



**EXPLORING THE STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES OF (DE) COLONIALITY: A CASE  
STUDY OF SOCIAL WORK PROGRAMME AT A SOUTH AFRICAN UNIVERSITY  
IN THE PROVINCE OF KWAZULU-NATAL.**

**Thembelihle Brenda Makhanya**

**A thesis submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of  
Philosophy (Social Work).**

**Supervised by Dr. Sibonsile Z. Zibane**

**Faculty of Humanities**

**School of Applied Human Science**

**2020**

## **DECLARATION**

I, Thembelihle Brenda Makhanya, acknowledge that this thesis is my original work. I declare that this study has not been previously submitted for any examination or degree in any university. The work is referenced in-text, and a bibliography is provided to acknowledge the work of other people.



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T.B. Makhanya

29 October 2020

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Date

I approve this thesis for submission as a supervisor of the candidate.

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Dr. S.Z Zibane

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Date

## **DEDICATION**

This thesis is dedicated to the sons and daughters of Azania who, against all odds, have endlessly battled against colonial legacies.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The doctoral journey cannot be perceived as the struggle of an individual. This project is like a tree with its roots drawing blossom from multiple sources.

1. I appreciate uMvelinqangi for everlasting protection and provision.
2. My precious supervisor, Dr. Zibane kaNontanda, thank you for leading this project in such a dignified manner. You have become more than my supervisor but a friend, a mother, a mentor, and a colleague.
3. Dr. Dorothee Holsher, thank you for laying a strong foundation for this project. You have played a fundamental role in conceptualising this study.
4. Mr. Senzeka Mntambo, if it was not for your editing services, comfort, love, and encouragement during the storms that fought against this achievement, I would not be here. Thank you, and may your heart desires be granted.
5. To my family, oMakhanya, oMnguni oPhakathwayo oYeye...all that I am and all that I have, it is because of who you are;
  - To Mnqobi, thank you for understanding and allowing me to be absent in your life during all these years, pursuing my career.
  - To my Dad, thank you, Mnguni, for being such a caring and loving father. You always boast about me, which gives me more zeal to continue progressing.
  - To my mother, you did not know or understand what I was doing and why I was doing it. But you were always there for me, calling, checking, encouraging, and praying for me. I am proud to be the fruit of a strong and a God-fearing woman that you are.
  - To my brothers and sisters, Bheki, Zamokwakhe, Nokuthula, Nokwanda, Nondumiso, and Nduduzo, thank you for loving, supporting, and believing in me.

6. To all my friends, Lindani Maphumulo, Liberty Mambondian, Nsizwazonke Yende, Thulisile Memela, Fezeka Khumalo, Thando Nokhanga, Gladys Makolomakwe, Hloniphile Khuzwayo, to mention the few, thank you for your support.
7. To colleagues in the discipline of Social Work at UKZN, thank you for your intellectual support during this journey. Dr. Zibane's postgraduate supervision group has also played a fundamental role in shaping how I think and write about this study.
8. I would also like to appreciate the contribution and support of colleagues at UNIZULU, particularly Mrs. Nxumalo, Dr. Dimo, Mrs. Ndlovu, Mr. Shabalala, Mr. Ngubane, and Mrs. Mkhwanazi.
9. To the study participants, this Ph.D. would not have existed if you did not provide in-depth information on your experiences. Thank you.
10. The financial assistance of the National Institute for the Humanities and Social Sciences, in collaboration with the South African Humanities Deans Association towards this research, is hereby acknowledged. Opinions expressed and conclusions arrived at are those of the author and are not necessarily to be attributed to the NIHSS and SAHUDA.
11. I appreciate the financial support I received to pay for teaching relief and to edit my thesis from the University Capacity Development Programme, UKZN.

## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis unpacks African graduates' understanding of (de)colonial Higher Education through the narratives of post-graduate social work students and practitioners who attended a university located in KwaZulu-Natal. This study is inspired by the 2015/2016 #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall South African students' movement, which called for a need to explore students' views about (de)coloniality in Higher Education. The case study was framed within the anti-colonial and Afrocentric theory and drawn on the tenets of the social constructionism paradigm in understanding the participants' experiences of university education. Twenty-two (22) graduates who were purposively selected participated in this study. Data was collected through focus group discussions and semi-structured individual interviews. The collected data was analysed through thematic content and discourse analysis. In a setting dominated by colonial legacies, graduates spoke about coloniality as the endorsed activities that oppress African people's humanity through Western domination. The study findings suggest that colonial cultures, white supremacy, colonial language/s, and difficulty in accessing the African university not only hinder access of African students in higher education (HE), but also suppress their emancipation during academic engagements. The graduates thus spoke about teaching and learning pedagogies, epistemologies, and languages as vital instruments that enforce coloniality in social work education and practice. Although participants acknowledged the encountered transformations in the new democratic dispensation of South African higher education; they perceive such transformation as at the minimal. Graduates thus called for higher education institutions (HEIs) to be mindful of the stubborn and persistent colonial realities still existing in African universities.

## GLOSSARY OF TERMS

African	As with Zibane (2017), African' in this study is not used to refer to any scientific racial categorisation but is used as a social construct to classify South Africans of African ancestry. Here the researcher is referring to these who were previously referred to as 'black' South Africans. Those who were colonially exploited and dominated because of their racial group (Biko 1987)
Africanisation	Ramose (1998) describes Africanisation as a conscious and deliberate assertion of nothing more or less than the right to be an African. “Africanisation is generally seen as a renewed focus on Africa – reclaiming what has been taken from Africa – and the emergence of a new sense of pride” (Laow 2010, 42)
Anti-coloniality	The practice that opposes the colonial rule of one country by another or opposing or resisting colonialism. The anti-coloniality is against foreign domination (Lee 2018); it thus demands full decolonisation of the economy, politics, and the mind (Thomas & Thompson 2018)
Apartheid	A policy or system of segregation or discrimination on the grounds of race. Apartheid was a racial segregation system in South Africa that was enforced through legislation by the National Party from 1948 to 1994 (Okoth 2006)
Colonialism	The policy of acquiring full or partial political control over another country, occupying it with settlers, and exploiting it economically (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2020). Colonialism is the invention of asymmetrical and colonial intersubjective relations between coloniser (citizen) and colonised (subject). It economically institutes dispossession and transfers of economic

	resources from indigenous to those who are conquering and foreign. It claims to be a civilising project, as it hides its sinister motives. The project also creates institutions and structures of power that sustain colonizer-colonized relations of exploitation, domination, and repression (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2020)
Colonisation	Is the process of settling among and establishing control over the indigenous people of an area. Colonisation is the institutes of colonialism which can be dated in terms of when it started and when it came to an end (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2020)
Coloniality	Is the practices of colonialism in social orders in postcolonialism society (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2015)
Decolonisation	Decolonisation is the “change that colonised countries go through when they become politically independent from their former colonisers” (Oelofsen 2015, 130)
Decoloniality	It is a school of thought used principally by an emerging Latin American movement that focuses on untangling the production of knowledge from a primarily Eurocentric episteme. It critiques the perceived universality of Western knowledge and the superiority of Western culture. Decoloniality is the practice of decolonisation by critically examining dominant practices and knowledge in modern society (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2015)
Epistemology	The theory of knowledge, especially with regard to its methods, validity, and scope, and the distinction between justified belief and opinion (Abdi 2006). Epistemology involves the concepts of knowledge, evidence, reasons for believing, justification, probability and so on (Fumerton 2006, cited in Abdi 2006)
Imperialism	A policy of extending a country’s power and influence through colonisation, use of military force, or other



