheid identity demonstrated fluidity and a shift in the way in which ‘young people in South Africa interactively produced racial positioning, both within but also against rigid racial classifications’ (Walker, 2005: 42-43).

Soudien (2010) in his exploration of integration in South African high schools finds that both black and white South African youth carry ambitions and aspirations to study and work abroad. A curriculum modelled on Western European canon is thus valued not only by the school but by the students as it is understood that this will provide access to Western European job markets and a better future. Commenting on Dolby’s research, which affirms her own findings, Walker (2005: 42-43) states that there are ‘crossovers in taste preferences, for example, and there are alliances across racial categories ... race is ultimately remade in ways which may re-inscribe racism, but also in ways that “loosen it” and at least begin to dismantle it’.

Similarly Twine (1997) in her study of young black women who have grown up in predominantly white middle class North American neighbourhoods finds that these young black women were not differentiated culturally in terms of behaviour, dress codes, speech patterns, leisure interests or food preferences from their European American peers. While the young women as children were clearly physically different from their peers in terms of phenotypical features, they experienced themselves as culturally neutral like their Euro-American peers due to their socialisation in predominantly white middle class neighbourhoods. These children thereby acquire white identity and embodiment in the sense that they: experience racial neutrality, have middle class privilege, an expression and embodiment of individualism, comfort zone. In regard to the first, there was an experience of being race neutral by the women of African descent. In relation to the second point, having the material benefits of being middle-class. Thirdly, this refers to holding the ideological position encouraged by parents of thinking of the self primarily as an individual and down-playing phenotypical features (Twine, 1997:227). The focus is on class identity and the individual rather than having any links to a specific 'racialised community or ethnic community' (Twine, 1997: 227). In relation to whiteness as a position of a comfort zone there is no self-censorship in the presence of white people. There is a feeling of familiarity and 'comfortable functioning in milieu culturally controlled and dominated by whites' (Twine, 1997: 229). One of the privileges of whiteness is not being constantly aware of one's race and thus having a limited understanding of how life is in fact shaped by race in racialised societies. Thus, research into race, in particular in regard to this thesis, whiteness can longer be strictly dichotomous. That is, being delineated strictly into whiteness studies (focusing in the dominant group white only) or race studies only (focusing on black people and the effect of racism on them).

### **3.3.2 Structural limitations to fluidity of whiteness**

Despite the fluidity of whiteness that can be provided due to socialisation as white, there can be however structural limitations that ensure that continued exclusion of the marginalised in society. Such structural limitations include for example limitations of access to particular schools due to the area that one lives in and income level (Guggenheim, 2010). These structural limitations bottleneck the likelihood of those who do not live in areas close to prestigious schools, nor for that matter fit into the income bracket valued by the school (Guggenheim, 2010). These structural factors in accordance with a recent study that show previously white only schools play a significant role in ensuring that the privileging of whiteness or what is referred to as white tone continues despite whites being a numerical minority (Hunter, 2019). Despite whites no longer being in political control, and legal support of whiteness being removed, the privileging of whiteness may

continue through structural limitations such as school zoning, and level of income of the parents. These ensure that a certain type of student who will fit into or promote the privileging of whiteness will continue. This means that it is possible for whiteness to continue to be privileged even when the majority of the bodies are not necessarily white but as long as they can promote a particular kind of middle-class privileged whiteness (Hunter, 2019).

### **3.3.3 Class and Race**

Within South Africa part of the reason for the shift towards more fluid social identities is because race has been due to ‘a much more dependent relationship with other factors, among which class is central’ (Soudien, 2010: 352). With the end of apartheid, and what some have seen as a growing black middle class, there have been arguments that the differentiation in South African society is no longer race but rather class. With legislation no longer limiting the jobs that people may acquire, and thus no longer any limitation on the type of income one may make based on race, some have argued that there has been an increase in the middle class in South Africa. The continent of Africa on the whole has in fact been argued to having a growing middle class. However, exactly what is meant by the term middle class is subject to differentiation and contestation. The African Development Bank has accepted that the limit from which the middle class is from US\$2 (Melber, 2016: 2). The result of focusing on such a low number is that almost a third of the African middle class is counted as falling into the broad classification of middle class. One of the first issues in regards to defining the middle class in Africa is therefore the focus on the ‘financial or monetary aspect whilst largely ignoring professional and social status, cultural norms and lifestyle related attributes as well as political orientation(s) and influence’ (Melber, 2016:2). While the African Development Bank may have accepted US\$2 per hour as the beginning wage from which to define middle class, the range of US\$10 to US\$100 has also been mentioned as defining the middle class in Africa (Melber, 2016:2). The second issue in regards to defining the middle class in Africa is that it is a very broad, including within it ‘a wide panorama of individuals living under extremely different socio-economic circumstances’ ranging from the wealthy part of a South African township to a shack dweller who cannot afford water and electricity (Melber, 2016: 4). Thus, a large part of what is thought of as middle class in Africa and South Africa has been argued to not have been studied in sufficient enough depth for its nuances, complexities and intricacies including most of all the reasoning behind the numbers that are chosen as defining the middle class. Within South Africa, one of the other major issues is how people self-identify versus how they may be defined by others (Melber, 2016: 3–4). These factors as well as many others complicate what is defined as middle class or for that matter class in Africa and South Africa. While numbers have been the focus, there are nuances and contradictions that complicate how the term is used and

who fits within it. While it is very apparent that class and wealth are important aspects of capital that determines access to whiteness, wealth and class are however beyond just a numbers game. While some have argued that South African middle-classness is precarious because black South Africans suffer from what has been argued to be black tax (the responsibility to look after relatives rather than focusing on own needs and wants) there is reason for some to simply argue that there are further intricate relationships of support, amongst other cultural norms that inform class than what has traditionally been understood as constitutive of a class (Manqoyi, 2018). The point here then is that class is indeed capital that informs access to whiteness. However, what is defined as class requires a more context-specific definition that is pertinent to the African reality rather than simply imposing a number on society. Race in South Africa arguably continues to be affected by the past of colonialism and apartheid which cannot be refuted through imposing a number on African society. Thus when class is mentioned as important capital in defining and accessing whiteness, the meaning of class, especially middle-classness, needs to go beyond a simple understanding of people who share the same number in regards to finance but is instead to be understood by how it is used and understood by the speaker within the context at the time.

This thesis pushes for exploring whiteness beyond white bodies not out of a gratuitous or superfluous desire for inclusion or diversity in whiteness research. Rather, as has been mentioned before, it points to the need to take seriously that whiteness and the intuitions and structures that perpetuate whiteness are socially constructed. Moreover, the turn to take seriously that some elements of whiteness may be acquired and lost across racial boundaries is to challenge the primacy of the white gaze, and its establishment as the norm and the standard. North American whiteness studies literature has heavily influenced South African whiteness studies research to the extent that it has been accused of merely reproducing what has been established before (Abramovitz, 2009; Goga, 2008). Goga (2008: 18), in her analysis of discursive practices and rituals that reproduce legitimate racial domination, critiques South African whiteness studies for ‘piggy-backing on the numerous analyses of ‘whiteness’ (most notably Richard Dyer, 1997) and look for evidence within ...[ the data]... that tallies with the traits of “whiteness” that have been “confirmed”’. In agreement with Goga (2008: 18), merely following such research not only robs us of an enhanced understanding of the reproduction of racial domination but in a sense also legitimises white racial dominance. If the social power of whiteness is ‘its ability to be seen as normal, natural, un-“raced”, and therefore to obtain a position of legitimacy’ then it is worth considering how simply accepting this before one carries out research provides whiteness with homogeneity, stability and invisible power (Goga, 2008: 18-19).

Research into whiteness should be wary of starting studies premised on what other studies have established is the key feature of whiteness — i.e. holding on to social power due to its ‘ability to be seen as normal, natural, un-“raced”, and therefore to obtain a position of legitimacy’ (Goga, 2008: 18). Such whiteness studies research begins from the premise of a powerful, fixed social identity which appeals homogeneity (Goga, 2008: 18-19) rather than being revealed and centred around whiteness as fragmented, unstable and contested, as any other social identity, and therefore undermining its fixed-ness in society. In order to avoid this, Goga (2008) argues a careful balancing act between taking into account the insights brought by previous whiteness studies research, and being open to seeing how race works in lived experiences. The latter for her can only happen when whiteness is not defined beforehand (Goga, 2008) in research. Similarly, Abramovitz (2009: 5–6), in an effort to nuance whiteness studies in South Africa, purposefully attempts to search for alternative interpretations of white discourse which move away from ‘the hegemonic discourses established in the early nineties’ of North American whiteness studies research.

In a critique of South African whiteness scholarship that merely reproduces or copies Western models of scholarship, several African scholars have called for an awareness that such models often marginalise African thought and ideas; create and reproduce dichotomies, and ultimately reject conviviality in research (Nyamnjoh, 2012; Nyamnjoh, 2012, 2013; see also Garuba, 2012; Sithole, 2012). Conviviality as defined by Nyamnjoh refers to ‘different or competing agentive forces which need a negotiated understanding’ that privileges ‘the spirit of togetherness, interpenetration, interdependence and intersubjectivity’ (Nyamnjoh 2002: 111–112). This recognises the open ended-ness or incompleteness of social identities rather than fixed, stable and homogenous (Nyamnjoh, 2015). As pointed out by Ratele (2007: 431), whiteness studies in South Africa which focus predominantly on the white gaze (white identity, white discourses) without an engagement with the black gaze (the suffering, ‘the resilience, beauty, and love, that arises, for indigenous people, out of a history of oppression and solidarity’) effectively denies that black people have always been conscious of, and survived oppression under white supremacy (see also Hooks, 1997).

For Ratele (2007), the work done by whiteness studies under its current guise of anti-racism work through making whiteness more visible is to deny the centuries of work that black people have been doing to undermine whiteness. Specifically, this work has called for a critical eye on whiteness, and a consciousness of white supremacy while being forced to live in societies of white supremacy. Focusing on whiteness without the critical eye of the indigene therefore affirms the

importance and dominance of the white gaze to some extent. While Ratele (2007: 436) ultimately argues that the totalising power of white ideology should be denied by indigenes by

[m]aking whiteness unconscious as a better way through which fundamentally different friendships, loves, education, thoughts, and other facets of a beautiful, psycho-culturally healthy life of the indigenous person can be carved out, less pained by the trauma of the long and brutal history of white and colonial regimes.

the position taken here, as inspired by the insights of Nyamnjoh's work, is that research that focuses on the boundaries between inside and outside needs to focus on the blurred boundaries; the between and betwixt place of almost all social identities to dismantle the power of the boundaries. Rather than simply focus on idioms and moments of only either domination or subordination in relation to whiteness and blackness we must accept that the two are intertwined, and result in 'contradictory complexity' (Roos, 2016: 140 on Gyanendra Pandey, 1997 and Gautan Bhadra, 1988). As per the insights of Roos (2016: 140), this means taking care 'to ask about the material, ideological, and cultural grounds for accommodation, taking care to identify gender, ethnic, class or other differences, and how these are deployed in particular contexts at particular times, and whether ordinary white defined (even if only symbolically) citizenship imposed from above, thus co-shaping its evolution. We might investigate the fate of whites who transgressed the terms of whiteness imagined from above [i.e. the apartheid state] remembering that such transgression was unlikely to have constituted resistance to the state itself. Rather, as suggested by the insights of Roos (2016: 140), research can look to moments of 'popular complicity, collusion and co-optation' as people compete for social resources in accordance with their social position as defined and informed by their habitus, and the capital they hold.

Collusion and complicity may therefore exist alongside resistance and undermining of dominant ideas or discourses in a space of between-ess or contradictory complexity. This is after all what Ratele (2007) admits is the position of black people to survive colonialism and apartheid: being both conscious and critical of whiteness on the one hand in order to survive, and choosing to not be conscious of whiteness in the private space in order to forge relationships that deny whiteness its totalising inferiorising power in black lives. This is the space of in-between-ess which allows the researcher to acknowledge and therefore deny the homogeneity, fixedness of whiteness. Moreover, the approach taken in this thesis is to accept that whiteness is ever incomplete, and therefore never completely closed off, any more than any other social identity but is always open to contestation, acquisition and being lost.

Following Chris Shilling, (2012: 15) such research takes seriously the socially constituted nature of bodies as:

best conceptualised as an unfinished biological and social phenomenon possessed of its own emergent properties (including those that enable individuals to walk, talk, think, supplement themselves with technological additions, and alter environment); properties that can also be transformed within certain limits, as a result of its participation in society.

Following this thought on social identities being connected to socially constituted bodies that are never complete, Nyamnjoh (2016) and others such as Warnier (2007) have conceptualised the body as a vessel, gourd, envelope or container continuously being filled with ‘forms of consciousness that have been shaped by the external world, which in turn shapes our consciousness’ (Nyamnjoh, 2016: 21). Although Nyamnjoh (2016) summarises several theorists’ conception of the body on this, the point is essentially that bodies are both socially defined by the external world, which is constantly changing, and bodies in turn define themselves in a similar if not the same fashion as the social or external world (social construction *a la* Bourdieu) (Swartz, 1997).

The need to look beyond the white gaze in whiteness studies research is also to take heed of the fact that colonisation was not only about the struggle ‘over territory, but also a struggle for control over meanings and minds’ (Nyamnjoh and Page, 2002: 608). For this reason, it calls for us to recognise that

[j]ust as white gazes on black, so black, also, gazes on white. Yet, all too often, discussions of alterity have portrayed only the ‘Occident’ as the bearer of the gaze and the maker of meaning, whilst the ‘Orient’, the ‘African’ or the ‘Other’ is left as the passive object of Western curiosity. The interlocking of gazes is ignored. In recent years ‘whiteness’ in the West has been subjected to ‘a barrage of unsentimental critique’, but these studies still suggest that only white people construct whiteness. This has engendered a history of white identity pregnant with missing links and missing perspectives (Nyamnjoh & Page, 2002: 608–609).

The gaze of blackness on whiteness is important because if we think of whiteness in terms of the power to define self, the other and the norm, this may be considered a resource. While whiteness is often constructed as a zero sum game of losers and winners, a more convivialist, open-ended approach to whiteness dedicated to showing its fragmented, unstableness ‘recognizes the potential for criticism, as well as the possibility for [all people] to recognize their own agency and legitimate place within the struggle for social change and an anti-racist society’ (Giroux, 1997: 285). Viewed in this way, whiteness does not have a magical quality (Ratele & Laubscher, 2010) but is rather way of being, seeing and understanding the world that relies on both essence and social construction to determine how social goods are distributed. The meaning of whiteness thus becomes open to all peoples not the purview of white bodies only.

Drawing on the concept of Occidentalism, in order to consider the contribution of black Cameroonian youth to the meaning of whiteness, Nyamnjoh and Page (2002) state that ‘the maintenance of every culture requires the existence of a competing alter ego’ to help consider the process of how meanings of whiteness are made in Cameroon (Nyamnjoh & Page, 2002: 609). However, rather than assume the youth are speaking ‘up’ to whiteness, as an ideal, ‘Whiteman’ and ‘whiteman kontri’ are understood as the means through which ‘[t]he black Cameroonian self is maintained through the production of the white as other’ (Nyamnjoh & Page, 2002: 609). Whiteman kontri has the allure of progress, resources and thus worth going to an ideal place where one has resources. In this regard, the image of ‘white’ is associated with benevolence ‘but moneyconscious, and the whiteman kontri as the ultimate goal but one embedded in the bureaucratic rituals of visas, which are a means of denying potential migrants the opportunity of realizing their dreams of sharing in the good life that whiteman-driven modernization has brought about’ (Nyamnjoh & Page, 2002: 611).

Whiteman kontri is thus about Cameroonian dreams and ambitions in as much as it is about the denial of those dreams through bureaucratic process, and the social realities which means they do not have the resources to attain the good life. This aligns with Bashkow’s (2006) argument that all societies, regardless of race, may use a construction of the other to make sense of their own social world. In Bashkow’s (2006) study of black Papua New Guineans’ construction and acquisition of whiteness, whiteness is constructed as lightness in relation to heaviness of the black body. Whiteness as a resource in Papua New Guinean cosmology is used for example in the social practice of establishing and cementing relationships through gift giving. To be presented with a gift in the Papua New Guinean cosmology requires at some stage the presentation of a return gift and thus is to some extent a burden. Whiteness thereby becomes a means of negotiating social life

in opposition to the heaviness – the social burdens of blackness. Thus, whiteness is not so much essence for the Papua New Guineans but as a means to make sense of their world. The construction of the other may also be used to articulate and make sense of the social concerns of the group. This use of the other, argues Bashkow (2006), is not particular to white or black bodies but is done by all groups.

### **3.4 Investment in biological essence**

A recognition of both the white gaze and the black gaze in conversation with each other does not, however, merely place the Occident as ‘the symmetrical opposite of Orientalism’ (Nyamnjoh & Page, 2002: 609). This would fail to recognise the power relations between black and white. Rather this means taking into account that the Occident has also served as ‘a ‘filter’ through which the other encounters itself’ (Nyamnjoh & Page, 2002: 609).

Nyamnjoh (2016: 7) in a review of whiteness in South Africa states that ‘Skin pigmentation may be the starting point of the journeys of power, privilege and opportunity that we undertake every now and then, but privilege, power and opportunity refuse to be confined narrowly by the diktats of pigmentation’ (see also Alcoff, 2015; Nyamnjoh, 2016:7 on West 2009).

Drawing from Mary West’s (2006) work on white women writing white, Nyamnjoh (2016: 7) furthermore states, ‘that whiteness has in fact very little to do with pigmentation, but it emerges as an identification that is premised on the historical fact that white settlers of mainly European extraction colonised large tracts of the rest of the world’, resulting in ‘an unequal relationship between the lighter-skinned settler and the darker-skinned native, and consequently between the descendants of the settler and the native’ (West, 2009:11 in Nyamnjoh, 2016: 7). Whiteness then is not strictly about having white phenotypical features. Nonetheless there is an investment into whiteness as biological essence by whites in the competition over social goods or resources in society (see for example research by Durrheim & Dixon (2000) on South African beaches which indicates that while culture may for example be used to differentiate between groups by whites, at the heart of it, Whitehead argues, is the belief in scientific racism – essentially biologically distinct racial groups). Rather than existing objectively, however, the investment in biological essence in regard to whiteness is to hold onto power, privilege and opportunities to the exclusion of those non-whites that might have acquired other socially constructed features of whiteness.

### **3.5 Conclusion: locating the study and problematising whiteness**

This study contributes to the limited South African whiteness studies that problematises whiteness in South Africa. Problematising whiteness in this thesis refers to moving away from simply following previous research on whiteness, as Goga (2008) and Abramovitz (2009) warn, and taking seriously the social construction of whiteness beyond biological essence only. In addition, the term problematisation of whiteness in this study refers to an attempt to peek behind the veil of the differentiation between whiteness studies and race studies, as suggested by Kolchin (2002). To draw on white or black bodies without looking for moments of complicity, collusion or contradictory complexity in order to produce more convivial scholarship is to reify and fix whiteness as stable. This study hopes to build on whiteness studies research that problematises whiteness in South Africa by prompting the acceptance of the idea that human beings are neither only complicit in systems of oppression, or simply only resistant (Bourdieu, Gee, 1999) along essentialised racial lines. It has been argued above that to some degree this process has already started in terms of social identities in post-apartheid South Africa being fluid.

This chapter has also discussed some of the key issues in undertaking race work: the connection between the individual and society; nuance, particularity and collective whiteness or systemic white; undertaking research without resorting to essentialisations; and lastly how ways of acting (including discourse) may unconsciously produce in-egalitarian social arrangements regardless of the intention of the speaker or actor. The key concepts used to explain these concerns or issues were Bourdieu's field and habitus. These concepts allow us to understand individual action as being inspired by habitus in interaction with external structures to unconsciously structure individual actions informed by the social position of the individual in society.

Lastly, this chapter also discussed the investment in whiteness as biological as a means to hold onto power, privilege and opportunities in tension with whiteness as a social construct which allows whiteness to be acquired and lost beyond biological essence. The power of whiteness, this chapter has ultimately argued, lies in its being perceived as whole, fixed and stable. Its power may be undermined by focusing on how it is fragmented, unstable and contested across racial boundaries because of its association with power, privilege and opportunities. Given that whiteness is socially constituted there is ultimately little reason as to why whiteness should escape redefinition and reconstruction in tune with the changing social relations, social mobility and interracial dynamics as mentioned previously.

## Chapter IV: Methodological Considerations

### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses how the study was conducted for the purposes of answering the thesis research question. This thesis research question explores the ways in which speakers' descriptions of their 'raced' experiences may play a role in producing and reproducing a pervading institutional culture of whiteness as highlighted by the Soudien Report (2008), extensively discussed in chapter one. Thus, chosen processes of collecting, analysing and interpreting data relevant to answering the research question are discussed in this chapter. Most importantly, in light of the research question, the role that discourse plays in constructing the world is considered in depth.

Institutional cultures of whiteness are said to specifically pervade within historically 'white' universities as they were historically created to serve the political and social needs of one group during colonialism and apartheid. That is, those who are constructed white due to their phenotypical features. In order to answer the thesis question, the site of the present study was Rhodes University, Grahamstown, Eastern Cape, South Africa.

It is worth noting briefly here that there was heated debate due to the 2015 student protests at Rhodes University calling for the renaming of Rhodes University (Maylam, 2017). The cause of contention, which is discussed in greater detail in the context chapter, was the connection of the university's name with racist imperialist Cecil John Rhodes after whom the university was named (Maylam, 2017). After much deliberation, due to the commercial worth of the brand Rhodes University, the University continues to retain its name (Maylam, 2017). Some, however, in protest of this decision have chosen to refer to the institution as University Currently Known as Rhodes (from here on referred to as UKCAR) (Maylam, 2017). While not taking lightly the transformational reasons for the call to change the institution's name, the institution is referred to as Rhodes University within this study. Aside from continuing to be officially named as Rhodes University, the primary reason to use Rhodes University rather than UCKAR in the thesis is because the study, and participants for the study reflected on their time at the institution before the 2015 student protests and the most recent discussions for the name change. Thus, for contextual reasons and ease of reference, the term Rhodes University will be used here throughout. The transformational issues which the University faced, and arguably still faces, which brought about the calls for the name change are not ignored and are discussed in detail in the context chapter (chapter three).

Secondly, it is also worth noting that the name of Grahamstown has officially been changed to Makhanda after a local poet and warrior (Chabalala, 2018). This is a move towards a decolonised South Africa through geographical name change (Chabalala, 2018). While this is a positive change, once again the decision is taken, for ease of reference and contextual reasons, to use the term Grahamstown. The name change to Makhanda occurred in 2018, long after the interviews, and the participants specifically described their experiences while the town was still Grahamstown. Once again, however, the transformation issues that called for this name change, specifically in reference to Rhodes University, are not ignored but are discussed in detail in the context chapter.

#### **4.1.1 How and why the research question arose**

In Sullivan's book *Revealing Whiteness*, the author suggests that the race of the bodies in a place racialises a place, and thus through repeated social interaction creates a raced way of doing things. The student body of Rhodes University, being over 60% black at the time the research was undertaken, from 2013 to early 2015 before the student protests, led the researcher to ponder how and why it is that numerical or demographic advantage does not necessarily translate into power and privilege (see Rhodes University Digest of Statistics, 2014). How is it that despite the numerical advantage, and what some phenotypical whites perceive as reverse racism, that South African institutional culture literature points to white dominance at historically white universities? In addition black staff and black students claim to experience excluding and alienating cultures of whiteness within the historically white institutions they attend or work in (see Aljazeera, 2015; eNCA, 2015; Jagarnath, 2015; John, 2015; Khunou, Phaswana, Khoza-Shangase & Canham, 2019; Tutu, 2015). It has long been considered, as indicated through the recent collection of essays reflecting on black academics' experiences in historically white universities, that transformation needs to be more than a numbers game (Khunou, Phaswana, et al., 2019). Rather, institutions need to ask themselves how everyday institutional activities – including the discursive action of the bodies that fill the institution – may be informed by, and to some extent reinforce the privileging of whiteness.

While other studies have focused on how institutional activities, structures,<sup>3</sup> leadership and, specifically, phenotypically white people's discourse may produce and reproduce whiteness, this thesis was concerned with how the micro-level experiences and constructions of the social world by black and white student bodies that fill the institutional space may consciously and unconsciously contribute or challenge the production and reproduction of white dominance.

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<sup>3</sup> Programmes meant to increase the number of black academic staff and black students.

In order to avoid research fatigue, the thesis drew upon former Rhodes University<sup>4</sup> students' raced experiences. Although invitations were sent to those who had attended Rhodes from 1994 to 2013, those who chose to take part in the research project were predominantly in their 20s at the time they took part in the research interviews (2014 to early 2015 before the student protests). Thus, many of the participants had recently graduated from the institution or were enrolled in their postgraduate degrees at the institution. Their experiences of the institution were thus still relatively fresh in the minds of the participants.

The thesis question was initially aimed at getting a better definition and understanding of what is meant by 'an institutional culture of whiteness'. This would be done by interviewing both white and black participants about their raced experiences of Rhodes. During the interview process it became apparent that an essentialist approach needed to be avoided. All phenotypically black students did not have the same experience nor did all phenotypically white students have the same experience of Rhodes. Rather, the researcher of this thesis began to think about whether intersectionality, and Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and capital, may be a lens through which to understand how different people experience and negotiate the institutional culture of a historically white South African university which has been said to be characterised by a culture of whiteness (see for example Maylam, 2017; Ngcobozi, 2015; Tutu, 2015), in regards to Rhodes University having a culture of whiteness). The researcher in the present study had noted that similar ways of talking about raced experiences appeared at times to be shared across race and the intersecting identity positions of gender, home language and class as the interview process continued. These factors led to the current thesis question which is interested in the discursive strategies drawn on by speakers (in this case former students of Rhodes University) to construct their raced experiences of Rhodes University, and how these either challenge or reinforce a culture of whiteness at Rhodes. The focus thus shifted from defining the phrase 'an institutional culture of whiteness' to focusing on what role discourse may play in either challenging or reinforcing the existing institutional culture of whiteness.

#### **4.2 The role of discourse in society:**

Discourse does work beyond mere communication (Durrheim, Mtose & Brown, 2011; Gee, 1999; van de Berg, Wetherell, Houtkoop- Steenstra, 2003). Through discourse, two acts are being performed: the first is discourse as doing something in itself in the talk (for example putting blame, excluding, including, inferring doubt). This may in turn lead to the performance of an external act

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<sup>4</sup> Hereafter may alternately be referred to as Rhodes for ease of reference.

such as moving away from the person who is being excluded. Where disparaging comments about 'black' people are accepted as the norm for example, this creates a climate in which racial discrimination is rendered more likely and legitimate (Myers, 2005). This is because how people speak about particular groups of people affects how we perceive and act towards the disparaged group – often in unconscious ways (Myers, 2005; Sullivan, 2006).

Discourse also relies on commonly held rules of communication including grammar and structure of sentences, the meaning of words and common-sense knowledge (Gee, 1999; 2011; Wetherell, 2003). These are all commonly held resources that the individual will draw on when communicating. These resources do not exist in isolation but are both part of and created in social interaction (Durrheim, Mtose & Brown, 2011). Delgado (1989), Ross (2000:43) and Toress and Milun (2000:52) all note that people use accounts of the world to pursue interests (see Ross, 2000: 43; Toress & Milun, 2000: 52).

Discursive resources, do, however, change through time as the society changes (Wetherell, 2003). At a particular time and place in history a group has commonly held resources and rules of communication which the individual will draw upon in their communication (Gee, 1999; Wetherell, 2003). While relying on commonly held rules and resources of discourse, the individual also has the ability to modify or change how they use the resources as they see fit in the context at the time (Gee, 1999; Wetherell, 2003). However, how the individual uses these resources is still limited by the fact that they must be understood by the others in the group with whom they are communicating. The meaning of words and concepts are limited to the meanings created at that time and place. Thus, discourse is both constantly changing as each individual communicates, but still also to some extent remaining the same in some ways as discourse is both a product of and part of the larger social structures, social relations and/ or ideology within which a person exists (see Ross, 2000: 43–44). An analysis of discourse therefore allows the researcher to gain access to the larger social structures, social relations and/ or ideology within which a person exists (Ross, 2000; Wetherell, 2005). Through discourse, society thus collectively and individually constructs reality, cultures and group identity and ideological beliefs (Gee, 1999; Myers, 2005). This in turn leads to the creation of institutions which both reflect and are a product of the discourse. The individual and the collective, discourse and action, discourse and group identity, discourse and culture, and discourse and institutions, all exist in a dialectical relationship (Gee, 1999; Myers, 2005).

