WITH DREAMS IN OUR HANDS:

TOWARDS TRANSGRESSIVE KNOWLEDGE-MAKING CULTURES

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Abstract

Knowledge-making in universities is not neutral and takes different forms. This thesis critically examines the politics of knowledge to propose and present a transgressive schema for knowledge-making that is co-created with students. It emerges from teaching and learning encounters in the Humanities Extended Studies (ES) Programme at Rhodes University, where for the past decade we have experimented with different ways of knowledge-making that run counter to conventional pedagogic practices. We set up a project for the thesis that allowed us to work with knowledge in ways that are Afrocentric, and that hold and nurture our dreams. The theory and methodology of the project are explained in the first academic paper for this PhD by publication.

The project and its derivatives use an African Feminist framing, and centre the onto-epistemologies of African young people who find themselves alienated and marginalised by a western bias in university curricula. Former ES student volunteers came up with topics, responded to them, reviewed each other's work, and co-wrote two academic papers that demonstrate a praxis of African Feminist research and pedagogic principles. Two further projects practise the principles that emerge from the primary project, and together they have tested knowledge-making cultures that inspire critical thinking and creative humanity. These are explained in two further academic papers. One is co-written with the co-presenter of an online inter-continental short course for PhD students on African Feminist Research Methodology. The other is single authored, and introduces the third project, a Political and International Studies third-year course on African Feminist theory.

The schema for knowledge-making uses the hand, which holds our dream, as a descriptive metaphor. Each of the five fingers of the hand represents an aspect of how we have collaborated on the projects and in lecture rooms, and what this has taught us about how to

nurture and inspire the dreams of young African people through transgressive knowledge-making cultures. The five aspects – framing, activating, seeing, creating, imagining – are mutually constitutive elements of knowledge-making that are introduced throughout the thesis, and explained in careful detail in the conclusion as a synthesis of the collaborations.

IsiXhosa Translation:

Siphethe amaphupha ezandleni zethu: ukwenza iinckubeko zolwazi ezigxile ekuphazamiseni isiqhelo

Isishwankathelo

Ukwenziwa kolwazi kwiiunivesithi asiyonto engathathi cala kwaye yenzeka ngeendlela-ngeendlela. Le thisisi iphononga ipolitiki yolwazi ngenjongo yokucebisa nokuvelisa iindlela zokwenziwa kolwazi ezigxile ekuphazamiseni kwesiqhelo, ndlela leyo eyenziwa ngentsebenziswano nabafundi. Le Ndlela yokuphazamisa isiqhelo ivela kwindlela zokufunda nokufundisa kwinkqubo yeExtended Studies kwiUnivesithi iRhodes, apho kwiminyaka elishumi edlulileyo besisebenzisa amalinge ohlukileyo okwenza ulwazi ohlukileyo kwindlela zokufunda eziqhelekileyo. Siqulunqe inkqubo yale thisisi evumele ukuba sisebenze nolwazi ngendlela ekhokhelelisa ubuAfrika phambile, nkqubo leyo eyondla nebamba amaphupha ethu. Inkcazo-bungcali neendlela zokwenza uphando lwalo msebenzi zicacisiwe kwiphepha lokuqala lethisisi yePhD ezakupapashwa.

Lo msebenzi neminye imisebenzi efana nawo isebenzisa iAfrikan Feminism ngenjongo yokubeka ngokusesikweni ndlela le ingxile kwindlela yokufundisa neengcambu zayo ezizinze eAfrika, kwaye ikhokhelisa imfundo yabantu abatsha abazifumana besenziwe amakheswa nabahlelelelekileyo kunyenjwa kwasentshona kwizifundo zaseunivesithi. Abafundi ababefunda kwiES baze nezihloko, yangabo abaziphendulayo, bahlola imisebenzi yoogxa babo, kwaye bancedisa ekubhaleni amaphepha amabini abonakalisa indlela yokuphanda kusetyenziswa iziseko zokufunda zeAfrikan Feminism. Eminye imisebenzi isebenzise iziseko eziphuma kulo msebenzi wokuqala, kwaye yomibini le misebenzi iphononga iinkcubeko zokwenza ulwazi ezikhuthaza ukuzikisa ukucinga nobuntu obunobuchule. Oku kucaciswa nzulu kumaphepha amabini. Omnye ubhalwe nomfundi kunye nombhali obefundisa

kwikhosi emfutshane ebikwi-intanethi ephakathi kwamazwekazi eyenzelwe abafundi be-PhD kwiAfrican Feminist Research Methodology. Omnye umsebenzi ubhalwe ngumntu omnye, nothi wazise umsebenzi wesithathu, ikhosi yonyaka wesithathu yePolitical and International Studies yenkcazo-bungcali iAfrican Feminism.

Icebo lokwenza ulwazi lisebenzisa isandla esibambe amaphupha ethu, njengesafobe esinika inkcazelo. Umnwe ngamnye umele indlela esisebenzisene ngayo kule misebenzi nakumagumbi okufundela, kunye nesikufundileyo ngokukhulisa nokukhuthaza amaphupha wabantu abasebatsha baseAfrika ngokusebenzisa imisebenzi egxile kwiinkcubeko zolwazi eziphazamisa ukwenziwa kolwazi ngendlela eqhelekileyo. Imiba emihlanu- ukwenza isakhelo, ukuqalisa, ukubona, ukudala, ukusebenzisa imifanekiso ntelekelelo- iyingqokelela yenxalenye yokwenza ulwazi ngendlela enentsebenziswano kwaye ezi ziseko zaziswa banzi kwithisisi, kwaye zicaciswe gabalala kwisishwankathelo njengengqokelela yentsebenziswano kulo msebenzi.

Dedication

To you, students. I see you. I am because you are. Thank you for bringing yourselves, and your dreams, into our lecture room. We teach each other, and learn from each other. Thank you for showing up and for generating hope that your dreams matter. We have made knowledge together, every day, and I dedicate this thesis to you. Your experiences, perspectives, visions, dreams, courage, love, curiosity, and ideas have helped to make it possible.

Acknowledgements

I offer my sincere gratitude to all those who have contributed in any way to the completion of this PhD dissertation. The conversations we have had, articles or books you have written, presentations you have made, performances, lectures, songs, poems, and messages: so many words and deeds have added their weight and inspiration to the work, and I am profoundly grateful.

To Rhodes University: my grateful thanks for granting me a sabbatical for a year between 2020 and 2021. It was the space I needed to conceptualise and pursue the ideas that have given the PhD life.

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unfiltered self a space to grow, more and more each year; Injairu, bless you, our walks and talks are precious opportunities to share our vulnerabilities and strengths. I look forward to more of everything with all of you.

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Contents

List of Tables and Pictures

Acronyms

CHE	Council for Higher Education
CK	Corinne Knowles
DHET	Department of Higher Education and Training
ES	Extended Studies
Pol	Political and International Studies
RU	Rhodes University
Soc	Sociology
UCKAR	University currently known as Rhodes
UCT	University of Cape Town
WDIOH	With Dreams in Our Hands

Key terms used in the thesis

I would like to introduce you to some of the key terms we use in making our arguments, as the words have contested meanings. I explain some of them in more detail or with specific application elsewhere in the thesis but to be clear from the start, these are the meanings we bring to them:

Transgressive: Used here to describe pedagogy and research practices, transgressive indicates a political orientation that deviates from or runs counter to what is normalised and conventional in curricula, research practices, and pedagogy. *Teaching to transgress* (hooks, 1994) is an inspiration for this kind of revolutionary, anti-colonial, counter-hegemonic, engaged, feminist, liberatory teaching and learning. Transgressive pedagogy is critically attuned to the politics of knowledge, and the biases and reproductions of exclusionary curricula. It seeks to find new ways, new values and practices that are inclusive, respectful, and hopeful for diverse groups of students and teachers.

Knowledge-making: Knowledge-making is an umbrella term that is used to include all the university activities that are geared towards creating new knowledge (Knowles, 2022; Knowles et al., 2022a). Students and staff bring their own cultural and familial ways of knowing into the university, and these are challenged and expanded through exposure to new ideas and ways of knowing. I argue that from the moment students enter the university, they embark on a journey of knowledge-making which includes meaning-making, self-knowledge, making sense of experience, and applying and expanding theory. This thesis argues for knowledge-making that is inclusive of Afrocentric onto-epistemologies, applied specifically to the Humanities faculty, for now.

Poor Black student: The university experience is profoundly structured by race and class inequalities, along with gender, age, language, sexuality, ethnicity, location, education, ability, colour, configurations that affect people's access (for example to knowledge resources and rewards), and success in the institution. Students who are co-researchers on the PhD project self-identify as poor and Black, as these have become ubiquitous terms to describe African young people who are born into financial poverty and rely on State funding for their university education. 'Poor' in this case refers to economic poverty, and should not be construed to include a paucity of moral, cultural, spiritual, historical goods and capacities

that students bring with them into the university. 'Black' in this case draws on the work of Steve Biko whose version of Black Consciousness in South African apartheid history refused the category of 'non-white' which was used by the apartheid government to subjugate anyone who was not European. For Biko and the South African Black Consciousness movement, 'Black' was a way to reclaim subjectivity and agency from a white apartheid government who labeled African people as 'non-white' in a brutally comprehensive 'inferiorisation' project (Biko, 1978; Moodley, 1991). I capitalize Black as a political statement of respect and recognition of the reclamation of subjectivity.

Intersectionality: This refers to ways in which social constructions and categories such as race, class and gender interact with each other interdependently and so cannot merely be seen as individual and isolated identity markers. Black feminist Kimberle Crenshaw coined the phrase in the USA in 1989 (Crenshaw, 1990). African feminists such as Sylvia Tamale (2020) have used it to show how, for instance, the interlocking and mutually constitutive elements of colonisation, capitalism, and patriarchy, dominate the social, economic, political, and intellectual life on the continent to perpetuate intersectional inequalities. While race, class, and gender are the categories most commonly intersecting in this thesis, it includes other categories such as language, age, sexual orientation, religion, ethnicity, location, education, ability, colour etc.

Colonial / Western/ Eurocentric: In the thesis, these terms are sometimes used interchangeably, to describe pedagogy, epistemology or curricula that are reliant on the scholarship and values of mostly white, elite, Christian, hetero-sexual men from Europe or the USA, who continue to be regarded as the voices of authority in many first-year Humanities curricula (Knowles et al., 2022a). As drivers of the imperial project in the 15th century and onwards to colonise African countries for their own benefit, the 'western' champions of 'enlightenment' have imposed these values through brutal subjugation of African onto-epistemologies. Coloniality, as an ongoing ideology and legacy of the historical events of colonisation, is intricately linked to the patriarchy and capitalism that were and are the mutually constitutive elements of the imperial project. The values of superiority based on masculinity, whiteness, and wealth, generated through exploitation, assimilation, and internalisation, continue to impact the socio-politico-economic life on the continent.

Neoliberalism: A spin-off of capitalism, neoliberalism is based on the idea of economic rationality, in that economic freedom is seen as necessary for social progress. Baatjes (2005) argued that neoliberalism binarises public and private, elevating the role of the private, the individual, competitiveness, and meritocracy, above what is considered to be the public or common good, and ignoring the systemic unjust hierarchies and inequalities that oppress groups of people based on intersections of race, gender and class. This has consequences for the social, economic, and political life of, for example, African people and countries. The role of the state to address and redress the historical inequalities that were achieved through slavery and colonialism is regarded with deep suspicion by neoliberalists. Conditions of poverty and unemployment are criminalised as "private problems for which those, who are experiencing them, must be punished" (Baatjes, 2005, p. 3). In the university sector, neoliberalism has the effect of commodifying knowledge, treating students as customers, and depoliticising radical transformation initiatives through mainstreaming them as compliance exercises (Lewis & Hendriks, 2017).

1. Introduction

1.1.   Introducing the thesis

The students I teach, work with, co-research, and care about, arrive at university with dreams in their hands, with contributions to make, and with ways of knowing and being that shape their potential. This thesis is a collaboration, a dance between us, to imagine university teaching and learning that nurtures their holistic inclusion, critical thinking, and creative humanity. It is an invitation to share with you our[1] journey to devise a schema for this kind of knowledge-making, building on the work of others and our own experiences.

The purpose of the study was to set up a platform or platforms for knowledge-making with students, using principles of African Feminisms to guide and inspire, which could recognise and nurture African students' onto-epistemologies.[2] I wanted to do this because for years while teaching students in the Extended Studies (ES)[3] Unit at Rhodes University (UCKAR),[4] I have been frustrated by ways in which their potentials have been marginalised, and their worthiness as academic citizens not genuinely or sufficiently recognised. Having come to know students and the complexities of their lives, I believe that they arrive at the university

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[1] I use the first-person plural to indicate the students and I as a collective who have worked on this project – interchanging between I and we, these pronouns aim to bring ourselves into an embodied presence in the thesis. This disrupts the so-called neutrality of the researcher/teacher/writer in much traditional academic practice.

[2] Epistemology, or how we know what we know, is intricately tied to our being in the world, and what is real to us – ontology. Western scholarship has tended to binarise these notions, and influenced what counts as knowledge based on the Cartesian separation of the mind from the body. Onto-epistemology infers the connectedness and interdependence of being and knowing (see Hernandez Ibinarriaga, 2022; Sefotho, 2021)

[3] The Extended Studies programme is a nationally devised intervention aimed at redressing exclusions of the apartheid regime in South Africa. Each university articulates the programme uniquely. At Rhodes University, the Humanities ES programme accepts around 50-60 students per year, who are invited to the programme based on criteria such as rural or peri-urban schooling, first in their families to go to university, and not enough points to gain automatic entry. They are required to choose one of two streams for their first year: Sociology 1 and Politics 1 (my group) OR Anthropology 1 and Journalism 1. Our ES classes are used to augment the mainstream subjects.

[4] Rhodes University was renamed the University Currently Known as Rhodes (UCKAR) by protesters and allies during the 2015/16 student protests. The #RhodesMustFall movement, instigated by a political performance by University of Cape Town (UCT) student, Chumani Maxwele, led to the removal of the Rhodes statue from UCT grounds (see https://www.sahistory.org.za/dated-event/rhodes-statue-removed-uct). In 2017, following a resurgence of the name-change debate at Rhodes University (RU) during and after the protests, the RU Council voted to halt any consultative process around renaming, citing pressing financial considerations as part of their reasoning (https://www.ru.ac.za/latestnews/archives/2017/councildecidesaboutthefutureofthenameofrhodesuniversity.html). In this thesis, UCKAR is used as a political and commemorative act in sections, while Rhodes University is used in others. See Daniels (2015) for the argument to change the name.

with ways of knowing and being that can be and should be more carefully and fruitfully acknowledged, encouraged, and employed, particularly in the Humanities faculty.

I understand knowledge-making as a key purpose of the university, in which case all aspects of it, not least of which is students' first introductions with its workings, hold the capacity to shape our collective understanding of and participation in making valuable knowledge. This means that pedagogy, as well as research, are aspects of knowledge-making that contribute to different forms of knowledge. For first-year students, their engagements with curricula are first encounters with knowledge-making in a university – including how they develop self-knowledge during this time, and how they make meaning of their worlds, their lives, the theories they are introduced to, and how they learn and apply the tools and schema for making new knowledge for the common good. The thesis asks: Who are our students? What do they bring into the university and to the knowledge-making project? What kinds of knowledge are substantively valuable in their lives today? And what steps can we take to transgress the western framing of knowledge to be more inclusively Afrocentric?

My goal was to demonstrate a collaborative praxis of African feminist ideas which would be the vehicle to conceptualise a culture for transgressive knowledge-making in African universities. I want to be able to offer the university, and colleagues, friends, lecturers, a method of pedagogic engagement that works from students' perspectives, albeit based on different values and 'currency' to what we usually find in many university spaces. Importantly I wished to argue the claims for new knowledge that centred the voices, insights, and experiences of students themselves. This thesis and associated projects show that students are far more likely to succeed at the university's goals for them if they are seen, welcomed, nurtured, engaged, and inspired in their first year. If they are considered as merely part of the economic viability of the institution, as 'throughput', and urged to complete their degrees in as short a time as possible, the students who are part of this project and thesis (and others like them) will continue to struggle, or to be merely assimilated, and are the group most likely to fail.

Students and I have found ways to articulate transgressive cultures, as will be shown, but why should this matter, and how is it compelling for a wider audience? Perhaps many of us who work in academia struggle to balance our energies in gruelling schedules, multiple stresses, competing interests, and a kind of hopelessness that makes us disengage from the ideals about humanising, liberatory, creative and participatory methods of teaching and

learning and making knowledge. But many of us also work in alternative, marginal spaces that can be contemplated as more generative for a sustainable future, in the company of others. The thesis is a contribution to, and builds on this kind of transgressive work, and presents a schema which is conceptualised, applied, and presented as a possibility here for all those who seek to make politically rigorous, culturally sensitive, inclusive knowledge contributions (Borras, 2016; Ntseane, 2011; Wane, 2008). Through a process (not necessarily linear) of storytelling, descriptions, critical reflections, theoretical engagements, and analyses, the possibilities of the schema will, we propose, become evident and inspiring for their generative and compelling qualities.

With Dreams in Our Hands (WDIOH) is the title of the thesis and of the research project. It evokes a prayer and a practice: it brings hands together to beg, to offer, to hold something precious, to release. The thesis is all of these. Keeping with the metaphor of hands holding the dream, I focus on the hand itself as a descriptive metaphor, and as a generative theme for the thesis. Each of the five fingers of the hand represent an aspect of how we have collaborated on the projects and in lecture rooms, and what this has taught us about how to nurture and inspire the dreams of African young people through transgressive knowledge-making cultures. The five aspects – ***framing, activating, seeing, creating, imagining*** – are equally important, mutually constitutive, and not only linear. How the content of each is configured, affects all the others. They can be seen as distinct features of this kind of knowledge-making, or merged as an orientation that is less distinctive. They are elements of a schema for the kind of knowledge-making (through teaching, learning and research) that is inclusive and inspiring despite functioning in the shadows of colonial, patriarchal, capitalism. The introduction, and the five papers that follow, will set up the final configuration of these aspects that are presented in the conclusion, as our contribution to new knowledge.

The ***frame*** of this project and thesis, or its intellectual orientation, is African/Black Feminist theory and principles. There are other theories and orientations, for instance participatory, social justice, critical, holistic, decolonial orientations and theories that overlap with the thinking and ideas of African women. As I will explain, the theory provides a view of the world, and teaching and learning, from the perspective of African women in a variety of contexts on the continent. It is grounded in love that is spiritual, intellectual, and embodied. It recognises and generates connectedness between people, based on mutual respect and appreciation. African feminism's position in the intellectual hierarchies inherent in scholarly

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publishing, curricula development, and reference lists, is deliberately marginal, given the historical forces, legacies, and political configurations of colonialism, capitalism and patriarchy and their various mutations. So, the framing is also ***activism,*** in that the theory compels and is compelled by African Feminist movements and solidarity. It identifies the power arrangements between people, and institutions, so that they might be reconfigured and/or navigated in socially just and liberating ways. It seeks to transform knowledge-making practices that intentionally and inadvertently leave people out, based on race, gender, and class. The activated frame enables a different kind of ***seeing*** – of students, especially poor Black students, who are traditionally marginalised in South African universities. Seeing them through this frame recentres their voices and concerns, and welcomes them as co-conspirators in transgressive pedagogy and research. This inspires the ***creation*** of different kinds of platforms and processes, and which set up a way of doing pedagogy and research that engages a collaboration of dreams and ideas. So, the platform holds the space to ***reimagine*** transgressive, inclusive, relevant curricula, activities and practices in universities.

A PhD by publication (see Addendum 1) requires a "properly designed PhD project which produces a coherent thesis and makes an original contribution at the boundaries of the field of Education". The research project for this thesis emerged from my academic life, which has been dominated by poor, Black South African young people, in an elite space. Since 2009, I have taught in the Humanities Extended Studies (ES) programme at UCKAR. Along with the ES students, I am constantly exposed to how the departments of Sociology and Political and International Studies and others teach their disciplines, and what, over time, they value as a good and worthy student. The students I have come to know and love, give me a profound perspective on the ES programme, the university, and knowledge-making. Some of them have overcome many challenges and through resilience and hard work have succeeded in their studies. But our collective experiences and findings are that despite university policies and promises that suggest the contrary, many poor, Black, young people do not always find themselves recognised, believed, and valued as a collective, and as individuals (Knowles et al., 2022a; Knowles et al., 2022b). In a collaborative process of knowledge-making, students and I (as a lecturer and PhD student) worked together in the project I will explain in detail, to formulate different ways of working with knowledge. These are our offerings to transformations that are already happening in Sociology, Politics, and

many other fields at our university. The "quality criteria for the particular type of study design" (Addendum 1) required of the project and thesis include an epistemic commitment to the African feminist lens, orientation and methodology; to the centring of students' concerns, perspectives and aspirations; and a coherence of these through each of the thesis components. It offers an innovative schema for knowledge-making that is the result of these.

A PhD by publication requires a minimum of four academic articles, at least one of which must be sole authored and "three should normally have been submitted to accredited journals and two should have been accepted for publication" (Addendum 1). The meta-reflection on these – the conditions and processes that gave rise to them, and the concluding condensation of their arguments – is a core element of the thesis.

The thesis firstly introduces me, and the students, who are the research project and pedagogic communities. Secondly, it provides a contextual backdrop for the study and some key assumptions. Thirdly, it explains the frame of African and Black feminisms which is expanded in the articles that follow. Fourthly, it describes the process of research and knowledge-making, and explains why deliberate choices were made for how we worked with knowledge. Each article is then introduced with a brief discussion of how it came to be and its publication journey. Finally, the conclusion provides a meta-reflection that emphasises the study's contribution to knowledge-making .

1.2.   Introducing myself and the students I work with

This is not a peace treaty.
This is me taking off my clothes
Outside the hall
Where patriarchy, colonialism, and capitalism
Negotiate their pieces.
It is to fetch the young ones
Into the foyer
So that we can not play with their lives.
Mighty be our power.
(CK[5] 2021 – with thanks to Leymah Gbowee, 2011)

The first set of stories in this thesis is concerned with how students at UCKAR and I found each other and a way to relate across our differences. For the past 12 years at UCKAR, I have taught between 28 and 42 young Black first-year students every year. We get to know

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[5] Over the years, I have become known as CK by students and friends, using my initials. My first and surnames are spelt and pronounced unusually, making it difficult to pronounce them correctly. Flipping the practice of white missionaries and colonialists who gave African people English names, I have embraced CK.

each other well during this time, and many of us keep in contact, some regularly, since our meeting in their first year. We keep in touch on Facebook; I see them in the campus café or the town's supermarket; I have visited them in hospital, in jail, or at home when a grandmother has died; I have accompanied them to tell their parents they are pregnant. I support their applications for funding or employment as their referee. I see those I teach every day, every week, every term – in class, and in individual or group consultations that are either voluntary or requested by me. Four of them teach or have taught in various capacities in the ES unit since graduating.[6] Some have dropped out. Some have died. I have been to their funerals, and grieved with their grieving families. I mentor some, and they have all mentored me in some way. In the lecture rooms of a small university in a small town, people very different from me, and I, have practised some principles that are our contribution to new knowledge about teaching and learning.

The ES programme I teach is an augmentation programme for the first year of a four-year degree – students take the mainstream classes and assignments for Sociology (Soc 1) and Political and International Studies 1 (Pol 1), along with other first-year students, and then have separate classes with me. After their first year, they continue on their own for the rest of their degree. Over the years, there have been some important shifts in how these two subjects are presented and conceptualised, but there are aspects of both that have not changed at all in the 12 years I have been attending them with my students. Importantly, they are not static entities, are perceived differently by different people, and have their own coherence and contestations within them. For both subjects, a different lecturer presents a module of the first-year course for each of the four terms (around six weeks each). Sociology 1 is an introduction to the discipline and foundational theories, using Durkheim, Marx and Weber amongst other theorists to understand the individual in society. Students are exposed to ideas about how we are socialised into the norms of a particular society by social institutions (such as family, education, religion etc), structured by hierarchies of race, class and gender. We learn about Social Change, featuring Malthusian theory amongst others, and about Deviance, using mostly western male scholars from the last century (see https://www.ru.ac.za/sociology/). Political and International Studies 1 is an introduction to Political Philosophy (and the big ideas of a liberal democracy – equality, freedom, justice,

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[6] Two are currently teaching in the UCKAR ES Unit – one as permanent lecturer in the Commerce programme, another as lecturer of Computer Literacy in the Humanities programme. Another two have taught my classes as leave-replacements: one for three months in 2016, one for a year (2020/2021).

rights, political obligations). We are exposed to the white male philosophers who first theorised these ideas in the west. There is a module on colonialism including the roles of pre-colonial women in Western and Southern Africa. Comparative politics introduces students to the comparative method of political studies, using five different countries, and two ideas (statehood and development) to learn how to do comparisons. And in International Relations, students learn about Realism, Liberalism, Social Constructionism and Feminism to understand relations between states, including Africa and its intra and inter relations (see https://www.ru.ac.za/politicalinternationalstudies/). In both Soc 1 and Pol 1, there are four lectures a week, weekly tutorials run by postgraduate students, a main assignment (a test or an essay) each term, and an examination each semester.

My pedagogy in the ES unit emerges from a desire to be part of a movement that runs counter to what I believe to be the marginalisation and neglect of some people, inherently raced, classed, and gendered, in society and in the university. Our ES classes have offered us the opportunity to experience and learn a different way to do things, using different values and practices to what we commonly find in mainstream classes. For several years, I have been saying to each ES class I teach that I would like to do my PhD on what happens in our classes, and that I would invite them to be part of the enquiry. When I made that call in 2020 during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, 24 former students who were in ES sometime between 2011 and 2019 volunteered to work with me to imagine and produce a way of making knowledge that we believe to be more inclusive, more sustainable, relevant to our lives and futures, holistic, connected, engaged, spiritual.

I asked each of the 24 students if they would provide a picture of themselves, and a few lines that told of their dreams on entering the university space, what their dreams are now, and anything else they would like us to know. The pages that follow are 18 contributions to this request.

Table 1: Student/co-researchers

"My ultimate dream when I arrived in ES was graduating with a law degree in record time. I thought law was the career path I wanted to follow because it was one of the few degrees I knew of, since I never had any career guidance before. However, that changed in my first year of mainstream as I realised that law was not something I wanted to do as a career and this left me with a lot of confusion as I needed to figure out what I was truly passionate about. It was only in my final year where I got to realise what I truly enjoyed and this was research and development studies. This was largely motivated by my involvement in community engagement at Rhodes and in Makhanda, which also influenced me to do my masters in development studies. My dreams now are to get a PhD and hopefully start my NGO in the future that will look into community development through education, career guidance and sports and arts."

Milisa Roboji, 2022

"My dreams when I arrived in ES was to study Psychology and be a psychologist. Over the years my ideas around wellness and what it means to be a healthy and well-rounded human on this earth, has changed. My dream is still to return and do my Masters in Psychology, at the moment I am still working on other areas of my life and becoming a well-rounded and healthy human myself. "

Chwayita Yose, 2022

"The dreams that I had (and still have) when arrived in ES programme, was to become an educational psychologist, this was inspired by a cousin of mine who lives with Foetal Alcohol Syndrome. Six years down the line, this is still my dream – my dream is to raise awareness, and try fight the stigma around this condition. I have witnessed how families with children with the condition struggle with accepting their children, and also how some don't even take their children to schools that cater for their children, because of all the stigma. I am very close into achieving this dream, as now I am only left with doing Masters in Educational Psychology. Being at Rhodes has also broadened the dream, as I have not been focusing on working with children with special needs, instead I have found myself turning into an advocate for education, working with high school learners through RUCE & GADRA, where I mentored a few."

Namhla Tukulu, 2022

"I was fearful and excited when I came to Rhodes. Initially I was a bit ashamed to say I was in ES – ashamed because people thought of ES kids as deficient. However, throughout the year 2013 I got to appreciate the ES class. It played a big part in my academic career and for that I'll forever be appreciative. My dreams now? Either to be admitted to the bar, or go to the DPP as a State advocate."

 Mbuso kaMaila, 2022

"When I first arrived at Rhodes University, I was very anxious and imposter syndrome had me by the throat. Coming from a disadvantaged public school, and now entering one of the most prestigious universities in the country, was a huge transition for me. However, Extended Studies felt like a soft landing. It became my safe space, and allowed me to fully transition without feeling too overwhelmed. Extended studies is where I discovered what I wanted to do in life, by the end of that academic year I was very sure of what journey I wanted to take the following year. A journey that has come with many challenges, but has been worth every sweat. Currently, I'm pursuing my Honours in Education. I hope to further my studies and become a Master of Education, but most importantly I hope to make a contribution and change in the education sector. I hope to one day be able to use all these skills and qualifications to better the education sector for young people."

Zikhona Faku, 2022
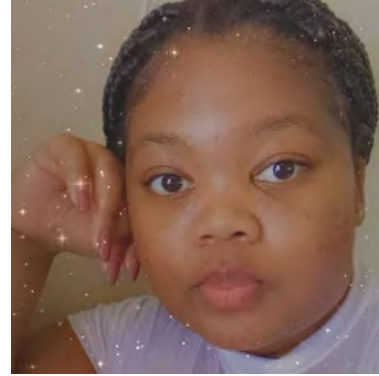
"Coming to Rhodes as a young man from the remote Limpopo region of Malamulele was a big step. I attended schools that did not adequately prepare me for higher education, so I had a lot to learn in a short amount of time. Nevertheless, it was a privilege and a tremendous honour to join the Humanities Extended Studies Unit. Extended Studies is a unique and safe space for black students from poor backgrounds like mine. One was free to be who they were in the ES environment. There was a lot of support. My ambition was to earn a law degree, but I had no idea I would fall in love with Political and International Studies. I intend to pursue a higher degree in Political and International studies."

Matimu Shivambu, 2022

"When I first applied for an undergraduate enrolment with Rhodes University I was in grade 10 or 11. I have always been an ambitious person. When the Dean of Humanities wrote back to me, I was excited. By then, I had already decided that Rhodes University is where I'm going to start my career.
The ES class gave me the opportunity to reflect more on the content we were provided. I enjoyed the discussions in our small groups which provided me insight that I would not have imagined. The multiple perspectives I got in the ES class have been valuable. After attaining an undergraduate degree in Organisational/Industrial Psychology and Industrial/Economic Sociology, my objective is to be an organisational psychologist. The courses I completed gave such valuable insight in multiple fields. The journey still continues."

Khauho Coetzee, 2022

"When I arrived at Rhodes University, the place was a strange world. It was a two-world. Technically, the university is a free space: it encourages students to dream. Yet, according to my experience and many of the other students I have come across, the university is exclusionary, very classed, and lacks willingness to understand our problems and to hold our hands in navigating the space. I was adept enough with the mainstream not to fail, but the mainstream did not accommodate me enough. Sometimes I would feel as though it does not accommodate me at all. I could not participate in lectures as they were very much carried in English. This at times created a feeling that I'm being penalised for coming from public disadvantaged schools.

The group that I felt the most affinity for was the ES. Thanks to this group, CK, and our long walk to achievements. This group was a home to some of us who needed to fit it. Two things were true about me when I arrived at Rhodes. One, I was scared. And two, I was capable. The group managed to calm down my fear and inspire me to work on my capabilities. It also contributed a lot to us who struggled to keep up with the pace and the style of learning of the mainstream classes. This group saved me from moments of self-doubt that the mainstream created. It instilled confidence in me that my dreams are valid and worth it.

It is through this group that my dream of being a writer is becoming possible. It is also through this group that I am able to pursue my Honours degree. This group inspired me to find my niche. It trained me to navigate the academic world seamlessly. CK's PhD has showed me more than once that there is no negative in a dream. All dreams are valid and possible if you cease from touching anything with half your heart. It also taught me that none of us are only one thing at any point in life. In that case, every space we occupy must reflect who we are."

Athabile Ntlokwana, 2022

"Upon arrival in the ES class in 2019, I saw myself completing my studies and becoming an economist – I have always been interested in studying Economics. Throughout my university experience, I have learnt that there is more to life than fixating on a career.

My dreams now are not limited to what I want to be, but now consist of creating lifelong relationships/friendships, helping those in need, interest in academic writing and sharing of knowledge."

Zinathi Sobuza, 2022

"I'm Abongile James from Butterworth, a small town situated in the Eastern Cape. When I started ES programme my dream was to be an advocate, I was even given the nickname 'Advo'. However as the time passed by I found happiness in helping people. Studying various theories more especially Feminism made me the person I am today, which is giving back to a black marginalised community, by using the skills and knowledge I attained from Extended Studies Programme."

Abongile James, 2022

"My dreams began in high school and that dream was to be the change in my family, acquire qualification to better the lives of my family. Also be change in my community, bring positive change and inspire the young ones. Since grad so many people young and old have been telling me how proud and inspired they are by me achieving this degree. The matric class at Ntsika where I am volunteering – these learners have become so inspired by seeing me wearing my academic regalia. And in the township it's really that children really learn from observing and they become inspired by what they see and that really did inspire them to study hard and do well in the exams now.

My dreams now well it's been so hard getting a job and I have been trying to get funding to do postgrad diploma in enterprise management. My dream now is this, but I am so happy with all the inspiration that many of the kids get from seeing what I achieved. My dream of becoming a change in my family and make life better for my family is always with me no matter what challenges I come across, that dreams always pushes me to work hard and never give up."

Thando Petnos, 2022

"In a broad sense, my dream of coming to ES has been to learn, grow and evolve as an individual. Also, I wanted to experience university life with people from various social and cultural backgrounds. But most importantly, I still desire to further my knowledge and create more knowledge. Be comfortable and confident in speaking your own native language."

Zikhona Ntombolwana, 2022

"When I got accepted for my first year at Rhodes University in 2016, it was a dream come true on its own as I knew that I wanted to go to university after finishing my high school. When I got into the Extended Studies (ES) programme that same year, I got exposed to so much more – other than academics, such as mentoring and community engagement. When I arrived in the ES programme I knew I wanted to finish my four-year undergraduate degree and get into postgraduate studies, those were my dreams. Years following that, I witnessed my dreams become a reality. I completed my triple major undergraduate degree in 2019, completed a joint Honors the following year, and started my Masters in 2021.

My dreams now are to secure employment. I also plan to further my studies and pursue a PhD. The goal is definitely the red gown, possible before turning 30!

I am very passionate about education and empowering the youth. Both my Honours and Masters research studies were on youth development. As a way of giving and ploughing back to the communities that birthed me, every year I assist high school children with their university applications and help them in developing a plan to achieve their academic goals."

Zikhona Mtwa, 2022

"Coming from a disadvantaged background, my dream has always been, trying to change the situation at home. When I arrived at Rhodes University, everything was foreign to me, the language, the way people speak, eat etc. When I arrived at ES class, I could relate, most of my classmates came from the same background as myself. It was a space where everyone related to each other, a family away from home. I always had a dream to change, inspire and contribute to the upliftment of students who don't think it's possible for them. I tried to do that as a mentor and tutor and even today I still get message from students who I have mentored, thanking me for the contribution I made in their lives and studies.

My dream is to address specific key factors that include issues of access and justice, higher education transformation and the articulation gap from basic education to higher education through learning, teaching and research. To contribute to the higher education landscape in South Africa. That's my passion, that's my dream. If I can inspire and assist the youth who think they cannot achieve anything because of their backgrounds, my dream would have been achieved. I want to assist in making higher education accessible to every student (access and success).

I am thankful to have been in the ES class. I wouldn't be here today if it wasn't for that class. I wouldn't have the dreams I have if it wasn't me being in the ES class. I wouldn't be here if it wasn't for CK, I really appreciate her, and may God bless her in the work she does. She is really changing a lot of lives through teaching and learning and through being kind, and always willing to assist."

 Lebogang Khoza, 2022
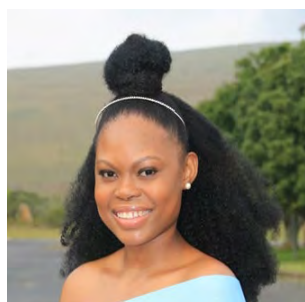
"My biggest dream when I started with my extended studies was to graduate in record time, but more so, to get exceptional results just to prove a point to myself about my capabilities. Achieving this was my silver lining.

My dreams currently are to continue my studies in hopes to achieve a PhD in Law. This has always been the goal and I'm excited about materialising this too."

Sagittarius, 2022

"My name is Viwe Makeleni, a postgraduate Diploma in Business Analysis candidate, who has the ambition of achieving his Master's in Business Administration (MBA). I have been with this research project since the year 2020 with the utmost respect to the researcher, Ma'am CK, for the role she has played in setting the foundation of university life for me in retrospect to the success I have gained thus far, and still looking to add more in the future.

Since participating in this research, I have learnt many things of which I had minimal idea or understanding as well as different research methodologies that have held me in good stead in my postgraduate studies thus far – I am hoping to implement the same in my dissertation in the near future.

I wish Ma'am CK all the best in her academic endeavours as I can, without fail, recommend her in any field of study in which she may choose."

Viwe Makeleni, 2022

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"When I first arrived at Extended Studies and university in general, my dream which I am certain was also the dream of many was just to make it, get the grades and graduate. A part of understanding my dream now is acknowledging that to graduate and get the degrees there were a lot of things that allowed that to become a reality, like having a healthy learning environment, understanding lectures, support system, community and having a lecturer like yourself who finds new ways to help us learn. So my dream now is to be that kind of lecturer, mentor and person for students who enter university. To never give up on anyone, any student and help them attain their dream of graduating. As Toni Morrison once said that "If you are free, you need to free somebody else. If you have some power, then your job is to empower somebody else."

Nomphumelelo Babeli, 2022

"One of my dreams when I started out in ES at Rhodes was to be a good student, work hard, obtain a qualification, and immediately venture into the world of work. Granted, I have worked very hard to obtain my postgraduate qualifications however my dreams have somewhat gradually changed, in the sense, that yes qualifications, jobs, and gaining financial independence are important, but equally so it is important and fulfilling to play an active positive role in changing individuals' lives in society for better. I am now teaching in the ES at Rhodes University where I started out and trying as much as I can to play a positive role in my students' lives through my teaching philosophy, through motivation and mentoring strategies. I am also learning from my teaching, from my students, from my friends and colleagues, listening more, and discovering anew about life and evolving."

Sibulela Ndemka , 2022

The 24 former students who responded to the call to participate in the project represent in some ways the collectively shared experiences of alienation in a stratified university space that we discuss here. Former UCKAR students have written about these experiences before (see for example Centwa, 2013, wa Azania, 2020), expressing the pain and alienation that especially poor, Black students have felt in the institution. In ES classes (five double periods a week) we have, over and over, found safe places to learn about learning, and life, and how to approach the mainstream curricula.

My ES curriculum is guided by and responsive to the Pol 1 and Soc 1 departments. Students need to pass at least one of these to proceed, and the ES augmentation classes are a navigation of the university operating systems as well as the curricula of each mainstream subject. Although there are notable exceptions I will discuss later (also see Knowles et al.,

2022a), it is our experience that Pol 1 and Soc 1 students are presented with theorists disproportionally white, elite, western, male whose perspectives remain dominant in discourses around what counts as legitimate (and examinable) knowledge. The erasure of African women from university reference lists and curricula is widespread (see Okech, 2020) and is evident in all institutional settings – Dlakavu noted their absence in "school curricula, our media, history books, museums, and heritage sites" (2017, p. 93). The effects of this bias and erasure are varied. Some students adapt to this kind of narrowed knowledge legitimation, and its reliance on white, elite, male scholars. But others feel its effects without necessarily understanding the source of their alienation and discomfort. Three former students and co-researchers on this project explained their first-year experience and how they later made sense of this:

> *In my first year in Humanities, I would look at the reference list at the end of my tutorial submissions or essays and never find a familiar surname or name. The more I engaged with texts, the more I longed for representation and familiar experiences. I ended up consoling myself saying, "that is why I don't understand Western theories". At first, I used to think this how it supposed to be, that the only legitimate voices are Western voices through a particular language, and the harder it is to understand this Western knowledge means the power in it and the relevance of it. For some time, I held this view, until I realised that this is deliberate exclusion, some oppositional voices and nuances to traditional knowledge-making are not fitted, thus denied legitimacy, and my failure to understand does not signify how powerful the knowledge is, but rather how deliberate the exclusion of poor Black students is. (WDIOH reflection, 2022) (also Knowles et al., 2022a)*

> *I was going to say that before even considering gender as a defining category [for knowledge in first-year university], race is the biggest defining category. So, before asking the question of what gender is knowledge, we should firstly ask the question of what race and what religion is knowledge, because for the most part people who wrote back in whatever century were the first to construct the supposedly knowledge. Those people were probably Christians and white. So, that affected how we understand knowledge because for the most part back in whatever century it was, women were not even allowed to produce knowledge. (WDIOH Workshop, 2021) (also Knowles et al., 2022a)*

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In my experience coming from an under privileged environment and school, being part of that socialisation plays a huge part in causing stress and depression at university, which at times, may lead to failure or derailed success within the university because you carry it with you. For example this caused me to adapt slowly to my academic work. Because even when I was and I am at university I was still faced, and still am, with overwhelming challenges that affluent students never have to confront. Coming from under privileged schools made my brain to adapt to sub optional conditions in ways that would later in my university life undermine my academic performance. This is not to say that academic success at university or life is impossible but emotional and social challenges disrupted my progress. Acute and serious stressors, such as depression and anxiety disorder played a very serious role in making sure that my development within university lagged behind. (WDIOH Submission #6, 2020)

The first reflection is written by a former ES student who is currently a top performer in Political and International Studies Honours. He comes from a rural village in the Eastern Cape Province, not far from the university town. He was recently awarded full funding for his Master's degree in Political and International Studies. The second former ES student is from a bustling township in Gauteng and is a Teaching Assistant in the same department, currently completing her M.A. degree. She taught the ES course for a year while I was on sabbatical in 2020/2021. The third former ES student is an MA graduate who now teaches Computer Literacy in the ES programme. He is from Makhanda. All aspire to complete their PhDs and be an ongoing part of the academy they have survived and seek to transform. Like many ES students, all are working class students on state and other bursaries, raised by mothers and grandmothers. All have worked on the project with me, and two co-wrote one of the papers in the thesis (the first two quotes appear in Knowles et al., 2022a). They, and many others who experienced first year in the ES programme with me, found ways to bring themselves into recognition in the university system, but we argue that this is at an unnecessary cost to them, and the university.

I love Okech's description of feminist epistemic communities, which resonates here: "It is not the physicality of a community that makes it real; it is the fact that across space and time there is a shared sense of politics, trajectories, and scholarship in conversation with and attuned to the question: who knows?" (2020, p. 4). This has been true for so many

ongoing relationships with former students. But there are those that did not recover from the alienation they experienced in their first year, and the core of our argument is that students arrive at university with contributions to make and with dreams in their hands, and we could and should make it a more welcoming space for diverse people, especially African young people, for our collective benefit.

Before teaching in the ES unit, I had a varied career path. I was a high school teacher (school psychologist, and English/ English Literature) for 12 years; then an NGO and community practitioner for eight years; before joining UCKAR first as a fundraiser for faculty programmes in 2002. I began my MA (Pol) degree, at the same time that I started teaching in ES, in 2009. After receiving my MA in 2012, I completed the Postgrad Diploma in HE and several other short courses over the years. My experiences up until this point all prepared me in some way for this chapter of my education and career.

As an older, elite white woman in this space, I have had to learn and unlearn so many things in the sincere quest to address the challenges of first-year university with these students. I have done this through getting to know them in and outside of the lecture room. Most are from working class families and are considered at risk academically, and part of my work is to facilitate a space where we can navigate a different university environment and their two first-year subjects, in order to succeed. Many of them struggle enormously with the social and intellectual demands of the university – not because they do not have capacity and intelligence and contributions to make, but because the system of the university is streamlined to homogenise and standardise success in a way that excludes them and others like them (Knowles, 2019).

The success rate of the ES class over the years I have taught them (2009 – 2021) mirrors the national figures. On average, 89% have passed their first year; 58% have graduated, and 29% have graduated with a postgraduate degree (Data Management Unit, Rhodes University, 2022). I have committed myself, with passion and integrity, to collaborate with them to find meaning, personhood and recognition in the university system fraught with the legacies of colonialism, patriarchy and capitalism.

Over the years, the ES students and I have also been part of the socio-political workings and happenings at UCKAR. Because my pedagogy is holistic, recognising the embodiment of knowledge, what happens to them outside of the lecture room affects what happens inside

it. In 2015, South African universities were rocked by a number of protests – at UCKAR these began in April 2015, gaining momentum through the year and flaring sporadically until December 2016. In many ways it changed the political climate at UCKAR, and drew lines in the sand in terms of student and staff politics. It became a divisive and contentious time in the university history and ongoing collegial relations. Poor Black students, including many from my past and current ES classes, were caught in the middle of a profoundly pedagogic moment – we were not merely learning objective lessons about race, class and gender framed by white male western scholars in Soc 1 and Pol 1, but were having to make subjective daily choices about whether to protest these actual realities and put our bodies on the line to defend our beliefs. It was a disruptive time for students and staff, but also the opportunity to operate differently and off-curriculum, to discuss the very real issues of oppression and transformation as expressed through various demands and concerns of the students over the two-year period.

The 2015/2016 student protests were seminal moments in how we think about transformation, racism, classism and rape culture on campuses, and the decolonisation of the curriculum in South African universities – all these formed part of the student agenda in these protests (Alasow 2015; Chengeta, 2017; Daniels, 2015; Mkhize, 2015). During the protests, I joined in countless discussions, individually and in small and large groups. Along with other concerned staff we took food to protesters where they occupied university Council Chambers or guarded barricades; kept watch while they held negotiations; attended meetings where they deliberated next steps; facilitated alternative curriculum classes on the lawns outside the lecture rooms; waited at the hospital with them to be treated from rubber-bullet and other wounds; drove around searching for them when friends couldn't find them; ran with them for safety when police fired randomly even though this was the students' home from home; took blankets and food to them in jail; attended court hearings; were caught in stand-offs with armed police; took the university to court to limit the scope of the interdict they wanted to enforce permanently (Socio-Economic Rights Institute of South Africa, 2022). The university campus, which includes 56 university residences housing half of the student population, became unrecognisable as public order police with armour and guns came onto the campus to control the unarmed student protesters at various points over the two-year period. It was a brutal reminder that the university and state will punish people with legitimate claims in ways that are blatantly capitalist, racist, and

patriarchal (Chengeta, 2017; Dorfling, 2016; Duncan, 2016 et al.; Muzenda, 2018). It changed us all, and faced me in the direction of this PhD.

The protests gained an initial hold on the increase of university fees ("Students celebrate fee victory", 2015), and have inspired some introspection and hard work in the necessary curricula and policy transformations that were part of students' concerns (Mkhize, 2015). Arguably though, the transformations that remain necessary are complex and deeply rooted, requiring multiple interventions and endeavours. The protests brought students' concerns about racism, classism and sexism to the public sphere in numerous ways and through a variety of hashtag markers (#FeesMustFall; #Luister; #RUReferenceList; #RhodesMustFall; #RhodesSoWhite; #RapeAtAzania; #RhodesWar; #RapeCulture etc). The danger in a neoliberal dispensation is that political ideas are domesticated and co-opted into policy, devoid of the messiness and urgency of protest and politics. When bodies have been brutalised, lives ruined, mental health shattered, trust destroyed, it is not easy to find ways to keep the struggle alive, and the systemic inequalities present in the political consciousness of universities. This thesis is a contribution to the many ways in which people continue to fight for transformation. It is the collaborative work of students and survivors whose lives matter, and who have a dream and vision of a better world.

The ordinary lives of many of the students in the ES unit are no strangers to systemic and material violence. The extreme inequalities and precarities in the country are a real and powerful influence on how students and staff, individually and collectively, experience and value knowledge-making.

At the time of writing the thesis, most of the 24 former ES students who are co-researchers on the project have completed their undergraduate degrees, and some have completed or are undertaking postgraduate degrees. Some are unemployed, others have found work. So much has changed since their first year at UCKAR, with national and global inequalities exacerbated by the global pandemic, climate change, war, and the consequences on state resources. Each one of us is impacted by these, and the work we have done on this project over the past two years is a way to conceptualise a different and more sustainable future for ourselves, and those who follow us into an uncertain future.

2. Situating the political, social, and intellectual context of South African university students

The students that I work with (in the PhD project and in my teaching), and I, are embedded in the social, political, and institutional fabric of South Africa. In this setting, the university plays a role in shaping and facilitating our active citizenship. Students' perspectives, our political engagements, and African feminists over time have influenced how the university is viewed and presented here. While I acknowledge that the students and I all benefit from our involvement in the university, and that our relationship with the institution is complex and complicated, I approach the context of the university with a critical lens to find the aspects of the arrangements that cause harm in some way – directly or indirectly, so that we can imagine and consider alternative arrangements.

There are contrasts between how I have come to know these students, and how they are spoken about elsewhere. They are part of a young demographic that statistically forms the majority group unemployed in the world (Ndondo, 2022). The United Nations Office of the Special Advisor on Africa (UN OSAA) rather jarringly speaks of "harnessing the demographic dividend" (2017, p. 9), by using the growing number of unemployed African young people in projects that will strengthen the continent's sustainable development and industrialisation etc. Nyambura argued that this aim, discussed with Heads of State, has not sought out the necessary insights of young people, and particularly young African feminists who could help to show how these ambitions cannot be contemplated without also including a gendered lens (Nyambura, 2018).

As a demographic, young Black people are also most likely to drop out of or fail their university studies in South Africa (Department of Higher Education and Training [DHET], 2021; Masutha 2022). To put this in context: only 6% of the South African population have any kind of university degree (Nkosi, 2022); according to enrollment figures of 2021, 5.3% of Black African young people are in university education (compared to 24.6% of white young people) (Statista, 2022); and the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET, 2021) reports that around 30% of students complete their undergraduate degrees in three years, moving up to 60% in five years, and around 10%[7] drop out in their first year. The DHET

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[7] This percentage could be higher – Karimi (2022), Dyomfana (2022) and Nkosi (2015) have reported that between 50 and 60% of first-year students drop out.

report concluded that "comparative statistics suggest that black African students are less likely to graduate relative to students in other race groups" (2021, p. 68). The students I work with fall into these demographic categories, and many are hoping that a degree will secure them better jobs with more money. Many are first generation university students, and their families too hope for the financial security that a degree will bring. I want that, and more than that, for them too.

Given the anticipated economic benefits of a university degree, and the skewed dropout and failure rates of African students, this thesis offers a critique of the university system that continues to operate with race, gender and class bias. Based on findings from our project and the critical lens of African and decolonial scholars (Baatjes, 2005; Badat, 2016, 2020; Magoqwana, 2019; Natanel, 2017; Tamale, 2020; Xaba, 2017), we argue that South African universities are built on colonial foundations, entrenched by apartheid, and the legacies of these work against the success of students profoundly disadvantaged by them. The deeply engrained patterns of exclusion and marginalisation are not easily corrected under current neo-liberal conditions, as I will explain, and they affect how lecturers and students think and act about knowledge.

Against the backdrop of what is arguably an alienating environment for many former ES students, and which locates them as vulnerable, at risk, underprepared and previously disadvantaged (Boughey, 2010), we have found ways to work together that transgress conventional categories and methods. There is sometimes slippage as we do this work, between complicity and resistance (Natanel, 2017), in our efforts to articulate and manifest our dreams in the logics and parameters of academia. This dance between our dreams and the conditioning context in which we find ourselves, strengthens our resolve to find the voices and frameworks that liberate our thinking, and sometimes it requires us to recognise the constraints, and name them, so that we can move on. Tamale explains a process of 'conscientisation' as a careful awareness of the histories and values that have shaped us in order to unlearn them (2020, p. 272) and that is part of our journey – to see the patterns of exclusion, understand their contexts, re-orientate ourselves, to ultimately demonstrate ways in which they can be substantively disrupted.

2.1.   Colonialism, Capitalism, Patriarchy and Neo-liberalism

The university currently known as Rhodes is in a small town in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa. The town's name was recently changed from Grahamstown to Makhanda as an attempt to address its brutal colonial history (Masinga, 2018); but the socio-economic legacies of apartheid and colonialism continue to play out in extreme inequalities, exacerbated by a dysfunctional local government leading to many service delivery breakdowns (McKaiser, 2020). As footnoted earlier, 'Rhodes' University has kept its colonial name, despite several attempts to change it (Daniels, 2015; "No name-change For Rhodes University following council vote", 2017). We argue, in the two co-produced papers of the PHD project, WDIOH, that coloniality continues to impact how we think about knowledge, and teaching and learning, in the university. Despite the promise of the Vice Chancellor that UCKAR's "academic and support staff are here to support you; they help you realise your dreams, goals and aspirations" (https://www.ru.ac.za/introducingrhodes/), our data and experiences show that this is not necessarily so (Knowles, 2019; Knowles et al., 2022a; Knowles et al., 2022b).

UCKAR is part of a bigger picture of the university landscape in South Africa. As part of the new democratic state shifts after the first democratic elections in 1994, universities in South Africa underwent many changes (Badat, 2007; Department of Education [DoE], 1997; Ensor, 2004; Reddy, 2004; Sheehan, 2009) to undo apartheid's brutal racist segregation and exclusion policies. One of these changes includes a national provision of Extended Studies Programmes (ESPs) to increase the access and support of 'previously' disadvantaged people into higher education (Council of Higher Education [CHE], 2013). But despite the attempts to transform the post-apartheid South African higher education system into a socially just space for all South Africans, this thesis proceeds from the well-argued perspective that universities are in different ways failing in their efforts of inclusion and academic success of historically oppressed racial groups (Badat, 2011, 2015, 2020; Madonsela, 2020; Sheehan, 2009). Diverse scholars in higher education argue that the failure of transformation is connected to a neoliberal global agenda (Baatjes, 2005; De Sousa Santos, 2020; Muller, 2018) which de-emphasises the idea of the university as a public good (Badat, 2001; Singh, 2001; Mama, 2003) to foreground the notions of individual benefit, the commodification of knowledge, and competition between universities for students as customers (Bruwer, 2018). The voices and experiences of the students in this study show that despite the ways

that race, gender and class intersect to marginalise and affect their prospects and contributions (Knowles, 2019, 2020), this does not have to be the case (Knowles et al., 2022a, 2022b).

University transformations in South Africa have been guided by Government Green and White papers that are the result of multi-stakeholder collaborations to define the terms and projections of the post-school sector. This is in the context of a country and continent whose population demographics are skewed in favour of young people (Ndondo, 2022). In his foreword to the 1997 White Paper for higher education (DoE, 1997), MP for Education at the time, Prof. Sibusisu Bengu urged that "The higher education *system* must be transformed to redress past inequalities, to serve a *new social order*, to meet *pressing national needs* and to respond to new realities and opportunities" (DoE 1997, emphasis added). The *new social order* that Prof Sibusisu Bengu speaks of, was imagined in various consultative processes (Raligilia, 2018) and articulated in an ambitious Constitution which normatively guides the state's redress of the past, and its anticipated response to *pressing national needs*, such as the recent COVID-19 pandemic. But while the norms of the state and the university are articulated with a social justice framing, this thesis argues that despite their good intentions, the processes and policies have been restricted and contained by the overarching neoliberal ideology.

