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A 'Derailed' Agenda?
Black Women's Voices on Workplace Transformation

By Claude-Hélène Mayer[1]

Abstract

This study assesses the experiences of workplace transformation of eleven Black women leaders working in South African higher education institutions (HEIs). The theoretical background is based in intersectional theories, also providing contextual information. The study uses a research paradigm based in Dilthey's modern hermeneutics, using qualitative methods, such as semi-structured interviews, as well as observations within HEIs. Interviews were analysed through content analysis. Findings show a strong commitment of women leaders to transforming their workplaces.

Their testimonies point in to the prevalence of gendered and racially biased experiences of Black women leaders in past and present. Their narratives include an account of their transformative vision including consciousness, awareness and positive attitudes, and transformative practices, such as networking and social support.

Keywords: Transformation, Post-Apartheid South Africa, Black leaders, women, Higher Education, intersectionality, race, gender, Dilthey's modern hermeneutics, qualitative methodology.

Introduction

"When she transformed into a butterfly,
the caterpillars spoke not of her beauty,
but of her weirdness.
They wanted her to change back
into what she always had been.
But she had wings."
Dean Jackson

Leadership is an important issue globally and across disciplines (Gupta & Wan Wart, 2015; Northouse, 2013). Women leadership in particular, has been extensively examined, also in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) (Darkwah, 2007; Van Wyk, 2012; Safdar & Kosakowska, 2015). In addition, the issue of transformation has become a seminal point of interest in post-apartheid South African leadership contexts (CHE, 2015; Cloete et al. 2006; Department of Labour 1998; Johnson, 2014; Mayer & Barnard, 2015). This paper will in the following define and address women leadership and transformation as defined for HEIs in the South African contexts.

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This study defines leadership as the ability of leaders to motivate others to reach the aims of the organisation (Amos, 2012). Through organisational leadership, leader's consciously influence individuals, teams and groups to perform (Northouse, 2013). Internationally women leaders are still rare in top leadership positions, even when equally qualified as men, based, on second generation gender bias, smaller networks, challenges to work-life balance and a seemingly lower self-confidence (Kets de Vries, Rock & Engellau, 2016).

Previous research (Mayer and Barnard; 2015; Mayer and Surtee 2015) have emphasised that women in leadership in South African HEIs are challenged by transformation processes and that women leaders need both, resolve and empathy, to cope with the situation.

Transformation in South Africa is viewed as a huge challenge to change "inherited apartheid social and economic structures and institutionalising a new social order" (Badat, 2010, p. 2). Socio-economic transformation in Post-Apartheid South Africa aims at overcoming the legacy of inequality and injustice created by colonialism and apartheid (Gumede, 2014) which is still predominant in the South African workplace (Khuzwayo, 2016). To lead and to transform social, economic, gender and race concepts, visionary leadership and competencies to analyse and to execute the visions of a transformed South Africa—in which equality, human rights and justice are valued—are needed to create socio-economic sustainability (Reilly & Bauer, 2015). Badat (2010) emphasises that transformation in South African HEIs should include the diminishing of discrimination and inequalities of class, race, gender and institutional nature within HEIs, creating a new social order, based on equality and inclusion. This article is based on this assumption.

The context of South African HEIs

HEIs are key players in transformation at political, structural and individual levels and are capacity drivers for economic growth and development (Cloete, Bunting & Maassen, 2015). In South Africa, they are also legally obliged to implement employment equity (EE) legislation (Department of Labour, 1998) and prepare for producing and retaining new generations of academics whilst advancing "redress and social equity for Black and women South Africans" (Badat 2010, p. 22).

Prior to 1994, HEIs in South Africa had been organized along racial and language lines and lacked a transformational curriculum (Naidoo, Adriansen & Moller Madsen, 2016). In post-apartheid South Africa, HEIs are classified as designated employers (Department of Labour, 1998) and are legally bound to ensure diversity and inclusion in annual EE plans (CHE, 2015) which outline policies and practices to diversify demographics and facilitate inclusivity (Cloete et al., 2006). However, with the continuing absence of demographically representative[2] staff profiles, staff experiences mostly remain shaped by apartheid experiences with a predominantly male and White workforce (CHE, 2015; Cloete et al,. 2006).