The resources that are used in talk, including rules of communication, become so widespread and well known amongst those in the group that they become taken for granted (Gee, 1999). Knowledge that is taken for granted knowledge becomes invisible to the members of a group that share the same resources and communicative rules. Those who are not part of the group, and do not know the invisible, taken for granted knowledge about how to communicate and how ‘things are done’ in the group are most able to point out this invisible assumed knowledge.

#### **4.2.1 Acknowledging positionality in discourse:**

It is assumed in this study that every person speaks from a particular position within a racialised society where whiteness is privileged – the marginal group or the dominant group – and is therefore an expert of their own experience within the systemic privileging of whiteness (see Wetherell, 2003). By paying attention to the specific position within the system of whiteness that a person writes or speaks from, it is assumed that no knowledge can claim to be neutral, objective or apolitical. Rather all knowledge is interest driven and is both a reflection and product of one’s place in the system of whiteness. The approach, here echoes that suggested by (Baszile, 2015: 239).

[The study] does not pretend to be neutral, objective, or apolitical. It embraces the realization that knowledge comes from thinking and feeling bodies, from bodies that are ‘raced’, gendered, and sexualized among other subjectivities, from bodies that are located in hierarchical relations and places of difference.

By acknowledging the experiential, this approach challenges the construction of white norms and ways of being, studying and understanding the world as being universal, objective and apolitical (Gladson-Billings, 2003: 398–402). Through this approach, both the participants who share their knowledge and the researcher who analyses the data are taking part in a process of challenging the dominant ways of knowing. This is particularly the case with critical race theory work, which argues that by valuing and respecting experiential knowledge that marginal groups within the system of racism are empowered to realise that structural inequality plays a role in their marginalisation (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Delgado, 1989) and can begin to challenge any negative assumptions that they might have assimilated about themselves (Delgado, 1989; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001).

All intersecting positionalities of the human experience are kept in mind so that we become aware of the many ways that oppression takes place (Collins, 2000). Within the system of racism, other factors such as gender, class, language, ethnicity and sexuality all affect how each person

experiences racism. By bearing in mind intersectionality, the interlocking complex nature of oppression receives attention. Thus, justice can be better served if we listen to how oppression operates in an interlocking system rather than by focusing only on gender, class or language, for example (see Caldwell, 2000; Harris, 2000).

The dominant group's white privilege and assumptions of whiteness as the norm can be challenged through hearing about the marginal group's experiences (Baszile, 2015; Delgado, 1989), which can provide the dominant group with insight into how oppression operates. This has been referred to as the ethnographic eye (hooks, 1997), double consciousness (Chigumadzi, 2015 on W.E.B. du Bois) or outsider within knowledge (Collins, 1986). This does, however, bear the danger that white people rely on black people to redefine and better understand whiteness and white privilege (see Sullivan, 2006). In order to counter this, Delgado's paper 'A plea for narrative' arguably places responsibility on white people to listen and then be catalysed to a white self-consciousness.

However, as much as those who are phenotypically white and black may have what has been referred to as positional insight into whiteness, no one group alone nor one individual for that matter has the complete means to see what Nyamnjoh (2012) has referred to as the elephant in the room. Each touches a different part from which the researcher can, collectively and carefully considering each, attain a more comprehensive image of the phenomenon or creature that they are dealing with.

The methodology for this study is one that goes beyond the limits of the dominant group's ways of knowing and constructing the world only; or for that matter the marginalised group's experience of whiteness only. This was particularly necessary because if whiteness is constructed by 'white' people as the norm, it can be said to be made invisible. For this reason, the study had to go beyond current dominant constructions of racism and whiteness as being limited to overt cases or extreme racism. There had to be a way of getting at the microaggressions, everyday subtle institutional racism. In order to gain access to the covert workings of whiteness, as well as the ways in which whiteness may extend beyond the phenotypical essence only, the study relied on stories that could be studied and analysed for the discursive strategies drawn upon by both black and white participants to construct their raced experiences of one particular historically white South African university's institutional culture(s). This thesis took the position suggested by Nyamnjoh (2012) that no person or group has complete insight into a phenomenon on their own. Thus, while essence and positionality are important in terms of positionality of being in the margins or part of

the dominant group, the social aspects of racial construction also make some racial boundary crossing and acquisition of whiteness possible – albeit with restrictions.

#### **4.2.2 Researcher's positionality**

As positionality is important, for the sake of reflexivity, this thesis researcher's position as a black South African heterosexual female is worth mentioning. The researcher for this thesis is bound by phenotypical black essence and some of the ideology that surrounds such a positionality. Phenotypical blackness is associated with an ideology, for example, of lack of competence and criminality (Goebel, 2015; Vincent, Idahosa, & Msomi, 2017). At the same time, however, through financial sacrifices made by a single father, the researcher was schooled at formerly whites only schools. The researcher's family fell into the missing middle in relation to the financial means test used to determine whether one qualifies for financial aid in South Africa higher education. That is, having insufficient means to comfortably pay for higher education fees and yet considered to earn too much to qualify for financial aid. Nonetheless, through financial sacrifices and difficulties the researcher was able to attain some social aspects of whiteness that are recognised and rewarded within the historically white institution. With no comfortable middle-class wealth, nor phenotypical essence of whiteness, this placed the researcher in some ways in the position of marginality. On the other hand, sacrifices made by a single father enabled the researcher to hold some cultural capital and white habitus to better negotiate places that recognise and reward whiteness than those who had not had the same experience of schooling. Holding the position of phenotypical blackness has on the one hand meant experiencing constant concern and sense of fear of when the next racial or micro-aggression of putting the researcher back in the inferiorised black body would occur within historically white spaces. At the same time, aspects of whiteness that the researcher had acquired through schooling, such as a middle-class English accent, came with some privileges of being assumed to be smarter or more capable as this was perceived as being closer to the ideal of whiteness. Being a black woman in a place that privileges whiteness has meant that the body the researcher inhabits has often fallen far short of the ideals of beauty in whiteness. In gender-mixed circles this was particularly apparent in not being seen as a desirable sexual partner. To this day, predominantly white spaces still create feelings of fear and anxiety due to these negative experiences as there was a concern as to which aspect of the body the researcher inhabited would matter more and to what extent. Extended family interactions, and among family friends, where social aspects of blackness such as being able to speak the local language comfortably were also a source of discomfort. The researcher of the thesis thus does not hold only marginal positionality, nor for that matter complete acceptance and extension of white privilege. The researcher carefully had to balance and engage in a nimble-footed dance of

belonging according to the context at the time. The concept of a nimble-footedness is taken from Nyamnjoh (2013) in reference to having to get a sense of what is expected and valued in the contexts that one finds oneself in. As contexts are often essentialised with their own rules, ways of doing things, the individual has to be adept to function in not only in one social context but others as well.

#### 4.2.3 Stories as a form of discourse

Stories provide a site at which to look for how whiteness is either resisted, unseated or re-inscribed in different ways – including across intersectional positionality which affects how oppression and domination are experienced. As a result of some of the resources in discourse or talk being commonly held and therefore taken for granted, many people are not fully aware of what their discourse does at the wider societal macro-level (Gee, 1999; Wetherell, 2003). How talk or discourse is organised, and the commonly held resources relied upon to tell stories draw on a common-sense knowledge such as racial stereotypes, stock stories and characters which work to either resist, unseat or challenge the taken for granted way of doing things (see Myers, 2005; Vincent, 2015). It is up to the researcher to reveal what is being *done* (rather than only what is being said) in the talk rather than rely on the interpretations provided by the participant or respondent only (Wetherell, 2003). How the participant or responder interprets the world or a phenomenon is therefore as important as what they are saying. In this study, stories are considered a form of discourse because they share the following features:

- rules on how to structure the communication, including grammar (Durrheim, Mtose, & Brown, 2011: 89; Gee, 1999);
- which facts to emphasise or leave out (Delgado, 1989); and
- an awareness of how to tell the story for the audience as informed by the interests or concerns of the speaker at the time (Myers, 2005; see Delgado, 1989).

For Gee (1999, 2011) this can mean changing the tone, formality, topic or word choice depending on the audience (see, in regard to racism and inequality, Ikemoto, 2000: 304; Lopez, 2000a, 2000b; Myers, 2005). Any attempt to account for reality or one's experience is thus a type of story (see Delgado, 1989; Durrheim, Mtose & Brown, 2011], and therefore a type of discourse even though it may not necessarily be recognised as such.

Through stories, we privilege some ways of describing, viewing and understanding the world over others; and draw on some elements of commonly held discourses over others. The way that is

chosen to organise and tell stories of experiences are therefore political acts in that they privilege some facts more than others, and stress or leave out certain conceptions while holding onto others for the audience (Delgado, 1989; Myers, 2005).

The use of narrative or storytelling is not about merely revealing that all people make sense of the world through stories, nor that realities and experiences are constructed differently. Rather, it is to reveal that stories serve a political purpose which plays a role in organising society and society's resources (Delgado and Stefancic, 2001). This is not, however, a smooth process attained with no contestation and competition between the margins and those perceived as part of the dominant group. The aim of all studies within transformative paradigms such as critical race theory is to reveal how the dominant story becomes hegemonic despite contestation and competition amongst groups and individuals and their stories (Gladson-Billings, 2003; Swartz, 1997). By revealing how social relations become the norm and reproduce the *status quo*, the invisibility upon which structural forces for continued domination rely may be challenged. These structural forces cannot exist outside of the dialectical relationship with discourse, through which we can begin to gain insight into the function of the structural forces that can limit the marginal group's chances to the advantage of the dominant group, although these positionalities are not always clear cut and simple.

### **4.3 Participants**

Although the thesis was undertaken in 2013, the data collection aspect was between 2014 and early 2015 before the student protests of 2015. The research included both black and white participants. In South Africa, the Population Registration Act created four groups around different phenotypical features: white, black, Indian and coloured. For the purposes of this thesis the term black refers inclusively to coloureds, African blacks and Indians in the sense used by Bantu

Stephen Biko (1971 in South African History Online, 2019), who defined blacks as

those who are by law or tradition politically, economically and socially discriminated against as a group in the South African society and identifying themselves as a unit in the struggle towards the realization of their aspirations.

What is relevant here, in terms of defining race with reference to the term 'black', and conversely the term 'white', is the relations of inequality established during imperialism, colonialism and apartheid but which continue to be relevant after independence and the establishment of

democratic societies – albeit with nuances and complexities that muddy the waters of how race has often been constructed and understood under apartheid legislation. In addition, as noted by Nyamnjoh (2016) in his book on RhodesMustFall, despite whites no longer being a political majority, access to power, privilege and opportunity is still associated with whiteness. It is in turn this association of whiteness with privilege, power and opportunity which may lead some black people to also invest in whiteness thus unconsciously collectively shoring up the privileging of whiteness in society (Nyamnjoh, 2016; Nyamnjoh & Fuh, 2014; Nyamnjoh & Page, 2002; Reilly, 2016). Thus, it is that even when white people are not the political and numerical majority, relations of racial inequality created during apartheid and colonialism continue to affect the relations between descendants of European settlers, and the sons and daughters of the native soil, as succinctly put by Nyamnjoh (2016). While there was on the one hand phenotypical essence to consider in terms of the research question, it is also worth noting that social aspects of racial construction allow bodies that are not phenotypically white to have some white privileges extended to them (Reilly, 2016; Walker, 2005). One may end up with ‘brown skinned white girls’ (Twine, 1997) who socially, economically and culturally may be white due to the social aspects of whiteness they hold. At the same time, however, the self-same aforementioned brown-skinned white girls, or more broadly what have been referred to as ‘coconuts’ in South Africa, never quite escape their phenotypical blackness. The idea of clear set dichotomies when it comes to race is thus not one that is stable. Rather there is great nuance and contestation – even among phenotypical whites in South Africa between Afrikaners and English whites – that add to the complexity of conceptualisation of whiteness. As whiteness is thus not always limited to the white phenotypical body only, both white and black participants were considered for the study.

Although South African society at this post-apartheid juncture, critiques whiteness (Ngcobozi, 2015; Tutu, 2015), there is also pressure for a more socially cohesive dispensation and ongoing attempts at redistribution (however rudimentary) of the power, privileges and opportunities traditionally the preserve of whites. Despite suspicion of whiteness in post-apartheid South Africa (Ngcobozi, 2015; Tutu, 2015), in the pursuit of a more cohesive and inclusive society, the ideal that is pursued are those aspects that have been the reserve of whites only: access to privilege, opportunity and power in its various guises. This also potentially creates tensions and competition not only between blacks and whites, for access to the aforementioned privileges associated with whiteness, but also amongst blacks, and amongst whites in competition with each other as they pursue the associated aspects of whiteness of the good life (Nyamnjoh, 2016; Steyn, 2001).

### 4.3.1 White dominance post-apartheid

Historical systems of privileging of whiteness often also included co-option and extension of white privileges to non-whites in order to shore up whiteness (Fanon, 2008; Macaulay, 1835; Mamdani, 1996; Ntsebenza, 2005; Reilly, 2016). Thus even today despite the change in the type of bodies that may be in political power, such as in South Africa, the process of racialisation still pervades, and enables the criminalisation of black, and conversely white moral goodness (Goebel, 2015: 172– 174). The structures, processes, policies of a place may continue to be informed by the privileging of whiteness. Ideologies of whiteness such as colour-blindness, for example, may continue to provide key frames through which to see and engage with racialised bodies even when white bodies are either the political and/or the numerical minority. The often contradictory approaches of whiteness were key issues that the thesis wished to explore; in particular how the two contradictory characteristics of whiteness as noted by Hartigan Jr (1997) may be present together; how the contradictory characteristics of whiteness of both homogeneity at the macro-level and nuance at the micro, local level are to be explained; and most importantly, how they are negotiated by people at the everyday level.

### 4.3.2 Participants' attributes

Table IV below titled '*Breakdown of total participants by race and gender*' indicates that 58 participants took part in this thesis study. In this sample, the race demographics were similar to those of Rhodes between 2014 and early 2015 when the interviews for the study were conducted. The participants in the study were 62% black and 38% white. In terms of gender and race considered together there was a 4% difference between the percentage of study participants and the demographics of the institution reported in the Rhodes University Digest of Statistics (2014) when the interviews were conducted.

*Table IV: Breakdown of total participants by race and gender*

<b>Total Participants (Supplementing and Email): 58</b>	<b>white: 23</b>	<b>black: 35</b>
<b>Female: 32</b>	white: 14	
	black: 18	Indian: 3
		coloured: 2
<b>Male: 26</b>	white: 9	
	black: 17	

Black students did not describe their experiences, nor how they negotiated university, in the same way. An initial reading of the data suggested that black students who had acquired white norms and values appeared to negotiate whiteness more successfully due to prior proximity and familiarity with whiteness. Not all wealthy black students felt accepted into whiteness nor for that matter did all working-class black students report feeling excluded by whiteness. In addition, not all white students experienced, negotiated and constructed their whiteness and their experiences in the same way. For this reason, the focus of the study shifted from what people said to how they accounted for their experiences and their interpretations of their experiences.

Accent discrimination and the expectation that everyone be able to speak English with a particular black accent was an anticipated theme before the data collection. As a result of the researcher being both a student and staff member at Rhodes for over 13 years, this was a matter that had arisen in her informal conversations with Rhodes students and staff. For this reason, all participants were asked what their home language was. In some cases, as is evident in the table, human experience resulted in responses where some people claimed to have two rather than one home language, or for that matter simply struggled to envision themselves as having complete proficiency in a single language. Nonetheless of those who answered the question regarding their home language, only one person who was interviewed spoke English and Afrikaans, and three spoke both English and an indigenous African language. The majority of the phenotypically white participants spoke only English as their home language, as can be seen in the table below, and the majority of the black participants likewise only chose one language as their home language. It is worth noting however that some participants may have been proficient in more than one language, yet noted only one language as part of their identity as mentioned above. Most of the participants spoke languages recognised as South African indigenous languages as their home language, with Oshiwambo and Ndebele being the only languages that are recognised as non-South African languages. Table V and Table VI below provide a breakdown of the participants and their attributes. Attribute coding (see Gibbs, 2002: 83, 95; Saldana, 2009: 55-58) including race, gender and home language was done using the programme Nvivo which allows the researcher to enter research relevant attributes of the participants. Nvivo enables the researcher to manage and code electronically (Saldana, 2009: 22–23).

Table V: Breakdown of Email Interviews Conducted for this Thesis

E-mail Interviews				
	Race	Gender	Age	Home language
1 : Andrea	White	Female	27	Afrikaans
2 : Aphiwe	Black	Female	24	Xhosa
3 : Anda	Black	Female	31	Xhosa
4 : Bridgett	White	Female	27	English
5 : Carla	White	Female	23	English
6 : Calida	White	Female	28	English
7 : Dianne	White	Female	29	English
8 : Earnest	Black	Male	29	Ndebele
9 : Olwethu	Black	Female	23	Xhosa
10 : Eda	White	Female	30	Afrikaans
11 : Gavino	Black	Male	24	Sesotho, Zulu
12 : Josie	White	Female	30	English
13 : Laney	White	Female	26	English
14 : Lithalethu	Black	Female	25	Xhosa
15 : Lael	Black (Coloured)	Female	29	English, Oshiwambo, Portuguese
16 : Lethu	Black	Male	29	Xhosa
17 : Lifa	Black	Female	24	Xhosa
18 : Lindani	Black	Female	27	English, Sesotho
19 : Meredith	Black (Coloured)	Female	24	English
20 : Matthew	White	Male	22	English
21 : Malcolm	White	Male	27	English, Afrikaans
22 : Natalie	White	Female	28	English
23 : Peter	Black	Male	31	English
24 : Phelela	Black	Male	26	Zulu
25 : Rea	Black (Indian)	Female	26	English
26 : Riba	Black (Indian)	Female	26	English
27 : Rupert	White	Male	33	English
28 : Rita	White	Female	25	English
29 : Swazi	Black	Male	36	Xhosa
30 : Sicelo	Black	Male	25	Zulu
31 : Shianne	White	Female	25	English
32 : Sandile	Black	Male	30	Xhosa
33 : Thenjiwe	Black	Female	24	Ndebele

34 : Thabang	Black	Male	24	Setswana
35 : Ted	White	Male	40	English
36 : Theodore	White	Male	29	English
37 : Thobeka	Black	Female	28	Xitsonga
38 : Vallarie	Black (Indian)	Female	28	English

Table VI: Breakdown of Supplementing Audio Interviews Conducted for this Thesis

Supplementing Interviews				
Name	Race	Gender	Age	Home language
1 : Andrew	White	Male	28	English
2 : Betthany	White	Female	28	English
3 : Beau	White	Male	28	English
4 : Caleb	White	Male	31	English, Afrikaans
5 : Desiré	White	Female	30	English
6 : Idusa	Black	Female	31	English, Sesotho
7 : Kandy	White	Female	28	English
8 : Lindelwa	Black	Female	24	Xhosa
9 : Mpendulo	Black	Male	26	Zulu
10 : Mbanzi	Black	Male	26	Swati
11 : Nkosinathi	Black	Male	32	Xhosa
12 : Nothando	Black	Female	27	Xhosa
13 : Segomotso	Black	Female	28	Setswana
14 : Wanga	Black	Male	28	Zulu
15 : Xavier	Black	Male	26	Xhosa
16 : Edwin	Black	Male	24	Oshiwambo
17 : Thembani	Black	Male	27	English
18 : Sabelo	Black	Male	27	Xhosa
19 : Phillip	White	Male	?	English
20 : Goddess	Black	Female	26	Setswana

#### 4.4 Interviews

The thesis question called for participants who were either still at Rhodes University or had attended Rhodes University since the ending of apartheid. Given that the process of investigating

and thinking about how to restructure and transform the higher education landscape began officially with the 1996 National Planning Commission on Higher Education (South African Regional Universities Association, 2012), the search for participants could have been limited from 1996 to the most recent date of when data collection started in 2014. However, the 1996 report was more of an investigation rather than official government policy bringing in change at the institutional level to effect a move away from the apartheid past (South African Regional Universities Association, 2012). The 1996 report was followed by the 1997 White Paper 3 which would later be passed as the Higher Education Act No. 101 of 1997. The aim of the White Paper and the Act was to move towards a unified and nationally planned higher education system and away from what was at the time a fragmented, unequal and racialised system. But it was in 2001 that the most significant change was made to the higher education landscape with the passing of the National Plan for Higher Education. The National Plan for Higher Education set out how the Higher Education Act of 1997 and White Paper 3 could be implemented (South African Regional Universities Association, 2012).

The aim of these three official government policies was not only higher student equity, academic staff and support staff equity, but also to bring about institutional and academic transformation (South African Regional Universities Association, 2012). A significant part of the restructuring has nevertheless focused on numbers rather than real structural change at the everyday level of institutional cultures and practices. The Soudien Report (2008) revealed racial discrimination still occurred at the time with a focus on institutional culture as sustaining and protecting a white heterosexual old boys club in previously white only universities. These are experiences which are still echoed by many years after the Soudien Report (see Khunou, Canham, Khoza-Shangase & Phaswana, 2019). For example, social media conversations concerning experiences at South African universities that have unfolded, for instance in relation to the hashtags Rhodessowhite, OpenStellenbosch and RhodesMustFall, along with the larger 2015—2015 South African student protests, continued pointing to the presence of institutional culture of whiteness – especially at historically white institutions (Contraband Cape Town, 2015; Ncgobozi, 2015; Tutu, 2015) For these reasons, the study focused on inviting participants who were students at Rhodes as early as 1998 to as recently as 2014. While the aim of the study was to focus on students who had already left Rhodes, not all former students had updated their year of graduation thus some participants were still students at Rhodes in postgraduate study.

Potential participants were identified by a search on the Rhodes alumni section of the professional networking site Networked,<sup>5</sup> with the search limited to as early as 1998 and as late as 2014. The hope was that by limiting the search to those who had graduated in 2014, research fatigue would be avoided to some extent. Research fatigue had been identified as a problem in earlier attempts to gather data from participants at Rhodes. For this reason, participants who had already left Rhodes were considered. Using Networked assisted in reaching a large number of potential participants in order to allow a wide set of views and experiences of Rhodes to be collected, rather than relying only on students currently at the University. Such a wide period (1998–2014) meant that the researcher was able to see whiteness and racism as malleable concepts which may change over time. Thus, it was hypothesised in the process of collecting data for this thesis, that how participants understood questions around race would be bound up with both their understanding of race and racism at the time of attending the University, and current conceptions of race circulating in society. That is, discourse (small letter d) and Discourse (with a capital D), respectively, as will be later discussed in this chapter.

Despite the widely sent invitations, however, participants who chose to take part in the research were mostly in their 20s, therefore time and age would not be as important a factor as had been initially hypothesised. This would provide an opportunity for deeper insight into the social construction and negotiation of race in narratives, providing insight into how race is not only a social construct but is a political tool or foil for the concerns of the speaker(s) at the time. The analysis would also be more contemporary, and potentially provide insight into the production and reproduction of institutional cultures highlighted by the RhodesMustFall, Rhodessowhite, OpenStellenboch and other student movements and protests of 2015 and 2016.

Invitations to participate in the study were sent through Networked's private messaging service, or directly by email where the potential participant had provided an email address on their Networked page. A total of 571 invitations to participate in the study were sent over a four-month period from December 2014 to April 2015. The gradual acceptance of interviews, and the data gathered from the interviews drove the continued process of inviting people until there was a sense that saturation had been reached. Thus 571 was the number invited until there was a sense that there was no new information in the data. Two interview methods were employed: structured email interviews and one-on-one semi-structured interviews. The nature of the questions posed in both interview methods were open ended.

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<sup>5</sup> Name changed for the sake of protecting participant anonymity.

Appendix I (page 201) and Appendix II (202) provide the exact the questions sent to the participants, as well as information about the purpose of the research, and the consent form. Importantly, participants were clearly informed in both the email interview questions, and in one on one semi-structured conversational interviews that the research focused on feelings of alienation due to institutional cultures of whiteness in South African institutions (with Rhodes University being used as a case study). The interviews (both email and one on one semi-structured interviews) were interested in former students' raced experiences of Rhodes University. The open ended nature of the phrasing for participants' 'raced experiences' (as stated in Appendix II) was to allow participants to write as freely as possible. This was also to include the possibility that some did not feel that they had had feelings of alienation due to race nor a culture of whiteness in particular. This open ended phrasing aimed to avoid a predetermined outcome of what the participants' answers could be. The researcher made it apparent that the research was for her PhD at the time registered at Rhodes, and more importantly from the name of the researcher in still racialised South Africa, that she was black. Participants were given the numbers and email addresses of both the researcher and her supervisor at the time<sup>6</sup>. Participants could thus contact the researcher and her supervisor directly should they have further questions, concerns or more importantly to make the choice to withdraw from the interview process should they wish to.

It is worth noting that 'raced experiences' as stated in Appendix I and Appendix II do not necessarily equate to whiteness. In fact there may be aspects of raced experiences that are connected to aspects such as social privilege or wealth. It is therefore acknowledged that raced experiences associated with for example social privilege are not necessarily wholly separate from whiteness as discussed in chapter three. While the overlap was acknowledged and kept in mind, the literature review on what is whiteness in chapter three, and participants' responses specifically using the words white and whiteness helped to guide the analysis.

The use of long-distance communication such as email for research has a precedent in the work of one of South Africa's founding whiteness scholars Melissa Steyn's (2001) *Whiteness just isn't what it used to be*. Electronic communication is a recognised method of communication that can be analysed for the purposes of social research (Bergmann & Meire, 2004: 244–257). Choices of what resources to use to formulate an email (Bergmann and Meire, 2004: 244) from sentence structure, and word choice all play a role in the final construction of an email. These choices reveal

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<sup>6</sup> PhD was registered at Rhodes between 2013-2016, and then moved to UCT with new supervisors in order to allow ease of completion.

idiosyncratic ways of communicating including respondents' discursive strategies. Despite not being able to capture hesitations, correction and pauses that are usually part of communication method of critical discourse analysis does allow the analysis of written texts, for instance at the level of sentence structure, word selection and word order (Bergman & Meire, 2004: 244; Gee 1999). Given that question formulation is never neutral, all respondents were asked the same questions, in exactly the same way in the email interviews.

Data analysis methods such as discourse analysis note that the way we ask questions, and the words used have implications for how questions are understood and answered (Gee, 1999). In structured interviews each participant is asked the same questions in the same way. As Bernard and Ryan (2010: 33) put it, the idea is that each respondent 'sees or hears the same cues'. Of the 571 invitations, 38 email interviews were conducted. Having a cursory read through the emailed interview responses, it became apparent that many of the responses (which ranged from half a page to almost three pages in length) were either too brief to be fruitfully analysed using a critical discourse analysis approach, or revealed themes that had to be followed up. However, respondents were reluctant to have follow-up interviews. For this reason, the decision was made to supplement the electronic interviews with a range of telephonic, Skype and face-to-face interviews to follow up on some of the themes that had been raised in the email interviews.

The email interviews, although brief, were critical in highlighting and further exploring common themes and contradictions that arose from the initial email data set. For example, accent and the use of English as an expected operating norm was an identified theme that needed to be followed up. An initial reading of the data also revealed that access to capital (social, cultural and economic) was believed by participants to play an important role in how they and others experienced and negotiated whiteness at a historically white English-speaking university. Both these themes were further taken up in the supplementing interviews.