	means (SAHO 2020). State policy, practice, or advocacy of extending power and dominion, especially by direct territorial acquisition or gaining political and economic control of other areas (Ibid). Because it always involves the use of power, whether military or economic or some subtler form, imperialism has often been considered morally reprehensible, and the term is frequently employed in international propaganda to denounce and discredit an opponent's foreign policy (SAHO 2020)
Neocolonialism	In 1965 Kwame Nkrumah introduced the concept of "neocolonialism" to name the continuation of exploitative economic relations long after attaining political independence (the sought-after political kingdom) (Nkrumah 1965)
Neoliberalism	"Neoliberalism is...a theory of political, economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterised by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade..." (Harvey 2005, 2)
Hibiscus	It is a term borrowed from the hibiscus flowers, which symbolise extraordinary features that come in many colors and are found in warm places. The term is used as a pseudonym for the research site of the present study. This term was seen fit to describe the geographic location and the complex nature of the university under study
Pedagogy	The method and practice of teaching, especially as an academic subject or theoretical concept. "learning-oriented towards social goals" (Hinchliffe 2000, 31)
Peripheralisation	It is a "synonymous with distance to a center and being situated on the fringes of a city, resources, services, economy..." (Kühn 2015, 1)

## **ABBREVIATIONS**

<b>HBU:</b>	Historical Black University
<b>HEI:</b>	Higher Education Institution
<b>HE:</b>	Higher Education
<b>HU:</b>	Hibiscus University.
<b>HWU:</b>	Historical White University
<b>IKS:</b>	Indigenous Knowledge Systems.
<b>KZN:</b>	KwaZulu-Natal.
<b>SA:</b>	South Africa.
<b>SAU:</b>	South African university
<b>SRC:</b>	Student Central Council.
<b>UKZN:</b>	University of KwaZulu-Natal.
<b>UNIZULU:</b>	University of Zululand
<b>UNISA:</b>	University of South Africa.

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# CHAPTER ONE

## THE (DE) COLONIAL DISCOURSE IN SOUTH AFRICAN HIGHER EDUCATION

### 1.1. INTRODUCTION

*“FeesMustFall is a clear call for a free decolonised, Afrocentric education. This call is rooted in the liberation of black people and the total dismantling of the anti-black system that maintains black oppression. FeesMustFall is an intersectional movement within the black community, aiming to bring about a decolonised education. This means that the FeesMustFall movement is located as part of the larger struggle to eradicate the western imperialist, colonial, capitalist patriarchal culture [...]. The movement argued that the current anti-black curriculum is designed to reproduce systems of oppression. The exclusion of the majority drives this anti-black education. In South Africa, the education system is not designed for the interests of the black community, but those who intend to preserve the status quo, which is a colonial education [...]”.* (Business News tech, 2 October 2016).

This thesis begins with an extract from a media article that foregrounded the context of the 2015/2016 #FeesMustFall students’ movement in South African universities (SAUs). The above media extract points out the three dominant colonial legacies that still exist in institutions of higher learning in South Africa. First, it exposes the high fees that are not affordable to disadvantage and needy students in HE. Access to university is still portrayed as influenced by the financial status of the student. Second, university education is referred to as 'anti-black.' The article criticises African education as Eurocentric. The article thus calls for a decolonialised, transformative and anti-oppressive education. Thirdly, it highlights that education in South Africa is not meant to benefit and transform the lives of the majority of Africans, but it is meant to privilege the colonisers. As such, the above article calls for the urgent need to address inequalities based on power, class, and race in higher education.

As South Africa celebrates twenty-five years of democracy, most of its citizens lives are still characterised by injustices of the past and continue to experience and witness colonial legacies. Ironically, the outcries for a decolonised South Africa is louder in South African Higher Education Institutions (HEIs); the same institutions that should be driving the transformation agenda. The reminders and experiences of coloniality are everywhere. They are visible in

university buildings, in how power and privileges are organised, in the curriculum, and even in the dominant culture and language of teaching and learning. This thus suggests a need for a deeper exploration of how historical bequests influence students' experiences in South African universities. This study thus explore students' understanding and experiences of (de) colonial higher education (as detailed in chapter three). Nakata, Nakata, Keech and Bolt (2012) also argued for the need to observe colonial orders being imposed and colonial reasoning applied to local context in everyday life. The findings also hope to unfold the decolonial transformation agenda in South African universities, especially in social work education. The findings also hope to unfold decolonial alternatives that can be developed for culturally relevant African university and social work curricula (Kreitzer 2012). Thus, this study calls for developmental inclusion and consideration of African philosophies as alternatives (Mignolo 2010) in knowledge production.

This chapter serves as an overview of the rest of the report. The motivation and background for conducting this study are explored. The major questions of the study are outlined. The methodology is introduced, and theoretical frameworks are explored. The chapter concludes by journeying with the reader into the chapters that will be covered in this report.

Throughout this study, participants are perceived as active in analysing and capturing of their experiences rather than passive individuals within social structures and systems, and not as silent individuals depending on institutions/systems to speak for them (Mhlongo 2012).

## **1.2. BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE OF THE STUDY**

I am from the rural part of Port Shepstone, located in the Hibiscus Coast local municipality (currently called Ray Nkonyeni Municipality), in the KwaZulu-Natal Province. I come from a society and a family that has survived and still surviving on informal learning. The learning takes place in diverse events and spaces such as home environments, izimbizo (traditional community gatherings), istokfela (women's social clubs), Zulu dance clubs, storytelling, virginity testing, ploughing, herding cattle, and church. Dominantly, the African value systems, the culture, the rite of passages, celebrations, oral history, and storytelling are the first line institutions that educate African children and society at large (Graham 1999).

In my community context, university education was thus a luxury and, in many instances, an unattainable dream. I am the first generation in my family who entered a HEI. When I entered the university, it became clear that I came from a different cultural background, as I was poor



and unprepared for this type of education. The journey of my undergraduate degree was uneasy. From first day of orientation and registration, I experienced difficulties, mainly due to language and system barriers. System barriers such as restricted access to university residence, access to study materials due to financial limitations; and access and use of computers were some of the challenges I experienced.

My own experiences of the university as a young African student from a rural community, before 2015/2016 #FeesMustFall students' movement, and literature that focus on the need for anti-colonial and African centered higher education have influenced the focus of the study. My struggles with language, for instance, contributed immensely to the rationale of this study. The language barrier emanated from that; my first and home language is isiZulu. IsiZulu is not only isolated to a home environment. It was a medium of communication also in my high school and the community at large. Unfortunately for me, my university relied on English. Although English was taught throughout my schooling years, English lessons were explained in isiZulu, and the main medium of communication was isiZulu. Clearly, my home and schooling background did not prepare nor equipped me for institutions of higher learning (HEIs).