Additionally, South African HEIs have faced difficult times in terms of student protests and political activism recently (Badat, 2016). Ahmed (2012) criticises that in South African HEIs, transformational policies have been described, whilst actions have not been applied. Following the 2015 "FeesMustFall campaign" in South African HEIs, discourses show that students aim at the reduction of student fees in HEIs, whilst critical voices on colonialism, apartheid, post-colonalism and transformation open up, spilling over into society (Masombuka 2016). Transformation has - from the perspective of Black students - not yet taken place to the expected degree, since socio-

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[2] The EEA (Department of Labour, 1998) requires that the staff profile, across all occupational levels, resemble the appropriate demographic profile of the South African population.

economic support for Black students to access HEIs is missing and insufficient resources have been admitted or they have been used ineffectively to develop transformed HEIs (Badat, 2016). Further on, Badat (2016, p. 80) highlights that 'transformation' is reduced to numbers and does not address the underlying issues of "de-racialization, de-colonialisation, de-gendering and de-mascularization of the academic and institutional structures and cultures of universities". Thereby, HEIs are expected to hold "the promise of contributing to social justice, economic and social development, and democratic citizenship. However, this promise remains unrealised and HEIs stand for social injustice, marginalisation and social exclusion. Discourses on transformation need to open up to the topics and the inherent culture of whiteness needs to be addressed (Du Toit, 2000). This study contributes to opening up these discussions from viewpoints that have hardly been heard, namely from Black women academics.

Women leaders in HEIs

Whilst some researchers highlight that numbers of women leaders increase constantly (Kinnear, 2014), others.argue that staff demographics and employment practices have not significantly shifted since the end of apartheid (Van der Berg, 2007), which is attributed to a "lingering racism and protection of White interests and privilege" (Cloete et al. 2006, p. 171). This "lingering racism" impacts the numbers of Black women in leading positions in South African HEIs and authors, such as Phendla (2004, p.54) link this absentism of Black women leaders in HEIs to them carrying multiple "burdens of oppression" (Phendla 2004, p. 54). Although the post-apartheid Constitution served as a foundation to address previous unfair discrimination (Government Gazette, 1996), Maboleka and Mawila (2004) highlight that Black women were downgraded to second class citizens, suffering from dual discrimination through racism and sexism. Spaces for women to articulate their voices only opened up in the late 1990's. However, EEA practices still seem to be ignored or are only partly implemented twenty years later (Agenda 2012). Large organisations still show severe failing in demographic representivity in middle and senior management roles in terms of both race and gender (Surtee & Hall, 2009). According to Mayer and Barnard (2015) this is still the case in South African HEIs since the racial ratios in organisations do not match with the population quota (Mayer & Barnard 2015). However, Breetzke and Hedding (2016) argue that transformation has been happening slowly, but surely between 2005 and 2016. This argument relates to the 2013 numbers of staff in HEIs (Council on Higher Education, 2016) which show that African staff member represent 45% of the total staff within South African universities, whilst Whites represent 36%. However, the report also shows "white senior management staff members constitute 53% of the total number of management staff" and that transformation is required here. Several reports and articles have shown this imbalance, however, there is hardly any research conducted on the emic experiences of Black women leaders who work in senior management positions in HEIs within the context of the 53% white male staff members. Some research addresses that Black women leaders suffer from gendered institutions, feelings of exclusion and being leaders "at the margins" (Johnson & Thomas, 2012). They experience dual racial and gender discrimination compared to White women (Agenda, 2012), who also occupy more senior positions than Black women (Kinnear, 2014). Gender and racial inequality seem to remain (Wale, 2010) and prolong former hierarchical societal strata terms of power dynamics, identity, and resource distribution (Kamoche, 2011). Other authors, however, also point out that shifts towards more equalised work places (English & Hay, 2014) and HEIs take place through legislation and within the professional life (Booyson, 2007) and that further

transformation movements are to be expected in future. The feelings of the members of different cultural groups, however, still seem to be strong: Black leaders feel unaccepted by White colleagues (Booysen, 2007), Black females express hostilities towards Black males (Cilliers & Smit, 2006), whilst the racial divide between White and Black males is decreasing due to the new, powerful roles Black women have inherited in government and business (Booyseen & Nkomo, 2006). Black women leaders have highlighted previously that they—in their leadership positions— aim for applying mindfulness, strong self-competencies, spirituality at work, awareness, needs-orientation, caring and a positive attitude towards others (Mayer & Surtee, 2015).

Intersectional persepctives in this article

This article argues from an intersectional theory perspective, implying that intersecting social identities and social relations, such as race, gender, age, and sexuality are highly complex and interwoven with related systems of oppression, domination and discrimination (Collins, 1995, 1998; Crenshaw, 1989, 1991; McCall, 2005; Weber & Parra-Medina, 2003). According to Crenshaw (1993), the intersectional perspective highlights that race/ethnicity and gender are understood as a combined category which is experienced simultaneously within an individual person (West & Fenstermaker, 1996). Crenshaw (1993) emphasizes, women of color in the US experience the intersection of race and gender on three levels: Structurally, Black individuals and women are considered as "lower status" identities, representationally, Black women are stigmatized and sexualized. Politically seen, they are torn between both, groups that represent women and groups that represent Blacks (Settles, 2006). Settles (2006, p.589) research has highlighted further that Black women show particular interest in the "Black women identity" as part of their identity, than "individual identities" (Settles, 2006, p. 589) which relate to individual characteristics. Oosterdorp and Jones (2014) further point out that in South African workplaces, tense, ambivalent and contradictory identities are created which rather relate to racial group membership and belonging than to individualised and personal characteristics. This shows that racial and gender group belonging have not yet been transformed in the workplaces.