The supplementing interviews were semi-structured to allow the interviewer to approach each interview with a list of questions and/or topics that had to be answered (see Bernard & Ryan, 2010: 29; Gray, 2004: 215–217; Schmidt, 2004: 25–257; Phillips & Jorgensen, 2004: 121). However, the semi-structured approach also allowed questions to be asked in a different order or format for different participants (Phillips & Jorgensen, 2004: 121) and for additional questions to be asked if necessary (Gray, 2004: 215–217). It has been noted that an open-ended approach is more useful when engaging in research of a more sensitive nature such as research on race (Van den Berg, Wetherell & Houtkoop-Steenstra, 2003). Open-ended questions were useful in capturing a

respondent's own words and ideas, and to allow for the emergence of lengthy rather than short responses as well as for narrative research to elicit stories or experience (Bernard & Ryan, 2010: 34–37). For this reason, the direction of the interview and responses of the participants determined that the researcher would ask similar rather than identical questions (Bernard & Ryan, 2010: 29). The benefit of semi-structured interviews is their lack of tight restriction, which enables further probing about personal experiences and subjective opinions (Bernard & Ryan, 2010: 31; Gray, 2004: 217). The number of participants included was determined by the principle of saturation: where perspectives or items are being repeated by the respondents, and the researcher can reasonably predict what will be said in the next interview (Gray, 2004: 219; Sutton, 2004: 67; 99), such that the incorporation of further participants is thought to be likely of little value from the perspective of adding new information or insights. The interviews and participants were set before the 2015-2016 student protests but one of the key issues of the student protests – that of institutional cultures of whiteness – was the main focus of this thesis. The relevance of the research gained importance – even continuing until this year (2020) as the issue of decoloniality has become part of higher education discussions (see Maylam, 2017).

#### **4.4.1 Reflexivity, inductive and deductive approach to the data**

A total of 20 supplementing interviews were conducted using a variety of methods: 15 telephonic, eight via Skype, and two face-to-face. The length of the interviews ranged from 45 minutes to an hour. All 20 interviews were recorded using a digital recorder in order to avoid what Bernard and Ryan (2010: 47) refer to as 'the missing data trap' where important information may be lost due to inaccurate or biased note taking. While it is possible to do a detailed transcription as Conversation Analysis, Gee (1999) suggests that it is always advisable to produce as detailed a transcription as is necessary to answer the research question, and to explore the researcher's hypothesis. While initially the data was closely transcribed for respondents' grammatical devices such as pauses, tone and inflection it soon became apparent that this detail was not necessary for answering the thesis question. Rather it was how speakers constructed and described the social world and the people within the social world in their narratives that would enable the thesis question to be answered.

The aim of critical discourse analysis is to pay close attention to the experiential knowledge of participants, while also being able to analyse how it is that they challenge or re-inscribe the status quo. The critical discourse analyst theorises what is happening in talk (or discourse) and seeks to support conclusions reached by being able to point to evidence rooted in a gathered *corpus* of texts – in this instance, interview transcripts (Gee, 1999; Wetherell, 2003: 25). Even while objectivity

and repeatability are pursued in all discourse analysis work, it is worth acknowledging that complete dislocation from the world within which a person conducts research is not possible. Each researcher conducts research from a particular social position and in this case the researcher's positionality as a black, heterosexual female who has experienced racial discrimination would not only affect how the respondents responded to the questions, but also had an effect on the position from which the data was interpreted. Nonetheless it has been noted that speakers cannot control all aspects of how they speak in a way that will completely subvert their interests, values and beliefs about the world.

The position taken in this thesis on discourse analysis is similar to that of Gee (1999, 2011) in that interpretation is never closed or complete. Rather the researcher provides what they believe is present based on a *corpus* of data, always open to the possibility that their findings may further be improved upon in the pursuit of better understanding a social phenomenon. In addition, analysis relies on the reading and re-reading of data in a cyclical, reflexive manner which allows testing of the researcher's hypothesis and therefore increased trustworthiness of the results (Gee, 1999; 2011). The data was thus approached both inductively and deductively. The theoretical lens employed for the purpose of deductive analysis was the identification of common-sense whitetalk strategies identified by the theoretical literature on whiteness. However, for the presence of alternative discursive strategies not described in the secondary literature, inductive analysis was also allowed for.

All participants were asked the standard question of whether they had had a raced experience of Rhodes University. The term 'raced' was used in the interview due to the recognition that whiteness is part of the system of racism, and a taken-for-granted norm. Raced was defined as both overtly racist, with the example of racist epithets being uttered, to more subtle incidents where an encounter was *felt* (researcher's emphasis) to be connected to race somehow in a manner that made the respondent feel uncomfortable. Subtle racism is often difficult to describe and prove in contrast to overtly expressed racial slurs and/or epithets (Pérez Huber & Solorzano, 2015; Pettigrew & Meertens, 1995; WingSue, 2010), leaving the subject with a feeling that the encounter was raced but with no proof of racism (WingSue, 2010). Critical race theorists recognise the development of *la facultad* (Anzaluda, 1987) or a sixth sense for racism which emerges as a survival strategy for historically marginalised and oppressed groups. bell hooks (1997) notes the development of the ethnographic eye by slaves due to their survival being dependent on the mood, nature and socio-economic status of their potential master. Angela Davis (1975) recalls similarly as a child developing a radar for danger when moving into historically white spaces despite the

end of segregation; and both writers note the passing down of this knowledge from black parents to their children as a survival strategy. As marginalised and oppressed groups continue to be oppressed in less overt ways, critical race theory argues for the recognition of this ethnographic eye or *la facultad* (Anzaluda, 1987) as providing insight into the dynamic nature of racism, especially in its currently pervasive covert form.

Each participant was approached as holding expert knowledge of their particular experience of the institution and treated as the only primary source of their experiences within whiteness as they made sense of them. This process of sense-making affects not only how people think but also how people act (Seidman, 2006: 10). The respondent is not necessarily aware of how their talk and the action they carry out in and through talk are connected to a larger collective discourse in society, nor the politics which these discourses express (Wetherell, 2003). The researcher, in their analysis of the talk, makes the larger connection to the political purpose and function of discourse (Wetherell, 2003).

As the thesis question is interested in how participants constructed their raced experiences and stories, participants were then asked for examples of particular experiences or stories that came to mind. If a participant felt that their experiences were not raced then the participant was asked how they would best describe their experience, and what story/stories for them typify their university experience. Looking at what is not said (i.e. the story that is told about a place, whose story is privileged, how bodies are constructed and located in the story, actions explained and justified) can also be informative data which reveals how racial inequality in its subtle nature can continue to operate (see Gee, 1999; Goga, 2008; Myers, 2005).

#### **4.5 Validity**

Validity checks include re-examining facts or patterns that do not fit into the researcher's hypothesis, and going back to check on, and if necessary, to modify the hypothesis as a result (Bernard & Ryan, 2010: 110). Validity of results or hypotheses may be tested in the reflexive, cyclical and congruent application of the tools of Gee's (1999) critical discourse which pay close attention to intra- and extra-discursive contexts in order to ensure culturally, historically appropriate understanding and analysis of discourse. Through convergence – that is, the resultant findings after application of Gee's (1999; 2011) discourse analysis tools leading to the same answers – the credibility of the analysis is enhanced.

It is worth restating that critical race theory argues that structural determinism in the form of methodologies used to study people's experiences of marginalisation are often culturally insensitive or inappropriate as it strips experiences or cases of their nuance which in turn results either in injustice or the diminishing of the marginalisation or discrimination that has been suffered by a person. The requirement of proof in cases about is one example of this – where overt racism is understood as an anomaly, where intersectionality has no place in law and where punishment for subtle racism such as micro-aggressions is thus unlikely. Stories were used for this reason to stay true to critical race theory (CRT), and in acknowledgement of the reflexive relationship between the individual and the collective in terms of the resources used in creating stories. The validity of the findings is also influenced by how reflexively the researcher understands their own position as being co-creative in the development of the knowledge with the participants. In the case of discourse analysis work, it has been noted that each researcher has 'their typical working assumptions, preferred research questions, and procedures for producing knowledge' (Van den Berg, Wetherell, & Houtkoop-Steenstra, 2003: 2) which affects how the data is analysed. In the present study, tools used included the cultural model, discourse, situated meanings and situated social identities. The convergence of these tools lent trustworthiness to the analysis.

#### **4.6 Gee's critical discourse analysis**

Like many forms of discourse analysis, Gee's theory of language holds that reality is socially constructed (Gee, 1999: 78–79, 2009, 2011), including group identity affiliation, the type of human activities under way, the formality or informality of a space or interaction (Gee, 2009: 1–2; 2011). Likewise, institutions and cultures are created and recreated in the everyday interactions between members of a group, culture or institution (Gee, 2009: 2). However, language or discourse alone do not constitute or build reality, human activities or identity. Rather a combination of language and extra discourse 'stuff' such as specific ways of acting, interacting, valuing at specifically appropriate times and places make this possible (Gee, 1999: 7). This is referred to as 'Discourse' with a capital letter 'D' rather than 'discourse' which refers to language only without the extra discourse 'stuff' (Gee, 1999). This use of a small d and a capital D is also used to refer to discourses at the micro-level as opposed to larger societal Discourses. The effects of language in terms of building identity, cultures, institutions and ideology to justify the distribution of the resources within society,<sup>7</sup> and the fact that each human being is both reflecting and building reality whenever they speak all indicate that language is not only about communicating and doing things in the communication but that it has real world effects on people in society (Gee, 1999: 2011; Myers,

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<sup>7</sup> These may broadly be referred to as beliefs, ideologies or theories about how the world is, why and the legitimacy of the way that society and its social resources are distributed according to the speaker.

2005). Given the effects of language in creating, recreating and/or resisting the way society is currently constructed it is not possible for any person to claim that they are neutral or not a party to the way society is currently organised, nor the dominant ideology(ies) and Discourses used to justify that form of organisation. Each person makes decisions and choices, for instance, about how to structure their sentences and why — although they are not always necessarily aware of this decision making; and their choices often also reveal their ‘own socio-culturally-specific ways of talking, listening (writing, reading), acting, interacting, valuing, believing, and feeling’ (Gee, 1999: 78–79). Each utterance is also context specific, revealing the reality constructed in that minute, between those specific individuals, while also reflecting and containing larger group- and time specific rules concerning language use. This is called reflexivity (Gee, 1999: 82, 92).

Reality, though socially constructed through language, thus not only constructs, and reflects language but it is also constraining (Gee, 1999: 94). Given the reflexive nature of language – its ability to create, reflect and constrain – the researcher using critical discourse analysis must constantly be aware of, and interrogate their own position and possible biases in research. Every researcher codes, transcribes, interprets and renders the analysis of their data in different way (Gee, 1999: 94; Saldana, 2009).

It is also worth noting that there are often several Discourses and cultures within society, and at any one time an individual can be both reflecting and drawing on several Discourses simultaneously (Gee, 1999: 78-79). The job of the analyst is to find out which of these Discourses and cultures are at work in the communication and in what combination they exist within the communication (Gee, 1999: 79) in order to reveal how participants make sense of their world, what tools are being used to do this, and to whose benefit this is being done. In this case the researcher relied not only on common sense knowledge and discourses of race in South Africa. In addition, the researcher also kept in mind dominant discourses as found by whiteness studies and race studies literature as part of the data analysis process as no researcher may be aware of all the discourses in their society.

#### **4.6.1 Where to begin and where to focus: structure of language or the content?**

There are two aspects to which any discourse analysis might pay attention: either the content of the utterance or the technicalities of sentences and discourse such as structure and design. The latter requires a concentrated look at aspects of grammar and sentence design by using tools such as breaking up utterances into stanzas, lines and analysing the clauses, or the use of verbs, for example (Gee, 1999). The former looks at aspects such as the cultural model, discourse, situated

meanings, situated social identities that can be discerned in talk or communication. Both aspects must eventually be covered by the analyst in the process of forming and testing their hypothesis. However, Gee points out that after application of the two aspects the researcher begins to get a sense which of the two aspects is the most useful for answering the research question. This was the process followed by the researcher until it became apparent that it was not necessary to analyse and organise the data using technical linguistic rules mentioned previously.

Rather analysis began with gaining familiarity with the data, and noting what ideas, words, phrases and themes emerge from an initial reading (Gee, 1999; Saldana, 2009) before testing these across the data set. In the present project a first phase of analysis focused on the content of the transcribed interview data before moving on to the technicalities of how language was being used by the participants content wise. Even while a broader content focused analysis was followed, trustworthiness of the analysis was made more likely due to the convergence of the tools used initially.

Gee (1999; 2011) states that the various tools are to be used as seen fit by the analyst where they provide illumination. Thus, not all of the tools that Gee describes are relevant or can be used in any one project but, in order to avoid missing connections in the data, it is advisable to employ a variety of discourse analysis tools before deciding which will be most fruitful in the analysis of any particular data set.

#### **4.6.2 Content-focused tools of analysis: situated identities, social languages, Discourses, Conversations, cultural models**

After highlighting the phrases, ideas, themes and words that come to mind when familiarising oneself with the data, Gee (1999) suggests looking at the context of the highlighted aspects of the data in order to reveal what these terms, phrases and ideas mean and how they are being used in the interaction at that time by those specific individuals. The specific context or instance at which an utterance or interaction takes place is called a situation (Gee, 1999: 82). Each situation in which an utterance and its extra discourse 'stuff' takes place (Discourse) is made up of several interconnected aspects which are made up of different building blocks. If one can think of a situation or context as a polished diamond with several faces then the different faces are the aspects of the situation while the building blocks can refer to the carbon, oxygen and other elements that make up the diamond. Together, the aspects and building blocks both reflect and create reality within that particular situation.

#### 4.6.2.1 Different aspects of a situation

The different aspects of any situation are (Gee, 1999: 82–84):

- 1) A semiotic aspect which refers to all symbolic or sign systems such as language, gestures and images that we use to communicate, construct and reflect reality.
- 2) An activity aspect which refers to the specific human activities and actions that individuals are engaged in any particular situation. In the activity of teaching, for example, within a traditional Western context, the teacher is expected to impart information as the expert while students are to ask and answer questions.
- 3) A material aspect which refers to the place, time, bodies and objects which are part of an interaction. In the activity of teaching for example, the adult teacher and students make up the bodies, while the tables, the room and books make up the objects which together form the material context.
- 4) A political aspect which is concerned with how social goods or resources such as power, status, wealth, beauty, strength and intelligence are distributed. The participants' Discourses tell us what is considered a social good or resource and how it is valued. Thus, sexual orientation, sex, gender and race can also be considered social goods with their own benefits and values which are distributed – afforded to some while being denied to others, in the course of Discourse.
- 5) And lastly, a socio-cultural aspect which includes all personal, social and cultural knowledge which tells us what to value, how much and when in an interaction, as well as which sign system, activities, materiality and politics to rely on.

If the example of teaching is used, it could be said that all these different aspects of a situation are interconnected. A room (material) or a classroom is needed which is configured in a particular way because of the activity of teaching which is indicated by how the bodies (students and teachers) are expected to act. Depending on the society or culture in which the teaching is taking place there are socio-culturally specific rules and expectations of where to stand, interact, behave, and those who embody these rules are rewarded in order to constitute teaching in that society or group. These rules are often learned as people grow up, through being part of the society (or a specific group within society) and its socially sanctioned and accepted practices. These socio-cultural rules, values and knowledge are accepted as the norm within the group or society – often perceived and experienced by the people within as *the* reality rather than one of many other realities. The interconnected nature of the different aspects of a situation as well as their reliance on each other

is referred to by Gee as a situation network or system (1999: 82–83). It is within this context that the term ‘system of whiteness’ may at times be used throughout the thesis. Internalised knowledge of these normative rules are included in what Bourdieu (see Swartz, 1997) refers to as internalised dispositions which are invaluable capital when negotiating the social world – especially useful when the context privileges one group’s ways of seeing, engaging and understanding the world over others, as is the case with the institutional culture of a historically white university.

Cultures and institutions in society are set up by repeating a situation – with its concomitant semiotic resources, activities, things, and political and socio-cultural aspects and building blocks with very little variation (Gee, 1999: 83). Over time such repetition in specific situations becomes habitualised or crystallised to become the various and endless types of institutions that we have in our specific societies at that specific time (Douglas 1986 in Gee, 1999: 83). These institutions may include particular types of schools, universities, academic disciplines, employment or street gangs, for example. Institutions in turn create forces (procedure, laws, buildings, etc.) that ensure that the repetition and habitualisation continue and therefore sustain the institutions and the situations that create them (Gee, 1999: 83). This study is an important part of discourse analysis.

#### **4.6.2.2 Building blocks of situations**

In any situation language is used to construct and/or construe the situation network in a certain way rather than another. These building blocks include the following (Gee, 1999: 85–86):

- 1) Semiotic building which refers to the cues, clues as to which sign systems, knowledge is relevant and activated within a specific situation at that specific time.
- 2) World building which refers to the cues and clues as to what is considered real, present, possible, probable and/or impossible within a situation by the participants.
- 3) Activity building that indicates what activity, activities and actions are being undertaken within a specific situation.
- 4) Socio-culturally situated identity and relationship building, where we look at what cues and clues tell us about what type of identities and relationships are relevant within a situation, as well as what values, attitudes, feelings, ways of knowing, believing, acting and interacting are considered relevant and appropriate within a specific situation.
- 5) Political building where we look for cues and clues to construct what is considered a social good or resource within a situation, and how such social goods or resources are valued within the situation.

- 6) And lastly, connection building where we look for cues and clues as to how the past and the future are assumed to be connected to the present interaction and to each other. This connection may be verbal or non-verbal.

#### **4.6.2.3 Thinking tools used for analysis**

Thinking tools help to reveal how the different building blocks of language and reality are constructed. Using these tools, the researcher can begin to unpack and reveal the different building blocks and aspects of a situation, and how they are packed together and connected. In any interaction people are often unaware of what and how they are creating, reflecting and being constrained through Discourse. These thinking tools make the researcher think about what is assumed is real by a speaker. The thinking tools that can be used to study the content of language or an utterance include the following:

- 1) Situated identities and situated meanings. The term ‘situated’ refers to a specific context or interaction at that specific time (Gee, 1999: 82). In order to reveal situated meanings and identities created by any particular utterance the researcher needs to look at both the rest of the transcript and any other extra discourse ‘stuff’ that reveals context. Situated identities refers to the ‘different identities or social positions we enact and recognize in different settings’ (Gee, 1999:12). Situated meanings refers to any images or patterns that are assembled in the interaction at the time based on the context at that time (Gee, 1999: 80–81). Both situated meanings and situated identities are mutually negotiated and developed between the individuals in the interaction at the time, while also revealing the larger group Discourses and identities that the individuals are part of. Situated meanings and situated identities draw on both what people in the interaction have experienced and know from their past within the society or group that they are a part of. They reveal the cultural models or knowledge that are being activated in the interaction at that time (Gee, 1999: 63–64, 86).
- 2) Social languages (Gee, 1999: 12-13) refers to the different styles of language that are used at different times, places and settings in people’s lives. The type or style of language used can be formal or informal for example and can be an indication of the particular identity that a speaker wishes to enact in that moment.
- 3) The term ‘Discourses’ refers to the combination of both language and non-language components that are used to communicate and do work with Discourse (Gee, 1999: 13). The non-discourse stuff includes different ways that people are expected to act, interact,

behave, what they value, how they value it, and any other tools, resources, symbols that are used to recognise and perform different identities and activities. These must be performed at the right time and at the right place, and often at the correct pace in order to successfully activate the relevant identities, meanings and activities relevant in that situation. These Discourses often also indicate how meaning is created in the world, how social goods are distributed, and how some ways of knowing are privileged over others. It is here that the researcher gains insight into how the participants' world/reality is built, and yet also where participants contribute to the creation of the world while being constrained by it. With this tool the researcher asks how both language and extra discourse stuff are being used to create, recreate and/or resist reality.

- 4) The term 'Conversations' with a capital 'C' is used by Gee to refer broadly to cases of interdiscursivity and intertextuality which are often found in any interaction. In any utterance or interaction, the participants will often use commonly held, well-known, longstanding themes or motifs from different interactions and texts in different social languages and Discourses. By doing this, commonly held meanings may be shared without necessarily explicitly stating them, or specific identities may be activated.

The last content thinking tool, but perhaps the most important is the cultural model tool. The term 'cultural model' refers to the invisible taken-for-granted knowledge, theories or explanations that speakers and hearers draw on in Discourse. It is often what is assumed to be normal or typical in the interaction (Gee, 1999: 59). This thinking tool is important because of how it connects the 'micro' level of interaction and the 'macro' level of institutions (Gee, 1999:58) or what has been termed macro-social constructionism and the micro social constructionism.

In the words of Gee (1999:58), cultural models 'mediate between the local interactional work and Discourses as they operate to create the complex patterns of institutions and cultures across societies and history'. Given the importance of cultural models in tying these two levels together, their identification is an important tool in analysing how institutional cultures are created, challenged and re-inscribed.

To deploy the cultural model tool for discourse analysis, in approaching a text, the researcher must ask what first thoughts or taken-for-granted assumptions about what is typical or normal are necessary to make sense of what a participant is saying (Gee, 1999: 59). The researcher can ask what the speaker consciously or unconsciously believes in order to make sense of what they are saying, or what theories the speaker consciously or unconsciously holds to make sense of the

context or situation (Gee, 1999: 72). This last question indicates that speakers will not explicitly state which theories or models they are drawing on. Rather they will assume that the hearer shares the situated meaning. Often cultural models are to be found in metaphors (Gee, 1999: 69), and they are socio-culturally context specific so that through their utterance group identity may be performed and recognised (Gee, 1999: 74, 77). By questioning what is assumed to be the norm, the researcher can then determine what is being set up or constructed as normal or typical versus what is being set up as marginal or atypical (Gee, 1999: 59). Thus, cultural models also hold judgement or value about what is important, is worth knowing, what is good or bad, and who is good, bad or worth knowing and valuing. Since cultural models embed assumptions about what is 'appropriate,' 'typical,' and/or 'normal', they have political implications (Gee, 1999: 59, 70). What is deemed to be appropriate and normal can determine as a result how valuable social goods such as positions, possessions, power are distributed. These social goods in turn determine access to economic wealth.

In any text or utterance, participants may draw on master or smaller tacit theories or models. The difference lies only in how widely they are used within the society. Since metaphors are often used to organise several important social domains in a given culture or social group they count as master cultural model. The equation of time spent as money or an investment can be used in the context of marriage (Gee, 1999: 69), studying or even loss for example. In each of these cases time spent should result in a valuable return or the loss of such return.

In addition to the other characteristics of cultural models, they may be incomplete, inconsistent and at times one cultural model may incorporate different conflicting half-formed cultural models (Gee, 1999: 70). At times these models may have conflicting social and cultural values which may undermine the interests of the individual and/or group that utters them. This is indicative of the power of the dominating group to spread and set up their models and versions of the world over more marginal groups and their theories of the world (Gee, 1999). It also partially reflects the many positions, identities and groups to which individuals belong, and the wide array of resources and Discourses that they rely on (Gee, 1999: 70). At times these groups may hold values, ideas, explanations that conflict with each other. From this it is also apparent that cultural models are not static but are often modified as society and individuals change and interact – both reflecting and creating change (Gee, 1999: 81-82).

It is clear that the tools, like the building blocks and aspects of a situation are interconnected, often leading to each other in a cyclic manner. It is also by paying attention to, and revealing, this cyclical

connection between the building blocks and aspects of a situation that a level of validity to any analysis can be ensured. Although each researcher codes, thinks and hears an interview from their own idiosyncratic socio-cultural position, the research findings and analysis should be such that they could reasonably be arrived at by any other researcher. If the answers to the tools all ultimately lead to the same conclusions or hypothesis then this convergence is an indicator of the validity of any particular interpretation (Gee, 1999). Other indications of validity which may arguably be reached through convergence is judging how coherent the discourse analytical account and resulting analysis are; and how fruitful or useful the analysis is in explaining a phenomenon (Phillips & Jorgensen, 2004: 125). In addition, transparency is called for in order to reveal how reasonable the interpretation and findings of the research are (Gee, 1999; Phillips & Jorgensen, 2004: 126). It is often helpful to also attach a copy of the data for other researchers to peruse. Similar to how reality is socially constructed by and among individuals, reflexivity in research means researchers also produce research and understanding of the world both individually and collectively amongst each other (Gee, 1999: 95–96). The purpose, thus, is to collectively build better ways to understand what is constructed so that it can be changed.

#### **4.7 Ethics**

All participants who were invited to participate in the study received exactly the same email detailing the aims of the study, and what their role in the study would be. An informed consent form was sent to all participants stating that all data would be used for PhD purposes and any further research (publications) out of the PhD thesis. Each participant was informed that the study would be kept anonymous, and thus all participants were given pseudonyms to protect their anonymity. Participants were asked if they had any questions or concerns in regard to the research and whether they needed the research topic and its aims explained further. All participants were asked to take part in the research on a voluntary basis, and were given the choice of withdrawing from the research at any stage should they wish. Participants were also provided with the study supervisor's contact details, and the researcher's contact details in case they wished to follow up on an interview or had any concerns.

#### **4.8 Conclusion**

This chapter has set out the steps that were taken to answer the thesis question: 'What discursive strategies do Rhodes University students draw on to construct their 'raced' experiences of Rhodes University, and how do these discursive strategies either challenge or reinforce an institutional culture of whiteness at Rhodes University?' – and how the study was conducted as a process of collecting, analysing and interpreting data relevant to answering the research question. Central to

the chapter is a discussion of the contribution of discourse to how the world is constructed and navigated as informed by Gee's critical discourse analysis. Discourse (both small letter d and capital letter D in this case), as highlighted throughout this chapter is a political act rather than merely a means of sharing information as we make choices as to what information is shared and how. It is the work of the researcher to not only hypothesise what is being done through discourse but through reference to larger social discourses or common-sense knowledge to hypothesise the implications of what they think is being achieved through discourse. The chapter also discussed ways in which meaning making is attained; how hegemonic discourses and institutional cultures may be produced; as well as the connection and interaction between micro-level discourse and meaning construction, and larger societal discourses and their construction. Through this chapter, the methods and underlying frameworks that inform the chosen methods to answer the question were comprehensively laid out, as well as the reasons as to why the methods were chosen.

## Chapter V: Exploring Participants' Understanding of the Term 'Raced'

### 5.1 Introduction

The term 'raced' was found to be interpreted differently by participants in the study, ranging from the extent to which participants thought that apartheid racial categories and segregation were still being practised; and the extent to which participants thought the historically instilled colonial and apartheid privileging of whiteness are still at play today – albeit in different variations in postcolonial post-apartheid South Africa. How participants understood the term had implications upon whether participants thought they had had raced experiences.

The difference in understanding as well as the extent to which the participants perceived whiteness to be at play within the institutional space revealed tensions, contradictions and contestations in interpretation. This chapter argues that part of the reason for this is that whiteness can only be discussed from an individual perspective. The positionality of individuals within a field or game is never the same despite some common group affiliation. Thus, while someone may share some of the experiences of being in the socially constructed phenotypical group black, for example, the type, combination and amount of capital that they hold means they will not have the same experiences of whiteness. In addition, whiteness cannot be discussed alone but in relation to the other – blackness and vice versa.

Thus, what appear to be discussions about race in general from participants' comments are actually in response to their positionality. The chapter therefore ultimately argues that whiteness cannot be studied in isolation but in relation to blackness as has been noted by those who have analysed the literature (see for example Garner, 2017: 1586; Kolchin, 2002; Roediger, 2006: 4–6). While the importance of inter-relationality is recognised in critical whiteness<sup>8</sup> (see Roediger, 2006: 4–6) few studies have explored whiteness in relation to blackness, both methodologically and conceptually.

This chapter offers conceptual and theoretical frameworks such as incompleteness, conviviality and contradictory complexity in order to better understand how whiteness attains the hegemonic

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<sup>8</sup> There is contestation as to whether there is a difference between whiteness studies and critical whiteness studies. According to Roediger (2006:4–6) there is a difference between studies that have recognised and worked collaboratively with the experiences and voices of the other in order to better understand and undo racism. This has been identified for him as critical whiteness studies.

position despite its precarious position due to the tensions, contestations and contradictions involved in everyday interactions to produce, reproduce, challenge and enforce whiteness as discussed at length in chapter three. New insights are offered by this thesis when focusing on the use of participants and discursive analysis in South Africa; and to the limited international studies that do inter-relational participant-focused discursive work as described here.

The chapter is organised thus. First, it takes a look at the various ways in which participants understood the term 'raced' including:

1. A breakdown of the participants' responses to whether they had a raced experience or not, including a discussion on ambivalence.
2. The extent of racial mixing as a measure of progress.
3. A focus on the number of raced bodies in the spaces they entered, as well those who contradicted what they perceived as the expected norms of being with those who have the same phenotypical features as themselves.

Lastly the chapter considers some of the reasoning for racial boundary crossing when it occurred.

## **5.2 Have you had a raced experience?**

In order to get to the ways in which discourse may contribute to the hegemonic status quo, participants were asked if they had experienced racism and, if so, to elaborate on any examples of their raced experiences at their historically white institutions.