I entered the university unprepared for the new life and academic experiences. Zibane (2017), in her Ph.D. study, also reflected on her high school experience, and how it did not prepare her for HE and the career she eventually enrolled for at the university. According to her, it was the educators, not the learners, who were choosing their subject specialisation during high school (ibid). Subject choices were based on the learners' grade 9 performance, not on a career path or learners' academic interests. Zibane (2017) further stated that, up to date, high school graduates from disadvantaged schools decide on their career paths after receiving their matric results or during grade 12. Two decades later, my own career path experience was no different from Zibane's experience of the early 90s.

I entered the university during the era when the university was aggressive in addressing their equity status and inclusivity. The university was particularly opening its doors to rural African communities. This meant that the university was getting a new breed of students. These were students from a different socioeconomic status, with a different educational background, and who are strongly rooted in their indigenous languages, African cultures and value systems. Personally, many elements of my identity were not fitting to the university environment. I was

a rural girl, with a home that is 150 km away from the university, with no funding, and no place to stay. I was from a different culture and belief system, spoke a different language, and in possession of a different type of learning.

In my first year of university, I was feeling lost, I was a stranger in my own country, and I felt as if I was uprooted from everything I knew. While I was excited to be a university student, I was very stressed by the fact that I struggled to follow and catch up on the lessons and was unable to cope with assessment requirements. I remember the first assignment, which was to write about yourself. It required that I submit it typed and honor all the requirements of academic writing. My computer illiteracy was a big stumbling block and let alone to critically discuss the assignment topic in English. My failure to cope with university demands made me hate my background and undermine my identity as an African student.

To me, addressing equity and promoting access without addressing the factors making a university an inequitable and inaccessible institution is a fruitless exercise. In my view, if the university was 'truly' committed to equity and was aware that many African students are from an oral culture, the first assignment about oneself could have been an oral presentation in one's language.

It is important to note at this stage that despite these blockages and others not mentioned in this background, I managed to complete my degree through some survival strategies. Some of them involved my resilience skills inculcated by my cultural heritage, mutual support from other students, the role played by the Student Representative Council, and the Hibiscus Coast Municipality. It is also vital to mention that I was a post graduate student at the university during the 2016 #FeesMustFall students' movement in South African universities. Some of the movement objectives were decolonised free education and students' accommodation. This movement is relevant to mention because it tackled some of the concerns that presented as hindrances for my progress at the university.

It thus appeared to me that the same students that the university was going all out to attract, the university was failing to meet their needs and to make education easily accessible to them. This suggests that my story is by no means unique for a student of higher learning in post-apartheid South Africa. This is also evidenced by a range of studies, articles and commentaries published on the topic (see, for example, Mamphiswa & Noyoo 2016; Abdi 2006; Bozalek 2011; Kreitzer 2012; Clows 2013; Le Grange 2014; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2015; Smith & Nathane

2018). In one of wa Thiongo's (2006) writings, he refers to my university experience as 'cultural bomb'. This implies the wiping out of indigenous identity for colonial domination (Ibid).

As much as I adapted the university culture, structures, and system to complete my degree, it came with the cost of considering my traditional background and culture as a stumbling block for success. Like in wa Thiongo's writings, I identified my background history 'a wasteland,' which made me desire to distance myself from it. I wanted to be removed from my background in order for me to be identified with modernised students, such as trying by all means to adopt a dominant foreign language. That was my cost of success. For this reason, this study craved to explore the students' experiences with structures and processes of (de)coloniality in a South African university, particularly in social work education. The study is particularly interested in exploring experiences and meanings that the students are attaching to colonial and decolonial African university and social work academia.

After I graduated, I did not wish for any student to go through my experience. I thus participated in the tutoring and mentorship programs for first-year students. In all my class discussions with students, I used a bilingual approach –explaining the content in isiZulu and English. This is also because the social work degree in my university is dominated by Zulu speaking students. In addition, in my mentoring experience, I witnessed that the vast majority of students who were at risk of being academically and financially excluded from the university were Africans. It was such students during our individual and group sessions who cited their disadvantaged background as preventing them from adapting to a fast university learning environment.

Without disregarding the relevant Western epistemologies and learning ideologies/pedagogies, this study explores the influence of colonisation on social work education and practice, and how the university responds or has failed to respond to the call for decolonisation of South African education. Asante (2014) asserts that development and advancement within the African perspective is rooted and is explained in terms of people's culture, beliefs, structures, language, and traditions. This study thus explores the extent to which the South African university training root or uproot the African students within their experiences, value systems, languages, cultures, epistemologies, and philosophies. The study raises such questions, particularly as the call for decolonisation of South African education and curriculum. My social positioning as an African graduate from a disadvantaged background (and the discussion above) resembles the need for such exploration.

### 1.3. PROBLEM STATEMENT

South African higher education institutions in the year 2015 and 2016 have been dominated by the #FeesMustFall student protests. These protests have been towards 'free, decolonised higher education'. Moreover, the students have called for contextually relevant curricula that would be free from the colonial influences (Kreitzer 2012; Mbembe 2016). In South Africa, social work education and training have been deeply affected by colonialism and apartheid. Dumbrell and Green in early 2008 also posit that, despite the commitment to inclusion and diversity, social work continues to be taught in Eurocentric philosophies that colonise indigenous knowledge system. Mkhize, Mathe and Buthelezi (2014) particularly highlight that the social work code of ethics continues to be dominated by the epistemological paradigms of the Western colonial conquerors.

Mamphiswana and Noyoo (2016) argued that the shortcomings were exacerbated by the reluctance of some South African universities, including social work disciplines, to address known discriminatory norms and practices in the curriculum (which further alienate and misrecognise African students and staff voices in higher education). Bozalek and Boughey (2012) also highlighted that there is a limited link between policies that aim to increase inclusiveness and the experiences of students and staff in South African HE. Therefore, restructuring is necessary since social work training was skewed to maintain colonial and apartheid systems and professionals were not equipped with skills to deal with the disempowered African population (ibid).

Building from Bozalek and Boughey's assertions, the point that needs to be explicitly brought to the fore is the continuation of African students' alienation, which indicates the extent of embeddedness of colonial effects on the educational structures and system. This also calls for social work education transformation and restructuring to renew the discipline of human service (Mkhize et al., 2014; Mamphiswana & Noyoo 2016). These authors call for the transformation of social work education because in some South African universities (SAUs), the same old, less responsive, and disempowering social work education still exists. In collaboration with such voices, decolonisation exercise is necessary for the attainment of anti-oppressive practice, social inclusion, and culturally relevant social work. Smith (2008) also called for social work education to engage with socio-political realities of the post-colonial and post-apartheid regime to engage with inequality, oppression, and cultural hegemony critically.

In conjunction with the scholars cited in this study, the researcher also articulates the need for university curriculum to be based on the inclusive needs and interest of learners and the selected content of the curriculum to be based on the life experiences of students for contextual relevance. Gray, Kreitzer and Mupedziswa (2014) express the need for indigenisation of social work education and practice for inclusion and solutions that are context-based to be exalted. This mean that the social work curriculum, its epistemologies, and pedagogies must rely on students' experiences for context-specific relevance. Although universities have increased access to Africans, lack of inclusive and context-based curriculum leads to injustice and exclusion of African students' experiences in South African higher education, resulting in African students' voices being alienated.