Intersectionality research in HEIs is long overdue and existing research suffers from a limited overreliance and one-dimensionality, a view that takes often only one dimension or perspective into account without seeing the systemic dimensionality of the intersections (Museus & Griffin, 2011). This further means that often only one of the intersectional aspects (as either race or gender or age) are taken into account. This is the case, although questions on identity definitions are usually responded to by using intersecting identity concepts (Jones, 2009) and various research highlights the importance of intersections, e.g. in the US (Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010) and also in South African HEIs (Mayer & Barnard, 2015; Mayer & Surtee, 2015; Nkomo, 2015) where women experience male domination and racial discrimination.

Objectives and purpose

This article argues from an intersectional perspective, highlighting that gender and racial categories are interrelated and experienced as interrelated by women leaders in South African HEIs. It takes previous research into account (Agenda, 2012; Booyson, 2007; Booyson & Nkomo, 2006; Cilliers & Smit, 2006; English & Hay, 2014; Johnson & Thomas, 2012; Kamoche, 2011; Kinnear, 2014; Mayer & Surtee, 2015) and aims at adressing the void in research on Black women's emic views on transformation in HEIs which have hardly been voiced and heared to date

and analysed by using qualitative research methodologies from the intersectionality perspective. The main research question: "How do Black women leaders in South African HEIs experience transformation at work?" informs the stated research aim.

Research Methodology

Dilthey's (2002) modern hermeneutics was used to characterise this study's research paradigm. It uses the hermeneutical approach of "Verstehen" (understanding) of the experiences described, whilst applying a self-reflective attitude of the two researchers' exploration of the topic and interpretation of the lived experiences in narrations (Ratner, 2002). This approach was chosen to integrate the aim of interpreting ideas, purposes and other experiences expressed in reality (Dilthey, 1976).

Sample

Convenient and snowball sampling process were used, on women who are members of HERS-SA (Higher Education Resource Services South Africa), a non-profit organisation that offers professional and leadership development to women in HEIs. A total of 900 women were invited to participate in this study. Twenty-nine women participated in qualitative interviews. Eleven of this sub-set self-identified as Black[3], and are the focus of this article. All of them are women leaders in HEIs in South Africa, either in academic (professors/ directors/ head of departments) or in management (e.g. dean, principle of university) positions. All of the women hold Doctoral degrees or are in the process of acquiring a doctoral degree. They all work in institutions which are not yet transformed in terms of structural and interactional diversification. They therefore can also be seen as representatives of belonging to a minority group within their organisations in terms of "being Black women leaders".

Table 1: Biographical information

No.	Race	Position	Degree	University
B2[4]	African	Senior Lecturer	MTech	Previously mixed university
I7	Indian	Senior Lecturer	Master	Previously Black University
C8	Coloured	Senior Lecturer	PhD	Previously Black University
I9	Indian	Head of Department	PhD	Previously mixed University
B12	African	Head of Department	PhD	Previously White University
I13	Indian	Senior Lecturer	PhD	Previously White University
I18	Indian	Senior Lecturer	PhD	Previously White University
I22	Indian	Full Professor	PhD	Previously mixed University
C23	Coloured	Director	DTech	Previously mixed University
C28	Coloured	Lecturer	PhD	Previously mixed University
B29	African	Senior Lecturer	Honours	Previously White University

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[3] According to the EE Act 1998, the category "Black" refers to individuals who belong to the Coloured, African, or Indian race groups.

[4] These codes refer to the interviewees: I9 means, for example, interviewee number 9 (Indian), B29, interviewee number 29 (African), C23, interviewee number 23 (Coloured).

Data collection

Data collection included semi-structured interviews which took 30 - 60 minutes to conduct on Skype or as face-to-face interactions. The interview questions were based on an extensive literature review on gender in South African organisations (Mayer & Barnard, 2015; Mayer & van Zyl, 2013; Mayer, Surtee & May, 2015) and explored views on leadership in HEIs, leaders' subjective identity definition, structural challenges, as well as conflict experiences and its management. Interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. The research team included observations made in one HEI. Observations were captured in field notes and used for the interpretation of interview data.

Data analysis and interpretation

Data analysis was conducted following the five-step process of content analysis: step 1—familiarisation and immersion; step 2—inducing themes; step 3—coding; step 4—elaboration; and step 5—interpretation and checking (Terre Blanche, Durrheim & Kelly, 2006, pp. 322-326). Categories and codes were constructed from the data set; themes were identified and used to interpret the emic views of Black women leaders. Data gathered through observation, within one selected university, also contributed to a deeper understanding and interpretation of information and is implicitly integrated into the interpretations (Yin, 2009).

Qualitative research criteria and ethical considerations

Qualitative research criteria (Gummesson 2000, p. 157) were applied, such as credibility, transferability, trustworthiness and confirmability. The clear and structured description of this research led to the application of the qualitative research criteria (Creswell 2003).