The responses varied. Table VII below shows that out of a total of 58 interviews, 23 participants answered in the affirmative regarding Rhodes University. Of these 23 who answered in the affirmative, 14 were black and 9 were white. Participants who stated that they had not had a raced experience at the institution numbered 12, of which 10 were black and 2 were white. There were also participants whose responses were less clear. These responses could be described as ambivalent. Ambivalent responses referred to answers that appeared to be both yes and no and often left one with no sense as to their position one way or another (Burke, 2012: 110; Steyn & Foster, 2008: 27). There were 23 of which 11 were from black participants and 12 were from white participants.

### **5.2.1 Is it the vessel, or the contents of the vessel that count?**

The interesting aspect of the interview results discussed in Table VII is that they cross the racial demographics. It has been mentioned in previous studies post-apartheid post-colonial South African youth are both reconstructing and having race reconstructed in various ways (Dolby, 2001; Hunter, 2019; Matthews, 2011; Nyamnjoh, 2016; Seddon, 2014; Walker, 2005). As apartheid and colonial apartheid racial segregation which supported the domination of whiteness are no longer in place, South African youth have been found to reconstruct race in new ways, such as through interests, attitudes and economic wealth, for example (Dolby, 2001; Walker, 2005).

The results strongly suggest that expectations that people with the same phenotypical features will have the same experience and hold the same opinions cannot be taken for granted. The findings of Table VII support Seddon's (2014) study which suggested that it is possible for both black and white participants alike to hold similar attitudes to issues of race (see also Soudien, 2010). In Seddon's (2014) study both black and white participants had historical ignorance or amnesia when it came to exploring the colonial and apartheid past in relation to a text she was teaching. The results of Table VII below not only point out the importance of thinking beyond phenotype when it comes to issues of race in South Africa – an aspect that is often forgotten when one looks at the large proportion of the whiteness studies literature involving participants. Rather the results above are also a critical reminder that we cannot assume the contents of the container merely because of the phenotypical features of the vessel *à la* Warnier (1993, 2007a, 2007c, 2007b). Instead results of Table VII point to the possibility that there may be other aspects at play that affect how individuals experience, perceive and talk about the world around them such as the capital that is available to the speakers at the time, and the type, combination and amount of capital valued in the context they find themselves in at the time. In the results of Table VII, for example, it was noted that in the speakers' descriptions of what they did or not find raced about their experience, speakers pointed to the importance of socio-economic background and schooling as likely affecting the extent to which participants felt at home, and the degree to which they could successfully be able to negotiate and navigate the historically white institution.

*Table VII: Breakdown of Participants' Responses to Whether They had had a Raced Experience*

<b>Did You Have a Raced Experience?</b>			
<b>Answer:</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Ambivalent</b>
<b>Participants:</b>	Anda (Black, Female)	Aphiwe (Black, Female)	Andrea (White, Female)
	Betthany (White, Female)	Goddess (Black, Female)	Andrew (White, Male)
	Diane (White, Female)	Lithalethu (Black, Female)	Beau (White, Male)
	Idusa (Black, Female)	Mpendulo (Black, Male)	Bridget (White, Female)
	Lethu (Black, Male)	Olwethu (Black, Female)	Caleb (White, Male)
	Mbanzi (Black, Male)	Phelela (Black, Male)	Desiré (White, Female)
	Natalie (White, Female)	Thembani (Black, Male)	Lael (Black/Coloured, Female)
	Nkosinathi (Black, Male)	Xavier (Black, Male)	Lindelwa (Black, Female)
	Nothando (Black, Female)	Eda (White, Female)	Matthew (White, Male)
	Phillip (White, Male)	Gavino (Black, Male)	Meredith (Black/Coloured, Female)
	Sandile (Black, Male)	Lifa (Black, Female)	Peter (Black, Male)
	Segomotso (Black, Female)	Ted (White, Male)	Rea (Black/Indian, Female)
	Sicelo (Black, Male)		Rupert (White, Male)
	Thenjiwe (Black, Female)		Theodore (White, Male)
	Wanga (Black, Male)		Vallarie (Black/Indian, Female)
	Edwin (Black, Male)		Lindani (Black, Female)
	Josie (White, Female)		Malcolm (White, Male)
	Earnest (Black, Male)		Riba (Black/Indian, Female)
	Calida (White, Female)		Swazi (Black, Male)
	Carla (White, Female)		Thabang (Black, Male)
Rita (White, Female)		Kandy (White, Female)	
Shianne (White, Female)		Sabelo (Black, Male)	
Thobeka (Black, Female)		Rupert (White, Male)	

### 5.2.2 Schooling and socio-economic background

The type of school that participants attended could provide cultural and social capital that either assisted or hindered their ability to successfully negotiate and navigate the historically white institution. As noted by several participants who claimed to not have felt excluded or alienated within the institution, such as Xavier (black, male, interview), Eda (white, female, interview) and Segomotso (black, female, interview), for example, the type of school they had attended allowed them to be familiar with what was expected in terms of behaviour, attitude and even how to negotiate the academic expectations of the university. This background experience plays an important role in terms of having access to aspects that are valued, recognised and associated with whiteness. That is having the capital that is associated with white English middle class to upper class whiteness; and the habitus to know how to navigate what feels for some to be coming into spaces where the rules have already long been set before they came in – despite being in their first year like others in their group. This was the experience that Nothando's (black, female, interview) friend shared with her that she herself as a participant could resonate with at the time:

They all started to go to shoot some arrows and then when she got there, she realized that, I'm the only person here of colour, everybody else is white. And now, I don't even feel like I have a friend here and nobody was talking to me and I have to try and force myself into these circles that were already established for some for other reasons (Nothando, black, female, interview).

The importance here is a sense of entering a space where the rules and cliques have already been established and that one is the odd one out – not having had prior successful socialisation and acquisition of the capital needed to be able to smoothly navigate and negotiate the space. If one has through socialisation picked up some of the aspects that are associated with whiteness through schooling, the neighbourhood and the capital that their parents passed onto them, then it would be easier to successfully negotiate and navigate a similar environment such as the historically white institution of Rhodes University. In particular, participants noted that private schools and former Model C schools or multi-cultural schooling provided familiarity with ways of doing things that were expected at the historically white institution. The schools, aside from having predominantly white pupils in the case of private schools, also importantly held what Hunter (2019) refers to as white tone, that is selecting, promoting and supporting aspects associated with whiteness or white tone. This means choosing pupils from specific schools that would support the white tone in place at the institution. The importance of local feeder schools in promoting white tone is noted by Caleb (white, male, interview):

In Grahamstown. I went to school there, and obviously also varsity after having graduated at Graeme College. If you want more details, I grew up on a farm outside of Grahamstown, plus minus 12 km (Caleb, white, male, interview).

More broadly, the need to have gone to schools which hold similar white tone and prestige plays a role in the extent to which one felt at home, and thus not having a raced experience of the institution is also highlighted by several participants' comments and experiences. A succinct example of this would be Goddess's (black, female, interview) statement that she picked the institution of Rhodes knowing that the type of high school she had attended which focused on liberal arts, would allow her to interact with white peers and fit comfortably within the historically white institution of Rhodes University.

I went to an art school right and a very liberal way of thinking, kind of like Rhodes University, express yourself, ... you know, very liberal about the way they approach things and even my parents are like that as well, you know, so that's why I thought I'd be comfortable there, that's where I thought I would excel and thrive ... For me that was the kind of environment that I grew up around and that is actually why I chose Rhodes University, because I knew I would be comfortable there (Goddess, black, female, interview).

Thus, participants whose schooling had enabled them to attain the ways of doing things associated with whiteness or white tone were argued to have an advantage over participants who went to historically black disadvantaged schools, as noted by Idusa (black, female, interview). As Idusa had attended a school whose ways of doing things were similar to Rhodes University, her experience of teaching students from historically black disadvantaged schools allowed her to be able to reflect on the effects of previous schooling:

I will be honest with you, from my perspective I could navigate that world a bit better than some of these participants coming in from rural townships schools (Idusa, black, female, interview).

### **5.2.3 Aspects of colonial and apartheid racial ideology revisited?**

With the advent of 1994 when South Africa became a democratic country there has been a concerted effort by the University to also accept some participants who come from historically

black disadvantaged schools, and often did not have sufficient points to enter the University. These participants report, however, being treated with suspicion as to their academic ability and intelligence due to the schools they came from. There is an assumption of lack – a lack of academic ability and intelligence as some participants described their experience. But more importantly, these participants noted suspicion due to not having the aspects valued, recognised and associated with whiteness. Thus, their acceptance into the institution – knowing the schools, and likely the socio-economic background that they came from – started from an assumption of these black bodies needing to be filled with the ways of doing things according to the institution. Thus, contrary to being only a means to provide extra academic support for participants who might desire and need it, participants argued that it was the schools they had gone to that was the basis of being placed in an extra support programme.

[I]t was usually the multiracial participants who got into the mainstream and people from the previously disadvantaged schools who got into the foundation classes. I think, if I speak honestly, I think some of the participants that were in the foundation classes even had better marks than some of the people in the mainstream, but because they came from those schools or whatever the background that they came from, it became difficult for them to integrate and fit into the whole you know, University and the lectures than all the other participants (Mpendulo, black, male, interview).

Thus, the extra support programme was experienced and, more importantly, stigmatised as being about the type of school that one had gone to and was not open to white students who struggled academically:

I had a white friend who didn't do so well, so he was saying, why couldn't they just put me in that class. And then I asked, and they said, you know it's a matter of going to a previously disadvantaged school, which is the main thing and the other thing is the marks ... I don't know if that's the case, but they, it might be things that are done in the Model C schools which are not done in the previously disadvantaged schools, so that by the time that you come here, you are familiar with some things but you're not familiar with others if you know what I mean? (Nothando, black, male, interview).

This could be an explanation as to how an institution even with a black majority may continue to be perceived and experienced as white – even to the point where individuals who do not fit the status quo feel that they are a minority even within an institution where there are more black

bodies, as argued by Hunter (2019). The importance of the type of schooling that one would have received prior to coming to the historically white institution points to how race –including whiteness is a social construct which consists of social aspects that are associated with whiteness.

The results above support Mark Hunter's (2019) study on post-apartheid South African schools in KwaZulu-Natal that schools are often interested more in white tone rather than phenotype only. In other words, in regard to the cross racial findings revealed in the table above bodies may be filled with aspects that support whiteness but do not necessarily accord with what would be expected of the phenotypical body in question. Thus, it is that not all black bodies will feel alienated and excluded from the historically white institution as shown by Table I above merely due to their phenotype alone. Some black participants in fact unequivocally said they had never had a raced experience in any way or form at the historically white institution – neither their own experience or noticing anything raced around them in any form, such as Xavier (black, male, interview) who stated that he did not 'remember any experience like that'. Xavier is one of 12 black participants that unequivocally stated that they had never had a raced experience of the historically white institution. This is contrary to what would be expected or assumed regarding the experience as noted in the works of an author such Ahmed (2007) who notes that the black body in a white space is always a body of disruption; bound to feel and be treated as being out of place. While participants such as Xavier (black, male, interview) and Aphiwe (black, female, interview) who unequivocally claimed to have never had a raced experience at Rhodes, a statement she made later noting that white participants did seem to dominate the space, supports Ahmed's (2007) argument. Aphiwe (black, female, interview) moves from saying she had had no raced experiences, 'Not at all'; 'I have never experienced any form of such nor did I witness it.' 'Not even', like Xavier (black, male, interview), for example, to stating that, 'Yes the institution was dominated by White peers and yet they were going to have the most dominant culture because of that' (Aphiwe, black, female, interview).

However, the interviews as shown in the table above reveal that Ahmed's (2007) argument is not always true for all black bodies – not all black bodies will feel isolated or alienated in spaces that privilege whiteness or white tone as also suggested by Twine's (1997) study which was discussed at length in chapter three. Socialisation, especially through schooling, means that the body, regardless of the phenotypical essence of the vessel, may acquire aspects that will be useful in attaining the best possible outcome within the context that it finds itself within (see Bourdieu, 1990, 2013 on habitus as part of the process of socialisation as discussed in chapter three). This need not necessarily be a conscious decision – at least on the part of the participants – although

their parents may well have calculated how to attain the best possible outcome for their children in the future as noted by Hunter (2019).

#### **5.2.4 Black again?**

The second aspect is that despite the aforementioned argument with regard to socialisation, there are cases where, despite the contents, the vessel may be reminded that there is one aspect that it can never attain – it will never be phenotypically white; that the black body may always be reminded as being a body of lack. In the case of participants from historically disadvantaged black schools, despite having the ability to speak English – and having shown, in his opinion, the ability to perform academically, for Nkosinathi (black, male, interview), for example, the school that he went to automatically made his body worthy of suspicion, and therefore being reminded of its blackness. He recalls how he was asked in his first registration at Rhodes by the Dean of Science at the time (2001) whether he would be okay with being taught in English:

he looked at my academic transcript from high school and judging by his appearance, he didn't have questions about my academic ability but one of the things he asked me was whether I would be fine with the English. Which I found very surprising because I wrote my exams in English and so for him to be questioning whether I would be comfortable with being taught in English in the institution that teaches in the same language which I wrote my exams in, I found it very surprising but in any event ... Because at the time, I think it was the early days of the foundation program, I came from a Township school so for me again, it was one of those things that, oh well, okay, you are expected, that maybe you need to come to that level (Nkosinathi, black, male, interview).

Experiences such as that of Nkosinathi (black, male, interview) and others discussed above point to the fact that race – including whiteness as conceptualised in the conceptualisation chapter of this thesis – can ever be assumed to be either about phenotype only, or for that matter the social aspects of whiteness only. Rather, both are at play where whiteness is constructed around phenotypical features, as well as influenced by and influencing relations of power. In this case power being about who decides what type of capital (i.e. the schools that one went to and why it matters) as being defined by one group of persons – those who have more of the recognised and valued capital.

### 5.2.5 Exceptions to the rule

It is worth noting that there are always exceptions to the rule. It is possible that one may have attended a former Model C school, for example, and thus had exposure to sports and a middleclass accent, for example, yet find oneself feeling alienated at the historically white institution. Despite having played hockey at a former Model C school where he interacted with various racial groups, and played a sport associated with whiteness, Nkosinathi found that he was not comfortable or willing to continue with the sport at university. University hockey for him appeared to ask for more than just the skill of being able to play the sport but rather a particular way of doing things related to the sport aside from skill (i.e. a culture of its own at university) that he was not comfortable or familiar with. Rather he postulated that perhaps part of the reason he did not carry on with hockey was because another aspect was needed to assimilate into and play hockey at varsity that he did not have. This points to the fact that it is not necessarily sufficient to think that one type of capital alone will be sufficient to be able to fit into the historically white institution. This supports Bourdieu and others' work (Bourdieu, 1990; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Swartz, 1997) in regard to how more than one capital and different combinations of capital are critical to influencing the position that one holds in a field or game, but in this thesis specifically the degree to which one feels at home within the institution. Although Nkosinathi might have gone to the right school in terms of having sufficient access to white tone, and having played hockey, and thus on the basis of it appeared to have white tone, he still found himself feeling excluded and alienated within the institution. This points to the fact that different types of capital and different combinations of capital determine the extent to which one feels at home within the historically white institution. Although it is unclear what exactly it was about the way the sport was played (i.e. the culture of hockey) at the historically white institution that made him feel uncomfortable and therefore unwilling to play at university, some insights might be drawn from similar participants' experiences.

In the experiences of participants such as Lithalethu (female, black, interview) who had attended multiracial schools or former Model C schools, there is an awareness that access to wealth and associated resources also plays a role in how comfortably one is able to successfully negotiate and navigate the institution of Rhodes University. Despite coming from working class parents, they did all they could to ensure that she attended a multiracial school. Thus, she had the 'code' (Idusa, black, female, interview); 'twang' (Edwin, black, male, interview) in regards to how one spoke English, and familiarity with being around white people that other participants did not necessarily have. However, despite these social aspects of whiteness (cultural capital), there was an awareness of how important economic capital and its associated resources were in influencing the extent to

which one was also comfortable or able to successfully negotiate and navigate Rhodes University. It was not sufficient to merely have been exposed to and acquired some whiteness but the type of whiteness and amount also mattered with regard to the English that one used, and with regard to the economic capital that one had access to. These amongst many other possible factors that participants and staff could list determined how close to the ideal of whiteness held within the institution, and thus the degree of comfort experienced contribute to and take part in its culture. It is also possible that despite having some social aspects of whiteness, participants who should have some familiarity with whiteness due to their prior schooling felt out of place because they can never be white enough phenotypically as noted by Nyamnjoh (2016) and (Reilly, 2016).

### **5.2.6 Is fluidity of race possible?**

Participants who had more aspects associated with whiteness such as attending a private school, having economic capital or wealth and being able to speak English with the desired middle to upper-middle class accent were perceived as being at the top of the social hierarchy within the institution. These participants (black and white) who seemed to hold similar type, combination and amount of capital were often seen as being the ones that have the greatest influence in terms of the culture of the institution amongst participants, as noted by Andrew (white, male, interview), for example:

well, after a while I just noticed, just a difference in wealth and that sort of thing and that's also connected to, well in my opinion connected to whiteness as well ... In many ways whiteness is associated with opulence and wealth and even today that still pretty much is the case anyway. So I'm thinking about it from that perspective. Just like how especially guys and girls who came from elite private schools. They all seemed to act in the same kind of sort of culture, and those from boys schools and multi schools, that sort of kind of thing ... I think a lot of the time, a lot of people from certain schools who come together to varsity have those cliques. Just the boarding schools, even though they'll be the one black man amongst other white guys, it would be the same for girls (Andrew, white, male, interview).

Similarly, Lethu (black, male, interview) and several others note that the black participants who were part of the white groups – the epitome of whiteness in the participants' narrative – were also included as acting no differently from the white participants:

Even among other black participants in the university, those that exhibited a style that was accommodated by fellow white participants tended to be closer to them than us. You would not be comfortable either with them because they would see you in no different way than the white participants (Lethu, black, male, interview).

This means that in agreement with current calls for decolonisation by participants there is an awareness that changing institutional cultures to make South African universities a home for all is not a numbers game.

There is awareness that black bodies may become white socially and culturally. These aforementioned elite participants (both black and white phenotypically) were nonetheless associated with whiteness. They were set as the epitome of whiteness by those who were further from the ideal of whiteness. Importantly, however, this group of elite privileged participants was not described and experienced as being multiracial as it contained both black and white bodies. Instead, despite the presence of a few black bodies, the elite privileged groups with their few black bodies were described as being the epitome of whiteness. This is not to say that the black bodies had literally become white but rather that what filled the bodies — the capital they held in comparison to other participants (both white and black) — allowed for these privileged elite bodies (both phenotypically white and black) to be constructed as socially and culturally white in terms of the type, combination and amount of capital that they held. Race — including whiteness — in this sense is argued to have some fluidity beyond phenotype when it came to the social aspects of whiteness.

### **5.2.7 Self-reflexivity**

One of the most common reasons that participants would claim that they did not have a raced experience of the historically white institution was because they had the capital to be able to fit into the expectations, values and norms of the institution. As the institutional values and norms were familiar to some participants, this meant that there was little reason for them to feel out of place. For self-reflexive participants, there was an awareness that part of the reason was because they were able to fit into the norms, values of the institution more easily than poor black participants from disadvantaged backgrounds. The point, however, is that although group membership may make one more likely to hold similar views of the world to their group members as argued by authors such as Bourdieu (Swartz, 1997), and Gee (1999), participants' experiences indicated that this is not always the case. Individuals can and do act contrary to the expected norms

and values due to friendships and familial relationships that had made them aware of the racialised biases in society and how they fit within that:

It was something I wondered about quite a bit – would I as a white South African get along better with a white non-South African, or a black South African? ... I wonder where my black, English-speaking sister will sit when she goes to university (Rita, white, female, interview).

At Rhodes I spent my time hanging out with people of all races, but I find in Joburg the experience to be much more raced. I find one friends group to be very white, and I frequently find myself asking how we can be considered 'liberal' and 'open' when we are so white in both our activities and composition (majority of this group went to Rhodes) (Bridget, white, female, interview).

For others, such as Natalie (white, female, interview) experiences of other forms of marginalisation such as sexuality and patriarchy made them more open to thinking about other ways of marginalisation they were taking part in but had not been aware of:

I would definitely say the institution is governed by whiteness, I did not feel that I was exposed to the experiences of others (pinned on identity aspects such as class, culture, race, etc) unless I actively sought it out through conversations with peers ... If I had not been already exposed to issues such as gender-based violence and sexuality, I do not think I would have grown as much as I did at Rhodes.

This suggests that self-reflexivity may be ignited by other experiences in the participants' life as noted by McIntosh (1988, 1989) in how her experience of marginalisation as a woman in society opened the door to thinking about her complicity in whiteness – albeit reluctantly at first according to her account.

How some participants came to be self-reflexive suggests that whilst study of group membership may be useful for explaining why and how people may hold particular viewpoints and positions, such membership does not close off the possibility of holding differing and at times contradictory positionality and views. As human beings' capital, and the context may change thus it is that positionality and views – that is the content of the vessel – may also change. Thus, social identity

as the content of vessels is open ended, ever incomplete, likely to change and can never be comprehensively predicted on the basis of group membership. A good example of this would also be those who crossed racial boundaries as discussed below and later in this chapter.

### **5.2.8 Change of curriculum and institutional culture**

The importance of how one teaches and what one teaches, since the 2015 South African student protests, points to the fact that some aspects of race – particularly whiteness – in regard to historically white institutions may be acquired and dropped by white and black bodies alike. Thus participants have increasingly become aware and sensitive to the fact that black bodies, due to their contents (socially, culturally and economically and in terms of interests) may act contrary to the interests of their fellow black members of society; and indeed the same may be said of white bodies acting contrary to what is expected of one of their phenotype. Idusa (black, female, interview), like the others above with regard to how some black bodies may act no differently from white bodies in terms of making others feel alienated and excluded, points to the importance of the contents of the body and what the body is willing to do to change the status quo which privileges whiteness as being the most important rather than phenotype alone in regards to decolonisation. The fluidity of race in regards to contents is not only worth noting when it is not willing to challenge the way things are done pedagogically, and epistemologically, but also when bodies which are of the same phenotype act in ways that actively privilege the status quo to the exclusion of others. That is, for example, by doing what Idusa (black, female, interview) describes as using the same code against each other. She describes

the other level of hecticness [being] when black people do that to each other. I know what that is like, when you sit in the space with black intellectual people and there is like ... 'what can you tell me?' And they use the same code against you, so what does it mean to speak black in lecture and have people respond to you, like I am talking but you can speak to me and all that stuff, you know. You are a student from this country, I can hear what you are saying, I understand your code but that doesn't mean that I have to be interested in it or value legitimately further through a kind of discussion on how we are going about things (Idusa, black, female).

Furthermore, this boundary crossing through the contents of the body and what it does rather than focusing on phenotype alone means that scholarship and academia may benefit from white bodies that pedagogically and epistemologically produce knowledge that contributes to the decolonisation of knowledge and institutions. Such bodies due to their contents have been shown

to be described as ‘the black of the department’ (Idusa, black, female, interview) despite being phenotypically white; or for that matter being provided with honorary black comrade status (Malcom, white, male, interview). The contents of the body, that is what contents bodies hold socially, culturally (including pedagogy and epistemology when it came to academic interaction), and economically may allow some racial fluidity. Although race is being reconstructed differently as has been suggested by the works of authors such as Bashkow (2006), Hunter (2019), (Matthews (2011), Seddon (2014) and Walker (2005), for example, phenotype is never far behind as Vallarie’s experience below seems to suggest. Despite being successfully socialised white, akin to Macaulay’s English Indians (see Reilly, 2016), bodies which are not phenotypically white are still always in danger of being reduced to biological essentialism as a means of exclusion. Essentialism is thus never far off even within the exceptions of race fluidity as shown by Vallarie’s (black, Indian, female, interview) experience with her previous Rhodes friendships:

I felt less of a sense of belonging and more like an outsider. It also made me want to re-look at my culture and what it meant to me. A sense of bitterness perhaps that I made myself accustom to a culture I didn't relate to in order to “blend in” (even if it was on a subconscious level). When I did discuss the polarisation with friends who previously part of the group and were not white they said they felt the same sense of not belonging. That there was no longer anything binding all of us together. We found we no longer share the same interests, ideas and (this was the most strange) values as our friends from Rhodes who are white (Vallarie, black, Indian, female, interview).

Even amongst close friends, where all, black and white, have invested in whiteness, at some point there may be a feeling that one falls far short of the ideal that others have in regard to the amount of whiteness that should be the different bodies in a new context. Whereas one may have initially not been made aware of being too far from whiteness due to having the capital type, combination and amount valued within the context at the time; when the context changes, for example as it did when it came to maintaining relationships after university, in the job market for Vallarie (black, Indian, female, interview), there may be a reminder that one is not white enough in the new context. This points to an important part of whiteness: that of being able to shift boundaries to enable racial fluidity in some contexts, and reduce the boundaries to exclude the very same bodies which were once included in another instance. In other words, this points to improvisation in how whiteness is constructed and maintained as the hegemonic ideal using and drawing from black and white bodies alike.

Through class, for example, black and white bodies – which are often separated into oppressed and oppressor in whiteness studies literature, and even in participants’ experiences of whiteness – may acquire and lose aspects of whiteness. However, one aspect that can never be attained by black bodies is white racial phenotype, which may in times of competition in different contexts such as the job market, and where social networks become more important for opportunities, become a means of exclusion according to the experience of those such as Vallarie (black, Indian, female, interview). Experiences such as Vallarie’s, where competition becomes more pertinent especially as one leaves school or university and white social networks become useful for opportunities, means resentment in investing heavily in an identity that excludes one at some point.

### **5.2.9 Degrees of whiteness: exclusion and inclusion**

The issue of degrees of whiteness is not limited to black bodies only. While whites can always play the phenotype card to exclude, as suggested by Reilly’s (2016) study, they may at times experience feelings of exclusion, or having lost some aspect of one’s whiteness due to class, for example (see Kruger, 2016). The epitome of whiteness is often connected to access to wealth, a connection that is often made in the participants’ narratives. It is for this reason that relatively poor whites, such as Josie (white, female, interview), identify themselves as not being part of the ideal whiteness due to not being able to buy the brand-new textbooks which other whites can.

I was on financial aid for the first two years of university and I was one of the few white students that I knew in that student ... Some (mostly white) students had all the newest textbooks from UPB, whereas others (mostly black) students had second hand textbooks. In our courses in politics discussions often became raced, and there was a clear ‘us and ‘them’ mentality ... We studied Steve Biko’s I write what I like. It was either third year or honours year. In the classroom the discussion turned to who could understand what Biko meant. This became very heated, and I often felt that I didn’t have the right to have an opinion.

(Josie, white, female, interview).

There is a feeling of not being white enough due to being one of the few whites who does not have one of the key accretions of whiteness — sufficient economic capital to not have to rely on the institution’s financial aid programme; and furthermore not be able to buy what she thought was one of the key signs of white wealth: brand-new textbooks. Yet at the same time she is also not black enough to be able to contribute legitimately to feelings of exclusion and oppression from

whiteness when it comes to the discussion of the then academic text Steve Biko's *I write what I like*. The point here is not to focus on the fact that she is phenotypically white. It would be easy enough to argue that she is distancing herself from whiteness simply because she is phenotypically white. Or claiming to be a different type of white – the good white (see Goga, 2008). Nor for that matter is to claim that black and white bodies are equally able to cross racial boundaries; nor benefit the most from a world that privileges whiteness either. Rather, the point is that while relationships of power differ, they may also be situations where phenotypically black bodies may claim more access to privilege to whiteness by arguing that they may have more social aspects of whiteness than the phenotypically white body; or for that matter contest claims for more access to privileges and opportunities associated with whiteness in competition with their fellow black brethren because they claim to hold more whiteness in a space that privileges and rewards whiteness. The point then is not to deny power relations between white and black, but rather to delve even further into the nuances of how whiteness is constructed, used and contested amongst individuals.