Several studies have been conducted to address decolonisation in HE. For example, in Canada, Abdi (2006) has examined the Eurocentric discourses and African philosophies and epistemologies of education. Nwanosike and Onyije (2011) in Nigeria have also focused on education and colonialism. Tamburro (2013) has also conducted a study focusing on the inclusion of decolonisation in social work education and practice. Similarly, in Johannesburg, Smith (2014) examined South African social work historiography, challenging the dominant discourse. Le Grange (2014) in Cape Town has also examined the Africanisation of the university curriculum. Thus, decolonisation concern has received much attention in South African universities. As a result, the 2017 Social Work International Conference held in Johannesburg was on the decolonisation of social work education. However, the battle of decolonisation is still at an infant stage in South Africa and KwaZulu-Natal Higher education. There are also no studies that focus on decolonisation of Social Work education and practice in KwaZulu-Natal, which is the focus of this study. Therefore, this study aims to be of contribution to decolonisation in higher education, which is context and culturally relevant. It is also a response to the South African transformation agenda.

#### **1.4. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND QUESTIONS**

The main aim of the study was to explore social work graduates' definition, understanding, and experiences of (de) coloniality in higher education. This aim was pursued through the following objectives and questions;

#### **1.4.1. Research objectives**

- To explore graduates' understanding and definition of coloniality within higher education
- To understand (de) colonial higher education experiences of graduates in a social work program
- To explore the graduate's definition and understanding of the decolonial university and social work program
- To explore the impact of broader institutional contextual conditions on the social work program

#### **1.4.2. Research questions**

- What are the graduates' understanding and definition of coloniality within higher education?
- What are (de) colonial higher education experiences of graduates in a social work program?
- What are the graduates' definitions and understandings of the decolonial university and social work program?
- What is the impact of broader institutional contextual conditions on a social work program?

### **1.5. INTRODUCING RESEARCH METHODOLOGIES**

The research methodology is discussed in detail in chapter three of this report. A summary is provided here. The social constructionism paradigm (Teater 2010; Andrews 2012), Critical perspective approach and case study design guided this qualitative study (Fidel 1984; Alnaim 2015; Harrison, Birks, Franklin & Mills 2017). The research focused on the case study of a KZN university that offers a social work program (pseudonym- Hibiscus University). Data was collected from twenty-two social work graduates. These twenty-two participants were divided into two groups, one was for recent graduates, currently doing their post-graduate degrees, and the other group was of practitioners in the field but studied at Hibiscus University. There was a mix of gender, but females dominated all the groups. Non-probability, purposive, and snowball sampling techniques were used (Rubin & Babbie 1993; Babbie & Mouton 2001).

The focus was on hearing graduates' voices with regard to (de) colonial higher education. The case study design orientated the researcher into deeply understanding participants' experiences

through interactive and narrative engagements. Data was collected through group and individual interviews. One university was selected to qualitatively dig deeper into the information required by the case study. One unit (social work discipline) also allowed relationship building and prolonged engagement with participants during interviews. This also provided participants with a safe space of communicating their experiences with regards to (de) colonial higher education.

The collected data was analysed using thematic content and discourse analysis. As stipulated by Conell (2011), the data analysis did not consider only what was said by participants, but it reflected on how it was said. Thus, the researcher's position remained on relying on participants' expressions to analyse their realities.

Participants' voices remained imperative during data collection, analysis, and writing of this report. This study thus perceived social work graduates as experts, authorities, and producers of knowledge in their social world (Pattman 2015).

#### **1.6. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK/S OF THE STUDY**

The South African higher education and its context that suffer from legacies of colonialism and apartheid require discursive and emerging theories that enable the exploration of historical impact into the current experiences of students in HE. This study is thus guided mainly by the anti-colonial discursive framework and the Afrocentric paradigm. The focus is on theories of decolonisation and Afrocentricity. These theories are used to advance each other for a clear understanding of (de) colonial higher education in the South African context. Anti-colonial discursive and Afrocentrism theoretical frameworks were chosen to allow the dialogue with local memories to come into critical consciousness. Both theoretical frameworks allow for critical exploration of coloniality, which provides room to challenge the existence of histories in the present. The Anti-colonial theory also gives room for an Afrocentric approach in decolonising South African higher education.

The theoretical framework saturates in the entire thesis. The purpose here is not to deeply engage with theory, but to outline the theoretical structure in which the study debate is based. However, the frameworks do not mean that the study is theoretical, but it implies that student accounts and voices are understood, positioned and structured using these theories.

### **1.6.1 Anti-Colonial Discursive Theoretical Framework**

Anti-colonial theory emanates from the processes and practices of colonialism and imperialism. This theory is one of the post-colonial frameworks that critically examine positions against the impact of colonial processes among the former colonies (Smith 2013; Tamburro 2013). Anti-colonial discussions focus on the still existing colonial practices in the current democratic dispensations. Simmons and Dei (2012, 71) also appreciate anti-colonial discursive theory relies on multiple places of colonial practice such as 'race<sup>1</sup>, class, gender, sexuality, ableism, law and religion.' This theory is against foreign domination (Lee 2018); it thus demands full decolonisation of economy, politics, and the mind (Thomas & Thompson 2018). This study is guided by the anti-colonial arguments of different scholars such as Dei and Kempf (2006); Rukundwa and Aarde (2007); Simmons and Dei (2012); Smith (2013); Elam (2017). These authors perceive anti-colonial theory as challenging the imperial and colonial existence, and it provides resistance and emancipation techniques for the oppressed.

Rukundwa and Aarde (2007) outlines eleven main principles of the anti-colonial theory, which also guided this study, namely: mechanics, operations and implications of imperial projects; colonial imposition; colonial as imposed and dominating; re-manifestation of colonialism; multiple places of power; claiming authenticity of local voice; integrated and relations of colonialism analysis; spirituality; indignity and indigene; literacy of resistance; a place for the coloniser in the anti-colonial struggle; and trans-historical analysis. Each of these principles are discussed below in relation to its application to this study;

#### ***a. Mechanics, operations and implications of imperial projects***

The anti-colonial theoretical framework focuses on "mechanics and operations of colonial and re-colonial relations and the implications of imperial projects" (Simmons & Dei 2012, 74). This implies that anti-colonial discursive theory encourages the relevant processes of knowledge production, interrogation, and validation. In this study epistemologies and pedagogies of teaching and learning are analysed for its applicability and relevance to African student and African communities.

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<sup>1</sup> the terms 'race' ('Black', 'white', 'Indian', 'coloured') is used in the study not to support apartheid categories but are seen to be social constructed.



***b. Colonial imposition***

Anti-colonial theory suggests that all knowledge must purposively serve to challenge the colonial imposition. The framework allows for the reflection on colonialism and analysis of the still existing and imposed colonial practices. This study has focused on African graduates' understanding of colonialism in higher education. Their experiences of colonial legacies and imposed colonial practices at the African university and in social work education are explored. Thus, African students' experiences and voices are valued for inclusive South African higher education. The focus is also on exploring and challenging the existing colonial practices in higher education.