The research project asks if, in fact, the *system* is not transformed, because the focus of the transformations has been framed by, and continues to operate from, a neoliberal ideology and practices which connect South Africa to the global economy. This agenda places a focus on efficiency and numbers: intake; throughput; staff to student ratio; research outputs; and the concomitant importance of performance management; economic risk aversion; managerialism; financial sustainability (Grosfoguel, 2013; Mamdani, 2009; Muller, 2018; Tamale, 2020). We argue that the 'collateral damage' of this approach includes the many poor, young, Black people who, even if they succeed, undergo epistemic violence, alienation, mental health issues, and are forced to develop unnecessary resilience to succeed (Knowles et al. 2022a, 2022b). Do the *systemic* conditions of race and class oppressions in universities, inherited from the colonial and apartheid regimes, remain, while transformation efforts bring about incremental change within, and not of, the system? We argue that the shifts we recommend will be better for everyone, more sustainable, because they recognise mutual, inclusive humanity.

Part of the difficulty of working, teaching and learning in this context is that neoliberalism distracts us from the kind of learning for life, and critical thinking, that could re-orientate values, practices and dreams of students and staff, to serve the common good. As Hames commented "universities now train students to be effective within capitalist structures, the market and the workplace" (2021, p. 64). Neoliberalism is ubiquitous, and diverts the energy we need to make necessary changes and different paths. A neoliberal framework shifts the purpose of the university from public or common good (Badat, 2020; Mama, 2003), to one of economic efficiency and individual benefit, legitimatised by a belief in meritocracy – if you work hard enough, you will succeed. This fallacy fails to acknowledge ways in which success is enabled or disabled by environments that retain colonial and apartheid race, gender, and class biases.

Baatjes (2005, p. 11) argued passionately that public universities in South Africa are coerced into a neoliberal framework imposed by the state, and that "institutions as non-commodified spaces are being transformed according to the dreams of global market utopia". He referenced an address by then minister of finance, Trevor Manuel, who argued that "these currently non-commodified or non-commercialised spaces are in need of proper management systems in order to improve their *efficiency* and *effectiveness"* (ibid., author's emphasis), words that have become associated with financial expediency in the sector. This is despite the ambitious goals of education policies as a key drivers of poverty reduction (Sayed, 2008). Sayed's article considers "a holistic and comprehensive approach to poverty reduction and elimination in and through education", by focussing on the "structural reasons for poverty rather than the individual poor" in order to understand "the interlocking nature of inequalities and placing an emphasis on groups" (p. 53). In many ways this is what this thesis sets out to reveal, from the perspective of Black young people.

The tensions between neo-liberalism and a social justice approach to thinking about universities are layered and complex. Sheehan (2009) showed though what some of the forces at work in a neo-liberal dispensation entail:

> *academic transformation inspired by ideas of conscientisation, pedagogy of the oppressed, decolonisation of consciousness, history from below, liberation sociology, was swamped by other forces: class compromise, elite-pacting, demobilisation of the liberation movement, priority of market norms, privatisation of public space, competitiveness, reduction of knowledge to immediate and narrow use value in*

problem-based learning, outcomes-based curriculum, customer service, research ratings, mode 2 knowledge production. (p.14)

A neo-liberal focus on quantifying benefits has led to a shift in how universities think about and value their success. How do we measure what kinds of benefits though? I have witnessed and experienced how much invisible labour, motivated by love and social justice, goes into student support or navigating staff politics, that flies well below the radar, and does not feature in any of the forms to complete for promotion or other kinds of rewards. UCKAR will quantify benefit and frame its successes and value in a competitive market using the lowest teacher:student ratio, and the highest national throughput rates (students) and output per capita (staff supervision and publication) (https://www.ru.ac.za/#). These are good benefits on the face of it, but not the whole story – what is the quality of teaching and supervision for instance? Is the throughput raced and classed? Badat (2007) warned us that "'transformation', 'development' and 'reconstruction'" are distinct ideas that should not be conflated, even though they overlap. He believed that university 'transformation' is misconstrued, and unavoidably linked to state support, arguing that "inadequately supportive macro-economic and fiscal policies" make real social transformation impossible and warned that "it compromises redress and social equity, confuses certification with meaningful education and confers private benefits while generating limited public benefits" (2007,p. 12). As important and commendable as the Sustainable Goals for Development may be (UNOSAA, 2017), it is possible that unless we re-orientate our thinking and acting in the minutiae of the academic project, the university and its students are instruments in an imperial project that has little concern for the lives of ordinary Black young people.

Notwithstanding the way in which university faculties and individuals have contributed to local and national "pressing needs" during the COVID-19 pandemic (see for example, the RU Pharmacy faculty in Jordaan, 2020, and the RU VC in "University steps in to produce hand sanitiser for EC", 2020), the danger of performing in a neoliberal framework is that even acts of so-called public benefit serve to promote private gain, and distract from the necessary *systemic* transformations that will lead more holistically to the common good. Increasingly, and with billions in state funding (DHET, 2017), poor, Black students are gaining access into universities, but if they are the majority of those who fail and drop out, what is the point? Should acts of charity or service towards the public be seen against the backdrop of how the university approaches recognising and supporting its own most vulnerable students in

teaching and learning before, during and after the pandemic? Is the emotional and supportive labour of lecturers and support staff who put in hours and hours, spending their own money and time, to support struggling students, recognised in any way by the institution? What do the university's raced and classed throughput figures tell us about how welcoming (or not) our curricula and ways of being currently are to which kinds of students? And in addition, how, and for what purpose, will the university work to transform the ongoing paucity of senior Black academics, especially women (Rhodes University Digest of Statistics, 2020), or retain its younger Black academics? This thesis does not necessarily answer these questions, but provides an alternative path through them.

The thesis seeks to undo binary thinking, such as setting neo-liberalism in the university up against the idea of the university as a public or common good as though it is only one or the other that operate at any given time. But to understand their different framings of the university is to recognise how both operate in different ways and spaces in the university, and in its staff and students; and then to generate something new, something worthy of the dreams in our students' hands. A common or public good understanding of the university's purpose (Badat, 2001; Mama, 2003; Singh, 2001) argues that in contrast to neoliberalism, this approach will seek and promote the kinds of substantive and holistic impact that university research, and graduates, have on the issues common to the majority. This kind of approach seeks to undo the systemic legacies of colonialism and apartheid, while continuing to operate within these systems. Natanel (2017) made a good argument on how we can do this, arguing that "we might practice transgression through fully occupying and embodying the seeming grey zone in which we operate. In doing so we may take up positions as wilful 'bad subjects' (Athusser, 1971; Ahmed, 2010), incompletely interpellated into the system and willing to cause its obstruction" (p. 15). This thesis looks at how we might foster such an approach, albeit in relatively isolated ways on a micro-level. It is an early small act, and our sincere hope and intention is that this approach may model ways of working with knowledge iteratively with students, and so have a broader reach.

In this study we have learned that students are our link to the common good. It is precisely their critical thinking, their experiences and understanding of *systemic* and structural poverty and racism, that could have an impact on social transformation and the common good, for instance while at home during lockdown for containing the spread of COVID-19, and in the aftermath of increased economic, political, physical precarity.

This thesis will argue that a different framework is needed if we wish to make progress towards a relevant, flourishing, sustainable university sector in service of the common good in the post-colony. Importantly for this thesis, it means thinking critically about what counts as knowledge, in how we set up our curricula, and how we regard our students.

2.2.   What counts as knowledge?

There are many ways to think about knowledge and knowledge-making. This thesis is a reflection on how knowledge-making is personal and political – we do it in unique ways, but we are also influenced by powerful forces that affect what we know, how we know, and whose knowledge is valued and legitimated. Teaching, learning and research in Higher Education humanities are the knowledge-making activities that are addressed in this thesis.

What we as academics in universities, across faculties, claim about knowledge has a tradition that largely decides for students and staff what kinds of knowledge are valuable, which knowledge skills are important to nurture, and what sorts of capacities and knowledge products are preferred and worthy of success (Adomako Ampofo, 2010; Heleta, 2016; Knowles et al., 2022a; Moletsane, 2015; Muller, 2019;). Moletsane claimed that South African universities, directed by the White Paper of 2013, are focused on an instrumental kind of knowledge that works towards employment as an end. There are two problems with this, argued Moletsane. Firstly, if the ethos of a discipline is informed largely by the employability of a graduate as an end, this encourages students to think of higher education as an individual benefit: to get a job, and perhaps in that way to help their own families to rise out of poverty (Moletsane, 2015). But secondly, Moletsane argued that the consequence of this kind of conceptualisation is that students graduate without being able to think critically (ibid.) – and critical thinking is what will bring about the kinds of knowledge that can meaningfully address *systemic* social injustices such as poverty and unemployment, more comprehensively. Students are also influenced strongly by a neoliberal agenda and its focus on individual benefit, and if we follow Moletsane's argument, their intention to graduate in order to find a better job should find reward. Sadly, graduates in South Africa are finding it more difficult to find work (Comins, 2020; Diale, 2019; Ndondo, 2022), and so could have a degree, and no work, and without necessarily having the critical thinking skills that could none-the-less contribute to the common good. Sayed (2008) too argued that our approaches to education are largely focused on the

individual, at the cost of being able to make significant changes to conditions of poverty and unemployment.

What we have come to understand through this collaborative project is what counts as knowledge in the humanities, and what we value about knowledge-work intrinsically and extrinsically, informs what and how we as academics in a particular discipline or institution teach; yet the politics of the knowledge framework is sometimes invisible to ourselves, and all too often to the students we teach. That being said, the neo-liberal dominance is not felt evenly throughout the university, and in some departments, especially in the humanities, others are working to dismantle, and generatively open up decolonial tools, curricula and processes (see Knowles et al. (2022a) for examples of the excellent work done by the Political and International Studies department at UCKAR). In this thesis and research project, we make the political frames of knowledge-making more visible. We argue that how we think about knowledge, how we define it, is not a neutral activity (Knowles et al., 2022 a, 2002b). Concepts mean different things, depending on who is using them, in what context, and why they are doing so (Arnfred & Adomako Ampofo, 2010). Those with political power also have control over what counts as knowledge and who has access to it (Lewis, 2010). It is politically prejudiced in ways that legitimise or marginalise ways of knowing, and the purposes of knowledge creation (Knowles et al., 2022a; Motsemme, 2002).

The neoliberal frame, as a mutation of the colonial, patriarchal, and capitalist trinity, legitimises and sanctions the kinds of knowledge that are considered valuable in universities. Adomako Ampofo (2010) told of the pressure on academics to publish, preferably in international journals. She explained that "in order to have our intellectual efforts legitimised we work within particular paradigms and theoretical frameworks," that are often Eurocentric, "because we believe that these are more valued in the academic community" (p. 29). It is risky to use marginalised theories, pedagogies, and methodologies in a teaching, learning, and publishing context that is focused on efficiency, standardisation, and economic expediency. hooks (1994) argued that it is an ongoing battle to counter this hegemonic tendency, and that "in this white supremist capitalist patriarchy, it seems that black people are always having to renew a commitment to a decolonizing political process that should be fundamental to our lives and is not" (p. 47). This thesis, and the collaborative projects, transgress the hegemony of a Eurocentric orientation, to work with knowledge in

an Afrocentric way, emphasising the profound contributions of African and feminist scholars on the continent.

2.3.   Situating this study

This research project and the papers that form part of this thesis emerge out of specific conditions, and use an African and Black feminist lens, to frame our thinking about knowledge, and pedagogy, in a politically and ethically rigorous way. Global events also affected how we thought and acted about knowledge. Madonsela (2020) argued that "Covid-19 has accidentally given us a new lens to see the stark realities that have always been around us, regarding extreme poverty, inequality and economic inefficiencies," making it a timely, common experience to engage for this project (see Knowles et al., 2022b). Mwambari argued that the pandemic can be "a catalyst for decolonisation in Africa" and that it "presents an opportunity for African peoples to see themselves differently, and the world to consider the African continent as a partner in finding solutions to complex problems such as COVID-19" (Mwambari, 2020). The project began in the height of the pandemic, which inadvertently was a powerful influence in the contributions that former students brought to the project – it affected how the project ran, and heightened people's awareness to the way in which inequalities affected the life and learning capacities of South Africans. In addition to this, factors over the years at UCKAR and other universities in South Africa, influenced the configuration of the project – who took part in it, how it was devised, and the theory we used as a framework for our thinking about knowledge.

Few (2007, p. 467) explained that how and what we think, research and teach as academics, and what theories we choose "is an intellectual and political choice influenced by the extent of formal training a researcher has or to the extent that a theory resonates with the researcher's personal experiences". Curricula in higher education, in all disciplines, affect the exposure to theories that influence knowledge acquisition and the tools for creation. And students themselves bring their own dreams and ideas of what it is they want to know, for what purpose, based on different ways of being and knowing. To what extent do our theories and knowledge building resonate with students' experiences and dreams? What shifts need to happen to reframe how we think that not only aligns and resonates with who our students are as young African people, but also re-orientates the work we do with them to be aligned with the 'common-good' understanding of the university? These are the questions that moulded and structured the project.

The 2015/2016 student protests in South Africa illustrated some of the tensions between neoliberal and social justice frameworks. Mkhize (2015) explained that the kinds of critical thinking that some students engaged in were outside of a neoliberal framework, in that "the students were talking about pedagogy, freedom, methodology — and they were not doing it for 100 marks; they were articulating an intellectual vision for a more humane society and critiquing our universities for paying lip service to transformation" (np).

This thesis follows up on this call, to understand the politics of the curricula we choose and the knowledges we value, and to expand the frames to be more relevant to our collective future. This kind of critical thinking recentres the student in the inquiry, and where "our solidarity must be affirmed by a shared belief in a spirit of intellectual openness that celebrates diversity, welcomes dissent, and rejoices in collective dedication to truth" (hooks, 1994, p. 32). By using an African and Black feminist lens, this thesis will recontextualise the student, particularly those who are part of the majority of poor and Black, as the focus of imagining a more sustainable, inclusive future for the university. A key intention of the thesis is to expand the possibilities of transformation from students' perspectives, and in some ways address the concerns of the student protests.

3. Reframing the politics and purpose of theory

The thesis uses African and Black feminisms as a theoretical lens and praxis, in that the project and its subsidiaries are immersive practices of African feminist principles. Ziai (2018) explained that the political struggle for transformation of a system "does not belong to the *content* of politics, the policy, but the *frames* and procedures of political processes, the polity" (p. 118 emphasis added). For this thesis, the research project, and the various teaching encounters explored, it is the frames of engagement and the people invited to participate that are key to how the work unfolds, and the kinds of knowledges it reveals, for what purpose. The frame illuminates the realms of possibility for the study, by showing and legitimating the stories and ideas that can help us to construct our schema for transgressive knowledge-making.

African and Black feminisms represent a bundle of theories including Critical Race feminism (Berry, 2010; Carter, 2012; Few, 2007), Black feminism (Crenshaw, 1990; hooks, 2000), and African feminisms (Gqola, 2008; Motsemme, 2017; Ntseane, 2011; Tamale, 2020), and with some overlap with Black consciousness (Few, 2007). As I will go on to explain, African and Black feminisms are related, and in some contexts can overlap, but they have quite different histories and distinct intellectual traditions, and I unpack these in detail throughout the thesis. These theories guide a commitment towards placing the young Black person in the centre of the research and pedagogy; enabling research participants to be co-researchers; reconnecting the mind, spirit and the body to understand the embodied nature of knowing; working as a collective rather than as individuals; encouraging love and connection as transformational aspects of pedagogy and research.

Students are taught in Pol 1 and Soc 1 that theory is a lens through which to describe, explain and transform society, and to guide research. What they are not necessarily told, is that theory is not politically neutral, in that each theory is a set of ideas that emphasises particular aspects of society, for specific ends. Appiah (2006) compared theory to a shattered mirror, where "each shard … reflects one part of a complex truth from its own particular angle" (p. 8). The theories we choose to look at in a context will, as Appiah went on to explain, have particular commitments that produce the data to support them (p. 40). Selecting a theory to do the important work of making knowledge that can be used beyond the scope of a particular study can thus be influential and significant in unanticipated ways.

Theory as praxis – applied theory, or practical wisdom – involves further political choice and consequences. Arnfred and Adomaka Ampofo (2010, p. 6) explained that there is sometimes an uncomfortable relationship between theory and praxis, in that activists find theory "empty and removed from reality" while scholars critique activists for denying "the centrality of theory as providing a roadmap for transformation". Their discussion argued that praxis brings theory and activism together, in that the theoretical lens is a guide for empirical and political work that expands the theory in an iterative relationship. I sometimes wonder if lecturers realise how telling their praxis is: that the way that they work with students and with knowledge reveals their theoretical biases perhaps without them realising it. I have found that African and Black feminisms lend themselves to the kinds of activism that can bring about change, but that the actions, or the praxis, requires our commitment and intentionality. As hooks explained, "theory is not inherently healing, liberatory, or revolutionary. It fulfils this function only when we ask that it do so and direct our theorizing towards this end" (1994, p. 61). So African feminisms as the frame for the PhD work, is a careful selection, and is activated by a political intention and attention to change what is not working.

Adomako Ampofo (2010, p. 28) encouraged scholars, who are also activists, to keep "maintaining commitment to core feminist goals in one's scholarship and praxis" because it "provides the strength needed to carry on" when life's pressures and demands are overwhelming, "through constant reflection, both personal and communal". While the theories I choose for this project (Knowles, 2021; Knowles et al., 2022a, 2022b) and in the teaching described (Knowles, 2022; Mensah & Knowles, 2022) are part of my politics as a social justice activist, it is important to maintain political and intellectual rigour through reflection that seeks out blind spots and relevance to the tasks at hand (Temper et al., 2019). And as hooks argued, "we must continually claim theory as necessary practice within a holistic framework of liberatory activism" (1994, p. 69). This means not turning away when there are uncomfortable truths to confront, and seeking the nuance that complicates the superficial. It also means examining binaries that sometimes mask ways in which life is messier and more complex than strictly black or white.

My own journey into African feminist theory was via White feminisms and Judith Butler's queer theory, which I found wanting as I sought a theoretical lens to think through African pedagogy and research practices and potentials. African feminisms are not commonly used

in journal articles or book chapters most easily found in Google Scholar searches on these topics, but my commitment to finding African solutions to African problems uncovered the parallel universe and rich networks of Black and African feminisms that could speak to the realities of South African young people. This commitment thus became a central methodological and analytical practice in the construction of this project and thesis.

3.1.   Black Feminism

There are many different feminisms (Donegan, 2018; hooks, 2000; Skeggs, 2008). What we now know as Black feminism, emerged as a response to the first and second wave of feminism in the USA that claimed to speak on behalf of all women, while showing clear bias for middle class white heterosexual women (Munro, 2013). Carby (2007) interrogated ways that White feminism mis-recognises, tokenises and marginalises Black life, concluding: "Feminism has to be transformed if it is to address us. Neither do we wish our words to be misused in generalities as if what each one of us utters represents the total experience of all black women" (p. 112). This caution against generalisation is a necessary tool in how we think and talk about people, for instance poor Black young people.

Black feminism is, however, more than a push-back against White feminism. As hooks (1989) explained, it is not merely to mark the exclusion of the realities of what Black women face, but for the "recognition of Black female presence as subjects in history, as scholars and critical thinkers" (p. 54). And importantly, the way that race, class and gender intersect is key to understanding Black life (Carter, 2012; Childers-McKee & Hytten, 2015; Crenshaw, 1990). As Few (2007) explained, intersectionality has to be recognised in order to be inclusive of Black lives: "An intersectionality matrix is a specific location where multiple systems of oppressions simultaneously corroborate and subjugate to conceal deliberate, marginalizing ideological manoeuvres that define 'Otherness'" (p. 454). Intersectionality is an analytical tool and a way to 'see' students in the project and the teaching encounters.

Intersectionality is also part of how I position myself in the PhD process and project. In the South African context, my experience of life and learning as an older, white, educated woman is vastly different to that of a young Black working-class student, for instance. Kulundu (2018), writing from a perspective of co-researcher with South African people, has pointed out that intersectionality is a complex and layered condition, that encourages nuanced ways to work with it in research projects. This thesis argues that intersecting

realities of class, race, gender, religion, ability and age etc. are factors that trouble our sometimes seamless understanding of teaching and learning, and knowledge, and that have impact in the state's and universities' responses to, for example, the COVID-19 pandemic (Knowles et al., 2022a, 2022b; Madonsela, 2020).

Black feminism is clear about racism as a global, socially constructed reality, and argues that liberalism (and the individualistic human rights discourse) detaches people from systemic, structural realities of class and its connectedness to race (Childers-McKee & Hytten, 2015). These ideas have resonance with South African reality in this thesis, which argues that the way we think about teaching and learning does not always consider systemic poverty and racism and its consequences. The effects of this omission are that measures are put in place that further exacerbate inequalities, for example, considering switching to online teaching during COVID-19 lockdowns (Gerber, 2020), when mainly Black, working class students do not have laptops, internet access, nor homes conducive to learning. The failure to think through this issue carefully enough, with the inclusion of the students themselves, resulted in tragic outcomes for some students. As we argue in the thesis and papers, how many academics usually think about knowledge is based on liberal ideas of meritocracy (Grosfoguel 2013; Sobuwa & McKenna, 2019), and a Cartesian separation of the mind from the body (Nguyen & Larson, 2015). This research project makes the frames of these oppressions visible, so that recognition liberates new ways of looking at life in a pandemic and beyond, and fresh contributions towards a common good. It reconnects the mind and the body, the teacher to the learner, theory to activism.

Black feminisms, theorised mainly by Black women in the USA, have many overlaps of ideas and values with African feminisms. They are both uncompromisingly political in their intentions to be more than descriptive of social phenomena. Both seek to transform the oppressive conditions that seek to assimilate or render invisible those who do not conform to western standards of what it is to be human. While some Black feminists theorise about Afrocentricity (see for example Collins 2003), they essentially theorise from a position grounded in the intersectional oppressions of race, class and gender in the USA that are the complex legacies of the Atlantic Slave Trade. While it may seem that I do at times use African and Black feminisms interchangeably, I recognise their similarities and overlaps as well as their differences. As you will see, I have leaned heavily on the theories of bell hooks and others and have found synergies with African feminisms in the development of

pedagogic and research principles to guide and frame the work of this thesis. There are, however, aspects of African life and worldviews that find clearer articulations in African feminisms.

3.2.   African Feminisms

Similar to Black feminism, African feminisms became known as a push back against white feminism that claimed to speak for all women but with no recognition of intersectional differences of race and class in this configuration. Salo and Mama (2001) argued that even Black feminism sometimes misrecognised African realities regarding, for example, decolonisation struggles (Oloka-Onyango & Tamale, 1995) and different arrangements around gender since pre-colonial times (Amadiume, 1987; Oyewumi, 1997). There are many different forms of African feminist theory (Mekgwe, 2007; Motlafi, 2015; Nkealah, 2016) based on contextual, localised, responsive ideas of diverse African women. Nkealah (2016) pointed out some of the fundamental differences between African feminisms and western feminism, including the anti-men stance of radical western feminism. She argued that Africa's specific history has meant that men and women have had to fight against colonialism (and apartheid in South Africa), and current transformations need both men and women as partners in the struggles for justice and liberation. For her, the fundamental unifying principles of African feminisms are: "(1) an African cultural perspective; (2) an African geopolitical location; (3) and an African ideological viewpoint" (p. 62).

In each of the papers that form part of this thesis, African feminisms form part of the theoretical lens, and in most cases is explained in some detail. African feminist theory is a deviation from the theories that the former student co-researchers and I have been exposed to in our academic journeys. As a form of feminist theory, it is a gendered lens which looks at the world from the perspective of African women, to notice their often-missing voices, perspectives and experiences in a patriarchal context. As an African theory, these perspectives and experiences are centred on the continent, where colonialism and neo-colonialism infuse relations with the western world (Tamale, 2020). The papers that form part of this PhD deal with aspects of higher education, teaching and learning, and the politics of knowledge. While the gendered aspects of these phenomena are an integral part of the story, it is the intersectional effects of colonialism, patriarchy and capitalism that are the focus. African feminist theory allows us to discuss these effects on knowledge-making using a theoretical framework that is constructed by African women.

My engagement with African feminisms in this thesis is complicated by two interlinked reasons which I explain in more detail here. The first is that as mentioned, in the thesis and papers I use the principles of African feminisms without necessarily emphasising a gendered aspect of analysis. In my reading of African feminisms, I am drawn to ideas that can inspire pedagogy and research that are inclusive, Afrocentric, contextual, liberatory, and bring dignity. I am drawn to the women who articulate and hold these ideas, and whose work is marginalised in traditional curricula. I am acutely aware of the intersectional effects of patriarchy, capitalism and colonialism (Tamale, 2020), and how these continue to have an impact on people's lives in ways that are raced, classed and gendered. These oppressions permeate all aspects of life, including how we make knowledge, and I use African feminist authors because I find resonance with their ideas in how I approach teaching and research. Importantly, the idea of community captured in the African philosophy of *ubuntu* (see Graham in Tamale, 2020, p. 21) is a significant aspect of communal knowledge-making so essential in the project and teaching encounters explained in this project. Notwithstanding the critique of Oyowe and Yurkivska (2014) regarding the ignored gendered aspect of African philosophising about the communitarian idea of personhood, I argue that personhood, from an African feminist perspective, is relational and also contextual. This is in stark contrast to individualistic western frame (see Tamale, 2020) and Cartesian inspired dualism of mind and body (Nguyen & Larson, 2015). I am compelled by African feminist ideas about knowledge and knowing that legitimise the embodiment of knowledge, and spirituality as part of how and what we know (Motsemme, 2017; Ntseane, 2011); and that emphasise connection and care (Collins, 2003; hooks, 1994; Nkealah, 2016; Nnamaeka, 2005). These ideas open a way to work with students that is holistic, caring, and transformational (Henry, 2005). These are the ideas that render students visible, and recognise their personhood, and where pedagogy becomes humanising. In the context of the students that I work with, personhood as relational is under-theorised as a pedagogic imperative, and while this is of course gendered in all kinds of ways, the ways in which it is raced and classed is as significant for the students I work with. Cruz (2015) argued that:

> *Holism makes sense of societal domains in relation to the whole and runs counter to dualistic worldviews. This principle applies to theory and specifically to analytical categories. It also pertains to praxis and individual lives considered in connection to multiple and overlapping realms. Regarding theory and analytical categories, some*

have argued for the incorporation of dimensions other than gender in feminist theory on the premise that one dimension irremediably shapes the other. (p. 26)

How I work with an African feminist lens becomes clear as the thesis unfolds. It is not to deny gender as a relevant lens – it is, and it helps us to explain and transform ways in which women, and particularly Black women, face marginalisation, misunderstanding, under-representation, cultural and institutional difficulties and barriers, amongst multiple other micro and macro aggressions. In this thesis, gender as a category is included in arguing that the mutually constitutive colonialism, patriarchy and capitalism (as so rigorously explained by Tamale, 2020) have unavoidable effects on a group that is also raced, and classed, and it is all of these oppressions we address collectively in the thesis. African women help us to do this. Because African women's perspectives bring an alternative view of the world to what we traditionally find in Humanities curricula, their voices are amplified as a way to see and transform the interlinked inequalities based on race, class and gender. African feminists are not interested in liberation as an individualistic idea, but in the liberation of the group – families, communities, and for instance, young Black people who are marginalised by colonially inspired university systems.

The second reason to trouble my engagement with African feminisms is because as a white woman who teaches the theory and uses it as a lens in the PhD research project and articles (Knowles 2021b; Knowles, 2022; Knowles et al., 2022a, 2022b; Mensah & Knowles, 2022), I have grappled with my relationship with and location in it. Africa's violent history of the Atlantic Slave trade and colonialism has consequences that continue today in how the continent is perceived by the West, and in how people in Africa perceive themselves, and how whiteness perpetuates these oppressions. Tamale (2020) explained that "in the neoliberal geopolitical order, the continent of Africa itself is positioned at the assemblage point of multiple structural inequalities and erasures, relative to other continents" (p. 7). This affects how African feminisms are viewed in the academy globally, and affects what kinds of theory and knowledge are legitimised in academic journals (Adomako Ampofo, 2010). Oyewumi argued that "gender and racial categories emerged during this epoch [slave trade and colonialism] as two fundamental axes along which people were exploited and societies stratified … the architecture and furnishings of gender research have been by and large distilled from Europe and American experiences". This ongoing positioning, and imposition, is significant to this thesis, in that it affects what counts as knowledge in

universities, and it compels how we have sought to make knowledge in the research project and in pedagogic practices. There is a long-established pattern of extractivism in the relationship between the west and Africa. This extends to what Grosfoguel (2020) called "epistemic extractivisim", which is the practice of engaging with indigenous communities with the aim "to plunder ideas in order to promote and transform them into economic capital, or appropriate them into the Western academic machinery to earn symbolic capital" (p. 208). My engagement with African Feminist theory requires constant reflexivity regarding not only how I portray and engage with African feminists, but also how I use the theory to justify research with former ES students. Moletsane (2015) and Pillay (2015) spoke of "symbolic" and "epistemic violence", referring to ways in which ideas from the west have been imposed with such enduring force, that the legacies continue to affect how we think of knowledge even in South African universities. My own heritage is that I am the daughter of missionaries who wanted to 'save' African people from their 'heathen' ways. I have had to navigate my role in African feminisms very carefully, and constantly, as I go on to explain. My location, and positionality is layered by intersectional stratifications, and powerful advantages that cannot be ignored. Tamale (2020) reminds us that "an intersectional approach is multifaceted, challenging Western hegemonic structures and institutions, including the very nature of knowledge (ontology) and how we access that knowledge (epistemology)" (p. 7). My immersion in African Feminisms over the past years has had revolutionary effects on how, and who, and what, I know, and how I navigate my whiteness in relation to my students and the African feminist friends and theorists who inspire me. To counter the deliberate exclusion of African feminisms as a legitimate theory in knowledge-making, I have almost exclusively engaged with Black/African feminisms to frame my thinking – not to talk back to other frequently used pedagogical theories, but to move towards the welcoming and transformational ideas of African feminisms.

Importantly, African feminist theory has a key motive which informs all of its versions: to bring about change, not only for women, but for the families and communities that constitute them. The theory is inextricably linked to the movement (Arndt & Adomako Ampofo, 2010), and for this reason refuses to be separated from the contexts in which it operates. To use the theory is to be very conscious of the specific contexts and people and dynamics where the theory is used to describe and conscientise, but also to liberate and transform.

3.3.   The theory applied to methodology

Using African feminisms (and Black feminism) as theory and methodology is risky. They fall outside of a commonly recognisable pedagogic lexicon in the Education Faculty given their marginality in the politics of knowledge. I will explain in the next chapter how I engage in a praxis of the principles drawn from African feminisms to think through methods of data collection, and the analyses of data sets, and the dissemination of the data through the papers that are co-produced as part of this process. All of these moments are inextricably tied to African and Black feminisms, that infuse all actions and thoughts to activate the methodological frame that produces the knowledge we present in this thesis. But as I go on to show in Chapter 5, international journals and the global knowledge gatekeepers that maintain the norms around which knowledges are legitimated, do not necessarily recognise African feminist scholarship as having sufficient rigour or standing or relevance in a wider community. I sincerely hope that the work I present here and that of numerous colleagues who are doing similar work, begins to shift these perceptions. In truth, African feminisms and Black feminism have many overlaps and synergies with other more recognisable theories and methods, and so briefly here, I address this gap in my methodology.

Part of my political stance is to prefer to speak forward with African feminist ideas, rather than speaking back to other more common and often western theories that have more traction in the field. I have deep admiration for scholars such as Tamale (2020) who have painstakingly shown the flaws in western thought and answered these with a decolonial understanding. This is not my method though. My journey has been to live, use, apply, expand, and immerse myself in African and Black feminist thought and ideas.

Part of my difficulty with the more commonly recognisable theories and methodologies has to do with my work as a teacher. This is mirrored in the work of Lin (2004) who notices the way in which "critical pedagogues have established their own field and own capital" with a "specialised language" and that scholars who used these, sometimes had difficulty with shifting "between registers" when teaching students who did not have these words yet (Lin 2004, no page numbers). Much of my teaching in the ES unit is around demystifying the concepts that their lecturers use, often forgetting that the majority of their students have English as a second or third language. It is about relanguaging the discourse with the students, through multilingualism and multiple examples from everyday life. In my university, scholars of higher education in the Education Faculty frequently use Critical

Realism and Legitimation Code Theory (see Maton et al 2015). Many conversations and discussions on teaching and learning in the institution and in journal articles are peppered with terms from this theory. Lin argues that to bring in different kinds of pedagogies and ideas in her setting, they needed to be strategically concealed within or around the terms with which people were already familiar. I confess I have not done this kind of work. I rather wish to contribute to a new decolonial lexicon and bring the African feminist voice to the ideas of reflexivity, qualitative data analysis and methods, interpretive traditions, participatory research.

Lewis (2007) makes an interesting argument around feminist imagining, and where it is located in political and academic discourses. I find that this has overlaps in my thinking about where African feminist pedagogy and methodology fits into the intellectual cartography of the academy. Lewis tracks the development from 2nd Wave feminism to the mainstreaming of gender, and its ambiguous consequences. The intellectual and activist forces at play over time led to gains in terms of funding for gender research (see also Ahikire 2014), but this in turn diluted the effectiveness of this kind of research "because this led to adaptation for survival, with research and teaching becoming increasingly market-driven or tailored to suit governments' specific agendas. The scope for developing autonomous, radical knowledge was therefore steadily eroded" (Lewis 2007, 21). This, she goes on to argue, leads to a situation where "fragmented and formulaic terms … take the place of a feminist language that gestures towards processes, towards what is complicatedly social and humanistic" (ibid, 22). This, for me, speaks to the increasingly popular emphasis on critical pedagogies, or decolonial studies and publishing, but in addition to that, a watering down of the actual work of decolonising the institution and how one teaches or does research. Lewis addresses an interesting and complex debate sparked between Perreira and McFadden on what is scholarly, what is visionary, what is political, what is radical, all in relation to sexual pleasure within or without heteronormativity. She concludes the discussion by drawing on Duncomde to make the point that "progressive politics habitually follow the rational and, in many ways safer, route of critique rather than envisioning" (2007, 28). I have wondered, using my own quite visceral aversion to loaded terms used in the field, if a deviation from the common terms can bring about more helpful and hopeful engagements with the knowledges gained from the projects and pedagogies described here. Critiquing other similar methodologies, or discussing their merits or short-comings in

relation to the African Feminist ideas, principles and methods I use is, I would argue, a distraction from the necessary and exhilarating work of just doing it, and letting it speak for itself. Lewis concludes her argument with what I find to be an affirming gesture towards my choice to leave out other more well-known theories and methodologies, and demonstrate instead a praxis of African feminist principles:

> *It straddles imaginative thought and action, so that action is embodied in thought and vice versa. Forms and media expressing kinds of knowledge and cultural expression, especially the kinds of non-scholarly genres neglected in the academy, have tremendous potential to contribute to knowledge that allows us to transcend our oppressive realities. (Lewis 2007, 30)*

4. The research projects: Process, praxis and unanticipated progressions

The proposal for this PhD anticipated a qualitative project that would provide data for analysis to find a schema for transgressive knowledge-making cultures. Although I had ideas about how I would like it to unfold, it was to be a collaborative project with those who volunteered to the call, and as such was not predictable. My research question was: What would happen if I set up conditions, with students themselves, guided by African feminist theory, to make knowledge together? I was not entirely sure what to expect, but trusted that what ES students and I had experienced in our ES classes would guide how we related to each other on the project, and could be systematically and reflexively analysed to produce an "original contribution at the boundaries of the field of Education", as per the requirements of a PhD by publication (see Addendum 1).

The proposal's plan was that the project would begin with an in-person weekend workshop with all former ES student participants, to establish together a platform for transgressive knowledge-making using African feminist principles and values. From this, a process of engagements would unfold where former students would make knowledge collaboratively, which would be the data for further work, potentially including co-written academic articles. What actually happened was much more difficult and disordered than this. The COVID-19 pandemic was a major unanticipated global phenomenon that emerged while I was concluding the writing of the PhD proposal. As I explain below, it changed how the project unfolded.

The global pandemic had personal effects beyond my academic life. It brought my pregnant daughter and her partner into my relatively small home (they had been living and working in China for five years until 1 February 2020); and within months, my granddaughter was born on the day that my PhD proposal was approved. Not long after this, my mother had a fall and broke her hip, which escalated her dementia, and which was complicated by severe COVID-19 lockdown and isolation regulations. I spent hours with her daily in the frail-care centre around the corner from my home as she healed from the hip-replacement surgery and has continued to deteriorate mentally, throughout the PhD process. The presence of my growing granddaughter (two and a half years-old at the time of writing) and deteriorating mother (85) in my daily consciousness have been unexpected gifts and have provided the opportunity to integrate and align my political, emotional, intellectual, spiritual and physical

life. I have grappled with ideas about teaching and learning with radical love (often in the quiet pre-dawn hours at my computer) while living this daily with my family, and in my teaching work at the university.

Another unexpected progression from my initial ideas about and plans for the PhD project was the way in which my engagement with African feminisms influenced my activities and opportunities. While I have a strong circle of African feminist friends, I have never been exposed to African feminist theory in a formal way, and so my journey into the theory has been driven by passionate interest and self-study. I started an online African feminist reading group in the early days of my PhD study which is ongoing – meeting every two weeks and now with a rotating chair. The reading group was suggested by my supervisor, to find solidarity with others who were interested in the theory, and to expose my supervisor and a colleague of his at a Scottish university to the theory that was the preferred theoretical frame for their PhD students (me, and Ghanaian Linda Mensah – you will meet Linda more convivially later). Linda and I had an immediate connection, and in the months that followed we submitted a proposal to run an African Feminist Methodology course as part of the Scottish Graduate School of Social Science (SGSSS) annual Spring programme for PhD students. We developed and ran the five-day online course, and it deepened and broadened our understanding of African feminist pedagogy and research methodologies leading to a co-written paper which reflected on the process (see Mensah & Knowles, 2022, the fourth paper in the collection that follows). As I will explain in more detail below, co-facilitating the course was the opportunity for Linda and I to think through African feminist pedagogic principles, which dovetailed with ideas that were emerging from the project with former ES students. In this way, it became a second and concurrent project to find a schema for transgressive knowledge-making cultures.

Soon after this I was invited to give a keynote address at the Strathclyde Postgraduate Law Conference 2021 titled: *Challenging domination: African Feminisms' contribution to sustainable futures,* which was my first ever keynote address. Around the same time, I was invited to write a review of Sylvia Tamale's *Decolonisation and Afro-Feminism* (2020) for the *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* (see Knowles, 2021), also a first for me. It was a humbling, engaging, terrifying, exhilarating, and enlightening task, as it immersed me in the world and work of Tamale's scholarship, where I found so much resonance and inspiration for my PhD journey.

Finally, I was asked to teach a course on African Feminist Theory to final-year undergraduate students in the Politics and International Studies department at UCKAR (see Knowles, 2022; and Course outline Addendum 2). As I explain below, this course became a further praxis for the pedagogic learning from the initial project, as well as the course I co-ran with Linda, and could strengthen the contribution to new knowledge that this thesis offers. All of these activities took me well out of my comfort-zone, and deepened my engagement with African Feminist thought, pedagogy, and research methodology.

The table below sets out a timeline with tasks and data produced for each of the projects and processes of the PhD.

Table 2: PhD Projects – timelines, tasks, data

WDIOH project	Discussions	Tasks	Data
Invitation April 2020	Finalised July 2020: 24 volunteers	Set up first workshop; contact details for all; questionnaire; supply data; Facebook platform set up	Questionnaire
Workshop 1 August 2020	Introduction, connection, choose topics, choose methods and principles	Questionnaire confirming topics; consent forms; *How to respond to a topic*. ALL RESPOND TO TOPICS and submit.	Questionnaire; Zoom recording; Submissions
Workshop 2 October 2020	Reflect on submissions and writing process; discuss how to respond to them	Each person reviews 2-3 anonymised submissions; composite piece devised	Workshop transcriptions; Reviews; Composite piece
Workshop 3 January 2021	Reflect on review process; discuss work teams – transcribing and writing	Questionnaire; send workshops for transcribing to volunteers	Workshop transcriptions; Questionnaires; Transcribing reflections;
African Feminist Reading Group:	Format	Tasks	Data
July 2020 – April 2021	Every two weeks: CK select and introduce an African feminist reading	Host Zoom discussion	Zoom recordings and chats
May 2021-present	Every two weeks, rotate chair	Chair: selects topic/reading, chairs the session	Zoom recordings and chats
African Feminist Research Methodology SGSSS		Tasks	Data
Submit proposal: January 2021		Plan content and pedagogy	Participant applications
Course workshops 19-23 April 2021	Introduction; Positionality; Participation; Data; Ethics	Presentations; reflections; questionnaire	Zoom recordings and chats; Reflections; Paper
Tamale Review			

Due: May 2021	Read Afro-Feminism and Decolonization; Read other Tamale work; Read Decolonisation edited volumes	Submit to editor 30 May 2021; submit to Journal June 2021	Review in JCAS 07/21
WDIOH Paper Writing teams	**Discussions**	**Tasks**	**Data**
Workshop 1 May 2021	African feminism as a lens; Our data – what do we still need? Questions and concerns	READ selected submissions and HIGHLIGHT common/interesting themes READ African Feminist articles JOURNAL	Zoom recordings
Workshop 2 June 2021	Themes that were emerging; questions, connections	READ again – highlight quotes; FILL OUT spreadsheet: claims/ resonance? etc. JOURNAL	Spreadsheets Zoom recording
Workshop 3 July 2021	The collated analysis of data and themes; questions, connections	READ articles provided, look for quotes that align to the data; FIND other articles JOURNAL	Zoom recording
Workshop 4 September 2021	How do we apply theory? How do we locate ourselves in relation to data?	Write summaries of papers read.	Summaries; Zoom recording
Workshop 5 October 2021	Discuss abstract – brainstorm. Discussion of papers	Sit with the abstract. JOURNAL ideas	Zoom recording
Workshop 6 December 2021	Share ideas about paper; came up with headings, divided between us. Writing exercises	Each person write their piece	Zoom recording
Workshop 7 January 2022	Shared process (mind-maps, journaling). Reminder to write for a reader; PEEL method; writing exercises	Keep writing	Zoom recording
Workshop 8 February 2022	Share process, encouragement. Challenges.	Keep writing	Individual sections; collated piece; edited papers; Review feedback
Workshop 9 May 2022	Discussion of full paper. Reflections on process.		Zoom recording
Pol 3 Course			
11 April – 27 May 2022	5 lectures per week; RU Connected set ups weekly; Tutor meetings weekly	30 x group project 140 x project reflections 140 x exam questions (3 essays)	Course Outline; Pre-course reflections; mid-course reflections; post course reflections; post project reflections

## 4.1.   The project: With Dreams In Our Hands

While the rationale, theoretical frame and methodology for the project are explained in detail in the first paper of this thesis (Knowles, 2021), this section comments and reflects on

how the project was run. The project was the opportunity to set up a transgressive knowledge-making platform, where former ES students and I could collaborate to articulate and manifest effective pedagogic principles through a praxis of African Feminist values, ethics and norms. As explained in the paper, the project anticipated five phases: inviting phase; creating phase; devising phase; analysing phase; dissemination phase. I deal with each one below.

4.1.1. *Inviting phase: Co-developing appropriate methods*

I wondered how to make the invitation to the project – as I have said, for many years I have warned the ES students that I would be doing my PhD sometime in the future, and that I would invite them to participate. This was met with enthusiasm every time. When it came to the moment of invitation, so much was uncertain – the pandemic had recently taken hold in the country, our university had sent students home and switched to online remote emergency teaching, current and former ES students were struggling to adjust, and the future was unclear and terrifying. I chose a Facebook call because I did not want to add stress to any former student who would have felt some sort of obligation to take part – I believed that the more informal platform of Facebook would reach those who could make the decision uncoerced, and it had been well used over the years by students who contacted me through Facebook messenger or on my timeline. Facebook is also a free app on many basic smart phones, which meant it would have a wide reach. Many former students are part of my Facebook community, and my Facebook profile is open, so I put out a call and hoped for the best in April 2020. The intention was that it would be a collaboratively designed project, but I wanted to give some sense of what the commitment would be even though it would be open to change.

Picture 1: Facebook open call for volunteers
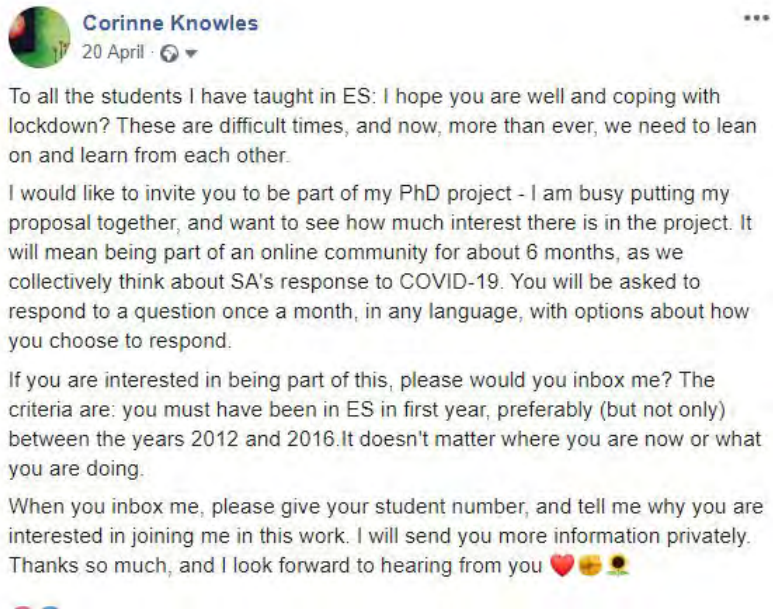
There were nine initial affirmative responses to this call – whether in the comments below the post, or in private messages. For each person who responded, I sent this follow-up response through private message:

Dear xxx

Thank you for being interested in my PhD project ☺. I will explain in more detail as we go along, but first:

1. *Are you comfortable using facebook to chat?*

2. *Would you mind if I made a private facebook group with 9 (for now) other former students to chat about things as we go along?*

3. *Would you prefer a Whatsapp group, and if so, please could you send me your whatsapp number?*

4. *Are there any other former ES students that you know would be interested in this project? If so, would you like to invite them or should i?*

My project asks: what ways of knowing do students bring to our classes (especially Soc 1 and Pol 1), and how can we accommodate them/support them/learn from them more effectively? I am using African and Black feminism to think about the question, and I would like us to think about the state and university response to the COVID-19 crisis as the way to apply different ways of knowing (eg, through experience), using some of the Soc and Pol ideas (eg, equality, freedom, justice, inequalities, social stratification, race/gender/class).

I am busy finishing off my proposal, and putting the Ethical Approval thing together. Once that is done, I will formally invite you to be part of the process and ask you to

complete a consent from. But for now, the group chat I set up will be for us to chat more informally about how we are dealing with lockdown etc. Does that sound okay?

I look forward to hearing from you and exploring this thing together ☺. Thanks again, so much, for responding xxxx

Over the next few weeks, either by direct response to the Facebook call, or prompted by their friends, further former students joined until I had a group of 24. I had participants ranging from those who were in their first year ES class in 2011, and all the way through to 2019. There were 11 women and 13 men; 15 were current students at UCKAR; two were busy with postgraduate degrees at other universities. One of them was my sabbatical leave replacement, teaching my ES class from July 2020 to June 2021. The rest were either working or looking for work. Some of them knew each other, either from being in the same year in ES, or by other means. While I waited for my PhD proposal to be passed by the Higher Degrees Committee of the UCKAR Education Faculty along with ethical approvals, I spent time remembering each one, looking over submissions and communications over the years, familiarising myself with what I knew about them. I was very excited at the prospect of connecting with them again.

My PhD proposal was passed unanimously on 18 June 2020, on the same day that my grandchild was born. It was a momentous time for me. Once this was all in place, I contacted each volunteer with a fuller explanation of the project (see Addendum 3), and set up a dedicated Facebook page to which each one was invited. This became the platform for communicating, and where we chatted in the group or by private message in those first few weeks to plan how to proceed.

4.1.2. The Creating Phase: Creating the co-researcher team – developing a code of practice/praxis

The purpose of this first workshop was firstly, to connect with each other. I had not seen or heard from some of the volunteers for a while, and they did not necessarily know each other. We were all looking forward to meeting up. Secondly, it was to set up the conditions for communal knowledge-making, through opportunities for participants to engage with each other. Thirdly, it was to come up with topics, and discuss how to respond to them. From here, the principles that would hold how we worked with each other could be established. Finally, it was to discuss logistical matters – what kind of timeline to work with, what forms of communication, which media platform to use, and what kinds of challenges

there might be in terms of connectivity, data, and the space and time to do this work together.

Because of the pandemic lockdown restrictions, instead of spending an introductory weekend together to carefully explain the project, collaboratively devise the process, and to get to know one another, I had to get my head around transferring the whole project onto an online space. Zoom was not yet the ubiquitous platform it has become, and I researched the platform online, watched multiple instructional videos, learnt how to run a workshop with breakout rooms, found a date that suited all of us, loaded data onto all their phones, and prepared for our first workshop which took place on Saturday 8 August 2020. I was excited and terrified. So much of my teaching and how I relate to students is based on presence, reading the room, working with energy, walking around, doing group work, creating an environment where people feel included and engaged. In our first workshop I was in an empty room with a screen and icons – we had to keep videos off to keep the platform stable for those with poor reception. Because I had not asked anyone to help with the technology aspect of it, there were silences as I tried to let latecomers in, or to advise those who were struggling with audio etc. It was a mess.

In the workshop, I had breakout room sessions where people could introduce themselves to each other, and then to discuss things I had presented to them in the collective sessions. My presentation had the following components, followed by breakout room sessions of four randomly selected people to discuss: why I was doing the project (breakout rooms: what their reasons were for wanting to be part of it); what I had envisaged as a call and response process where they would come up with topics, and then respond to them, and review each other's responses (breakout rooms: discussing this approach, and coming up with topics); how to respond – written pieces, visual pieces, audio pieces, photo essays etc, and what kinds of principles would frame their responses (breakout rooms: discussion of the various kinds of responses, and what would these principles be). After each breakout session, one or two groups were invited to report back, and others were invited to write up their discussions in the chat.

When the workshop was done, I watched the video recording, and cried. I was profoundly depressed for a day – ashamed, disappointed, and afraid I had broken the project. I had such high hopes for meeting everybody again and anticipated some kind of vibrant, interactive event, and of course it was not like that. It was a cold and disheartening

experience, and I could not respond to their energies or see their responses to mine. After a day, I sent a message to the Facebook group apologising for how badly it had gone (I discuss their heartwarming response to this in the final, single-authored paper in the collection, 5.5). I followed up with a questionnaire sent to each one individually, which included a consent form. Their answers to the questionnaire restored my faith: they told of their commitment to and excitement about the project. From their responses I wrote up a document: *How to respond to a topic* (Addendum 4) and posted it onto the Facebook page. They had submitted their suggestions for topics and I organised these into four groups that represented each suggestion, concentrated into one broad topic for each group. I posted these onto the Facebook group for them to choose one, and respond to it. We were ready to engage.

The creating phase, as tricky as it was, helped to establish a platform for engagement despite the constraints of the more impersonal interface of a Zoom workshop. The follow-up questionnaire and reflection on the first workshop was the opportunity to consolidate how the project and workshop had been experienced by everyone. I share some of the responses here to the question: why do you want to be part of the project?

- *After fully understanding what the research project is about it is my conclusion that it would be a great project to be a part of. It gives my experiences meaning, and makes my experience useful to this project as i understand that i have something to contribute as a working class, black women who has been a part of Extended studies. (#6 postworkshop questionnaire)*
- *I found this space to be a comfortable environment to engage in conversations as I was free and comfortable to speak and share my thoughts, but to also listen and hear from other minds. (#10 postworkshop questionnaire)*
- *With the topics that we come up with here this platform is really eye opening and has many lessons that I can take and pass on to other people especially in the township there is so much that needs to be unlearn and learn there especially during this pandemic. (#14 postworkshop questionnaire)*
- *because the things it will tackle are things that are not foreign to me it is what is affecting me on a daily basis. (#19 postworkshop questionnaire)*

– *because I want to contribute to this project by adding my own voice, as well as hearing other people's voices about how knowledge makes our lives better. (#22 postworkshop questionnaire)*

It was encouraging that already, those who were involved in the project felt that it was worthwhile and relevant, and that they were looking forward to connecting and making knowledge together.

The creating phase also reminded me of important principles to guide my orientation. Firstly, that working collaboratively is always bigger than any one individual – it entails multiple connections across similarities and differences (Nnaemeka, 2005). The volunteers to the project demonstrated by their reflections that they were engaged, even though I had not felt very engaging during the first workshop. It was an important reminder that it is not all about me. Secondly, and linked to the first point, it reminded me that African Feminist leadership means rising above my individual insecurities felt keenly after the first workshop, and can be associated with the idea of motherhood. Importantly, my role would be to facilitate a connected collective. African ideas about motherhood are clear about women's roles as those who carry the burdens and accept the wounds while ensuring that families and indeed communities keep moving forward. Ntseane (2011, p. 319) problematises the "subtle and hegemonic sexism" inherent in the Setswana proverbs that speak to motherhood, while recognising that these roles are also the responsibilities that women often choose, or are forced to accept. Two proverbs that resonate profoundly are *Mosadi ke thari ya sechaba*, meaning 'a woman is the pouch that carries the nation', and *Mmagwana o tshwara thipa ka fa bogaleng*, meaning 'the real mother is the one who will hold the knife on the side of the blade'(ibid.). Recognising the tensions and ambiguities inherent in these dangerous and exploitable roles, Ntseane (2011) argued that "women in this culture have realized that in their African gendered patriarchal context, the female voice is likely to be heard if they learn and work as a group rather than individually" (p. 320). My experience in the first meeting with the research volunteers was not specifically gendered in the way Ntseane describes, but her story helped me to work through what should happen next, and what my position and responsibility was. I have raised my children as a single mother (their father died when they were 2 and 3 years old); my role as grandmother, mother, and daughter to my dying mother as I write this thesis, all locate me in the entanglements of motherhood. Many students call me 'Mama CK'. How could I interpret that role as I worked

with this project? The young co-researchers on this project are marginalised in terms of their voices, because the race, class, age, language, and gender hierarchies that operate in the university and in society, render them so. Epistemic motherhood would mean facilitating the project in a way that amplified their voices, and by holding space and navigating institutional arrangements so that they could be heard. Ntseane argued that working as a collective was empowering for women; similarly, working as a collective on this project also made it more likely for the young people to be heard. As facilitator it was my role to keep holding a communal space, emphasising the qualities of empathy and connection, and affirming the status of the group of volunteers to the project, as co-researchers in the important work we were doing.

4.1.3. The Devising Phase: Co-constructing of the research process

The devising phase was where the co-researchers would draw on their own experiences and perceptions to make knowledge. In her discussion on the discursive challenges facing African Feminism, Desiree Lewis (2010, p. 29) asked:

> *To what extent do the procedures and value systems for elevating certain kinds of expert knowledge function as forms of repression, surveillance and silencing? And how do current forms of gate keeping curtail the circulation of radical knowledge even in spaces that seem amenable to the free flow of information and ideas?*

Importantly for this thesis and project, the knowledge that students bring with them into lecture rooms and disciplines is, we believe, too easily dismissed as irrelevant, while reference lists cite western scholars, disproportionally white and male, who are imbued with the authoritative voice. The project was an opportunity to counter this claim, by recognising that the knowledge that ordinary people hold in their bodies is significant for expanding or remaking theory that illuminates new pathways to contextually and culturally relevant transformation, liberation, and social justice.