The research study followed clearly defined research ethics. Individual informed consent was provided by all interviewees who were assured anonymity, confidentiality and the freedom to withdraw during the interview process. Ethical approval was provided by the ethics research committee at Rhodes University and HERS SA.

Findings

Findings show that interviewees identify transformation issues in terms of the intersections of gender and race using four categories:

1. Past experiences: their experiences at work as Black women during the apartheid era;
2. Present experiences: their recent and current work experiences;
3. Transformation visions: their perceptions and anticipations for the ideal situation within their work context in post-apartheid South Africa;
4. Transformation actions: the actions that they would apply to transform their work environments, in order to realize their visions.

Past and present experiences in the workplace

Interviewees describe their work experiences during apartheid. Six women (four out of five Indian; two Coloured[5]) reflect on their experiences by highlighting "racial discrimination" to

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[5] The category of being "Coloured" was established in the beginning of the 20th century and became a category for individuals who were classified as mixed race (Mayer & Barnard, 2015). From 1908 Afrikaans was established as

capture their experiences (I9, I13, I7, I18, C8, C23). By contrast, African women use terms such as "victimization" and "hostility" to describe their experiences.

One Indian woman (I18) highlights how, both in past and present, she has felt the impact of a racial institutional history (HEIs) in a predominantly "White institution located in the Gauteng province". From her perspective, transformation has "not taken place in the institution" - she feels the carry-over effect of discrimination in terms of race and gender contemporarily:

> "I think it's harder for women, because whatever anyone says, and especially Black women, to actually be taken notice of, let me put it that way, because the institution, it's historically White, historically Afrikaner and unfortunately the people in power are still very White, very male led and still very Afrikaner and I think that hasn't changed. So, I think, as Black women, we are still not heard because we're not seen as important unless you work in a one-to-one with someone and they see your worth.".

This woman strongly points out her "invisibility" as a Black woman in a context that had historically been established as a white context. The experience of "not being heard" and "undervalued" can only be overcome when racial group dynamics are broken through communication and cooperation on a one-by-one interaction. For this leader, the chances to overcome apartheid categories are best when members of different race groups open up spaces in which they come together as individuals and not as members of a certain racial group.

Another Indian woman experienced mostly male domination in the past while working in South African HEIs (I22). For her, the gendered discrimination was stronger than the racial discrimination (although also present), which might be related to the fact that her university was a previously "mixed university". One Coloured woman describes how she experienced political conflict in the past that is related to gender, race and social discrimination (C28) working at a previously "mixed university". For her gender, race and social discrimination are strongly intervowen. All three interviewees argue that race, gender and social strata are strongly interconnected and alive and have not dissipated in their workplaces, no matter if they were based at previously white or mixed HEIs.

Two of three African interviewees comment on the past by referring to "victimization" and "hostility". One interviewee highlights victimization experiences in HEIs (B29), referring to exclusive practices within her HEIs and being treated in an unjust way which made her feel like a victim. Another interviewee refers to hostility within the HEI (B2):

> "As a Black woman working in this kind of environment, when I started I found it to be quite a hostile environment – you actually need to win people over and when you get to that point you actually feel you've made it – you go to another department and this process starts again and you are always looked at with suspicion, whether you are worth what they are worth. It's those kind of things that are a bit disturbing, but I'm glad to say I get everything done that I need to do, and I don't bother with what other people have to say. If they need to find out what I'm all about then sometimes you invite them, come…talk to my students, talk to the people I work very closely with".

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the "mother tongue" of individuals classified as Coloured. Coloureds mainly belong to the Christian or Muslim religion (Adhikari, 2005).

Being a Black woman, this African interviewee feels scrutinised regarding her abilities and self-worth, as also mentioned by another interviewee. As a member of a minority group within the HEIs, these experiences have left her with the need to prove herself to be part of the power dynamics at work. She also feels that discrimination can only be overcome through establishing personal relationships proactively within the previously white HEI context. The past experiences of discrimination of the majority of Black women shows that race and gender intersect independently if they have worked in previously White, mixed or Black HEIs.

Four women point out the combined experience of male domination and White dominance they have encountered. I9, an Indian female leader, with Hindu religion, who works at a previously mixed university comments:

> "I feel tired now after three years. Sometimes I don't get support from the males.
> It's a male dominated White environment and you don't get the support and
> cooperation. At the same time you need to get the work done and prove yourself. It
> can be difficult. And sometimes it's deliberate where people don't want to
> cooperate with you as a woman, and as a short woman and a dark woman they
> won't take you seriously. I think there's gender adversity, religion, background—it
> all comes to play especially in a very conservative and untransformed
> environment".