***c. Colonial as imposed and dominating***

Simmons and Dei (2012,74) highlight that, in this theory, colonality is understood not on the simple terms of 'foreign or alien' but as imposed and dominating. Thus, this study analyses colonial experiences of students in higher education as existing through power domination and imposition.

***d. Re-manifestation of colonialism***

Anti-colonial discourses broaden the understanding of colonial relations and oppressive practices and direct or indirect different forms of imperialism (Dei & Kempf 2006). The anti-colonial theory also proposes that colonialism imposition and domination never ended with the return of political 'sovereignty to colonised people', but continues to manifest itself in education, politics, and social relations (Simmons & Dei 2012, 75). For example, in the context of education, knowledge gets produced and receive validation, but there are experiences of students that get counted as [in]valid, and there are identities that receive recognition and response from educational structures and authorities (Dei & Simmons 2010). Therefore, using this framework, the experiences of African students at the university are understood as diverse, and all considered for validation and recognition.

***e. Multiple places of power***

The focus of the anti-colonial theory is based on power, domination, and different manifestations of a power imbalance to establish 'dominant-subordinate' relations (Simmons & Adie 2012). Young (2003,7) argued that this theory 'threatens privilege' and power by challenging domination; therefore, it emphasises administering equality

and justice for all people. Thus, the theory supported the study into analysing the working of dominant power relations at the university and in Social Work education.

***f. Claiming authenticity of local voice***

The anti-colonial framework is also based on engaging with concepts such as colonial encounter, colonialism; oppression; decolonisation agency and resistance in the process of claiming realism of local voices and their intellectuality. The authors such as Young (2003); Adie and Kempf (2006); Rukundwa and Aarde (2007) also argued that anti-colonial discourse framework is concerned with the intellectual agency of local people. Thus, in this study, African social work graduates' voices are perceived as the intellectual property to be valued in HEIs of South Africa. The focus is on context-specific knowledge production.

***g. Integrated and relations of colonial analysis***

The emphasis of the theory is on integrated relations of colonial practices that nurture imperialism. In this regard, the anti-colonial framework is understood as offering a deeper understanding and exploration of decolonisation. In the process of challenging domination, colonial procedures are understood to differ in nature and practice. This calls for the analysis, which is based on the interconnectedness of colonial relations. Similarly, in this study, participants' experiences are analysed based on the interconnectedness of life events (historical and present) in South African HE. Thus, African graduates' current experiences are perceived as influenced and/ connect with the country's historical context.

***h. The central place of spirituality***

Spirituality is recognised in anti-colonial theory as a central embodiment of knowledge for indigenous people. Although the aspect of spirituality was not fully explored in the findings and discussions of the present report, this study does acknowledge the central nature of spirituality among Africans. African people place value in supernatural powers in their existence. This means that participants in this study were perceived as individuals with spiritual beliefs that might influence their understanding of (de)coloniality and HE systems.

***i. Indiginiety and Indigene***

The primary focus of the anti-colonial framework is on prioritising the 'indigeneity' in terms of identity and 'indigene' in terms of voice authenticity (Simmons & Adie 2012,75). Meaning that the anti-colonial approach presents itself as an epistemology of the colonised, anchored in the indigenous<sup>2</sup> sense of collective and common colonial consciousness (ibid). It is a theory that emerged from the "ground-up" in terms of local people understanding their experiences in the context of colonialism, colonial relations and other associated oppressions (Kempf 2010, 45). Kempf (2010) further appreciated that anti-colonial theory allows the dialogue with local memories to come into critical consciousness. The anti-colonial theory relates to the Afrocentric approach by encouraging the context and centrality of the indigenous knowledge system in decolonisation. In this study, the African graduates' perspectives are explored to narrate the lived experiences of indigenous people in HE.

***j. Literacy of resistance***

The anti-colonial theory examines connections concerning oppression, colonialism, and change, focusing on anti-colonialism and guidelines for resistance to bring social change. Thus, this study explored the legacies of colonial education through African voices as a way of challenging coloniality. Anti-colonialism is thus understood in this study as offering a room to dispute colonial practices in higher education.

***k. A place for the coloniser in the anti-colonial struggle***

The theory of anti-coloniality gives a space for the dominant /coloniser /oppressor in the colonial struggle. Kempf (2010, 46) argued that "dominant bodies must work primarily against the oppression by which they are privileged and in which they thus participate." The dominant must be prepared to invoke and act on their complicities and responsibilities through politics of accountability to bring about change. In this study, the anti-colonial theory encourages the re-thinking of South African university and social work education against the lens of colonial powers. This forces those in power to challenge their colonial/oppressive authority in South African higher education.

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<sup>2</sup> Indigenous in this study do not suggest to provincialized Africa while making Europe Universal (Comaroff and Comaroff 2012). Instead, the concept is used in the study to refer to local knowledge.

### ***1. Trans-historical analysis***

The anti-colonial theory emphasises the significance of bringing a trans-historical analysis of colonialism to the understanding of colonial privilege. This is because the colonial encounter is transhistorical rather than historical, in that it persists across time in the colonising of nations and people (Dei & Kempf 2006; Kempf 2010). Therefore, the study has analysed African education from post-colonialism to get a grasp of changes that came with colonial powers in South African HE. The theory also enabled the researcher to understand and place at the centre the colonised, oppressed, marginalised and indigenous people in the analysis of HE in the country.

#### **1.6.1.1. Anti-colonial theory, African university and social work education**

Despite the fact that anti-colonial theory provides principles of challenging colonial practices, some authors have criticised it for being too broad and lacking specific direction. For instance, Slemon (1995, 100) viewed anti-colonial theory as lacking 'consensus and clarity.' This means that there is a lack of clear harmony in existence and application of the theory. This theoretical framework is also being criticised for its fluidity and continuous change in time and space (Simmons & Dei 2012). Meaning that this framework is not fixed and stake in the past, but it is evolving with society.

Against this criticism, Dei and Asgharzdeh (2001) argued that the anti-colonial framework could not be measured in terms of philosophical grounding due to its varied positions. The fluidity of the anti-colonial framework is also considered as the best aspect for understanding the complexities of human lives in different societies (ibid). This is because human life cannot be homogenously explored as a single unit of specific measurements. The theory thus keeps on changing to reflect the changing realities of social issues (ibid).

The discursive component of the anti-colonial framework has been adopted in this study to avoid the rigidity and lack of flexibility. The framework is chosen to offer a clear and flexible language (Dei & Asgharzdeh 2001). The researcher also adopted an anti-colonial discursive theoretical framework to capture the complexities of participants' experiences based on their different contexts, places, and time in HE. Thus, this study argues for this theory's criticisms to be observed as its strengths, since it allows the colonial discussions to be embedded in evolving societies and based on different social positions of African students in an African university. Indeed, professions such as Social Work does need a flexible theory that caters for the diverse lived experiences.