In the first workshop, and in the follow-up questionnaire, co-researchers came up with topics that they considered important, and that they felt they would like to respond to. My early communications with them, mentioned earlier, set up an orientation for these topics. I made it very clear in our first workshop that this was as much their project as it was mine, and that their concerns and interests were welcomed. Given the power dynamics inherent in our relationships though, I concede that their choices of topics could have been
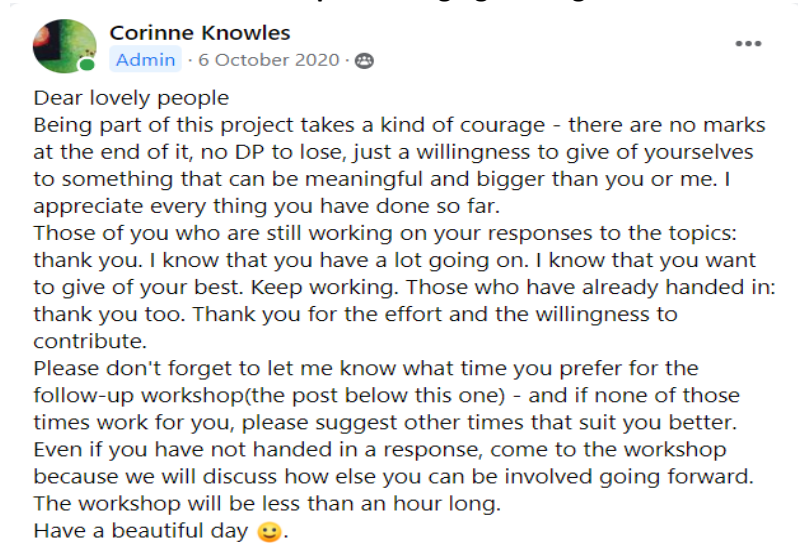
influenced by my early musings more than I would have liked. Mkabela (2005) warned that Afrocentric research aims to "to reduce researcher imposition in order for research to meet and work within, and for, the interests and concerns of the research participants; within their own definitions of self-determination" (p. 181). I noticed this aloud in the workshop, to be told that these were topics that co-researchers also felt strongly about. This seemed to indicate that there was resonance between how I had introduced the thinking around the project, and students' own experiences and opinions. We were navigating together the power arrangements inherent in the relationships between us, and part of my facilitation was to keep finding ways to strengthen agency, creativity, and critical thinking in the process.

Each breakout group reported on the topics participants thought were useful, and the follow-up questionnaire was an individual invitation to remember which topics had come up in groups, but also to suggest what other topics they would like to put on the table. The full list of topics, arranged in broad themes, is in Addendum 5. Through a series of Facebook chats, and finally a survey, the following four topics were selected by them, combining a number of topics in each:

1. **Confidence/ owning the teaching and learning process**. Many of us found that we were so comfortable in the ES learning space and that provided room for us to be able to engage and be confident in our engagements because we knew that this is a safe space. However, this was not the case when we had to go into mainstream classes. None of us remembers actually speaking, raising a point or asking a question in mainstream during a class in Barrat. (A1/2/3/4)

2. Looking at how COVID-19 has exposed **inequalities in South African universities and/or public schools** (B6/7/8/F28)

3. What causes **mental pathologies amongst students**? Broadly, whether the university environment through alienation (of various sorts, including Western ways of doing things) and its other vices causes pathologies. How not coming from model C / privilege schools can contribute to depression in university as you feel like you behind. (C10/11/A1)

4. What has been the **most shocking/interesting discovery** about yourself during COVID? (F23/24/25)

Setting up a platform for knowledge-making, using African feminist principles of communal knowledge-making, inclusion, recognition, participation, was the important first step of the project, and incorporated the framing and seeing elements of the schema. We had already collaboratively come up with the instructions on how to respond to a topic, and now co-researchers were invited to respond to them in any way they chose, in any language, and together on the Facebook group we decided that a time frame of three weeks would be enough time. The deadline kept stretching to accommodate those who were juggling university or work with the project, and in the end three weeks stretched into five. During those weeks, I sent a number of encouraging messages on the Facebook group, such as this final one:

Picture 2: Facebook Group encouraging message

> **Corinne Knowles**
> Admin · 6 October 2020 · 🌐
>
> Dear lovely people
> Being part of this project takes a kind of courage - there are no marks at the end of it, no DP to lose, just a willingness to give of yourselves to something that can be meaningful and bigger than you or me. I appreciate every thing you have done so far.
> Those of you who are still working on your responses to the topics: thank you. I know that you have a lot going on. I know that you want to give of your best. Keep working. Those who have already handed in: thank you too. Thank you for the effort and the willingness to contribute.
> Please don't forget to let me know what time you prefer for the follow-up workshop(the post below this one) - and if none of those times work for you, please suggest other times that suit you better. Even if you have not handed in a response, come to the workshop because we will discuss how else you can be involved going forward. The workshop will be less than an hour long.
> Have a beautiful day 😊.

The point was to keep an encouraging presence of our project in mind so that our next set of workshops would be the continuation of a conversation on the group page. For each message I posted, at least three people would respond with a message of their own in the comments, and many would respond with emojis.

I was surprised at the submissions: as mentioned in the first paper of this collection, despite the broad range of genre and vernacular possibilities, the 19 submissions were all written pieces, in English – one person had written in isiXhosa and translated it into English. There were 15 opinion pieces, one letter, and three academic/research papers (Knowles, 2021, p. 14). I have commented in the first paper (Knowles, 2021) on the role of language, in that the first workshop was in English, as were all of my Facebook messages, so despite my encouragement to respond in any language this was what the group chose. The project's

aim was to be as inclusive as possible, using African feminist principles including establishing a sense of community, putting the community at the centre of the research, looking at the world from an African perspective. Blay wrote from the standpoint of an African American, drawing on the work of Molefi Asante on Afrocentricity as a compelling diasporic issue affecting pedagogy and curricula, amongst other things. Her words ring true for the complex situation I find myself in, as a white woman, descendant of colonisers and missionaries, who works with young Black people. Blay (2008, p. 60) argued that

> *the degree to which research is Afrocentric is often determined by the researcher's location, or centricity/centeredness, which informs the language s/he employs, the direction of his/her sentiments, themes, and interests, as well as his/her attitude toward certain ideas, persons, or objects. Thus, it is when, and only when the researcher's language, direction, and attitude are centered within an "African cultural territory" that it qualifies as Afrocentric.*

My inability to converse spontaneously and without fear in isiXhosa thus limited the extent to which this research community felt included enough to respond in their own languages. In South African universities and certainly at UCKAR, there are students severely constrained by language, because inequalities in the school sector means that many students arrive at university having been taught very little in English, despite it being a compulsory component of their schooling. The second co-written paper in the collection speaks about this issue, arguing that it holds people back from being able to engage with or contribute to knowledge-making at university – leading to alienation and mental health issues for some (Knowles et al., 2022a). That we were able to address this issue in the paper means that at least by facing this real constraint, it could gain an audience beyond our own margins.

Importantly, in the devising phase of the project, 19 of the 24 initial volunteers submitted written pieces, and one person is working on an art piece – he and I have met in person a few times to discuss similarities and differences in our artistic processes. His work is ongoing and is expanding his capacity for meaning making and practice-based research. The co-researchers made these contributions while their lives were complicated by the pandemic and national lockdowns, and having to move work and studying online, all while living at home in conditions that were often demanding and distracting. I invited them all, even those who did not submit, to join me for a second set of workshops, to reflect and to plan our next steps.

4.1.4. Analysing phase: Collaborative analysis of data and findings

The submissions were the data that we could now work with. Our zoom workshops this time were a series of smaller groups. I offered six time slots over the weekend of 8-10 October 2020. People chose their slots (this was a deliberate decision to increase agency, and an open process on the Facebook group ensured that participants could see who else was going to be in the workshop with them). I provided data, and the zoom links. There were between 2 and 5 people in each. The aim of these workshops was to continue to establish a sense of community; to let them know what kinds of submissions had come in; to find out how the writing process had gone for them; to discuss the peer review process, which was the next step. All these questions introduced the process of collaborative analysis.

These workshops had a very different feel to the first one – because of smaller groups, for the most part we could open our videos and see each other, and where not, we kept our microphones on to be able to hear each other's comments. Each workshop began with sharing where we were, what we were doing, what the joys and stresses of our lives were. One example of this is:

> *Speaker 5*: Okay, I'll go. uhm, so what's stressing me at the moment I think it's the same as you uhm CK. It's like family related stuff, right. I think for the past month or so, like yah. My family, we have been going through the most. But here we are, right. And then, what's giving me joy is the support that we have given each other during these difficult times right. And also, I have a two-month year old boy, so yay! [laughter] He brings so much joy into my life, so yeah.

> *Speaker 2*: It's like joy and stress next to each other, having a baby. [unclear, laughter]   (Workshop 2 #4, WDIOH October 2020)

Beginning the workshop in this way established a sense of openness with each other, allowed us to 'see' each other as whole people, which set the tone for the guided questions which followed.

The next discussion followed a brief description of the kinds of submissions that I had received, and my question on how they had found this process of writing – compared, for instance, with the writing they did for academic submissions of tutorials and essays. Some of their responses were:

Speaker 2: There really wasn't the same feel hey. I just felt like this time around I did not have to go back to what an old white man said in the 18th century… (soft laugh) … to reflect what my opinions were. it was so much easier because like … what I'm talking about is what I'm feeling and what I'm experiencing … and I did not have to … like, use some old white man's philosophy to try and explain what I'm feeling … with what they theorised, you know … So, it was a lot easier that way. It, it did not have an academic feel although, uhm … I missed an opportunity to write in, in my home language because I'm not that fluent in my home language, unfortunately. But I've been taught with, with the English all my life, so I think that is the language that I feel very, uhm … fluent and where I can articulate myself more … properly and especially in, in (inaudible) where I can include other people. But … but I'm also missing in that (inaudible) people can also learn from, from my home language even though they don't know it because things have nothing to do with language per se, it has everything to do with … are you understanding and feeling, am I emoting enough of myself to you so you can understand what I'm going through. So, I think that is the part I felt that I missed because I genuinely wanted to write in my home language but I struggled to express myself in my home language. (Workshop 2 #1, WDIOH October 2020)

Speaker 5: [uhm] Well CK, I really enjoyed doing that, I love expressing myself, like, through writing, for me it was as if I was writing a diary or it was as if I was talking to a close person, right. So, I was just like true to myself, I was just authentic, and I just poured my feelings out. If you read my piece, it was a bit like personal because I was truly, truly talking to someone. And, also at the same time giving advice, right. I enjoyed it because it was not academic, I did not need to do research, I did not need to reference, it was just me and my laptop, just typing everything out. Yes, I did have, ok, because like, I didn't know like how long I should write. So, that was quite a concern, how long should it be but shame, otherwise I enjoyed it. (Workshop 2 #4, WDIOH October 2020)

The feedback in the workshops reminded me of Moletsane's argument, that

> *people's realities are often defined and explained by outsiders and that the interventions that come their way, are likely to be irrelevant to their lives' needs. To*

address this, what is needed is context-specific knowledge, cocreated and co-disseminated with the local people themselves. (2015, p. 44)

My aim with this project was to set up a knowledge-making platform using African Feminist principles that were different from what students generally encountered in their mainstream university courses. It was to make knowledge that was relevant to their lives. It was to recognise experience as knowledge, and to include a more holistic epistemology. This first workshop encouraged me to believe that we were on the right track.

In this workshop, we also agreed that their pieces would be anonymised and sent to peers for review. I asked them how they would like to review – what would they look for, how would they like others to review their work, what kinds of feedback would be helpful, what principles should inform their engagements, and how many would they like to review. Once all the workshops were complete, I put their comments and suggestions together in a document *How to respond to each other's work* (Addendum 6) which I then posted onto the Facebook group for further comment. I anonymised all the submissions, assigned the reviews, and emailed two or three to each co-researcher, along with the reviewing document. Collins (2003) promoted an African feminist approach arguing that "because knowledge comes from experience, the best way of understanding another person's ideas was to develop empathy and share the experiences that led the person to form those ideas" (p. 58). Our workshops and the collaboratively devised response document confirmed these ideas.

While co-researchers were working on their reviews, I wanted to find another way in which to expose them to the way in each person, working from their own locations, on different topics, was contributing to a collective idea. Communal knowledge-making is an African practice where, as Wane (2008) noted, "in Indigenous societies, knowledge is collectively and communally shared, and not monopolized by individuals" (p. 191). In reading each other's work they would see ways in which there were overlaps in their experiences, but importantly we wished to dissolve a sense of individual ownership in a way that did not seem to be a loss, but rather an expansion. I then went through each submission, extracted sentences from each (inspired and guided by conversations, feedback and themes emerging in our gatherings), and then put these extractions together on a page, moving them around until it made a cohesive whole (Addendum 7). It felt spiritual, like poetry. I posted this onto the Facebook group.

Co-researchers reviewed each other's work, emailed the reviews to me, and I anonymised them and sent them on to the authors. I then, with their permission, posted all of the submissions, with their reviews, onto the Facebook group, so that everyone could read and engage with all of the work. It was time for our next workshop – the final one for some, while for others it would signal the beginning of the next phase.

The third workshop in January 2021 aimed to reflect on the reviewing process, the composite piece, and then to invite co-researchers to be part of the dissemination phase. There were seven smaller groups this time, ranging from 1-5 people per workshop. As usual, we started with everyone sharing: where are you, and what do you hope for the year ahead? Again, this gave us insight into who everyone was as human beings with locations and aspirations. 'Seeing' each other at the start of each session remained an important signal for each of us to bring our whole selves to the process of knowledge-making.

I ran through the process of the project up until this point, and asked for their reflections on the composite piece (see the final paper in the collection, Knowles, 2022) and their reflections on the reviewing process:

> *Speaker 4:* For me it was just like a transition in itself. When we like – you move from your own … reading your own words and your own experience then you move to someone else's experience that makes your experience make sense, does that make sense? uhm, because I also saw there was like, I mean when you read other people's theories or other people use concepts and those then made other peoples' narratives or experiences seem valid. Not valid, not invalid, like put them into a bigger picture, like you understood the process better, like the Facebook post you posted, the individual articles. The people who were not sent those particular things were able then to engage on everything, also still. (Workshop 3 #4 WDIOH January 2021)

> *Speaker 5:* For me, it was quite amazing because it seems like the person who commented could relate to what I was actually going through at that moment. So, to see that you not alone and someone understand what you going through was amazing for me. (Worskhop 3 #4 WDIOH January 2021)

> *Speaker 3:* I related to what they were saying, it felt so familiar to what I wrote it felt as though me and the writer were both sharing our experiences. I understood what

they were saying and you know they also understood me. You know when you're telling someone something and they understand it, they get it. So that was how I felt. Some of the things that I couldn't put into words in my paper, you know, the writer put in their paper. It was a very interesting thing. It would have been even better face to face (laughter). But I pictured me listening to the writer and giving input, and us talking, which also leads to *okanye* give life to other ideas, and, you know, other things. Sometimes through sharing ideas you end up thinking about other things that are important.   (Workshop 3 #1 WDIOH January 2021)

This process of reflection on the project was important – Moletsane (2015,p. 45) recommended that "it is not enough to use these tools in our research, rather, what is needed is the co-reflection with our participants on the research process itself, the power dynamics inherent therein, and the extent to which these tools enable us to challenge and address these". Reflection involves taking the time to check our own responses, and as Adomako Ampofo (2010) reminded us, even though reflection is not considered to be part of scientific research practice, it is a way to bring ourselves into the knowledge-making process. She noted that "we rarely find the opportunity to go behind the scenes of our ideological or theoretical positions to examine and re-examine them, to ask ourselves, 'How do I really feel about this perspective? Do I really support this position or have I been compelled to?'" (p. 29). This set of workshops provided the opportunity to do this. The young researchers were not only exposing their opinions to each other, but also finding their own voices, trusting their own experiences. It was thus important to hold a space where this work could happen in a way that would inspire and support this level of trust and criticality long after the workshop.

Social change, and the transformation of the situations and inequalities that co-researchers had written about in their submissions, begins with mutual recognition and a sense of solidarity – 'seeing' each other with a sense of appreciation, and recognising the power arrangements and politics at play. In part, these emerged from the composite work from their submissions, the reviewing process, and the smaller workshops where participants could bring their whole selves and reflect together. These reflections also formed part of the initial analysis of data: finding themes and resonances; noticing the link between the process of the research, the principles that shaped it, and what it produced. For me, it was,

in addition, a way of legitimating the knowledge that had already been produced, and set us up for the next steps.

The next steps involved volunteering to be part of work teams – firstly, transcribing the three different sets of workshops. Transcribing is a useful skill, and 12 co-researchers could learn, practice, and be paid for this. They would be exposed to what happened in the other workshops for different groups. I asked each person who transcribed to include a reflection on how it went, and the following reflection speaks to many of their responses, and was confirmation to me that including this opportunity would lead to mutual benefit:

> *I really enjoyed every moment of transcribing. Honestly it really takes time. I did mine in two days. Transcribing is not easy and it is not hard it just requires one to pay attention and to listen attentively. Some speakers are not clear, some don't use direct sentences, some say a lot of things in one moment, some changes what they wanted to say many times, so it becomes hard to pick and to write proper (grammar) sentences. The interesting part about transcribing is that one gets to learn new things while transcribing. I got to understand and hear things I've missed in my previous workshops. Honestly I would really like to do it again, because it exposes me to new information and knowledge. Transcribing is eye opening, it also enhances my listening and writing skills and that's wonderful. Transcribing as a whole offers one an opportunity to grow.* (Reflection post transcribing #MS, WDIOH, February 2021)

Mutual benefit was an important aspect of the ethics of my research. Mkabela (2005) was scathing of the kinds of research processes that take the participation of the research community and then leave, with no real benefit to the community. While I would be able to use the data from this research to work towards a PhD qualification, what substantive benefit would be available to the participants? The direct and indirect benefits of transcribing was one way to build in mutual benefit. They were relatively well paid for this (R15 x per minute transcribed), and could practice a new skill and learn from the content of their transcriptions.

Another form of mutual benefit would be through co-writing academic papers. Learning to write, living through the process of submitting our work to external academic review, and being published, are all useful and beneficial aspects of establishing an academic footprint. Most, if not all, of the volunteers for this aspect of the process aspire to continue in

academia and this would be an advantage to them. The second set of work teams were established to be part of this process. I had discussed this in our third workshop, and nine co-researchers had expressed interest in it. Two broad topics were selected from combinations of submissions, and these were posted onto the Facebook group as well as in emails to all co-researchers. The invitation to write a paper gave the topics, the information we already had on it, some ideas about what was still needed (Addendum 8). I asked the community to indicate to me which one they would like to work on. Fortuitously, two teams emerged from this: one with five members and one with four. The process of co-writing a paper is discussed in more detail in section 4.1.5. below.

This first phase of the project had come to an end, five months after our first workshop in August 2020. We were excited for the outcomes of our process.

4.1.5. Dissemination phase: Iterative dissemination of findings

The potential dissemination of research findings was discussed in the first workshop, in the follow-up questionnaire, and had been on our minds since the start of the project. Some possibilities that remain as potential methods of dissemination are theatre pieces, an artwork (still in process), newspaper articles, a movie, photo essays etc. Perhaps because of the familiarity of academic writing to former ES students, many of whom were continuing into postgraduate studies, writing an academic article for publishing in an academic journal was selected by the co-researchers as the appropriate first route for dissemination. It was a way to amplify students' voices given issues of the politics of knowledge and the inequalities in South African institutions of education exposed by the pandemic, albeit for a limited audience.

Importantly I believe, the papers produced in this part of the process are a form of quantitative data to legitimise the new knowledge we produced. Two papers have been co-written with undergraduate and postgraduate students that are the tangible productive outputs of our collaborations on this project. It is extremely rare (I have not been able to find out if it has been done at UCKAR) for undergraduate students to co-write academic articles for journal publication with their lecturers. As explained below, one of the papers was presented in the Politics Department, and the report on this which appeared on their Facebook page, noted that it was "a rare and wonderful display of intergenerational intellectual collaboration"

(https://www.facebook.com/PoliticalAndInternationalStudies/posts/). The HoD, Dr Magadla, wrote to the team and said: "I am not sure that such a collaborative paper has been presented before in the department" (personal email). These students are considered marginal and at risk in the university, requiring additional intervention through the ES programme to support their studies. There is some stigma attached to being in the programme, as mentioned in the student stories in Chapter 1. And yet, it was these students who, given the right kinds of conditions, have worked together to produce journal articles, while dealing with a pandemic, and online teaching and learning. This is a feat that some of their lecturers have yet to achieve.

For each of the two paper writing teams, a WhatsApp group was set up and continues to be in use today. On it we have made plans, encouraged each other, asked questions and kept in touch. For both groups, the same process was used, with some differences in content because each team had its unique personality. The paper-writing process began while we were still under lockdown levels because of the Covid-19 pandemic and its mutations, and so in the face of isolation and distance, the online spaces needed to be warm and welcoming to build on our sense of community. One of the teams was made up of current students of UCKAR (two undergraduate and two postgraduate) and from the end of 2021 we have met in person for our work meetings. The other team members were spread around South Africa, studying, working, and waiting for work, so while two of them were in Makhanda some of the time, all of those meetings have taken place online.

Writing a paper is not easy – I had only written five, all of which were responses to calls or conference proceedings. These papers would be working with data we had generated collaboratively, and with people who had never written a paper before, and because we could not be sure of how it would end up, it was for a nameless journal we would have to find upon conclusion. Initially we chatted over WhatsApp before setting up the first workshop in May 2021. For each team, over the next 10 months, we met eight or nine times. Briefly, all of our meetings began with where we were at, to affirm that we bring our whole selves to the process. What follows is a process, carried through with both teams, which brought us all closer to articulating our voices in an academic paper that used the data from our project. There were some differences in how we proceeded with each team, but we more or less followed the same process.

In the first workshop, we looked at African feminist theory as a lens for analysis; we discussed whether we had enough data, or whether a further questionnaire to the group would be necessary. We spoke about how to find themes. The tasks that were set were: to read the selected submissions and their reviews (written by participants in response to the four topics – I had selected around six relevant submissions for each paper) and to highlight themes that were common or interesting; and read two papers that explained or used African feminist theory. The second workshop aimed to report on these activities. Some themes had begun to emerge, but it was clear more guidance would be needed. We decided to look through the submissions and the readings again, firstly, to highlight quotes that we felt could be used to support the claims we might make. Secondly, we would note on a spreadsheet details of two submissions, distributed between us: what claims were made in each; what methods were used to make/support these claims; what did the author feel about the topic – and how do they show this; what resonated, what did the reader feel about the topic in response to what was written. Before the next workshop, they sent me these spreadsheets, and I collated them for our next meeting. The third workshop was the opportunity to share these findings and discuss them. In the fourth workshop, we discussed the themes that were emerging, and discussed how to use a) African Feminisms as a lens to analyse and work with the claims, and b) their own responses as a way to locate themselves in the story we were telling. We spoke about journaling. I used the information on these as well as the recordings and chats of the previous four workshops to write an abstract for the paper. The fifth workshop was a discussion of the abstract. In the chat, we brainstormed words that came to mind, to find where each one was located in relation to what the abstract said. We discussed the papers that had been read. We did writing exercises. We spoke about journaling. In the sixth workshop, we wrote what the paper was about in our own words and shared these. We then came up with headings or sections that would make up the paper, and divided these among ourselves. We discussed how each person would approach their section, reminded ourselves of the PEEL method of writing (make a POINT, EXPLAIN it, bring EVIDENCE or examples, LINK it to the topic) (see https://www.virtuallibrary.info/peel-paragraph-writing.html). We agreed to write our pieces, and keep checking on each other in the WhatsApp group during this time. The seventh and eighth workshops were to check on the writing process. People shared their processes – mind-mapping, reading, free writing. I asked them to share what kinds of papers made them want to read more, and we discussed how to make our own writing the kind

that others would want to read. We agreed on deadlines by which time they would send me their completed sections.

Once everyone had sent their sections in, it was clear that there had been some repetition and overlaps with other sections. People also had different styles of writing. I sent the combined sections to the group, and asked their permission to juggle some lines and sections around to add to the flow of the paper. They agreed, and what followed was some back and forth via email as I moved things around, and we all edited and commented. Finally, a year after we had started on the process, we had two complete papers, co-written, collaboratively devised with the project participants' submissions, and most importantly, we all felt that they represented us, and were beautiful.

The papers were posted onto the project Facebook page, so that all those who had contributed to the papers could read them and give their permission for their words to be used. Their support was enthusiastic and unanimous.

These two papers are further explained along with the other three that make up the following section 5.

Our experiment was to set up a transgressive knowledge-making culture, through a project that built on our connections and experiences of pedagogy in the ES unit, using African feminist ideas as a frame, activated by a political consciousness of inequalities in how we worked. Working on the papers together was a further experiment to produce knowledge that we valued from this process. The reflexivity we practised informally and formally throughout the project has consolidated the learning and unlearning we welcomed in this endeavour. Framing, activating, seeing, creating, and imagining, as fledgling indices for transgressive knowledge-making cultures at the start of the project, has developed into the five fingers that could hold our dreams.

4.2.   African Feminist Methodology Course for Scottish and African PhD students

As mentioned at the start of this section, an unexpected progression from the original project was the way in which my interest in and growing knowledge of African feminisms became a springboard for further projects that contributed to the thinking about this PhD. In the curricula of my students, and indeed any of the postgraduate courses I have taken at the university (MA 2009-2011; Assessors Course 2012; PGDip. HE 2013,2014; Supervisors course 2015), African feminisms (or any African thought) was missing. I was determined to

reorientate my thinking by focussing almost exclusively on African feminist thought, as much as possible. When my supervisor would recommend authors to me, I would find out how African feminists thought about the same idea or concept. He quickly realised my single-minded intentions, and suggested that I start a reading group which would become a communal African feminist thinking and reading space – what Okech has called "African Feminist epistemic communities" (2020, p. 20). As mentioned, he invited a colleague, Dr Saskia Vermeulen from Strathclyde University in Scotland, and her PhD student, Linda Mensah from Ghana, to join. Soon more and more people joined as they heard about the group. It ran (and continues to run) every second week, and at first, I would post a reading a week before, and we would discuss it in the group. During this time, Linda and I put together a proposal for the Scottish SGSSS *Spring into Methods* programme to present a course on African Feminist Methodology. It was approved, including our request for equal numbers of Scottish and African students, who then attended the free, five-day, online course. The course is described and explained in some depth in the fourth paper of this collection (Mensah & Knowles, 2022).

Apart from the opportunity to work on this exciting project with my new friend, Linda, the course was also the opportunity to apply the pedagogic ideas emerging from the project with former ES students. As the paper (Mensah & Knowles, 2022) argues, African feminisms were both the frame for engagement and the content of the course. It was activated by a careful consideration of our different positionings in relation to African feminisms, each other, and a transgression of traditional North-South epistemic relations. We ensured that even though it was an online course, we had set up opportunities to 'see' each other in every session. We focussed on creating collective knowledge-making opportunities. And this inspired imaginative and evolving manifestations of this schema which continue through the reading group and the paper that we co-wrote.

Linda and I worked collaboratively on the course – we agreed on the five aspects we would cover over the five days, and that I would facilitate three and she would facilitate two. The presentations (the preparation, compiling PowerPoint slides and reading lists, the two-hour Zoom session including three breakout room discussions each day) were excellent opportunities to hone our ideas about African feminisms. It crystalised our thinking on the principles of African feminisms, positionality, working with communities, methods of data collection, and ethical considerations. But most importantly, it allowed us to think through

the pedagogy of African feminisms: how to present the course in a way that demonstrated the principles of African feminisms in each topic.

It was very encouraging and comforting to have the support of Saskia and Linda in each session – Saskia providing all of the technological and administrative support, and Linda and I supporting each other's presentations by adding anything we thought would be helpful, and also keeping an eye on what was happening in the breakout rooms. It was an interesting disruption, we felt, to the usual North-South kinds of extractivist arrangements as mentioned by Grosfoguel (2020). The African women candidates from South Africa and other countries on the continent added the weight of their experience to the readings we were engaging with, and the subject matter. It was a wonderful opportunity to share experiences and concerns and ways of doing things across continents, and to learn from each other in this way. For Linda and me, the facilitating experience and the reflections of the candidates were an opportunity to take this further, and to write a paper that explored the relationship between theory and praxis, research and pedagogy, that proved invaluable insights to both of our PhD journeys. Course participants were invited to join the African Feminist reading group, which continues to meet every two weeks, now with a rotating chair, to expose different members to leading and holding the feminist space.

The paper gives greater detail and describes the thinking behind the project and the pedagogy, which I will not repeat here. Significant for me was the different experience of writing a paper with Linda, compared to co-writing with the WDIOH co-researchers. Both Linda and I are completing our PhDs. We both use African feminist theory as a lens for this. We are both single mothers. Beyond these and other important commonalities are numerous differences – age, race, location, disciplines, home countries, amongst others. Nnameaka (2005, p. 64) argued that "teaching connections requires that we grasp and teach sameness and difference simultaneously", and in many ways this was a true expression of our teaching experience for Linda and me. As co-teachers on this course to diverse students from different continents and multiple disciplines, it was a case of teaching *and learning* sameness and difference as we connected with each other, and facilitated connections in the course. Co-writing the paper together afterwards was a continuation of this, and we both welcomed the opportunities it afforded us to connect and catch up and encourage and witness as we balanced the writing of the paper with our many other commitments. It was a dialogue between us – and as Collins (2003, p. 59) suggested "a primary epistemological

assumption underlying the use of dialogue in assessing knowledge claims is that connectedness rather than separation is an essential component of the knowledge validation process". Despite being separated continentally and in so many other ways, writing the paper together deepened our connection. Because we both came into the relationship and project with a "shared orientation towards knowledge" as Ntseane (2011) put it, seeking Afrocentricity, liberation and transformation, and because we cared deeply for each other, the paper flowed more easily and with encouragement, support and innovations as we progressed. The entire process – the reading group, the course we ran, and the paper we wrote – all combined to be an African feminist praxis for transgressive knowledge-making cultures.

4.3.   African Feminist Theory course for Political and International Studies

The methodology course run by Linda and me was voluntary, free, and without assessment or accreditation. The pedagogy we practised and theorised fell outside of the fairly rigid, imposed traditions of university credit-bearing courses, which would have to comply with various standards in terms of delivery and assessment. I wondered at the time how the pedagogy we theorised and practised there would translate in a more institutionalised setting. I would soon find out. An African feminist good friend, Head of the Political and International Studies department at UCKAR, contacted me in January 2022 to ask if I would consider teaching a Pol third-year module for the second term – seven weeks, five lectures per week. The African scholar who was supposed to teach the course had to cancel her contract suddenly because visas could not be obtained for her children. This course would run alongside my normal teaching of the ES course, which entailed eight lecture periods per week every week for the year. So not only would it be a large time commitment in terms of my daily teaching load and PhD work, but it would shift me right outside of my comfort zone – I had never taught at third-year level, and never in Political and International Studies. I was terrified, but also strongly believed that this was the opportunity to bring together all the strands of the PhD and put it into practice. What would communal, inclusive, empathic, embodied, relevant teaching and learning look like in a Pol 3 course for 150 students with formal assessments required? Could I apply the schema of framing, activating, seeing, creating and imagining for transgressive knowledge-making cultures in a formal university course? I simply had to take up the opportunity, and I am so glad I did. It was an

exhilarating, terrifying, generative, exhausting seven weeks, followed by three-hour exam which included three essays (and all that marking!).

My teaching in the ES unit is responsive to the curricula set by Pol 1 and Soc 1 lecturers. Depending on their lectures, readings, assessments, I work with this knowledge in much more informal ways with the ES students – we have group discussions, debates, multiple draft essays, tests they set themselves, and other kinds of much less conventional engagements. It is how I get to know them well, exposed as we are to different kinds of group learning activities, and including individual interviews. The Pol 3 class was expecting a formal lecture every day, complete with PowerPoint slides, weekly formal tutorial essays, and the exam (see the course outline, Addendum 2).

It was a risk worth taking to agree to this course. I learnt so much about how to apply African feminist pedagogy in a formal course, and exposed students to a way of learning they had not yet experienced. Their first and second years in 2020 and 2021 took place online, because of Covid-19 restrictions. This, their final year, was the first time they had had face-to-face lectures and exams. They did not know each other, and only the 15 or so former ES students in the class knew me. I had to find creative ways to bring our whole selves into the lecture room – bodies, minds and spirits; find ways to establish a community; facilitate a sense of agency and active learning, rather than as passive objects of teaching.

The frame, lens and orientation for this course was African feminisms, seeking to find connection, showing love, and activated by the conscientisation of the political arrangements that are part of our histories and present. I told the students a bit about myself, and what the course entailed and how we would approach it. I then invited them to write down on a piece of paper what they knew about African feminisms, what they wanted to know, what they thought so far, and what they wanted me to know about them. I have selected four of their responses to demonstrate how this exercise helped me to see who the students are, and what their perspectives were on how we would proceed:

> *I am keen on learning African feminism and how much it differs from Western feminism. I think the call to bring a sense of community in the lectures is extremely important for the individualistic society we currently live in.* (First lecture reflection, Pol 3)

I'm really excited for this course as well as your inclusive and liberal style of teaching. I myself would like to think of myself as someone quite radical and passionate about creating a world that I would like to exist in. Hence my podcast. A platform that I created to make others feel seen and heard. With as little as I know, I definitely feel as though I am at home with this course. I already know that it'll further free and inspire me as a future powerhouse and black woman. (First lecture reflection, Pol 3)

Honestly academics have been weighing on me the first term the transition from online back to face to face, however with you explaining how you will conduct the course it is more understandable for me compared to how other lecturers have been conducting their lectures. I also feel like you are preparing us for our progression into carrying on with this subject. Is feminism practised the same across the continent? (First lecture reflection, Pol 3)

I am a very anxious person so it is difficult to speak in class in front of everyone. However, ever since the year started I've been demotivated about school or being alive in general but after attending your class I have felt better about starting this term. I have already felt your warm energy regardless of the school work already being overwhelming. I am able to understand you when you speak. (First lecture reflection, Pol 3).

I continued to seek opportunities for students to show themselves – there were two more formal feedback questionnaires (in week 3 and at the end of the course), and students were not shy to ask questions or challenge my ideas. So, in many ways the first three aspects of the schema for transgressive knowledge-making – framing, activating, seeing – were in place, and the fourth, creating a communal knowledge-making platform was in progress. This allowed imaginative manifestations of collaborative knowledge-making that emerged from these processes.

I will highlight three aspects of the course to show how I worked with the pedagogic insights that had emerged in the project and through the PhD process, and that sought to apply the schema:

1. Reading.   One of the key aspects of any Political and International Studies course is reading. From first year, students are required to read between two and four readings each week, preferably before the lectures, and to write a tutorial using at

least two of them. Most students struggle with this, and tutors complain regularly that students are not reading. Their term essays require them to reference at least five readings. In the Pol 3 course, I invited students to participate in a reading exercise each week for low marks (4% of their term mark) but helpful outcomes. Every Monday morning, they were invited to submit a reading summary for one of two or three supplied readings, according to guidelines we discussed in class. Once they had submitted on deadline, their submission was automatically sent to two others, who were required to comment on them briefly, again using guidelines discussed briefly in class. This meant that by the time they attended their tutorial discussions (on Monday, Tuesday, or Wednesday), they had already engaged with a reading, and read two other reviews of the same or alternative readings, and could participate more actively in the tutorial sessions. Between 70% and 80% of the class took part in this each week, and many of them commented on how useful it was in feedback to me. Their willingness to participate demonstrated that they valued the opportunity to be held accountable for reading before their tutorials; that they valued reading the work of their peers; that they felt safe enough to expose their work to their peers. Feedback from the tutors intimated that students were more confident in their engagements, having read the readings. The reading platform was a way to increase and support agency, engagement, and tap into the capacities for critical thinking that students were not sure about. This expanded their desire and ability to participate more freely in the course, and to be part of creating and imagining its forms as we progressed.

2. <u>Tutorial and exam questions</u>: Written tutorials are submitted to tutors every Friday. Because so many students had reflected that they were anxious and overwhelmed in their written feedback in the first class, I invited them to be part of creating and imagining the assessment of the course. Every Thursday, we would set the tutorial question that was due the following week, based on the current week's work. I would suggest the broad topic for the tutorial, and open it up for them to decide the details of the question. It was an opportunity to demystify the terms we use in questions (define/explain/ compare/critically discuss etc.), and it activated their agency to write the kinds of questions they felt comfortable with or even challenged by. As we approached exams, they expressed their anxiety as this would be the first

'sit down' exam they would write since the start of their degrees – all previous exams were online. The HoD and Teaching Assistance agreed to come and speak to them about the exam, and again, I gave them the entire question paper to discuss and consider and make changes, before the exam. The purpose of this was to illustrate that assessments were not being designed to trick them, but to invite their active participation and engagement. Even though the exam results for my course were no better or worse than for other courses, the practice of transparency and the invitation to be part of the imagining added to the tone of collaboration in knowledge-making. It created a sense of ownership, critical imagination, and even accountability, because students were co-devisors of their own assessments. A narrow focus on results would miss the opportunity to reflect on other kinds of learning that are important for young academic citizens: confidence, conscientization, empathy, relevance, responsibility – all of these were the potential and immeasurable features of doing things in this way.

3. <u>Group Project</u>: The term assignment counts 40% of their term mark. It usually takes the form of an essay. For this term assignment, they were required to write a research proposal, using African Feminist theory as a lens. In the first week of the course I asked if they would consider doing the assignment in groups, explaining that if it was done with clear principles in place, it would align with African feminist ideas about communal knowledge-making. They agreed, albeit with some misgivings. Every week I would tie what we discussed in class to how they should approach their project, or how the readings contributed to their thinking for the project. I invited them to come and see me in groups, or to email me with queries. Once they had submitted their project, they were required to write a reflection which commented on how working together had gone; what they had learnt about research, about their topic, about themselves; what they might do differently next time. These reflections showed me the value of working in this way, and setting up group work that is framed and activated in specific ways to make it a valuable exercise. I share one student's response as an indication of how many responded to this task:

    The transition from working online and engaging with people in Zoom meetings to working and having to engage with people face to face has been something entirely scary for me, because I find it uncomfortable and very hard to socialise and engage with people especially people I don't know.

However, I must admit that working in this group and specifically working with these incredible women and feminists has been life changing. This is because I become exposed to individuals who had a different worldview from mine. And that gave me an opportunity to see the world through their eyes and I'm convinced there are certain things I still need to reconsider about myself and really where I'm heading and the kind of impact I want to have in the world.

What i liked and respect is how we gave our all, we really did. How we each went out and researched our topic and shared the ideas we had. I liked how we were all present for the meetings we had for the research project and how we all engaged and contributed to make the best out of it. I also liked how we easily got along with each other and had no arguments, and most importantly how one's ideas and their views was respected and taken into consideration. Another thing i really loved is how we collectively wrote the paper even though it was hard to, because we wanted it to present one voice as inspired by African feminist principle of togetherness and communal knowledge making.

What I learned about research work is that it needs one to research about something that they are really interested in, as much as the work becomes too much but at least it becomes bearable because of the interest that one has on the topic or research question they are researching about. About knowledge making, this research has taught me that knowledge is really created communally especially in a space that it is respectfully critiqued and questioned in, that becomes eye opening because in that way, one becomes exposed to different perspectives that are seen in different angles and I learnt so much because of knowledge created in such a space.

I learnt that my ideas are valid, I have always been one to shy away in answering in tutorial sessions because of being afraid if what I think it's the right thing or not. However, with my group members, I felt as if my ideas were recognised and sometimes, they even said how good they are. As silly as it sounds, when i articulated my thoughts, I really felt them being taken as important. In a way, this boosted my confidence. Another important thing I learnt was to respect how other people think and if I critique, to do that respectfully. I also learnt that I could become a team leader and something else I didn't know was that I could crack jokes, this has been a beautiful small journey.

Of course, not everybody had this kind of positive experience, but the majority found that working in groups shifted how they thought about knowledge-making, and themselves, in positive ways that will remain with them long after this course. It was a platform that inspired their creativity, their critical thinking, and their imagination.

The Pol 3 course on African Feminist theory showed me that the emerging schema for transgressive knowledge-making cultures is possible, is exciting to work with, and has the effect of engaging students from the start as co-creators of the knowledge we make in the course. Importantly it was a way to expand the schema to the reimagination of assessment and curricula activities as a collaborative process, which enabled our knowledge-making activities to be owned, interrogated, and expanded.

5. Introducing the papers

The five papers that follow, represent a praxis of the ideas that are discussed in this introduction, including the five aspects introduced on page 2: **framing, activating, seeing, creating, imagining**. They do not fall neatly into these categories, but each has an emphasis on one or two, while necessarily overlapping with the others. They are also in a variety of ways part of the methodology for the PhD. Each paper introduces an aspect of the research question; it explains briefly what our methods were for generating data; it analyses the data to come up with ideas and contributions to transgressive knowledge-making platforms. I introduce them here, and discuss them in more detail below. For a summary see Table 3.

5.1 is the first paper, and falls into the **framing** aspect, in that it explains the theory and methodology I proposed for the projects that followed. This paper includes the politics of the choices I made, so it also has overlaps with the **activating** aspect.

5.2. and 5.3 are papers co-written with former ES students who are part of the WDIOH project. These papers emerged from the data generated by the project and articulate the perspectives and experiences of the students themselves – so both fall into the **seeing** aspect, because they show us who the students are. But they are also **activating** in their content, in that they make political arguments, critiquing the power arrangements that marginalise some will privileging others. The aim of both is to bring about conscientisation and transformation.

5.4 is co-written with friend and colleague Linda Mensah, and falls into the **creating** and **imagining** aspects, in that it puts into practice the **activated framing,** to set up and describe a platform for knowledge-making that **imagines** alternative and transgressive processes and principles in how this project was run.

5.5, the final paper, pulls together the principles and experiences of three projects: the WDIOH project, the African Feminist Methodology project discussed in 5.4, and a final project of the PhD process – the Pol 3 course on African Feminist Theory. For all three of these, the platforms for the knowledge-making (**creating** aspect) are explained, and it draws out two principles that are part of the **re-imagination** of what transgressive knowledge-making culture looks like.

Some logistical notes about the papers in this section:

- Each paper has its own introduction below, and then the paper has been inserted, using a different font (Times New Roman), so that they are distinct from the thesis.

- All the papers use the referencing format required by the journal to which they have been submitted.

- The first paper can be searched online, as it has been published.

- The footnotes in all the inserted papers follow numerically from the rest of the thesis. It was not possible to allow their own numerical values as inserted documents.

- NB: The PhD by Publication states that "there should be at least four publications of which three should normally have been submitted to accredited journals and **two should have been accepted for publication** (in press or already published) with at least two of these normally submitted to internationally accredited journals" (Addendum 1). You will see in the table provided that the first paper is published. All the remaining papers were submitted to journals in August or September 2022, in the hopes that one would be published by January 2023. This might still happen. I am hoping that by February 2023 at least one more paper will have been accepted.

- NB: The PhD by Publication states that: "Co-authorship is thus permissible, but the PhD scholar must be the main author and must lead the paper in:

  a. the initial idea,
  b. the logic of reasoning,
  c. the data collection/material generation,
  d. the analysis
  e. and the manuscript production.
  The scholar must include a clear indication of what aspects each co-author was responsible for and what percentage they undertook (as per the NRF requirements). In the case where three of the publications are co-authored, there is a lower limit of 70% input by the PhD scholar in all five categories above."

For the sake of compliance, I have indicated a percentage for each paper in the table that follows. I would like to argue, however, that this is not a matter of simple arithmetic measurement. The project with former students, as explained, was collaborative, as was the writing of the papers 2 and 3 – this was the praxis of the African feminist principles which guided the process. While I have taken responsibility for the process throughout, I would like to disclaim the accuracy of a percentage. Likewise, in Paper 4, while I took responsibility for most of the meetings and the publishing process, it was very much a shared process.

Table 3: Paper submissions summary

	Paper 1	Paper 2	Paper 3	Paper 4	Paper 5
author	Corinne Knowles	Corinne Knowles, Nomphumelelo Babeli, Athabile Ntlokwana, Zhikona Ntombolwana, Zinathi Sobuza	Corinne Knowles, Lebogang Khoza, Abongile James, Zikhona Mtwa, Milisa Roboji, Matimu Shivambu	Linda Mensah Corinne Knowles	Corinne Knowles
% by Knowles	100%	70%	70%	50%	100%
title	*With Dreams in Our Hands: An African feminist framing of a knowledge-making project with former ESP students*	*Knowledge and power in a South African university: What kind of knowledge matters in first year Humanities?*	*Problematising the Inequalities of the South African Education Sector from Students' Perspectives*	*Navigating decolonial pedagogy: An Afro-feminist story*	*Pushing against conventions: An African feminist contribution to knowledge-making*
key words	African feminisms; decolonial knowledge-making; intersectionality; positionality	African Feminism; decolonial; knowledge-making; university; first-year students	*education sector, inequality, decolonial*	decolonial pedagogy; Afro-Feminism; feminist community.	African feminism; praxis; reflection; communal-knowledge-making; pedagogy
journal	**Education as Change** https://upjournals.co.za/index.php/EAC ISSN 1947-9417 (Online) Volume 25 | 2021 | #8744 | 22 pages	**a)Teaching in Higher Education** https://www.tandfonline.com/journals/cthe20 Print ISSN: 1356-2517 Online ISSN: 1470-1294 **b) Transformation in Higher Education** https://thejournal.org.za | ISSN: 2415-0991 (PRINT) | ISSN: 2519-5638 (ONLINE)	**Critical Studies in Teaching and Learning** (*CriSTaL*) https://cristal.ac.za/index.php/cristal/about **ISSN: 2310-7103**	**Feminist Studies** www.feministstudies.org.	**Gender and Education** Print ISSN: 0954-0253 Online ISSN: 1360-0516 https://www.tandfonline.com/action/journalInformation?show=aimsScope&journalCode=cgee20
	7806 words	a) 7055 words b) 5951 words	7370 words	9003 words	7253 words
submission process	Submission: 1/12/2020 Reviews: 8/3/2021 Changes submitted: 5/7/2021 Published 17/10/21	a) Submission: 13 /8/22 Editor Decision: rejected – 24 /9/22 b) Submission: 18/10/2022 In Peer Review: 19/10/2022 Published 27 February 2023	Submission: 24/08/2022 Peer reviews 23 Dec 2022 Revision and Resubmission 2 January 2023 Published June 2023	Submission: 1/09/2022 In Peer Review 19/09/2022	Submission: 11/09/2022

5.1. Paper 1: Knowles, C. (2021). With Dreams in Our Hands: An African feminist framing of a knowledge-making project with former ESP students. *Education as Change*, *25*(1), pp. 1-22

This first paper was written in response to a *Call for Papers* by editors Professors Bozalek and Aditi, for a special edition of the journal *Education as Change*, on the topic of Promoting Scholarship of ECP (Extended Curriculum Programmes). I submitted an abstract soon after my PhD proposal was passed, and as I was starting the PhD project with former students. I believed it was an ideal opportunity to frame the African feminist theoretical and methodological aspects of the project. I submitted the full paper in November 2020. While waiting for peer review of my paper, I reviewed two papers for the same edition.

My peer reviewed comments came back to me in March 2021. The second reviewer loved the paper, the first reviewer had several concerns, and believed that these should be addressed before the paper was publishable. Peer review comments appear in Addendum 9. I was devastated, but also so very grateful for the first review, because it alerted me to assumptions I had made, and gave me the opportunity to work on the paper further.

There were two major concerns of the first reviewer. Firstly, the reviewer was uncomfortable with my use of African feminisms. The argument was that African feminism is many things, and I was focused on one particular author, Peggy Ntseane, to the exclusion of others. The reviewer also felt that although I was using a theory that specifically emphasised gender as an analytical lens, I did not use it as such. I could go back to how I spoke about African feminisms, use more authors to frame my arguments, and show how I was using the lens more carefully. It strengthened the paper enormously.

Secondly, the reviewer was concerned that although I said the project's aim was to centre the voice of students, the paper did not do this. I realised that I had not made it clear enough that this paper was solely to explain the theory and methodology, and that further papers, co-written with co-researchers, would centre the students' voices. This too strengthened the paper. Once I had worked on the paper, it was re-submitted, and published soon after.

The Paper:

With Dreams in Our Hands: An African Feminist Framing of a Knowledge-Making Project with Former ESP Students

Corinne Knowles

Abstract

This article introduces a research project that works with former Extended Studies Programme students to make knowledge that emerges through online, multimodal collaborations. Knowledge-making is not politically neutral, and the project and article are responding in part to the calls of the 2015/2016 South African student protesters to decolonise and transform university curricula. The project draws on African feminist ideas, emphasising the intersectional oppressions of colonialism, capitalism and patriarchy, which continue to influence theoretical choices in the knowledge hierarchies of South African and African universities. The "race", class and gender inequalities that drive success or failure at university and in society become some of the topics addressed in the project, where former students as co-researchers collaborate to devise the topics, responses, and kinds of dissemination. Ntseane's overlapping principles of a collective worldview, spirituality, a shared orientation to knowledge, and communal knowledge-making are motifs that influence how the project is imagined and run. My positionality as lead researcher and former lecturer of the co-researchers is navigated using African feminist guidance, which also informs the ethical principles of the project.

Keywords: African feminisms; decolonial knowledge-making; intersectionality; positionality

Introduction

Every year, students arrive in the Humanities Extended Studies Programme[8] (ESP) at the South African university where I lecture with dreams and hopes for a better life. The project I introduce is a collaboration with former ESP students to explore knowledge- making and produce knowledge that we believe provides new ideas in the field of higher education and promotes different ways of teaching, learning and doing research. The theoretical framing sets up a methodology that conspires to work with participants as co-researchers in the multimodal project, with collective agency over the questions asked, how they should be answered, and how they can be disseminated. This deliberate framing imagines a platform for

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[8] At the university currently known as Rhodes, the Humanities Extended Studies Programme invites students into the programme based on a number of criteria, including matric marks that fall short of automatic entry into the Bachelor of Arts (BA) or Bachelor of Social Science (BSS) degrees, being the first in their family to go to university, and having received township or rural schooling. They are required to select one of two streams. Those I teach have selected Politics 1 and Sociology 1 as their mainstream subjects. They are taught computer and academic literacies, and most of our work involves the augmentation and literacies of their mainstream courses. The class size ranges between 30 and 45 students.

knowledge-making that centres student voices to contribute insights into the kinds of teaching and research that would be decolonised and inclusive.

The 2015/2016 student protests in South Africa were an important moment that marked the public outcry from students who struggled with the costs and content of university education. They highlighted some of the challenges of poor black[9] students (Department of Higher Education and Training [DHET] 2017; Moloi, Makgoba, and Miruka 2017) concerning the unequal effects of colonialism, patriarchy, capitalism and neoliberalism, which distribute their rewards filtered through socially constructed human attributes such as "race", class and gender. In part, this research project aims to honour the calls of student protesters (characterised in Twitter feeds #FeesMustFall, #RhodesSoWhite, #RUReferenceList) and pays attention to the inequalities that continue to shape the daily lives and the success rate of students based on these constructions.[10] While university fees did fall for a while (DHET 2017) along with, increasingly, state support (McLaren and Struwig 2019), the more important call for pedagogic and curricula transformation has been unevenly realised between and within universities—and has now been complicated and exacerbated by a global pandemic. A number of ESP students were part of the protests at the university currently known as Rhodes (UCKAR),[11] and some of them are part of this project.

It is an opportunity for us to apply politically rigorous scholarship (Borras 2016) in response to the calls to change how we think about knowledge-making on the continent, to be representative, relevant, and transformational.

In line with this, this article argues for a Black/African[12] feminist framing of the research question and project, the positionality of the lead researcher, and the analysis of the data in collaboration with co-researchers. The theories we use shape how we collect, produce, and

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[9] To use the term "black" to define the "race" of students is contested and complicated. It dates back to Steve Bantu Biko's Black Consciousness work during South African apartheid to reclaim blackness as a subjectivity in contrast to the divisive apartheid categories under the umbrella of "non-white" (see Mahlangu 2012). Former students who are part of the project self-identify as "black".

[10] South African students' completion and pass rates are "raced" and classed. Recently, Jeynes (2020), of Africa Check, reported that "the completion rate for white students was vastly higher, at 71.6%. Black students had a 53.5% completion rate and coloured students a 53.8% completion rate. Asian students came in at 62.1%". Student protesters wrote about experiences of racism and frustration with a Western curriculum (see Daniels 2015; Erskog 2015).

[11] Rhodes University was renamed the University Currently Known as Rhodes (UCKAR) by protesters and allies during the 2015/16 student protests. In 2018, following a decision by the Rhodes University Council to halt any consultative process around renaming, and instead to keep the name, some are using the acronym USKAR—the University Still Known as Rhodes. See Daniels (2015) for the argument to change the name.

[12] Black feminism and African feminisms have many overlaps and some differences (see Salo and Mama 2001). While African feminisms are predominantly used in this study, African-American feminists also contribute ideas that align to African feminisms.

analyse data in institutions that make certain kinds of knowledge-making feasible (Adomako Ampofo 2010; Appiah 2006; Moletsane 2015). African feminisms provide a lens that allows us to see not only how the knowledge economy in many South African universities is structured to limit the success of young black people and women (Linden 2017; Pather 2018; Skade 2016), but also how new possibilities to flourish can be opened for those who are marginalised in the current system by the intersectional and mutually constitutive oppressions of patriarchy, colonialism, and capitalism.

African feminist principles, I will explain, direct how I as a researcher position myself in relation to the community that shapes the project. I will clarify how the Covid-19 pandemic has become a vehicle for the knowledge-making and what the challenges and opportunities are in the consequential shift in how I originally anticipated the unfolding of the project. I describe the methodological steps of the project and reveal some of the early reflections of the process. As part of the ethical considerations for the project, when I use the words of the co-researchers, they will give permission and we will discuss how their words are used. I purposefully do not use their words in this introduction to the project but focus instead on how the theory helps to construct a methodology that is a platform for knowledge-making with former students. Later papers, including those co-written with co-researchers, will present findings and centre the voices of the former students.

Choosing a Theory

The theories that we as academic researchers use in our research guide the way we approach knowledge-making (Adomako Ampofo 2010; Appiah 2006; Moletsane 2015). In African universities, as Wane (2008, 193) argues, teaching and research take place "within the context of a history of colonialism, imperialism, and neo-colonial, post- colonial and** anti-colonial conditionalities". Many have written on the frustrations and dangers of Eurocentric influences on our knowledge-making (Lundgren and Prah 2010; Moletsane 2015). Choosing an African theory is a disruption to the homogeneity of Eurocentric thinking to orientate and enable a process where student voices are central in the process. Blay (2008, 60), drawing on the work of Asante, explains how this orientation works:

The degree to which research is Afrocentric is often determined by the researcher's location, or centricity/centeredness, which informs the language s/he employs, the direction of his/her sentiments, themes, and interests, as well as his/her attitude toward certain ideas, persons, or objects. Thus, it is when, and only when the researcher's language, direction, and attitude are centered within an "African cultural territory" that it qualifies as Afrocentric.