This interviewee describes the highly un-transformed environment which lacks tolerance for differences in gender, race and religion and which is still defined by white, male power. This leads to fatigue and frustration, particularly as she—as a Head of department—constantly works against the barriers in a non-inclusive environment, thus impinging on her primary work commitments. In her interview she states further that colleagues and subordinates do not support her in the way that they ignore her in her role as a leader of the Department. They do not attend departmental meetings, do not join conversations and reject to cooperate with her. In her role, she has been accused by her colleagues of plagiarism and "unethical behaviour" and had to undergo several grievances in which—over years—was not clear if she would lose her job due to these accusations. She related these accusations to her being a "dark women of colour" in a leadership position by pointing out that the "colleagues could not take it".

Women feel that in the past, workplace discrimination seemed to be primarily racial rather than gender-based. By contrast, in the present, women feel more discriminated through gender, however they still see the intersection with racial, discrimination. It is assumed that in the post-apartheid workplaces, racial discrimination is more subtly embedded in gender based discrimination, since the focus is on punishing racial rather than gendered discrimination (B12).

Reflecting on the present, one Coloured and two Indian women emphasize "racial oppression" as Black women in HEIs (I18, I22, C23). Three interviewees, one Indian and two Coloured (I22, C23, C8), feel discriminated as Black women leaders - for them racial and gender discrimination intersects again. However, no African women highlights racial discrimination at present. Interviewee C8 states that she sees the resistance of particularly White colleagues in transforming HEIs:

> "We had a departmental evaluation and it was a very traumatic experience,
> because there are two colleagues in our department who are not White, and the

two of us felt very strongly that our department should do more to transform the profile of our students and staff, and that was potentially a conflict situation because we were arguing for something we felt strongly about, and certainly it was my disappointment that my White colleagues didn't argue equally strongly for these same things, and so that was a bit contentious."

The interview data show, however, that of the six women who experienced race-based discrimination in the past (I9, I13, I7, I18, C8, C23) only two of these women continue to experience racial oppression in the present, particularly through white male colleagues (I18 and C23). The one woman who had experienced male domination in the past believed that there now is repression of Black women in top positions (I22). The other two women (C23 and C8) who believe that there is currently repression of Black women in their HEIs (previously mixed and previously Black universities), interestingly do not refer to these kinds of experiences in the past. This might be due to the fact that in the past power relations in these HEIs were clearly defined and maybe experienced as rather balanced, whilst today, these HEIs experience new dynamics of inter-racial cooperation within these institutions. Finally, three women (B2, I7, I18) stated that they try to "go with the flow" and live in the present, whilst taking the opportunities which are coming up to make the best out of the situation. They have decided to overcoming the past by making a new start.

Only Indian interviewees emphasised that their present work environment is policy driven (I12, I18) and that colleagues are highly competitive (I18, I28). Two Indian leaders tried to see this positively and have hope for change (I7, I13). I7 who is a Senior Lecturer at a previously Black university, states:

"I try to approach life with a positive attitude. I think I'm a realist. I try to deal with situations as they are, but very often if I'm unhappy I will sit down and try to think things through. I try to approach life from the positive, but thinking things through after they've happened".

This senior lecturer applies an individual approach how to deal with situations which are difficult to handle. She applies a positive mindset whilst dealing with the experiences and the realities she experiences. She further uses an applied practical approach to deal with negatively experienced feelings through reflecting on them and using a contextual and situational perspective.

Transformation visions

Interviewees shared varied opinions on the pace of transformation at work and described transformation processes as very slow (I22); peaceful but chaotic (B12); difficult with regard to the treatment of employees (C23); conscious in terms of leadership (B29); conflict-riddled between unions and management (C28); and imbalanced in terms of power (C23). More specifically, findings show that five women believe that women should build up stronger networks to collaborate with other women to overcome present challenges in terms of transformation in HEIs (I18, I13, I9, C23 and C28). Interviewee I18, an Indian Senior Lecturer working at a previously White university, emphasises:

"Like making sure in a faculty in a university: it doesn't work in isolation from others. In our workplace we have a lot of contact with other departments, other

faculties, other services, so networking is extremely important to make you feel ok".

This narrative highlights how important social cohesion and networking are for this woman to feel motivated and empowered at work. She aims at overcoming gendered and racial boundaries and isolation by focusing on the common aim of the HEI to create success and well-being. In this way, the organisation becomes a stabilising factor to create a common ground beyond racial and gendered categories.

Four women (I9, B29, B21, B12, one Indian and three African), describe their aim to develop personally and to being of service to others:

> "I set a goal with the thought in mind that, I need to reach out, that there's some impact that I need to make. And if I cannot make a positive impact, it's like I'm derailed altogether, like a train on a railway line. I feel derailed, I feel delayed also and I feel like a failure, because I'm not achieving anything. I want to achieve something, not for my sake but, so that I can make a difference in the people that I serve, and in this case, it's the public. The disabled people, the women out there, and the young people out there, they need to feel the difference, because I'm there in this position in the work I'm doing. But if that impact is not felt out there, if I cannot make a difference, it makes me feel like a failure" (B12).