Social work education and practice are positioned to deal with daily and diverse challenges faced by human life. Social work is also a profession that facilitates social change and development, social cohesion, empowerment, and liberation of people (Schenk et al. 2015, 7). The focus is on principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility, and respect for diversity (Australian Association of Social Workers 2013). This means that social work discourages oppression and values the emancipation of the disadvantaged groups. In this study, the focus is also on liberating the voices of African students in higher education. Social Work thus allows for the analysis of colonial practice and offer resistance strategies (Patel 2015). It was necessary for this study of (de) coloniality in a social work program to adopt an anti-colonial discursive framework to allow for context-specific decolonial discussions and transformation. Smith (2013) also argued for the need for progressive social work to challenge colonial hegemony through anti-colonial approaches for social justice.

### **1.6.2. Afrocentric Theoretical Framework**

Afrocentricity, Afrocentric worldview, or African-centred worldview are terms used interchangeably. Afrocentricity merged back in 1954, and Marcus Garvey was one of the activists of the ideology (Chawane 2000). Asante Molefe then popularised the term in the 1980s (Ibid). Afrocentricity suggests that Africans must look at knowledge and experiences and understand them based on African perspectives (Kreitzer 2012). The focus is on African viewpoints. Asante (2003, 6) defines Afrocentricity to mean "placing African culture at the centre of any analysis that involves studying African people." It is a mode of thought and action in which the centrality of African interests, values, and perspectives predominate (Asante 2003). Theoretically – it is placing the African people at the centre of any analysis of African phenomena. It is an intellectual movement and a political view of simple re-discovery of "African Centeredness" (Chawane 2000, 79). Asante (2003) proposes five Afrocentric methods, which are discussed below in relation to the present study;

The first method argues that the phenomenon needs to be explored within its location. The phenomenon needs to be analysed against the psychological relationship of its time and space. This means that phenomenon exploration must always be located. This allows for the exploration of complex interrelations of different phenomena based on diverse locations (Asante 2003). In this study, the experiences of African graduates were explored in relation to

the South African context. It is believed that this context and its dynamics have shaped the current experiences of participants.

Secondly, the Afrocentric paradigm view phenomenon as made of diversity and dynamics; thus, the phenomenon's location is accurately recorded in the midst of fluctuations (Asante 2003). This means that the explorer/investigator must be aware of his/her standpoint in critical analysis. Higher education and African students are considered in this study as functioning within the realm of multiple dimensional factors that need to be captured for a holistic understanding of African students' perspectives. These dimensions include but are not limited to culture, history, location, and politics.

Thirdly, Afrocentrism views culture from an 'etymological' perspective (Asante 2003), a word that is used to acknowledge the importance of knowing the author and his/her locational/ origin before analysis. Asante emphasises the importance of considering the background and location of the author, who has produced a specific knowledge. The knowledge can only be applied to different contexts with the conscious mind of its source of origin. This is to allow context-specific applications. Thus, African students' curriculum should focus on African literature and epistemologies to understand and deal with diverse issues facing South African communities.

Fourthly, the masks behind the rhetoric of power, privilege, and position are uncovered in Afrocentrism to understand place created by principal myths (Asante 2003). The authority's suppressing the voices of African students in higher education are uncovered in this study to challenge supremacy and oppression.

Lastly, Asante (2009,4) further argues that "the Afrocentric method locates the imaginative structure of a system of economics, bureau of politics, the policy of the government, expression of cultural form in the attitude, direction, and language of the phenomenon, be it text, institution, personality, interaction or event." This means that nothing is taken for granted in Afrocentric methods, but all existence is subject to critical analysis. Thus, African university and social work curriculum in South African HEIs should be subject to critical attention and exploration for its relevance to the African context. Asante also argues that Afrocentric theory encourages youth to be empowered by including their cultures and interest in the curriculum.

The above discussion suggests Afrocentricity as a perspective that allows Africans to be subjects rather than objects on Europe's fringes. Gray and Mazibuko (2003) also viewed

Afrocentric as referring to an idea and a perspective which holds that African people can and should see, study, interpret, and interact with people, life, and reality from the vantage point of African people rather than from the vantage point of European people, or Asian, or other non-African people. It is a philosophical perspective associated with the discovery, location and actualisation of African agency within the context of history and culture. This suggests Afrocentric as concerned with discovering the African's central place in every case (Asante 2003). For this study, Afrocentricity reflects on the need to place African students' interests, cultures, traditions, values, and structures at the centre of African higher education. That is, African people must determine the teaching, learning and content of their education based on their experiences for context-specific relevance (Ramose 1998).

## **1.6. DISSERTATION OUTLINE**

This report is made up of seven chapters. **Chapter two** is the literature reviewed that focuses on higher education and (de) coloniality. Although the study focuses on the university and the social work program, the reviewed literature focused on the broader scope. This is because individual experiences are perceived in this study as the product of the interaction of multiple factors in the broader society. The literature thus explores pre-colonial African education, the history of South African higher education, particularly social work education, and existing histories in the present education. The concepts such as Africanisation; decolonisation and deconstruction are also discussed as a response to colonial practices. The chapter concludes by discussing globalisation and (de) colonial HE.

**Chapter three** reflects on the research methods adopted in exploring African students' experiences of (de) colonial HE. The chapter begins by reflecting on how the social constructionism research approach has provided the opportunity of exploring (de)colonial experiences of social work graduates. In this chapter, the researcher has also demonstrated how her own experience was co-constructed to respond to the different realities during data collection. The sampling strategy, data collection techniques, data collection methods, and data analysis are explored. The chapter concludes by discussing the trustworthiness of the study.

**Chapter four to six** are based on the discussions of study findings. **Chapter four** explores African students' understanding of colonialism in higher education. **Chapter five** explores students' experiences of coloniality in the social work curriculum. This chapter examines the colonial legacy in the everyday lives of African students in the university curricula. **Chapter**

**six** focuses on participants encountered and desired decolonial transformation in South African HE.

**Chapter seven** is a summary of the study and findings. This chapter also draws conclusions and recommendations that emanated from the discussion of results and analysis of literature.

## **1.7. CONCLUSION**

This chapter has provided the rationale, background, and problem statement that motivated the researcher to embark on the (de) colonial project in higher education. The African students' movements, researcher's social position and lack of decolonial research in social work education are explored as some of the motivations for conducting this study. Anti-colonial and Afrocentric as post-colonial theoretical frameworks are discussed above as guided the writing and analysis for this research project. The anti-colonial discursive framework has been outlined as a liberation strategy that allowed participants and the researcher to acknowledge, challenge, and resist colonial practices in an African university and social work academia. This is advanced by adopting Afrocentrism, which encouraged anti-colonial discussions to be African centred in South African HE.

The next chapter explores the reviewed literature.



## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1. INTRODUCTION**

This chapter presents the reviewed literature. With the study objectives in mind, the experiences of (de) coloniality in higher education are explored. The reviewed literature acknowledges the connections between the socio-cultural and the academic experiences of African graduates in institutions of higher learning in South Africa and the legacies of colonialism and apartheid in current systems of higher education.

The literature discussions are formulated around the writings of different scholars as a way of broadening understanding of (de) coloniality within institutions of higher learning and in social work education and practice. For instance, this literature review is built on the work by African scholars such as Patrice Lumumba; Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni; Sibonsile Zibane; Mamphiswa and Noyoo; Mbembe; Chawane; Ndumiso Dladla; Lwazi Lushaba; Leila Patel; Steve Biko, and Julius Nyerere. The focus on these African authors is adopted to ensure African centredness in (de)colonial discussions of South African HEIs.