The point here is that whiteness is about degrees of whiteness often in relation to others' access to more or less whiteness in ways that are applicable and useful to the speaker or user at the time. South Africa and its history of racialised hierarchies of humanity is an example of this. Whites of English extraction often tended to position themselves at the apex of the hierarchies of whiteness, with Afrikaners often considered inferior, and poor whites, most likely Afrikaners, considered even more inferior. It is a matter of degrees in relation to others' phenotype, social aspects (i.e. capital) at the time. It may be possible for black bodies to discriminate against other black bodies due to not having the requisite whiteness in a place that privileges and recognises the white aspects they hold. On the other hand, these self-same groups who due to holding capital valued and recognised within the institution at the time may find themselves excluded from the privileges and opportunities they once held because the context and therefore capital recognised has shifted, using Vallarie's (black, Indian, female, interview) experience in particular as an example.

Similarly, whites who have become accepted as part of the black group to some degree because of similar interests may find themselves reminded of their phenotype in certain conversations as was the case for Josie (white, female, interview) in regards to contributing to academic discussions on race. The idea that whiteness may be acquired and lost across phenotypical racial boundaries to some extent is a limited area of research in whiteness studies, especially in South Africa. While historically, racial boundary crossing on the basis that one looked more white was possible, what is being discussed here is racial boundary crossing linked to the capital and habitus that is held by the individual. While apartheid was about creating clear distinctions about what phenotypical

bodies can do, the Table I results discussed in this chapter challenge the idea that racial boundaries are fixed. This chapter then offers an insight little seen in whiteness studies literature where bodies may successfully to some extent in some contexts and times become viewed as white/black due to their contents; but at the same time never completely reach the ideal, whether black or white.

#### **5.2.10 Ambivalence**

Out of a total of 58 participants, therefore, 35 out of 58 could be clearly identified as to whether or not they had a raced experience. However, out of 58 participant interviews, 23 were identified as ambivalent. Aside from some of the email interviews contributing to the number of ambivalent results, the large number of ambivalent interviews were also because the audio interviews were meant to follow up on themes that had been identified in the email responses – thus being identified as supplementing interviews in the thesis. As mentioned in the methodology chapter, because participants were reluctant to have follow-up interviews once they had filled in the email responses, audio interviews were sought to further explore themes, topics and further questions raised across the email interviews. This meant at times that participants were not asked for an unequivocal answer as to whether they had a raced experience or not. In addition, given that race continues to be a sensitive topic in South Africa, it was important not only to follow up on themes and ideas from the email interviews, but to also establish and maintain rapport during the supplementing interview. In addition, as rapport was established, it opened up the possibility of new themes, questions and topics to be raised by the participant. Thus, the exact same questions, following the same order and format, could not be used for the supplementing interviews. Regardless, however, in cases where it was indicative from the narrative that the speaker had either had a raced experience or not of the institution, this was accordingly placed in the relevant column in Table I above as much as possible.

#### **5.2.11 Interpreting ambivalence**

Ambivalence within the confines of this chapter is used to refer broadly to where the speaker both admits and denies having had a raced experience at Rhodes University. They may start off by stating that they had indeed had raced experiences but then go on to explain that these incidents were isolated or may go on to focus on examples of where there was no raced experience. Or, on the other hand, they may start by categorically stating that they did not have a raced experience but then going on to describe a raced incident. The result in either case is ambivalence – a clear lack of clarity as to the speaker's position on their experience. The same result is also possible when the speaker does not categorically say yes or no but simply goes on to describe both what they believed are raced experiences, as well as experiences that they believe were unraced. There

are several possible reasons for this. Firstly, the speaker fits into whiteness to some extent due to having the capital associated with whiteness. Thus, they may answer that Rhodes was not raced, yet still however be aware of the fact that one had to have access to particular capital in order to fit in at Rhodes, as was the case with Meredith (black, Coloured, female, interview). On the other hand, there may be those who were aware of the dominance of Rhodes University but found means of survival and navigating Rhodes that allowed them to move within the space cushioned from the alienation they would have otherwise experienced due to not having the capital associated with being able to do well at Rhodes. In either case, the speaker was in the middle in terms of their positioning. This middle positioning has often been interpreted as a means to protect white privilege, and thus keep the status quo in place – especially by whites. Ambivalence is often associated as being part of the parcel of skills that may be used by whites in what has been referred to in the conceptual chapter as white talk or white discourse.

As capital type, amount and combination were pointed to as important aspects of part of being able to negotiate Rhodes successfully, and at the same time participants were aware of the larger public discourse on race and belonging in South Africa, it is possible that ambivalence may also be an attempt to balance several interests across two different contexts within which participants operate. On the one hand, the world of Rhodes where whiteness is the dominant culture that is privileged and rewarded; and where the degree will be of more value in the job market than any of the historically black universities. On the other hand, there is also a larger public rhetoric contesting the grounds of belonging in South Africa. For the latter the rhetoric has tended to be about distancing oneself from unearned white privilege, and more about pointing to the dangers of white monopoly capital. Once it is not possible to completely deny the pertinence of race in South Africa overall, ambivalent results in post-colonial post-apartheid South Africa may also point to South Africans' need to be nimble-footed in how they engage with and use race – including whiteness.

The South African context, where whites are in the minority rather than majority may thus offer an alternative means to explain ambivalence rather than a conscious effort to keep the status quo in place. Rather, due to the importance placed on capital by the participants, it may be about balancing what in South Africa have been positioned as polarised positionalities (black and white) but where in reality the two need to co-exist as individuals attempt to pursue and prove their belonging in the new democratic South Africa.

### 5.3 Racial mixing as a measure of progress

Participants saw the degree to which different races mixed socially and utilised spaces on and off campus as a measure of progress. When asked to discuss any examples of their raced experiences, several students made reference to racial groups still largely sticking to their phenotypical groups. The implication therefore was that until South Africans either no longer sit in their homogenous phenotypical groups, nor feel the pressure to be within the homogenous phenotypical groups, apartheid and colonialism still bound bodies to some extent to act and be in specific locations.

Examples of this include, firstly, the racialisation of facilities on Rhodes campus:

Certain physical areas such as residence common rooms, computer labs, study areas and relaxation areas seemed to be implicitly demarcated for particular races (Carla, white, female).

The lack of racial mixing was not only limited to official spaces of social interaction, such as different tables for different racial groups, as noted by several participants, but also in the lecture room itself. Rhodes University's identity has been constructed post-1994 as being a university concerned with academic freedom and learning rather than race (see Buckland & Neville, 2004; Greyling, 2007). Yet even spaces within Rhodes that are supposed to be more neutral – at least in terms of being concentrated on academic learning and academic freedom – are experienced as visibly raced, and having made limited progress. In some cases, as experienced by Segomotso (black, female, interview), for example, not only were some courses racialised as being 'more' white but interestingly she noted that as the only black female in the class she would often be ignored, disregarded and forced to sit on her own:

I would always sit by myself in one row and I would say, I would take the first chair on that row and there will be nobody who comes to sit next to me right, whenever I was late I would find a whole lot of people sitting on that row, and I will have to go and sit in the background myself some way, for me I thought that was so racist because when I am sitting there nobody sits there but the moment I am late for class all of a sudden that entire row is taken up, the entire row, so ... we not going to sit next to the black girl, when she's late then we are all sitting there and I go and I sit on my own (Segomotso, black, female, interview).

Participants who had experiences such as that of Segomotso (black, female, interview) would be forced to sit on their own because of their race in their opinion. The learning space was thus alienating and unprogressive, not necessarily only because of the course content and the racialisation of the course but also in terms of the expectation and pressure that one sits with one's own. While this practice might have not been overtly supported by the university, it was accepted as the norm at Rhodes. This was accepted as a matter of student choice, rather than questioning the extent to which the university may have made this segregation possible through the attention and support given to activities associated with whiteness such as the choice in sports (e.g. rugby, swimming, canoeing), as well as the extramural and cultural activities encouraged by the university, for example Triversity, and the rituals chosen for residential house bonding and identity. Through being constructed and perceived as a matter of student choice as to where former students sat, socialised and utilised space, racial segregation could be largely ignored and silenced as matters under the topics of class, interests, existing friendship groups for example rather than being connected to privileging of certain ways of being continuing to dominate how bodies interacted and utilised space. This is in agreement with the early work of Goga (2008, 2010) which shows how that which is problematic can be re-storied for in ways that silence and obfuscate how the status quo is kept in place. It is worth noting, however, that since the 2015 South African student protests, there is anecdotal evidence which suggests that these experiences of racial segregation, at least along phenotypical lines, will not be as pertinent. Through informal conversations with library staff members who provide annual first year orientation, academic lecturers, brief discussions with local town residents in the stores, as well as the researcher's own observations on campus between December 2019 to February 2020, the demographics of the historically white institution appear to have shifted significantly. Not only are there suggestions that there have been increases in the number of black students, but particularly an increase in terms of the numbers of black students who rely on NSFAS.

These are, of course, not reliable data but rather impressions gathered from discussions with various Grahamstown locals (particularly after term time started), and therefore cannot be taken at face value. However, these discussions do raise the question of, if there has indeed been a steady increase in the number of black bodies within the historically white institution then, once again, to what extent has the demographic shift affected the institutional culture? If there has been a shift in greater numbers of black students, particularly poor black students, does these mean fissures in institutional culture will be reflected in different ways? For example, will there continue to be investment in whiteness which places bodies at odds. And will the competition and investment in whiteness be weighed more heavily towards the social aspects of whiteness – rather than

phenotype. Given that whiteness is more than just phenotype but about aspiration, better access to privilege, opportunity and wealth, the results discussed in this chapter suggest that whiteness will continue to be at play in South African universities albeit in slightly different ways where the contents of the bodies matters more than phenotype.

Secondly, despite initially being willing to cross racial boundaries during orientation week where all first years are at a loss in terms of being in a new place with new academic pressures, these friendship groups of survival later dissipated in accordance with phenotype. This was apparent in the statements made for example by Rupert (white, male, interview), Thabang (black, male, interview) and Thobeka (black, female, interview). Rupert notes that ‘different racial groups in Rhodes tended quite strongly to separate out into their own social/academic cliques’. Thabang similarly states that there was a general pattern of ‘African people mixing with other African people (... I mean blacks with blacks) and white people mixing with other white people’. This is also echoed in Thobeka’s (black, female, interview) statement that ‘the culture of the student body [was one of] – whites with whites, blacks with blacks, Indians with Indians’.

Thirdly, social spaces such as the local clubs and pubs that participants went to in the small town were also racialised as either white or black. The [Mouse] and [Budgie] was for example perceived and experienced as a ‘white bar’ while [BD] was perceived and experienced as the ‘black bar’ according (Theodore, white, male, interview).

#### **5.4 Number of raced bodies doing what**

Aside from racial mixing as a measure of progress it is also worth noting that participants were conscious of the racial demographics in almost all sections of the university:

I only had two black lecturers (or rather lecturers who spoke in a more ‘black’ accent and weren’t as culturally ‘white’ as others) during my time at Rhodes (Economics and Property Law) and I was pretty horrified in both of those courses at the immediate decrease in respect shown to the lecturers (Calida, white, female, interview).

[Y]ou found that you were in a class of mostly white learners and we were mostly lectured by white lecturers, in my varsity career I was only lectured by 2 black staff of which they were foreigners (Anda, black, female, interview).

The number of black versus white bodies that were lecturers, and in management positions was never lost on the former students. Demographics are important as they serve as role models, and potentially may cause disruption of perceptions of what type of phenotypical bodies can be assumed as bodies of knowledge, control, management and capability. However, as has been warned not only by academics but students as well, a shift in the racial demographics, that is which bodies are in which positions, does not mean that the pedagogy and epistemology has changed also. Nonetheless, as the historically white institution appears to be making some changes, the question that remains for future research is as to how much shifts in what bodies do what will continue to matter when the majority of the bodies in power are also black. Particularly if drawn from poor black backgrounds like many of the students that have previously been marginalised by historically white institutions.

There were exceptions, however, which recognised that there has been some progress since the end of apartheid. Although progress as measured by the amount of racial mixing was limited, the existence of exceptions however pointed to the flexibility and constantly shifting borders of race. That is, racialisation is never completely homogenous and stable. This affirms works such as that by Bashkow (2006), Hunter (2019), Reilly (2016) and Twine (1997) that argues that race is not a stable identity. Exceptionalism when it comes to racialisation is not new but also occurred during apartheid (Francis B. Nyamnjoh, 2016). Then, as is the case in some instances today, as evident from participants' descriptions, where the context allows there may be exceptions granted to extend privileges of whiteness and blackness to bodies that are otherwise phenotypically not in accordance with the privileges extended. This affirms the fact that the content of the permutations of racial identification is constantly shifting, and is never completely exclusive or homogenous. While whiteness studies research acknowledges the ever shifting permutations of whiteness (see Garner, 2017; Hunter, 2019; Kolchin, 2002), the fact that there are still studies that attempt to point to characteristics or features means that the only aspects of whiteness that remain the same and constant are the ever-shifting boundaries where necessary.

In other words, the only constant when it comes to race, including whiteness is incompleteness. Without this framing of race – including whiteness – as incomplete, whiteness studies scholarship stands in danger of focusing on constantly shifting nuances of race and racialisation *ad infinitum*. Without the framing of incompleteness, race and racialisation including whiteness appear overwhelmingly powerful and beyond prediction. Without the framing of incompleteness to conceptualise the possibility of constant shifting or acceptance of the exception, whiteness appears chaotic; and beyond being able to understand how and why it constantly shifts. Without the

framing of incompleteness, the researcher and reader are left with no more than attempting to grasp the manifold nuances of whiteness across contexts.

The existence of both reference to homogenous groups or sticking to one's own phenotypical group, as well as reference to exceptions to the rule also point to the importance of conviviality in explaining how a wide generalisation, and exceptions to the rule can co-exist when it comes to racialisation, the identity of race including whiteness. That is, two opposing forces actually coexisting and serving a particular function of both keeping the status quo in place, and also presenting situations where it appears to challenge the status quo. This aspect of race and racialisation has been noted by Hunter (2019) and s when it comes to race and racialisation in South Africa. Conviviality offers the possibility to accept that the existence of both wider generalisation and exceptions are a key means of how whiteness operates across contexts regardless of the period. There is little whiteness studies research that provides the theoretical or conceptual scaffolding to understand the wider generalisation and exceptionalities. This thesis adds to the limited research attempting to understand this simultaneous existence of both wider generalisations and exceptionalism not only in terms of whiteness studies in general but in regard to South African understanding of race and racialisation in particular.

### **5.5 Contestations of questions asked by interviewer**

Not all participants simply accepted the questions that were put to them by the researcher. While there were several participants who responded clearly that there is a privileging of whiteness in South Africa and within Rhodes University which left them feeling marginalised or as belonging to a minority group in terms of access to power, others were less equivocal in their responses. One of the main ways in which this was done was to question and contest the meaning of 'raced' or even 'whiteness' itself. Interviews certainly do not need to be one way; but rather participants may question, challenge and critically engage the questions placed to them. This is certainly a possibility with critical research where the respondents are not simply people from whom one extracts information but rather the individual is also taken as an expert on their experiences. Meaning as revealed through the contestation of the meaning of terms 'raced' or 'whiteness' could be argued to be a direct challenge of the authority of the researcher due to her positionality as a young black female. That is, as a result of being in a body that is not often associated as knowledge producer or knowledgeable on the topic she is researching. There is considerable literature that would support this interpretation of the data and certainly this could be the case in some instances. However, the data also revealed that there could be an alternative interpretation where dominant or hegemonic ways of doing things are the result of contestation of meaning. That is, meaning is

contested due to the implications that the meaning has for access to power, privilege and opportunity for the speakers. Several participants, for example, clearly described how fitting into Rhodes was connected to the capital that one held which is discussed throughout all the analyses chapters.

## **5.6 Conclusion**

This chapter highlighted the dangers of assuming certain responses because of the phenotype of the bodies involved. This is critical in post-apartheid South Africa where the public discourse around race may tend towards essentialisms. As noted by the Abahlali Basemjondolo, South Africans need to be wary of focusing so much on assumed phenotypical responses that the South African public can fail to see what the aforementioned society referred to at the time as the behaviour of black boers when it comes to criminalising the black body (Goebel, 2015). This is especially worth bearing in mind, and being reminded of in regards to the criminalisation of the poor black body which does not have as much access to aspects associated with whiteness as those wealthier blacks in politics, as some have argued in regards to the responses of wealthy political elite during the Marikana strike and following massacre (Goebel, 2015). Similar caution has been also been made by Abahlali Basemjondolo as they weighed in on the expropriation of land bill arguing that land should not be simply be taken from the wealthy white elite to be given to the black elite (Duma, 2020).

Unless South Africans are constantly mindful of the fact that phenotype does not determine the contents of the container, systems of inequality which privilege whiteness may continue but under different bodies. Whiteness, if the results presented in Table I above are not taken seriously, can remain intact with little to no change as the hegemonic ideology and means of determining resource distribution because the focus continues to be predominantly on phenotype. This is particularly worth bearing in mind in regard to which black bodies are allowed access – particularly into historically white institutions. As mentioned previously if the new bodies, albeit being primarily black are taught or engaging with issues pertinent to Africa, and a curriculum aimed towards challenging the Eurocentric cannon then whiteness may still be kept intact – even if more black bodies are accepted into historically white institutions. What would be worth further exploration in future studies would be the extent to which inclusion of more poor black bodies into historically white institutions has made any significant changes to the institutional culture of the institution. In other words, as more black participants are accepted into historically white institutions, would the presence of these bodies – given their limited access to privileges of whiteness – have any impact upon what type of institutional culture the historically white

institution has in the future. While the numbers game is of course highly contested, unless the contents of the bodies are also willing to challenge the status quo, the inclusion of poor black bodies who may not have as much white capital available to them bears questioning if the new contents available will change the ways things are done (i.e. culture) at the institution.

The chapter also discussed how participants' understanding of the term 'raced' had an impact as to whether they felt they had had a raced experience or not. Rarely was this question answered easily, as the discussion on ambivalence shows. However, rather than merely being a means by which white bodies to privilege and protect whiteness, the importance of capital in participants' descriptions of their experiences points to the possibility that ambivalence may also be connected to attempts to balance expectations and rhetoric of belonging from different aspects of South African society that are often placed at polar ends of each other. Belonging in post-apartheid postcolonial South Africa for both whites and blacks has meant taking part in a game where one has to be constantly aware of what capital type, combination and amount is of value and when. Indeed, some participants indicated the ability to draw from both constructed polar opposites associated with blackness and whiteness in order to successfully negotiate not only places that value and recognise whiteness, but also those that have invested in a polar essentialism of whiteness. The most successful South African in terms of belonging is not one who invests heavily in one polar opposite versus another but rather one who can foresee that South Africa requires navigation of several spaces with constructed essentialist rhetoric which requires a mixed arsenal of capital together with the knowledge of what capital to use when in order to get the best outcome according to the context and time interaction. Belonging in South Africa requires a nimblefootedness that allows one to be able and willing to invest and draw from whatever will be useful – a body and a mind willing to fill itself with whatever is perceived to be useful once one gets to the interaction, context, place where the relevant essentialism is drawn from. It is a game of ever incompleteness and conviviality – always willing to evolve to continue to survive while also willing to carry within the body aspects that are usually placed at odds with each other: blackness and whiteness.

## Chapter VI: Participants' Acknowledgement of the Privileging of Whiteness

When one's race is granted a certain notion of normalcy or one's culture is accepted as intuitive or innate, it is given great power. As a white woman, I know that I have this power or privilege, because I am treated differently because of the colour of my skin. I am treated better because my behaviour is generally deemed acceptable or understandable (Diane, white, female, interview).

[I]n general it was a "white culture" from residence dinners, social function and the way things are organized (Thenjiwe, black, female, interview).

When white people get to Rhodes University, like they belong, from the first day, they just belong. The way they relate to lecturers, the way they relate to everything, it's like they are provided home and other people have to figure out what's happening, they have to learn, other people they just come there and then they are in that space, they are at home (Mbanzi, black, male, interview).

### 6.1 Introduction

The above excerpts introduce the discussion of how the privileging of whiteness is discursively acknowledged. This chapter discusses the extent to which participants acknowledged the dominance of the privileging of whiteness within the institution they attended, and their own complicity within whiteness. Of importance, aside from the extent to which they acknowledged whiteness, is also the way in which the privileging of whiteness was acknowledged in relation to the way they positioned themselves in the description of their raced experiences.

The chapter argues that although some participants did acknowledge the dominance of whiteness, their own complicity in whiteness was at the same time also distanced through various discursive strategies. There was, on the one hand, an acknowledgement of the dominance of whiteness – especially because whiteness is rewarded and recognised within the historically white institution of Rhodes University. On the other hand, as the privileging of whiteness has been challenged in public discourse – especially since the 2015 students' protests calling for decolonisation of South African universities – participants also found various ways to distance or downplay the extent to which they are complicit in whiteness. As aspects associated with whiteness such as wealth,

privilege and opportunity still continue to be valued in society, it is no wonder that many continue to buy into and invest in whiteness even when it appears to be contrary to their positionality as part of a particular phenotypical group. Therefore, there is little choice – even for those who are constructed as black – but to buy into whiteness in order to survive where whiteness predominantly is privileged. The effect of being stuck in this dichotomy was that whiteness was found to be both challenged and reinforced in the ways that participants acknowledged the privileging of whiteness.

In this chapter, firstly, the various ways in which participants acknowledged the privileging and dominance of whiteness within the historically white institution of Rhodes University. In the second half of the chapter, the various ways in which participants decanted what they perceived to be undesirable aspects of whiteness, and thus attempt to control the extent to which they are implicated in an ideology and identity that remains negatively viewed in South African public discourse. Through the plaiting of these two positions participants could both benefit from their investment in whiteness on the one hand through doing what needs to be done to survive and attain their degree; while also at the same time distancing themselves from an identity that is to some extent still associated negatively with oppression. Unlike much of the whiteness studies literature which argues that participants using white talk are merely interested in protecting their white privilege, this chapter argues that belonging in South Africa requires, firstly, a nimble-footed dance of both acquiring and performing some aspect of whiteness where and when it is valued; secondly, while also precariously proving that one is removed enough from negative aspects of whiteness to belong in South Africa. Belonging – and therefore access to resources – in South Africa is not just an issue for those who are phenotypically white, but for all who reside in South Africa and want access to social goods.

**6.2 Section I: Acknowledging the hegemony of whiteness and its personal implications** It is worth noting first and foremost that participants acknowledged the hegemony of whiteness, as is done for example by Diane (white, female, interview) and Thenjiwe (black, female, interview) above. Participants described experiencing certain behaviours, actions, attitudes, knowledge construction and production, for example, being predominantly in alignment with one group's preferences and benefit (i.e. those successfully socialised white). Although the university may no longer overtly exclude blacks, the institutional culture of the university was experienced by some white and black participants as being 'white'. Whiteness, as many students pointed out, was the norm with which all were expected to align in order to successfully navigate the institutional space.

The privileging of whiteness was subtle and covert. This subtle power of whiteness lying in the expectations to acculturate and assimilate to some extent to the ways of doing things associated with whiteness (i.e. the norm) is evident in the fact that those such as Eda (white, female, interview) due to having the relevant habitus associated with whiteness fitted into the university's culture, while those who held less habitus associated with whiteness felt alienated and never at ease with the university's institutional culture.

I never felt I was treated differently because of my race or that practices/'ways of doing things' at Rhodes excluded me or were alien to me. This is probably because I am white and fitted into the university's 'culture of whiteness (Eda, white, female, interview).

The pervasiveness of whiteness as the norm allows practices and actions which privilege whiteness to appear to be neutral or normal for those who have successfully been socialised white, including those who are phenotypically black, such as Meredith (black, Coloured, female, interview). Contrary to Diane's statement above, however, Meredith's (black, Coloured, female, interview) and Thembani's (black, male, interview) experiences of feeling at home at Rhodes due to their white socialisation make it apparent that one need not always be only phenotypically white to be able to feel at home within Rhodes University, and feel like one is contributing to Rhodes' dominant student culture.

Participants such as Thembani (black, male interview) are aware that not everyone had had the opportunity to be socialised white, and thus do not have some of the necessary white habitus and capital to successfully navigate a place that privileged whiteness. The socialisation and extension of white privileges to those who are not phenotypically white, in alignment with Reilly's argument about Macaulay's Minute to whiten up Indians in India at the time, can however, be co-opted and mistaken as an indication that race is no longer an issue in post-apartheid South Africa and that class rather than race is an issue within spaces that privilege whiteness. Through the extension of some white privileges, the privileging of whiteness may remain intact as whiteness is not seen as the focus of the problem. Rather, the focus is placed on the lack of white habitus or capital of bodies that enter a place where whiteness is the norm.

The power of the ideology of whiteness in bolstering whiteness through this co-optive method is apparent in Thembani's (black, male, interview) and Segomotso's (black, female, interview) comments for example. The two aforementioned participants, while denying that they had a raced

experience of Rhodes University, however, acknowledge that having a background that familiarised them with what was expected at Rhodes university was key. They, as blacks, have been able to negotiate Rhodes successfully therefore race is not the issue but rather the issue is that those who feel less at home came to an institution where they did not have the capital and habitus to negotiate. To some extent, those who are being marginalised are indirectly and unconsciously being blamed for their marginalisation rather than exploring the institutional culture of the university. That, through being able to feel at home within the institution to some extent phenotypically black bodies socialised white are able to fit into the institution, points to bias in the institutional culture rather than neutrality.

The racialised aspect of whiteness is evident in that those who do not have the white habitus or capital necessary are most likely poor blacks, tying the issue of race and culture together rather than separating them. Despite the inclusion of whitened-up blacks to some extent in whiteness, as noted by Goebel (2015) and Reilly (2016), this does not preclude the problematisation of the poor black body as one of lack and criminalisation (Vincent, Idahosa & Msomi, 2017). Through the cooption of the inclusion of some black bodies whiteness can be bolstered and strengthened rather than weakened.

### **6.2.1 Solving the issue of black bodies as bodies of lack**

Historically white institutions such as Rhodes do not, however, only include black bodies that have been successfully socialised white. In 2016, one of the primary issues raised by South African students was the issue of fees. The issue of inclusion of poor black bodies within historically white universities came more to the fore. Of primary concern in some of the participants' experiences was how poor blacks do not only struggle with structural issues such as paying Minimum Initial Payment (MIP) early on in the year. Minimum Initial Payment (MIP) is a significant portion of the university fees which are expected to be paid upfront. Without paying this large portion of the student fees, students cannot expect to get access to residence and the academic programmes unless alternative arrangements have been made by the university. The expectation that participants' parents, some of whom come from a working-class background, argued some students, took little account of their socio-economic background. Rather, they argued, the blanket assumption that all can pay this sum in one instalment was more in alignment with the university's exclusive history based on racial and class discrimination. Government funding through NSFAS has however made it possible for some participants from working-class backgrounds to attend historically white institutions. Nonetheless these students face the struggle of not having the

sufficient cultural, social and economic capital that is associated with wealthy to middle-class Englishness expected at Rhodes.

Focusing on the limited cultural capital of working-class participants, Rhodes instituted academic support programmes that allowed poor working-class students, who might not necessarily have gone to schools with the requisite white tone, to be accepted. However, as participants such as Sandile (black, male, interview) and Nothando (black, male interview) experienced, not necessarily academic support, but rather the programmes also being a means to whiten them up to successfully acculturate (see Booï, Vincent & Liccardo, 2017; Hlengwa, 2015; Hunter, 2019; Reilly, 2016; see also Nyamnjoh & Page, 2002).

My first experience of such was being placed on the program called 'extended studies'. The intensions of the program were beautified in explanation, but the fact that they were based on the fact that your mother tongue is not English, and you have not done English as your first language was enough to spell it out that 'you not White enough so you won't make it' ... To cut this long story short I can say the day I became a bad student by not submitting my drafts is the day I started passing above the average 60 on my assignments. After almost a year being told (in a program that was meant to help me) that I am in a wrong career and will not make it and how I should be doing Arts because Journalism was not for people like me and will not progress to the second year ... (Sandile, black, male, interview).

Once again, this process of acculturation arguably foils or covers up the need to question the culture of the university, and thus retains the status quo. The issue of lack of inclusion of black bodies, and then later on, complaints about the inclusion of poor black bodies are resolved in such ways that subsume these arguments within the historically white establishment and ideology, and thus weaken the aforementioned complaints (see Goga, 2008, 2010; Maylam, 2012). The acceptance of the poor black bodies in these academic support programmes, as well as those who had been socialised white already, could be used to shore up and bolster whiteness rather than bringing about change in the institutional culture, as noted by Idusa (black, female, interview), who later on worked as a lecturer in the academic support programme at Rhodes University. Although the post-apartheid discourse and experience is more subtle than that detailed in Macaulay's Minute, the means of shoring whiteness are very similar: fill bodies (black and white) with the idea that

white Englishness is the norm, is the superior standard, and thereby shore up whiteness as an identity and ideology as argued by Reilly (2016; see also Macaulay, 1835).