As an older white woman in South Africa, given the country's colonial and apartheid history, I am awkwardly located off-centre of Afrocentric in terms of my "race", class and gender. Later in the article I grapple with this positioning to understand and undertake a process of decolonising my own thinking and being in the world. As a teacher and researcher, I am interested in the ways in which the politics of "race", class and gender play out in the knowledge hierarchies that continue to shape who teaches, and what they teach.

The kinds of theorists that undergraduate students are exposed to (for instance in Sociology at the university where I have taught for 11 years) are disproportionately white, male, Western and elite. The same can be said for numerous postgraduate courses I have taken at UCKAR. How relevant are these theories in a South African context? Tamale (2020, 43–44) argues that:

> *[G]iven the history of the continent and the lingering legacies of colonialism, imperialism, racism and neoliberalism, theories and paradigms formulated in the West do not necessarily apply in Africa. It also underscores the need to develop alternative schools of thought and counter-hegemonic narratives that expose the subtle and intricate power relationships embedded in mainstream theories.*

Wane (2008, 185) explains that being taught from a European canon caused her "to be disassociated from and devalue the cultural knowledges and wisdom of [her] ancestors, [her] community, and [her] family". Alienation and disassociation are even more likely at a time of national pandemic lockdown, given the huge changes, such as digital teaching and learning, and a loss of connection for many. The aim of the project is to reveal adapted and expanded ways of knowing that restore connectedness. Its intention is to think through the principles of knowledge-making from a perspective that imagines a future that is unpicked from a patriarchal and colonial past. Tamale (2020, 30) explains that this "is a multifaceted, holistic and integral process" made more complex because of the pervasiveness of colonialism's legacy, resulting in a situation where "many in mainstream academia, even today, are yet to be convinced that feminist methodologies, approaches and analyses in research are part of legitimate scientific inquiry" (2020, 47). I have taken this observation to heart by using African feminisms as the theoretical frame.

African feminisms grew as alternative contributions to the conversation about gender in response to the way in which white feminism, and, despite many overlaps, even Black feminism (Salo and Mama 2001), failed to articulate and recognise African realities regarding, for example, decolonisation struggles (Tamale and Oloka-Onyango 1995) and the

different significance of gender in some African societies (Amadiume 1987; Oyěwùmí 1997). Even though, for centuries, African women struggled against patriarchy (Salami 2013), it was not known as "feminism", resulting in some resistance to the term among African women (Lewis 2010; Motlafi 2015). But through several iterations over the last few decades strong ideas have emerged that clarify some of the fundamental ideas of what African feminisms are, rather than what they are not. African feminisms foreground gender as a tool for analysis, and locate that in a collective, where the aims of gender transformation are to bring about a better world for all.

African feminist theory has many strands and is more than a set of ideas about the experiences of black women and men. Mekgwe warns against simplistic gender binaries and reminds us that "women do not easily fall into neat categories" (Mekgwe 2007, 21). Ahikire claims (2014, 8) that African feminisms are a "myriad of various theoretical perspectives emanating from the complexities and specifics of the different material conditions and identities of women" and how they resist oppression and navigate power. While African feminist theory is developed by diverse women and scholars from a variety of locations and orientations, there are common threads that are explored or assumed by many of them.

Firstly, there is a dynamic relationship between African feminisms and the women's movements on the continent (Goetz and Hassim 2003; Lewis 2001; Mama 2020), in that their intellectual orientation is the collective struggle against the effects of patriarchy, capitalism and colonialism (Mama 2011). Understanding these forces as interdependent and interlinked is key to transforming society through the lens of intersectionality, which recognises that these "systems of oppression are interwoven and co-produced in complex ways" (Tamale 2020, 66). For this reason, argues Tamale, it is vital to "understand this dynamic and stop thinking of discrimination superficially as residing in separate, neatly-marked compartments. For many disadvantaged social groups, discrimination is an inextricably blended experience" (2020, 66). In this project, thanks to the work of Tamale and others, "the epistemic value of intersectionality is that it provides us with a critical lens within which to view the world" (Tamale 2020, 67).

Secondly, while the feminist movement and theory in Africa have undergone shifts and changes over time (Ahikire 2014; Lewis 2010; Salami 2017), another common theme is the fight against the structural erasure of black women, individually and collectively (Gbowee 2011; Masola 2018). Mekgwe (2007) unpacks some of the emphases and complexities in African feminisms, including their aim towards "a positive transformation of society

such that women are not marginalized but are treated as full citizens in all spheres of life" (2007, 13).

Thirdly, Mama (2011, 2) describes African feminisms as an ethical "intellectual politics", in that an important aspect of the theory is to locate African experiences within the social politics of their contexts. Ahikire explains that "in African contexts, feminism is at once philosophical, experiential, and practical" (2014, 8). Mama laments that despite the potential of African feminisms to transform universities, "the discourse on academic freedom and intellectual responsibility in African universities has rarely yielded ground for feminist ethics" (Mama 2011, 1). The feminist ethics implied here become important guidelines in how the project is set up.

For me, then, African feminisms provide an ethical orientation that opens my thinking about pedagogy and this research project in ways that recognise black young people from their own contexts and perspectives, to make knowledge that is relevant and owned by them. The theory is a lens to see how experiences of gender are intricately linked to "race" and class, and how this affects knowledge-making. African feminists have guided my thinking about ethical research, decoloniality understood through the lens of intersectionality, and have provided principles to direct how I work with young South African black people in the project. Tamale (2020, 67) explains that "an intersectional approach is multifaceted, challenging Western hegemonic structures and institutions, including the very nature of knowledge (ontology) and how we access that knowledge (epistemology)".

African feminisms mean different things in different contexts. In fields that have used other frames and theories to shape the academic conversation, African feminisms are the "other"— they perhaps have token value but have not captured mainstream imagination for various reasons (Adomako Ampofo 2010; Moletsane 2015). Using African feminisms to frame this project about knowledge-making is an alternative orientation that seeks to change the status quo. It tries to follow the directive of Tamale that as academic researchers, "we must adopt ethical non-positivist intellectual paradigms that acknowledge subjective interpretation of reality and are commensurate with Indigenous (and feminist) knowledge systems that are nonlinear, nonrational and value-laden" (Tamale 2020, 279).

Principles of African Feminisms that Shape the Project

The project I introduce in this article is set up for former ESP students to make knowledge together, at a time of a global pandemic that exacerbates the inequalities in our society and university. It is a mixed group of young black women and men, who at some stage between

2011 and 2019 were part of the ESP programme at UCKAR and were taught by me. As such, it works with young black people whose lives are shaped by gender, "race" and class inequalities that are the outcomes of patriarchy, colonialism, and capitalism. In this article I foreground the thinking of African feminists who are marginalised in the knowledge hierarchies in our thinking about pedagogy in the South African academy, and I apply their thinking on how to conduct research as I grapple with power relations and ethics in the project. In particular, Ntseane (2011), drawing on Mkabela and Asante, offers principles that run through the work of many African feminists, and that have guided the thinking and planning for the project.

Ntseane (2011) writes from the position of an African woman who acknowledges that even while her being is constituted by her location in the collective, the "reality of marginalization has been pushed further to the periphery due to the gendered contexts defined by the legacy of colonialism" (Ntseane 2011, 308). Her paper explains a project that draws on African and African feminist ideas that resonate with my aims in the project.

Ntseane (2011) argues that the four interconnected ideas that guide an Africanist and African feminist approach to research are a collective worldview, spirituality, a shared orientation towards knowledge, and the role of gender in how knowledge is processed. A collective worldview demands that thinking about the individual, for instance regarding human rights and social justice during a pandemic, is, as Motlafi explains, a "delicate balancing act" between individual and community needs, recognising that "both black men and women continue to struggle with colonial legacies of socio- economic deprivation" (Motlafi 2015). Wane (2008, 187) explains that African feminisms, overlapping with most African societies, "stress the ideology of communal, rather than individual, values and the preservation of a community as a whole". As Ntseane argues, a sense of the collective shapes people's recognition of what constitutes a problem, and for this reason research on the continent must locate the research community as agents in the research (2011, 312) whose worldview becomes the perspective from which the project emerges.

Spirituality is part of the African orientation that Ntseane recognises as important to the collective worldview, in that "the spirit is the ultimate oneness with nature and the fundamental interconnectedness of all things" (Ntseane 2011, 312). Spirituality motivates African feminist politics and intellectual work to be "whole and fight the injustices, positioning the academic as one who fuses within this knowledge the head with the heart to understand the world" (Motsemme cited in Wils 2017). This holistic imperative differs from what Collins (2003, 59) calls "Western, either/or dichotomous thought", because "the

traditional African worldview is holistic and seeks harmony". Tamale draws on Graham's work to encourage "decolonial activism" through a focus on, among other ideas, the Ubuntu philosophy: "the interconnectedness of all things; the spiritual nature of human beings … oneness of mind, body and spirit; and the value of interpersonal relationships" (Graham cited in Tamale 2020, 21). The implication is that the researcher is not merely doing intellectual work, but has a responsibility to bring her body, mind and spirit to the process of inclusion and connection that she enables for others. Wane (2008) reminds us that knowledge is embodied, and this affects how knowledge is accessed. Working with former young, black students as part of the project, this will become significant in how we connect with one another, and how the interconnections of "race", class and gender affect our knowledge-making. Reconnecting the mind, body and spirit enables the process of connecting to others.

An openness to spirituality in the research process can guide and enhance the direction and legitimacy of the project. It can influence the "holistic sustainability of interconnected ecological systems" of knowledge (Wane 2008, 192) by being mindful of the values, emotions and experiences that co-researchers bring. Feminist writer Malaika Mahlatsi[13] argues passionately that we resist excluding emotion from our intellectual work:

> *[E]motion is not lack of reason. The insistence on treating emotion as mutually exclusive from reason is rooted in Westernised formulations of what constitutes valid knowledge and what doesn't. It is used to delegitimise any and all things that don't fit neatly into the box of what it deems credible—such as, for example, indigenous knowledge systems that have often been dismissed as emotional, mythical and superstitious. People can be emotional and rational. It is not mutually exclusive.*
> (Mahlatsi cited in Knowles 2020)

And so, a focus on the whole person as a spiritual imperative is brought into the project in careful collaboration with co-researchers over time. A code of practice is co- developed to keep open and to enable a deeper listening for the ideas that orientate our thinking and being towards connection and transformation. As the initiator of the project, I am learning to honour my own spiritual and emotional connectedness, and the reflective journal and critical friends I keep as part of the journey are helpful records and reminders of this.

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[13] Mahlatsi, writing under the pen name Malaika Wa Azania, is an UCKAR graduate. She recently published Corridors of Death: The Struggle to Exist in Historically White Institutions (2020). The book outlines the mental health crises among black students in universities such as UCKAR. She routinely leaves Facebook for periods and breaks from the thousands of people who follow her there.

The shared orientation towards knowledge that Ntseane emphasises is threefold. Firstly, it emphasises the fluid nature of knowledge to be shaped by the context in which it emerges. It is not absolute. It is constructed by those who work with it, for particular ends (Ntseane 2011). Secondly, it refers to the function of knowledge to liberate those who work with and produce it. Emancipation is an important feature on a continent and in a country that continues to feel the effects of colonisation, capitalism, patriarchy, and apartheid, for instance in terms of the people and ideas we venerate in universities. For this reason, Adomako Ampofo and Arnfred (2010, 25) explain the purpose of African feminisms as the work of imagining a better future, and to produce and find "the kind of knowledge that allows us to fully understand our divided realities in order to transcend them". The long-term purpose of the project is to create the conditions to reveal new possibilities to co-create knowledge about teaching and learning with students. This practice has the potential to join and develop conversations that will inspire practices of de-investment in the neoliberal model, liberation from a patriarchal, capitalist, and colonial Western framing, and the eradication of harms and oppressions based on "race", class, and gender.

The third aspect of a shared orientation towards knowledge brings together the ideas of liberatory, communal knowledge and spirituality. Ntseane explains that women in her research project that looked at women's transformational learning had the realisation of segakolodi, which means "intuitive guide", or pelo ya bobedi, which means "second heart", as part of the research outcomes. The role of these realisations "was to remind individuals of their purpose on earth, which in their context was to be useful or to give back to the community" (Ntseane 2011, 313). For her, emancipation is conceived as a connection between the past and the future in that a spiritual connection with ancestors and guides could bring about transformation (and liberation) in the community.

Ntseane's fourth principle to guide research methodologies is the role of gender in how knowledge is processed. Critiquing the focus on the individual in Mezirow's transformational learning model, Ntseane points out and gives examples of ways in which her study in Botswana demonstrated that one contribution to knowledge-making that women generate is to make it communal (Ntseane 2011, 319, 320). She argues that this orientation to the communal is linked to gender roles, for instance the idea of women as mothers and the strong connection between motherhood and nature; the idea that women are strongly oriented towards labouring collectively (for instance in crop growing and harvesting); and the belief that women are expected to work towards the good and emancipation of the community. These gender role constructions are "not without the usual subtle and hegemonic sexism"

(Ntseane 2011, 319), but, as she recommends, "these cultural learning values appeal to community construction of knowledge as opposed to an individual's construction; thus, they offer alternative ways in which adult educators may work with communities" (Ntseane 2011, 320). In the project I will go on to introduce, guided by this principle of communal knowledge- making, we find ways to work together to create knowledge for the purpose of communal benefit while navigating the hierarchies of "race", class, and gender.

Reasons for Selecting the Site of Research

I am drawn to African and African feminist theories, and methodologies, because of relationships and connections that are intellectual and emotional. The selection of co-researchers and the site of the project has not been neutral or dispassionate. The questions I ask are germinated from 10 years of connecting with students, as a group and individually. While the project is a response to the calls of 2015/2016 student protests in South Africa (Mkhize 2015; Ngcobozi 2015), it is also about reconnection with former students, in a project that is a platform where dreams, gifts and concerns find expression and are welcome.

In April 2020, I put out an open call on my Facebook page,[14] inviting former ESP students to join me in working on a knowledge-making project as part of my PhD. I also asked them to tag friends or recommend to me others who might be interested. I followed up with all those who replied, and with those they recommended, outlining the commitment of the project. The 24 individuals who volunteered for and committed to the project are all former ESP students—half of them are still at UCKAR studying or lecturing, and the remainder are working, unemployed or between jobs/plans. I taught all of them Politics and Sociology extended studies (between the years 2011–2019) to support their success in the mainstream formal curricula. A few of them know one another, but largely the common

relationship is with me. As I explain later, this has important implications for how I manage my power to enable a collective worldview and shared orientation to knowledge.

My pedagogy is based on hooks's liberatory, humanising, transgressive learning (hooks 1994). Through class and group discussions (in English and isiXhosa), numerous feedback opportunities (anonymous and named), and individual meetings with students (voluntary and compulsory), the students and I get to know each other well in the year that I teach them.

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[14] Many former and current students are Facebook friends, and my account is open, which means that even those who are not friends can access my page. I asked those who accessed my page to recommend others who might be interested in the research project.

They give me insight into their lived experience, their backgrounds, their knowledges, and I work hard to be aware of how power is distributed in the lecture room in order to undermine my own power and to encourage mutual vulnerability as a pedagogic and humanising strategy (Knowles 2014 a). I expose them to African feminist ideas, noticing the intersection of "race", class, and gender oppressions. Many students maintain their relationship with me (by visiting, writing, or via social media) long after they have left the Extended Studies Programme or graduated.

My pedagogic strategies in the Extended Studies Unit are to build shared knowledge and mutual trust; to establish a community of practice, where we feel a sense of responsibility for each other as well as ourselves; to encourage critical thinking from a South African, localised perspective, for the common good; and to use the power of imagination to apply theory and knowledge to potential real-life situations (Knowles 2014b).

In these and other ways, students who come through my ESP classes already have, to some extent, a lived understanding of the principles of the project. I believe that this sets us up to collaborate. Ntseane reminds us that for her, research requires a special kind of relationship between the researcher and the researched, where "African researchers are not supposed to be objective and remain distant from the person who needs assistance, but rather researchers have to work toward a close and reciprocal relationship" (Ntseane 2011, 312). I argue that the students I teach, and have taught, and who teach me, have ways of knowing and being that can expand our current canons and pedagogies. The project's aim is to find ways, with former ESP students, that enable them to benefit collectively.

Positionality of the Researcher in Relation to the Research Community

As a white, middle-class woman, I have the privilege to access public and private goods in the face of profound inequality in South Africa. The students I teach have gifts to give and dreams to realise, but are given only limited access to how public goods, such as universities, are configured. A focus on numbers and quotas and on a neoliberal framework purposefully accepts a majority of students categorised as black and poor, and yet in formerly white institutions such as UCKAR they are precisely the ones most likely to fail (Pather 2018). Even when qualified, they are the least likely to be hired (Diale 2019; Skade 2016).

Concern about the positionality of the researcher requires noticing ways in which power is distributed in the project, and what researcher biases and orientations influence the outcomes and benefits of the research. Because knowledge-making is never politically neutral (Appiah 2006), and because I claim to work with participants as co-researchers with agency, I have to

put things in place that will provide the project with checks and balances to legitimise the knowledge we make. As lead researcher in the project, and former lecturer of the co-researchers, I inevitably have the balance of power, which I must navigate responsibly alongside my co-researchers. The privileges afforded to me by the structural benefits of my "race", class and age could blind me to the realities of my co-researchers because I do not share their lived experience and my thoughts and actions could bear the traces of residual and insidious prejudice. Few (2007, 460) generously argues that in "using a Black feminist or critical race feminist theoretical lens, how the standpoint is articulated matters more than the color of the researcher". She claims that it is our motivation for the project and for the groups we choose that will shape the relationship between the researcher and the research community. Is "motivation" enough to liberate knowledge-making beyond my limited perspectives?

Using African theories as a white woman, the daughter of missionaries, to do research among black former students, risks re-inscribing the power arrangements that for centuries have plundered Africa as a site for extraction (Grosfoguel 2020). As Carstensen-Egwuom (2014, 269) points out, "[t]his means that an awareness of a (possibly privileged) position before entering the field may be helpful, but a reflection upon experiences during fieldwork can show how such a position is negotiated, questioned, or challenged". For this reason, I am compelled to consider my position beyond mere intentions and motivations, reflecting more on "the interactional, relational and power dynamics of the research at hand, rather than focusing on a confession of emotional or discursive positionings of the individual researcher" (MacCleod in Chiweshe 2018, 77). To hold me to an African feminist orientation, I keep a reflexive account throughout the project (Ellingson 2009, 2017), developing a case record of plans and journal entries for regular reflection. I have critical friends with whom I discuss aspects of the project and how I feel about them, regular discussions with my supervisor, and an African feminist reading group that keeps reminding me of the principles I aspire to live by. These and other measures are in place to undermine the default positions of whiteness, so that I am able to work with former students with integrity, openness and care. Despite this, I acknowledge the effectiveness of privilege at hiding its own operations (Matthews 2011). I am guided by the prophetic words of Adomako Ampofo (2010, 28):

> *[M]aintaining commitment to core feminist goals in one's scholarship and praxis provides the strength needed to carry on scholarship and praxis in a context where the exigencies of life so often threaten to crowd out these goals. … I contend that*

ultimately it is only possible to maintain one's strength as a feminist scholar and activist through constant reflection, both personal and communal.

While in many ways the project integrates my activism, worldview, and pedagogy, it is the students' perspectives, context, worldviews, and the dreams and longings they arrive with that the project will facilitate, honour and commend. There are protocols in place (discussed with the group) for anonymous feedback and for concerns to be raised by the co-researchers, including concerns around my facilitation and power in the process. My aim is a kind of leadership that is reflective, empathic, and ethical (Eze 2015), while enabling a mutually responsible community, and encouraging the visibility of alternative ways of knowing and expressing (Ntseane 2011). hooks discusses the empathy and leadership required in a pedagogy that seeks to liberate, arguing that it "means welcoming the opportunity to alter our … practices creatively, so that the democratic ideal of education for everyone can be realised" (hooks 1994, 189). The power that I have because of histories of unequal interactions structured around student/teacher, "race", class, and gender can be reworked to be "creative and life- affirming" (hooks 1989, 86–87) by consciously embracing African feminist principles and practices in how I work with co-researchers, how I read and enable their responses, and how they experience and shape the project.

Starting the Project during Covid-19

My intention was to enable the sense of a collective through setting up a space for expressing and listening, calling and responding, so that a shared appreciation and recognition emerges. Mkabela (2005, 185) claims that the research community must be part of the research process from beginning to end, so that research outcomes are used to contribute towards community goals and needs in a relevant way, demonstrating a collective sense of the world and/or of the purpose of the knowledge-making between the co-researchers. An immersive, face-to-face weekend workshop at the start of the project would have been an opportunity to demonstrate these principles and open up an understanding of what it means to be co-researchers in a research community. It would have allowed co-researchers to get to know one another through formal and informal activities set up to create a safe space for sharing vulnerability. But as the Covid-19 pandemic swept across the world, it made travel and face-to-face gatherings impossible.

 As was the case with teaching, research projects have had to adapt to the changed conditions necessitated by the pandemic. Despite my experience of and frustrations with online teaching and learning during the first few months of lockdown when Covid-19 reached South Africa, I

initially failed to adjust my expectations of a project that was envisaged as a collaboration between people who have developed a sense of the collective. I will explain the phases of the project in more detail, but an important aspect of introducing it is to recognise what was lost, and found, in the reconfiguration of how it unfolded alongside strict lockdown as the pandemic affected life as we know it.

How the Project Works

The project is conceived in five phases, which are not necessarily linear or discrete:

- the inviting phase,
- the devising phase,
- the creating phase,
- the analysing phase,
- and the disseminating phase.

I have explained the inviting phase, which secured the commitment of 24 people to the project. A dedicated Facebook group (closed to these 24 co-researchers and me) was set up and each participant joined via private message invitation.

The devising phase would have been discussed in the immersive face-to-face workshop over two days at a resort. The project is based on a call-and-response process, where co-researchers respond to topics they have devised and give feedback on each other's work. The shift from a face-to-face workshop at a venue for two days to an online Zoom workshop for two hours was a stark reminder that fostering engagement, liberation and connection as a methodology is not an event, but a process. The pandemic pushed me out of my comfort zone as an engaged, embodied, present and intuitive teacher, into a digital space that was unequally accessed, cold, and constrained by time and data issues. The Zoom workshop was by far inferior to what it could have been, and so began a process of letting go of my methods and identities that resist change. I devised a post- workshop questionnaire that at least gave voice to co-researchers' preferences, reflections and concerns. Moletsane (2015, 45) reminds us that "what is needed is the co-reflection with our participants on the research process itself, the power dynamics inherent therein, and the extent to which these tools enable us to challenge and address these so as to pave way for democratic decision making about the strategies needed for social change". The questionnaire was developed with this in mind. In private messages and completed feedback forms, participants reminded me that they remained eager to be part of the project, overwhelmingly because they believed that it could produce new knowledge, and that they had contributions to make to it. They gave input on

topic suggestions, on which work-teams they wished to be part of (for example, transcribing and translating), and how they felt about participating. They signed consent forms and indicated their understanding of the confidentiality agreements and the voluntary nature of all engagements.

The Creating Phase

The post-workshop questionnaires delivered a list of 28 topics, and via Facebook polls a final four topics were selected from the list for the first round of submissions. The topics were, broadly: 1. Confidence/ owning the teaching and learning process; 2. Looking at how Covid-19 has exposed inequalities in South African universities and/or public schools; 3. What causes mental pathologies among SA university students? 4. What has been the most shocking/interesting discovery about yourself during the Covid- 19 pandemic?

Co-researchers were invited to respond to one of these four topics. A document devised from workshop and questionnaire inputs on how to respond to a topic was posted onto the Facebook group to guide their engagement. The document explained the range of ways to respond, including in different languages and using different genres, written, voice or video submissions, and the relevance and importance of personal experience. The majority of the co-researchers submitted responses to one of the four questions, and of the 19, all were in English (one was also translated by the author into isiXhosa); all were written pieces; 15 were opinion pieces; one was a letter, and three were academic/research papers.

When we speak or write, our words take on a life of their own beyond the creator. Co-researchers expressed their fears, concerns, hopes, strategies, discoveries, outrages, and observations around the four topics, from their personal perspectives, in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic. Considering their answers and my personal communication with some of them, I acknowledge that they engaged in this process of writing while, along with many South Africans at the time, they were dealing with the stresses of life— people falling ill, online learning, unemployment, poverty, health risks at work and home, and increased insecurity and uncertainty.

Enabling a space for people to bring their experiences with the aim of making knowledge that is liberating is perhaps idealistic, but nonetheless necessary, and it is a journey that is always incomplete and being remade. I see it as a profound and important task that needs wisdom, alertness and presence, and constant reflection. It is a process of connecting people around an idea and to one another. Collins, drawing on Belenky et al., argues for "an epistemology of connection in which truth emerges through care", claiming that "connected knowers see

personality as adding to an individual's ideas and feel that the personality of each group member enriches a group's understanding" (2003, 64). Two strategies helped with an "epistemology of connection" in response to what I viewed as an inferior and cold Zoom workshop with all the co-researchers to kick off the project: the first involved a set of smaller workshops post-submission that allowed co-researchers, in groups of between two and five, to reflect on the experience; and the second was creating a composite piece from all their submissions.

The post-submission workshops were small enough to have video throughout our conversations, and this had an effect of a much freer discussion than the first workshop. Real people with faces were part of a conversation, allowing a space for co-reflection and the reading of power dynamics espoused by Moletsane (2015, 45). I told them that all submissions were written in English, despite the freedom to explore other languages. Wane (2008, 188) claims that "colonial education had seared [her] consciousness and [she] had become indoctrinated in the belief of meritocracy", and the co-researchers seemed to support this belief. Reflecting after these workshops on what they said about feeling more comfortable writing in English, I realised the more important point not brought up: what they did not say, is that part of it was that I introduced the project in English and am not nearly fluent enough in isiXhosa to hold spontaneous conversations. Reminded of Blay's injunction (2008, 60) about the language of the researcher, I recognise how the liberty of co-researchers is limited by the boundaries of my understanding in terms of language, presenting a position to be "negotiated, questioned or challenged" (Carstensen-Egwuom 2014, 269). In the workshop, co-researchers offered ideas on how they should respond to each other's work, and I worked these into a document titled "How to respond to each other's work", and posted it onto the Facebook group, as well as to each co-researcher along with two anonymised submissions for their review. My sense is that the workshops had the effect of getting to know one another better and establishing the principles of empathy and connection that would guide how they reviewed the pieces that were sent to them.

The second strategy to connect co-researchers to one another was to devise a composite piece. I read through each submission and highlighted a sentence or two in each that touched me or indicated what I thought to be their core argument. I then put all the highlighted sentences onto a page and juggled them around to create a composite piece using only the words of the contributors. Wane supports a research methodology where "knowledge is collectively and communally shared, and not monopolized by individuals" (2008, 191). hooks (1989, 131) argues for a humanising use of dialogue that creates a connection between two

subjects, rather than a subject and object arrangement. Collins takes this further to claim that a "primary epistemological assumption underlying the use of dialogue in assessing knowledge claims is that connectedness rather than separation is an essential component of the knowledge validation process" (2003, 59). The composite piece, posted on the Facebook group, recognised the unique contributions of each submission and put these together to resemble a dialogue with one another, to show how each one fits into their collective worldview and shared orientation towards knowledge, which are the important African feminist principles that guide the project.

The co-researchers went on to review one another's work, and then all submissions and reviews (all anonymised) were posted on the Facebook group. A third set of smaller workshops was held where we reflected on the process and discussed ways forward. The co-researchers were given the opportunity to leave the project (one did so, citing a new work opportunity), to work on co-written papers (18 would like this), and to work on other kinds of pieces such as visual art (1 is working on that with me), newspaper articles (11 are interested), or theatre/fiction (8 would like to try).

The Ongoing Analysing and Disseminating Phases

The project generates data from a number of sources, including transcriptions of all the workshops (completed by those of the co-researchers who were interested in this), and all the submissions to the topics and their reviews. Other data sources are contemplated by the contributors to this project that continues to unfold, including recordings of interviews with African feminists that co-researchers undertake and narrative questionnaires or recorded interviews with each participant.

The data generation for this research project serves a number of purposes: as explained, the process aims to place the co-researchers at the centre of the research, with power over their own contributions and what happens to these; and the process assumes that the data generated from it will provide the material for knowledge-making about teaching and learning, and to demonstrate the kinds of knowledge that can be produced when African feminist principles are used in research with former and current students. The project will run for a year, and over time might shift in focus and expression depending on the careful thought and agreement of the co-researchers. Currently, two teams are working on co-writing journal articles on topics they have selected, using the data from their initial submissions. This involves regular online Zoom meetings and tasks we agree to ahead of each one. Another small team of two is working on an art piece. The data generated by the project is the material

we use to make knowledge together—about how we know, what we know, and what we are learning in an unprecedented global moment of uncertainty and change presented by the Covid-19 pandemic.

What emerges from the data is the subject for further papers and pieces, worked with collaboratively. How we disseminate the knowledge we make will be collaboratively decided, with permissions from those whose work will be used.

Conclusion

African feminist theory is a deviation from the theories usually employed to undertake research in the field of higher education. It has been explained as a political and intellectual choice because its end is not only to explain and understand, but also to transform the status quo. Importantly, as Tamale (2020) and Mama (2011) explain, African feminisms seek to dismantle the mutually constitutive "race", class and gender oppressions that arise from colonialism, capitalism, and patriarchy. The project I introduce in this article uses an African feminist framing to work with former ESP students whose university life is shaped by the "race", class and gender inequalities they seek to transform. As co-researchers, they have agency over the content and process of the project, which aims to make knowledge that is relevant and transformative, in keeping with the idea of the university as a public good. Although the Covid-19 pandemic interrupted what could have been an immersive weekend workshop to engage co-researchers with the purpose and process of the project, different means were found to develop a sense of the collective: smaller online workshops, individual contact, creating a composite piece from their contributions, and working in small groups on knowledge-making projects. The agency that co-researchers have, to choose the questions that are asked, to choose how to respond to them, and to engage in reflection on this together, is anticipated and enabled by African feminists who believe that members of the research community, as individuals and as a collective, matter. It places the former ESP students in the centre of the ongoing research project, as collaborators in knowledge-making as a contribution to conversations and processes that aim to decolonise the university. Using an African theory in this way sets up a methodology that breaks free from a Western framework to open up expanded ways of knowing that integrate experience, emotion, values and intellect. The project is ongoing. It finds that former ESP students have things to say and ways of being that compel the university to take them seriously, and so we are working together to find a pedagogical innovation that can meaningfully nurture and support the dreams that these students have in their hands when they arrive at the doorstep of the university.

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5.2 Paper 2: Knowles, C., Babeli, N., Ntlokwana, A., Ntombolwana, Z., and Sobuza, Z. (2022). Knowledge and power in a South African university: What kind of knowledge matters in first year Humanities?

Submitted to: *Teaching In Higher Education* (Taylor & Francis group, Routledge: Submission ID: 227512047) on 16 August 2022. Rejected: 24 September

Published in: *Transformation in Higher Education (*AOSIS publishing. Submission ID #244) on 27 February 2023. https://thejournal.org.za/index.php/thejournal/article/view/244

This was one of the papers to emerge from the PhD project, using data generated from the project, and co-written by volunteers from the project. The co-authors of this paper are all current UCKAR students, two of them completing postgraduate degrees in the department of Political and International Studies. The paper discusses work done by the current HoD of the department, Dr Siphokazi Magadla, who was interviewed for the paper. We believed it would be a useful process to present the paper at the weekly Friday Seminar in the department, because it was an opportunity to open it up for critique, and get some feedback. We were granted permission to do this. It was a terrifying and exhilarating experience – the hall was packed, and the academic audience (which can quite often be brutally critical) applauded after each one of us presented our sections. There was enthusiastic engagement afterwards, and an Associate Professor who could not make it to the seminar, asked if she could read and critique the paper. Her comments were very helpful, and allowed us to make a few adjustments before submitting it to the journal.

The Department of Political and International Studies posted the following on their Facebook page (see picture that follows).

Picture 3: Department of Political and International Studies Facebook page

I originally submitted this article to *Teaching in Higher Education*, found by submitting the abstract into the *Journal Finder* feature on the Routledge/ Taylor and Francis website. This journal was the first one to come up, and the paper seemed to fit into its aims and scope. However, the journal editor rejected it after a month, before peer review, saying:

> *Having carefully considered your paper, one of the executive editors has decided that despite its laudable inclusion of students as co-researchers, it is not suitable for the peer review process for publication in Teaching in Higher Education. The reasons for this decision include: methodology not clear and under-theorised, no explicit theory of learning, too embedded in a South African context for the journal's readership.*
> (Administrator letter, see Addendum 10)

As much as I had warned the co-writers of this paper that our paper might be rejected (*Teaching in Higher Education* has a 19% acceptance rate), I was surprised at the rejection. I did not believe that the editor's critique was fair. The editor noted that there was "no explicit theory of learning" (editor private email to me). The journal's scope and aims include: "exploring the various values which underlie teaching including those concerned with social justice and equity; offering critical accounts of lived experiences of higher education pedagogies which bring together theory and practice" and welcomes papers that address these (https://www.tandfonline.com/action/journalInformation?show=aimsScope&journalCode=cthe20). We believed that our paper did this. There is no mention of the need to use a "theory of learning". Could it be that our use of an African feminist lens, and the discussion on the politics of knowledge, language as an issue, and a reliance on western theorists as alienating for African students was not considered to be legitimate knowledge? I was reminded of Adomako Ampofo's discussion of the difficulties of publishing, where African feminists will use Eurocentric frameworks because they are more legitimised and "they are (re)produced in the accepted international journals, or because we feel that failure to work within them reduces the value of our own work" (Adomako Ampofo, 2010, p. 30). And Tamale's discussion on the constraints on African publishing houses includes noting that "tight gatekeeping at the major peer-reviewed publishing outlets" is a way in which colonialism continues its influence "on the intellectual growth of African Academics through various mechanisms" (Tamale, 2020, p. 51). I knew that there might be issues with the paper, and imagined that we would be given the opportunity to work on revisions based on peer-review. Instead, I hunted for a new journal.

To prepare the article for a different journal meant reworking some sections to fit within the scope and aims of the new journal, changing the referencing style, and reducing the word count by 1000. I submitted it to *Transformation in Higher Education*, a South African based journal of good repute. It was published on 27 February 2023

The paper:

Abstract

Knowledge-making in South African universities is set up and framed in particular ways, with a Euro-centric bias. We argue that many of the contributions that African first year entering students could make to this process of knowledge-making are dis-abled, leading to alienation. In this article, we argue for a different perspective and approach to teaching and learning in the humanities. Former Extended Studies students from a South African university have worked collaboratively in a knowledge-making project, and using data generated from this, suggest different kinds of environments and strategies for more inclusive teaching and learning. Using an African feminist theoretical and methodological lens, we consider alternative ways of knowing, and recognition that supports powerful senses of belonging and agency, using examples from student experiences of an Extended Studies humanities programme. We contrast this with how humanities programmes are experienced by some first-year students at the university, sometimes with tragic consequences. Finally, we recommend pedagogic, curricula and extra-curricular changes that can be made, to realise the possibilities of decolonised knowledge-making that is more relevant and inclusive. The authors believe that the ideas around decolonising knowledge that are explored here are more broadly applicable and necessary.

Keywords: African feminism; decolonial; knowledge-making; university; first-year students.

Introduction: The context, the question and the project

Knowledge-making in universities is shaped by ideas about knowledge that have been developed over centuries, mostly in the imperial West (Moletsane **2015**). Our study considers the implications of this in a small South African university, where in 2021 the majority of first-year students were black and from lower-income group families and qualified for the state-supported National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS). It is safe to say that in the most unequal country in the world (Sguazzin **2021**), with the highest percentage of youth unemployment (Flanagan **2021**), there are important contributions to these and other social problems which are anticipated from the relatively small percentage of young people who find themselves in South African universities. In this article, Rhodes University (RU) is used as a case study to consider how to reframe how we think about knowledge to be decolonised, inclusive, relevant and sustainable. Rhodes University is a small, formerly white, state university in South Africa, where 88% of the undergraduate student population is black people (RU Digest of Statistics **2022**). It will use the reflections of former Extended Studies (ES) students who were engaged in a knowledge-making project in 2020–2021. The ES programme is part of a national intervention to increase access to previously disadvantaged groups (CHE **2013**). It is an academic support programme where students are provided with additional augmented support for their two first-year subjects – in this case, Political and International Studies 1, and Sociology 1. The ES class is usually about 30–40 students, and we see each other for five double periods each week. The article considers pedagogy (ways of teaching), curriculum (content and assessment) and organisational context as the mutually constitutive components that affect this kind of knowledge-making.

Research methods and design

The knowledge-making project, With Dreams in Our Hands (WDIOH), that gave rise to the findings in this article was set up during the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) lockdown in South Africa in 2020 (for more details on the project, see Knowles **2021**). The project was

part of a PhD (Knowles **2023**) and former ES students were invited to be part of the project through an open Facebook post. Frustrated with ways in which the author felt ES and other students are marginalised in the university system, the project's aim was to set up a platform for knowledge-making that recognised students as legitimate knowledge-makers. The project was ethically run, using principles of African feminism (Mkabela **2005**) and permitted by the Education Faculty Ethics Committee. The 24 former ES student participants who volunteered for the project are scattered across South Africa – some are still students (undergraduate and postgraduate), some are working and some are in-between. We collaborated in the qualitative knowledge-making project, guided by African feminist methodology principles (Knowles **2021**; Ntseane 2015). Working online over 6 months, through a series of workshops, we firstly came up with topics we felt were relevant to the times. Secondly, the project participants responded to one of four final topics, according to the guidelines drawn up collaboratively in our online workshop. Once these responses were submitted, we anonymously reviewed each other's work (two or three each), again according to the guidelines agreed upon in online workshops. We reflected on the process of writing and reviewing and the content of the submissions in a further set of workshops. We then volunteered to become part of writing (among other forms of meaning-making and dissemination) teams to address the topics in more depth, using the submissions, reviews and workshop transcriptions as data. The authors of this article are two undergraduate and two postgraduate students at Rhodes University and our ES lecturer. Over the past year, through nine online workshops and tasks in between, we scrutinised the submissions and transcriptions using reflexive African feminist analysis to find themes and compare claims that people made, looking for similarities and differences. We used empathy and openness in our readings and discussions, recognising that experience is a valid form of knowing, which people experience differently depending on their context and looking for connections between them. These are distinctly African feminist ways of working with knowledge (Ntseane **2011**). We worked together online and on our own in between workshops to bring our individual voices to the process of writing, critique each other's work and build our argument for this article. Our positionality as participants in the project and located in a web of power arrangements was carefully and reflexively navigated, using individual and group reflections to remind ourselves of our political, intellectual and ethical responsibilities (see Knowles **2021**). What we have produced from this process is, we believe, an African feminist praxis and a contribution to knowledge about inclusive teaching, learning and research. The findings from the project are ongoing and the subject of future articles, and this article sets the tone for them. It demonstrates the kind of knowledge that can be produced by an Afrocentric and student-centred pedagogy and practice that began for us in ES classes and continued for the duration of the project, even though constrained by pandemic lockdown conditions.

This article will address the politics of knowledge – firstly, by discussing different ways of knowing and being that students bring with them when entering the university and what we imagine knowledge could be in universities; secondly, by contrasting this with how knowledge is set up and legitimised in university humanities programmes, using our experiences at Rhodes University. It will look at how the ES programme provided an alternative space to the mainstream and what kinds of recognition and support this encouraged. Finally, it will make recommendations about what could change to make knowledge-making more inclusive and relevant.

Different ways of knowing and what can be imagined

The question of 'what can be imagined in how we think of knowledge?' is partly addressed by Luckett (**2016**:416) when she poses the question: 'what must the world be like for black

students at a post-colonial university?' She writes in response to protesters' anger and their demands in the 2015 student protests in South Africa, calling for decoloniality and curricula that centred the experiences of (poor, black) students and Africa. Lewis and Baderoon draw on the work of Collins to suggest 'seeing from below' (Collins in Lewis & Baderoon **2021**:2–3) as a way to see the world differently. They argue that these perspectives and understandings 'speak not only about and to – but beyond – their own locations' (**2021**:3). This has been our strategy in the WDIOH project and in the writing of this article.

Lander (**2000**) and Chavunduka (**1995**) have argued that Western views of knowledge, since their introduction in Africa and other non-Western societies, have failed to understand or include an encompassing, holistic way of knowing and knowledge production. The current problem with educational structures that have inherited this system is that their knowledge is based on cultural values that are different from those existing in most of the African indigenous societies and that shape peoples' ways of knowing and being (Lewis & Baderoon **2021**). This is a complex challenge in that, firstly, the institutional cultures of all universities everywhere will be challenging to some; secondly, it is the nature of universities to challenge students to bring about new learning and ways of learning; and thirdly, the binaries of what is Western and what is African are often blurred. Ndlovu (**2018**) addresses some of these conundrums, arguing that 'crafting a different future for the African subject' involves conscientisation of the chains of coloniality, in order to withdraw from and transform the 'structural system of colonial domination' (p. 110). This article is a contribution to this work.

The authors argue that how we could foster knowledge in the country, and in universities, that allows people to be recognised and to thrive is by working with knowledge that speaks to who they are in the most holistic sense. Knowledge that speaks to their political, social, economic, cultural and spiritual communities helps them to better understand their backgrounds and futures and enables criticality (Hames **2021**). The authors argue for knowledge that is collective, spiritual, transformative and generative – the knowledge that 'does not only counter racist and patriarchal world views; it envisions new ways of being human and is therefore relevant to all' (Lewis & Baderoon **2021**:3).

Despite problematic practices and inadequate resources in the state schooling system (see Amnesty International's report of 2021, Broken and Unequal), students come to university with prior experience of life, knowledge and ways of knowing. The authors argue that their presence at university deserves recognition that embraces diversity of experiences, knowledge and pedagogy to form more inclusive and relevant curricula. Heleta (**2016**:2) observes that universities have not done much to welcome 'different bodies and traditions of knowledge and knowledge-making in new and exploratory ways'. And as Heleta (**2016**) suggests, lecturers make assumptions about who their students are and fail to adjust their pedagogy to a demographic beyond their own comfort zones. The implications are that first-year students are treated as though they come to university lacking moral and cultural maturity, and as blank slates and empty vessels, students are dependent on the university to fill them with knowledge to address the deficiency (Shahjahan, Wagner & Wane **2009**:64). The tragic consequence is that alternative ways of knowing, teaching and making knowledge are too easily excluded or marginalised. The extent of this exclusion hinders many first-year black students in their ability to resonate, understand and reciprocate. It is set to erase indigenous knowledge as though there is no place for the kind of knowledge passed on by grandmothers and grandfathers through storytelling, riddles and idioms in the university space. We argue that it does not have to be this way.

African feminism, as we will explain, gives us insight into how 'there are various practices that tend to legitimise particular knowledges, rendering them of most worth – while marginalising others' (Moletsane **2015**:42). Moletsane goes on to argue that this needs to be re-ordered by, for instance, valuing indigenous and context-specific knowledge. She discusses research practices in local communities that have resonance with how lecturers sometimes think about their first-year students, urging us to 'recognise and acknowledge them as dynamic individuals and groups capable of understanding and articulating their own issues, and as able to identify local solutions to address these' (**2015**:43). This can happen in lecture rooms when students feel recognised and safe and can then think critically about the challenges in communities and how to address them. Some of the values that are recommended as principles for knowledge-making from an African feminist perspective are a sense of the collective and a shared orientation towards knowledge; spirituality as part of the knowledge-making process; and communal knowledge-making (Ntseane **2011**).

Later we will make recommendations about how some of these different ways of knowing and being can be achieved. Before that, we discuss some of the difficulties and challenges to achieving them, given the colonial roots of South African universities.

Results

How university knowledge-making is set up and legitimised

Knowledge-making framed in academic institutions in racial, religious and gendered ways, through culturally insensitive lenses, results in a reluctance to recognise alternative pedagogies and epistemologies (Moletsane **2015**; Tamale **2020**). It is our experience and argument that knowledge-making in universities fails to transcend many of the Western ideas and principles that have been put in place to operate the academy over centuries. Instead, the first-year programmes in humanities are often set up to 'suppress heterogeneity' (Tamale **2020**:63), as they devalue prior experiences of many black, first-time entering students. Lewis and Baderoon (**2021**) argue that voices such as these from the margins 'can intervene at distinct moments' to envision 'new ways of being human' and to produce 'future possible worlds' (p. 3).

One of the ways in which this marginalisation is evident is in the texts recommended in curricula, for instance in Sociology and Political and International Studies. The texts that first-year students are compelled to consume are raced, classed and gendered in such a way that bears no resemblance to the lives of young black students. The authors of this article experience much of the teaching and learning as emphasising Eurocentric white male ways of thinking about knowledge while excluding a more maternal influence on knowledge, which is what has shaped many of the knowledge experiences of black first-time entering students. For instance, many of us have experienced that there is a rejection of spirituality and the embodiment of knowledge in the realm of academia.

The project WDIOH was co-created by students to reflect on topics we selected and to use these to make knowledge. In a follow-up workshop, we asked: how did you experience university knowledge in your first year? The answers reflect how humanities knowledge is perceived:

> *'I understood at that time knowledge as white and male because we would engage the Dead White Men theories in every course, be it sociology or politics, there was Marx and Durkheim. I had this idea that knowledge is white and dominated by men.' (WDIOH Workshop **2021**)*

It is unclear whether this experience is a continuation from experience in school curricula or specific to university. But it points to what stood out for us in our first year. Another fellow student explained:

> *'I was going to say that before even considering gender as a defining category [for knowledge in first-year university], race is the biggest defining category. So, before asking the question of what gender is knowledge, we should firstly ask the question of what race and what religion is knowledge, because for the most part people who wrote back in whatever century were the first to construct the supposedly knowledge. Those people were probably Christians and white. So, that affected how we understand knowledge because for the most part back in whatever century it was, women were not even allowed to produce knowledge.' (WDIOH Workshop 2021)*

What emerged in discussion were collective experiences of alienation in the university environment, where students feel unrecognised by the kinds of text they are presented with and then are unable to make meaningful contributions in class discussions or assignments. As we will discuss in more detail later, this is exacerbated by the language issue. In a submission earlier in the project, a fellow former student spoke of the strangeness of learning everything in English when he arrived at university and how this limited his engagement with deeper issues the knowledge brought up:

> *'All of my life up to that moment I had communicated in vernacular languages. Even the English I encountered, I engaged it in my vernacular language … So before one even engages with Karl Marx, one was confronted with English itself. Reading was much easier than raising a hand to ask a question in Barrat [lecture room] I must confess … So to avoid this seemingly apparent embarrassment on raising a hand to ask, say, why Marx's "Historical Materialism" pays no regard to problem of race in society for instance. Not asking at all felt safe.' (WDIOH Submission 10, 2020)*

Another argued that the inequalities, for instance of social class, evident but seemingly unrecognised in the lecture room, limited how much he felt he could engage, resulting in a kind of rote reproduction of knowledge that had very little relevance to his life:

> *'Inside universities materialism create "outsiders within" whereby I am part of the university but because of my poverty university rejects me all the time. These inequalities and hardships we experience makes one question the relationship between inequalities and academic achievement. As it stands, I feel alienated. The fact that I have no personal control over learning shows powerlessness. This absence of personal control makes me to be pushing to able to submit the required work that I should submit, not to learn. In terms of meaninglessness, learning becomes irrelevant knowing that I do not learn for the future. There is no welcoming and conducive environment that I feel needs to build to what I cover in academics. This condition created disconnection from myself and academics.' (WDIOH Submission 16, 2020)*

These sentiments were echoed by another:

> *'I did not feel like I belong. To a certain extent, I do believe I was projecting my own insecurities out into the world. I saw myself as inadequate, as undeserving of a seat at this table and believed that everyone else saw me the same way. So, I shied away from anything that would make me the centre of attention, if I had a question I would not ask, if I had an opinion or knew the answer to a question, I would not say anything.' (WDIOH Submission 4, 2020)*

These reflections reveal that not all knowledge at the first-year humanities level is welcoming of some students' ways of being. The historical and foundational framing of knowledge gives authority to white, male Eurocentric knowledge and disables what can be important contributions of students in universities and particularly the black majority. As a result, we do not recognise ourselves in this knowledge and are alienated from our own rich cultures and histories of knowledge-making.

Many of the project submissions spoke about the way that language limited how much they felt they belonged or could engage with knowledge-making:

> *'In my experience it is the pressure that comes with the studies that you have to take in a language that is not your own. A language that you do not fully understand but you are expected to know it well, according to the demands of being at university in South Africa … Not coming from a model C school at times can affect confidence also within lectures because at times the content that is being taught or questions asked, can be things that we understand and know only if they were asked and taught in our language. Then things would be far better in terms of success in the university space. But instead, it can make you feel inadequate and become an under performer because of the impact it has on our ability to think and show creative capacity as black students. It can make us get trapped in a vicious cycle of toxic thoughts, hating on yourself for not being born in a better off family which would have afforded you better education, that would allow one to function better within the university space.'* (WDIOH Submission 6, 2020)

This experience is an example of ways that university knowledge is lopsided, and these experiences of anxiety and depression are far more common than they should be (Malaika 2020). Indigenous language and culture were neither welcomed in academic knowledge-making nor represented in the academic texts which were used for this. As a fellow student observed:

> *'In my first year in Humanities, I would look at the reference list at the end of my tutorial submissions or essays and never find a familiar surname or name. The more I engaged with texts, the more I longed for representation and familiar experiences. I ended up consoling myself saying, "that is why I don't understand Western theories". At first, I used to think this how it supposed to be, that the only legitimate voices are Western voices through a particular language, and the harder it is to understand this Western knowledge means the power in it and the relevance of it. For some time, I held this view, until I realized that this is deliberate exclusion, some oppositional voices and nuances to traditional knowledge-making are not fitted, thus denied legitimacy, and my failure to understand does not signify how powerful the knowledge is, but rather how deliberate the exclusion of poor black students is.'* (WDIOH reflection 2022)

Lewis and Baderoon (2021:2) help us to understand the issues around knowledge production and point out that to honestly answer the question what kind of knowledge matters, we need to link it to whose knowledge matters. They argue that identity politics in the 20th century has enabled understandings of the wide range of knowers. Weiler (2009), on the other hand, argues that the question of what kind of knowledge and whose knowledge should instead be linked to the question of power and that it is crucial to understand it through this lens, as it will help us to create a political theory of knowledge production. Lewis supports this, arguing that the powerful 'also wield control over and access to knowledge' (Lewis in Arnfred & Adomako Ampofo 2010:205). First-year humanities lecturers, where Sociology and Politics

curricula deal with subjects such as inequality, are more powerful than their students, with the responsibility to recognise issues of inequality that exist in every lecture room. They could collaborate with students to produce contextually relevant, African-centred, culturally respectful, ethical knowledge that seeks ways to reconfigure the inequalities. Instead, unfortunately, this submission suggests otherwise:

> *'The sad thing about poverty is that as students at some point we get tired that every time we must constantly perform our poverty for us to get assistance. The fact that we must prove that we are poor every time to the institutions of higher learning for consideration of our grievances is a proof that universities lack comprehensive understanding of our societies. The experience of those coming from disadvantaged background have less platform in informing the realities of the university. For me, universities should know by now that they are an unequal space. It is the duty of universities to know that we are an unequal society, universities deal with knowledge. It is the duty of universities to also inform decisions that help to close the gap of inequalities not to deny them.' (WDIOH Submission 16)*

Discussion

<u>What was different in Extended Studies</u>

Students in the humanities ES programme that we consider here see each other for five double periods every week to augment the work of mainstream subjects. The bulk of this work is learning how to read, write and understand the concepts taught in the Politics and Sociology mainstream courses and trying to make these relevant to our lives. The lecturer attends many of the mainstream lectures with her students. Because the ES class is a smaller group of students, and we see each other every day, we can do things differently. The kind of pedagogy employed is based on bell hooks' transgressive, liberatory pedagogy (**1994**), which argues for a 'radical pedagogy' where 'everyone's presence is acknowledged' (**1994**:8) – and in our case, this included our language, race, class, gender, culture, problems at home or on campus, our fears and our dreams for our futures. The ES students can express themselves in any language that they are comfortable in, even their native language – and where necessary, someone will translate for those who do not understand. Even though we were coming from different schools and had different life experiences throughout high school, the ES class brought us together because we all shared one common goal in mind, to learn. Extended studies offered a different experience for first-year students; this stood out because first-year students in mainstream experienced their first year differently, and this will be explored in the following section.

In mainstream lectures, lecturers typically follow the conventional ways of teaching, which mainly comprises doing most of the talking themselves, teaching in English and requiring students to speak in English. Students who attended ES classes shared how they were uncomfortable in mainstream lectures, and this influenced their overall class participation, as they felt out of place. In ES, there was an emphasis on group work, where students were encouraged to discuss concepts, find local examples, share their experiences, dissect difficult readings and work on assignment questions together.

One former fellow student explains:

> *'Extended studies felt like a safe space, a family, for so many of us. It gave me the opportunity to be myself because I knew I was surrounded by one of my own, people who understood me and afforded me the opportunity to make mistakes. When I wanted to voice out something, I did not have to think about how it would sound to the next*

person, how my English accent would be, worry about the need to sound intellectual and smart. I was surrounded by people who needed to hear what I had to say as much as I needed to hear what they had to say. We did not have to perform for anyone.' (WDIOH Submission 4)

For those who struggled to speak in class, the open-door policy with the lecturer outside of lecture times meant that students could see her on their own or in small groups. One student admitted despite the relative freedom in class, she preferred, at first, these one-on-one opportunities:

> *'I grew more comfortable in the ES class as weeks went by because we engaged one-on-one with the lecturer and could easily open up ... ES lecturers are somehow aware that not engaging in class discussions does not necessarily translate to "not knowing" or "understanding" the work, but we lack confidence and the ability to address a large group of students ... It is not easy opening up, it is a process.'* (WDIOH Submission 1)

One of the lessons we learn from the experience in ES classes, and supported by former students here, is an atmosphere of recognition. Inequalities are not ignored – they are acknowledged. Getting to know each other in regular group work, which operated with the ethics of care and respect, enabled a sense of freedom and confidence. Where that freedom was inhibited in some way, one-on-one sessions with the lecturer helped to build understanding and confidence. A focus on group work, using the language of choice, enables students to grapple with concepts and work with knowledge in ways that are relevant and sustainable. As a former fellow student observed:

> *'In conclusion, the amount of confidence one has in the teaching and learning process has effect on their knowledge production. Students need to own knowledge production, they have to understand that they play a crucial part in it. This will cause an unbelievable amount of improvement.'* (WDIOH Submission 4)

Steps we can take to make university knowledge-making more inclusive

There are ways that universities can address the inequalities between students from the so-called developed and underdeveloped backgrounds to make knowledge-making more relevant and inclusive. We make some recommendations based on the data from the project and our own experiences. Experiential knowledge, produced reflexively, gives unique perspectives that reveal aspects of social issues that are otherwise hidden beneath more dominant discourses. Following Moletsane's (**2015**) arguments around the politics of knowledge production, we thoughtfully bring our own experiences as 'substantial participation and contribution from those most affected' (Moletsane **2015**:36). The recommendations arise from epistemological and ontological challenges inherent in the colonial knowledge framework that influences how universities operate and determine what counts as knowledge. We look at the data through a lens of African feminism, which argues that knowledge is embodied and communal, and it can also be spiritual and maternal (see Lewis & Baderoon; Knowles **2021**; Ntseane 2015). All the points we make here are interlinked and contribute towards enabling a more inclusive teaching and learning environment.