The focus on African narratives has not, however, replaced the essential struggles of (de) coloniality explored by the scholars in the diaspora. The study has thus relied on some writings of the Africans outside of Africa and Western or none African scholars who have journeyed with the African continent in the struggle against colonial practices. For example, the work by Molefe Asante; Walter Mignolo; Linda Smith; Linda Kreitzer; Andrea Tamburro; Maldonado-Torres Nelson; Mahmood Mamdani; Ali A. Mazrui; Ramon Grosfogual, to mention the few, has played a fundamental role in uncovering (de) coloniality in society and higher education.

Although this research focuses on social work graduates' experiences of (de) coloniality at a university and in social work education, the reviewed literature is not limited to these areas. This is because the study recognises that participants are societal members; thus, their experiences are constructed by wider societal systems (Zibane 2017). Therefore, participants' experiences, perceptions, and views of higher education are the interplay and interactions of multidimensional factors. Smith (2017,17) also stated that 'social structures do shape people's problems.' The broader approach in reviewing the literature was thus adopted, reflecting on the construction of participants' community cultures and experiences in relation to the historical

context of the country, existing histories in the present, policies governing higher education, and global norms effect on Eurocentric domination in African HE. This literature review also built what has later emerged as the findings of this study.

The first section discusses the historical context of South African higher education. The section consists of pre-colonial education, colonialism, and apartheid in South African HE. The history of social work education is also explored. These discussions have given room to explore the context of (de) coloniality in higher education and how the current students' experiences are constructed by the country's historical context (Hunter 2010).

The subsequent section explores the (de) colonial legacies existing in the new democratic dispensations of the university. The focus is on understanding and contextualising the university and social work education in post-apartheid South Africa. The explored themes include democracy and HE, coloniality in current higher education, and coloniality in post-apartheid social work education. Policies governing higher education and social work education in South Africa are also explored.

The last sections focus on the Africanisation and decolonisation of higher education and social work academia. The chapter concludes by discussing globalization discourses and their influence on the decolonisation of HE in South Africa.

## **2.2. HISTORY OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN SOUTH/ AFRICA**

### **2.2.1. Pre-Colonial African Higher Education**

Before European conquest and domination, the traditional educational system existed in Africa (Flavio 2015). Maringe and Ojo (2017) argued that it is not true that higher education in Africa came with colonisers in the late 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. Before colonisers came, institutions of higher education existed in Egypt at Alexandria in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC (Ibid). It also existed in Tunisia at EZ Zitoana in 700BC (ibid). These institutions served as a research field for Africa, Europe, Asia, and India (ibid). Zeleza (2007) asserted that the African continent is the distinct center for the oldest Islamic universities in the world.

The Alexandrian Academy was the first institution of higher learning in Africa, located and funded in Egypt in 331 BC, focusing on Mathematics (Mail and Guardian 2015). In c 1100

AD, the University of Timbuktu in West Africa was established and became a world-famous center for learning (Mail and Guardian 2015). During 859 AD, AL Quarawiyyin University was also established in Fez Morocco (ibid). This was also the first degree-awarding higher institution in the world. In addition, Cairo funded Al-Azhar University in 970 AD, focusing on Islamic law (Ibid).

It is important to note that education in Africa is conceptualised as not limited to classrooms or universities. Most African education took place and continue to take place in informal community-based settings. As such, the structure of African education was informal, sourced from the family, kinship, village group, and the broader community, which participated in the educational and socialisation process (Flavio 2015). It focused on the real lives of Africans. Therefore, African education took place in emadlweni (in ranch), in the rivers, during hunting, in the crop plantations, during ceremonies, and in many other everyday family activities. "indigenous African education encouraged close links with social life in a material and spiritual sense" (Rodney 1982, 239).

Moumouni (1968,15) also highlighted the African education as one that relied on "equal opportunity for all, social solidarity and homogeneity." Nyerere (1968) demonstrated that the role of education in every society is to prepare individuals to participate fully and effectively in their world. Fundamentally, African education's main target was to produce individuals who grow to be well-grounded, skillful, cooperative, civil, and able to contribute to the development of the community (Rodney 1982; Flavio 2015). The African ideologies such as "it takes a village to raise a child", "Ubuntu", "I am, because we are; and since we are, therefore I am" (Zibane 2017); "Umuntu umuntu ngabathu" (a person is a person by other people); governed the informal African education and collaborative progress and development (Engelbrecht & Kasiram 2012). Thus, the spirit of solidarity, collectiveness, oneness, and togetherness influenced African education (Ibid).

Of particular relevance to careers such as social work is that pre-colonial education was oriented through practicality. For example, those who were educated about fishing were taught navigational techniques such as seafaring, the effects of certain stars on tide and ebb, and emigrational patterns and behavior of fish (Moumouni 1968; Bassey 1999). Those who took to farming had similar training (ibid). Those who took to the profession of the traditional priesthood, village heads, kings, medicine men and women diviners, rainmakers, and rulers

underwent a long period of painstaking training and rituals to prepare them for the vital job they were to perform (ibid). Thus, African teaching was by examples and learning by doing. It is such education that the South African children's movements of 1976 and the #FeesMustFall campaign were and continue to quest for.

The African educational process essentially was based on "gradual and progressive achievements, in conformity with the successive stages of physical, emotional and mental development of the child" (Moumouni 1968, 15). The gradual growth was also facilitated by the use of the native language as a medium of instruction through which systematic instruction was delivered by way of songs, stories, legends, and dances to stimulate children's emotions and quicken their perception as they explore and conquer their natural environment (Ngugi wa Thiong'o 2006). That kind of education was complete and relevant to the needs and expectations of both the individuals and society (Ibid). It was an integral part of the social, political, and economic foundation of African society.

### **2.2.2. Colonialism and higher education**

The late 15th century marked the arrival of European powers in Africa. The arrival brought changes in the African indigenous system, wars, and slave trades disrupted African learning spaces. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, colonialists divided the African continent. The Berlin Conference that was held in 1884/85 declared African countries as controlled by Britain, France, Germany, Spain, Italy, Belgium, and Portugal (Birmingham 1995). Such power imposition and control were proclaimed as "white people burden of developing African countries" (Birmingham 1995,1). It thus whipped away culture, indigenous knowledge system, African education, and natural resources. Colonial racism also demonstrated how Europeans ruled over "blacks" for the advancement of "whites" (Tsotsi 2000,6). For example, the Europeans hierarchically arranged the people of the world, with Caucasians at the top (the dominants), Asians, Native Americans, and Africans. Africans were placed at the bottom because they were regarded as having inadequate physical abilities and qualities as humans (Spickard 1992, 19 in Zibane 2018). The indigenous education was thus demolished while the Western norms were elevated (Tamburro & Tamburro 2014).

Imperialists established universities in the African continent (Maringe & Ojo 2017). The first South African university was established around 1829, called the University of Cape Town, as a boys' and tertiary schools (Smith 2014). In 1924, the University of Cape Town offered the

first social work diploma in the country (Smith 2014). The universities were developed based on European templates and offered European degrees (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2016; Maringe & Ojo 2017). Colonial universities taught foreign curriculum in the African continent, designed for the context of Europe (ibid). As a result, students who were educated in these universities were perceived as civilised; thus, qualified for partial rights of close relation with the colonisers (Ibid). The tuition language in these universities was the language of the coloniser. Local languages were banished from the 'mainstream curricula' (Maringe & Ojo 2017, 27). The indigenous knowledge system was thus not prioritised in education and training.