### **6.2.2 The privileging of whiteness in social, extra-curricular activities**

The power and pervasiveness of whiteness is particularly telling in that participants found themselves taking part in activities, practices and spaces (such as St Patrick's Day celebrations, Triversity and the heavy drinking culture of Rhodes) without necessarily having consciously agreed to doing so; nor understanding their meaning in some cases (for example the relevance of St Patrick's day in Africa). This is supported by the experiences of the following participants:

I remember when people were all wearing green to celebrate St Patrick's Day, to this day don't know what that is but it's a big deal at Rhodes (Anda, black, female, interview).

With regards to Triversity, I only went to one event during my five years at Rhodes and it was the field party at Student Union. I just felt like the music was raced, appealing largely to a white audience – the anchor performance was Jack Parow. A lot of black participants took to the streets to party, which was then described by a lot of white participants as being 'inappropriate' and 'not classy' (Shianne, white, female, interview).

[Y]ou have mates who'd be able to go out and they'd spend however much money they had ... quite a lot of Rhodes relations are also built on drinking in a way (Wanga, black, male, interview).

The above excerpts point to participants not only finding themselves being co-opted into whiteness but also into established racial boundaries created by historically white-led legislature – the expectation that one primarily associates and identifies with those who phenotypically look like them. Vallarie (black, Indian, female, interview) and Riba (black, Indian, female, interview), for example, were of the opinion that they were especially invited to join Indian social circles by other Indians because of their Indian phenotypical features. Thus, the elements of whiteness such as creating different racial groups is not only pushed by phenotypically white bodies, as the reader may get the impression from reading most whiteness studies literature, but by those who are phenotypically black as well. This is a complexity in whiteness studies literature which needs to be taken more into account as it is a product of the historical establishing of the superiority of

whiteness which continues to affect social identities after apartheid. It is for this reason, perhaps, that some have argued that whiteness studies literature needs to be considered as part of race studies rather than as a separate field (see Garner, 2017; Kolchin, 2002). Nonetheless, the data in this thesis point to the need to focus beyond the phenotypically white body in order to understand the complex ways in which whiteness remains the hegemon despite whites being a numerical minority in South Africa.

### **6.2.3 Nimble-footedness and incompleteness**

Contrary to the idea that bodies can be filled with whiteness alone, or blackness only, as one arguably gets such an impression when reading much of the whiteness studies literature, the experiences of participants indicate that bodies in post-apartheid South Africa rather need to draw from different aspects of the other in order to survive and belong in post-colonial post-apartheid South Africa. The most advantageous position, as intimated from participants' experiences, would be being able to show aspects of whiteness where the context calls for it, yet also being able to show aspects of blackness or the constructed other where the context calls for it. An aspect of nimble-footedness and conviviality is required as no human being is one essentialised identity only. This was particularly exemplified through the experience of Lindelwa (black, female, interview), who despite describing her parents as working class, was able to attend a multiracial school where she could attain aspects of whiteness. While she attended the multiracial school, Lindelwa also continued to live in the township and thus needed the capital and habitus to negotiate the township world as well. There is an awareness for her, that survival is not about essentialism – investing in one essentialised identity only – but rather taking on different aspects that are necessary to negotiate different social worlds and contexts:

I got along with everyone but at the end of the day my friends were still ... not even hey. I did have good white friends, good Indian friends but I could feel ... I don't know if they could, but I could feel that this space was different, when I am hanging out with them, and when I am hanging out with the black kids is different (Lindelwa, black, female, interview).

In the above excerpt by Lindelwa there is a distinct feeling of incompleteness in investing in one essentialised identity. The pursuit of completeness means accepting that incompleteness is ever the state of the social being as it constantly needs to change and adapt according to what is needed in the context at the time; with no one essentialised identity being all that there is to the individual. This sense that essentialist identities are constricting and unsatisfying because one is a

conglomerate of different interests, aspects and capital from different groups and identities is also evident in Rita's experience. Rita, for example, although feeling pressured to be with those who are phenotypically white, realises that the music she enjoys and atmosphere she enjoys is actually that which is associated with the other. Thus, though there are social aspects of her that are associated with whiteness, what was associated with the white identity did not satisfy all aspects of her identity. For this she had to cross the racial boundaries into black spaces (i.e. clubs) in order to express an aspect of her identity she had until then felt was constrained and had had to stifle in terms of the music she enjoyed:

I remember always being so amazed at the stark contrast in the queues for these clubs that were all of one corner away from each other. And amazed at how much better the music was in EQ when I finally gave it a go! (Rita, white, female, interview).

These experiences of bodies not being able to feel fully comfortable and satisfied in being expected to fit into one essentialised identity firstly points to the idea of the body as a vessel that can be filled with different elements often associated with the other *à la* Warnier (1993, 2007a, 2007c, 2007b) and Bourdieu (see Swartz, 1997). Essentialisms therefore are not just a reflection of people's preferences and their identities as was argued by some participants. Rather essentialisms can be argued to have, even when chosen by individuals, to keep the status quo of racial boundaries and racial hierarchisation in place in terms of the wider social significance of individual action. Essentialised boxes, that one is expected to fill due to one's phenotypical features, fail to encapsulate what it means to be human — constantly evolving, borrowing, dropping aspects that one needs according to the context at the time, as shown by the participants' experiences discussed above. The experiences of the participants also point to the relevance of Bourdieu's theory that the process of socialisation allows one to take on capital and habitus that will allow one to have the best possible positioning in the context at the time. This socialisation process has been indicated to not necessarily be a linear process resulting in a complete essentialised identity as shown by excerpts from participants' experiences.

In addition, while Bourdieu argues that if one is on the marginalised or lower aspects of society, they will remain so across various social fields, the data in this thesis revealed that this is not necessarily always the case. In the case of Lindelwa (black, female, interview), for example, her poor working-class family did not necessarily mean that she could only have poor working-class experiences which are located at the uttermost margins of Rhodes University. Rather, her workingclass parents used as much of their economic capital as possible to provide her access to

a multiracial school where she could attain some of the capital associated with whiteness, and thus be less on the margins of the institutional culture of Rhodes University, enabling her to fit better into the historically white institution than other participants who came from the same background.

This is not an isolated case. Mbanzi (black, male, interview) also from a historically black disadvantaged experience should have felt marginalised and alienated at the historically white institution due to his socio-economic background, and phenotype. This was especially the case as he did not have the desired English accent or schooling that would allow the University to bolster its whiteness (see Hunter, 2019). However, despite being part of the marginalised field and lacking white habitus and capital, he nonetheless had access to powerful circles as a member of the SRC (Student Representative Council). The SRC at Rhodes has not been experienced as a political institution since the end of apartheid. Political activism in terms of concerns for racial inequality and social justice – aside from issues of sexuality – was not a popular concern within the SRC in post-apartheid years (Maylam, 2017). Having been part of Rhodes University first as a student from 2003, and then later as a staff member (administrative and academic) between 2013 and 2015, the researcher can also attest to this view of the SRC at Rhodes. However, despite not having the capital associated with whiteness, Mbanzi (black, male interview) was able to gather sufficient support as a black student from a historically black disadvantaged school to get voted into a position in the SRC. It could be argued that he gained a position in the SRC through calling on capital that he had – that associated with coming from a working-class, black historically disadvantaged university to get support from those with similar backgrounds to garner enough support to be voted into a position in the SRC. Once in the SRC, however, he had access and exposure to powerful decision-making circles of the university that few could access. That which was often scorned by the participants who set the dominant culture of Rhodes (i.e. SRC as a political institution) became a means for this former student to carve out a place of belonging and deeper understanding of how the university functioned. While he may not have been the most powerful person in the decision-making circles, the SRC position in relation to other participants from a similar background allowed him to carve out more of a place of belonging and power in comparison to others who come from a similar background. While it is agreed with Bourdieu that one who belongs to a marginalised or lower field often will also hold a similar position of marginality in other fields, the data of this thesis suggests that relativity is important when exploring whiteness.

Bourdieu's theory of habitus and fields, given the data discussed here, indicates that relativity is important when exploring whiteness in the everyday. The power of the hegemony of whiteness

lies partly in being able to award some whiteness; some niche that one can claim as one's own in one's privileging of whiteness; and thus compete to claim that aspect of whiteness which matters most. The hegemonic power of whiteness is even more evident in that each individual in some way needs to find their own particular way of utilising whatever capital is available to them in relation to other to attempt to claim and feel even more at home within the institution.

### **6.3 Section II**

This section of the chapter discusses the various ways in which participants decanted aspects of their own complicity in whiteness. In particular how complicity in whiteness may be limited by decanting aspects of whiteness magically elsewhere.

#### **6.3.1 Privileging of whiteness in academic activities**

The hegemony of whiteness as experienced in terms of not having consciously decided to take part in activities and practices that privilege whiteness is not only in the social field but can be in the classroom. For example, Andrea (white, female, interview) states that she 'found' herself being part of a mostly white classroom:

'you found that you were in a class of mostly white learners and we were mostly lectured by white lecturers, in ... in my varsity career I was only lectured by 2 black staff of which they were foreigners (Andrea, white, female, interview).

The implication here being that without realising it, an invisible power has landed her in a class of mostly white people. With the idea of a racially mixed class as the ideal, being in a mostly white class is therefore expected to be understood as negative rather than positive. The implication here is that the participant is notifying the hearer that she herself finds this to be a negative, and that things could be better if it was a more mixed class – the epitomised ideal of progress from apartheid and colonial segregation. However, playing a numbers game of transformation as has been noted in transformation literature (Maylam, 2017: 272) does little to remove the practices, structures and daily actions in an institutional culture of whiteness. This experience of being affected by an invisible power that simply places one in a situation where whiteness is the norm is also evident in Natalie's statement:

... I cannot recall any [raced stories or experiences]. What I do recall is the silence or absence which in itself says something about the space (Natalie, white, female, interview).

Once again, there is the assumption that no body or entity takes action to ensure the status quo. Without a specific cause for the state of affairs, the acknowledgement of the dominance of whiteness bears the danger of simply being a witness or testimony of white power. In a sense, either doing nothing more than stating the obvious – that whiteness as an identity and ideology is powerful and dominant as argued by Ratele (2007) – or arguably can be interpreted as a white confessional which re-centres whiteness (Applebaum, 2016: 10–11; Milazzo, 2016: 4–11; Scott, 2012: 42–43). The self-evident truth is that whiteness equals power because it is powerful, and powerful because it is white (Leonardo, 2004). In a sense it becomes white is powerful because power is equated with whiteness rather than being part of an identity and ideology created to justify slavery, exploitation, colonialism (Horne, 2017; Ignatiev, 1995; Roediger, 2005), and later apartheid.

### **6.3.2 The invisible hand of prosperity**

The pervasiveness of white hegemony and white privilege thus becomes inexplicable, just the way things are (i.e. natural), or as shall be discussed below the result of powers, circumstances beyond the speakers' control. Participants' acknowledgements and construction of white privilege in the narratives may similarly be explained as 'akin to walking down the street with money being put in your ... pocket without your knowledge' (Leonardo, 2004: 138 on James Scheurich), will or control.

In alignment with Leonardo (2004) and Applebaum (2016) what is of note here is who has placed the money in the pocket? While white privileges are indeed unearned privileges, simply acknowledging this with no active actions to change the status quo, bears the danger of downplaying the myriad active ways in which (Leonardo, 2004: 138) bodies re-centre and keep in place the status quo of the hegemony of whiteness. Using Leonardo's (2004) metaphor of the invisible hand, if one follows the above reasoning bodies simply become benefactors of privileges through no action whatsoever of their own on a daily basis. Given this, it is unsurprising then that some may see affirmative action policies as racist and/or unfair as they perceive that they are being punished for something beyond their control, knowledge or will.

Rather than placing a duty or responsibility to challenge and undermine whiteness, the investment in whiteness allows individuals to fit in as part of the norm, and thus argue that race is not an issue but one primarily of having the relevant capital and habitus only. Raising the issue of institutional culture becomes construed or understood suspiciously as people unfairly playing the race card, as

may be shown by some participants' descriptions of their experiences at the historically white institution:

... there were quite a few other guys who would play the race card to try and get what they want, you know, for their advantage, that's not right man (Thembani, black, male, interview).

... I don't know if you know, people that say if something doesn't go well for them... and this and that. So it is kind of difficult to differentiate a genuine case of racism from someone who is just having a hard time because someone didn't give them a chance or flag or whatever they thought they did deserve at the time ... there are a lot of black guys who feel like they are not being compensated enough or they are not being given enough opportunities like that. In my experience, the things that I found is that, if one, if you put your head down and you work and you show that you are a valuable employee, maybe opportunities will come (Xavier, black, male, interview).

Because I am very aware of how our country and leaders are looking through the lens of race, I am always careful to ask, hang on; there may be other issues that play here (Caleb, black, male, interview)

These above excerpts from various students (black and white) point to how raising the issue of institutional culture may become construed or understood suspiciously as people unfairly playing the race card. This in turn means that a questioning of the speaker's own complicity in whiteness becomes distracted.

It is worth noting here that there were several complaints about experiences of racial bias, discrimination or micro-aggressions. These abounded in the data as they do in the literature. However, the specific purpose of this thesis is to attempt to look beyond the veil of what has predominantly been considered in much of the whiteness studies literature. Not denying racial bias, the dominance of whiteness and that whites do benefit most from it nor for that matter to deny that some whites are aware of how they are complicit in whiteness in varying ways. Rather one of the aims of the thesis is to reconsider those aspects of whiteness studies literature that can simply be understood as whites protecting their privileges only, or blacks simply being victims of racism with little or no agency for survival. As the data in this thesis increasingly suggests,

whiteness is not a zero-sum game of loser and winner only, but relies on degrees of awarding privileges worth pursuing because it is recognised and rewarded.

#### **6.4 Historical white privilege: the gift that keeps on giving**

There is increasingly more black middle class in post-apartheid South Africa (Southall, 2016). For this reason, it can be argued that the issue after apartheid is class rather than race, but structural benefits tied to history that allow children from white parents to continue benefiting from, and in turn reinvesting in whiteness, remain in place. These benefits are not overtly connected to whiteness but rather because the institution was one that previously served whites only, the structural benefits meant to encourage families to attend Rhodes University can be argued to continue to benefit whites. Thus, contrary to statements such as from Andrea and Natalie whiteness needs to be continually invested, practised in the everyday post-apartheid context.

For example, if one's parents are academic or hold other positions of considerable power in the university, this has implications in terms of whether or not their children may access staff rebates. Rhodes alumni who have had a sibling or another family member were once given preferential access to residences that their family member stayed in. This was a question which appeared in the researcher's application papers for studying at Rhodes University as a student. There are also implications in terms of knowing people that are in better positions (which statistically continue to be white in the highest management and academic positions) as personally experienced by the researcher as an academic, student, and supported by literature (see for example Conely, 2000; Lushaba, 2016). There are more opportunities in terms of the people one potentially have as a contact to get into a better school, speak to the Dean or enter the residence one desires, for example (see Lushaba, 2016). In the example provided by Andrea specifically, it makes it more likely that the children of the many white participants in the classroom can one day receive a student rebate for their children because their parents attended the university.

The point here is not that there are no black people in power, or that black and white bodies can claim and benefit to the same degree from the dominance of whiteness. Or some other form of colour blindness. Rather the point is to be aware of the complex, nuanced and at times contradictory way that whiteness clambers to the privileged position as participants compete for survival and the benefits associated with whiteness. There is racialised access to power, authority and therefore concomitant benefits connected to whiteness

## **6.5 Moving beyond local, individualistic or wider social, systemic whiteness**

In simply acknowledging the dominance or privileging of whiteness with no cause, in a sense, centres it as the norm and universal rather than particularised (Nakayama & Krizek, 1995); or at the other extreme, focused on the individual particularised. This points to dichotomised construction of whiteness: either individualistic or universalised (Applebaum, 2016). There are few explorations of how people may construct and work with whiteness with a less dichotomised approach. Speakers may in their confessionals shift from the local/individualistic to the wider social, systematic workings of whiteness in order to attain the best positionality (Applebaum, 2016). The ideal that the reader is often left with is where the two – local, individualistic, and wider social, systematic – are connected in the confessional (Applebaum, 2016); and where this is followed by several material actions that contribute to challenging and changing of the status quo (Milazzo, 2016). Most recently in South Africa, whiteness has turned to the question of land redistribution without compensation and again the issue that remains on the margins in these discussions is how whiteness is not limited to the phenotypical white body only (see Goebel, 2015). The point here is that people will not necessarily choose either the individualistic or the wider social position but that in reality there are constantly shifting uses of both the local, individualistic and the wider social aspect to different degrees. The proportions of each may always be in constant flux, shifting and adopting different proportions of each where deemed necessary by the speaker(s) at the time.

## **6.6 Unconscious whiteness and history**

... from the perspective of a white South African who undoubtedly has perpetuated any prevalent culture of whiteness by virtue of my inherited position of privilege ... I'm likely perpetuating a culture of whiteness despite my best efforts to not do so, and inadvertently reinforcing the notions of racial identity (Malcolm, white, male interview).

... we were able to live, and we were able to actually exist and create an identity for ourselves without having to assimilate or at least assimilate to an extreme extent. Some level of assimilation was definitely there, there is no way you're going to go through Rhodes without assimilating to some [degree] but at least for the rest of us we were able to create a little culture of our own and live a little tough life of our own, in a way (Wanga, male, black, interview).

Despite this positive move of starting to think about what is constructed as normal and unearned in society, it is worth noting that the acknowledgment of whiteness is constructed and understood as being by virtue of the past acting on, and determining, the present. In the case of Malcolm, for example, the acknowledgement that one may be perpetuating whiteness unconsciously is connected to being in an ‘inherited position of privilege’; while for Natalie it is due to previous exposure to diverse environments and experiences. While exposure to different environments and experiences is somewhat helpful for fracturing white solipsism, the issue here is that it is the past that determines the present in ways that are beyond the control of the individual in the speaker’s narrative. This is not necessarily wrong, as history indeed is the reason that the white racial identity was constructed, and continues to affect racial relations today (Horne, 2017). However, the way that history is brought to bear as a causative element in the present implies that no action is being taken today to reproduce and centre whiteness. This is possible when the past or history is understood in a linear manner. The implication is that what is happening now in terms of the prevalence of white power, white domination and white privilege is caused by the past. Since the past has already passed there is nothing to be done to change the continuing effects of the past on the present.

The dissonance from whiteness, even while it affects the person actively, is understood as not being located within the same temporal plane as the individual and is therefore inaccessible. Laney (white, female, interview), for example, describes the effects of whiteness on her life as not being lived, and embodied but rather as existing distantly in the background. This force from a different temporal plane affects the world and the people around her including herself.

I do not think there is a single experience – that a single experience can portray this sense of whiteness that I experienced, but is rather a combination of factors that were being played out in the background. That all lectures and conversations that I experienced were in English and, on the very rare occasion, Afrikaans; that I lived in a residence for two years with 70 other students, the majority of whom were white, and a sense that those around me, while my experiences weren’t actively raced, with race influencing them in the background (Laney, white, female, interview).

While this undoubtedly is her experience of whiteness and is therefore valid and worth taking seriously, it is also worth taking into account that when whiteness is explored as being in the background whiteness also becomes beyond the control and reach of the material body. This

spatial distance between the material world where the body is located and its mind on one hand, and the power of whiteness explained as background on the other implies that never the twain shall meet. While the effects of the power of whiteness can be discerned for example from the privileging of English, from the choice of being around those who look like the speaker, whiteness itself is an elusive force that cannot be engaged.

This experience and construction of the experience of whiteness means that the embodiment of whiteness, the sitting in the uncomfortable place with white complicity as necessary towards developing a more positive identity formation (Applebaum, 2008: 298) is therefore made less likely as the speaker constructs the status quo as beyond any human possibility to control or change.

Framing white privilege, racial inequality and other racialised topics as existing on a different temporal plane thus divests the necessity to take action towards anti-racism work because the focus of responsibility and action (i.e. sources of whiteness) is on a different temporal plane. History, when understood broadly as time-locked past events which affect the present or the location of the material body and its mind, may therefore be blamed for having placed privilege upon the shoulders of the speaker and unconsciously directing his actions beyond his control or knowledge. In a sense, if one is to follow the above reasoning, to instil affirmative action policies and language policies to change the status quo is to fight the effects of the past rather the cause. Thus, affirmative action policies and other means to intervene are understood as unnecessary, unfair or just misguided. The reasoning being that the past cannot be changed, and that to fight the effects of the past which have provided white people with privilege is to do the impossible. Thus, actions of affirmative action are interpreted as reverse racism and unjust. The past is therefore paradoxically locked in the past when affirmative actions are suggested even while the past is invoked as providing white privilege.

### **6.7 We are all responsible**

When the present racial inequality and racial tensions are understood as the effects of the forces of the temporal plane, all people in South Africa are rendered being equally affected by the past. Thus, white people and black people alike are rendered equally subject to forces beyond their control in the narrative. Responsibility for continuing racial separation in socialising and the use of space is for example rendered the fault of all, as Rupert argues.

The nightlife in Grahamstown (specifically the student pubs) struck me as incredibly raced. On any given party night, it was undeniable how segregated various restaurants or nightclubs would be (Dubstep vs Rock and Trap, for example). Yet this was not enforced separation, it felt like some kind of wilful disengagement of each group by the other, which was bizarre. People would just not want to enter each other's spaces (Rupert).

Racial separation becomes the fault or wilful choice of all rather than the product of active racial boundary policing. Racial micro-aggressions and the use of racial epithets – never mind the real possibility of violence in some cases with bouncers absent in the narrative. Part of the reason for this is made possible by associating oppression, discrimination with overtly racialised policies of discrimination or action. With this removed there is a sense that people now have total freedom to do what they want. That is discounting the myriad ways that whiteness and racial inequality are produced and reproduced in society – including for the purposes of this chapter the discursive space. All alienating experiences are robbed of their particularity in regards to access to power.

In describing who is affected by the pressure to assimilate into English culture at Rhodes University, Betthany (white, female, interview) states,

... I know there were people who felt like they needed to use more of an English accent, and I am talking about Afrikaans students, so it is not only black South Africans ... also kids who went to Afrikaans schools and had a bit of a heavier ...

Betthany's response challenges the association of whiteness with dominance and marginalising, and blackness being associated with being oppressed and marginalised in race discourse.<sup>9</sup> The focus shifts from racial inequality and the privileging of whiteness to how all peoples in South Africa have all equally (regardless of race) been affected by race in one way or another. To some degree then, within the narrative, all are rendered equally responsible and culpable within our racialised society. The issue is not who is to blame but rather what is the latent possibility of action within the discourse used. Do the ways of talking about race create a latent need to take action and therefore move a step closer towards anti-racism action? In Betthany's excerpt for example, the use of English as the language of instruction at Rhodes equally marginalises non-English

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<sup>9</sup> A discourse of questioning the norms, values of whiteness, as well white people's economic, social and cultural capital and its role in oppressing black people has been the subject of the #Rhodessowhite and #RhodesMustFall student protests. News coverage of these movements meant the interviewees were aware of the increasing questioning of whiteness in public discourse.

speaking whites, as much as black South Africans. This denies the fact that white South Africans have historically been at tensions to control and rule South Africa to the exclusion of blacks; as well as the fact that Afrikaans was made a compulsory language of instruction during apartheid. This equalising of white and black marginalisation alongside the denial of the history of white domination works to eschew the power held by whites in post-apartheid South Africa. Furthermore, there are many members of the coloured community in South Africa who speak Afrikaans as their first language. Yet it is not the coloured Afrikaans speakers that concern her as she races blackness but not whiteness. Afrikaans in this case is meant to be understood as white rather than including coloured<sup>10</sup> speakers. The utterance is thus meant to some extent to equalise experiences of race. This in turn has the effect of denying the experiences of marginalisation, alienation and exclusion, and eschewing the power of those socialised white in post-apartheid South Africa (Frankenberg, 2004; M. Steyn, 2003; M. Steyn & Foster, 2008). The excerpt racialises even while it attempts to evade race (Frankenberg, 1994). Whiteness is thereby re-centred and protected even while there is an attempt to avoid attention to racial difference. Moreover, racial hierarchies and inequalities are left in place because they are eschewed and distanced from the speaker – thus limiting their own complicity in whiteness.

## **6.8 Nexus of old and new; present and past**

Rather than a strict continuation of the past or completely new production of whiteness, racial inequality and racial separation and the privileging of whiteness are both partly new and partly old.

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Part of the problem is the assumption that one can only take responsibility to act when there is completely untainted free choice. That is, action as choice free from the effects of forces beyond the present temporal plane. Informing the discourse is that people have untainted free choice rather than having a choice within limiting structures (Bourdieu, 1990; Idahosa, 2016; Swartz, 1997). The distanced temporal plane, particularly in terms of the past (including previous experiences), can never be completely separate and removed from the social subject, however. The distanced temporal plane in that sense does not take away human agency – despite the perception that it does. Rather, choices can and are made within the limiting structures of the group locations that history and society have placed the social subject within (Bourdieu, 1990; Idahosa, 2016; Swartz, 1997). These structures, whether racial or otherwise, continue to define

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<sup>10</sup> Coloured is included under the term black throughout the thesis. Here, however, due to the relevance of needing to differentiate between the different historically disadvantaged groups in South Africa as made relevant by the speaker, the term ‘coloured’ is used.

and affect the social subject in the present, mediating but not completely preventing human agency (Bourdieu, 1990; Idahosa, 2016; Swartz, 1997).

## 6.9 Vesseling

The most prevalent means to limit extent of complicity was to focus on individuals to the speaker appeared to hold more whiteness. Extreme individuals and actions do exist; however, it is the construction of a few individuals as holding more whiteness than the participant that is of interest here. In describing what he understands as whiteness, Andrew (white, male, interview) refers: opulent whites, who have attended 'elite' private schools, who get the best girls and generally appear to have the means to set the student culture.

In many ways whiteness is associated with opulence and wealth and even today that still pretty much is the case anyway ... Just like how especially guys and girls who came from elite private schools. They all seemed to act in the same kind of sort of culture ... (Andrew, white, male, interview)

This group of opulent whites also seemed to have the most influence on the student culture as mentioned previously. These were what Andrew referred to as 'jocks' who tended to look

'decent with a vest on, A T-shirt vest in their bright colours, caps backwards, like wear rugby shorts and go out drinking, a lot, very much try and hook up with girls. Very much rah rah, or we will do this ... I was a little bit shy and for the first period of my first year, it cost me a lot of mistakes, all the guys, they ended up getting girlfriends with all the nicest women, met them in that first month at Rhodes ... (Andrew, white, male, interview).

While these 'opulent' whites share social positioning with Andrew due to being phenotypically white, they are constructed as vastly different, distanced and exceptional from himself in his narrative. The implication, due to the focus on those who have more whiteness than him, is that he is less complicit in whiteness due to having less capital and power. Less complicity in whiteness means that one is less likely to be viewed negatively because there are those who hold vastly more whiteness.

This decanting of some whiteness elsewhere is also evident in Bettany's (white, female, interview) discussion of whiteness as being those who not only have that which others aspire to but also as defined by lifestyle that others neither need nor have.

‘When I say whiteness in the culture of whiteness, it is drifting with labels, it is driving an expensive car, it is going to Port Alfred [i.e beach a few kilometres from Grahamstown], for me that is what the culture of whiteness was ... [L]ike everyone wanted a car. You can walk around everywhere, but if you had a car, it was like the white people had the cars and everyone wanted a car.

Despite being white herself, what differentiates her from other whites in Betthany’s narrative is that there were those who were more white than her because of their lifestyle, freedom and mobility. As Grahamstown is a small town where everything is within walking distance, those who have access to cars therefore seem more excessive – wanting and having excessive luxury where none is needed. This distancing between herself and those who have more whiteness is evident when she states specifically states that she doesn’t have a car. Thus, despite being phenotypically white, and having more capital than those from historically disadvantaged backgrounds, for example, the focus of whiteness for her is on those who have excessively more than herself.