This woman's self-worth is connected to making a difference, serving others and developing herself whilst contributing to the community. Three African women mention the social dimension of their work, serving the people. Their feelings of success are therefore strongly connected to acts of benevolence, and creating positive impact. and thereby overcome racial and gendered boundaries.

Two Indian women believe in developing a clear individualised vision (I7, I9) and being aware of planning a sustainable future. Women leaders share a vision which anticipates Black women in leadership (I22); deeper transformation processes (I18); supporting people who struggle (I18); raising the voice of women (I9); balancing of the feminine and the masculine (C8); the need to see others as whole human beings (C8); engaging in issues of racial and sexual oppression across cultures (C23); and the glorification of God (B12). I18, an Indian Senior lecturer at a previously White university, explains.

> "I think Black women—we understand the struggles a lot more—we don't all come from their resourceful background, but as Black women we understand the past and history that we've come from. It's important to ensure that women in this world get educated, that they make a difference and make an impact because the more visible you are as women, the more understanding society becomes of the role women can play. Black women don't come from very resourced backgrounds. We talk about first generation learners who come to university. As Black women we understand that, whereas White women come from a culture— not all of them—of academic backgrounds, but Black women know what it is to be a first generation learner. We know what it's like not to have resources and schools at your disposal. As Black women we understand the concept of making sure that other Black women are looked after now and in future."

This interviewee emphasises Black women's awareness of the socio-historical dimensions of apartheid, whilst White women are stereotyped as resourceful and academic. She distinguishes between the Black consciousness and White unconsciousness, Black caring and White ignorance. Race becomes an intersection of gendered belonging in this narration and I18 divides the group of women by describing her idea about differences of Black and White women.

Summarizing, Black women develop their vision for their future in HEI in South Africa on the intra- and inter-individual levels of the individual person (develop and grow, define a clear vision, Black women in leadership). Secondly, they demonstrate the importance of the Black women as a collective across organisations and society (support strugglers, voice for women, network with women). Thirdly, they are committed on a spiritual level (in terms of deep transformation, seeing others as whole beings, glorifying God, balancing and harmonising genders). Fourthly, they express transformational needs through explaining their emotions and being empathetic towards each other's emotions.

Transformation actions
Interviewees describe their actions to initiate and/or expedite workplace transformation. Three Indian women (I9, I18, I22) stress that they tried to "do the right thing" in compliance with their value sets, ethics, morality and their religious beliefs. Interviewee I22, a full professor, states:

> "I try to maintain professional boundaries in terms of the code of ethics I apply to myself. Even when things are difficult for me I stick to a certain form of behaviour. So I'm not prepared to play dirty. I could have but I chose not to".

Ethical behaviour is an important source of conduct with regard to the oneself and in relationships towards others. This includes straight forward, truthful and kind behaviour.

One African and two Indian women (B29, I7, I22) highlight the importance to reflect and being conscious in communication practice:

> "There are certain instances where I had to recommend a particular woman to be part of a conversation within the university setting, and I'm told no, but I'm sure she would not fit in as it's a boys' club. When I try to investigate what the problems are, I would find out that because you understand the setting as a woman, you want to behave like a man. You want to behave like a man. You want to use the same kind of conversation engagement that they are using and at the end of that you want to appear tough. But that is not important. What is important is as a leader what kind of principles do you apply in such a setting? …You don't distance yourself from that. You are part and parcel of the conversation; you know that they need you" (B29).

Even for this women leader, applying her personal principles in conversations is important, whilst standing her point of being a woman leader with a certain gendered viewpoint which should not be transformed into male leadership behaviour.

Two African women (B12, B21) highlight "making a difference" through concrete actions, is the most important aspect of transformation. Two women mention "working hard" as a strategy to transform the workplaces (I9, C28):

> "I was absolutely amazed in my early days to see how competitive the environment is, and I must say I tend not to be competitive. I tend to be as hard working and as productive as I can but I'm not competitive. That sometimes freaks me out, with people, you know, you notice in meetings and so on, people will say things, not because they are contributing to the conversation, but because they are competing for favour or whatever" (C28).

Two Indian women (I9, I13) stress that transformation need active, positive thinking. For two others (B29, I7), an proactively applied change of perspective is the key to transformation. Two women each highlight "keeping boundaries" to make transformation possible (I22, B29). Further strategies are: praying (C28, C8) and developing a vision (C8, C23), making peace with things (B21); distance yourself (B29); apply new work strategies (B29), transform slowly (I9); keep balance (I9); look at the context (I13); re-invent alliances (I13); respect (I18); resign (I22); confront (C28); and engage with intra-gender differences (C23). A Coloured Director of a previously mixed university highlights:

> "I sometimes find it amusing that, particularly when you are speaking to White women, immediately the sort of default response to you is, 'yes but we are both women.' It's almost an unwillingness to deal with the intra-gender differences, caused by the fact that you come from different racial backgrounds. So I think that intersection of race and gender, and I suppose class as well are important - it's well past time that we actually engage those instead of just pretending that as women, our experiences are similar when often they are not".