Language matters

Usage of different languages is vital for students to feel welcomed and important in the lecture room. Being taught in a foreign language makes it challenging to express yourself,

especially when you come from a differently developed background and schooling and have been taught even the subject of English in isiXhosa or other indigenous languages. As shown in this article, language can often be a barrier to speaking, raising a point or asking a question in a lecture room (WDIOU submissions **2020**).

These barriers to engagement are epistemological as well as ontological. When students' ways of being and ways of knowing are recognised and accommodated, it changes how they feel and engage intellectually. A former fellow ES student compares the learning experience in a monolingual English humanities lecture and in isiXhosa lectures:

> *'It was different for a student who came from a class in which English was their second language because you would listen attentively. The lecturer would speak those bombastic English words. You would lose track of what is being said and focus on figuring out what the word means but not paying too much attention to what is being taught. You would write down those words on a piece of paper so that you could look it up when you are in res; while the lecturer is speaking, you would be looking at a slide show, note-taking maybe looking through the reading, and listening to what other students engaging with the lecturer. In the IsiXhosa Home Language, it was a complete shock that you could feel so relaxed, laugh out loud and engage with the lecturer without overthinking and thinking about how to construct the sentence in your head before you speak. Everyone was engaging.' (WDIOH, reflection 2022)*

In our experience, not enough effort has been made to encourage critical engagement with students who feel more comfortable in indigenous languages, but there are some laudable exceptions. Notably, the Political and International Studies Department at Rhodes University now provides course outlines and assignment questions in isiXhosa for first-year students, and they are invited to submit assignments in their own languages. Dr Siphokazi Magadla, working with the isiXhosa Department, makes a number of arguments for the use of multilingualism in mainstream teaching. Dr Magadla (Head of Department of Political and International Studies at Rhodes) is one of the champions of multilingualism in the university and has presented and written on the subject. She was interviewed for this article by one of our team.

Firstly, Magadla argues that being able to work with concepts in isiXhosa strengthens English language development. She describes how working with senior students to translate course outlines and assignment questions into isiXhosa had the knock-on effect of improving English skills through this work. Her argument is that gaining confidence in isiXhosa increased confidence to work with the concepts in English (S. Magadla & N. Babeli, pers. comm., 25 April 2022). Related to the given point, in ES classes, students reported that a sense of belonging was fostered even where English was the main language spoken:

> *'We feel as though you are important. We are a small group of students from "similar backgrounds", and our ideas and opinions about a particular topic are valid. Our lecturer would always say, "there are no wrong answers, we must speak our minds, and we can express it in any language, and it will be translated". This focus on a freedom of expression, and welcoming different views, rather than being correct, gave many students the freedom to speak, raise their points and ask many questions. It was different in a mainstream class. We would watch other students who would engage with a lecturer regularly. Besides knowing the work context, they spoke fluently and confidently.' (WDIOU reflection 2022)*

Secondly, and related to this former student's experience, Magadla argues that one of the most successful parts of her multilingualism project is the tutorial work, where they have

'normalised a multilingual discussion so that students just understand what's going on here' (S. Magadla & N. Babeli, pers. comm., 2022). If students can make sense of the concepts and questions in their indigenous language, they are more likely to articulate their understanding of concepts, even if it is in English:

> *At the heart of it, with the understanding that most of them are going to write in English, but they will understand the question to understand the content because it's in their language. (S. Magadla & N. Babeli, pers. comm., 2022)*

Thirdly, multilingualism is helpful on a broader, national scale, where, as Magadla argues, 'we are by nature bilingual, really multilingual' given the number of indigenous languages in our country. Normalising the use of isiXhosa in an Eastern Cape province university where this is the main language spoken has the effect of welcoming non-isiXhosa speakers from other provinces and countries into the language and world of its people. She argues that:

> *[T]hey then acquire a new language which is predominant to where they are, you know … after four years it should make sense that they acquire isiXhosa as another language of competence. (S. Magadla & N. Babeli, pers. comm., 2022)*

Final comments on this aspect are that it is clear from the submissions of students to this project and the interview with Dr Magadla that we need to encourage students and lecturers through multilingualism to be comfortable enough to raise their views on different perspectives and to develop translation skills in their collaborative efforts to understand and be understood. This will create an environment where innovative ideas from difficult aspects of life can be developed. The promotion of multiple languages can be followed through to signage on campus, online university sites and even books and learning materials. This kind of recognition of who the students are influences how welcome students feel and how they engage with knowledge.

But importantly, without political will, strategic prioritising and investment, it rests on a few motivated individuals to carry this forward. As Magadla notes:

> *It must not be symbolic as it is now. Right now, it depends on individual departments, and really the enthusiasm of individual academics within departments… you definitely need political will beyond just a cosmetic approval, you know or statement that says that they support this. They really need to invest in it. (S. Magadla & N. Babeli, pers. comm., 2022)*

The relationship between power and knowledge includes the resource allocation to projects that are deemed valuable by the institution. We argue that despite the issue of language and inequalities of access, the success of students disadvantaged by endemic inequalities is not yet sufficiently valuable to those who could release the funding required to address language issues in the institution.

Representation matters

Representation without a transformational agenda will not necessarily bring about the changes that are necessary in society (Hassim, Goetz & Hassim **2003**:5). But it is one of the identified shifts that would lead to a greater sense of inclusion and legitimacy for first-year students. The WDIOH students argue that having more black African lecturers, and lecturers who care about students, is essential (WDIOH reflection **2022**). Even if they do not necessarily actively make allowances for these, they can understand many black African student challenges such as language barriers, a lack of information, poverty and even family

issues. Some topics are raised in classes about societies, for instance in the study of sociology. It helps to have a lecturer who understands the experience and uses examples from familiar societies such as the townships. It helps students to be more open and give their views, experiences and challenges. If a particular student cannot understand what is being said, the lecturer can explain in the language that the student understands. The student can also respond or ask questions in the language on how they understand the work in their language.

Importantly as well, the texts that inform first-year curricula are too often disproportionally authored by white, male, elite thinkers. Texts that are written by African women and men are more likely to speak to the complexities of black life and serve to recognise and inspire students who feel encouraged to become academics themselves.

Representation makes a difference to how welcome and legitimate students feel and the extent to which they feel they belong and can aspire to academic careers. Who their lecturers are in the classrooms and who the scholars and voices of authority are in required texts and reference lists all contribute to legitimising the contributions of young black people in knowledge-making in universities.

Recognising inequality of opportunity and capability matters

We have noticed that students from disadvantaged backgrounds have few to no computer skills. Almost everything in university now requires knowing how to use computers. Our assignments must be typed in a specific way, so a student must know how to create and save a Word document accordingly (WDIOH Submission 3). We recommend that universities should provide computer literacy to all first-year students or students struggling to use a computer, based on the computer literacy course we do in ES.

Reading and writing skills are essential. Each department should emphasise and demystify the reading and writing skills associated with their discipline, based on the information literacy and academic literacy and augmented courses offered in ES. Some students also face challenges in constructing good academic essays because of their backgrounds. Building their confidence through regular writing opportunities, assessed through peer review, would build their capacities as knowledge-makers.

There are other life skills that would be useful to learn while completing undergraduate courses, which also recognise the inequalities that students bring to university. Skills associated with research, such as translating and transcribing, and skills around job searching, CV writing, and how to interview are all important for life beyond university. Learning to drive, learning to budget, learning about nutrition and cooking for oneself, are all skills which recognise that students have a life outside of the classroom but which they have not necessarily had equal opportunities to develop. What we argue is that the energy and experiences of students themselves can be more fruitfully employed in making these things happen as part of an institutional commitment to recognise and address the inequalities that are exacerbated by a narrow approach to knowledge and knowledge-making in our universities.

Conclusion

Knowledge-making as individualistic, and linguistically exclusive, has been constructed through predominantly colonial, patriarchal and capitalist ideas which are simply not relevant to the lived experience and futures of young black people in South Africa. We argue that an African feminist lens helps us to see a different kind of knowledge-making that does not

pretend to be neutral while exacerbating the inequalities inherent in South African society. It helps us to see that knowledge-making can be embodied, communal and welcoming of differences. Using data generated from a project that sees former ES students making knowledge together, we have centred student voices to argue for a different orientation in humanities studies. Our recommendations include: (1) much more rigorous engagement with multilingualism in teaching and learning; (2) more lecturers who understand or have experienced the kinds of conditions common among the majority of poor black students; (3) more Afrocentric scholarship and representation in curricula; and (4) working collaboratively with students themselves in creative and sustainable ways to initiate courses and opportunities outside of the set curricula of the university. This enables the agency of students, who can engage critically with the concepts in an atmosphere that celebrates a diversity of languages and experiences and can produce knowledge that is relevant and sustainable.

The article hints at structural and systemic changes that need to happen in the university. We have brought attention to the differences in teaching and learning cultures present in ES classes on one hand and many of the mainstream classes on the other. We believe that treating students with respect and kindness and finding ways to inspire their active participation in knowledge-making do not have to be limited to ES classes but can in fact be part of a broader transformation. Knowledge-making as an inclusive, welcoming process requires an orientation that is supported by African feminist principles of connection, the embodiment of knowledge and mutual respect. Inspired by Collins' idea of 'seeing from below' (Collins in Baderoon & Lewis **2021**:2–3), we have argued for a re-politicisation of knowledge to include black students' contributions and aspirations.

Acknowledgements

Data availability

The data that support the findings of this study are available upon reasonable request from the corresponding author, C.R.K.

Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated agency of the authors.

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WDIOU Workshops 2021

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5.3   Paper 3: Knowles, C., James, A., Khoza, L., Mtwa, Z., Roboji, M.,Shivambu, M. (2022). Problematising the Inequalities of the South African Education Sector from Students' Perspectives

This is the third paper of the thesis, and the second paper co-authored by volunteers from the PhD project, using data generated from the project. While one of the authors is a student at UCKAR, and another awaiting examination of her MSocSc thesis at UCKAR, the other four authors live in Pretoria, and rural towns of the Eastern Cape Province. We worked on the paper online, as outlined in the previous section. It was not possible for us to get together to present it, although this might happen in the future.

It was submitted to Critical Studies in Teaching and Learning on 24 August. I was aware of the journal, and once I had read their aims and scope, it seemed a good fit. The editor agreed that it fell within the scope of the journal, and it has been passed on for review. I followed up with the editor on 8 November 2022, and again on 8 December, and on 23 December, the editor forwarded two sets of reviewer comments (see Addendum 11), and a request to revise and resubmit. These were helpful and required of us a clearer framing of the project and paper, to simplify and clarify its message. I contacted the co-writers, and we have worked on a revised document and resubmitted it in January 2023.

The Paper:

Problematising the South African Higher Education inequalities exposed during the Covid-19 pandemic: Students' perspectives

Corinne Knowles, Lebogang Khoza, Abongile James, Zikhona Mtwa, Milisa Roboji, Matimu Shivambu.

ABSTRACT

Former Rhodes University students, co-authors of this article, were engaged in a knowledge-making project during the Covid-19 pandemic. This paper is a product of that project, where participants deliberated on the inequalities in the education sector based on their experiences in their university. These were exposed and exacerbated by the pandemic. Using a decolonial theoretical lens, they present the experiences of students to critique university decisions at the time. They argue for a reconnection with the idea of the university as a public good, as an antidote to the neoliberal tendencies that perpetuate inequality in the sector. This requires a reconnection with its own students, and to collaborate with them to find strategies to deal with crises such as the Covid-19 pandemic. Additionally, a reconnection between the university and the school sector could lead to greater synergy and an easier transition between school and university.

Keywords*: decolonial knowledge, education sector, inequality, students*

Introduction

Students come to university in South Africa with experiences and ways of knowing and being that are not necessarily aligned with the university system. This is partly linked to experiences in school settings that fail to anticipate and shape their navigation of university life. But in addition to this, we[1] argue that the university itself has shown a lack of vision and empathy for the lived experiences of young people in the throes of extreme inequality. The Covid-19 pandemic exposed inequalities in the education sector in South Africa that were already present (Madonsela, 2020), and this is our motivation for writing this paper. The severe lockdown restrictions in 2020 and in 2021 meant that universities had to quickly adapt to emergency remote teaching and learning (Mpofu, 2020; Reddy, 2021). Unfortunately, many universities and households were unprepared for this, and the inequalities that are deeply entrenched in South African society were exacerbated by the switch (Mudaly & Mudaly, 2021). Despite the mantra by Minister Blade Nzimande that 'no student be left behind' (Dlulane, 2020), many are exactly that. They are left behind by political, economic, and educational decisions that were and are taken about them, without them, and which failed to acknowledge the daily struggles of the poor majority, especially during lockdown. These struggles include poor or no

internet connections in the homes of many students; crowded homes with no conducive workspace; and food and physical insecurities that were exacerbated during lockdown.

This article exposes the experiences of some students as they were forced to adapt to a situation beyond their control, and without the means to do so. It considers the inequality in the higher education sector from students' perspectives, using a critical, decolonial theoretical lens through which to explain the challenges, but also the possibilities that these lost years of the pandemic offer us. It is a contribution to ideas about teaching and learning in universities going forward, using the lessons we have learnt during and from the pandemic experiences. We argue that the exacerbated inequalities that were exposed during the pandemic compel us to approach educational transformation from a decolonial perspective, collaborating with students themselves, to find a reconnection to the idea of the university as a public good.

The data that informs how we approach the issue of inequalities comes from a project that began at the start of the pandemic. The project asked the questions: What do students entering the university bring with them to contribute to knowledge-making? And what would happen if students and former students, working according to African/Black feminist principles, collaborated to produce knowledge together?[2] So, this article does two things: the topic we address, inequalities in the higher education sector, is one we care about and have experienced; and the writing of it is a collaborative praxis of African feminist principles in a knowledge-making project. We have worked with data from the project to construct knowledge in the form of this article.

Putting the problem in context: The 'With Dreams in our Hands' (WDIOH) project

The project, With Dreams in our Hands (WDIOH), began at the start of the pandemic. It was part of a PhD by publication project of our former Extended Studies (ES)[3] lecturer, Corinne Knowles, and it used many of the pedagogic principles that we were familiar with in our ES classes over the years, including communal knowledge-making (Ntseane, 2011). Twenty-four former humanities ES students from the University Currently Known as Rhodes (UCKAR)[4] responded to an open Facebook call by our former lecturer. We worked together on the project for five months, and then spent a further eleven months on the writing of this article. We applied African feminist principles of empathy and connection (Nkealah, 2022; Nnaemeka, 2005), recognising the intersectionality of oppressions that affect the potentials of young people in South Africa (Tamale, 2020; Xaba, 2017), and valuing the experiences and ways of knowing that we each brought to the process (Wane, 2008).

The project was forced to operate online because of lockdown stipulations in response to the Covid-19 pandemic and so we experienced some of the frustrations of online work, while critiquing how universities made this adaptation. In a series of online workshops and a dedicated Facebook group where we communicated in between workshops, we chose topics that we believed were current, relevant, and important to us, and then came up with ways to respond to these (Knowles, 2021). Nineteen of the project volunteers responded to the four topics with text pieces, one of which dealt with inequality in the education sector. Each submission was reviewed by three or four other participants. We then volunteered to be part of paper writing teams, using the submissions and workshop transcriptions as data. The team that has worked on this paper has scrutinised seven of the project submissions and their reviews. We have participated in nine online workshops to discuss the topic, work on our writing and to analyse the data, asking questions such as: What claims do the authors make? How does he/she make these? How are they supported? How do we respond to what has been said? What resonates? What themes run through them? Where are the differences? In our online workshops, we practiced empathy, listening and welcoming each other' s beliefs, feelings, opinions, and experiences.

In our paper writing teams, we also looked at articles by African feminist, African, and decolonial scholars, to help us to find critical ideas for thinking through the stories and opinions in the topic submissions. Each of us was tasked to write a section of the paper, to review each other's work, and to rework it in response to reviews. Importantly, the way we worked with knowledge, using the principles mentioned, allowed us as students and former students to feel seen and heard, and to bring our dreams and capacities to this task. We believe that South African university students deserve no less.

The article starts by explaining our theoretical choices, arguing that South African academia continues to be heavily influenced by western texts and ideas that are rooted in colonialism and fail to speak to the lived realities of Black young people in Africa. It considers the idea of the university as a public good against the backdrop of a neoliberal university ethos. To undo the epistemic violence of colonial, capitalist influences, we argue for a critical decolonial lens that pays attention to intersectionality and reconnection in the university. We examine the inequalities in universities, emphasised by the pandemic and articulated from students' perspectives. Finally, we offer some ideas about how to use the experience of the pandemic to rethink the education system to be more socially just and sustainable in an uncertain future, through a reconnection with its students.

Constructing the lens and the nature of knowledge

Knowledge-making is an important aspect of university education and is a life skill that can equip us to deal with uncertainty and the stresses of life. In humanities courses, we learn about different theories and how to apply them, which can lead to a deeper understanding of society and ourselves, and the creation of new knowledge. The focus of this section is to critique the colonial legacies in our universities and societies, to show how they contribute to inequalities, and to explore what decolonial knowledge-making would look like. Knowledge-making is always political (Appiah, 2006), and as Tamale (2020: 280) reminds us, 'neutral knowledge does not exist' . In our experience, most of the theories we were exposed to in our undergraduate courses at UCKAR, and the methods that are employed to collect and analyse data, have histories that are loaded with power imbalances (Moletsane, 2015; Tamale, 2020; Wane, 2008). Tamale (2020: 235) notes that colonial Eurocentric thinking has dominated African knowledge production for centuries, and she argues that, 'the African decolonization/decolonial project must pay particular attention to the education sector in order to seize back the minds of its people' . This article is a contribution to this work.

Decolonising our thinking is a way for us to regain our agency amid the epistemic violence of a reliance on Eurocentric ideas and examples in the university courses to which we have been exposed. It is also a way for us to understand and address the inequalities in the sector. Linked to the idea of epistemic violence, is 'symbolic violence' , which Moletsane (2015: 40) explains

is similar to the Marxist idea of "false consciousness" , and refers to a situation where, without any overt force or coercion, an individual or group accepts, internalises, and plays a role in its own subordination.

Epistemic violence refers to deliberate not only ways in which western knowledge is favoured in academic settings, but also ways in which African or indigenous knowledge and ways of knowing are rendered invisible or worthless (Pillay, 2015). Importantly, Pillay argues that epistemic violence includes the legitimisation of the use of physical violence and prejudice against others (Pillay, 2015). Epistemic violence, then, is linked to the inequalities we find in the education sector, in that when African thought, scholarship, poetry, fiction, history and experience is left out of curricula and syllabi, it is a way of reducing the value of African people. Wane argues that we need to be more inclusive of indigenous knowledge systems, and that we need to consider 'the role of the

educational system in producing and reproducing racial, ethnic, religious, linguistic, gender, sexual, and class-based inequalities in society' (Wane, 2008: 194).

As a first step towards addressing the issue of inequality in the education sector, the lens we use is a decolonial one. Decolonised /decolonial knowledge can be viewed as providing a forum for African academics to research and write about Africa in an African-centric manner and in a way that fits the interests and needs of their respective communities (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2020). Moletsane (2015: 4) explains that

people' s realities are often defined and explained by outsiders and that the interventions that come their way, are likely to be irrelevant to their lives' needs. To address this, what is needed is context-specific knowledge, co-created and co-disseminated with the local people themselves.

We have taken these ideas to heart in our collaborative research and while constructing this article. We have worked with students from the historically and currently disadvantaged communities we come from, to think critically and creatively about recognising and shifting the marginalisation of the poor.

Pillay (2015) is of the view that decolonising teaching and learning - pedagogy as well as content - will play an important role in the production and the rise of decolonial knowledge, which will contribute towards a more inclusive and just university experience for many students. He explains that the decolonisation process should open and create an inclusive academic atmosphere that encourages pluriversal knowledge production, so that the west can learn from Africa. This shifts the purpose and power of higher education away from western methodologies of objectification, extraction, appropriation, and exploitation (Grosfoguel, 2020). And as we go on to argue, it opens the possible return of the idea of the university as a public good (Badat, 2001).

To undo the epistemic violence discussed by Pillay (2015), Moletsane (2015), and Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2020), we argue that we need critical thinking that employs a process of 'unlearning' and 'conscientisation' (Tamale, 2020: 272). This process of debunking what is familiar and taken for granted, to pay attention to alternative narratives and histories, will allow us to see more clearly from an African perspective how our societies are influenced by oppressive colonial ideas. The South African economy, based on western-inspired capitalism, continues to favour the few, and the country is regarded as one of the most unequal societies in the world (Sguazzin, 2021). How is higher education in South Africa contributing to the necessary critical thinking around the economy, and the process of socio-economic development? How is critical thinking addressing the social and educational inequalities in society? Capitalism emphasises the role of the individual to get ahead by means of a meritocracy. And yet we know that in South Africa, where colonial legacies continue to influence race, gender, and class hierarchies and inequalities, meritocracy is not the only factor that leads to success. As Diale (2019) and Galal (2023) show, Black young people are the least likely to find work, even if they have degrees, and this raced (and gendered) pattern signals that 'meritocracy' is not the whole story. The identity trends of who succeeds and who fails economically is not about what is deserved, but linked to race, class and gender inequalities that are legacies of our past and were exacerbated by the pandemic.

The focus on the individual so valued in capitalism is repeated in other western institutions and knowledge-making, and runs counter to many African communities and ideas, where the emphasis is on our mutual constitution and responsibility. African knowledge-making emphasises the communal aspect of African societies, where, as Ntseane (2011: 313) explains, research and learning need to be 'responsive to an African worldview which is collective and one in which the community itself will influence and shape the method' . Our understanding, as ES students who were exposed to a more communal approach to teaching and learning, and now as co-authors of this article, is that the academic journey is not an individual one: we think, learn, and write

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in community. This is in contrast, we believe, to South African higher education, which is arguably captured by neoliberalism with its emphasis on individualism and the economic and market function of the university, rather than on the social function (Baatjes, 2005).

We echo the calls made in the #FeesMustFall protests of 2015/2016, where students, working in solidarity with each other across provinces, were not merely fighting for free education, but also for decolonised education (Mkhize, 2015). For us, education is a chance to improve our lives and that of our families and communities. Education for many of us is not only the way to escape poverty, but importantly, also to contribute to society. We argue strongly that the exposure to African thinkers and theories will resonate more profoundly with us, and expand our critical thinking so that we are able to address the social issues in our communities. This way of thinking about higher education - its communal aspect and its focus on addressing social issues - shifts the neoliberal focus to the university as a public good.

Two ideas emerge from this discussion on decoloniality and contribute to our understanding of the inequalities that continue to oppress young Black students: intersectionality and reconnection. Intersectionality is a theory and methodology used by African feminists, that allows us to see that oppression is multifaceted, in that the intersections of race, class, gender, sexuality, language, ethnicity and so on, affect the extent and nature of oppression in inseparable ways. Inequality as we experience it in South African universities today, is rooted in the triple and mutually constituted oppressions of colonialism (with its racialised implications), capitalism (and its effects on class) and patriarchy (which enables gender and sexuality advantages and disadvantages) (Tamale, 2020). Tamale (2020: 66) explains that 'for many disadvantaged social groups, discrimination is an inextricably blended experience'. As we have explained above, the dominance and normalising of White, male, elite, western theorists in knowledge-making disadvantages and marginalises many students in ways that overlap and intersect - their race, class, gender, location, language and so on, fall outside of what is regarded as legitimate or authoritative knowledge-making. In tracking how colonialism (interlinked with capitalism and patriarchy) was internalised as authoritative, Tamale (2020: 250) notes that certain knowledges that supported colonialism and justified discrimination, 'were allowed to evolve as "science" while other indigenous knowledges were simply labelled as lore, superstition and quaint fancies' . Other strategies of colonialism involved 'othering' and 'invisibilisation' (Tamale, 2020: 246,247). These strategies created and embedded race, gender and class hierarchies that are profoundly interlinked, along with various other identity markers that articulated colonial preferences. The intersectional lens, according to Tamale (2020: 73,74), 'helps African people understand why our "truths" do not always match with the official "truths" constructed in Eurocentric-capitalist-heteropatriarchal master narratives' . She urges us to 'take into account the complexities involved in issues of inequality and Othering', and also to notice the complexities in identities, to avoid essentialising people based on one or more of these socially constructed categories. As Kulundu argues, intersectionality allows us to examine intragroup differences, and she warns against an analysis that rests on a single axis (Kulundu, 2018). Our understanding of intersectionality has encouraged us, in the WDIOH project and in the process of writing this paper, to listen to young Black people's experiences, and notice ways in which they are similar to, or differ from, official discourses and each other. It has encouraged us to use theoretical ideas of African women and value the opinions of African young people in our quest to unlearn colonial discourses and conscientise ourselves about the longstanding mechanisms of oppression.

The second idea is reconnection. This idea is based on the distinctly African notion of *Ubuntu* which is loosely translated as: I am because you are. This idea that we are mutually constitutive as human beings expands to being connected to everything - Graham (in Tamale, 2020: 21) explains it as 'oneness of mind, body and spirit; and the value of interpersonal relationships' and Ntseane explains the spirit as 'the ultimate oneness with nature and the fundamental interconnectedness of all things' (Ntseane,

2011: 313). The idea of connection runs counter to the Eurocentric ideas of individualism and separation of the mind from the body, which dominate western academia (Collins, 2003). It is an orientation that we find useful in our analyses because it points to ways that we can heal and enable some of the damages of inequality in the education sector in South Africa. We use this idea of reconnection to seek out ways that validate the experiences of young Black people, reconnecting them to each other, and to reaffirm them as legitimate knowledge-makers. We think through ways in which the university can reconnect with students, and with the idea of the public good, as a way towards a decolonial future. For the authors of this paper, the connectedness that we experienced as ES students while in our first year, and the connectedness we felt with each other while working on this project during the pandemic, encouraged us to see how reconnection could be a way to address the inequalities in the sector.

Our research focus: Inequalities in the education sector

We have explained our project, and the lens we used to examine social problems. Many of our discussions and the submissions to topics in the WDIOH project dealt with the frustrations of dealing with inequalities in the university. This was particularly difficult in the shift to online, remote, emergency teaching and learning in response to the pandemic. Our approach to this is to notice that the pandemic exposed inequalities that were already there, and perhaps gives us the opportunity to address these with more energy now.

As was the case with many countries, South Africa adapted its educational provisions in response to pandemic conditions to 'distance learning' and 'remote, emergency learning' (Commonwealth of Learning, 2020). This applied to schools and universities. Online learning can be explained as teaching delivered on a digital device that aims to promote and support learning (Ferri, et al., 2020). South Africa was perhaps doomed to fail in its aim to provide all learners and students with this kind of learning, given the high levels of inequality to start with. A study by Mpungose (2020) revealed that only a few students had access to the online learning platform. This stalled their shift from face-to-face learning to remote learning. So, while South Africa was quick to follow western practices, the ongoing legacies of colonialism and apartheid that have seen the widening divide between the rich and the majority poor, meant that only the elite could embrace the change without being left behind.

Exposing the inequalities in universities

As South Africa went into lockdown to try to contain the spread of Covid-19, the Minister of Higher Education and Training announced the shift to online learning, leaving it up to individual universities to decide how they would implement online leaning. While online teaching and learning may appear to offer the advantage of greater accessibility, the Covid-19 pandemic highlighted the depth of the digital divide and how complex and multi-layered it is (Gupta, 2020: 1).

Nationally, only 22 per cent of households have computers and 10 per cent of households have an internet connection. In the Limpopo and North West provinces, only 1.6 per cent and 3.6 per cent of households have internet access in their homes respectively (Amnesty International, 2021). Country-wide, school children and students from wealthier communities and homes with computers and internet access were able to continue with remote learning, leaving children of the working class to fend for themselves with limited access to devices, data, and stationery, to make remote learning possible (Amnesty International, 2021; Anciano, et al., 2020). Even though universities attempted to make online learning accessible by providing laptops, data, and printed materials for students, this was not enough to bridge the divide as the majority of the students' challenges were compounded by the lack of a conducive place to study in crowded homes. Some students were prevented from learning because of household chores and family responsibilities (Anciano, et al., 2020; Pillay, et al., 2021).

These difficulties are explained in some depth in Mpungose's study (2020). Firstly, he claims that only a few students had access to the online learning platform and explains the intersectional nature of this exclusion: 'issues such as socio-economic factors, race, social class, gender, age, geographical area and educational background determine the level of the digital divide in a university context' (Mpungose, 2020: 2). Secondly, he argues that learning is essentially interactive, arguing that 'students are not taken as a blank slate or passive recipients of information but are taken as active participants who can nurture, maintain, and traverse network connections to access, share and use information for learning' (Mpungose, 2020: 3). There is an overlap between this kind of thinking and the African feminist ideas of communal knowledge-making (Ntseane 2011). While group interaction could have been exploited and expanded through different social media platforms, in most cases it was not. Mpungose (2020) explains that very little training was offered to staff, and so the resources provided by teaching staff to students depended on their connectivity. In many cases, because of a lack of exposure and training to different methods, lecturers and teachers failed to encourage the kinds of connected learning that would normally take place in face-to-face lectures, in between lectures, in dining halls and through social media group chats such as Facebook and WhatsApp.

Project participants expressed their frustrations with the move to online learning, supporting some of Mpungose's claims. The first echoes the digital divide based on economic conditions, which is also manifest in the living environment:

I do not have any Wi-Fi, and this made me to depend more on limited data to keep up the output of deliverables. Not only that, but the type of environment we occupy makes it hard to maintain good learning. In a sense, for example, the state of our residences in which we reside is appalling while on the other side we are expected to excel academically (WDIOH Submission 4: 2021).

Another participant commented on the nature of learning that took place in these kinds of conditions:

… the online learning that is happening has put the poor Black child from the location in a really disadvantage. In this online learning there is no learning that is done, it is just submitting and moving on … You are just reading readings to answer the questions that are asked in the assignments. The universities believe by giving students data that is making the learning equal, but there is nothing that is equal in this learning (WDIOH Submission 5: 2021).

This submission confirms the point that Mpungose (2020) makes regarding the conversational, communal, informal learning that takes place between classes and should have taken place on social media platforms if lecturers and students were better prepared and better connected.

Another comment points to the unseen burdens placed on many students from poorer households, where academic activities were deprioritised, often in gendered ways, as female students were expected to take on caring and household chores:

Being a student under these circumstances has been very difficult for me. Living in a three-roomed house, where I would have to wait for everyone to go to sleep, so that I could have the space to myself where I would then be able to learn without being disturbed. Secondly, trying to balance everything else with the responsibilities that I have - the chores, cleaning and cooking and looking after my sibling. It is not easy, but I try to balance everything out (WDIOH Submission 7: 2021).

One of the project participants compared the experiences of online learning between students from different institutions. She contacted friends of hers at different universities to gain a picture of the similarities and differences between universities in the Eastern

Cape Province. Her first observation was that even within universities, inequalities flourish:

… even if students are enrolled in the same university, it does not mean they are equal or the same. Different backgrounds or social statuses may have different impact on how students respond or receive [to] institutional measures (WDIOH Submission 9: 2021).

She outlined the different timeframes for starting online teaching and learning, noting that two of the four public universities in the Eastern Cape began soon after lockdown, whereas the others two took months to begin. Furthermore, she noticed a discrepancy in the provision of data:

Students from some universities received little to no data to cover online learning, while some received a lot of data.… However, I do acknowledge that universities differ in their capacities, abilities and sponsorships, but we cannot turn a blind eye to how this negatively impact on students from other universities. I believe that the Department Education needed to fill in the gaps to ensure that all students in universities are provided with all resources needed for online learning and resources that would sustain them throughout the whole process (WDIOH Submission 9: 2021).

Based on the above realities of these students, online learning during the Covid-19 lockdown has been shown as not the most inclusive method of learning for university students from low socio-economic backgrounds. As one of the project participants concluded:

South African universities have also proved to show lack of comprehensive understanding of our unequal societies and its students, and it is the duty of universities to inform decisions that will close this gap, as universities deal with knowledge (WDIOH Submission 16: 2021).

The inequalities in and between universities, established by colonialism and apartheid and exacerbated by the pandemic, failed to recognise, and support the challenges experienced by the majority poor, leading to disastrous consequences. As an academic community, decolonising our thinking in how we approach the emergency shifts during a pandemic and how and what we teach, is, as Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2020) and Pillay (2015) claim, a way to bring about epistemic justice and also to find relevant and sustainable solutions to issues of inequality. Our contribution to this work has been to expose the inequalities that we and others like us have experienced, using the decolonial lens that values embodied knowledge, communal knowledge-making, and finding an African-centred perspective.

Reconnection of university to society as a public good

We argue that because of the pandemic, and how it changed our approach to teaching and learning, we can use our insights into the unequal provision of education to rethink how to go forward. Reconnection is a useful idea when we consider the role of the university in society, and we emphasise its importance in contributing new ideas that can assist our society to reduce the inequalities that marginalise the majority poor.

Higher education has long been considered a public good. Kant (1979) argued that universities played a critical role in holding state bodies and the professions to account. With this understanding of its role, the university could have had a critical role to play as the state responded to the pandemic, often in ways that did not make sense to ordinary people. If university leaders were more connected to who their students were/are, they might have had insight into how many poor Black students would struggle with the switch to online learning.

The definition of public good in relation to higher education has shifted over time. For example, universities have thrived in the modern period as central public institutions and bases for critical thought. At the time of pandemic adjustments, universities were confronted by a variety of social forces and were compelled to undergo changes in their structures and their association with the rest of society. How universities coped with pandemic conditions is important to us as academics because the ongoing transformation of universities will affect (or not) the intensification of social inequality, privatisation of public institutions, and reorganisation of access to knowledge. Losing our way in the understanding of our purpose as a public good fundamentally challenges the nature of higher education. Arendt (1954) suggests that education plays a role in training new groups of students into the knowledge of a pre-existing world for them to make anew; and now, in a different century, post-pandemic, there is even more urgency and reason to facilitate this process.

Giroux (2010) supports Arendt (1954) and adds that higher education could be a space for making alternative futures, whether through study, research and discovery, teaching, professional learning, managing, organising, leading, consulting, and engaging with various communities of practice, the communities we live in and with industry. Giroux (2010) theorised neoliberalism, and foresaw that universities would increasingly be locations of inequality. These inequalities were exacerbated during the lockdowns in South Africa. Only the relatively rich could access the key combination of goods such as data, laptops, and a favourable environment to study. Zheng and Walsham (2021) support this claim, and argued that during times such as the pandemic 'digital inequality operates at the intersection of the multiple fracture lines of differences that mediates the various spaces of inclusion/exclusion'.

As the most unequal society in the world (Sguazzin, 2021), the majority of South African society falls into the category of poor. Who then is the public, and what is the "good" that universities will recommend and support? If most students also fall into the category of "poor" , then we argue that rigorous attention needs to be paid to the socio-economic arrangements of these students when provisioning educational support, not only during times of a pandemic, but as we plan for sustainable educational systems going forward. There needs to be a reconnection between the university and the public good, and a reconnection with who the students are and how to support their aspirations.

There are three recommendations we make as contributions towards reconnecting the university to its students, as the "public" in public good. None of them are new ideas, but they are emphasised here as a timely reminder. Firstly, universities must lead the fight against injustices and inequalities in our communities through education and through focused research. South African universities already do this, and what we argue for is a greater emphasis on decolonised models of education and research. When students are engaged in thinking critically, and research methodologies are geared towards local issues with community participation, sustainable change can happen. Research could be guided Mkabela's principles of collaborative practice, where she argues for research happening *with),* and not merely *in,* a community (Mkabela, 2005). Moletsane (2015) argues that this kind of decolonial re-ordering leads to greater agency and empowerment, and critical thinking amongst participants:

… in recognising the contested nature of local interpretations and knowledge generally, we actively enable participants to confront, critique, and challenge such understandings in order to develop alternative understandings. This means that members of communities must be able to meaningfully participate in all activities meant to achieve this (Moletsane, 2015: 45).

Our research project, WIDOH, was a participatory collaboration between students, former students and a lecturer, where we worked towards mutual agency and responsibility. We believe that these kinds of research approaches can have helpful outcomes for the researchers as well as the communities they work with and are part of.

Secondly, curricula that speak to students' lived realities are more likely to encourage and inspire solutions for inequalities in society, especially if African and decolonial scholars form the core of curricula (Okech, 2020). Reconnecting with who the students are, means rethinking curricula and theories to make them representative of us. Local examples to illustrate concepts would be a way to connect students to their lived realities. The critical thinking skills we learn in university can be more effectively applied to localised social issues that have been introduced to demonstrate how Afrocentric theories work. We ask for a much greater emphasis on decolonised pedagogy and curricula, to undo the ways that university education has tended towards western ideas and neoliberal notions of economic effectiveness and individualism, resulting in a disconnection from the majority of students.

Thirdly, poor students are best placed to understand the complexities and struggles of our lives. We assume that the urgent shifts and plans to cope with pandemic lockdown conditions are not the last time that the university will be called upon to make urgent changes in response to outside forces. Students are not blank slates; we are not ignorant of how to cope with crises. We ask that all students, especially those whose vulnerabilities are compounded by national or global emergencies, should be consulted on how to manage crises. We believe we have contributions to make and should work collaboratively to strategise on how to adapt teaching and learning during these times. We recommend working collaboratively with students, including those who are rural, and/or poor, to come up with relevant interventions during times of crisis.

Reconnection between universities and schools - teacher training, and the transition between school and tertiary education

We claimed at the beginning of this article that students arrive at university with contributions to make, but they are often unprepared for what is expected of them in the university system. We have argued in the previous section that this is partly to do with the unpreparedness of the university, and a lack of understanding who their students are. We argue that decolonising curricula and pedagogy is a move in the right direction, and that greater consultation and collaboration with students is necessary. In this section, we ask if the university has a greater role to play in the school system. This links to the role of the university as a "public good" , in that schooling is also part of the "good" that requires the attention of higher education. Our experience as learners who were unprepared for university (and one of the authors now as a teacher in a rural school) leads us to the conclusion that there is the need for more attention to the connection between universities and the school system. Jansen (2008) noted that there is substantial evidence that current school preparation is insufficient to ensure a successful transition from high school to higher education. As a group, we discussed and concluded that a key purpose of school is to prepare children for university and/or their career paths. Schools are set to provide for the fullest development of each learner to live morally, creatively, and productively in a democratic society (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2013). However, we have witnessed learners struggling to adapt to universities due to a lack of career guidance and preparedness for university - and thus we believe that there is not enough relationship between the school system and the tertiary education system.

The economic and social inequalities in schools means that there is an uneven preparation for post-school life. Learners who can afford to go to private or elite schools are given career guidance or relevant preparation for the tertiary level of their studies. As Modiba and Sefotho (2019) point out, career guidance is part of the Life Orientation (LO) offering, but teachers outside of the few elite schools are underprepared. They argue that 'LO teachers seem to experience confusion, feelings of incompetence, and insufficient training that points to a need for training and professional development' (Modiba & Sefotho, 2019). These teachers and the learners they teach are faced with challenges that make information about, and preparation for, tertiary education difficult, if not impossible. As a project participant explains:

I went to a public school that never offered career guidance, only top performing learners would be chosen to go to career expos and even those career expos were not as detailed and significant as they needed to be. In high school I thought the only courses I could do when I get to tertiary were law and psychology based on the subjects I did. Little did I know that there were so many career paths that I could follow, as a result I got to understand what I was passionate about when I got to my final year of undergraduate study. Fortunately, for me I had the option to choose from three different subjects I had done through my undergraduate studies. (WDIOH Submission 9: 2021)

Many schoolteachers, including those who teach Life Orientation, are trained in universities, and it seems that there is work to be done to reconnect this provisioning of the university to the teachers who need to feel more equipped and secure about teaching senior learners more rigorously about what to expect at university, or post-school.

Besides the exposure to career guidance, there are other factors that work against an easy transition from school to university. In the WDIOH project the language issue came up. For example, one participant explained the difficulty in engaging with difficult concepts, or of asking the relevant and important questions about content, because of a lack of exposure to English in the schooling years:

All of my life up to that moment I had communicated in vernacular languages. Even the English I encountered, I engaged it in my vernacular language... So before one even engages with Karl Marx, one was confronted with English itself Reading was much easier than raising a hand to ask a question in Barrat I must confess.... So, to avoid this seemingly apparent embarrassment on raising a hand to ask, say, why Marx' s 'Historical Materialism' pays no regard to problem of race in society for instance. Not asking at all felt safe (WDIOH Submission 10, 2020)

The transition from school to university means a shift in the kind of language competencies that are expected. More research on the complexities of multilingualism needs to be undertaken in this regard in universities (see for example Mkhize & Balfour, 2017) and in schools (see for instance, Setati, et al., 2008) on how to include and intellectualise indigenous languages (see Kashula & Maseko, 2017; Knowles, et al., 2023). There are many reasons why teachers teach the way they do, including the institutional cultures of their schools, but importantly it would seem that teacher training, undertaken in universities, could and should pay more attention to the potential lived realities of some school communities, to be inclusive of diverse South African contexts. A decolonial approach to teacher training would facilitate a more contextual focus, including the complex issue of language. There needs to be greater synergy and connection between departments in the university that are addressing this issue - for instance the collaborations between the African Languages and the Political and International Studies departments at UCKAR (see Knowles, et al., 2023), and the Education Faculty who oversee teaching training.

Besides English being the language of choice, there are other alienating aspects of the institutional culture at UCKAR showing a western bias, that affect the day-to-day experiences of African students. These issues are being addressed over time, but a number of the participants shared their experiences of alienation when they first arrived at UCKAR. A project participant explained:

I remember my first day sitting at the dining hall and all I could see was a fork and knife, and I wondered what is going to happen when I chose the option to eat pap. Am I going to use a fork and knife to eat pap? And that was obviously a no because that was not something I was used to. However, as time went by and being in residence leadership the next year we asked for more diversity and inclusion, because we wanted to feel at home and be comfortable. So, these are some for the kinds of factors that makes the transition from school to university difficult for some learners. There needs to

be a smoother transition in terms of cultural practices, including language, between a more forgiving school system and the university system. (WDIOH Submission 18: 2021)

Wane speaks of the way in which her schooling and university experience alienated her from her own culture (Wane, 2008). Post-pandemic, this kind of alienation is something that we could address as we consider the transitions between schools and universities. According to Cliff (2020), the sad reality of higher education in South Africa is that only about one third of the students who qualify to gain entry into higher education are actually prepared for the academic literacy demands of a university. Much of this, we argue, can be attributed to South Africa's weak education system, and poor alignment between schools and universities. The transition gap from secondary to tertiary education is a challenge to many first-year students. The Council on Higher Education (CHE) describes this as the articulation gap, a discontinuity in the transition from one educational stage to the next (CHE, 2013). Even the brightest students who get good grades in public schools often experience conspicuously bad grades for the first time when they enter universities (Rogan, 2018), because the articulation gap has not been adequately addressed. Unfortunately, most educational institutions try to solve the problem of poor schooling only after students enrol in higher education (Lombard, 2020). Only a few institutions actively intervene by addressing this issue at the secondary school level (Bangser, 2008). Most students find the transition difficult or simply lack the skills and motivation needed to succeed in higher education.

Any education system depends on the quality of its teaching profession (Wolhuter, 2006). Wolhuter points out that the quality of the teacher is dependent on their training in universities. He goes on to argue that education is regarded as one of the main means to bring about is the desired social change (Wolhuter, 2006). As we have argued, many teachers in public schools -especially in the rural areas - are not equipped for providing intense career guidance or mentoring learners into realising their paths and preparing them for university. A study in 2018 pointed out that 'current teachers were less confident about their training, and most university faculty did not believe that they were effectively trained' (Jez & Luneta, 2018), pointing to further work that needs to be done to align the work between universities and schools. More focused research is required, to reduce the inequalities exacerbated by the pandemic in the education sector.

Conclusion

We have argued that the measures undertaken by the education sector in South Africa during the Covid-19 pandemic and lockdowns failed to understand and support students who were most vulnerable during this time. The inequalities that have plagued South African society were exposed, and have provided an opportunity to consider the areas that need work, going forward. Using the data from a project that was run during the pandemic with former ES students at UCKAR, we have argued that the university perpetuates inequalities by relying on Eurocentric curricula and neoliberal ideas. We recommend that a shift to decolonial thinking firstly revives the idea of the university as a public good. Secondly, we recognise students, and particularly poor Black students as part of this public. We argue for a reconnection between the university and its students by offering more representative and decolonised curricula, and by greater collaboration with students in times of crises. We also recommend a reconnection between the university and the school sector, so that a more successful transition between school and university is enabled. This includes paying attention to greater levels of engagement between universities and schools, and adequate and appropriate teacher training that empowers teachers to provide effective career and post-school advice. These measures, we believe, are some of the ways to begin to address the extreme levels of inequality in the higher education sector.

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1 We, the authors, use the collective first-person pronouns in this article. Although not all of us are still students, we speak from the perspective of those we have worked with on the project described later *(With Dreams in our Hands),* and the students we know who continue to struggle with the inequalities inherent in schools and universities.
2 See Knowles (2021) for more details on the theory and methodology for the project
3 At the university currently known as Rhodes, the Humanities Extended Studies Programme invites students into the programme based on a number of criteria, including matric marks that fall short of automatic entry into the Bachelor of Arts (BA) or Bachelor of Social Science (BSS) degrees, being the first in their family to go to university, and having received township or rural schooling. They are required to select one of two

streams. The authors are part of the group who selected Politics 1 and Sociology 1 as their mainstream subjects. Computer and academic literacies are also taught, and most of our work involved the augmentation and literacies of the mainstream courses. The class size ranges between 30 and 45 students.

4 Rhodes University was renamed the University Currently Known as Rhodes (UCKAR) by protesters and allies during the 2015/16 student protests. In 2018, the Rhodes University Council decided to halt any consultative process around renaming, and instead to keep the name. See Daniels (2015) for the argument to change the name.

5.4. Paper 4: Mensah L. and Knowles C. (2022). Navigating decolonial pedagogy: An Afro-Feminist story

Submitted to and received by Feminist Studies on 1 September 2022
(http://www.feministstudies.org/home.html)

Linda and I wrote this paper as a reflection on the African Feminist Methodology course we ran as part of the Scottish Graduate School of Social Science annual Spring programme for PhD students (see section 4). It is included in this collection of papers, because as I have argued, the thesis is about African feminisms and students – this exploration of African feminist pedagogy is an important part of my thinking through the project. Linda and I have written the paper over the past nine months. In the previous two papers co-written with project volunteers, I carried the process and as such contributed approximately 70% of the work towards the completed papers (although it is difficult to measure, as explained before). In this paper with Linda, that was not the case. She and I contributed equally, writing in a dialogue with each other. We conceptualised it in conversation over Zoom meetings, giving ourselves deadlines, editing and expanding each other's work in a collaborative and empathic process of co-writing. We presented it at our online African Feminist reading group in August 2022, and had rich and meaningful conversations with those present. After making a few adjustments, we submitted it to *Feminist Studies*. We struggled to find the right journal – it is a long paper (over 10 000 words), and we were reluctant to leave out any of the sections. *Feminist Studies* is one of the few journals that are privately owned, and as such is not open access. We found the journal by seeing where similar papers to ours were published. We decided to choose this journal because in conversation with other feminists, we were led to believe that it is a good journal, and worth supporting for their brave stance against the corporatisation of academic journals. If

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our journal is accepted by them, we will consult with them about posting the pre-edited

version of the paper on our personal Research-gate and Academia-Edu pages, and also

lobby university libraries to take out subscriptions.

The Paper:

In Review: *Feminist Studies*

Navigating decolonial pedagogy: An Afro-Feminist story

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Abstract

African feminist pedagogy and methodology approach knowledge-making as political and inclusive. They seek to work with, rather than in, a community, to transform and liberate the community, rather than benefit the individual. The African feminist teacher and researcher is challenged to be vulnerable and bring her whole self to the encounter. In a world marked by sharp geopolitical differences, collaborations between researchers in the Global North and the Global South, even amongst feminist scholars who share similar visions, can be marked by hierarchies and the very oppressive systemic inequalities that we seek to disrupt. In this reflective essay, we draw on an Afro-feminist approach to decolonial pedagogy, which we applied in an online multi-disciplinary and inter-continental PhD methodology course. Our contrasting positionalities based on our different races and locations mean that we navigate and experience decoloniality differently. We explore this in narrative dialogue, employing a sense of *Ubuntu* which implies that we are mutually constituted, and connected to each other, the earth, and our ancestors. We argue for the inclusion of African feminist pedagogy as a mainstream framing in all higher education across Africa and the rest of the world to make sense of and identify ways to transform intersectional exclusionary practices.

Key words: decolonial pedagogy; Afro-Feminism; feminist community.

1. Introduction

Teaching, writing and theorising are not neutral activities, and the push towards decolonising pedagogy is a political process of re-orientation. In this reflective essay, we draw on an Afro-Feminist approach to decoloniality, which we applied in an online multi-disciplinary and inter-continental PhD methodology course and use in the writing of this text. Our contrasting positionalities based on our different races and locations mean that we navigate and experience decoloniality differently. We explore this in narrative dialogue throughout the paper, employing a sense of *Ubuntu* which broadly implies that we are mutually constituted, and connected to each other, the earth, and our ancestors. First, we discuss our respective journeys into African feminisms, and what informed our vision of a transcontinental African feminist workshop to explore some of the loopholes we had identified in our individual journeys. In so doing, we examined decolonisation/decoloniality from an Afro-feminist perspective, which

troubles the intricately linked relations between colonialism, capitalism and patriarchy that continue to dominate knowledge-making in universities. Key ideas include different ways of thinking about knowledge that recognise epistemologies and ontologies from Africa and the Global South. These embrace communal knowledge-making, and a recognition of spirituality and connectedness as significant aspects of being human, which provide new possibilities towards sustainable futures for students and their communities. Second, we reveal the process of re-orientating our pedagogy in preparing for the online course, which included UK, Ghanaian and South African PhD candidates. Working online becomes an opportunity and a challenge to establish a sense of community essential to decolonised pedagogy, where the participation and collaboration of students from different parts of the world demands mutual respect and a sense of belonging. Thirdly, we reflect on the course, using feedback from course participants, to provide some ideas on how to navigate North-South collaboration, positionality, and the gift of difference, in the relationships between teachers, students, and knowledges. Finally, we consider the implications of our experiences on how North/South Afro-feminist collaborations can be empowering and an effective tool in dismantling Eurocentric ideologies about theorisations, methodologies, and pedagogies.

2. Our journeys into African Feminisms

Linda:

Sikakrom (the Golden City), is one of the many popular local names for my hometown of Obuasi, a historic gold mining community in the Ashanti Region of present-day Ghana. The missionaries described it as the land of the Quartz Mountains, and the capitalists of Britain floated many shares in earnest anticipation of huge profits from the largesse potential of its rich gold fields. The glistening gold veins of this town were not only central to the advancement of colonial frontier politics, but they also became a huge motivation for the expansion of the triad mercantilism, militarism and missionarisation in Asante.

The experiences that have defined my journey as an environmental law researcher whose work is framed by decolonial African feminisms were forged in the bowels of this community. My very first encounter with African feminisms in academia was at the undergraduate law level where we were handed a reading list and given a rather short seminar on African feminist thoughts on women's reproductive rights as a distinctive framework from white feminism. While this was undoubtedly a defining moment that grounded a paradigmatic shift in my onto-epistemological thinking throughout my legal training, this experience only came to name and to fortify a lot of the things I had already known, learnt, heard, felt and reflected on for years.

I lived my formative years through the mine strikes, the demonstrations, state sanctioned militarised evictions of criminalised local small-scale miners, and the constant assault of the dusty pothole-filled roads of Obuasi. My ears are familiar with the earth-shattering sounds and the shaking roofs from the blast of the hills by the mine. I know all too well the sounds and the silences of despair when the government deploys its military watchdogs in service to the protection of propertied mining concessions whenever there are disturbances between the small-scale miners (locally known as the *galamsey*) and the large-scale mining corporation in

town. Through all of this, I also learnt to recognise the sounds of laughter, fun, community and the joys of living in Obuasi.

Battling the indignities of poverty while living in one of the wealthiest gold-producing communities has a way of shaping one's worldview on capitalist extractivism. For a number of my peers researching on the subject, the use of African feminisms in exploring mineral resource extractivism on the continent seemed like a strange idea. Far too often, I got the question, 'But what has African feminisms got to do with mining?' I read this as an invitation to offer insight on how the canons of the scholarship are entrenched in Eurocentrism and the need for a paradigmatic shift defined by indigenous epistemologies. This is precisely the framework which I employed in my doctoral research on artisanal and small-scale mining (ASM) in Ghana. The objective of my research right from the outset was to dig deeper beyond the axiomatic adaptation of state-centric legalism and to explore alternative legal frameworks that were more culturally appropriate and beneficial for local small-scale miners. Despite employing over a million people directly and being a significant contributor to the development of many rural economies, ASM is often casted as the archetype of all that is wrong with the mining industry in the country. Its negative social and environmental externalities have gained it such negative publicity by which its actors are criminalised and constantly referred to as 'cancer', 'menace' and 'criminals' in media and research publications (Eduful et al, 2020).

Coming from a place of an anti-colonial, anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist worldview, I understood that there was more to the legalities of the current regime than what was imprinted in the law books. It was apparent that adopting the mainstream Western canons and a doctrinal approach was only going to lead to one result- a regurgitation of theories that reinforce the assumed criminality and marginality of local small-scale miners. This, to me was a woefully insufficient and an unsuitable pathway. My lived experiences had already given me enough pointers to be sceptical of the assumed innocence, neutrality and objectivity of law in the context of mining and environmentalism. Mining on the continent has an undeniably horrific entanglement with colonialism, racism, capitalist exploitation, classed and gendered hierarchies where law has served as a key organising factor.

Obuasi stands at this crossroad of recovery from colonialism and its ongoing colonialities, a land rich in gold and even richer in indigenous knowledges. As a member of the community, I came into research embodying these intersectional paradigms, and chose to engage with the African feminist and socio-legal ethnographic approaches to law. Through this, I found the language to convey my departure from legal positivism and began to challenge the concept of 'law' within the mining sector and more specifically in ASM. Where do these laws come from? How were they formed and for whose benefit do they continue to stand? Evidently, the answers to these questions could not be derived from a doctrinal positivist legal research approach. Even my choice of socio-legal ethnography had to be interrogated through an African feminist lens and divested from its intrusive, extractivist and individualist orientations.

At the dawn of the coronavirus pandemic when travel plans to Ghana for my fieldwork ethnography were stalled due to the travel bans, African feminisms provided a redemptive path for my research. Those gloomy days at the onset of the pandemic served as moments of deep reflexivity where I reflected on the methodologies and ethical underpinnings of conducting research that required an intrusive gaze into the lives of marginalised and vulnerable

communities such as mine. I considered what it meant to amplify muted voices and project subdued knowledge and legal systems in ASM without co-opting and replicating the dynamics of colonial epistemology quite known to Global North based researchers whose works are situated in Global South communities. I began to engage deeply with Afrocentricism and decolonial research where I was initially guided by Fanon, Tamale, Smith, hooks and Dei, which led through a whole array of other decolonial scholarship. Just when I thought that the empirical trajectory of my research was sinking, I found the lifebuoy I so desperately needed. Those were moments of relief and joy. It felt like I had finally come home to myself. I had finally found a community of scholars whose words spoke my discomfort, pain and anger with the way issues about mining on the continent were framed.