Through the focus on those who have more relative to self, there is always going to be someone who is more white, and thus someone who is more worthy of criticism for complicity in whiteness. The issue with this is that if everyone focuses on another who has more whiteness markers than themselves, according to the perception of the speaker, then whiteness will ever be elsewhere. This would mean that whiteness never gets challenged, as no one is ever willing to fully accept that their small role in complicity is all that is needed to allow whiteness to continue to be privileged. This supports the idea that whiteness attains dominance through the reliance on small co-option which can be denied when compared to another. This points to the dominance of whiteness being attained through degrees of whiteness rather than any one person or peoples who have reached the ideal whiteness.

This method of decanting some aspects of one’s complicity in whiteness elsewhere is named by the researcher as *vesseling*<sup>11</sup> (see further Msomi, 2019) . This draws from Warnier’s (1993) concept of the container king. *Vesseling*, as inspired by Warnier’s (1993) conception of the container king, refers to a strategy whereby whiteness is located and constructed in an extreme location or body away from the proximity of the speaker (the vessel or container), thus pre-empting and discouraging the speaker and the hearer from contemplating their own complicity in systemic white privilege and racial inequality. That is, not only viewing the body as a container which can

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<sup>11</sup> A paper was published by the thesis researcher on *vesseling* in the process of analysing the thesis data.

acquire whiteness, but when the context calls for it, also pour out valuable substances (i.e whiteness).

Vesseling highlights how systems of oppression and inequality are reproduced by ordinary individuals who are co-opted into systems and structures of oppression rather than being perpetrated by the monsters and extreme members that are partly exaggerated in imaginations (see Arendt, 1963). The decanting of some whiteness elsewhere is necessary given that access to social goods – especially in the racialised society of South Africa – is connected to being able to prove one's belonging and citizenship.

The aspirational aspect of whiteness is not limited to phenotypical whites, however. This is evident in that the investment in whiteness through choosing the degree at Rhodes University rather than any of the historically black universities in South Africa is not limited to whites only. A degree from one of the more highly rated South African universities such as Rhodes will likely provide more opportunities to access to privilege, opportunity and power. In a world where all compete for better lives, there is often little other choice but to choose what will give one the best outcome. The investment and aspiration for the good life is therefore pursued by both black and white bodies as noted by Sicelo (black, male, interview):

Whiteness is not just expressed in the white student who is unaware of their white privilege, but also the black student who feels (as do many South Africans) that whiteness is a goal that should be aspired to.

For phenotypical whites, there is a need to prove belonging in a country where whiteness in public discourse is associated negatively with oppression and unearned white privilege; while at the same time being recognised and rewarded internationally – especially in the metropole – and amongst other whites. For phenotypical blacks, however, there arguably is a need to explain how black

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bodies can be part of the historically white institution – especially for those who negotiate the institution successfully and comfortably due to white socialisation while also proving that one is still black enough to be South African.

One of the ways in which one can nimbly prove belonging while also being able to invest in whiteness is to, firstly, point to those blacks who have more whiteness than the individual. That is, being able to point to those blacks who, because of the capital, are able to have friendships with whites. Or secondly, in the case of those blacks who are especially closer to whiteness due to the

capital they hold, attempt to point to schooling, socio-economic background, and interests. The racialised nature of access to schooling, socio-economic background and interest is not paid as much interest as it could and should be. Thus, rather than having to explain why and how blacks are able to negotiate the historically white institution, their blackness is downplayed even while it is used to prove that race is not necessarily the reason that some do not feel at home within the institution. The issue, in the narration, simply becomes that those who feel alienated and excluded feel that way because they are immersed in a game where they do not know the rules, nor have the capital to play the game.

Vesseling therefore also points to the importance of having a keen sense of habitus as a South African seeking belonging. Where belonging determines access to social goods, means being able to not only claim whiteness where necessary but in other contexts also limit the extent to which one is white, and thus have reason to belong in post-apartheid South Africa.

#### **6.9.1 Open ended resources, and sites of vesseling**

Rather than being vested with goodwill and blessings, vessels as constructed by the speakers in this study, are receptacles of aspects and associations of whiteness deemed undesirable by the speakers in the new South Africa. While for Andrew this might be excessive wealth, any other forms of capital may also be the focus of the speaker that they deem as exceptional, such as mobility and lightness (see Bashkow, 2006), as the excerpt from Bethany (white, female, interview) indicates in its reference to whiteness as including the means to travel outside of Grahamstown whenever one desires. Whiteness is often associated with the paraphernalia of the good life – access to wealth, good schools, better healthcare and better neighbourhoods (see (Hartigan Jr, 1997; Nyamnjoh & Page, 2002; Twine, 1997), a situation which in a post-apartheid South Africa of still emergent black citizenship and humanity, is one of stark dichotomies in racial terms. Other aspects of whiteness have included the use of the English language, English accent, tastes, preferences and interests. While it was excessive wealth that was used by some of the students in this study, it became increasingly clear that other aspects of social, economic, cultural or symbolic power in varying volume and structure may be used to posit whiteness elsewhere. With each individual pointing to another who has more wealth (or any other signifier of whiteness in South Africa) there is ostensibly no one who can be said to be responsible for whiteness. Since no two people can be said to hold exactly the same amount and composition of wealth (or any other desired resource), each person potentially has the capacity to point to another who has more wealth (or any other undesirable signifier of whiteness).

... it is more dangerous in here, don't get me wrong, I mean I very rarely worry about safety and security but again people get shot in Dublin down the road here, here it is far lower than it is in South Africa on average, but it is not perfect ...

... a lot of the kids are in Australia, India, Canada and the States purely because there is no jobs and that's not something that I have to worry about at all in South Africa, I know that if I went back tomorrow that I could get the job within a month or two in South Africa because there is just there [jobs] in the skilled sector ...

... So everywhere has like again obviously the end quite a good salary across here and are leaving nice area and everything but I mean the weather is horrible and that even a tiny little flat that costs me a small fortune to rent, just because everything is so expensive so lifestyle ... (Beau, white, male, 28)

In comparison to Andrew who focused on wealth, in the excerpt by Beau, who is living in Ireland, it is not economic capital nor other South Africans that are the focus and the resource in vesseling. Going against the grain of findings that white South Africans align themselves with international whiteness, Beau constructs other whites from Europe, Ireland, Australia and New Zealand less positively. Rather than problematising South Africa as many white South Africans do, other more developed states are constructed as having the same or similar problems to South Africa. Aware of the many negative stereotypes that white South Africans have on South Africa, Beau chooses to decant this undesirable aspect of white South Africans elsewhere by locating the problems associated with South Africa as existing equally elsewhere in geographies associated with international whiteness. South Africa, and South African whites are thus less whitely, and possibly less problematic through this decanting of negative stereotypes of white South Africans and social ills of South Africa elsewhere – while not denying the issues of crime and other social ills. The excerpts by Beau also suggest that white South African youth are aware of some of the problematic white discourses of the older white generation such as pointing to corruption, crime and many other social ills as the reason to leave South Africa. The vessel thus becomes other white geographies, and the resource the undesirable trait of white South Africans to critique postdemocratic black led South African society.

As the older generation is often associated with the past of apartheid it could be argued that there is also a desire to leave the past – in older generational talk which constructs South Africa negatively in the past. Much of whiteness studies literature focuses on coming to terms with and negotiating post-apartheid whiteness thus highlighting the dilemma of being phenotypically white African citizens in a post-apartheid and post-colonial society (Abramovitz, 2009; Matthews, 2011; Vice, 2010). Being able to partly decant what is often constructed and perceived as troubling whiteness elsewhere then also allows white South Africans to become post-apartheid white Africans. The new generation who see South Africa more positively become the new whites; different whites. Part of the reason for this may be an encroaching sense that white South Africans as third or fourth generation whites feel more at home in South Africa than they do in white metropolises.

Whiteness, in the discursive strategy of vesseling, as it increasingly becomes apparent, is ever fluid: able to be acquired and used as the participants best see fit to attain the best possible position in the context at the time. As a constructed concept with social aspects, whiteness like a liquid mercury may be poured off elsewhere into other bodies. In as much as whiteness is acquired through socialisation, as the social context changes in a myriad complex ways the construction and use of whiteness similarly requires complexity and flexibility – possible to essentialise when necessary, and fluid and flexible enough to partially pour off elsewhere when necessary. In order to determine how, when and what type and how much of whiteness to acquire and use; or partially pour off in another situation if need be, the participants need to have a keen sense of the rules of expectation; and what the best possible outcome is given the capital that they hold. Media reports about ‘white monopoly capital’, student protests calling for decolonisation and free education for all make it apparent that whiteness has not only been associated with oppression but that postapartheid phenotypically white South Africans must distance themselves from known constructions and ideas of whiteness that went before them. This is what Beau (white, male, interview) and Andrew (white, male, interview) attempt to do in decanting some aspects of whiteness. In both cases, as it is with Betthany who associated whiteness with lightness, movement and aspirationalism – which she clearly states as she does not have a car – whiteness is constructed as being associated with a limited extreme few rather than the ordinary. Yet Bourdieu’s theory of habitus and capital points to socialisation being an ordinary everyday process that all individuals undergo. The result of which, a sense of what the rules and expectations are, including the valued capital, is not limited to an exceptional few but all who have undergone socialisation. Thus despite being socialised white enough to know the value of whiteness, Beau, Andrew, Betthany and many other whites are aware of the value of whiteness in places that recognise and reward whiteness and

the opportunities that come from having the requisite white associated capital and habitus; are also aware of the need to limit to what extent this whiteness is performed outside of places where whiteness is the hegemon such as in public South African discourse.

For black South Africans, the phenotypically black body being able to negotiate a historically white institution is explained to some extent as being the result of class, having the requisite capital and habitus recognised and rewarded within the institution. The narrative thus moves away from the participants' possible complicity in whiteness, that is having invested in social, cultural capital associated with whiteness to get a degree from the relatively prestigious university, rather than one of the less recognised historically black universities. As one of the more highly recognised institutions of South Africa nationally and internationally, it is no wonder that black and white alike are caught in a game of having to recognise that whiteness is associated with access to privileges and opportunities. Hence an investment wherever possible – black and white – in whiteness due to the possible rewards. However, as Nyamnjoh (2016) points out, not all blacks are black enough.

Vesseling also points to how whiteness is a means to negotiate one's own concern as argued by the work of Bashkow (2006). The concern for belonging in South Africa means that whiteness is used in different ways: acquired and displayed when necessary, and poured off as well in order to be too white and thus be seen as not belonging in post-apartheid South Africa.

## **6.10 Conclusion**

This chapter has provided an overview of how the privileging of whiteness was acknowledged by participants in the data. Of importance, aside from the extent to which the privileging of whiteness acknowledged by participants within the institution, was also the extent to which participants acknowledge and manage their own complicity in whiteness.

The chapter argues that although it is encouraging that some participants did acknowledge the dominance of whiteness, there were at the same time attempts to limit the extent to which participants acknowledged their complicity in whiteness, which was achieved through various discursive means. Firstly, through the description of the dominance of whiteness as simply being present without a causative action or element by the speakers and their parents. Thus, any privileges held in whiteness were simply like an invisible hand placing money in the pocket of the speaker. Secondly, where complicity in whiteness was acknowledged there was the use of time, which indirectly and perhaps unconsciously distanced the extent to which the speaker was complicit in privileging whiteness. Lastly there was the discursive strategy of vesseling, which

allowed them to decant some aspects of whiteness to limit the extent to which they may be perceived as being close to whiteness.

The chapter highlighted the following in regard to the conceptual understanding of whiteness. Firstly, that whiteness is like both essence and social construction, and they may operate together as the speaker sees fit. Even while speakers dealt with and recognised that they cannot escape their phenotypical features, whiteness however could be poured off elsewhere via vasseling; constructed differently and ever incomplete when it came to identity and attaining the best possible outcome for the speaker. Lastly, it was worth noting that aside from revealing that identity construction and thus how whiteness is constructed and used is ever incomplete, was the issue that identity construction has important ties to resource access. In the case of this chapter it was pointed out that while whiteness is recognised and rewarded, especially in historically white space, there is also at the same time criticism of whiteness in public South African discourse. Notwithstanding this criticism, aspects of whiteness – opportunity, privilege, wealth – are desired by all: black and white. The issue however is to balance these two interests to get the best outcome for the participants. This nimble-footed dance of belonging that South Africans must negotiate points to the importance of habitus that participants must hold in order to successfully negotiate and navigate worlds that are often constructed as essentialised but, in reality, constantly borrow from each other. The best possible positioning and outcome is through an internalised understanding that the two dichotomised worlds are actually not in reality completely and utterly separate (i.e. habitus in regard to balancing whiteness and blackness to perform belonging discursively). The next chapter analyses whiteness specifically within the context of Rhodes University.

## Chapter VII: Rhodes University as a Liberal Institution: Redefined and Resurrected

Rhodes University provides a space of tolerance, as evidenced by the diverse cultures and races of students found on campus. The university also encourages several activities around social unity amongst different groups of people. I have also never experienced any instances of racial preference (e.g. grades received etc.) with regards to the institutions educational system. So overall I do not feel Rhodes is a raced space (Lael, black, female, interview).

I enjoyed Rhodes and its diversity, I was exposed to a lot of different cultures (Riba, white, female, interview).

### 7.1 Introduction:

In 1902 Cecil John Rhodes died. His extensive estate, however, meant that his legacy of imperialism, and Milner's plans of Anglicisation in order to stem the tide of growing Afrikaner influence in South Africa would revive Rhodes's influence beyond his death. The revival would partly be in the form of the creation of Rhodes University in 1904. Post 1994, Rhodes University, has claimed a history of liberalism, where imperialism and segregation are constructed as being products of the time, and beyond the power of the institution to defy at the time (Buckland & Neville, 2004). This construction of Rhodes as a liberal institution during the state-instituted segregationist years has been refuted by in-depth studies of the institution's history and identity, which show that Rhodes University practised segregation before it was legally necessary to do so (Greyling, 2007; Maylam, 2017). The chapter therefore argues that the construction of a liberal past acts as a foil to play down the extent to which the institution actually supported segregation and racial exclusion for its own ends: to carry out imperialist interests of Anglicisation in a South Africa where Afrikaner power was increasingly growing. This would ultimately lead to its continued existence by appealing to English political and economic giants such as Milner for support (Maylam, 2017).

The institution's construction of its historical identity as liberal is meant to be mostly positive. However, the post-apartheid label of 'liberal' is more negatively viewed today as it is arguably associated with underplaying issues of racialisation (see Maylam, 2017). This chapter argues that the idea of Rhodes as a liberal institution persisted in some participants' stories – negative experiences notwithstanding – post 1994. While indeed Rhodes offered cross-cultural and

interracial interaction, which some participants had not experienced before, this exposure also allowed Rhodes to be more positively constructed as far more liberal and less white than what might have previously been the case. Furthermore, the chapter reveals how the historical identity of Rhodes, which privileged a particular type of whiteness, has to some extent continued post 1994. In some ways the historical identity has remained – resurrected through participants’ descriptions of their experiences post 1994, whilst in other ways due to the changed context of democratic South Africa. The chapter therefore reveals how the historical identity of an institution may continue to survive discursively after having become part of the body present at Rhodes, while in many ways also requiring some reconstruction due to the changed democratic context of South Africa.

The chapter begins with a discussion of the theme of diversity in participants stories. The idea of Rhodes as a diverse institution, which is relatively better than other spaces, is one shared by many participants which allows the institution to be perceived as a race-neutral space and one which is accommodating for all. However, positive experiences of Rhodes are not without contestations, as there are participants for whom the construction of the institution as liberal is a superficial fallacy of inclusion and diversity that prevents the challenging of whiteness. This opens the space to explore the various coping strategies of participants within the historically white institution. With whiteness being privileged on the one hand, within the institution, and whiteness being challenged in public discourse on the other, it is worth considering how participants dealt with these tensions and their effects on either challenging or reinforcing whiteness.

## **7.2 Diversity**

One of the foremost comments from participants about the positive experiences of Rhodes University was that it was a place of cultural diversity, as the introductory excerpts from Lael (black, female, interview) and Riba (white, female, interview) above indicate. There is reference from participants to being exposed to different cultural groups and activities which they felt they could not have experienced elsewhere, either at other institutions in South Africa or in their work life thereafter. This is part of the reason that Rhodes was felt by some to be the best time in their lives. This is further supported by Goddess’s (black, female, interview) statement, which states that Rhodes was a place in which each cultural group, view and perception was engaged with and exchanged.

I ... found that, you know, there were other groups, you know, like that kind of people and Indian people and you know, they all have their own little community going on,

you know and there were the Eastern culture or the white culture wasn't really like enforced by them, it was like the Zulu guys were very proud of their culture and all that. So, from my view point I didn't feel like that was the situation there, you know, I think everybody had an opportunity to express their individuality and their culture (Goddess, black, female, interview).

In support of the claim of cultural diversity, participants felt that there was a niche group for all:

I think no matter what background or culture you come from, that there are so many different people there that you can always find your own niche, you don't have to fit in with the mainstream to have a good time or to have a nice university experience (Desiré, white, female, interview)

The idea that one simply had to find one's niche implied that Rhodes University had no structural roles in privileging whiteness. Where participants felt there was privileging of whiteness, there was also sufficient diversity which permitted students not being compelled to go with the dominant student culture, nor feel the need to fit into or pursue whiteness as the ideal. The idea of all the colours of the rainbow being permitted to be at Rhodes, was seen not only progressive of Rhodes, but to some degree, with Rhodes being a neutral space, became an opportunity to be unified by its diversity. However, the idea of neutrality due to all racial groups being allowed at Rhodes University, does not mean the institutional culture of the university does not privilege whiteness in less overt ways. Simply adding more colours, which still sit in their own specifically allotted, apartheid racial groups, reinforces rather than challenges the privileging of whiteness because there is no questioning of the status quo. The diversity discourse thus may unconsciously maintain the status quo – especially when it is supported by racial boundary policing.

By constructing Rhodes as a place where there is a niche for all, the participants' narratives imply the freedom to choose with little to no pressure, the dominant student and institutional culture associated with whiteness. Despite doing activities which she thinks are associated with black girls, Nothando (black, female, interview) felt it was possible to find one's own identity and place within the institution due there being many cultures at Rhodes, yet she still had a willingness to stay true to what she felt were her interests and culture:

Like, I hang out with black people, I did a lot of activities that are deemed to be black girl activities you know, I didn't play hockey, and I didn't go swimming

and all the other things like, you know and I hung out with my friends were black, I had moved out of res, I didn't have any white, you know so for me, it's different because I sort of pulled myself away from that thing and associated more with things that related to me, yeah.

The implication of personal choice and freedom is also specifically noted in Mpendulo's (black, male, interview) and Shianne's (white, female, interview) advice on how to make the best of the Rhodes experience included respectively below:

You can choose to be academic, or probably you can choose to be ... choose to balance ... So it's quite a happy no pressure environment, like you can literally find yourself at Rhodes or something like that. So yeah, it's a really nice environment.

With regards to advice on fitting in, I would say just be yourself. You will find people who you get along with, maybe for the first time in your life.

This is also supported by Lindelwa's (black, female, interview) statement that despite being an introverted person she had to make a conscious choice 'to be open to people that [she was] not used to, [especially as Rhodes had] people coming from all over the world'.

This implication of freedom of choice was not however felt by all students – especially those with the least amount and combination of capital valued by the institution. Nonetheless, with the diversity discourse in the background, it is possible that raced and racist incidents may be placed at the doorstep of individualistic and isolated incidents, rather than a symptom of the institution's historical identity which continues to affect what it means to be a Rhodes student, as evidenced in Lael's (black, female, interview) statement:

On a whole I do believe Rhodes provides a niche of racial tolerance and any raced experiences I have encountered were primarily due to an individual's and/or group thoughts and ideas about race.

Other factors, such as personality (Aphiwe, black, female, interview), tenacity (Lindelwa, black, female, interview), individual ability or merit (Xavier, black, male, interview), playing the race card (Them bani, black, male, interview) and many more can come into play, rather than exploring how

the privileging of whiteness continues within the institution, or for that matter, how one is coopted into whiteness.

The diversity discourse, which although appearing to be positive, is revealed to also play a role in keeping the status quo in place. Although some students felt that they could make the choice as to which group to affiliate with, due to Rhodes no longer having an overtly discriminatory policy, their construction of Rhodes as a place of diversity opens the door for the privileging of whiteness to rest upon anything but Rhodes itself as an institution. Instead, issues of race may be placed as being the influence of people who do not know any better (Beau, white, male, interview), or as mentioned previously, due to personality, individual ability or merit.

### **7.3 A close-knit community**

The diversity discourse was also peppered with descriptions of appreciation of the small close-knit nature of Rhodes as evidenced for example by Caleb's statement:

when I think about the Rhodes campus, I think about an intimate campus, I think about the chance or the likelihood of seeing someone you know or one or either side of the street when walking between lectures is very likely, where the tutorial groups were of a size big enough to have in-depth and intriguing thought provoking critical discussions concerning the content at hand. Yeah obviously because of the geographical size, close walking distance, that is really how I would describe it ... (Caleb, male, white, interview).

This idea of Rhodes as a close-knit community has the potential to contribute to the silencing of how whiteness, through the co-opting of bodies, either in conscious or unconscious ways into the privileging of whiteness. The idea of the small community implies a friendliness, familiarity and a sense of family that some students have not necessarily felt. Even for those who had some form of cultural capital, felt at some point that they did not always belong or were being purposefully maligned due to race. Such was the experience of Lindelwa (black, female, interview) who, despite having some cultural capital to negotiate Rhodes better than others, at times felt alienated due to experiences of micro-aggression.

[S]ometimes just that walking on the street, when someone sees you, whether they acknowledge your presence or not, they don't have to say hi. I get that in South Africa, but on campus it is there, where some certain races don't see you, it feels like you are not being seen, they are just walking past; and then another

black person passes, they don't say anything but you just see that they saw you  
(Lindelwa, black, female, interview).

Micro-aggressions are small acts of subtle aggression which usually make black people wonder whether what they have experienced is connected to race. Through their small aggressive acts such as a snide remark, a look, or simply being denied friendliness and warmth which appear to be usually to be given to others, can cause feelings of psychological dis-ease (see further Pierce, Carew, Pierce-Gonzalez, Diane & Wills, 1977).

This idea of Rhodes as a close knit community – a little bubble of safety, familiarity and friendliness – separate from the rest of the Grahamstown community and of the rest of South Africa , could be argued as playing a role in marginalising the various ways in which Rhodes was actually a microcosm of the larger South African society in regards to racial segregation in some ways. As some students pointed out, for them the experience of Rhodes was no different than what they expected from the rest of South Africa in regard to racial tensions and segregation. This was the experience of Thabang, (black, male, interview) for example, who states that the alienation, exclusion and racism which he experienced during his stay at Rhodes University 'is what [he had] come to expect from South Africa'.

Thus, the issue of Rhodes as being raced, was simply one example of a larger societal experience that they had become used to, and simply had to survive. Yet the idea of Rhodes as a special place – a different place from the rest of the Grahamstown community and South Africa was, according to Edwin (male, black, interview), not simply a student perception but one which might be held by some residents of Grahamstown – albeit their views being more disparaging than positive in the view of Edwin. He recounts one of his experiences thus:

[T]his one time I went to the police station [and my interaction with the coloured man who I think is one of the police officers there, he asked me what is my experience of South Africa and I told him my experience of South Africa was [fine] and he said OK, was that your experience of South Africa or was that of your experience of Rhodes? Then I was confused for a moment and he said you must be careful not to conflate [the two] because Rhodes is not Grahamstown. Rhodes is not South Africa, South African people may be different, but that's a space where people perhaps have to perform that professionalism, they have to be that way, they have to be academics and professional students, so when you

generalise a South African experience to the Rhodes experience you sort of lose out quite a lot. (Edwin, black, male, interview).

Even though there are students from historically disadvantaged backgrounds at Rhodes who often feel like they do not belong within the institution, none the less, there is still a perception that Rhodes is an ivory tower of privilege and prestige in its own way.

The idea of Rhodes being a small close-knit community is also upheld even when students spilled out into the larger Grahamstown community. While the Rhodes community was spread out to the pubs, clubs, streets, and shopping stores of Grahamstown, there was a sense that the Rhodes community was still in place. It was not the Grahamstown community's identity that was predominant in the participants description as they moved through the grounds of Rhodes, but rather how relations and identity of being a Rhodes student carried on beyond the physical space of the University. The construction of Rhodes as unique was also supported by the student jargon particular to Rhodes, and a heavy drinking culture which revealed a sense of belonging, as indicated by a glance at the Rhodes University website and on Rhodes lingo (see Lingo, 2016).

This points to Bashkow's (2006) argument that social identities such as whiteness are important, not necessarily because of biological essentialism (i.e phenotype), but because of the role they play in dealing with their social concerns. In this case, the chapter argues that the discourses of diversity and the uniqueness of Rhodes all play a role in continuing to construct of Rhodes as a liberal institution.

#### **7.4 The ivory tower of Rhodes University**

The construction of Rhodes as a small close-knit community implies exclusivity rather than inclusivity through the activities that are celebrated as part of the Rhodes student culture. As students from disadvantaged background often struggle to even have sufficient means to make ends meet, never mind drinking, this not an inclusive identity of Rhodes. Rather, arguably, activities that are associated with whiteness, such as certain particular sports, are perceived to be more celebrated and are associated with whiteness than are other groups of South Africa. Rugby, swimming, and hockey are perceived as being more prominent and are therefore celebrated extracurricular activities as opposed to other sports such as soccer for example. The type of music chosen for the orientation activities was perceived as being more white than black, or for that

matter, cross cultural. Furthermore, sports events such as Triversity<sup>12</sup> which includes at least three universities competing in sports against each other, was more celebrated and considered more worthy of attending when it was held at Rhodes, rather than at the other historically black universities such as Fort Hare and Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University (Lingo, 2016; News24, 2004). Participants reported that the sports activities generally considered to be worth attending were rugby especially, whilst soccer was perceived as less supported or mentioned in the excitement of the tournament. This can also be affirmed by the researcher of this thesis who was a student at Rhodes between 2003 and 2016. In addition, boat-races held in Port Alfred every year tended to be perceived as a more important topic of conversation, and worthy of attendance rather than any other activities – especially in relation to soccer which has been more identified with blackness in South Africa. Attending boat-races not only requires funds, or relatively wealthy social networks in order to travel to port Alfred, but also funds for accommodation and the heavy drinking that takes place over the boat-racing weekend. Thus, it is no wonder that events that are supposed to be a welcoming, orientation and belonging for all – especially events such as Triversity, which are supposed to encourage engagement with some of historically black universities in the Eastern Cape, are actually perceived and experienced as white events by some. The historical identity of Rhodes associated with white English manliness, continues within the sports that are perceived as celebrated: rugby, primarily followed in some cases by hockey and the boat-races. Thus, white masculinity associated with sports of strength and monetary exclusion, continue to re-inscribe a white, English, middle class identity of Rhodes, as being more dominant and ideal rather than any other.

One of the most critical issues of contention raised by students post 1994, was the importance of economic capital as a Rhodes student. Long before the 2016 student protests of #FeesMustFall, students at Rhodes were raising the issue of how insensitive the university was to the plight of students from disadvantaged or working-class backgrounds who could not:

- 1) Afford the minimum initial payment (MIP): a lump sum of half the student total fees to be paid at the beginning of the academic year.

- 
- 2) Pay for accommodation or for a ticket home during the academic holidays – particularly during the academic year

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<sup>12</sup> Now called Intervarsity.

Aside from issues of the curriculum, and naming of meals (normal versus African; Halaal – implying the abnormality of the other), participants raised how the university and other students who could afford the MIP and vacation accommodation were insensitive to their plight. While the university would later on have a rich community engagement programme, there was a feeling by many students that the expectation that the MIP and accommodation cost was indicative of for whom exactly the institution was built. Although there may today be black students whose parents can afford the MIP and accommodation fees, the lack of structural support for these cases before the 2016 #FeesMustFall protests sent the message to students that it was middle class to wealthy students for whom Rhodes was built. The small number who can afford the MIP and accommodation fees is not representative of the larger South African society, but rather of the small elite. The motto ‘Where Leaders Learn’ thus, was experienced as a place for those who have the economic means already (middle class and above), rather than a place for growing and nurturing new leaders and representatives of the South African society and the realities and challenges that it faces. The issue of the missing middle whose parents earn too much to be considered for financial aid, but not enough to easily pay MIP and accommodation.