This women critiques the differences in dealing with racial and genered intersections experienced with White and Black women. Intra-gender conversations across racial divides are needed to explore differences and similarities and the intersectionalities of race, gender and class. Only if these are acknowledged, then can women build a stronger unified network and synergies across racial divides to champion transformation barriers in the workplace.

Discussion

The data provide rich, contextualized voices of Black women leadership in South African HEIs. Findings support Phendla's (2004) and Mayer and Surtee's (2015) call to listen to emic perspectives of Black women who still carry "burdens of oppression" to further explore their experiences.

Overall, the study reveals a combination of continuing experiences of intersectionality-based discrimination through race and gender and contributes to filling the described research gap in South Africa (Mayer & Barnard, 2015; Mayer & Surtee, 2015; Museus & Griffin, 2011). It shows that Black women leaders do not only feel oppressed respectively discriminated against, but also carry "encouragement and hope for transformation" in terms of their vision and agency.

They highlight an emerging consensus around the value which both, diversity and inclusion, in terms of EEA practices bring to HEIs.

Interestingly, women leaders mainly refer to race and gender as being categories of intersectionality at work while they hardly refer in a differentiated way to the intersections of their professional background. The profession does not seem to intersect as much as could be expected which might relate to the fact that Black women leaders experience racial and gender implications so strongly that their professional background hardly impacts on their daily experience. This means that their high professional status does not for racial and gender discrimination.

As emphasised for the global context (Northouse, 2013; Gupta & Wan Wart, 2015), leadership and transformation are important issues for South African Black women in HEIs. This is continuously the case in past and present organizations (Darkwah, 2007; Safdar & Kosakowska, 2015; Van Wyk, 2012), growing and specifically South African HEIs (CHE, 2015; Cloete et al., 2006; Department of Labour, 1998; Johnson, 2014; Mayer & Barnard, 2015). The findings present transformation as an important part of Black women leadership, mainly distinguishing Black from White women colleagues. Interestingly African, Indian and Coloured women classify themselves as "Black", thereby creating an inclusive group of women leaders which is contrasted with White women leaders. As Black women leaders see themselves as a united force (again Whites), the findings hardly show differences in the narrations and arguments of the women leaders from African, Coloured and Indian background. However, it might be assumed that there are differences in the experiences between women leaders of different racial groups due to the fact that their status was created differently during apartheid, they do hold different cultural approaches to deal with racial and cultural issues and they might be classified as women leaders according to their specific racial background. However, as being members of the majority in their work contexts, they might feel provide similar perceptions and experiences on the surface of this research.

Leadership is defined in the context of interviewees' past and present work experiences, their visions for transforming their workplaces (ideas and actions), the ability to execute visions and to create sustainability (in accordance with Reilly & Bauer, 2015). Black women leaders highlight these abilities and are aware of their historical and current struggles as minorities in HEIs in post-apartheid organizational structures.

They aim at developing a conscious transformational leadership which increases opportunities for other (young/new generations of) Black women, visionary actions, individual development, increased gender-based networking—agreeing with the literature that gender networks need to grow (Kets de Vries, Rock & Engellau, 2016). Transformation, for these women, is about self-development, self-actualisation and being of service to others to making a difference, based on humanistic values (equality, empowerment, spirituality).

For Black women in this research, leadership is not as much connected to Amos's (2012) definition of reaching the aims of the organization as such, but correlates rather with Northouse's (2013) notion that leadership should have an impact on others. However, the impact these authors allude to relates to organizational performance, whilst Black women in this study define their impact in terms of developing others, serving others and contributing to social transformation. This individual and collective transformation is a challenge for Black women, as emphasised by Badat (2010, p. 2), due to a persistent "inherited apartheid social and economic structure" and the institutionalising new social order". However, Black women leaders are aware of their key role and the HEIs societal key role (Cloete et al., 2015) to transform the society. Black women leaders are prepared to take action for increasing racial and gender inequality—however, the request the conscious awareness of White women towards racial differences and intersectionalities within

their gender group and - as Cloete et al. (2006) highlight—whilst still being riddled by racism at work and by feeling excluded through the protection of White interests and privilege.

For the interviewees, race and gender intersect (Crenshew, 1993; West & Fenstermaker, 1996) and "being Black" and being a woman interweaves them into complex systems of power, white and male domination and discrimination (from past and present) (see also Collins, 1995, 1998; Crenshaw, 1989, 1991; McCall, 2005; Weber & Parra-Medina, 2003), however not as much in combination with sexism (Mabokela & Mawila, 2004). Interestingly, the previous status of the university (previously White, Black or mixed) does not seem to impact much on the perceptions since women leaders experience racism and gendered behaviour across all of the HEIs. It might, however, be stated that gender seems to be - for singular women in previously mixed universities— a predominant issue, whilst race seems to be predominant in previously white organisations. However, this impression needs further exploration in future studies.