It was during this period that I met [second author]. Our initial encounter led to fortnight meetings. It was a refreshing to find community with her. It has been deeply satisfying to note that ours has not just been a space to read and discuss African feminist literature, but that we have developed a bond that embodies the very tenets of African feminisms. Ours is a friendship that provides a safe space to explore our individuality, positionality and spirituality.

When I speak of my research journey, I do not only emphasise the fact that I entered doctoral research as a practising lawyer in my thirties parenting two children under 5 years old, but more importantly, that I came in as a child of Obuasi, an *Adanse* woman of the *ɛkoɔna* clan and the daughter of a working-class mineworker. I arrived at this place as a first daughter who embodies the stories and lessons learnt at the feet of my mother, grandmother and great-grandmother all of which have had a lasting imprint on how I approach the world. Coming from this long line of industrious *Adanse* women who have always worked both in and outside of the home to provide for their families taught me, among many other things, the value of work, community, joy, survival and rest. Thus, the desire to become an environmental lawyer was both deeply personal and political. On the personal level, every effort I put in to obtain excellent grades throughout my education was an attempt to escape the financially struggling, street-hawking life I was born into. This also influenced my interest in environmental law and the drive to pursue a research path that centred the interests and injustices of communities directly affected by the environmental, social and economic impacts of natural resource exploitation. In pursuing these interests, I also recognise my current positionality as a lawyer and a legal researcher based in a Global North institution and the privilege and ethical responsibility that come with it. Thankfully, we discover new thoughts every day through our respective African feminist journeys, and we learn to hold space for each other in love and respect.

Corinne:

My relationship with African feminism is a fine line between imposter syndrome and sisterhood. I am always amazed when my contribution is invited because I feel so far behind, so unfamiliar. And yet I also feel a kind of confidence, and even kinship, from the real connections with my African feminist friends.

For me, the process of decolonising anything is personal and political. It's personal because of my colonising ancestors; and growing up with all the advantages afforded to white people during apartheid in South Africa. It's loaded with a history of messianic narcissistic colonial patriarchal privilege and imperialism. My own father was a Maths genius with a narcissistic

personality disorder, who left academia to become a missionary in Zambia. That's where I was born, with those kinds of conditionings, in 1958. The journey out of that fundamentalist framework and into one that resonates with African feminism is a long story of questions, many moves and shifts, death, therapy, and dreams. The journey took me through marriage, being widowed, raising two children alone, teaching, NGO work, market research, fundraising for community projects, until I joined academia at the age of 50. And over the past few decades I have actively sought out the ideas that my people suppressed, as personal, political, and ethical acts of resistance.

I am drawn to African feminism not to exoticize, but to find our mutual humanity with an acute sense of my place in the circle. I make terrible mistakes when I forget who I am. I know I have made people flinch and hurt because of things I have said without thinking, and names I have or haven't called people in a moment of profound forgetfulness. I sometimes blank out of presence, and my silences or scripted responses to people and ideas is astonishing. In some uncomfortable ways I relish these dark moments because they show me the ghosts of my ancestry and how I knowingly or unwittingly protect or perpetuate them. I have to confront and own my whiteness while simultaneously screaming at it as though it is the other.

My journey into African feminism is a daily set of actions and reflections, checking for gestures or thoughts that are nostalgic for privilege and imperialism. And always, always in community with African feminists. I am deeply grateful to the now non-operational Women's Academic Solidarity Association on my campus that introduced me to African feminists in person, in activism and in theory and encouraged my own academic journey in a warm, critical alliance of scholars and friends. Since my belated and overdue entry into academia, I am drawn to thinkers and texts that are outside of the colonial and even the post-colonial, and sadly even marginalised by decolonial curricula. I have visceral reactions to traces of capitalist, colonial, patriarchal, Christian, dogma in texts or in authors. And sometimes I am offended or triggered by a tone and become over-sensitive about the writers that people quote or recommend, so there is that, and I also need to check my conscious reluctance to read "seminal" authors who are white and male. My strategy has been to try to find alternative thinkers who are African feminist, black feminist, black consciousness, or Africanist. I do this to try to understand the world from the perspective of African-ness and blackness. I follow threads and conversations that are sometimes elusive, to find deeper understanding. I could get back to engaging with the white and male voices that dominate the fields that interest me. But for the extended now, I want to remain as true as possible to learning a new orientation, a new language of ideas and thought with political and intellectual rigour. It's all I want to read, and there is so much! I want to honour these thinkers in my reference lists, use methodologies that are a praxis of African feminist principles, while fighting and exposing the internal ghostly tendencies to extract, to individualise, to appropriate, to dislocate people from their contexts.

The relationships I have with African feminists inspire me to believe that sustainable, respectful, socially just, collective humanity is possible, often by transgressing social and intellectual norms. As a theory, it cannot be separated from the lived realities of African women. And so my engagement with the theory, while it is sometimes a lonely journey on google scholar, thrives in community with others – whether social or academic, virtual or in person, it is these constant encounters with women who live and learn in a dynamic praxis of African feminist principles that lead me, invite me, even welcome me to a shared future.

Meeting [first author] through our supervisors' networks across continents has been an important introduction to diasporic African feminist networks. Moving beyond the known African feminist circle in South Africa, the collaboration with [first author] has been an opportunity to experience a home away from home, across borders, on different continents, to stretch and resonate with friendship and sisterhood.

3.   The African Feminist Workshop: Beginnings, Anticipations and Anxieties

The Scottish Graduate School of Social Science (SGSSS) 'Spring Into Methods' Workshops are annual events that host training programs on research methods across various disciplines. In 2021, when we set out to submit a proposal to facilitate one of these workshops, we were fully conscious of the fact that while there had been previous trainings on feminist research methods, ours would, if successful, be the very first African Feminisms workshop on the platform.

We were immensely excited about the fruitful possibilities that this opportunity presented, but also deeply burdened by the anxieties and the pitfalls of pedagogy which we so cautiously wanted to avoid. We recognised that by proposing to share knowledge on African Feminisms on a Western platform, to a partly Western audience, and sponsored by a Western research institution, that we would be confronted with many epistemological and pedagogical questions. One of the very first issues we had to contend with was the contextual relevance of our project within the particular time-scale frame, namely, of what use was African Feminisms to Global North-based researchers? And was it really necessary at all to teach African Feminisms to students in the Global North?

We were not naïve of the fact that for African women and other minoritized and marginalised groups, inclusion was not always a welcomed thing, especially in places that are not built as safe spaces to accommodate differences. Several decolonial scholarships have also cautioned about how the inclusion of indigenous knowledge systems or the making of such methods accessible to Western research institutions could of itself be a form of colonialism (Harding 2018; Grosfoguel 2020). There have been concerns about Western educational institutions and academics always craving for the 'next best/big thing' in a fast consumerist fashion and satisfying this devouring indulgence by enriching their pedagogies with knowledge from indigenous and other minoritized communities, all the while undermining and failing to give due recognition to the expertise of these communities (Grosfoguel 2020: 208). North-based scholars, many of whom had made profitable professional careers from studying, researching and teaching about Africa, African women and other marginalities had done so from a predominantly Eurocentric worldview which had contributed to the perpetuation of grossly distorted narratives about these peoples.

From another standpoint, we recognised that African Feminisms represented a critical scholarship that touched on a diversity of onto-epistemologies. African Feminisms hold such huge relevance on a broad, global and trans-disciplinary scale to be limited to one-dimensional discourses or solely on a singular continental platform. Thus, in designing our workshop, we were cautious not to perpetuate any exoticisation of African Feminisms as an indigenous knowledge system, but rather demonstrate how crucial it was for all critical scholarship- both for the continental researcher and Global-North based student on Africa.

To this end, we structured our workshop -from the presentations to the subsequent discussions- to address crucial epistemological and pedagogical questions such as: How is knowledge *from* African women represented? How is knowledge *about* African women constructed, disseminated and taught? What theoretical frameworks are used to conceptualise issues about African women and other marginalities? Who is funding and who is getting funded for such research? How is the information being gathered? What stories are being told, and what are being left out? Who is allowed to speak and to whom? What texts are informing the lessons being taught about African women and Africa in the classrooms? And what factors are determining the choice of these texts?

We were wholly submitted to the ethics of African feminisms in creating a safe space for discourse and a lasting community building. Like Obioma Nnaemeka's quilt symbolism, we imagined our workshop not as a metaphor for tokenised inclusivity, but as separate patches of individualities from different geographies and histories, finding community in a beautiful tapestry bound by respect, humility and mutually empowering intersections that would go on to nurture fruitful discussions (Nnaemeka 1994). For the first time in the history of the SGSSS 'Spring Into Methods' workshops, participants were not only going to be Scottish-based, but also researchers from across Ghana and South Africa. The opportunity to create this virtual community of scholars without borders was not taken for granted, and we acknowledged it for exactly what we had envisaged it to be- a powerful site of energy, spirituality, humility, agency, respect and constant reflexivity.

4. Facilitating the course as a praxis of African Feminist principles

Our aim with the course was to introduce African Feminist methodologies to PhD students across continents, and to use African Feminist principles as a guide for our pedagogy. We shared our thinking around the questions, what does African feminist pedagogy look like? What content to include? How to present it to and engage with such a diverse and scattered group? We wanted the theory, pedagogy, and the curriculum to be mutually constitutive, in a process of reshaping each other as the preparation and presenting of the course unfolded.

Watkins and Mortimer (1999) define the concept of pedagogy as a suitably complex model which specifies relations between its elements: the teacher, the classroom or other context, content, and view of learning and learning about learning'. They draw a distinction between the academic model of pedagogy and the practitioner's model, where the latter is underpinned by the dynamic interrelationships between all the role-players involved in the learning context and the numerous influences on learning. For an African feminist pedagogy, this interrelationship manifests in the development of growth and collective care as a pillar of education, and since feminism values community and equality, the building of a trusting environment where all members are respected and have equal opportunities for participation is at its core.

In this regard, Awino Okech's(2020) conceptual use of feminist epistemic communities in demonstrating what decolonisation of educational projects should look like is of critical relevance. Okech employed Nelson's (1990) feminist epistemic communities to refer to groups or communities who know and are epistemic agents, and where community is centred as a way of thinking through how epistemic agents come to be by providing communal standards of evidence. She also referenced Grasswick(2004)'s 'individuals-in-communities', which rather

than communities, enables feminists to consider relations between communities, individual knowers and knowledge-seeking practices. In our case, the Covid-19 pandemic, as harsh and unwelcome as it was, presented an opportunity for us to re-imagine communality through an African feminist epistemology, which as Okech observes, is not only read as fixed groups existing in a physical location, but can include other realms with specific sets of actions and the capacity to be momentary or sustained through virtual connections. As she rightly puts it, 'It is not the physicality of a community that makes it real; it is the fact that across space and time there is a shared sense of politics, trajectories and scholarships in conversation with and attuned to the question: who knows?'

As already mentioned, the course ran as the Covid-19 pandemic gripped the globe. Remote and online learning became the opportunity and challenge for course presenters everywhere. The opportunity included the increased access to international groups and seminars/talks/workshops/webinars as long as there was a digital connection. We could welcome course participants and presenters from at least two continents without them having to travel or pay. This is in stark contrast to ways in which African scholars are often prevented from participating in conferences in the west because of financial reasons, or spurious reasons for rejecting visa applications – leading to marginalising and extractivising situations where conferences will talk about Africa without Africans being present. Most notably this was the case for the recent International AIDS Conference (IAC 2022) hosted in Canada, and where the visas of hundreds of African, Latin American and Middle Eastern delegates were disgracefully denied "on superfluous grounds". People from the Global South, most affected by and with good contributions to make, from attending (Mwareya 2022). The challenges included making the adjustment to a screen instead of a room, icons instead of real bodies. We provided data to those who needed it and the SSGSSS course operated with an online platform where we could load all our resources (power-point slides, articles, links) and use a forum chat group. Spread over 5 days, the course consisted of a 2 hour zoom session each day.

We had around 40 candidates evenly spread over both continents, who applied with a brief outline of their fields of interest, and why they were interested in the course. Getting to know who our participants were was crucial for us as facilitators, as it provided the very relevant entry point into building a meaningful connection through validating their personal experiences. From her experience in teaching African feminisms to a predominantly Western audience over the years Nnaemeka (1994) commends the act of knowing, and not just developing an assumed knowledge of the sisterhood, in order to teach them. She observed that many Western students who flocked to courses on African women did so for many reasons, such as the desire to learn about African women because it is in vogue, i.e., the right thing to do in this day and age of cultural literacy and pluralism. Whatever the reason, it is generally known that many researchers come into these courses with very entrenched expectations and preconceived notions. Teaching through an African feminist pedagogy therefore requires retooling ourselves through knowledge of our material and learners, in a way that make great demands on our energy, time and dedication. Thus, the request for applicants to provide a brief outline of their expectations was a crucial first step in gaining a glimpse into their specific individualities and multidisciplinary backgrounds from which we would build participatory discussions.

The principles of African feminist theory were the content of the course, and also suggested ways that we could set up and present the course. In grounding our workshop in an African feminist pedagogy, we aimed for the content and delivery of our presentations to be reflective of a critical engagement and a transformational learning experience for everyone involved. In an African feminist pedagogy, power and control are shared between the learners and teachers and the teaching environment becomes an active and collaborative context where risk-taking and intellectual adventure are encouraged, power is viewed as energy, capacity and potential. Based on this, we were certain that we would come out of this exercise as transformed and as educated as the course participants.

African feminist pedagogy, as we set out to reflect in our workshop, strives to remove or reduce hierarchies in the classroom as a way of uniting theory with praxis to teaching and engaging with students. In a feminist pedagogy, the connections built are meant to challenge the traditional educational approaches where the teacher is perceived as an omniscient and authoritative figure and the learner as a passive recipient of knowledge. Accordingly, we re-organised the power hierarchies in the course set-up with the understanding that our participants were not tabula rasas where information from us was to be deposited (Freire 1972) but as active agents. In contrast to Western individualism and an emphasis on rationality, and the Cartesian separation of the mind from the body, African feminist theory sees knowledge as also embodied; spiritual; always political; and oriented towards the collective (Wane 2008, Moletsane 2015, Ntseane 2011). Working with a diverse group of strangers, with different locations, origins, fields of interest, values, experience, language, needs, aspirations, we did not want to reduce these to common denominators. The brief introductory profiles of our participants gave us a clue as to their different levels of familiarity with and exposure to African Feminisms and Afrocentric research methodologies. We therefore drew on African Feminist ideas to emphasise connections and interactions as vital to the course and each of the participants, so as to expose and embrace differences in order that we could learn from and teach each other.

This disruption of hierarchies is another kind of scholar-activism intrinsic to African feminist scholarship. In one of our sessions, a participant asked whether African feminists have to double as activists, and whether our research has to necessarily be geared towards making a change in society. As Adomako Ampofo puts it, the immediacy of issues that face us, the position of women and the terrain we fight compels us, and for most of us, we cannot afford not to be activists. African feminist scholars are strongly committed to teaching, research and activism and the division between scholarship and activism often seem artificial (Adomako Ampofo, 2010). In a world that remains divided along tensed geopolitical lines and conflicting interests that determines who is a knower and what is worthy of being known, African scholars do not have the luxury of being mere onlookers. We continue to push the frontiers of limitations constantly placed before us by resisting the urge of Northern researchers and funding agencies to cast us as mere empiricists and echoes of thoughts emanating from the Global North (Mkandawire 1997). One of the ways to pursue this is by interrupting, if not disrupting and redefining epistemologies and pedagogies on African women and other marginalised peoples in the intertwined work of our teaching, research and activism. As Charmaine Pereira puts it, feminist knowledge is not about adding to progressive knowledge, but about transforming and invigorating it (2002).

There were many opportunities for dialogue and connection in smaller groups, which would give everyone the opportunity to bring our whole selves and contribute to a shared African feminist orientation to knowledge-making. Patricia Hill Collins (2003, 60) reminds us that "a primary epistemological assumption underlying the use of dialogue in assessing knowledge claims is that connectedness rather than separation is an essential component of the knowledge validation process." For an emphasis on community and communal knowledge-making in the theory to make sense, it needed to be practically demonstrated in how we opened the conversation, and how each member of the community experienced the day's work. For it to be a praxis, the experience would expand what we know and think about the theory. Part of decentering power in a feminist pedagogy involves active learning, activist projects and feminist assessment practices. Garber and Gaudeluis (1992) advise that methods such as active learning and activist projects can assist learners to collaboratively create knowledge, question oppressive structures and participate as agents of social change. An African feminist pedagogy therefore empowers learners by offering opportunities for active learning through critical thinking and self- analysis, and the balancing of power between the teacher and learners. This sharing of power creates space for dialogue which reflects the multiple voices and realities of the learners, a more equal position between the teacher and their learners, the learners as knowledge producers and the decentralisation of the traditional understanding of learning and assessment (Robertson 1994).

We demonstrated this active learning process through the two-hour zoom sessions which were set up in such a way that there was a balance between activities. We started each session with 10-minute break-out rooms of 4-6 people, to meet, introduce themselves to each other, share their fields of interest, and as the course progressed, share their concerns, questions, or comments on the previous day's work. The groups were randomised in each session, to give people as wide an exposure to different people as possible. We encouraged them to open their videos for these meetings, to see whole, unique, sovereign and relationally entangled individuals. The open-ended introductory breakout session was an important signifier of the embodiment of knowledge, and connectedness, across differences and locations. Each morning it would be a different combination of people, and this was a way for us to facilitate and establish an expanding community of people who were exposed to an increasing range of embodied ideas, and applications of the theory. The second breakout room session took place after a presentation with supportive power-point slides of about 15 – 20 minutes by one of the facilitators. In the second breakout session of between 10 and 15 minutes, a question would be asked for the groups to consider, based on an aspect of the presentation. They were told that two random groups would be asked to give feedback on their group discussions once they returned, while the other groups would be invited to summarise their discussions on the zoom chat function. Upon return to the large group, two groups reported back, followed by further 10–15-minute presentation from one of us. There was then a 3rd break-out session, again for around 10-15 minutes with 2 randomised reports afterwards and the remainder reporting on the zoom chat function.

Although it is inevitable that some of the break-out group sessions exhausted what they wanted to say to each other before their time was up, most of these sessions were vibrant, interesting spaces that encouraged connection beyond the content of each presentation. People found allies who were doing similar work to their own or were introduced to new ideas and experiences.

The vast majority of candidates' feedback after the course indicated their appreciation for the break-out rooms and wished there were more or longer group sessions. They found them "collaborative and stimulating" and as one candidate said, "I think the networking and hearing about others' challenges is comforting (sounds terrible but you then realise that you are not alone which motivates you to keep going). We also discuss an alternative research method so there was learning happening in the breakout groups." (SGSSS candidate 2021). Many indicated in feedback that they would have enjoyed more interaction in the larger group sessions, and while this is often difficult to manage, it is a suggestion we will take forward to similar courses in the future.

What we did find though is that the zoom chat space became an additional space for conversations to run parallel to the presentations taking place: there candidates, in real time, could ask questions, make comments, provide references, and raise concerns. It also became a rich aspect of this knowledge-making platform, and as one candidate noted, "The online chat was sometimes distractingly interesting (and fun)" (SGSSS candidate 2021). As far as possible, and with the help of our technical assistant, we addressed the things that came up in the chat, but for future reference could have made time to ensure that each question and concern brought up there was adequately addressed in the larger group. The chats were saved as resources for the course participants and presenters. In the first day's chat, two of the group report-backs is an example of how the pedagogy – connecting across difference to make the theory living, contextual and relevant – could be a praxis:

> "to Everyone : Group 4 - We discussed so much! 1) How everyone has a unique and differential experience, African feminisms allow us to recognise this. 2) AF allows us to apply different theories and analyse people through a lens that is more applicable to them (Zoom chat, 10.06am, 19/04/21)"

> "to Everyone : Group 7: It began with saying as much as we 'talk about the need for alternatives'— African feminism is and offers alternatives, and gives us way to put into practice those alternatives. African feminism offers an embodied knowledge— it is creative, communal, relational, dependent, experiential. We are the knowledge we can learn from— knowledge is a practice, as opposed to an object... The powerful knowledge we can learn is a different way of seeing and being in the world. Knowledge is not goal-orientated—and therefore linear. From African feminism, we learn knowledge is a collaborative, inclusive process (Zoom chat, 10.33am, 19/04/21)"

Our presentations required us to ask of ourselves, as Linda has indicated, "How is knowledge *from* African women represented? How is knowledge *about* African women constructed, disseminated and taught?" We also tried to enhance the embodiment of knowledge and encourage engagement, in that our PowerPoint slides had pictures of each of the African feminists we introduced, their own words on the topics, and comprehensive reference lists so that candidates could follow up afterwards with articles that interested them. All our slides, references and where possible, zoom recordings, were made available on the SGSSS online platform so that candidates could download these for reference after the course. Each of the five sessions developed content around an aspect of research methodology.

4.1 Day One: Introducing the theory

The first was an overview of what African Feminism is and included some of the principles of the theory and methodology that are alternative to Western ideas about knowledge: the intersectionality of oppressions (Tamale 2020); communal orientation (Graham in Tamale 2020; Wane 2008); and spirituality, understood as connectedness (Motsemme 2017; Ntseane 2011). It also located African feminism in relation to white/western feminism and Black feminism. Here, the benefits of having African women as part of the presenter and participant mix with western/white women, cannot be overstated. It encouraged a talking "with" rather than "about" African women's experiences and ideas. And in some ways, it shifted the traditional and colonial power dynamics of Africa in the relation to the west – from being object of research to subject and custodian of knowledge and knowledge-making.

4.2 Day Two: Navigating power and positionality

The second day looked at positionality of lead-researcher, and how to navigate power in the process. Positionality is to notice the power that is held (or not) based on the politics of social hierarchies. This session started with Dube's (1999) storytelling of the popular Setswana myth about the hawk and the hen. It drew linkages between the commonalities of this myth and similar folklores in Ghana as illustrative of the pervasive coloniality of knowledge and asymmetry of power in academia as a site of knowledge production.

Scholars employing African feminisms, whether located in Africa or elsewhere across the globe are required to constantly reflect on our positions of privilege and power in some contexts as well as our positions of disadvantage and on the margins in others. Bennet (2010) found theorisation of feminist research ethics around positionality, self-location and self-reflexivity provocative in its insistence on the centrality of the privileged representing voice to the significance of the text. She however remained interested in exploring research as a process encompassing the possibility of multiple deictic positions for those involved. This was based on her belief, which we share, that an approach to research which acknowledges the mobility of those involved, whether as participants or researchers, may reflect more accurately the reality of the conditions under which feminist research is negotiated. Research may be a dirty word for most indigenous people (Smith,2012) but such an approach as described above is helpful in transforming the definition of research, moving from a primary reference to a dynamic between researcher and subject participants towards a mesh of interaction (textual, communicative, organisational and individual) which helps in uncovering new information (Bennet 2010).

The question of positionality was nuanced by the diversity of the group, in that African women, along with white/western women had to navigate power relationships which were articulated in multiple ways at different levels in every research project. Linda shared her experience of being the daughter of a miner, being born in a mining town, and yet being an outsider in her research field which looks at women miners in relation to the law. Being an insider or outsider is therefore not always a clearly defined, fixed state because its boundaries are often blurred by the constant ebb of our changing presences and individualities. However, no matter where we stand on the positionality spectrum, African feminisms demand a humility that can only derive from being intentionally reflexive of our actions, intentions, privileges, encounters and the cultural baggage with which we come into the field of study. Therefore to the question, 'Does

African feminisms deter the studying and teaching of a culture as an outsider?', we reference the words of Nnaemeka(1994: 55) thus:

> Can we teach as outsiders? Oh, yes, we can. The pertinent question, however, remains: How do we learn and teach as outsiders? In studying and teaching another culture, the teacher finds himself or herself situated at the congruence of different and often contradictory cultural currents. This point of convergence where the teacher stands has its privileges and rewards, but it is also fraught with danger. To survive at this precarious position requires a large dose of humility.

African feminism therefore gladly welcomes outsiders but with the demand that researchers entering into such unfamiliar terrains maintain a conscious reflection of their positionality and the humility to allow the field to teach and challenge their preconceived notions. From their black feminist perspectives, Dillard and Neal (2020) advised that as researchers, living ubuntu also asks us to be answerable to the central question, whether we are willing to learn about our research communities 'in the humble state of a student?'

The unfortunate thing however is that when it comes to Africa, African women and other minoritized communities, it is our experience that many outsiders prove too impatient to claim expertise. All it takes is a few weeks tour of African communities and the Western scholar is suddenly an expert on the subject. This practice is sadly sustained by Western institutions that are quick to give intellectual, logistical and financial platforms to such 'Africa experts', while placing stiff requirements for the teaching of their own cultures and literature (Nnaemeka,1994).

With the aid of Akan Adinkra symbols from Ghana, this session introduced participants to African indigenous philosophies as an emphasis to the fact that indigenous forms of knowledge are not only a historical task, but a contemporary creative project to grasp how pedagogical and epistemic communities emerge in response to the demands of the moment. This is an important aspect of the course, because African feminisms seek to work with, rather than in, a community, to transform and liberate the community, rather than benefit the individual researcher. Because the West's dealing with Africa has tended to be brutally imperial and extractivist, the theory counters this with the wisdom of *ubuntu*, that argues that we are constituted by each other and so cannot know individual benefit without it being mutually experienced.

One of the Zoom break-out room reports helps to explain how people grappled with these ideas of positionality:

> we had a beautiful discussion and kind of I feel quite a lot came up with kind of the ongoing interrogation of positionality and that it's an ongoing project. We talked about privilege and how it's often so entrenched that it becomes invisible …And then we also talked about the challenges of being outsider or insider … I feel like I missed so many different angles and what we talked about but it was, it was a really cool discussion to be a part of and to listen in on (Group 4 report-back, 20/04/21)

The take-away for everyone, and which also informed the ongoing course, was a sense of humility and willingness to contribute, as part of the research process as well as the course participation.

4.3 Day Three: Working "with" rather than "in" a community

The topic on the third day was about the positionality of the research community in relation to the researcher's topic and intentions. Queeneth Mkabela's (2005) radical Africanist research methodology argues strongly for working with a community, so that they steer the direction of the research and decide on its dissemination. The implication is that a commitment to the community is prioritised over a commitment to obtaining a PhD. These ideas are so different from ways in which traditional research and pedagogic practices are formulated around achieving outcomes decided in advance, and well beyond how we are required to think through ethical concerns to obtain ethical approval for our studies. This has overlaps with bell hook's radical pedagogy which argues that the aim of liberatory teaching is to establish democratic ideals in the classroom, with different power arrangements than is usual with the teacher holding most of it. She argues that as teachers we must be willing to alter our practices creatively (hooks 1994). In the chat, many questions and comments came up, as we all grappled with these ideas and pushed through discomfort levels to find each other. As presenters and facilitators, it was important to suspend our own truths and to encourage democratic ideals where every participant's contribution is valued. By now many were speaking and posting about their own research and sharing questions and responding to these in the chat as well as in the break-out rooms.

4.4 Day Four: What counts as research?

The fourth day dealt with various techniques for data collection that African feminists propose and promote, which led to vibrant discussions as people shared their work and questioned how to adapt their methods and techniques. What emerged from this discussion was the frustration of working in the academy that has strict conventions around what counts as valid research, and we discussed how to challenge this. From a break-out room report back, this suggestion came forward, that:

> We formulate a statement against HE institutions' restrictive approaches to implementation of "alternative" methodologies. HE institutions, whether intentionally or not, do damage to the thinking of students by restricting teachings on ontological and epistemological stances to existing institutionalised paradigms. The work to unpick and unlearn those ontological and epistemological stances that have become ingrained in. (Zoom Group report, 22 April 2021)

This suggestion indicates to us that participants were able to move beyond their own research interests to find the structural impediments to doing African feminist research – and suggesting the kind of activism that would let us address this. Earlier in the course we had stressed that a feature of African feminism is its link to activism, and that it encouraged us to challenge the power structures that limit the voices of the marginalised. Here we saw this idea being

manifested. A further suggestion emerged to continue our collaborations beyond the course, in a regular reading group, so that we could continue to challenge and support each other.

4.5 Day Five: A moral orientation

Our final day came too soon. We looked at the process of obtaining ethical approval, and this was nuanced by ways in which African feminism challenges us to a moral orientation beyond the bureaucracy of the university. We explicated the different kinds of gatekeepers of morality and how "ethics" can also be used to maintain harmful socio-cultural practices that oppress African women. Chilisa and Ntseane (2010) for instance explored how requirements of anonymity can protect perpetrators of sexual violence and the tensions of navigating such ethical dilemmas as an African feminist researcher. Interrogating the inadequacies of institutional ethics guidelines in protecting indigenous communities and formerly colonised societies of the Global South from harmful and unethical research practices is central to decolonisation (Smith, 2012). African feminist and other decolonial scholars from the continent have in more recent times taken a strong stand against unethical research practices conducted in African communities by Global North scholars, choosing not to even debate the agency of Africans as legitimate arbiters of their own narratives (Mohammed, 2022; Odanga, 2022). The practice of parachuting into vulnerable communities with pretensions of saviourism, only to extract, claim and erase the collective communal efforts of these often over researched communities is strongly denounced (Sukarieh and Tannock,2012). In our session, we discussed how African feminisms can guide our ethics of research towards co-production of knowledge that centres local agendas and perspectives.

5.   Amplifying African feminist scholarship and voices in pedagogy

A key aspect of decolonial thought involves interrogating the coloniality of knowledge, which includes epistemological questions, the politics of knowledge production as well as questioning who generates which knowledge for what purpose and from where (Quijano 2007). African women and scholars from the Global South are all too familiar with the systemic marginalisation, invisibility and erasures that are embedded in institutional practices, pedagogy and knowledge production. Okech (2020) employed the notion of failure -as manifested in neglect and dereliction of duty to examine one of such structural challenges, i.e., the lack of critical citation praxis.

Resistance to these erasures is not new and are part of a long line of conversations raised in black feminist thoughts since it creates an inequality in higher education (bell hooks 1994; Desiree-Lewis,2008; Mupotsa & Lennon Mhishi, 2008). The lenses through which our knowledge of the world is framed determines how our worldview is constituted. Therefore, who is left out of the syllabus silences alternative ways of writing and presenting knowledge that is not viewed as theoretical (hooks, 1994). This failure translates into what is understood as knowledge, and how it is distributed and consumed. It determines how different epistemic traditions, often Western epistemic traditions, are automatically vested with authority and credibility while non-Western epistemologies are othered as not rigorous enough (Moletsane 2015). This hierarchy of knowledges manifests even in the purportedly 'decolonised' modules on African studies and other non-Western oriented courses which still maintain reading lists from a predominantly all-white scholarship. In such circumstances, the writings of African or minoritized women are often thrown into the course syllabus to create the semblance of a

multicultural course. Such tokenistic inclusions in the syllabus hardly ever works in speaking to the other chosen materials (Nnaemeka 1994).

Accordingly, the Eurocentricism that continues to shape knowledge production and transfer processes sits at the heart of demands for decolonisation. Redressing these failures of critical citation begins with recognising that knowledge production processes are not value free, and any curriculum design process that does not account for this is engaged in uncritical citation praxis (Okech,2020). African feminisms provide an approach to break this cycle of erasure and invisibility as it provides the tools to recognise the importance of the changing role and authority of the teacher, the value of personal and professional experience and the need for a major shift between the affective and intellectual in the classroom (Schoeman, 2015).

In the spirit of this African feminist tradition, our course presentations centred African feminist scholarships and highlighted how these illuminate pedagogical and theoretical imperatives that must be considered in the decolonisation discourse. We highlighted the works of social media activisms such as **#citeblackwomen** which highlights how the failure of citation affects black women writers. Our presentations emphasised at every turn, that African women are not mere objects to be spoken for or about, but that African women's scholarship abounds across disciplines, and these need to be fully represented in the design of curricula. In doing so, we also recognise that addressing these fundamental structural deficit goes beyond merely reviewing syllabi or solely focusing on reading lists. The decolonisation project which underpins African feminist pedagogy does not solely focus on reading lists but an overhauling rethinking of how teaching is done in higher education. Consequently, the idea is not to remove the canonical texts from the syllabi, but to include non-Western works that speak to these texts. As Nnaemeka(1994) argues, this is 'not about increasing 'diverse' voices in the reading list, but turning the knowledge and learning process on its head.' Teachers employing African feminist pedagogy must overcome this difficulty by painstakingly and judiciously selecting materials that build a balanced syllabus.

6. Mobilising resistances, forging communities

The pedagogy we used to introduce the principles of African feminist research methodology challenged us as presenters to bring our whole selves to the process – our vulnerabilities, our questions, our interests, and to share these humbly and in such a way that others would do the same. In this way, a communal knowledge-making process was set up. It continues to the present, with an online African feminist reading group that emerged from the course and continues to inspire and support those who access it. Many fruitful long term transnational collaborations have been established by African feminist scholars worldwide. These friendships and collaborations are testament to the possibilities of positive benefits that can be derived from building North-South and South-South connections in teaching and research. Adomako-Ampofo quoted the *Dagaare* adage that *the sweat of one person has significance only when it serves everybody* to demonstrate the need for collaboration and mentoring each other in nurturing the kind of strength needed to dismantle the patriarchal structures that oppress women. As she rightfully noted, space-sharing is a feminist thing to do. However, these collaborative efforts are often constrained by the authoritarianism of Global North researchers, betrayals, gatekeeping and other forms of epistemic violence that keeps African

feminist scholars disincentivised from, and cautious of building and maintaining such connections (Adomako Ampofo 2010).

 In our African feminist community, we constantly reflect on the character of solidarity, and identity as a basis for political action and as grounds for engagement with African feminisms. These synergies are made possible by conscious efforts on the part of every group member to construct for ourselves a safe space to grow and constantly reflect and interrogate our biases, privileges, struggles and joys. This reading group represents a vital aspect of our critical pedagogy. The lessons to be drawn from African feminist epistemic communities is the function that critical pedagogy in a hostile context serves as a much-needed political intervention. Bennet argues for the evolution of methodologies and pedagogies that respond to our contexts that dialogue with worlds we want to change (Bennet 2008). Reading groups have been an essential part of building communities in pursuit of change that is rooted in revolutionary theory (hooks 2003). Such groups offer an attentiveness to conscientisation where members can understand the root causes of and learn how to unsettle the power hierarchies which African feminisms grapple with. From the SGSSS sponsored African Feminisms workshop, we have carved for ourselves our own version of African feminist epistemic community. We have from this created a safe space where we celebrate our joys and individual journeys with African feminisms, consume knowledge and have radical engagement with the scholarship. Our virtual fortnightly meetings are therefore a testament to how feminist epistemic communities can generate exchanges and emergent ways of knowing, sharing, teaching and learning as well as conceptualising African feminist experiences.

7. Conclusion

Across higher education all over the world, the decolonisation movement calls for interrogating Eurocentrism and re-centering the longstanding debate about how non-Western epistemologies are viewed and valued (Tamale 2020). More and more feminist scholars are calling out the convergence of corporatised, neo-liberal and marketized higher education environments that foments structural inequalities and exclusionary politics in higher education Knowles 2021; Tamale 2020; Moletsane 2015). These decolonisation debates provide a return to feminist pedagogies that challenge the traditional and controversial power structures and offer nuanced understanding of teaching and researching cultures as part of thinking decolonially.

As we have shown in this paper, our SGSSS-sponsored African Feminist workshop demonstrates the possibility of African feminist epistemic communities that build individuals-in-community to facilitate the co-creation of knowledge production spaces which are generative rather than extractive. Through this, we boldly declare our aspiration for the inclusion of African feminist pedagogy as a mainstream framing in all higher education across Africa and the rest of the world as a way to make sense of and identify ways to transform intersectional exclusionary practices. Our course represents one of many exercises that provides the 'political punch' which African Feminisms provide in the much-needed policy interventions to pedagogy, research and fieldwork (Tamale 2006).

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5.5. Paper 5: Knowles, C. (2022) Pushing against conventions: an African feminist contribution to knowledge-making

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This final paper of the collection brings together the threads of the PhD process. It looks at three knowledge-making platforms: the PhD research project; the African Feminist methodology course; and the Politics 3 course on African Feminist theory that I ran in the second term of 2022. It uses an African feminist frame to see how all three platforms use the tools of reflection, and communal knowledge-making, as strategies for inclusive, sustainable education. The Politics 3 course I ran was an opportunity to put into practice what I had learnt from the PhD project and the African Feminist methodology course, and as such, it is a praxis of the theory and of the arguments put forward in the other papers. The paper was submitted to *Gender and Education* in September. Seeing no movement on the Taylor and Francis Author portal for the site, I emailed an enquiry to the editor in December. The editor responded that "we can confirm that the paper is under review – this means that the editors see potential in the work, and have accepted it for reviewing" (private email, 15 December 2022). They went on to explain that they have had difficulties finding two reviewers, but were optimistic about completing this round of reviewing by February 2023.

The Paper:

In Review: *Gender and Education*

Pushing against conventions: An African feminist contribution to knowledge-making

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Pushing against conventions: an African feminist contribution to knowledge-making

Abstract: Knowledge-making in universities is shaped by conventions that neglect and/or suppress less conventional kinds of knowledge that may hold viable solutions to society's problems. Knowledge always has political interests, and close-up research on knowledge-making can liberate marginalised ideas, by exposing how they push against and beyond conventional perspectives and mutations. African feminist theoretical ideas are used to examine three different platforms for knowledge-making: one research project and two courses that were taught. The African feminist praxis is demonstrated through two main processes – reflection and communal knowledge-making – which infuse the methodology and pedagogy of the three platforms. The article shows how they transgress the conventions to bring about inclusive and generative knowledge-making. They provide strategies for future research and teaching experiments, demonstrating ways in which African Feminism can have transformative effects beyond its own margins.

Key words: African feminism; praxis; reflection; communal-knowledge-making; pedagogy

1. The overall aim of the article

The article reflects on and proposes three different knowledge platforms, as praxes of African feminist inspired knowledge-making. In some ways all of them transgress some of the conventions around knowledge. For instance, the conventional binary between research and teaching in academia creates a hierarchy that values research over teaching (Chen 2015), while African feminist principles apply equally to teaching and research. The binary between the individual and the collective is a western, neoliberal idea that singles out individuals for a "meritocracy" that not only fails to acknowledge the ways in which privilege operates to favour one group over the other, but also negates an African orientation to the collective worldview (Wane 2008: 188).. The binary between mind and body neglects and dismisses how knowledge is embodied, and spiritual ways of knowing (Motsemme 2017). The platforms I propose here are a praxis of African feminist theoretical ideas and the methodology, ethics and orientation they inspire. The lens sharpens the focus and signals strategies for future knowledge-making experiments. African feminist inspired knowledge-

making is marginal and unconventional in western knowledge productions (Moletsane 2015:42). But it can inspire and liberate knowledge-makers who are not necessarily recognised or welcomed in conventional theories, teaching and research.

Knowledge-making in universities is shaped by conventions that deliberately or inadvertently suppress less conventional kinds of knowledge. Moletsane explains that 'there are various practices that tend to legitimise particular knowledges, rendering them of most worth—while marginalising others' (2015:42). In this paper I argue that knowledge always has political interests, and close-up research on knowledge-making can liberate marginalised and lesser-known ideas, by exposing how they push against and beyond conventional perspectives and mutations. The purpose is to examine the moving parts and minutiae of knowledge-making processes from an insider perspective, to contest what counts as legitimate, relevant knowledge. The aim is to demonstrate close-up research, and African feminism, as transformative beyond their own margins

2. A brief critical engagement with literature

The choice of theory is deliberate and political, in line with Henry's argument that 'Black womanists/feminists who write about their classroom practice show that their pedagogy flows out of a political commitment that informs their curricula and classroom interactions' (2005: 95). Students protests in South Africa in 2015/2016 were a 'rejection of a "Eurocentric epistemic" which legitimates global northern knowledges at the expense of global southern ones' (Hlengwa 2021, npn). Knowledge-making (like the mentoring programme that Hlengwa critiques), is 'embedded within institutional cultures of daily experience'. University cultures are increasingly shaped by a neoliberalism that influences the kinds of knowledge, and the theories, that are valued, published, and taught (Baatjes 2005). The neoliberal ethos affects the operation of activism against its values too. Ahikire argues that over the decades, in pockets of collaborative resistance and sisterhood, African feminist struggles have brought about many gains across the continent in a number of areas, 'including governance, health, education and domestic relations' (Ahikire 2014:9). However, she argues that these gains become their own nemesis, because struggles for liberation and justice become sanitised and mainstreamed, emptied of political content in a neoliberal dispensation. Similarly, universities now measure equity and transformation numerically and with the logic of bureaucratic and economic feasibility. The decolonisation of the curriculum (a powerful motivation for 2015/2016 student protests), is a deafening silence of actual African feminist voices. In my experience for the last 12 years of teaching in learning in a South African university, they are missing from the theorists we read and use and quote and reference in our curricula and articles (even in books on decolonisation -see Knowles 2021b). They are missing from what is usual and conventional in many universities.

African Feminisms foreground ethical, spiritual, collective approaches to knowledge-making in diverse ways, and promote principles that do not align with conventional, colonial, neoliberal, patriarchal, individualistic practices that continue to influence how we make knowledge in universities (see Tamale 2020; Moletsane 2015; African Feminist Forum 2009). For instance, communal knowledge-making is encouraged as a sustainable alternative to individualism (Ntseane 2011; Adomako Ampofo 2010). When working *with* a community, rather than *in* a community, the collective world view dissolves individual researcher aspirations to facilitate a platform for communal knowledge-making where the community devises its direction according to issues that are salient to the collective (Knowles and Mensah 2022; Mkabela 2005). Connectedness and relationship are advocated rather than

researcher and teacher neutrality (Mkabela 2005; Motsemme 2017). As I will argue, working *with* a community means that the lead researcher/teacher is compelled to constantly navigate power positions to enable the authentic engagement of the community. This requires a specific kind of orientation that is fluidly responsive to context and the people she works with; and thinking in terms of the other as mutually constituted, or as a collective, challenges how we think about personal ambition and achievement as learning or research goals (Collins 2003).

3. <u>Introducing the knowledge-making platforms</u>

The three knowledge-making platforms that are used to expose the workings of an African feminist orientation are all connected in some way to teaching and research. The first platform was established as part of my collaborative and co-designed PhD project (see Knowles 2021) *With Dreams in our Hands* (WDIOH). The project has been a way to re-connect with former students in a knowledge-making project using values of community, care, and recognition. It consists of a group of 24 former UCKAR[15] humanities extended programme students who responded to a call I put out on Facebook in 2020. It has different phases, and each one was co-devised with them – coming up with topics, responding to them, responding to each other's work, analysing the submissions, and disseminating findings were/are all undertaken in a collaborative, communal way. It builds on relationships between us that began when I taught them for their first. Because of Covid-19, Zoom workshops had to replace what could have been in person weekend workshops, challenging how we could connect, find a collective world view, and make knowledge that we believe is a significant contribution to how we think about teaching and learning.

The second platform is an African feminist methodology course (AFMC), co-devised and run in 2021 with Linda Mensah, a Ghanaian African feminist friend and colleague, in response to a call from the Scottish Graduate School of Social Science (see Knowles and Mensah 2022c for details on this). Our successful proposal asked that we be allowed to invite an equal number of African PhD candidates to the course. The course ran for 5 days, with a 2 hour zoom session each day, and a Moodle[16] platform for further engagements, readings and recordings. About 38 candidates attended the course, and the contribution to knowledge-making that emerged from it emphasised the value of shared ideas and communal approaches, amongst people from different continents and disciplines.

The third platform is an unplanned opportunity where I was privileged to teach a Politics 3 course on African feminist theory in 2022, *The Politics of knowledge: African Feminisms contribution to pedagogy, research and activism* (POK). The course was run daily for 7 weeks, with a sit down in person exam at the end of it. The invitation came when the African scholar who was meant to teach it, could not obtain visas in time. Though I had never taught in that discipline or at that level before, I accepted the invitation because it held the potential for me to push myself out of my comfort zone, and to apply the principles of African feminist pedagogy that I have been deeply immersed in for the past few years, and practice communal knowledge-making in a significant way. This would be attempted with students who, in their

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[15] UCKAR: Rhodes University was renamed the University Currently Known As Rhodes (UCKAR) by protesters and allies during the 2015/16 student protests, who called for a name-change. In 2018, following a decision by the Rhodes University Council, all consultative process around renaming were halted and the university continues to be named "Rhodes". See Daniels 2015 for the argument to change the name.

[16] Moodle is an online platform which allows universities to place and co-ordinate all resources for teaching and learning

final under-graduate year, were experiencing face to face lectures for the first time due to pandemic lock-down situations in 2020 and 2021. Connection and relationships would be attempted with students who did not know me at all and barely knew each other. It would be the actions beyond the words that exposed the challenges and potentials of African feminist pedagogy with consequences for the students and for me.

In each case, African feminist principles compel a caring, embodied, and accountable orientation that goes well beyond the ethical compliance protocols that universities use to safeguard and guide these kinds of engagements. And in each case my social location as a white, privileged woman is deliberately problematised, and requires rigorous reflection.

4. Principles and praxes of engagement

My struggle and experience with resisting and transforming the problematic conventions of knowledge-making has involved intellectual, emotional and political labour that requires more than identifying what must be changed. It also needs the tools for change, to make knowledge that is generative, liberating, inspiring. It needs acute awareness of the power dynamics at play in research and pedagogy and their institutional arrangements; and it needs the roadmap for a re-orientation, starting with a sense of one's physical and spiritual location in the journey to transformation and decolonisation. In this section, the African feminist principles that frame my analysis of the knowledge-making platforms will be explained and applied. The understanding is that theory does not need to give the answers as much as it must inspire and facilitate different questions, co-produced, inclusive and sustainable. Central to my methodological and pedagogical framing, the *process* of engaging in "decolonial" research on knowledge-making and pedagogy is as important as the production. The imprint of Western, patriarchal, capitalist ideas that frame so much of what and who and how we teach, and how we conduct research are powerful influences, and even, as mentioned, determine the kinds of resistance that are possible in the university. To counter the perpetuation of knowledge-making that deliberately leaves people out, I use African and Black feminist theory in this case as activism, to subvert, divert, and transgress knowledge-making conventions, and generate networks of knowledge-making that make new pathways.

There are many African feminist principles that infuse my teaching and research, and are embedded in how I work. In this article I discuss two of these principles to show how I work with them, and to reveal new pathways: **Reflection** - politics and positionality; and **communal knowledge-making** – care and spirituality. I reflect here on the theory and praxes of these two ideas on the three knowledge-making platforms introduced earlier, intentionally dissolving the binary between research and teaching as differently valued ways of making knowledge.

5. Reflection: politics and positionality

The researcher and the teacher in knowledge-making processes have advantages that could manipulate and limit the inclusiveness and authenticity of their work. They work in communities that in South Africa, are affected by astonishing levels of inequality (see Knowles *et al* 2022b). Because knowledge is not neutral, and because research and teaching are structured and possible within the constraints of a neoliberal arrangement of university protocols and funding (Baatjies 2005, Tamale 2020), it is necessary to expose and navigate the privileges that come with the positions of researcher and teacher, in order to transform them. Tamale asks us to question: 'Do the theoretical connotations of the research conducted in your university perpetuate colonial concepts, stereotypes, imaginaries and cover-ups?'

(2020: 277), and she calls for methodology to be 'conceptualised as a political process, a space in which complex issues of context, voice, ethics and ideological depth are played out' (2020:279).

Reflection, as a way of articulating the navigation of power dynamics in academic work, is associated with words. Pedagogy and research are influenced by a 'dominant culture that values speech over silence, presence over absence' (Chigumadzi 2021:228). In academia we rely on words on the page, words in the interviews, words delivered in lectures. Chigumadzi, speaking of silences and how to hear them, tells a story of a visit to her grandmother with the intention of asking her many questions which would inform her writing. She tells that after a while 'I decided to put my questions away and just focus on *being* with her…it was only through this space, a space created by a respect for my grandmother's silences, that I was finally able to *hear* her' (2021: 237). While I discuss acts of reflection in this section, I argue too that reflexivity as a way of *being* is not necessarily assessable or articulatable, but is as important for knowledge-making. Being reflexive means reading a room, gauging responses, being with, and even the 'delicate art of storying the silence without speaking over it' (Chigumadzi 2021: 237). Reflexivity may not be so easily measured, but it gives rise to acts of reflection that are richer for the *being* that shapes them.

The regular acts of reflection of the researcher/teacher are important for several reasons. Firstly, , it is to note how power is distributed based on identity hierarchies that operate in society, the lecture room or in the research community. Race, gender, class, age, language, religion, sexuality, location, history, education *et al* all have some degree of intersecting currency and traction which affects the dynamics between people. As an older white woman on a South African campus, I carry the advantages of age, language, race, education and class amongst others. I am indulged and believed in spaces where a young black woman would find it harder.

The advantages of whiteness in South Africa are an ongoing legacy of apartheid, and are, as Matthews (2012) argues, prone to unconscious, residual "stickiness". And on the continent, Okeke (1997:227) bemoans the fact that 'The colonial advantage has long justified white women's dominant presence in the study of African women', often without an examination of their privileges, or the awareness of who is silenced by their interventions. Regular, purposeful reflection is necessary to interrogate my own power in order to subvert and redistribute it in my pedagogy and research strategies. I have kept journals for the past few years to assist the process of reflection, as a record of my interrogations and deliberations. They are a way to hold myself accountable to a constant and rigorous engagement with positionality.

Secondly, reflection is a way to express, navigate and enhance the dynamic between people and the intersectional power arrangements – in this case students or research community. Depending on how and why communal reflections are solicited, they are interventions to express the silences and unspoken questions and concerns, and can guide and shape the ongoing dynamics of a group. As teachers we are familiar with the purpose of student feedback and evaluation as reflection to guide further engagements, but unfortunately for many, given a managerial neoliberalism of higher education, these pedagogically useful acts have become co-opted to rationalise course and lecturer conformity and economic viability (Butcher 2018). As Mkhize argues, universities are 'under pressure to submit to market-driven ideologies that [see]a rise in managerialism and performance management systems, whose aims directly opposed the ethos and purpose of public scholarship' (Mkhize 2014).

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In research scholarship, as Macfarlane (2021) argues, reflection/reflexivity have become compliance exercises to be seen to be doing research the "right" way. Countering these domestications of reflection is vital, as Moletsane (2015) warns us that the tools of participatory research will not work in a transformative way without reflection. She explains that:

> 'what is needed is the co-reflection with our participants on the research process itself, the power dynamics inherent therein, and the extent to which these tools enable us to challenge and address these so as to pave way for democratic decision making about the strategies needed for social change' (2015:45).

Similarly, in transformative, transgressive pedagogy, it is necessary to make space for the mutual accountability of teachers and students (hooks 1994). Henry (2005: 95) argues that Black feminist pedagogy insists on the the analyses of mutually constituted constructions of race, class and gender et al, because they' show us how these social and historical positions are present in the classroom and need to be addressed in our relationships with our students'.

My experience in teaching and research has taught me that mutual reflection on the intersecting issues of race, class gender *et al* lead to a sense of recognition and belonging – without this reflection, whether informal or formal, we miss the opportunity to connect across differences. Regular reflection is the political imperative that will allow the ongoing questioning, challenging and negotiation of positionality for teacher and student, and researcher and research community. For all three of the platforms described above, I used mutual reflection as a way to keep the knowledge-making platforms open to critique and direction.

Finally, as Adomako Ampofo suggests, regular individual and communal reflection is important to keep one's strength, as a feminist activist and scholar. It is not easy work, resisting conventions, paying attention, picking battles, on top of the usual 'exigencies of life' (2010:28) that can derail one's motivation. The praxis of African feminist methodology and pedagogy is a continuous process of co-operation, compromise, mediation, intervention, diplomacy and activism. Reflection is a way to generate the energy that this requires. I am unceasingly grateful for and held up by the friendship of African feminists that sustain us in the push against conventions, as we unpack and celebrate the struggles and triumphs together.

5.1 Applications of reflection

In the WDIOH research project, which began in 2020 as South Africa had locked down in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, I asked those who had responded to the open Facebook call to submit questionnaires which told me where they were, what they were doing, and why and how they wished to be part of the project. It was important for me to establish this kind of regular reflection and feedback which would be a vital part of the project. The written reflection gave me a sense of the range of experiences and people who would form part of the 2-year process, and what their motivations were. This could guide how I interacted with them, and make provisions such as data to encourage their full participation.

We had our first project interaction on zoom, a far inferior platform than the in-person weekend workshop that was anticipated in the project proposal. I was humbled by and devastated at how cold and difficult that meeting was and unpacked my impressions in my journal, and with a critical friend. I sent an apology to the Facebook group, sharing my embarrassment at how badly it had gone (for instance the long silences as I tried to fix tech

issues and admit members who were struggling to connect etc). One of the participants replied 'Don't be too hard on yourself, CK. We're all trying to adjust to this virtual world, so it's okay if you felt that way. It will get better though. From my perspective, I think the workshop went well. I have no doubt that this, our project, will be a success. Love and light' (with many heart emoji responses from the other participants). I loved that the tables had turned in terms of power dynamics – here the participants and former students were encouraging me to keep positive, and allaying my fears about the use of technology which came more easily to some of them. They all expressed their wish to continue with the project and their belief in its goals in the follow-up questionnaire.

As the project continued, we met every 2 months with smaller workshops, where we always began with a question about our well-being and ended with a reflection on where we were going. These virtual reflections, as well as ongoing written reflections and personal messages, helped us to keep negotiating our positions and power dynamics as the project progressed. Being aware of the power differentials between me and my former students, and how different our experiences of pandemic lock-down situations were, my journal reflections were and are what Naidoo calls 'a form of autocritique, and in so doing contribute to a more complex practice of fighting oppressive power' (Naidoo 2021:254)

In the second knowledge-making platform (AFMC, 2021), I worked on the preparations for and presenting of the course with my Ghanaian friend and colleague, and her PhD supervisor, based in Scotland. The co-researcher, Linda Mensah, and I reflected together all through the development of the course, and after each of the 5 sessions we ran online. We asked ourselves: what did we hope to achieve? What does African feminist pedagogy look like? How to we organise each session to teach but also demonstrate the principles of African Feminism?

The participants sent applications for the course which not only gave their fields of interest, but what their interests were in terms of African feminist theory and its application. This was important to assist us to prepare in such a way that we could speak to the realities in people's lives, rather than in some sort of vacuum; and that we could work with any inequalities and power dynamics as the course progressed. The reflections of the co-presenters each day was important so that we could share our impressions of how things had worked – including the break-out rooms, where many rich conversations were held between smaller groups of the participants. We could encourage each other and notice what should change for the next day. The feedback of the participants afterwards in the online feedback form was another important reflection opportunity, where they could articulate what had been meaningful and why, in terms of the process, delivery and content of the course. And always, individual and group reflection was a way to check the power dynamics and "stickiness" of privilege in our relations with each other.

The third knowledge-making platform (POK, 2022) was the opportunity to put into practice many of the pedagogic lessons from what I am learning about African feminist principles of engagement in the other two platforms (see Knowles 2021; Knowles and Mensah 2022c). But it was also challenging in terms of the relative freedom afforded by the other two platforms. In this case, the course outline had to go to the Politics staff committee for approval; an external examiner also perused it, along with the examination questions and marking memorandum; formal assessments, including weekly tutorials, term assignment and examination would be devised to test students' knowledge and application; course material and features needed to be loaded onto the university online site. All of these, and what is

expected from face-to-face teaching, have conventions that shape student expectations and lecturer possibilities for creativity. Henry's claim that 'the traditional classroom continues to encourage competitive, individualistic, and hierarchical climates with winners and losers; often students become regurgitators, content to figure out how to "give the teacher what s/he wants"' (Henry 2005: 96) rings true for me and many of my colleagues today. It does not have to be this way, especially when there is a connection established between teacher and students.