This affirms that Rhodes – at least financially and lifestyle wise – needs to be more conscious of the challenges faced by South African society, and thus its students. Until the #FeesMustFall movement of 2016, the accusations of elitism of Rhodes have generally fallen on deaf ears. While some concessions were made in 2016, and there are discussions that Rhodes has taken on more students from disadvantaged backgrounds than ever before, it remains to be seen however, how this has affected issues such as MIP and accommodation fees in the long run – especially for the missing middle. Although matters might have changed, participants experiences and descriptions are still pertinent in providing a means to understanding how Rhodes in some ways could be reinscribed as a English, middle class university for the few, even though the ways in which to do this may not remain exactly the same, as in the apartheid and colonial years, where exclusion and elitism were overtly racist and discriminatory.

The understanding of middle class in particular, bears thinking about in a more nuanced manner post 1994 in order to have a better understanding of the socio-economic realities and challenges of South African society. This in turn, will potentially allow more nuanced and informed solutions for the future in regards to financial means and inclusion as pointed out by authors concerning the middle class in Africa (see Melber, 2016) – the pressures of competition and capitalism for higher education institutions notwithstanding (Hunter, 2019).

## 7.5 Comparison

The degree of racism in RU, if any, where so insignificant compared to the extreme level here in Rustenburg. For that reason, if there was such a space maybe I was not in a position to see it as my radar was set to detect high level only (Thabang, black, interview).

Things would have been very different at an 'Afrikaans' university. The split in languages of communication would have divided people into factions (Gvaino, black, male, interview).

Rhodes is not, as compared to other institutions, you know, when it comes to the culture of whiteness, it's quite different. For example, compared to UCT and compared to WITS, it's quite different ... Well, you know, my experience so far, you know, let me just put it this way first, let me say Rhodes is one of the best universities in my experience, because everything is good ... [F]irst Rhodes is a small institution, as compared to for example, UCT, WITS university, University of Pretoria, so if I can compare to UCT and UP and WITS as well, Rhodes is very welcoming and the reason being, you know, it's a small institution, everyone knows everyone and you get to interact with everyone (Sabelo, black, male interview).

However, for some participants, the description and comparison of Rhodes University as a liberal university is not something that is necessarily positive. Liberal, in the more negative experiences of Rhodes university is synonymous with superficial engagement with race, as was Edwin's experience as detailed in the previous chapter. There is a sense that engagement around race is carefully controlled to avoid an in-depth analysis, reflection and discussion about race (Edwin, black, male). This careful management is also supported by Josie's (white, female, interview) experience of classroom discussions, where some felt they could not contribute to race discussion of their phenotype:

We studied Steve Biko's I write what I like I what was either third year or honours year. In the classroom the discussion turned to who could understand what Biko meant. This became very heated, and I often felt that I didn't have the right to have an opinion.

For participants, this careful management and control of race discussions and engagement is not only viewed as a means of gatekeeping engagement, but arguably also potentially keeps the status quo in place.

### **7.6 Gendered aspects of Rhodes University**

Overtly offensive practices such as Founder Days are no longer celebrated at Rhodes. However, there are still practices and activities which some participants found to be problematic. In particular, there was a sense for some that white wealthy heterosexual males predominantly contributed to the Rhodes student culture. A gendered experience of Rhodes University is apparent in the competition for the ideal sexual partner. In the case of males, this has meant competition for the 'nicest girls' (Andrew, white, male, interview). The standard of beauty for the ideal female partner has been synonymous with whiteness. Black women who have been socialised white may be extended some white privileges, such as being seen as different and better than black women who have not been socialised white. However, this sense of being extended some white privileges (i.e. be able to have white friends) is however limited when it comes to the standard of beauty. Despite the extension of white privileges, there was a stark reminder that one was simply not white enough due to phenotype. Thus, although close friendship could be formed across racial lines, this did not preclude the possibility of experiencing exclusion when it came to choosing sexual partners. As phenotypical whiteness is the ideal beauty standard, those who are not phenotypically white would be reminded of their place in the racial hierarchy in terms of phenotype.

Not all sexual relationships were bound by phenotypical essence. Sexual relations did occur across the racial boundary. However, there was a sense from participants that this was the exception rather than the norm. Moreover, these sexual relationships held in common a similar socioeconomic background and or social aspects associated with whiteness, as was Peter's (black, male, interview) experience. Thus, aspects associated with whiteness were the common ground upon which these cross-racial relationships occurred.

### **7.7 Coping strategies**

Survival for people swimming against the tide in such an environment needs people who are very much aware of the culture, who purpose and are determined and made up their minds that no matter what it takes, they will be the few that will walk away obtained what they wanted (Sandile, black, male, interview).

In order to cope with the pressure of the privileging of whiteness at Rhodes University, especially for those from historically disadvantaged backgrounds, participants adopted a variety of coping strategies. One of the first coping mechanisms is some degree of acculturation. That is, coming to terms with the fact that in order to successfully negotiate and navigate Rhodes requires that one be able to use the aspects associated with whiteness. This may include switching immediately to English as soon one gets to Rhodes as Wanga (black, male, interview) says he did:

if you don't assimilate and I think a part of me did, where you realise you're a fish out of water and when at Rhodes you need to start doing what the Romans do.

And where needs must, acquire new aspects such as speaking English with the twang (Edwin, black, male, interview) in order to fit in better: '[Y]ou pick it up like many black kids feel as though they need to twang in order for them to fit in maybe'. Twang in this instance refers to emulating a middle-class English accent. For some participants however, such as Wanga (black, male, interview) the best means of survival required withdrawing from the pursuing of trying to fit in, but rather finding those who similarly felt alienated and excluded, and relying on those networks of support:

I realised quite early that the environment was quite harsh and quite violent ..., not physical really, but [I] ... wasn't the typical person they wanted them to be and with that I became OK with it very early ... your first point of call wouldn't be house com, because house com is a representative or they won't understand the issue you have, your first point of call would be either the older black students who have been there a while or at a later stage you'd be that former black student that the other students would come to with their issues. So, if that wasn't it your point of call would be to the dining hall and have a chat with a group of black students who would sit by themselves. Ja, so essentially you found that black students, especially in founders, had to create their own little structures that they felt comfortable in, their own little structure that sort of assisted them to cope with the environment.

This latter group of students would not necessarily have to assimilate as much into Rhodes, as they felt they could not simply fit in, but rather relied on their own support structures. Thus,

whiteness on the one hand, was resisted because assimilation was not the first port of call for survival. Yet at the same whiteness was reinforced as participants did not feel that they could challenge whiteness directly, but rather had to form their own networks of support.

## 7.8 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the myriad ways in which the historical identity of Rhodes University has been re-inscribed through the ways that participants described their experiences of the institution. The participants' descriptions of their experiences suggest that although the ways in which whiteness may be privileged and re-inscribed post 1994 may change, there are also some elements that still resonate with the past. This includes the preference for a middle-class English lifestyle, and other aspects associated with class and race. Rhodes was specifically constructed as unique, exclusive and separated from the rest of the community and South Africa. This was possible through the jargon and activities particular to Rhodes that allow a sense of community past the geographical boundaries of the institution.

Yet, those who were part of the elite (the leaders of tomorrow), were no longer overtly raced but rather partly determined by financial means. Thus, even black bodies that have the financial means could be included. However, as has been pointed out in regards to middle classness in Africa, participants' experiences also supported insights such as that by Melber (2016), that the idea of the middle class in Africa needs to be studied in more depth – particularly when it comes to the missing middle who are considered to earn too much for financial aid but too little to easily afford expenses such as MIP and accommodation fees. Yet, despite this need for deeper nuance, what participants' experiences pointed to was Rhodes as a place where cultural capital, social and economic capital continue to be paramount. Thus, participants must successfully navigate the dominant student culture of the institution, *à la* Bourdieu's concepts of game field and capital.

In addition, the chapter also revealed the different ways in which students constructed Rhodes university was both reinforced and challenged whiteness at the same time.

## Chapter VIII: Conclusion

### 8.1 Introduction

This thesis set out to understand how and why institutional cultures of whiteness continue to dominate students' experiences of historically white institutions despite both the demographics of the student body and the policies of these institutions being geared towards inclusion and change post-1994 South Africa. Rhodes University, which was the site of study for the thesis, for example, had over 60% per cent black students when interviews were conducted between 2014 and 2015. Yet despite this, the issue of continuing privileging of whiteness would be raised nationally by student protests of the RhodesMustFall movement. These experiences had not only long been affirmed by a national analysis of institutional cultures of south Africa's higher education institutions, but the student protests of 2015 and 2016 have continued to spark conversations around the need for challenging and changing the privileging of whiteness for a more Africanrelevant education. In addition, both the protests and national survey found that students' experiences of alienation and exclusion because of the privileging of whiteness occur at the everyday level as students go about their business.

Discourse (that is discourse as in everyday talk plus larger societal factors such as structural forces) has long been argued to play not only a significant role in constructing and reconstructing the world around us, but also of doing critical work such as alienating, blaming and excluding.

Whiteness studies have also revealed that actors are not always aware of how the way they talk (discursive strategies), including relaying experiences, may have larger social implications. This is particularly important in the post-1995 period where whiteness is no longer legally supported and defined. Given the many aforementioned factors that continue to contribute to students' experiences of alienation and exclusion, the thesis therefore set out to answer the research question: 'What discursive strategies do Rhodes University students use in describing their raced experiences, and whether these discursive strategies either challenge or reinforce a culture of whiteness.'

### 8.2 Findings

In order to answer the research question, the thesis drew primarily from Gee's discourse analysis work, to analyse interviews conducted with former Rhodes students (referred to as participants) who had been asked to share any raced experiences of Rhodes University. Where relevant, this was also supported by the thesis researcher's own raced student experiences of Rhodes University she had attended between 2003 and 2016. Thus, the thesis drew some inspiration at times on autoethnography as well. It is worth reiterating here that each institution has its own institutional

culture and identity informed by history and context. Furthermore, discursive strategies are never the same but ever shifting as context shifts, and identity shifts. Nonetheless, the findings of this thesis have implications to better understanding why these shifts occur. Details as to how and why whiteness has ever-shifting boundaries is not only relevant to one specific locale. As the privileging of whiteness is still an issue in other historically white institutions as proved by continued discussions about the need for decolonisation of African institutions, the findings of this thesis also arguably have relevance beyond Rhodes University alone – without necessarily ignoring Rhodes' specific institutional identity and construction of whiteness.

### **8.3.1 Chapter V findings summary**

The first analysis chapter (chapter five) revealed that participants' different ways of understanding the term 'raced' was not directly linked to race. Out of a total of 58 interviews, 23 participants answered in the affirmative that they had a raced experience of Rhodes University. Of these 23 who answered in the affirmative, 14 were black and 9 were white. Participants who stated that they had not had a raced experience at the institution numbered 12. Of these participants who claimed to have not had a raced experience of the institution, 10 were black and 2 were white. The number of participants whose answers were ambivalent were found to be 23. Of these ambivalent responses, 11 were from black participants and 12 were from white participants.

### **8.3.2 Chapter's contribution to whiteness studies and answering the research question**

Chapter five's findings are contrary to the expectation that people that hold the same position in the constructed racial hierarchy would necessarily hold similar views. Rather it was the capital that people held that seemed to play the most significant role that affected people's views and experiences of Rhodes. In other words, it appeared that those that held similar types and combinations of capital had similar experiences and views of Rhodes University. This highlighted how it was a combination of capital: cultural, economic and social that affected how comfortably one was able to negotiate and navigate Rhodes University. There is literature which is increasingly arguing that economic capital rather than race is becoming more important in South Africa (see Seekings, 2008, for example). However, the thesis finds that the focus on schooling in participants' narratives challenges works that argue that economic capital alone is most important post 1994. Not only is the right amount and combination of cultural and social capital also relevant to how race is constructed, used and negotiated but race is still relevant in terms of racialisation of capital.

The contribution of the thesis to whiteness studies lies, on the one hand, agreeing with works such as Seekings (2008) which argues that who owns capital post 1994 is no longer a foregone

conclusion tied to phenotype. However, the thesis, on the other hand, argues that the racialisation of capital as well as the importance of type and combination of capital valued at Rhodes continue to make race a relevant factor affecting how bodies are expected to act. This supports arguments such as that suggested by Twine (1997) and Goebel (2015) that bodies, regardless of phenotype, may acquire whatever capital that is useful and necessary to attain the best possible outcome. However, this does not preclude the importance of racialisation of the acquired capital. Thus, post 1994 South Africans may no longer construct and use race in the crude heavy-handed manner of apartheid and colonialism, but nonetheless race continues to be relevant and worth investing in. The thesis's new contribution in this sense is to point out how race – including whiteness – is increasingly no longer the purview of whites. An oppositional focus in whiteness studies where the white body, on one hand, is only studied as the dominant group and, on the other hand, blackness being primarily synonymous with marginalisation only needs to be reconsidered.

The chapter therefore also highlighted the possibility of constant improvisation when it comes to the boundaries and use of whiteness as it reveals that it is due to competition for social goods that whiteness is constructed and reconstructed. As the context changes, what is valued in regards to whiteness may shift not only in terms of the social aspects, but potentially offers hope for whiteness being stretched beyond phenotype in the future – especially in a country where the aspects of whiteness are no longer the purview of whites only. Importantly this chapter also pointed to how bodies may be socialised one way or another. Yet this socialisation and improvisation process is never complete and stable as further supported by the chapter that followed. It also pointed to degrees of feeling at home, alienated and excluded as informed by capital that one holds rather than it being a zero-sum game or winner and loser only.

#### **8.4.1 Chapter VI findings summary**

The second analysis chapter focused on the degree to which participants acknowledged the privileging of whiteness, and their own complicity in whiteness. The chapter argued that participants had sufficient self-reflexivity to know they cannot avoid their own complicity in whiteness. However, participants at the same time sought to limit the extent to which they are complicit in whiteness in myriad ways. Using discursive strategies such as vesseling this pointed out how whiteness may be acquired, lost and decanted elsewhere as a means to limit complicity in whiteness.

#### **8.4.2 Chapter's contribution to whiteness studies and answering the research question**

Racial construction and use do not occur in a vacuum. Often there may be not only capital and discourse at the local level (i.e Rhodes University in this case) but also larger Discourses

(with a capital D) that appear to hold different capital. Participants need to be savvy enough to know that they are expected to negotiate and balance both worlds in the pursuit of the best outcome. Thus, investment in capital valued in one space only is not sufficient, but rather incompleteness and conviviality are the best means to survive having to nimbly balance acquisition valued in different worlds, in order to attain the best outcome for self.

As aspects associated with whiteness such as wealth, privilege and opportunity still continue to be valued in society, it is no wonder that many continue to buy into and invest in whiteness – even when it appears to be contrary to their positionality as part of a particular phenotypical group. As whiteness offers access to privilege, opportunity and wealth, and its aforementioned aspects are still greatly valued, there is little choice – even for those who are constructed as black – but to buy into whiteness in order to survive where whiteness is predominantly privileged. The effect of being stuck in this dichotomy was that whiteness was found to be both challenged and reinforced in the ways that participants acknowledged the privileging of whiteness.

### **8.5.1 Chapter VII findings summary**

The idea of Rhodes as liberal institution has largely remained in place post 1994 despite it being well established by historical study that this was not the case in reality (see Greyling, 2007; Maylam, 2005, 2017). The liberal identity continues to be produced through discursive moves such as the diversity discourse, comparison and ways that students dealt with the pressures of the privileging of whiteness within the institution. Themes such as Rhodes being a place of exclusivity, elitism and uniqueness where a specific type of whiteness – English middle-class – was also bought to the fore.

### **8.5.2 Chapter's contribution to whiteness studies and answering the research question**

The discursive moves and themes not only showed that each institution has its own particular historical identity which continues to affect bodies in the present, but that the historical identity is also co-produced discursively by participants – albeit not necessarily consciously. Thus, whiteness cannot be studied as being tied to specific types of bodies separated into dominant and marginal on the basis of phenotype, as has traditionally been the case. Rather it was revealed that whiteness needs to be studied methodologically and conceptually as an inter-relational social identity which relies on co-production across the racial lines – even while some benefit more from whiteness than others. This is one of the most key new contributions made by this thesis to whiteness studies: highlighting the need to move away from zero-sum games drawn along predominantly phenotypical when studying whiteness. Rather, the thesis argues that there is greater need to study

whiteness by drawing both from white and black bodies as both are co-opted into and construct whiteness in various ways. The themes and discursive strategies in participants' narratives also had the effect of both challenging whiteness and, at the very same time, to reinforce whiteness. This helped to partly answer the thesis question in regard to the role which participants' narratives play in either challenging or reinforcing a culture of whiteness. Rather than being a question of either/or, the answer to this question seemed to be more complex – both challenging and reinforcing whiteness at the same time. Neither being eradicated nor gaining more ground, but rather remaining firmly in place. Even as the boundaries of whiteness are always shifting and achieving more nuance, it became more apparent through this study how whiteness also retained its power and worth – even within a society where phenotypical whites are the minority. Although there are many studies showcasing the nuances of whiteness, and in many ways how whiteness still remains dominant – this thesis contributes to whiteness studies by showing how both nuance and remaining are achieved at the same time across the racial boundary.

The seventh chapter argued that the construction of a liberal past acts as a foil to play down the extent to which the institution actually supported segregation and racial exclusion for its own ends: to carry out imperialist interests of Anglicisation in a South Africa where Afrikaner power was increasingly growing; and ultimately ensure its continued existence by appealing to English political and economic giants such as Milner for support (Maylam, 2017). Most importantly however, for the sake of this thesis these revelations are in agreement with Bashkow's (2006) argument that the importance and power of whiteness do not rely on phenotype necessarily. Rather race – including whiteness – is important because of the usefulness of this social identity as means of negotiating and engaging the individual and society's key concerns: that of proving belonging and citizenship. How one negotiates the racial landscape needs to be nimbly handled in order to attain the best outcome for self: balancing both within the larger South African society as well as within spaces that privilege whiteness amongst many other fields and spaces. Another contribution to the whiteness studies is how the local and nuanced are at the same time connected to the larger social Discourses. As the two (discourse and Discourse) are at work together at the same time, whiteness studies work needs to explore the nexus between the two rather than drawing insights from one or the other. This is important as many studies tend to draw on one rather than the other as highlighted in the conceptual chapter three.

## **8.6 Limitations of the study**

This thesis draws from former Rhodes students raced experiences to explore not only the discursive strategies the use in describing their raced experiences, but also the work that such

discursive strategies may play in either reinforcing and/ or challenging whiteness. The insights from these interviews revealed that new ways of approaching and studying whiteness are necessary – especially in a country where whiteness is no longer legally supported and protected. The new conceptual and methodological approaches revealed in this thesis are not necessarily bound to locale or time – even while they are nuanced. The implications of the study suggest application and relevance beyond the time that the study was undertaken as whiteness continues to be an issue in higher education institutions well after the study began. Nonetheless, to further deepen and test the conceptual and methodological insights offered by this it would be useful to also draw from students experiences well after the 2015–2016 student protests. This would be worth considering especially because informal conversations with lecturers and town residences suggested that there has been a shift towards including more students from historically disadvantaged backgrounds. While the thesis reveals how whiteness attains dominance amongst contestations and contradictions, it would be of interest to further explore how, if at all, the student culture has changed in more recent years. Thus, a comparative analysis is suggested for the future to further enrich the ever-changing fluidity and improvisation of whiteness.

A concern for someone who reads some participants’ raced experiences is that some participants drew from their experiences before registering at Rhodes. This raises the possibility of two questions by the reader: Firstly, whether aspects of the stories that connect to life experiences before being registered at Rhodes really can be argued to be part of the institutional culture of Rhodes. Secondly, this may also raise the question whether an analysis of life stories rather than discourse analysis would have been more appropriate.

It is acknowledged that a simple differentiation between what happened before Rhodes and after being registered at the institution may indeed be a cause of confusion. Human life, and their experiences are not easily differentiated, and understood within a vacuum. Rather, descriptions and people’s understanding of an event or experience are shaped by what has happened before in their lives as pointed out by Bourdieu<sup>13</sup>, and Gee<sup>14</sup>. In agreement with Gee this thesis took the position that history, that is, what has happened before (including becoming race conscious before attending Rhodes for example) is critical to contextualising, and hypothesising the meaning and significance of a speakers’ utterances. The thesis also takes Gee’s position that no hypothesis or reading of data is wholly beyond an alternative reading. This is especially a possibility given that pure objectivity does not exist, and thus the researcher and reader’s positionality may influence

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<sup>13</sup> See chapter three

<sup>14</sup> See chapter four

hypothesizing despite the best attempts. Rather, the responsibility of the researcher in furthering knowledge is to be as transparent as possible in their positionality and methodology, while also remaining open to the possibility of others building upon or even theorising differently to improve the area study. Thus, all research work although bearing responsibility to be as comprehensive and coherent as possible is also at the same time to be viewed as exploration. Otherwise no research would ever be done for always fearing that another may theorise a little differently or used a slightly different research method. The responsibility of the researcher is to be able to show the logical steps as to how and why the research has taken the steps it has, while being open to the possibility that others' contributions may push one's work further even more (Gee, 2011).

Regarding the use of discourse analysis rather than an exploration of life experiences it is once again noted that one's life experiences within society shape how speakers construct and make sense of what they have seen and experienced. Thus, life experiences, as covered extensively by Bourdieu's concept of habitus discussed in chapter four cannot be separated from how a speaker understands and constructs their utterances. Gee's (2011, 1999) discourse analysis work also takes into account not only what is said at that moment (discourse) but also extra-discursive 'stuff' (Discourse) that may influence how the utterance may be understood. This specific method of discourse analysis was chosen because it recognised the complexity of human life, human experiences and more importantly as a result allowing the researcher to bring to bear many other extra-discursive 'stuff' that may not necessarily be traditionally be seen as relevant to a discourse analysis.

Similarly, concerns about differentiation between discourse and structure, as noted by Gee (1999) are connected cyclically. Repeated practices, norms and ways of talking become part of the way that things are done. This cyclical connection is the link between discourse and structure. The two are again not mutually exclusive but are connected. Furthermore agents, that is participants are those that make utterances that are analysed for hypothesis as to what is happening for the phenomenon being studied.

To conclude, this chapter has laid out once again the purpose of this thesis, what it set out to do, and most importantly how the research question was answered. A summary of the findings of each analysis chapter was recounted, and most importantly how each of these contributed to answering the research question, as well their individual new contribution to whiteness studies. Overall, the thesis argues that whiteness, given the shifting contexts and ever- shifting boundaries, has no reason not to be redefined. Whiteness in post-colonial post-apartheid South Africa, where

whiteness is not legally defined and protected, has no reason not to be redefined. In practice, the analysis chapters have shown that the boundaries of whiteness are already being redefined even as some aspects remain the same. What is of importance despite this is the revelation that whiteness is not a zero-sum game predetermined by phenotype. Rather, as the boundaries of whiteness are always subject to shifting and being improved upon, whiteness is a game of gradations. Each individual arguably proving that he or she has more whiteness than the other because whiteness is associated with access to privilege, opportunity and power.

For this reason, the thesis argues that whiteness studies should increasingly move away from studying whiteness in an oppositional approach: that of phenotypical whites on the one hand as the dominant group, and blacks as the marginal group on the other. Although works such as that of Roediger (2006) and Kolchin (2002) have long called for drawing on both phenotypically white voices and black voices in studying whiteness, there is little work that has taken this to the extent of methodologically and conceptually drawing from both voices in studying whiteness, using both white and black experiences in order to understand how these two may be implicated and co-opted into whiteness. As this is already happening in practice, there is little reason to not study whiteness in this manner. Further, rather than whiteness being special and overwhelmingly powerful, the idea of whiteness being about degrees also takes seriously that whiteness is a social construct and therefore not bound to specific types of bodies. Rather, a large part of whiteness is revealed as being liable to be acquired, lost and decanted across racial lines as suggested by the work of Twine. However, unlike Twine's (1997) study, the data for this thesis show that in reality the concept of whiteness has reached a point where whiteness needs to be studied seriously as it is adopted by, and into, both white and black bodies. As racial identities are no longer legally supported, and therefore no longer necessarily superficially made stable, there is space to study and better understand whiteness without being bound to specific types of bodies. In a country where race is a critical aspect of negotiating the everyday, the redefinition and new approach to whiteness potentially opens up the possibility of no longer needing to be bounded by race. Whiteness studied in this way opens up the possibility of hope rather than a consuming sense of being overwhelmed by its dominance. If there are fissures as this thesis has shown and argued, there is room to move away from the current understanding and approach to whiteness, and increasingly more of a move away from phenotype as binding but rather as one of many means to claim more social goods.

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## Appendix I

### Consent to Participate in an Interview

#### Experiences of Rhodes University's Institutional Culture of Whiteness

You have been asked to participate in a research study conducted by Zuziwe Msomi ([zuziwemsomi@gmail.com](mailto:zuziwemsomi@gmail.com)) (071 386 7176) from the Department of Political and International Relations at Rhodes University. The purpose of the study is to typify the characteristics, materials, practices of Rhodes University culture through people's experiences of Rhodes University. As the higher education literature increasingly speaks of South African universities having a culture of whiteness the research attempts to get at what exactly is meant by the term 'cultures of whiteness' and what do they look like if they have been found to exist at Rhodes.

- All information and or your contribution to the research will be kept anonymous.
- The research will only be used for this PhD project and any publications that flow from it for academic research purposes only.

Please feel free to ask any questions or to contact the researcher on any point you may want to discuss with the researcher in regards to the project.

The researcher, Zuziwe Msomi can be contacted at: ([zuziwemsomi@gmail.com](mailto:zuziwemsomi@gmail.com)) (Cell: 0737543556) with any questions or concerns or my Supervisor: Professor Louise Vincent, [louise.dorothy.vincent@ru.ac.za](mailto:louise.dorothy.vincent@ru.ac.za) (27 (0) 46 603 8353). Department of Political & International Studies, Rhodes University.

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature (Participant): \_\_\_\_\_ Please sign rather than type as signed permission is needed to use the responses.

## Appendix II

### Rhodes University Institutional Culture of Whiteness Questionnaire:

Please could you start by saying a bit about yourself - I am asking for this information because I want to make sure that I get views from as diverse a group of people as possible.

1. Name? [Click here to enter text.](#)
2. Age? [Click here to enter text.](#)
3. Nationality? [Click here to enter text.](#)
4. Where did you grow up? [Click here to enter text.](#)
5. Where do you work and live now? [Click here to enter text.](#)
6. Home language? [Click here to enter text.](#)
7. What did you major in at Rhodes? [Click here to enter text.](#)

South African higher education institutions are being increasingly described as having a culture of whiteness. The term 'culture' has been taken to refer to the 'way things are done', and the sense of feeling at home within the institutional space. Through the anecdotes and stories of black staff and students who report feelings of alienation and being unwelcome in some South African higher education institutions we know that some people have experienced a culture of whiteness at some South African universities.

The following questions are aimed at getting at your experience of Rhodes University. Your experiences and thoughts on the topic are very much welcomed and appreciated so please feel free to write as much as you like with as much detail as is comfortable for you to share.

Was your experience of Rhodes University raced in any way? Please describe or discuss in what way.

[Click here to enter text.](#)

Are there particular stories or experiences which stand out in your memory as being raced during your time at Rhodes University? Please tell me about it/them.

[Click here to enter text.](#)

Are there any other aspects of Rhodes which you found raced or which made you feel Rhodes was a raced space?

[Click here to enter text.](#)

If you did not have a raced experience of Rhodes University how would you describe your experience of Rhodes?

[Click here to enter text.](#)

If you did not have a raced experience of Rhodes what story or experience typifies your experience of Rhodes University?

[Click here to enter text.](#)

Some of the literature on 'whiteness' includes experiences and stories of not being aware of being raced. In what ways do you think that it would be possible to not be aware of one's race?

[Click here to enter text.](#)

Is there anything else that you would like to add in regards to the topic?

[Click here to enter text.](#)

I would like the responses/participation in the project to be as diverse and broad as possible. Is there anyone who worked or attended Rhodes University that you would feel comfortable sharing the interview questions with? Please feel free to do so and or provide their details below. This is completely voluntary and dependent on whether you think anyone you know would be interested in participating in the project.

[Click here to enter text.](#)

Thank you so much for your time and your responses. Your participation is invaluable to this project. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions at any time. Thank you again.

Kind Regards,

Zuziwe Msomi