The three experienced levels of intersectionality of race and gender (structure, representation, politics; Crenshaw, 1993) are strongly represented in the findings. Although interviewees see themselves as women, they also reconsider themselves as women, Black women or Blacks and redefine their group membership flexibly and according to their needs (Oosterdorp & Jones, 2014; Settles, 2006).

Although HEIs are changing through curriculum development and mergers (Naidoo, Adriansen & Moller Madsen, 2016), this study supports previous findings (CHE, 2015; Cloete et al. 2006) that diversity and inclusion are still highly absent (as in Mayer & Barnard, 2015; Surtee & Hall, 2009). Although racial and gender equality is rising in terms of numbers of staff representing certain racial groups (Council on Higher Education, 2016), the quality of experiences of Black women leaders remains shaped by racial and gender categories and is anchored in power struggles created and established in the past: Black women leaders—including Indian, Coloured and African—often still feel marginalised as a minority (as in Johnson & Thomas, 2012) and discriminated against (Mabokela, 2003). This sense of being members of minorities in HEIs and feelings of being at the lower end of the executive power and resourcefulness within HEIs, seems to lead Black women leaders to the fact that they do not even voice their high educational status as being professors and/or lecturers and its impact on their experience of intersectionalities. This aspect should be further explored in future research.

Black women do not experience intersectionality at an external and inter-personal level only, but also at an intra-personal level (Crenshaw, 1993). Being a Black woman seems to be the prevalent identity definition form (as in Settles, 2006). With their intersectional narrations, however, Black women leaders also create new discourses, are finding a voice, whilst being members of their (in-)groups (Oosterdorp & Jones, 2014) in which they, however, still experience dual discrimination (as emphasised in Agenda, 2014). Participants set clear boundaries in terms of the differences of White and Black women (varying degrees in resourcefulness, marginalisation, experiences of struggles) which they want White women to acknowledge to then create synergies within the gender group, cross-cutting racial divides.

Supporting Nkomo (2015), this study finds Black women experiencing male and racial discrimination, whilst working towards transforming HEIs through thoughts and actions. It is assumed that the transformational processes change slowly and women leaders are aware of their (peacekeeping) key roles (as in English & Hay, 2014) and prepared to fill them in by behaving ethically and taking up agency. Actions to transform the workplace (in this study, e.g. working hard; leading discourses on intersectionality of race, gender, class and social strata, reflecting ideas/discourses) lead to identity crisis (according to Booysen, 2007). However, this study rather

shows the resilience of Black women leaders than a crisis: focusing on their visions, dealing with the loss during apartheid, the continuing challenges of intersectionality and the challenges to build themselves as equal leaders beyond the inferiority - superiority realm.

They lead the discourse on leadership based on human values, principles, visions and practical actions, highlighting the notion of empowerment and not only shifting power from White males to Black females (as in Booysen, 2007), but also from White to Black women. Through identity work on individual, organisational and societal levels, Black women leaders aim at establishing new identities across intersections for strengthening future transformation.

Limitations of the study

The study is limited to the hermeneutical research paradigm and the frame of the qualitative research methodology, using a limited number of interviewees in the HERS-SA network. The aim is limited to an in-depth understanding of the research subject without proclaiming generalisations. The findings reflect the perceptions of the women leaders interviewed and therefore provide a perceptional bias and do not guarantee that all intersectional forces are taken into account.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The aim of this study was to explore Black women leaders' emic narrations on transformation experiences in South African HEIs. While this study supports previous research on intersectionality in the global and South African realm, it also provides a differentiated view on emic experiences and new insights which show the following: firstly, the three levels of intersectionality experienced by Black women leaders are not only limited to structure, representation and politics, but also include intra-psychological intersectionality aspects in terms of race and gender.

Secondly, this study shows that Black women leaders are not trapped in an identity crisis, but have intra-personally transformed the challenges into individual and collective transformation visions and actions to constructively create new Black women leadership identities. However, these experiences still seem to be strongly influenced by apartheid categories and post-colonialist power struggles, as well as concepts of dominance, inferiority and superiority.

Thirdly, women leaders have started to voice their own needs in public and HEIs more openly, whilst being prepared to experience and overcome discriminatory reactions through consciously applied strategies and broader identity development, including: 1.) working hard; 2.) reflection and self-actualization; 3.) building stronger leadership networks with other Black (and possibly White) women; 4.) creating visions and action for transformation; and finally 5.) leading discourses on intersectionality across race, gender, age, social strata, class and profession.

Based on the findings, it is recommended that further research should investigate Black women leaders' needs for (social) support and the question how intersectionalities of race and gender—experienced by Black and White women leaders—could be used synergetically to transform male dominated work places and particularly racial staff representation in senior positions in HEI. Differences in experiences between Indian, Coloured and African women leaders should be explored in more depth. In how far HEIs, the professional status and the individual biography plays a role as intersectional forces in the experiences of women leaders, should be differentiated further.

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