In the teaching of a Politics 3 course on African Feminist theory, my aim was to bring the theory closer to the students, so that they could see themselves in it, and find ways to connect theory to life in a transformative praxis. Hames argues that 'applying a feminist pedagogy when teaching students with whom you are more familiar makes it easier to ask questions about the self' (2021: 71). I find this to be true of teaching in the Extended Studies (ES) programme where, apart from 3 or 4 lectures in other departments each year, all my academic teaching takes place. They are a smaller group, I see them every day, I see them individually, and we get to know each other well. I augment the work they do in Politics 1 and Sociology 1, and so my curriculum is led by others' agendas, but nonetheless we have many opportunities to apply theory to life because we mostly know each other well which arguably is the safe space from which to learn more about self and society. In these classes, regular reflection is undertaken – formal and informal, with the purpose of shaping and adapting our everyday engagements.

In the POK course, I knew very few students, there were 135 compared to 35 in ES in 2022. In my first lecture I asked them to write down on paper I had provided what they knew about African feminism, what they wanted to know, and what they wanted me to know about them. Also, in that lecture, I told them a little about myself – not only my research interests and academic profile, but also for instance that I had recently become a grandmother, and that my mother was dying with dementia, and that I felt stretched and enlarged by these love relationships in my homelife. I told them that I acknowledged that they too brought other selves into the classroom and I wanted to honour that they are more than the essays that they hand in as course requirements, but real people with complex lives. Their initial reflections confirmed this: on slips of paper, many of them told of their anxieties about the workload, about face-to-face lectures, about communicating with lecturers, about things that were happening in their "private" lives. It set the tone for how I should work with them. After every lecture and between lectures students from this group felt free to carry on the conversations with me in my office or outside the lecture room, begun in class that day or in that first reflection. Most of them had never heard of African feminism before. Nnaemeka (2005:56) argues that 'one can teach as an outsider, but to do so requires the humility that is grounded in knowledge'. In addition to this, as a white woman teaching a Black theory, I needed to regularly disrupt the conventional power held by white people in South African universities by asking the students to explain things. I problematised my whiteness by admitting what was difficult for me as a white person, such as the collective world view common in African societies. I was open about my own experiences and invited theirs, which they were surprisingly willing to share.

Apart from the first lecture written reflection, and the sense of open reflection in lectures, there were two further opportunities for written reflections: one after two weeks of lecturing, and the final one at the end of the course. In each of these cases an online platform was established for anonymous participation, and once students had completed the questionnaire,

they could view what others had said. In the first reflective questionnaire, the questions aimed at finding out how students were navigating the lectures, slides, tutorials, and online Moodle site. It helped me to see where they might be struggling, and what might be limiting their engagement. As with their first reflection, I gave feedback to them about what their colleagues had said anonymously, to alert them to a sense a community and that they are not alone. The final reflection was a more in-depth set of questions requiring their deep reflection on what they had learnt, what would stay with them, what remained unanswered.

I have found that acts of reflection, whether in research or teaching, whether verbal or written, and especially when committed regularly and authentically, are a useful way to give voice and affirmation to our thoughts and concerns, and in so doing, provide a roadmap to increased relevance going forward. The use of reflection in knowledge-making platforms enhances the capacities of students and teachers, of research communities, to keep navigating the distributions of power in transformative ways. The transformation happens when people feel heard, when their concerns are taken seriously, and when they have the opportunity to become subjects, rather than objects or consumers, of knowledge-making.

6. Communal Knowledge-making: love and spirituality

Communal knowledge-making as a transformative technique in teaching and research starts for me from a sense of purpose and motivation. Why, what and how do I teach? And what is the purpose of the research I undertake? I am inspired by bell hooks' approach to teaching, where she argues that 'to teach in a manner that respects and cares for the souls of our students is essential if we are to provide the necessary conditions where learning can most deeply and intimately begin'(1994:13). And Mkabela (2005) inspires my research, where she argues for the kind of research that works with a community's total involvement in the project, including its directions and disseminations. She explains that

> 'intimacy, trust, and understanding grow where individuals are linked to one another through multiple bonds in a holistic relationship. This relationship promotes conformity, generosity, openness and consideration of group members' interest over selfish interest. It promotes feelings of ownership that motivates members to invest time and energy, to help shape the nature and quality of the research process as opposed to being merely involved in research'. (Mkabela 2005, 187)

These are both powerful motivations that push against the conventions of teaching and research 'careerism' where Tamale (2006: 39) argues that 'We sit and strategize not on how to genuinely transform society but on how our positions will benefit us financially'. The individualistic, self-serving focus and ambition of the neoliberal university separates the public from the personal, promotes teacher and researcher "neutrality" as though the bodies and spirits, the values and backgrounds, that they bring to these processes do not exist. African feminist pedagogy and research practice requires us to navigate spaces of lecture room and research field fully aware of our intentions, just as we are aware of our gendered and raced bodies and the histories that have informed our values. With this self-knowledge, communal knowledge can be facilitated with a transformative purpose.

African feminist knowledge-making is orientated towards a caring relationship to and with those we teach and research communities. It is linked to the African ethos of *Ubuntu* which Graham describes as 'the interconnectedness of all things; the spiritual nature of human beings… oneness of mind, body and spirit; and the value of interpersonal relationships' (Graham in Tamale 2020: 21). Collins (2003: 59) explains the limitations of 'Western,

either/or dichotomous thought', arguing instead for the holism and harmony inherent in the African worldview. She goes on to argue that

> Neither emotion nor ethics is subordinated to reason. Instead, emotion, ethics, and reason are used as interconnected, essential components in assessing knowledge claims. In an Afrocentric feminist epistemology, values lie at the heart of the knowledge validation process such that inquiry always has an ethical aim' (Collins 2003: 66).

The values of care and respect, and the acknowledgement of the interconnectedness not only of the heart with the mind, but also of the teacher/researcher with her students/research community, suggests a different way of working together to make knowledge.

Communal knowledge-making is a way to recognise and appreciate these connections because it validates 'the ideology of communal, rather than individual, values and the preservation of a community as a whole' which is common in African society (Wane 2008:187). Ntseane found in her research work in Botswana that what worked best was the 'community construction of knowledge as opposed to an individual's construction' explaining that even in broader contexts outside of the continent, the principles of communal knowledge-making 'can be used to develop transformative learning to theorize and build models of research and learning that are owned by the people' (2011: 320). This resonates with Mkabela's claim, that by working closely and holistically with a research community, trust is built and there is ownership of the knowledge that is produced communally (Mkabela 2005: 187).

Communal knowledge-making is a way to connect people to each other, so that the knowledge that is produced emerges from a place of relationship and mutual respect, to be meaningful to the people who work with it and for it. As Henry argues, Black feminist pedagogy 'underscores the interconnectedness of student, teacher, and the entire knowledge-production processes within and outside of the classroom, as well as the power of pedagogy to change consciousness' (Henry 2005:97)

6.1. Applying communal knowledge-making

In the WDIOH research project, the people who indicated their willingness to be part of the project did not necessarily know each other. They had all been part of the ES programme in their first year at UCKAR, but this was spread over a span from 2011 to 2019. Instead of spending a weekend together to familiarise us all with each other and plan the project together, the pandemic limited our engagement to online meetings over zoom. In our favour for developing a sense of community, was our experience in the ES year – the principles of care, respect, and connection which operated in how I facilitated those classes meant that for many of us there had been ongoing contact once they completed that class. On Facebook, on campus, and through various ways and degrees of connection, relationship had been maintained with me, at least. But to establish relationships with each other would be a challenge. The breakout room function on zoom was useful in the first zoom meeting, and this is where participants came up with topics they would like to address. The switch to smaller online workshops, rather than as a whole group, was another way to be able to see each other's faces and get to know each other better. I would report back to them as a group what had come up in individual responses and reflections. But when we started to work on the content of the project, I needed to find ways to connect them to each other more decisively.

Topics were chosen from a process of group work on zoom, and then a survey in the dedicated Facebook group. Each participant was required to respond to one of four topics in any way they chose. Once these were submitted, they were anonymised and sent to two or three others for comment and review. We spoke about the process of writing, and of having their work reviewed in our next workshop. One of their comments[17] express what many felt about this process of diffraction:

> *The person who commented had similar experiences, for my case it almost felt like I was not alone, and they helped me to kind of somehow elaborate on everything I was saying, because obviously sometimes when you write you not really thinking or you just writing and you trying to make sense, and then someone else say something that just helps you build that idea on your head… like it was almost looking in the mirror but like at the same time, I think there was one particular paragraph and the person looking in the mirror and was like me, but the person was just different. So, I think you also learn to appreciate that regardless of the different side or where they stand, it's still the same thing going down like we have similar experiences of sort. (Speaker 2, Group 3, workshop 3 WDIOH)*

Creating a sense of community is about finding how to connect across differences (Tamale 2006). As a conscious intention in research and teaching, Nnaemeka explains that 'teaching connections requires that we grasp and teach sameness and difference simultaneously' (2005: 64). The recognition, care and solidarity fostered by the review of one another's work helped to establish a sense of community, and communal knowledge-making. Another way of building on these connections was the creation of a composite piece from all of their submissions. I highlighted one or two sentences from each of the submissions, copied and pasted them onto a page, and then juggled them around to create a two-page narrative that used only their words. I sent it to the Facebook page to show them how their ideas connected across differences and space. Two comments below reflect their responses to this, and demonstrate the purpose and benefits of communal knowledge-making:

> *It was amazing because when I read those comments, I saw similarities in all of us. When I read, I saw uba (that) I do relate to this and we all relate to those somehow, and then I saw my comment, I was like oh my God you combined my piece with other people's, and it make sense. (Speaker 6, Group 3, workshop 3 WDIOH)*

> *it was very interesting, yoh! It was very interesting, because, I've gotten to understand that even though we might be in different spaces, but sometimes our struggles however interlink right, so that was the most highlight thing for me, is that our struggles they interlink. And that is what you've shown in the African Feminism, that we have a shared… we share struggles and we…we… you might take a small group, because we are a small group right, but this shows a bigger picture, a bigger spectrum, that these… these things they do happen, and they affect a lot of people, because we are different people. We come from different background. …as I read, things that people wrote, I could just like haibo mos, my struggle isn't different from the other person … like it's…it's really beautiful, and it also shows, uhm…. you know when you speak of African, anything that had to do with African, it always has a collective… and that takes me back to the narrative of Ubuntu. Because, that's our fundamental theory. It means that, all of the things that we do, are interlinked, even…*

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[17] All comments by co-researchers are used with consent and Ethical Clearance (1476) by Rhodes University

> *no… no matter how we… where we stay, or how we grew or, but always interlinked.*
> (Speaker 2, Group 1, workshop 3 WDIOH)

The final way of communal knowledge-making with this group is a process of co-writing academic papers. Two teams of volunteers from the group have worked online over the course of a year to write two academic articles which are now complete and awaiting feedback and publication (Knowles et al 2022a; Knowles et al 2022b). The purpose of the project was to create a platform that centered the voices of students to make knowledge, and communal knowledge-making has been an inspiring and meaningful tool in this process.

The second knowledge-making project (AFMC 2021), held online across continents over 5 days, also challenged our intentions to create a community. Although we were strangers to each other, we found that by using the break-out room function, a sense of the collective began to emerge strongly. We made sure that there were at least 3 break-out sessions per day – always at the start, to check in with each other and to introduce themselves, and then twice more during each session with a question to discuss. The 10-15-minute sessions were not enough, but worked to establish a sense of community which would continue once the course was completed. Many of the comments in their post-workshop reflections spoke to the benefits of working together in these sessions, and all of them wished the sessions had been longer. One comment echoes what others said:

> *Yes, I think the networking and hearing about other's challenges is comforting (sounds terrible but you then realise that you are not alone which motivates you to keep going). We also discussed an alternative research method so there was learning happening in in the breakout groups* (participant feedback, AFMC 2021).

An African feminist reading group was established by request, responsive to participant reflections, to build on the community begun in the course. This continues to take place every two weeks with revolving chairs for each session. The power arrangements that conventionally favour white women over Black women is contested in this group where African women participants' embodied proximity to the African feminists we read and discuss, distributes power differently. Race hierarchies are diffracted through African feminism to circumvent the obstacles of othering with the African feminist principles of care and respect. Our communal and individual reflections have enhanced our capacities to learn and hold a plurality of experiences and beliefs without hierarchy (Mkabela 2005).

The third knowledge-making project (POK 2022) used communal knowledge-making in a number of ways. These students had expressed their difficulties with adjusting to face-to-face learning after two years of online learning; they had also expressed that they did not know each other, after being on campus for only one term of six weeks before this course. Firstly, I invited the class to set their own tutorial question each week – we discussed it in class each Thursday, after which it was posted onto the dedicated Moodle page, along with two or three relevant readings. As an additional task (worth 5% of their total mark for the term), they read one of the set readings, reviewed it according to three reflective questions, and submitted it onto the portal by Sunday. The portal feature then automatically and randomly sent two reviews to peers, who were asked to comment on these by Friday. The benefits of this process were important: it ensured that students had read at least one of their set readings before their tutorials on Monday. It also exposed them to how other students had interpreted the same reading, and how they write and think. Finally, I set a group task as their term assessment, and tutors put them into groups of five based on which tutorials they attended. As much as

the students expressed their wariness of groupwork, overwhelmingly their reflections at the end of the process articulated how surprised they were at how much they enjoyed getting to know other members of their class, and how helpful it was to approach the task with the insight and contributions of others. Some even reported that they had made friends from this subject group for the first time in three years. Tutors also reported that there was more active participation in tutorials as a result of both processes – the peer-review process, as well as the group projects. Applying communal knowledge-making in a formal academic course is not necessarily a new idea, but it was new to the students concerned, and enriched their experience of the course.

Communal knowledge-making has the advantage of demystifying the role of teacher, breaking down the barriers to self-knowledge to empower students to own the learning process with more confidence.

Conclusion

I have shown how African feminism pushes against the conventions of western, neoliberal, individualistic knowledge-making that is common in universities today. It has different principles that shape teaching and research encounters, that emphasize connection and mutual respect. It does not separate the mind from the body, but values a holistic commitment to knowledge that is caring and inclusive, emphasising connection and relationship rather than researcher or teacher neutrality. The article has explained two African feminist infused techniques of knowledge-making that use these principles: reflection and communal knowledge-making. Applying them to three knowledge-making platforms, I argue that African feminist knowledge-making can be generative and transformative. It inspires the imagination of this teacher/researcher, and the students and research communities that form part of this study. Importantly, it shows that the political choice of an African Feminist framing, and its application and praxis in the methods used for teaching and research, can have a profound impact. Working with the unequal power arrangements between teacher/researcher and students/research community, this study shows a close-up view of how power can be rearranged to bring about new ways of seeing and knowing the self in community with others

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6. Conclusion

The thesis, projects and papers have argued and demonstrated a schema for knowledge-making that transgresses conventional pedagogic and research practices. Students and I have collaborated to imagine the kinds of knowledge-making platforms and activities that encourage our worthwhile and sustainable contributions to the knowledge project in universities. In many ways, this work holds the echo of Kulundu-Bolus, McGarry and Lotz-Sisitka (2020), who collaboratively wrote *Learning, Living and Leading into Transgressions*, claiming that

> *at the heart of this is a re-generative project that seeks to provide loosely hanging threads as multiple entry points into a future that is distinct from the past. By doing so we endeavour to transgress… We seek to re-seed a decolonial future through a germ of multiple beginnings.* (p. 114)

In this qualitative study, With Dreams in our Hands, African feminist theory has guided the terms of engagement that have shaped our contribution. We have asked several questions: who are our students? What do they bring? What kinds of knowledge matter to them? And importantly, what would happen if we set up the conditions for knowledge-making that recognised and welcomed their creative and critical contributions?

Student volunteers selected topics and areas of interest that were relevant to their lives, which would be the initial focus of our knowledge-making. Collaboratively we established codes of practice on how to work with each other as well as with the topics. Submissions, reviews of each other's work, transcriptions of workshops, reflections on the processes, were collectively and iteratively analysed using thematic and process analysis. Emerging principles from this process were applied in two different pedagogic settings – one, a voluntary, non-credit bearing short course on *African Feminist Research Methodology* for PhD students from two continents; the other, a formal seven-week credit-bearing course compulsory for third-year Political and International Studies students: *The politics of knowledge: African feminisms' contributions to decolonial research, activism, and pedagogy*. Academic papers that used the data from each of these research/pedagogic settings were co-written, as a demonstration of the theoretical praxis and experimentation.

As a contribution to the field of education, the thesis has deliberately and intentionally used decolonial theory, methods, and analysis. African and Black feminisms and African-centric scholarships have guided how the pedagogies and educational research have been imagined and manifest. These are not commonly used in educational research or found in Education faculty curricula. It is my sincere wish that the demonstration of sound theoretical principles that cohere through the projects, curricula and teaching processes in the thesis will contribute to the ongoing legitimisation of decolonial theory and methods in the field. This conclusion to the process and the thesis will clearly articulate a template and schema that consolidates all the lessons gained from the processes outlined. The template has the potential for application beyond the educational field in which the thesis is housed, to the humanistic social sciences; beyond the apartheid geography of South Africa to the continent with its colonial wounds and mutations; and indeed, to the extended and messy global village that is inextricably constituted by others and othering. The thesis demonstrates and supports the claim that decolonial theory and feminist ethics and pedagogy can be inclusive and transformative to a sector of the student population that is currently excluded, exploited and/or neglected.

It is our sincere wish that our conclusions are inspiring for those who seek a future academy that welcomes, engages, and cherishes young African people. The schema we present in the thesis has generative qualities. Where the multiple contesting stresses threaten to overwhelm us as academic citizens in an increasingly uncertain world, there are ways to keep a focus and process that creates its own energy, always in the company of others. We have proposed conditions, values, and actions that we believe in, and then demonstrated how they work in the parameters and logics of the university system – through pedagogy/curricula, research, and publishing. The projects that are described and explained in the thesis are the small beginnings for many other possible decolonial potentials.

This thesis is a testament to our struggles and discoveries, held by African feminisms. The rigour with which we have documented the journey in various ways has helped to articulate the ideas and schema with empirical evidence as legitimation of their value and worth. The projects and the thesis kept on evolving because the schema is generative: it gives energy, it restores, it inspires life, sometimes literally when life has seemed hopeless for some. Each time the lens sharpens, or moves to view a different segment, it creates new possibilities, different stories.

We all came into the process with dreams in our hands, offering them to each other as we listened to and shared our stories, memories, experiences, and imaginations. We offer our collective vision and hope to you. Each finger of the hand in which we hold our contribution represents an element of the schema, working together to shape the articulation of our dream of transgressive knowledge-making cultures. The five elements, *framing, activating, seeing, creating, imagining*, each touch and hold an aspect of the dream we bring, and their combined effect can release and manifest transgressive pedagogic and research practices.

Presented here as distinct elements, in practice they are variable and dynamic, affecting and affected by each other. They are the "loosely hanging threads as multiple entry points" (Kulundu-Bolus et al., 2020) that invite a way to configure knowledge-making that is transgressive, inclusive, and transformational. In this conclusion, I describe each element, each finger, with the hopes of moving towards something more than a definition. I attempt this expansion by demonstrating and modelling how I have interpreted and expressed it, and why. Each new element builds on and interacts with the others. They present ways in which the schema has worked, and indicate that there are still ways to sharpen and test and strengthen the schema, in a future alive with possibilities.

6.1. Framing

> The frame is the light, and the compass, that directs the scope and range of possibilities for knowledge-making. It is the lens and theory that guides our focus. The frame exposes or illuminates how far we can go in our dreams, what form they take, and what their potentials. The frame requires us to ask: Whose ideas underpin our pedagogy and research, and whose interests are served by them?

I use an African feminist orientation as a frame for pedagogy and research. Working as I have with Black South African students over the years, I am drawn to theorists who see and humanise them as worthy and welcome as knowledge-makers and as people. Black and/or African women who theorise the politics of knowledge do so from the raced, classed, and gendered perspectives of their positions and contexts. They give a unique outlook that seeks to make visible the stories that are often neglected or marginalised in how the politics of knowledge configures their contributions. As a frame, an African feminist orientation also reveals the range and scope of self-knowledge, and invigorates the agency to build

nurturing conditions for inclusive knowledge-making. There are overlaps and synergies with other orientations and theories, and our contribution in this thesis has been to demonstrate how African feminist ideas and principles guide and inspire knowledge-making at different moments of the process.

There are principles and orientations of this frame that I have used to think through pedagogy and research practice in the quest to make knowledge inclusively. Love, connectedness, and spirituality are three interlinked aspects of the frame I will present here.

The political rigour that compels me to question deeply how I am positioned as a White person in relation to Black young people, and how I manage and transform my privileges and power, is supported, and illuminated by love, the generative emotion that keeps it on course. I argue, like hooks (1994, p. 13), that ''learning can most deeply and intimately begin'' when there is deep respect and care for our students. The word 'love' sits uncomfortably in an academic discussion and yet here it is. It transgresses "the well-learned distinctions between public and private" that "make us believe that love has no place in the classroom" (hooks, 1994, p. 198). It takes many forms and has different manifestations, and we have found that it motivates liberatory, socially just, engaged, transformative pedagogic and research practices. Importantly, it inspires the conditions that are necessary for critical thinking, which is part of the learning process. Ghabra and Calafell have argued that "criticality needs nurturing, support, and love. It needs to feel safe in order to come out and blossom in public" (2018, np).

I argue that love is also intellectual work. When we make the shift from locating knowledge in Cartesian dualism that separates the mind from the body, to being holistic and embodied, then the emotion we bring to how we think and make knowledge is legitimised. As hooks (1994, p. 155) asked: "If we are all emotionally shutdown, how can there be any excitement about ideas? When we bring our passion to the classroom our collective passions come together". She argued that this can sometimes be overwhelming, and she argued that we should shift our attention from the "pleasure and pain" of emotions, to focus on how "they keep us aware and alert". She explained that reading the room and involving students in mutual responsibility for keeping the energy up is part of liberatory pedagogy. It might mean deviating from our agendas to switch our focus onto something not planned for the day, but more important is the engaged presence of teacher and learners to be able to put our collective minds to working with knowledge. This kind of work is possible when we care

about the students more than we care about merely completing the content of the curriculum. It is an essential element of pedagogy, and in similar ways, of research practices. Mkabela (2005) made a strong argument for working with (rather than in) a research community to give them the agency to recognise what the salient issues are, and how to work with them – even in how to disseminate findings from the research project. She argued that this might mean deviating from the researcher's intentions, and that it was important to respect the community enough to let them direct the time frames and directions of the research. Letting go of our intellectual intentions and ambitions, to honour the genuine concerns of the communities where we conduct research, takes love. It is a letting go of the ego that seeks personal achievement, to be connected to the people that we are working with, ultimately to make knowledge that is inclusive and relevant.

Love has overlaps with other African ideas – for instance, the African philosophy of *Ubuntu* and African ideas about motherhood. Many African feminists have shaped my thinking on this, collectively suggesting a capacity for love that is infinite, archetypal, bigger than me, and able to blur and trouble the shape and form of what is human entangled in relation to each other. Mangena (2009, p. 8) argued that "despite hunhu or ubuntu's promotion of andro-centric attitudes in society" that women should reclaim the role they are given in the home as one of agency and power, and use motherhood to transform patriarchy from the inside. Nkealah (2022) argued that while African feminism seeks to change oppressive conditions for women, it is also a theory of humaneness, which "is definitively a quality of showing kindness, care, consideration, affection and understanding for another human being who is undergoing a difficult situation in life, or experiencing a personal crisis" (p. 4). Tamale (2020) unpacked Nzegwu's argument that warns against using a western frame to judge African cultural norms, but rather working towards equally valued, albeit different, roles for men and women. She explained the practice of *Ubuntu* as holding people to treat others with the respect and dignity you also deserve, and the inversion that if you diminish someone else, you, as part of the connected whole, are also diminished. Tamale (2020) argued that "through *Ubuntu*, values such as respect for human dignity, humaneness, compassion and mutual deference can be edified. Women can be reconstructed as holistic human beings imbued with agency. The best method to achieve this is through conscientization" (p. 233). Using Freire's work to suggest how this works, Tamale recommends a combination of thinking, being and doing. Reflection on how we are shaped

by social, historical, political conditions, in a context of kindness and recognition, can translate into actions that are transformative. This is Freire's 'praxis' of intellectual work, self-awareness and action. Finding justice and humaneness in a context of inequality, invisibility, marginalisation, insecurity, is possible when *Ubuntu*, love, respect, dignity, kindness have the space to flourish.

But love is also complicated. There are times in my teaching where I know that students will let their guards down only to have to put them up again when they step out of the lecture room. Their dreams are not safe in judgemental, unfairly hierarchical context that has race, class and gender biases. The conditions of the university can be so alienating that they can lead to severe mental health problems, as noted in paper 2 and 3 (Knowles et al., 2022a, 2022b). Over the years almost every year one of the ES students has had to de-register because of suicidal ideations. Some of them return, and others carry the scars of an environment that fails to recognise, support, include and welcome them. We have to remind each other constantly that the university environment is different to what we experience in the ES programme. And importantly, love, linked to connection and spirituality, are aspects of the frame that need to be combined with other elements of the schema to avoid potential harm when assumptions are made that love is everywhere. Love in ES (and other) classes is an onto-epistemic frame that establishes different kinds of engagements for different ends, and used responsibly will also fortify those who operate in alienating spaces. Because they find in ES classes the support and kindness that is lacking elsewhere, many former students continue their relationship with me after their first year. They tell their friends to come and see me when they are experiencing difficulties. I continue to support some of them, materially and emotionally, even a decade after their first year.

Bringing love into an environment that is alienating places invisible burdens on those who have it to give, or who are expected to give it. Okech (2020) researched the experiences of African women lecturers who supported the calls to decolonisation in the 2015 #RhodesMustFall movement (a precursor to the #FeesMustFall protests later that year). She found their experiences useful for thinking through her and other Black academics' experiences of the decolonisation movements in the UK from where she writes. She has argued that the energy of Black women is being mined and extracted in a context where systemic racism marginalises them, and Black students, who then turn to Black women for

support and nurturing. This is not work that is recognised in any way. Students who are struggling with white supervisors will turn to them for unrecognised supervision; Black women will use inclusive and decolonial pedagogy to draw up new reference lists, and have informal reading groups. As she argued, "the power hierarchies linked to institutions that position one as an outsider make the labour described above exploitative, extractive rather than generative" (Okech, 2020, p. 20). My Black feminist friends and I often talk of the way Black students lean on us, because there is nowhere else to go. It can be draining and exhausting. But our friendship, love, and support for each other is what helps and inspires us to do this work. Long evenings of good food, laughing, shouting, sharing or snatched conversations in between classes are part of it, but as important are the insights and theorising that we share in what Okech (2020) called "African feminist epistemic communities". Love, as part of the frame for knowledge-making will always be transgressive in a neoliberal dispensation, and so measures must be taken to guard against the commodification and exploitation of it as we seek to make liberatory knowledge in the company of others.

The African feminist frame that considers teaching, learning and research that is held and fortified by love, will seek and find connections as part of pedagogic and research practice. Collins (2003) spoke of "an epistemology of connection in which truth emerges through care" (p. 64). She explained that as an Afrocentric idea, new knowledge claims are made in community with others, through dialogue and connection. Recognising experience as generative for new knowledge, "the best way of understanding another person's ideas was to develop empathy and share the experiences that led the person to form those ideas" (p. 57). It is the connection between people in a knowledge-making community that inspires the openness and empathy that allows new knowledge to emerge through dialogue. As Collins argued, a "primary epistemological assumption underlying the use of dialogue in assessing knowledge claims is that connectedness rather than separation is an essential component of the knowledge validation process" (p. 59). Part of the work of the frame is to reveal ways in which we are unique expressions of a common humanity, and to find the connections that will harness different perspectives and experiences to find an articulation of truth that will connect and enlarge us. Nnamaeka (2005, p. 63) built on this idea of connection, arguing that "these points of intersection and convergence constitute sites of

energy, power, and agency, sites where we can name ourselves or refuse to be named as we center our marginality".

Love and connection bring a holistic view and engagement with knowledge-making that can be described as spiritual. According to Ntseane (2011) "the spirit is the ultimate oneness with nature and the fundamental interconnectedness of all things" (p. 312). Linking back to the idea of *ubuntu*, Tamale drew on Graham's definition of this as "the interconnectedness of all things; the spiritual nature of human beings … oneness of mind, body and spirit; and the value of interpersonal relationships" (Graham cited in Tamale 2020, p. 21). Spirituality as part of the frame for knowledge-making brings an awareness of how the mind, body and spirit are all part of the process; how the past and future inform the present; and of how we are constituted by each other, and by our connection to the earth. Tamale has explained that "the African worldview is relational and formed through active engagement with the ecology and the community. We are horizontally connected to our communities, and vertically connected to our ancestors and offspring" (p. 212). To include love, connection and spirituality in the frame is to channel a consciousness of all these things, and sustain an alertness and attentiveness to where there is work to be done, where attention is being diverted, and how creativity can be encouraged.

In the many meetings, workshops, lectures, and conversations that have contributed to this thesis, the principles of love, connection and spirituality that are the framework for the work we have done have directed and held our scrutiny, shaping how we engage and work together. This has liberated our critical consciousness to make sense of each other and of the worlds we inhabit, and guided our collaborations.

6.2. Activating

> While the frame exposes the scope and limitations of the platform for knowledge-making, it does not do the work required to produce valuable knowledge. It gives an orientation that inspires the knowledge-maker to put one foot in front of the other on the journey to find meaning. The frame is *activated* by a political rigour that seeks to navigate the journey with agency, in the company of others. hooks (1994) reminds us that "theory is not inherently healing, liberatory, or revolutionary. It fulfils this function only when we ask that it do so and direct our theorizing towards this end" (p. 61).

As I and others have argued (Adomako Ampofo, 2010; Knowles, 2021; Knowles et al., 2022a; Moletsane, 2015), knowledge-making – as pedagogy and research – is not neutral, and if we pretend that it is, we merely perpetuate ways in which it has been set up to leave people out of its consideration. Using the frame of African feminist scholarship means deliberately including African women, and by association in this case, Black African young people into its purview. Activating the frame means noticing how power is arranged, and interrogating whose interests are being served by the ways in which we work with and make knowledge in teaching, learning and research. It brings an edginess to the endeavour, making us hyper aware of positionality and agency, and who we are taking on the journey with us. It means probing and managing the shifting axes of power in every step.

Conscientisation is an aspect of activating, in that it is a bringing into focus the histories and currencies that affect whether and how people exercise their agency in the process of knowledge-making. Conscientisation is the process of removing "the scales from our eyes" to "focus on pathways that re-centre Africa and its people" (Tamale, 2020, p. 41). Explaining this process, Tamale recognised that even though the university is a site of Western norms and values, it is also a site where the transformation of these norms is possible. She drew on Mama's argument, that "conscientization is a dynamic dialectical relationship between radical thinking and action" (Mama in Tamale, 2020, p. 44) and so locating this in university knowledge-making processes such as teaching, research and scholarship is another pedagogic imperative I accept as part of my privileged positionality as a White person working with young Black people. Nnameaka (2005, p. 64) explained that working with difference, to bring about connections, "compels us to retool ourselves through knowledge", using difference and plurality "as modes of production for bringing about personal and societal transformation through knowledge".

It is not necessarily easy to work in this way to challenge the status quo while living and working within it. We are all produced in some way by the systemic oppressions and privileges that affect our access to knowledge, and shape how to work with it. Decolonial feminist Natanel (2017, p. 14) argued that "in drawing attention to power, structure, agency and resistance in our classrooms, yet remaining entangled within their tensions, we effectively undertake a mode of bargaining that positions us both inside and outside the system – in this, we are poised to disrupt". Even if our disruptions are motivated by love, this position of insider/outsider can be tricky and divisive. But ultimately the way in which

we politicise the conditions of learning, while seeking connections, demonstrating love, evoking past and future, becomes a way of being that is sustained by the epistemic communities that are formed through this evocation and provocation.

Activating the frame requires our presence. Presence is linked to vulnerability, and refers to the process of bringing my whole self to the encounter of teaching, learning and research – my body, my emotions, my desires, my attention, my intuition, my flaws and strengths. hooks (1994) advised that we "must practice being vulnerable in the classroom, being wholly present in mind, body and spirit" (p. 21). When I am fully present, I am more alert to the opportunities to connect across differences, and to conscientise and be conscientised about the systemic racism, classism and sexism that manifest in multiple small teachable moments.

The frame of African feminist principles is an orientation to love and mutual appreciation. The politics of this include that as someone with privileges that are deeply embedded in our society, I need to destabilise my authority while holding space for mutual humanity and agency. This is one way to de-centre whiteness as an operating value in how I work with knowledge in the classroom and on the field. The love that is part of the orientation is activated and actualised when I work with it in intentional ways. hooks, speaking of "eros" not as sexual, but as a self-actualising force, explained that "it can provide an epistemological grounding informing how we know what we know, enables professors and students to use such energy in a classroom setting in ways that invigorate discussion and excite the critical imagination" (1994, p. 195). It is a way to bring joy into knowledge-making, while recognising the cartographies of pain that have made it a struggle in a country so deeply affected by race, gender and class inequalities.

Political consciousness allows me to see my own raced and classed privilege, and also find ways to build confidence and agency in students with the unashamedly political radical pedagogy of care. Henry (2005, p. 93) explained this well, claiming that:

> *Black womanists/feminists who write about their classroom practice show that their pedagogy flows out of a political commitment that informs their curricula and classroom interactions. They argue for analyses of the social constructions of race, nationality, culture, gender, sexuality, and class as important for understanding*

Western patriarchy, and that these constructs remain central to understanding historical and societal phenomena.

I have learned through the course of this PHD, and my career, that activating the lens for knowledge-making is not an event, but an ongoing process, a political commitment, to welcome diverse students and community members to be part of the knowledge-making project, and to navigate political arrangements and social structures with agency.

6.3 Seeing

> When the frame or orientation of the knowledge-making endeavour has been activated by political consciousness and rigour, it compels us to want to know who our students are, what they bring with them to the lecture room, and what they are capable of. When love is also political, it is not content to believe what others say about the students or research community – it seeks out and foregrounds students' and communities' own voices, experiences, and concerns, and demonstrates faith in their aspirations and capacities.

When we arrive in the lecture room, or in the field, we bring with us the baggage of our lives, perhaps a night of sleeplessness, stresses, and concerns, even the sins of our ancestors or a hopelessness for the children not yet born. The content of our curriculum is then a safe anchor in the present, and the temptation is to compartmentalise our humanity to get through the day. As lecturers we are not alone in this. Our students bring unspeakable anxieties with them into our rooms. How can our engagements with each other become not only a safe place to bring our whole selves, but an inspiring place to restore hope and generate excitement, and make knowledge together? When we care about our students and ourselves – recognising that we are mutually constituted, and aware of the power arrangements that structure how we relate, it opens up a different way to 'see' each other. The framing and the activating make visible the ways in which this can happen.

Over the years I have come to know that seeing students for individual consultations is one way to get to know them better and to see who else they are. I have been able and privileged to do this because my ES classes are a manageable size. In a week at the start of each term, I can see everybody for a 10 – 15-minute consultation in my office between

classes. It makes a difference to how we then relate in class – I know their names, and some of their stories, I can draw on real-life examples to illustrate difficult concepts. I can remember not to call on that person to answer a question because they have social anxiety. I can check up on someone whose mother is dying, or make sure someone else has found a place to stay. I can bring bananas and apples to class because I know that some will not have eaten. And in time they will come to my office voluntarily, to ask for help with academic work or for social or emotional concerns. An open-door policy and the invitation to see me has allowed me to get to know students well over the years, and not all of them are in my classes – recommended by their friends, they will seek me out because they know that I care. I have been privy to extraordinary events, stories, meetings, celebrations, and traumas generated by a willingness to see students outside of the lecture room.

Importantly, I have been able to see, through individual or group conversations; through formal and informal feedback reflections; through home visits or hospital trips; through speaking to loved ones; attending events; being a witness to protests and hearings, a perspective on the university and knowledge that is theirs, unfiltered. It is a mosaic of multiple unique shapes, textures and colours that is as much a portrayal of the collective present as it is a vision for the shared future.

But this is not necessarily possible in a large class of 100 – 500 or more students. How do we 'see' them? The activated frame of love, connectedness and spirituality evokes a different kind of lecture-room experience, in that it requires me to bring my whole self to the teaching encounter (hooks, 1994). White (2011) explained that "the interrelationship of our identities with course topics calls for exceptional vulnerability in the classroom as we disclose personal life experiences in order to demonstrate how the personal is both political and theoretical" (p. 196). This requires us to be 'present', to be alert to and aware of the opportunities to show ourselves in ways that conjure the engaged presence of the students we teach. This is transgressive teaching and learning, taking us beyond the bounds of the conventional. Kulundu expanded on this, saying that "leading into transgression is an open invitation for each person to become more of themselves in response to what they reclaim as well as what they strip away. It implies the cultivation of a fierce and generous spirit capable of creating spaces that invite a multiplicity of being" (Kulundu et al., 2020, p. 121).

Teaching as I do in a small university in a small town, it is also a caution to live with integrity – in and outside of the classroom and campus. White (2011) clarified that "integrity implies

consistency of actions, values, methods, principles, expectations, and outcomes. How we as instructors live and practice Black feminist theory outside the classroom, as well as what we say about it in the classroom, affects our credibility" (p. 196). She went on to argue that the grounds for mutual vulnerability and openness for new learning are established by our own willingness to take risks, always treating students with respect, being willing to be stretched with them in grappling with concepts. We build rapport through these ways of being (White, 2011), and it becomes a safe space for students to show themselves.

When teaching a large class, before I begin the first lecture, I sometimes ask students to write on a piece of paper what they know about a topic we are going to cover, what they would like to know about it, and what they would like me to know about them. As explained in the introduction of this thesis, this is a way to welcome their presence into the engagement. I can draw on their responses to this as I go along, including their contributions in how I work with the material. Even though many of them will find it difficult to speak in a large class (see Knowles et al., 2022a), welcoming students' opinions and contributions in class has the added advantage of letting them 'see' each other. When the orientation includes genuine care, activated by political awareness of the forces that shape how we relate, there are all kinds of ways to get to know students and work with knowledge that speaks to their lives and includes them in how it is configured and produced.

What we have found in working together over the PhD process is that a framework of care that is activated by an awareness of the relations of power that operate in our encounters, lets us 'see' each other and seek out opportunities to make connections. Knowledge-making, if practised in an Afrocentric way, is communal. It needs a mutual recognition to ignite the communications and questions and insights that take us towards new learnings. As a lecturer and researcher, I must show up and show who I am, in a way that also welcomes the selves that students and co-researchers will reveal in the encounter.

6.4. Creating

> The *framing* clarifies the range, focus and scope of our pedagogy and research. *Activating* the frame means an awareness of the politics that will shape our purpose and navigations. The activated frame influences our *seeing* of students, and research communities, because the orientations and politics we employ make aspects of them visible and possible. This sets up the next element or phase of the schema: *creating* the kinds of spaces, environments, platforms, learning opportunities that will best serve the purposes exposed and developed by the other elements. The creation of conditions and principles of engagement, and the kinds of knowledge-making platforms and encounters we set up, will elicit particular kinds of responses depending on the orientation, the politics, and how we see the people we are working with.

An African feminist orientation prompts me to find ways of working with students and research communities that will inspire creativity, critical thinking, and innovation, and all of this collaboratively. Drawing on aspects of the theory, particularly the ideas around *ubuntu* and connectedness, students and I have found ways to work together which do this. We found these ways through consciously and unconsciously seeking the guidance of African elders and scholars, and through cultivating mutual respect and appreciation in the lecture room. We found these ways because love and courage were part of the mix.

The co-creation of this platform for communal knowledge-making is a response to 'seeing' the student, and seeing the context from the student's perspective. For me, an awareness of the ways in which students are alienated and marginalised by daily micro-aggressions and systemic brutalities, in and outside of the university, is reason enough to want to generate the conditions where dreams can flourish. It is not merely a solace from an indifferent environment. It is a space where the intersectional differences between people can be recognised and engaged to contribute unique insights and experiences to a collective knowledge-making process.

An aspect of communal knowledge-making requires the ongoing awareness not only of the contributions that each person brings, but also of the intersectional inequalities and power arrangements that are present in any group. Tamale (2020) recognised the appeal of an intersectional lens, for its potential to unpack "within-group differences and inequities" which can strengthen the potential to find principles of engagement and "mutual

commitments" that do not rely on homogeneity (p. 68). And Kulundu (2018, p. 98) suggested that an intersectional pedagogic praxis provides "the possibility of fostering a form of *emancipatory resonance* between and within different socio-economic, cultural and psychic demographics" (emphasis added). Creating the conditions that cultivate awareness of difference and mutual appreciation is where "contradictions and synergies can be used as a catalyst in renewing our subjectivities in ways that affirm the collective struggles that we individually experience as well as those that others face" (Kulundu, 2018, p. 98). It is our way to expand what we know of the world, of each other, and of ourselves. And significantly, the emancipatory resonance that Kulundu proposes is generative: it ignites a mutual energy that brings passion into how we work collaboratively with knowledge and with each other.

My belief has grown, over years of 'seeing' students, that everybody comes into the university with contributions to make for our collective benefit. With the right conditions (shaped by love, connectedness, spirituality, political edge), they are able to offer these gifts and dreams in an exchange that is potentially instructional and challenging in helpful ways. Setting up group discussions, or group assignments, is not in itself transformational. Group activities can be deeply problematic, and students are well within their rights to mistrust them. But when they are framed and activated in ways that include them and encourage their sense of agency and opportunities to learn from and with each other, they are possibilities for self-growth and collective growth.

Communal knowledge-making fosters a different kind of relationship with knowledge and knowers. The authority and responsibility are shared and contested, rather than residing in the role of the lecturer or lead researcher. It shifts the basis of authority from the one who has institutional power, to those who have lived experience, different perspectives, and contributions to make. Chilisa and Ntseane (2010, p. 619) pointed out that "existence-in-relation and being-for-self-and-others sum up the African conception of life and reality", and so setting up the conditions for communal knowledge-making means tapping into a way of being that transgresses a western individualistic onto-epistemology. It means a commitment to a process rather than a product, and so the framing and activating of such a space needs the recognition and commitment of all involved. Fostering communal settings that are conducive to openness and sharing and mutual vulnerability takes ongoing labour, modelling, reminding, encouragement, guidance, and so deserves more consistent attention

than, say, the rubrics for marking group assignments. The terms for communal knowledge-making are generated collaboratively and dynamically over time through multiple learning opportunities that are engaging and forgiving, and sensitive to possibilities.

6.5. Imagining

The final component in the five-fingered schema for transgressive knowledge-making cultures is *imagining*. With a *frame* in place; *activated* by political consciousness; and when students and research communities are humanised and *seen;* and iteratively the conditions for communal knowledge making are *created*; then *imagination* can be employed to manifest and revitalise the minutiae of knowledge-making.

The schema for transgressive knowledge-making cultures is a dynamic, evolving process, and the element of imagination discussed here is part of the process from the start. The manifestations of the imaginings differ, depending on the other four elements, and they are the everyday activities and tasks associated with knowledge-making as pedagogy and research. They align with the principles and politics I bring into the lecture room or field, and are made and remade in collaboration with students and research communities. Imagining is also a futuristic endeavor that is set up in courageous and even naïve early steps that anticipate something bigger than and beyond the initial frame.

When setting up a course, for instance, we have to think through how to frame it in the course outline and early lectures; the course outline will give an overview of the course, sometimes including the topics for each week; the course outline will also include reference lists or bibliographies, which indicate who the authoritative voices are in the material we are dealing with; usually, the course outline will indicate how the course will be assessed – so that from the start, students are aware of the submissions and tasks that will earn them the marks to pass the course; each lecture is presented, usually with PowerPoint slides that not only guide the lecture, but also are a resource for students to prepare for assignments and exams; weekly or termly tasks must be set up that assess students' grasp of the material and align with the intended outcomes of the course. These are the minutiae of knowledge-making that can be revitalised by imagination.

As lecturers, we tend to think of these tasks as the sole responsibility of the person running the course, perhaps approved by the Head of Department (HoD) or staff committee. Exam

questions are externally examined or at least internally approved by the HoD. It is my experience that sometimes course outlines and even exam questions remain unchanged for years.

When, however, the frame for knowledge-making includes love, connectedness, and spirituality; when political rigour activates the frame; when students are seen, along with their hopes and fears and their view of the world; and when a platform for engagement is set up that welcomes their participation and agency; then it is possible that there is a shared responsibility for shaping the minutiae of the course. This is not the same as having a *laissez faire* attitude to how the course is set up and run. It is an intentional act of inclusion at different points to expand students' agency, interest, and contribution.

This final aspect or element of the transgressive schema is where the values and principles set up by the other four elements are demonstrated and manifested in practical ways. Assessment tasks, for instance, are no longer about standardised mark allocations, but about student participation and engagement, for the purpose of critical and imaginative thinking and learning. There is no blueprint for this kind of work, but a daily navigation and orientation that holds space for innovative ideas to emerge.

ES teaching operates differently to mainstream courses because it is responsive to their curricula and guided by their offerings and assessments. Even so, soliciting students' input in what we will cover each day in our ES classes (we usually plan this together on a Monday for the week), which tasks count for their ES term mark, how groups are set up for group discussions or tasks, has become part of our practice. There are regular feedback opportunities, either at the start of a class, or at the end of a task – this to gauge where people are at, and what the concerns, struggles, experiences, and understandings are that students bring to the project of meaning-making and knowledge-making. There is group work almost every day – sometimes that I set up, or that they choose for themselves. Indigenous language use is encouraged, and managed by translating questions or comments for those who do not fully understand the language used. They devise test questions in groups, along with the memo for marking them. They mark their tests, anonymised, in groups, according to the memo they have set up. They discuss readings. They bring their essay outlines to share and discuss. We constantly remind ourselves of the terms of engagement with each other. My role in this is to hold the space, ask the kinds of right questions that will inspire critical thinking and welcome debate, and make the opportunities

to bring their group discussions to the larger group to consolidate the learnings and fill in the gaps. This collaborative way of working is held by shared concerns and responsibilities, to achieve successful engagement with Soc 1 and Pol 1 content and assignments, but importantly also to learn about life, the university, the disciplines, the world, and ourselves. It is to express a sense of agency that allows imagination to thrive, and to manifest in ways that bring mutual benefit.

Working with Linda Mensah on the intercontinental African Feminist Methodologies course for PhD students was also different to mainstream courses, in that it was voluntary and not credit bearing. While Linda and I had a clear outline for the course, and a presentation with PowerPoint slides for each of the five days, we built in significant time for group reflections and interactions each day which formed part of the content, where issues were debated and shared by participants in breakout groups in the zoom sessions, and then shared with the larger group. They were invited to add to the reference list as the course progressed and as they found authors who contributed to the discussions. In this way, their own imaginative engagement with the content as well as the process of knowledge-making was employed.

The Pol 3 course which I ran in 2022, *The politics of knowledge: African feminisms' contributions to decolonial research, activism, and pedagogy*, was the opportunity to test the schema more rigorously. I will first demonstrate how I had applied the previous four elements, framing, activating, seeing, and creating, before showing how we could work with the final element, imagining.

- **Framing**: My engagement with this class was framed by principles of African feminist pedagogy that seeks connection with love to encourage holistic engagement with African feminist theory.
- **Activating**: It was activated by how I thought through and discussed with them at the start of the course how colonialism, patriarchy and capitalism globally and locally had positioned African feminisms as marginal in the knowledge economy (most of them had never been exposed to it before). I noticed aloud how inequality operated in the classroom via language amongst other features that privileged some, and I invited them to ask questions or make comments in other languages, to be translated by volunteers for different language speakers. I problematised my position as a white person in relation to them, and teaching an African theory. I

argued that the university system inadvertently favoured whiteness, and that they were more likely to indulge my quirks than if it were a Black lecturer, and that they should watch out for that. All through the course, I emphasised the politics of knowledge, the politics in the lecture room, and where agency could be imagined and manifested.

- **Seeing**: In the first class with them, I asked them to write down what they knew about African feminisms, what they wanted to know about it, and what they wanted me to know about them. This allowed them to show themselves in a small way, and it set the tone that welcomed their participation as the course progressed. I referred to these comments the next day and all through the course, and welcomed them to see me after the lecture and in my office between lectures. Some did this. From these engagements I gathered that many of them were struggling with face-to-face teaching and learning (this was their first time of doing this since starting university, due to the pandemic); many admitted mental health, anxiety, depression issues; and many were excited about doing this course and remained interested and engaged throughout. There were two further opportunities for formal feedback which demonstrated an ongoing interest in seeing them, hearing from them, seeing the world, and the course through their eyes. The possibilities for connection and recognition were daily navigations, and some students from that course have kept in touch, months after the course was completed.

- **Creating**: We discussed the terms of engagement in the first class (respect, empathy, openness). I believe I began to establish the conditions that invited their agential engagement with the course in the first session: by making myself vulnerable in the first class with them; by admitting that I was learning as much as they were; explaining that I understood my positioning with humility; and admitting that I was anxious and excited about teaching a class at this level and recognised their anxieties about the course; by regularly asking them to contribute or pausing to listen to questions; by treating these with respect and kindness; by soliciting formal feedback from them after three weeks and acting on their feedback. A collaborative space was iteratively conjured in every lecture, to affirm their participation as knowledge-makers.

From here, the ***imagining*** aspect of this kind of knowledge-making could draw on all of the other elements in place, using innovations and imagination to engage students in the

knowledge-making process. I have explained three aspects of the course in section 4.3. in some detail, and draw out the relevance in terms of imagining here.

In terms of reading, which is a vital aspect of the Pol 3 (or any) course, I welcomed their participation in the pre-tutorial reading process through a weekly summary and a peer review process. This brought their imaginations into play: writing their own summaries of the required readings, while imagining that a peer would read it; reading peers' work with the agency to construct comments that would be encouraging. Reading became revitalised, and not only because there were marks to be gained – these were negligible. Their consistent participation in the exercise and their formal positive and enthusiastic feedback on this aspect halfway through and at the end of the course demonstrated that a necessary component of the course had become more exciting and that they found it useful and even necessary.

The invitation to be part of the devising of tutorial questions was another aspect of collaborative imagination to contribute to knowledge-making. The function of assessment is to demonstrate that students have understood and can apply the course content. Encouraging them to devise how this should happen on a weekly basis allowed them to access the material from a different perspective, and to think critically about the content to come up with appropriate tutorial tasks that showed their understanding of the course. An ordinary weekly assessment task was revitalised by their inclusion in imagining what this should/could look like.

The group project which was their final task was another aspect of collaborative imagining. It required more than content on a page to demonstrate understanding of a course. It also meant working together, managing group dynamics, collaborating on tasks, unpacking African feminist methodology together. I have mentioned that group work in and of itself is not necessarily a helpful exercise. But when supporting by iterative framing, activating, seeing and creating, it can encourage imaginative and beneficial participation. It was a synthesis of the course, with freedom and agency to build something together that they believed was worthwhile. It had the added effect of letting students who hardly knew each other, form friendships. Tutors reported much more vibrancy in tutorials once this process had begun, as the groups were set up by the tutors from their tutorial groupings. Again, an assessment task that is usually an isolated and potentially intimidating endeavour was opened up to collaborative imagination. The compulsory reflection on the process (for

marks) showed overwhelmingly that students had benefited from this process, intellectually and socially.

There are many other ways to re-imagine, revitalise and manifest the components of the curriculum that have the effect of engaging students, with agency, in the company of others. Importantly, this schema allows the dreams not yet dreamt, selves not yet formed, connections not yet established, the space to incubate.   Imagination as the engine for a journey into the unknown is made possible and is vitalised in the process of love, activation, recognition and communal knowledge-making.

Concluding remarks

So close to the end now. Big endings always bring with them other endings that lurk in our consciousness for these kinds of moments.
I keep hoping for that moment, clearing space in my head and heart for it.
Anxiety like a swarm of bees bloom up whenever I think: how does it end, though?
I can almost see what starts to happen after *the end. My little hand clutches the newly constructed lens to look there, and there, and there! But when I look* here*, ideas crawl like ants so so far away and ridiculously small and slow. Or enormous, too close to see clearly. I get caught in the tiny knots that tangle as they fluff and fray.*
It will come. I need to remember how to put things to death.
I remember my first love, and first death. He keeps nudging into my deepest being... after all this time, a sudden well of tears, a clutching at the heart. And yes, I remember sitting with him wondering when he would finally slip away. I remember making peace with things left undone, honouring the gravitas, letting go, floating, buffeted, unmoored. The tower tarot, terrible and transformative.
Not all ends are final, and even when they are, they never really leave. Who we could have been, is forever a shard of the mirror that shows us who we are now.
(CK, Journal entry, December 2022)

The schema for knowledge-making presented here is a synthesis of the collaborations that students and I have worked in over the course of years of teaching in the ES unit; the project, *With Dreams in our Hands* that we initiated in 2020; the African Feminist Methodology course that Linda Mensah and I facilitated in 2021; and the Politics 3 course, *The politics of knowledge: African feminisms' contributions to decolonial research, activism, and pedagogy,* that I ran in 2022. It is a schema that combines the aspects of framing, activating, seeing, creating and imagining that from part of any knowledge-making endeavour – in pedagogy and research. What I have demonstrated and explained here are the ways in which the African feminist frame, with its elements of love, connection and spirituality are activated by a political consciousness and ongoing conscientisation. This enables a way to see students and their perspectives and dreams, and to engage their potentials and capacities to create collaborative, communal knowledge-making platforms which generate imaginative ways to work with knowledge.

The schema has a way of expanding the African feminist frame in some ways, through a systematic application of ideas through a variety of processes – the project, the pedagogies, the products. We have all been welcomed and changed by African feminist ideas in this process. The praxis of the ideas gives meaning to our connections to each other, and produces the schema which can be applied over and over in different scenarios from here.

Tamale (2006) gave a plenary presentation at AWID forum in 2005, to inspire what she saw as necessary changes to African feminisms. I have found it a useful guide to think through the changes that need to happen in pedagogy and research practices if we hope to build sustainable cultures for transformational knowledge on the continent, and in so doing it also speaks to the theory and activism in the field of Higher Education. Tamale intended her self-reflexive critique to "provide the much-needed zeal that will spark many of us into action to initiate the process of transforming ourselves and our societies into a more equitable, democratic and tolerant one" (2006, p. 39). She noticed the gap between theory and practice, arguing that under-theorised praxis can hinder "clear vision, knowledge, progress and enlightenment" (p. 40). Our experiences in the PhD projects and the ES classes that were their motivation, were observed, transcribed, reflected upon, analysed, to find the threads that can hold our dreams for an inclusive future, and to affirm a theory through practice. Tamale (2006) has provided clear pointers to achieving these kinds of futures: firstly, she insisted on our political engagement, urging us to declare our political agendas. We were careful to do this, in our choice of theory, in our critique of how knowledge-making has been influenced by capitalism, colonialism, patriarchy and neoliberalism, and in navigating our own positionality with political rigour. Secondly, she encouraged us to theorise, by noticing the normativities – we have asked, in what ways have capitalism, colonialism and patriarchy normalised ways of being, teaching and learning, that limit, oppress, marginalise, the voices of African feminists, and young Black people? By noticing what is normalised, we can transgress these practices to find Afrocentric, Afro-feminist stepping-stones to an alternative future. We have recognised experiences as a valid starting point, finding ways to articulate these with integrity. When experience matters, it expands how we think about knowledge to include embodiment, spirituality, and connectedness. Practising communal knowledge-making with intention and rigour relates the theory with the practice, and this can be applied and expanded in different contexts elsewhere. Tamale (2006) promoted radicalism – she pointed out that those who recommend taking it slowly have not experienced the direct discrimination that limits their freedoms and flourishing. The work of this thesis listens carefully to the radical voices of students, during the 2015/2016 protests, and in the papers that form part of the thesis where we argue for an Afrocentric approach to knowledge-making on the continent. Finally, Tamale (2006) urged us to find innovations that do not avoid controversies, that connect across differences, and that build and nurture their own support mechanisms. Whether through African feminist

reading groups, intergenerational paper-writing teams, pedagogic collaborations across disciplines and continents, and different kinds of pedagogy that collapse the hierarchies and encourage a mutual respect and responsibility, the PhD thesis and projects have sought out ways to do things differently, reaching to find each other's hands across our differences, guided always by courage and love. We argue that this transgressive schema has the potential to make new knowledge that is inclusive, and contributes a perspective of the world that can be transformational.

I told my friend, Injairu, on a walk the other day that I am left with a sense of: So what? Why should any of this matter? Who is it for? For what purpose? Perhaps, said Injairu, it doesn't matter. The point is that students matter. Their dreams count for something. And this thesis and process has been an opportunity to let them speak, and hold up their dreams. The culture and platform for knowledge-making that they/we have imagined and lived, works. It inspires, and generates bigger dreams. There are all kinds of extraordinary teachers and researchers who consciously and unconsciously see and support students and communities in inspiring ways. This thesis is a contribution to their work. It is another perspective on what inspires engaged, inclusive, creatively human knowledge-making, that says, we can do this differently. It is an African feminist approach to pedagogy and people. It is students' hopeful and generous dreams. That is what matters.

At the end of this thesis and process, we are left holding our dreams. We have held them through the rage, the silences, the brightness of the last decade, in our town, our country, our families, our residences, our lecture rooms. We have held them with the strength and wisdom of our mothers and grandmothers, our elders, African feminists, coursing through the veins of the hands that offer, beg, pray, release, hold our dreams and each other. Thando still wants to save his family, and shine for the younger people he teaches. Namhla dreams of reducing the stigma and ignorance for children born of addiction. Chwayita needs a moment to remember and dream who else she can be. Mphumi's dreams burn with a passion to free others as she has been freed. Milisa holds as an offering the dreams that give and give to future generations. Zikho imagines her contributions to the necessary changes we all need. Matimu dreams in several languages of bigger steps to take. Khauho keeps on putting one foot in front of the other in a continuous journey of dreams. Lebogang is inspired and inspiring in his dreams for young people. Mbuso strives for his place in a just future, and Sagittarius smiles her dream of a similar path. Sbu dreams and evolves, listening

to the heartbeat of the youth. Athabile shrugs off the chains that have held him back, to write his dreams and live his passion. Zikie dreams in her mother tongue. Zinathi laughs her dreams as she finds the connections that give her life. Abongile dreams of ancestors and children not yet born, to bring healing to those who are forgotten. Zikhona's dream of her red gown is closer, as she reaches out her hands to others. Viwe dreams with new understandings and learnings. Bathabile, Mfusi, Lian, Ndikho, Anam, Sandiso, all dream and dream, along with so many other students who enter the university and leave, sometimes with less than they had, sometimes with so much more.

We will keep dreaming. Our hands are stronger and more dexterous now, we can hold yours too in this five-fingered schema. We know now that our dreams are not merely a mirage of actions and statuses, but they become a way of being that is expanded and enriched by pedagogic and research communities that are grounded in love.

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Addenda

Addendum 1: PhD by Publication
SUBMISSION TO THE EDUCATION FACULTY, RHODES UNIVERSITY

GUIDANCE FOR PHD *BY* AND *WITH* PUBLICATION IN THE EDUCATION FACULTY

Callie Grant, Heila Lotz-Sisitka, and Sioux McKenna - June 2017

Subsequently discussed at the Research Committee, 14 November 2017 and amended thereafter based on discussion at the Research Committee meeting.

We were tasked at the Board of the Faculty of Education on 15 May 2017 with meeting to discuss the possibilities of PhD with/by publication for the faculty. We brought together our collective experience of supervising and co-supervising (internationally), producing and examining such forms of PhD. We referred to the University calendar, a number of key articles in the literature and to a number of examples of such PhDs, as per the reference list below. From this we produced the following guidance for PhD *by* and *with* publication in the Education Faculty to extend the current HEQSF (DHET 2013) and the RU Higher Degrees Guide statements; with alignment to the University Calendar which requires a PhD 'thesis' to be produced:

1. The PhD by/with publication is not a new model of PhD, neither internationally, nationally nor at Rhodes University. The South African Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework of 2013, for example, describes how a doctoral candidate "may also present peer-reviewed academic articles and papers … in partial fulfilment of the requirements" (HEQSF, 2013, p. 40). At Rhodes University, a PhD by/with publication is an acceptable model of PhD. The rule pertaining to this model of PhD is explained in the Higher Degrees Guide:

   A PhD thesis cannot be merely a collection of published papers. Where published papers and other materials are included in the thesis there should be integrating material of a nature than ensures that one coherent document is submitted for examination that meets all the requirements of the PhD as stated above (Rhodes University, Higher Degrees Guide, p. 3)

2. The benefits to including publications within the PhD are multiple. This route to the PhD supports scholars in developing other forms of literacy, it provides immediate access to the disciplinary community, it provides quality indicators during the PhD process, it assists novice academics in building a CV, it ensures better dissemination of knowledge and it ensures contribution to the field, especially in cases where the field is one of constant change. The literature provides many other benefits.

3. This must be a properly designed PhD project which produces a coherent thesis and makes an original contribution at the boundaries of the field of Education. It is not simply a collection of papers that happen to address the same object of study. The project must have a coherence of theoretical position and there should be clear methodological development, and the study should overall adhere to the quality criteria for the particular type of study design.

4. As is the case with all PhDs, the representation of the final thesis should be as creative as it needs to be to ensure it meets its demands.

5. This is NOT a model of publications submitted in lieu of a PhD thesis – which would amount to 'double-dipping' where subsidy for the articles are then doubled through subsidy for the PhD. Instead it must meet the HEQSF (2013) requirement that publications submitted in the PhD are

only 'in partial fulfilment of the research requirement'. The PhD by/with publication is MORE than the sum of the publications included.

6. There are a variety of models of PhD with publication – where scholars write a metanarrative indicating how the various articles contribute to the field, or where scholars write a reflective evaluation of the papers, or where students write a full thesis with appendices of publications and so on.

    There is a need to distinguish between a PhD *with* publication, where a thesis may include a publication/ publications as part of the process towards a full thesis.

    Another form of PhD *with* publication is where the thesis is a reflective analysis of a number of publications written prior to the PhD project.

    Then there is the PhD *by* publication where the PhD contains a number of publications within its core but does not only comprise those publications. Overall, the publications with the meta-reflection produce the doctoral knowledge.

7. In the case where the model is PhD *by* publication, there should be at least four publications of which three should normally have been submitted to accredited journals and two should have been accepted for publication (in press or already published) with at least two of these normally submitted to internationally accredited journals.

8. While all of the papers can be sole-authored, at least one of them should be sole-authored.

9. Co-authorship is thus permissible but the PhD scholar must be the main author and must lead the paper in:
    a. the initial idea,
    b. the logic of reasoning,
    c. the data collection/material generation,
    d. the analysis
    e. and the manuscript production.

    The scholar must include a clear indication of what aspects each co-author was responsible for and what percentage they undertook (as per the NRF requirements). In the case where three of the publications are co- authored, there is a lower limit of 70% input by the PhD scholar in all five categories above.

10. The student is expected to submit a proposal fulfilling all the usual processes and requirements. The student should explain in this proposal which articles are planned to be co-authored.

11. Whether a PhD by publication or with publication, the full document sent to the examiner should be of approximately the same length as a traditional PhD thesis. The examiners should be given clear guidance on the examination of the PhD *with* or *by* publication in the examination process.

Reference list (selected references)

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We also consulted a number of recent PhD by thesis examples from educational fields in diverse countries including Turner (2016) (Norway), Nuutila (2016) (Finland), Chaves (2016) (Netherlands), Haanson (2015) (Sweden).
From this we developed the above guidelines, capturing the best practices from the construction of these studies.

Addendum 2: Pol 3 Course Outline

The politics of knowledge: African feminisms' contributions to decolonial research, activism, and pedagogy

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Political studies in and of Africa are complex, in that we are located on a post-colonial continent, but profoundly influenced by colonisation and its mutations. Decolonial studies aim to distinguish African experience and thinking from its colonial objectifications and effects, but as Tamale notes, African women are scarce in these conversations. She argues that the "masculinist bias" in mainstream scholarship means that gender is often missing from these discussions and analyses (Tamale 2020:3).

This course is an introduction to African Feminist thinking, and how it has resisted or circumvented colonialism, capitalism, and patriarchy in theory, and in social and political movements. The aim of the course is to emphasise the voices of African women who give us an alternative view of socio-political issues and provide us with a roadmap of how to do the kinds of research that are inclusive and sustainable.

The course is by no means comprehensive – there is so much to read and hear and know about African feminisms! But it will provide an overview of some key ideas and ways in which African feminisms trouble western, and mainstream thinking about the continent and women. It is also an invitation to contribute your experiences and ideas to how we understand African feminist knowledge-making, and its sustainable, socially just and decolonial potentials.

Course outcomes:

- An understanding of the range of African feminisms, and their similarities and differences, and how they are positioned in mainstream knowledge systems
- A foundational grasp of gender as an analytical tool, and some of the debates around this
- A working knowledge of the intersectionality of oppressions, and how to apply this
- A good grasp of African feminist research methodologies
- A working knowledge on how to find African feminist resources for research purposes
- An improved understanding of working in groups, using African feminist communal knowledge-making principles
- An ability to engage in critical African feminist scholarship, as it relates to the course
- An ability to express coherent opinions, based on the readings for the course and own experience
- An ability to respond to peers, and accept their responses, with respect and flexibility

What you can expect from me:

- Well prepared class sessions with the necessary learning materials for each of the themes
- Guidance in class discussions
- Individual or group assistance where necessary
- Clear information on assessment tasks
- Enthusiasm, openness, commitment, and kindness

What I expect from you:

- Your punctual attendance at all lectures and tutorials
- Engagement with the readings, and the topics, and the class discussions
- Completion of all of the assignments with full commitment, and on time
- Honest feedback when it is requested
- That you will let me know when there are issues that prevent you from keeping up
- Curiosity, openness, commitment, and courage

Assessment:

Tutorial: Tutorials take place every week from the second week of term (19 April), and excluding the last week of term. For each tutorial, two tasks are set. The first is a short summary of a reading, due every Monday; and the second is an answer to a question based on that reading to be completed before your tutorial session. In some cases, the question will be based on a reading that you have found yourself on a topic. Tutorials are compulsory.

> Aim: the aim of the tutorial is to ensure that you understand the content and arguments of a reading, and can find your own readings, and can use these to debate in a group.

> Assessment: 20% of your total mark

Proposal: The proposal will be a group project (3-5 people). For this project, you will be required to work together on a research proposal of 1500 words, outlining a research question, the context, theoretical frame, methodology, ethical considerations and means of analysis. More details will be explained as we go along.

> Aim: The aim of the proposal is to put into practice the principles of African feminist research, applied to an issue that interests you. It is also the opportunity to practice African feminist research methodologies and communal knowledge-making.

> Assessment: The proposal will form 40% of your total mark – all members of the group will get the same mark for 75% of the total, with 25% individual mark based on a reflection on the process.

Exam: The exam will take place in June. It will ask you to answer 3 of 5 questions in essay form.

> Aim: The aim of the exam is to provide the opportunity for you to demonstrate your understanding of the concepts and their application and express them in a coherent way.

> Assessment: The exam will form 40% of your total mark.

COURSE ASSESSMENT

Tutorials and reviews	20%	x5	weekly
Proposal (group)	30%	x1	last week
Reflection	10%	x1	last week
Exam	40%		
TOTAL	100%		

Lectures:

There are 6 lectures per week (2 on Mondays). Depending on pandemic issues, these will take place in person, or on zoom. A register will be taken, and an LOA must be completed if you are not able to attend. Each week, there will be the opportunity to provide feedback and questions, and these will be used to formulate the final section of the course.

Week 1: 11 April	Gender as a category and analytical tool
Week 2: 19 April	African feminism and the hierarchies of knowledge
Week 3: 25 April	African feminist research and methodologies
Week 4: 3 May	African feminism as resistance
Week 5: 9 May	African feminism law and culture
Week 6: 16 May	Critiques, questions, and concerns
Week 7: 23 May	Proposal and exam preparation

1. Gender as a category and analytical tool

Gender is an important part of the African feminist lens, in that it provides perspective on the world from the experiences of African women which are often missing from analyses, and which provide alternative viewpoints. Some African feminists argue that gender as a category is a colonial construct that has deliberately misunderstood the role of women in Africa, and how in some cases being a woman is not the most important aspect of a person's status or role in the community (Oyewumi, Amadiume). Another debate is around gender-mainstreaming, and how this is a threat to the transformations anticipated by African feminisms. Ahikire (2014:15) warns that "feminism, as a struggle for transformation of gender relations, is increasingly being conscripted into, perhaps even engulfed by, the increasingly neo-liberal development industry, with disturbing consequences". Gender as a category intersects with other categories to oppress black women, and we will consider the intersections of race, class, and gender on the continent and particularly in South Africa. Tamale (2020: 65) for instance argues that the systems of oppression (colonialism, capitalism, and patriarchy) are mutually constitutive and "shape each other interactively" to oppress people based on their interwoven race, class and gender. The much-publicised case of Caster Semenya will help us to understand and expand some of these intersections.

Gender

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Intersectionality

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2. African feminisms and the hierarchies of knowledge

In the hierarchy of knowledges, African feminist theory is not considered mainstream. It looks at the world from the position of African women, who are located and have roots in different socio-political contexts on the continent. Josephine Ahikire claims (2014, 8) that African feminisms are a "myriad of various theoretical perspectives emanating from the complexities and specifics of the different material conditions and identities of women". We will look at some of the varieties of the theory. In all of them, the social and political world is understood and explained from the perspective of African women, as part of a community. The orientation is always communal and transformational, using the position, experiences, and wisdoms of women to explain and anticipate more inclusive social and political arrangements. It avoids individualistic thinking, or ways of knowing that are only intellectual, and in this way teaches us that theories, programmes, protests, practices that emerge through careful, consultative, holistic attention are relevant and sustainable.

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3. <u>African feminist research and methodologies</u>

African feminist research methodology is linked to the idea that knowledge making is not neutral, and not only an intellectual endeavour. Contrary to ideas of researcher neutrality, and individualism, African feminist methodologies promote communal knowledge making, and profound respect for people who are part of the project – Mkabela (2005) goes so far as to suggest that the dissemination of research findings should be decided by those who participated in the research, even if this means it is not published or used for the researcher's post-graduate degree! Some of the aspects of this section include noticing the social and political location of the researcher, to mitigate power imbalances and bias. Several techniques are suggested, which are informed by clear principles which are present in how the research is conducted – including spirituality, and a collective orientation.

Reading list:

Ethics and principles

Collins, P. H. 2003. "Toward an Afrocentric Feminist Epistemology". In *Turning Points in Qualitative Research: Tying Knots in a Handkerchief*, edited by Y. S. Lincoln and N. K. Denzin, 47–72. Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press.

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Bourke, L., Butcher, S., Chisonga, N., Clarke, J., Davies, F., & Thorn, J. (2009). Fieldwork stories: Negotiating positionality, power and purpose. *Feminist Africa 13 Body Politics and Citizenship*.

Knowles, Corinne. "With Dreams in Our Hands: An African Feminist Framing of a Knowledge-Making Project with Former ESP Students." *Education as Change* 25, no. 1 (2021): 1-22.

4. #RUReferenceList: African feminism as resistance

African feminist theory is linked to women's movements on the continent, in that its intellectual orientation is the collective struggle against the effects of patriarchy, capitalism and colonialism

(Mama 2011). But there is not always an easy relationship between the theory and the movement, as Arnfred and Adomaka Ampofo (2010:6) explain, in that activists sometimes feel that scholars are removed from the "messiness and raw brutality" of lived experience, while scholars argue that it is theory that can show a way out of the mess. As we will see in this section, for centuries on the continent women have been mobilising around issues that affect their communities, and women have been thinking, writing, and imagining a better world, in solidarity with others. Their resistance takes a variety of forms, including scholarship, protests, and cross-national alliances and programmes. This section will look for themes in how women have mobilised over time, and how these mobilisations have expressed and expanded African Feminist theory. It will consider the role of digital activism and the rape culture protests (eg #RUReferenceList, #EndRape protests) in South Africa in 2015/2016 to understand how African Feminism can help us to make sense of that.

Reading list:

Movements

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Hassim, Shireen. "Voices, hierarchies and spaces: reconfiguring the women's movement in democratic South Africa." *Politikon: South African Journal of Political Studies* 32, no. 2 (2005): 175-193.

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5. <u>Queering African feminism: law, culture, and sexuality</u>

Cultural ideas about the role of women in African communities are complicated by colonial patriarchy that disrupted the kinds of positions that women held in precolonial times. African women's roles and positions are further complicated by human rights discourse, which are focussed on the individual and sometimes removed from cultural ideas of community. In this section, we consider some roles of women in Africa, in an attempt to understand the debates in and about African feminism, the law, and human rights discourse. Our discussions will include how men fit into feminism on the continent, and what African feminism has to say about LGBTQIA and different sexualities. It will also examine how cultural roles can add to sustainability discussions, for instance regarding the land and water.

Reading list:

<u>Culture and resistance</u>

Frenkel, Ronit. "Feminism and contemporary culture in South Africa." *African Studies* 67, no. 1 (2008): 1-10.

Dery, Isaac. "A situated, African understanding of African feminism for men: a Ghanaian narrative." *Gender, Place & Culture* 27, no. 12 (2020): 1745-1765.

Oyekan, Adeolu Oluwseyi. "African feminism: Some critical considerations." *International Journal of Philosophy* 15, no. 1 (2014): 1-10.

Pindi, Gloria Nziba. "Beyond Labels: Envisioning an Alliance Between African Feminism and Queer Theory for the Empowerment of African Sexual Minorities Within and Beyond Africa." *Women's Studies in Communication* 43, no. 2 (2020): 106-112.

Aniekwu, Nkolika Ijeoma. "Converging constructions: A historical perspective on sexuality and feminism in post-colonial Africa." *African Sociological Review/Revue Africaine de Sociologie* 10, no. 1 (2006): 143-160.

Datiri, Blessing Dachollom. "Online Activism Against Gender-Based Violence: How African Feminism is Using Twitter for Progress." *Debats* 5 (2020): 271-286.

Omotoso, Sharon Adetutu. "When the Rains are (Un) Stopped: African Feminism (s) and Green Democracy." *Ethics and the Environment* 24, no. 2 (2019): 23-41.

<u>Human rights discourse/ law</u>

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Amadiume, Ifí. "African Women: Voicing Feminisms and Democratice Futures." *Macalester International* 10, no. 1 (2001): 9.

Tamale, Sylvia. "The right to culture and the culture of rights: a critical perspective on women's sexual rights in Africa." *Feminist Legal Studies* 16, no. 1 (2008): 47-69.

Busingye, Godard. "African Feminism, Land Tenure and Soil Rights in Africa: A Case of Uganda." *Legal Instruments for Sustainable Soil Management in Africa* (2020): 133.

Addendum 3: Follow-up Invitation

Hello

How are you? I hope you are keeping well and safe. I am sorry for the delay in getting back to you about my project: my proposal has now been passed, and the university has given me permission to start ☺.

Thanks again for being willing to be part of my PhD project. Let me explain a little better what it is I have in mind, and how it will unfold, and you can decide if you want to be part of it:

1. This is a project about knowledge: how do we make it, and how does it make our lives better. I taught you in ES (and you taught me!!), where we worked with "knowledge" in Sociology 1 and Politics 1. My claim is that the way we work with knowledge in these subjects, and in university, is missing something. Students (and all people) make knowledge in all kinds of ways. I argue that "academic" knowledge, especially western knowledge, doesn't always recognise, or speak to the lives of its students, and doesn't give them adequate ways to express themselves.

2. The space I would like to create with you (and about 15-20 other former ES students) is a facebook and/or whatsapp group, where different ways of knowing, different languages, different ways of expressing (eg photos, statements, pictures, films, journalism, journaling, essays, etc etc) are all welcome. I would like us to be part of this group for about 5 or 6 months (we can decide as a group when to end, but you can also leave anytime you want to).

3. Covid-19 is affecting all of us in different ways. Part of the focus of the project could be how we are experiencing the pandemic – in many ways it exposes the inequalities and challenges of our society. And so we will be able to share with each other, and provide a safe and nurturing space, as we try to make sense of the things that are happening around us, and how our plans and dreams are being limited/shaped/challenged by Covid-19 and its effects. We will make new knowledge, in new ways, with the things we share and what we do with them.

4. If you would like to be part of this, I am going to invite you to an online workshop (I can provide data for this if necessary). In the workshop we will "meet" each other. We will discuss what kinds of questions we will ask, and how we will answer them, how often, in what languages, in what form. And other things. After that, and depending on the ideas of the group, I will post a question every month or so, and invite you answer it.

5. If you are still interested in doing this with me, I would like to suggest this:
    a. Join the facebook group "with dreams in our hands" https://www.facebook.com/groups/667093117174540/ (let me know if you need data for this)
    b. For two weeks, every day or two, post something or like something on the group
    c. What you should post: something you experience in your day – so, either a photo you take on your phone, or a phrase you hear, or a post you read, or something you are thinking or feeling, or a dream you had, or something you experience, etc etc.
    d. After 2 weeks, I will invite you to the online workshop, and you can decide then if you want to continue or not.

I hope this all makes sense to you. A lot can change in a month, so if you would like to change your mind about being part of this journey, please feel free. Also, if you have suggestions about anyone else who you think might want to join, please let me know?

Have a wonderful day, and please take care of yourself

Addendum 4: How to Respond to a Topic
How to respond to a topic

4 topics/questions will be posted. You need to pick ONE of them and respond to it. You will have 3 weeks to do this. You can respond in any language or form (more on this below). As far as possible draw from your own experience.

1. Your experiences are important, because looking at these collectively enable us to make new knowledge.
2. This group is a collective – you are writing to each other. Keep that in mind as your audience – so when you write, keep a person or a few people in the group in mind and speak as though you are speaking to them.
3. If you respond from your own experience: what did you see/hear/touch; how did it make you feel? What did it mean to you? What were you expecting? What did it remind you of? Describe the surroundings. Give details (texture and quality).
4. If you write/speak about others: use empathy – try to stand in their shoes and see the world from their perspective, with their concerns and insights – these will be different from your own, so be careful of making assumptions. Use similar questions to no 3 above, but from someone else's perspective.
5. When you write about experience (yours or others) there is no right or wrong/good or bad. Experience IS. The stories speak for themselves, and it is up to the reader to decide, if they wish, on the morality of what happened. Writing from experience (yours, or others with empathy), allows the reader an opportunity to see the world differently.
6. We are mind, body, and spirit. As you respond to a topic, keep open for what your body and spirit remembers and tells you.

Any language. You can also mix languages if that feels comfortable. You can translate your own work, or I will give it (without your name attached) to someone else to translate into English.

Any genre/form:

- Write or speak an essay –
  - Creative essay (where you tell a story or create a mood)
  - Opinion piece (where you give your ideas and back them up with experience/examples)
  - Academic essay (where you use a theory to explain a situation, and reference)
- Write or speak a poem – there are many different kinds and forms of poetry, all are welcome
- Write or speak a dialogue/script – an imaginary or overheard conversation between two or more people
- Write or sing a song
- Write or speak a letter – to anyone.
- Draw/paint – a picture that sets a mood or illustrates something you want to express

- Take a Photo/video – take pictures or films of something that helps you to express yourself in response to the topic. Remember that if you photograph somebody else, you need their permission to use their pictures. Your photos/videos can be with or without a script/music
- And any other way of expressing that feels right to you….

Addendum 5: Full list of topics

Knowledge

1. How Western studies are affecting students / How Western studies affect us Africans.

2. What constitutes as knowledge

3. generating knowledge/ knowledge creation: in the manner that the way knowledge is created or rather the teaching and learning process is different in the mainstream from e.s. So many of us had a huge culture shock when we went into mainstream of how different things now were. But this is something that we would even notice while we were still on first year.

4. confidence/ owning the teaching and learning process. Many of us found that we were so comfortable in the E.S learning space and that provided room for us to be able to engage and be confident in our engagements because we knew that this is a safe space. however, this was not the case when we had to go into mainstream classes. none of us remembers actually speaking, raising a point or asking a question in mainstream during a class in Barret.

5. The transition between high school and university in terms of knowledge

Schools/Universities response to COVID-19

6. How learners from public schools are affected by the pandemic outbreak. '

7. The success of online teaching in higher education: A case study of Rhodes University.

8. Looking at how Covid-19 has exposed inequalities in South African Universities. How some universities have not started with their academic year to this date and issues of online learning

9. How does the Western way of studying affect us students during this pandemic?

Mental Health

10. What causes mental pathologies amongst students? Broadly, whether the university environment through alienation (of various sorts) and its other vices causes pathologies.

11. pandemic How not coming from model C / privilege schools can contribute to depression in university as you feel like you behind

12. How the consequences of covid-19 have affected the mental health of people from different living arrangements.

13. the lack of Information about mental health during this

Inequalities in society

14. Looking at how Covid-19 has exposed realities/challenges in our health care system.

15. How covid-19 exposed the struggles in Health institutions.

16. How lack of access to information can negatively affect lives of ordinary citizens.

17. How people in informal settlement and informal traders are affected by the pandemic and lockdown   restrictions and their responses.

18. We discussed the discourse between the white and black race in terms of how they have been treated with regards to adequate police presence at which has been rampant during the coronavirus pandemic.

19. Socio economic inequalities and lack of accountability in government affect ordinary citizens the suffering of ordinary citizens

Politics

20. We spoke about the political move from voting for political parties into power to voting for individuals into power

21. The topic which was at the fore was the decision taken by the Independent electoral Commission (IEC) in allowing candidates to run for elections independently. We tried to bring the discussion back to universities in a way of understanding the advantages and disadvantages of the judgement.

22. We analysed the role of our government leaders with regards to such, whether or not the leadership at which they are portraying was whether indeed ethical or not in a period that is demanding ethical leadership in order to construct measures to curb the spread of the virus for all South Africans.

Self-knowledge

23. What has been the most shocking discovery about yourself during COVID.
24. What privileges do you realise you have, that you didn't realise before COVID.
25. What annoyed you the most during lock down.
26. What keeps your spirit high or alive (inspiration), every day. What is your reason for keeping it going.
27. Have you reached any personal goals/did you make any.
28. How has the pandemic affected your academic life?

Addendum 6: How to respond to each other's work
How to respond to someone else's work

Responding to someone else's work is about how YOU experience it – do you agree or not with their ideas or not? Did you enjoy reading it? Did you learn from it? Do you have things to add to their perspectives and examples?

Your response to their work should be no less than 10 lines long (or longer if you have more to say) – please write your comments at the end of the piece. Keep in mind what you said about the kinds of comments you would value from other people and let this guide you as you respond. Take note of the points below:

- Read it at least twice.
- Respond to the piece as though you are in conversation with the author.
- Be guided by kindness and empathy and keep true to yourself in your response to them.
- Ask yourself:
    - How does it make you feel?
    - How do you think the writer/speaker feels about the topic?
    - Do you have questions about the piece?

- o Does the piece remind you of anything you have experienced or read or seen? In what way?
- o Do you have examples to add to the person's work?
- o Are there particular words or phrases that the author uses a lot? What does this tell you?
- o Is there a main theme, or more than one? What does this tell you?

Addendum 7: Composite piece
'Outsiders within' and finding our way: former ES students reflect on life and learning under lockdown.

I am often spending time trying to muster up the courage to speak, about the world's issues, about my issues, and asking myself the tough questions. Writing allows me to shake off the fear of accepting myself and of being able to look at myself in the mirror. I think that is the danger: not being aware of the aspects of my personality that I refuse to acknowledge, I project my own insecurities out into the world. I run the risk of sabotaging myself and the people I love, unknowingly. I have been, we have been pushed and challenged to move beyond the world to which we were accustomed. It has been the year in which I learnt a lot about myself, and a year in which I had to do a lot of learning and unlearning, and online learning.

The spirit of mentorship and the love for knowledge that was inculcated in me by the extended studies unit never left me. ES lecturers are thoughtful because they are somehow aware that not engaging in class discussions does not necessarily translate to 'not knowing' or 'understanding' the work, but a lack of confidence. ES felt like a safe space, a family, for so many of us. Familiarity with each other is what made it easy to engage in class, so it was a safe space for me. It gave me the opportunity to be myself because I knew I was surrounded by one of my own, people who understood me and afforded me the opportunity to make mistakes. I did not have to think about how it would sound to the next person, how my English accent would be, worry about the need to sound intellectual and smart. I was surrounded by people who needed to hear what I had to say as much as I needed to hear what they had to say. We did not perform for anyone.

I do not have a safe space anymore, where I can present my ideas without being awfully criticised in public or being fearful whether my opinion is good enough.

By the time I went to university I was 20 years old and had spent 12 years in the public education system. But that was not enough to prepare me for the ways of the university, how people communicated there. All my life up to that moment I had communicated in vernacular languages. So before one even engages with Karl Marx, one was confronted with English itself. Information is disseminated on the internet in English. Student online academic sites are written in English. Even if students are enrolled in the same university it does not mean they are equal or the same. Different backgrounds or social statuses may have different impact on how students respond or receive institutional measures.

In my experience coming from an under privileged environment and school, being part of that socialisation plays a huge part in causing stress and depression at university, which at times may lead to failure or derailed success within the university because you carry it with you. Inside universities materialism creates 'outsiders within' whereby I am part of the university, but because of my poverty, the university rejects me all the time.

It was March 26, 2020, when the national lockdown of South Africa was announced by the President. None of us were prepared for this. We had no tools for what was to come.

With Dreams in Our Hands

This Covid-19 has exposed the inequalities in south African universities. Most public institutions tend to lack resources. When the lockdown was implemented there was clearly no plan as to how the learners from public institutions would be accommodated in terms of academics, socially and psychologically, as we all have experienced some sort of shock or trauma during this pandemic. Covid has allowed predominantly white institutions to move to remote learning with ease. They have managed to find solutions, have managed to tackle the remote learning, getting learning materials to students even though it was not on time. They had resources to facilitate online learning for some, while black universities have had to extend their year to 2021.

But the online learning that is happening has put the poor black child from the location in a real disadvantage. The absence of study groups and physical contact with lecturers and tutors make it challenging. In this online learning there is no learning that is being done, it's just submitting and moving on. When you learn, you acquire new knowledge and increase your knowledge; but when you are submitting and moving on, you are just reading readings to answer the questions that are asked in the assignments. The universities believe that by giving students data, that is making the learning equal, but there is nothing that is equal in this kind of 'learning'. Being a student under these circumstances has been very difficult for me. Living in a three roomed house, where I would have to wait for everyone to go to sleep, so that I could have the space to myself, where I would then be able to learn without being disturbed. Secondly, trying to balance everything else with the responsibilities that I have – the chores, cleaning and cooking and looking after my sibling. It is not easy, but I try to balance everything out. The fact that we must prove that we are poor every time to the institutions of higher learning for consideration of our grievances is a proof that universities lack comprehensive understanding of our societies. As it stands, I feel alienated. In fact, e-learning can be best understood as alienation, estrangement in the learning process. Alienation rests upon four fundamentals which include powerlessness, meaninglessness, social isolation and normlessness.

The pandemic has been a struggle for many. It revealed the inequalities within the education sector. I perceive the pandemic outbreak as a social change, and that various institutions like education needed to shift from the normal and try to accommodate the 'new normal'. What does normality look like for those countless people who lost loved ones during this pandemic? what does normality look like after unemployment, after an unpleasant storm, after a pandemic? The most shocking yet interesting discovery about myself is how the pandemic has been a learning opportunity. An unwanted, painful, irritating opportunity, but a chance none-the-less for some.

I was able to shift my mindset and programme my mind with positivity. Seeing people losing their lives everyday and here I was waking up every day, made me to appreciate life even more. People were struggling to even buy bread and I was fortunate enough to be able to buy bread, that taught me the importance of sharing. Churches were closed during the global pandemic and spiritually I was not good but after a few weeks or a month I then developed a bible and prayer strategy with my family. It was the most amazing thing that I did with my family was discovering God or knowing God more by ourselves as a family. I realise that the life I dream about is not only for myself but for my entire family and getting there without them being there will feel like I have been robbed of the full picture of everything I am working towards.

On the other hand, if I do not love myself entirely for who I am as a person and learn to make myself my own priority, I will find it difficult to do the same for others. Happiness is an inside job, one that is only achieved in continuing to grow and develop the individual that we are on a daily basis. How do we move on? For me I will write my way to whatever tomorrow holds. I will no longer be the victim to my shadow self, to allow the hidden to come to the light where it is less of a threat.

I remain hopeful that the crisis exposed by Covid-19 can also be used as a revolution to force universities to change and deal with inequalities. Students need to own knowledge production, they have to understand that they play a crucial part in it.

Addendum 8: Invitation to write a paper

Hello lovely people,

I hope you are well and having a good Easter weekend?

I am writing to you (on facebook and email) to let you know where we are in the project and what happens next. Some of you said you would like to co-write papers, and I am including all of you in case anyone else would like to participate.

There are two papers we can work on for now (more will come later). Have a look through each one and let me know if you would like to work on one of them with me - and let me know which one interests you. I am hoping for at least 5 people to work on each paper.

For each paper, I list the data we already have that we can use for the paper, and I list the potential tasks we have to do before we get down to writing the paper – together we can decide on these tasks – there may be other things you think of, or ones you want to take out.

We will be work teams of about 4-6 people for each paper, so we will have a zoom meeting unpack the topic, to go over these steps, and to select who does what, and to decide on timelines. You will have a say in all of this. If you are busy with university or work, you can say which task suits you best, and by when you can do it. A paper takes about 6 months to write, so nothing will be rushed. It can be something you do on the side while you carry on with other things. We are in this together.

PLEASE LET ME KNOW BY FRIDAY NEXT WEEK (9 April) IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO BE PART OF THIS 😊

The paper topics and potential tasks are:

1. **Knowledge and Power in a South African university: what kind of knowledge matters in first year Humanities?** [this comes from **topic 1** on Confidence and owning the teaching and learning process]
     a. *DATA we have:*
          i. Submissions and reviews you have written: numbers 1,4,6,10,15
          ii. Workshop 2 transcriptions
     b. *Reading and research TASKS:*
          iii. Find NEWS articles on the topic
          iv. Find BLOGS/PAPERS/YOUTUBE talks on the topic
          v. African feminist theory papers which will help to frame our ideas and our questions.
     c. *DATA we possibly still need:*
          vi. Questionnaire to all co-researchers (you 😊)?
          vii. Interview with an African feminist?

2. **Theorising the inequalities of the South African education sector during Covid-19 lockdown.** [this comes from the **topic 2** on inequalities in schools and universities]
     a. *DATA we have:*
          i. Submissions and reviews you have written: numbers 5,7,9,11,13,16,18
          ii. Workshop 2 transcriptions

b. <u>*Reading and research TASKS:*</u>
      i. Find NEWS articles on the topic
      ii. Find BLOGS/PAPERS/YOUTUBE talks on the topic
      iii. African feminist theory papers which will help to frame our ideas and our questions.

c. <u>*DATA we possibly still need:*</u>
      i. Questionnaire to all co-researchers (you 😊)?
      ii. Interview with an African feminist?

Addendum 9: Paper 1 Peer Review Comments

The article cannot be accepted in its current form since revisions are needed.

Does the article fit into the aims and scope of the journal? it could yes, but needs work

2) Is the *title* explicit, brief and appropriate and the *abstract* a concise account of the article including the main conclusions? I don't think so

3) Is the *research problem* clearly stated and well motivated? Does it address important issues? It explores an important issue but needs reworking and refocusing as per extensive comments in the text of the review paper

4) Is a sustained and coherent argument present in the article? I have made some suggestions in the review paper

5) Does the argument engage critically with relevant theories? the author employs African femist theory but does not consider gender, I have made suggestions in the review copy

6) Is the research *design and methodology* appropriate to the inquiry? yes, more detail could be offered

7) In the case of empirical research, was the generation of data reliable, appropriate and sufficient? Are the data well presented and interpreted (with consideration of alternative interpretations) and adequately discussed with reference to the relevant theories? quotes needed from participants - the author inadvertently ends up speaking for participants instead of foregrounding their voices. The emphasis needs to shift from telling the reader to showing the reader.

8) Is English appropriately used? (Documents are acceptable when standard editing is required, but not rewriting. You do not need to provide detailed editing comments since accepted manuscripts are professionally edited. While the principle of *world englishes* is accepted, articles should address a global readership). yes, excellent English

This paper is full of potential but needs (in my view) a significant amount of work to make it publishable. I have commented extensively on the review copy, using track changes. I hope these are helpful. In sum my reservations are:

African feminist theory foregrounds gender (and the intersection of gender with other social locations such as race, class, ethncity, sexuality, ability and so on), and yet the paper, while claiming to employ African Feminist theory, makes no mention of gender, or of participants as gendered beings, as men or as women (never mind trans). And by using terms such as students, participants, researchers, teachers etc etc the paper inadvertantly conceals gender and gendered inequalities. The absence of any acknowledgement of gender in the light of the claim to employ an African Feminsit theory needs to be explained or reconsidered.

The author slides between I and we…. Perhaps more consistency is needed, and/or some explanation of who 'we' might be…. A dept? teaching team? Faculty? Institution? Or is it the ESP students? Don't make readers guess

And, given the institution is identified as Rhodes in the early pages, is there any reason to anonymise it in the abstract and early part of the intro?

What does it mean to say (footnote 1) that Black is used in the political sense? The footnote below it also seems to be uncritically using apartheid catgeories. I'd recommend a bit more clarity here…how have other researchers navigated the tricky ground between reifying and acknowledging the social locations around race produced through aparthied categories.... do people self identify? how have participants self identified? What are the challenges around uncritically using apartheid categories...

sorry about the different fonts...cut n pasting....

Another reservation I had revolved around what seems to be a narrow understanding of what constitutes African feminist theory, drawing very strongly on just one theorist, Ntseane. Ntseane's work/ideas could be located against African feminism more broadly rather than presented as exemplifying African Feminist theory, esp as gender doesn't seem to be central in Ntseane's work. I suggested (see cut and pasted comment below, hence font changes) that this might be addressed by the following

I think you need to frame much earlier on that you are employing a very specific understanding of African feminism, the Ntseane version, and that you acknowledge its contested, that other versions of African feminism offer different kinds of analyses, are more critical of patriarchal cultures/religions etc but that nevertheless you have chosen to use Ntseane because you believe she has some important insights to shed on processes that you are writing about. In other words deploy the understanding of theory that I raised in an earlier comment, that theory emerges out of the incompleteness/inadequacies of existing theory, theory in dialogue with theory…. So you are entering the dialogue, contributing your perspective on how Ntseane's theory matters/adds value/ through an analysis of your study… not with a view to eliminating discussion among and between African feminists, but as a way of 1. deepening the debate between and amongst African feminists and 2. Offering insights from a strand of African feminism to those who a) are interested in 'decolonising' higher ed/ESP programmes and b)(interested in learning something about African feminism

The final major revision I'm suggesting is that the last part of the paper be reworked to foreground participants voices. The last section is where the author tells us what her participants thought and felt about her innovative pedagogical approach. This section would be strengthened by using the words of participants themselves - foregrounding their experiences/insights in relation to the pedagogy in their own words instead of speaking for them. So I'd recommend that the reader be informed about the social locations inhabited by participants early on, so that later on in the paper we can see how diverse gender, race, class, ethnicity etc etc positionalities can be accommodated through the pedagogcal approach employed, that persons from diverse language groups, diverse cultures, diverse educational backgrounds can 'find' each other.... reader needs to be shown this, rather than be told this. ----------------

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Reviewer B:

I enjoyed this article very much.

I would have liked you to locate the work from the beginning into South Africa where the legacies of apartheid have left a deep scar on scholars and students who are accepted into ESP programs.

The description of your pedagogic approach using African Feminism was an inspiration to me (also a white female academic) but I would like a bit more discussion on Black feminism and then African feminism. I also would like a discussion on what the word 'empower' means (see note with in the text).

The article seemed to be the first part of what may become 2 parts of the outcome of the current study. (please see comments with the document).

When describing the 'inviting' phase, it would be helpful to read what was written about the project (on Facebook) that invited people to participants. This provides information for researchers who may wish to use similar methods for inclusive practices.

The use of theory throughout shows a immersive understanding of African feminism and inclusive pedagogical practices. I found the references and use of theory valuable throughout and look forward to recommending this article to fellow academics and students.

Addendum 10: Paper 2 Editor Decision

12/6/22, 6:52 AM   Rhodes University Mail - Teaching in Higher Education - Decision on Manuscript ID CTHE-2022-0388

Teaching in Higher Education <onbehalfof@manuscriptcentral.com>   24 September 2022 at 13:08

Reply-To: tihejournal@gmail.com

To:

c.knowles@r

u.ac.za 24-

Sep-2022

Dear c.knowles@ru.ac.za,

Re your manuscript: CTHE-2022-0388; Knowledge and Power in a South African university: what knowledge matters in first year Humanities?

Having carefully considered your paper, one of the executive editors has decided that despite its laudable inclusion of students as co-researchers, it is not suitable for the peer review process for publication in Teaching in Higher Education. The reasons for this decision include: methodology not clear and under-theorised, no explicit theory of learning, too embedded in a South African context for the journal's readership. Please visit our website for a copy of our policy statement.

We cannot provide feedback on your specific manuscript due to the volume of submissions, but we can inform you that most common reason for this decision is that the paper did not match the expectations of our aims and scope to a sufficient extent. We would highlight the following typical characteristics of articles that we believe are suited to the peer review process:

- A strong focus is offered on teaching in higher education, one that addresses an international audience.
- A well-developed critical and/or theorised perspective on the issue is in evidence.
- New insights are provided to the readership, along with a robust demonstration of originality.
- The research design and conduct of the study occurred on a rigorous basis.
- Claims made in the study are fully substantiated, drawing appropriately on data or academic argument.
- The structure and language are suitable clear and precise for publication.

You may also find it useful to read a fuller description on the Teaching in Higher Education blog about the nature of articles that we are looking to publish: https://teachinginhighereducation.wordpress.com/2020/02/01/seven-questionsfor-potential-authors-how-to-get-published-in-teaching-in-higher-education/

Your manuscript may be better suited to one of Taylor & Francis' other journals, and the Taylor & Francis editorial team might be in touch with some specific suggestions.

Thank you for considering Teaching in Higher Education. I hope the outcome of this specific submission will not discourage you from the submission of future manuscripts.

Best wishes

Kind regards

Alison Stanton

Administrator

Teaching in Higher Education Editorial Office

tihejournal@gmail.com
https://twitter.com/TeachinginH
E

Addendum 11: Paper 3 Reviewer comments

Reviewer A:

I think this article tries to do too much and as a result the focus is lost. With a lack of focus, it is difficult to see where the original contribution lies in this article. Is the focus on schooling or post-schooling (university) or the transition between these? Doing all of these is too broad for an article. If your emphasis is on the transition between transition between school and tertiary, then your mention to schooling is very specific with particular challenges to that sector and not drawing on the challenges for the transition of schooling to tertiary.

The abstract is disconnected from what the article promises as stated in the introduction.

At the end of the introduction it is claimed that the article will end with "how to use the experience of the pandemic to rethink the education system to be more socially just and sustainable in an uncertain future". In the last section ("Reconnection between universities and schools…..") I could not see how this is put forward. Rather than a critical discussion, this section is a descriptive account of aspects such as key purpose of school, the economic and social inequalities in schools, culture as well as the quality of the teaching profession. This does not live up to 'rethinking' a more socially just education system.

The connection between colonialism, decoloniality and material inequalities is important but I think is under theorised. Theoretical lenses of intersectionality and re-connection lack depth and need further exploration through decolonial and post-colonial literature.

Trustworthiness is in question when mention is made of the participants verbatim responses without first providing details on the research design followed (including the methodology, sample, methods of data generation and analysis to arrive at these findings as well as ethical considerations). Only mention to the project, With Dreams in Our Hands (WDIOH), is not enough. More detail is needed.

Some sources in the text do not appear in the reference list. For example, Wolhuter

The submission needs to be language edited for grammar and other language errors.

See also narrative comments on the article

Reviewer B:

In broad terms, the article can be a valuable contribution if there is more careful integration of the feminist lens in the data discussion section, and greater attention paid to measures and solutions that go beyond the well-worn decolonial rhetoric, providing substance to actual implementation by key role players, specifically policy makers, schools, universities, and especially support for students in the home and community, given the turn to digital teaching and learning. The section-by-section comments that follow should be seen in this context.

Title

While the title indicates a focus on "theorising" inequalities, the article goes beyond theorising. In fact, it attempts to integrate theory with data, something that is self-evident and as per my comments below. As such, I would suggest replacing the word "Theorising" in the title with "problematising" or something similar.

Introduction: The author states "With a critical African lens, we examine the inequalities in schools and universities, emphasized by the pandemic" – While this is explored in the conceptual framework section, this lens is not pulled through sufficiently in the subsequent sections. Author should consider reviewing this aspect to better connect the conceptual lens with the data discussion sections.

Constructing the lens and the nature of knowledge

In the abstract, reference is made to adopting an African feminist lens; however, in the Introduction reference is made to "drawing on critical theory and African theorists for a lens through which to explore the challenges" – there is no mention of the "African feminist" dimension; there is a need for clarity and consistency in this regard, especially given the following important claim: "Our contribution to this work has been to think through the inequalities that we and others like us have experiences, using the African feminist lens that values embodied knowledge, communal knowledge-making, and finding an African-centred perspective". It's only in the last two paragraphs that draws on Tamale that the feminist perspective, and the two key concepts of intersectionality and reconnection, are discussed. However, as indicated in my comment under Introduction, this lens is also not pulled through sufficiently in the subsequent sections – it will help if there are references to Tamale, either using direct quotes or paraphrases, that is integrated with the data discussion sections, to strengthen the arguments. Overall, suggest paying more attention to the "feminist lens" throughout as this provides the basis for the article's unique and original contribution.

The following sentences raise an important point: "He suggested that decolonial knowledge production must be dominated by academics located in Africa; African universities should prioritize, support, and recognize more great studies about Africa. Eventually Non-African scholars will deter from being authoritative voices of Africa" – however, there is a need to problematise the notion

around African academics as some African academics themselves perpetuate coloniality, as asserted by several decolonial scholars.

Exposing the inequalities in schools

Providing references to important claims needs attention, e.g. "In this way, the South African government continues to be moulded by the legacies of apartheid culture of inequality, by failing to recognise the realities of many public schools. It fails to fulfil the necessities in many public schools especially those that are situated within the rural areas. For example, most of these schools have ablutions that are not in proper healthy conditions, mostly, but not only, due to not having running water within those areas.

The Department of Education has expectations that the public schools should perform academically within the same range as private schools, not taking into consideration that this expectation can be derailed by so many obstacles that the public schools have to endure more especially during this pandemic."

These statements need to be supported by evidence. In addition to the Amnesty International reference used earlier, there are several sources that speak to these issues, e.g., Nic Spaull, Jonathan Jansen and others.

Similarly, later the following claim is made "The DBE failed to recognise and support this reality" – again, what is the evidence to support this claim?

"The covid-19 did not only display these inequalities but also revealed that there is a lot that the education sector needs to work on especially in the public schools that are situated in small/outlying areas…learners come from different walks of life." What are "these inequalities"? Is it access to resources for the rural or poor? Other issues? Some elaboration is needed.

"The symbolic violence described by Moletsane (2015) and articulated in the marginalisation of poor Black students in the state arrangements for schooling during pandemic lockdowns, can and must be addressed by 'context-specific knowledge, co-created and co-disseminated with the local people themselves' (Moletsane 2015:4)". This is a huge leap to be making. The suggestion that systemic economic and social inequalities can be resolved through epistemological interventions needs more careful articulation.

Exposing the inequalities in universities

This section is quite well presented and argued. The one suggestion relates to the following

important argument: "Decolonising our thinking as the academic community in how we approach emergency shifts due to the pandemic, and in how and what we teach, is, as Ndlovu (2020) and Pillay (2015) claim, a way to bring about epistemic justice as well as find the relevant and sustainable solutions to the issues of inequality". To strengthen the argument here, some examples of solutions resulting from decolonial thinking would be useful.

Reconnection of university to society as a public good: It is in this section and the next that the article's main contribution is presented. The author attempts to make a case for addressing the needs of poor students as a way of the university's contribution to the public good, suggesting "Students from poor societies and rural villages with no access to internet and laptops have found very difficult to exercise their rights to education. This has nullified Giroux, (2010) and Arendt's (1954) ideas, which emphasized that higher education could be a space for making alternative futures". But how then does one explain the reality that students from poor communities have made contributions to new knowledge prior to the advent of ICT and the digital age – this

contradiction needs to be addressed. Second, among the "measures" proposed for universities are: "Curricula that speak to the realities in the classroom are more likely to be able to conceptualise solutions for inequalities in society. Poor students, if they were included in how the university arranged its resources and its rewards, are best suited for being involved in the generating of solutions for the problems of poverty in their own communities" – These measures need to go beyond the level of generalisation, e.g., what should the curriculum content include that is not there currently; likewise, how exactly can student involvement in the universities' financial management policies offer solutions to the problems of poverty? These questions need some answers to strengthen the argument being made.

Section on: **Reconnection between universities and schools – teacher training, and the transition between school and tertiary**:

The following is argued: "Besides the exposure to career guidance, there are also factors such as being taught in English in tertiary where previously many learners are taught in indigenous languages in schools. Transition from school to university means a shift too in the kind of English competence that is expected. Therefore, being in huge lecture halls with all kinds of people, being taught in a language that you not very good at is overwhelming". The language discourse needs to be more nuanced as there are studies (e.g, studies by Chrissie Boughey) that reveal that learning in one's vernacular or first language does not necessarily make students to succeed in their studies.

The author states: "With the arrival of democracy in 1994, the newly elected democratic government introduced reforms to eliminate the legacy of apartheid (Lombard, 2020). These include reforms in education funding, curriculum content and teacher rationalization. After the first democratic elections in 1994, some policy changes were made". What is not explained is whether the policy changes were effective.

Second, the author states "there is substantial evidence that current school preparation is insufficient to ensure a successful transition from high school to higher education" – however, there is no citing of this evidence. Third, the author suggests that answer to addressing the articulation gap lies in improved teacher training: "A study in 2018 pointed out that 'current teachers were less confident about their training, and most university faculty did not believe that they were effectively trained' (Jez and Luneta 2018), pointing to further work that needs to be done to align the work between universities and schools". The author needs to extend this line of thought and suggest how and what needs to change in teacher training programmes – this will enhance the contribution that the article can make.

Conclusion: ends with the sentence "We argue that a reconnection between the university and the public (including its own students), and the university and school systems, are a way to orientate our thinking, planning, policies and practices to be more inclusive, and also more relevant to the majority". Add one or two specific solutions that the article offers, e.g. in relation to teacher training.

General suggestions:

Bridging sentences needed to connect different sections more tightly, e.g. section on inequalities and section on reconnection to enhance flow and readability.

A thorough language edit is needed to address grammar and readability, as well as some vagueness and too many generalisations. An example is the first sentence in the section, *Exposing the inequalities in schools*: "The Covid-19 pandemic has placed South African schools into further crisis, it has swiftly exposed of how our country continues to be precast by the legacy of apartheid" – there are two sentences presented as one, and the grammar in the second part needs correcting; this and similar language errors can be easily fixed.

The following references can be consulted to assist with the suggested revisions:

Boughey, C. (2005). Lessons learned from Academic Development Movement in South African Higher Education and their Relevance for Student Support Initiatives in the FET College Sector. Commissioned Report. Human Sciences Research Council.

Boughey, C. (2007). Educational development in South Africa: From social reproduction to capitalist expansion? Higher Education Policy, 20, 5-18. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.hep.8300140

Boughey, C. (2008). Texts, practices and student learning: A view from the South. International Journal of Educational Research, 47, 92-199. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijer.2008.01.007

Council of Higher Education (CHE). (2010). Higher Education Monitor: Access and Throughput in South African Higher Education: Three Case Studies. Pretoria: Council on Higher Education. Available at: https://www.che.ac.za/sites /default/files/publications/Higher_Education_Monitor_9.pdf

Cross, M. (2018). Steering epistemic access in higher education in South Africa: Institutional dilemmas. Argentina: CLACSO. Available at: http://biblioteca.clacso.edu.ar/clacso/sur-sur/20180425114100/Web_Steering.pdf

Cross, M. & Atinde, V. (2015). The Pedagogy of the Marginalised: Understanding How Historically Disadvantaged Students Negotiate Their Epistemic Access in a Diverse University Environment. Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies, 37(4), 308-325. https://doi.org/10.1080/10714413.2015.1065617

Cross, M. & Govender, L. (2021) Researching higher education in Africa as a process of meaning-making: Epistemological and theoretical considerations. Journal of Education, 83, 13-33. https://doi.org/10.17159/2520-9868/i83a01

Fataar, A. (2012). Pedagogical Justice and Student Engagement in South African Schooling: Working with the Cultural Capital of Disadvantaged Students. Perspectives in Education 30(4), 52-75. Available at: https://journals.ufs.ac.za/index.php/pie/article/view/1782

Lange, L. (2017). 20 Years of higher education curriculum policy in South Africa. Journal of Education, 68. Available at: http://www.scielo.org.za/scielo.php?script=s ci_arttext&pid=S2520-98682017000100004

Addendum 12: Ethical Clearance

22 June 2020

Ms Corinne Knowles Education Department C.Knowles@ru.ac.za

Dear Ms Corinne Knowles

Your application for ethical clearance for the study provisionally titled "With dreams in their hands: an African feminist framing of student responses to COVID-19 experiences and effects in South Africa" (1476) has been reviewed by the Education Faculty Ethics Committee.

Ethics approval has been granted pending the required Permission Letters being obtained from the organisation(s) listed in your application. These are: The Registrar, Rhodes University.

Your application can be downloaded as a PDF version and forwarded with your permission letter request. Please refer to the Applicant User Guide for how to do so. Once you have received the required permission letter, please forward it to the Education Ethics Coordinator in order for your approval to be finalised.

The Education Faculty Ethics Committee had the following comments on your application:

An ethnographic account will be used in the study to strengthen researcher reflexivity, but this may not be sufficient. Consider including a critical friend in the study; this is a recommendation rather than a requirement. This is indeed a low risk study.

Sincerely

Professor Eureta Rosenberg

Chair: Education Faculty Ethics Committee