The colonial language was considered as the first powerful instrument to destroy African peoples' self-esteem. This was evident on the Lord Macaulay's address to the British Parliament on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of February 1835;

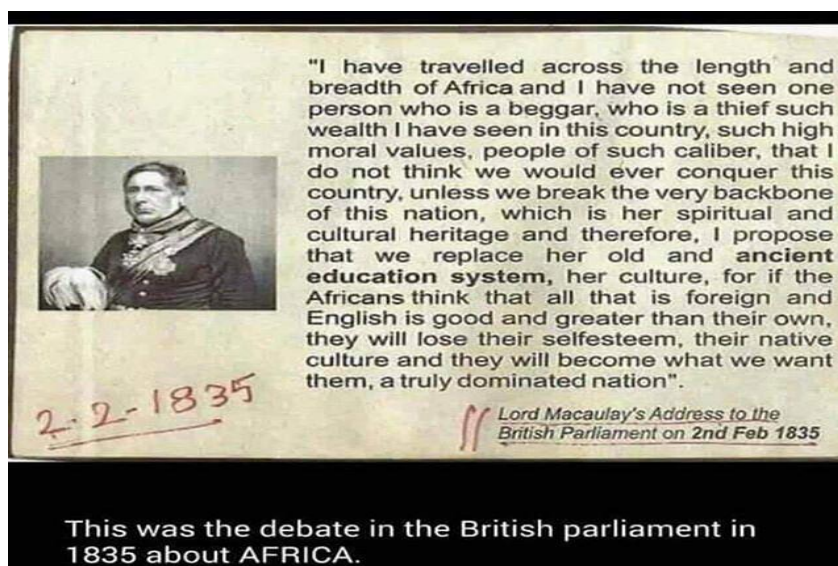


Image 1: Speech image of Lord Macaulay.Boom news (2020).

The reality of current South African destruction and suffering as a dominated nation through the colonial education system and cultures is revealed in the above image. Although the authenticity of the above speech is contested and there are debates about Macaulay's address since others believe he referred to India. Others are convinced that it was Africa. The address is used in this study not to validate it, but to highlight the damage inflicted by imperialism and colonialism. Similarly, the writing by Aime Cesaire (1972) argues that, colonialism was the deliberate destruction of cultures. This is also evidence in statement by Hilter which says “we aspire not to equality but to domination...It is not a question of eliminating the inequalities

among men but of widening them and making them into a law” (Aime 1972: 37). Cecil John Rhodes also shared the same sentiments, by contending that British are the first race in the world, thus suggested for British people to inhabit and rule the spaces occupied by ‘the most despicable specimen of human being’ in Africa (South African History Online 2021). This is the language of oppression and destruction to local values, cultures and knowledge.

The colonisation was functioning by the supremacy of language in philosophies of education, and the idea was, those who pursue more of coloniser language become economically advanced than those who are not (Abdi 2006). As a result, advanced education is seen as unattainable by the use of mother tongue language (Makhanya & Zibane 2020). This notion has neglected the idea of language as not only represent the medium of communication, but it holds people's worldview. Colonisers progressively achieved by imposing the language to natives, and they, therefore, remained the source of culture, education, and technology for Africans (Ibid). For instance, for an indigenous student to attain Bachelor, Masters, or Doctoral degree, he/she has to accomplish it through English.

There are universities such as Fort Hare, which produced famous alumni, including Nelson Mandela, Oliver Tambo, and Robert Mugabe, who led the new independent movements and government of African countries. In the majority, the mission of colonial higher education was to produce the elite for colonial administration, not to benefit African societies. Julius Nyerere (1968) pointed out two remarkable historical items of colonialism: "the destruction of African education systems and the distortions of social development schemes in the African space." The mission of colonialism was to disable the existing African systematic structures of education and paradigms of social advancement so that African philosophies of education will be viewed as problematic whilst European perspectives are considered as modernised, civilised, and appropriate.

According to Smith (2014), the arrival of the European missionaries, such as the London Missionary Society in South Africa changed African education dynamics. Christian missionaries served to educate and ensure the wellbeing of an African child (Global Black History 2012). However, missionaries viewed Africans as uncivilised and introduced them to Western education and Christianity (Ibid). Western education soon took center stage in Africa, degrading, challenging, and replacing the traditional, informal learning and cultural

foundations. "Beyond Christian liberal discourse, a missionary zeal was a capitalist and imperialist motive" (Smith 2014,5).

Fanon (1984) identifies three means of which colonialism violated against Africa and African people. First is the physical violence enforced through brutality toward local people to forcefully accept the order of colonisers. Secondly, is the psychological violence implemented through education? This is where African students are taught to observe and analyse the world through Western views, and Western values are interpreted as universal. Lastly is the structural violence through the implementation of structures that encourage group divisions.

### **2.2.3. Apartheid and higher education**

South Africa gained independence from colonialism around 1902 (Okoth 2006). Nevertheless, the National Party, which later took over on the ruling of the country, introduced the apartheid regime. Apartheid was a racial segregation system in South Africa that was enforced through legislation by the National Party from 1948 to 1994. Different legislations affecting education were implemented during this period to ensure the exclusion and oppression of Africans. For example, the Bantu Education Act of 1952 (later called Black Education Act) was one of the discrimination policies governed the apartheid government education system, ensuring that Africans receive minimal education, which sustained them in the oppressed group (SA history online 2018). In addition, the University Education Act 45 of 1959 also extended its ruling by prohibiting African students from attending "whites" universities (SAHO 2018).

Different universities were governed and resourced differently (Bunting 2002, cited in Bozalek & Boughey 2012). The number of postgraduate qualifications were limited in Black Universities compare to White Institutions (Ibid). The white universities were given the power to make decisions regarding government subsidies, school fees, and staff to be employed whilst black universities were constrained in decision-making (Ibid). As a result, African institutions were geographically located in deep rural areas, homelands, or periphery within the group it served (Mamphiswa & Noyoo 2016). This social segregation negatively affected academic life and universities since rural areas failed to attract high-profile qualified staff (Ibid).

Bozalek and Boughey (2012) also found that, under apartheid, even research was made to cover the needs of white people. The colonial and apartheid curriculum relied on scientific racism, which undermined Africans' humanity and encouraged their inferiority (Mamphiswa & Noyoo 2016). As a result, Zibane (2017, 43) argued that instead of being "learner-centered,"

Bantu education was more authoritative and centered on the interest of educators and the state. For example, Africans were required to obtain permission from the minister of education to study, and those who were considered as "persona non-grata by the state were not admitted" (Mamphiswa & Noyoo 2016, 2). This shows how access to HE was hindered or limited for African students during the apartheid regime.

Apartheid university systems did not go unchallenged. South African societies formulated vast movements against the apartheid government and oppressive education. In 1969, Steve Biko led the formation of the South African Student Organisation, called Black Consciousness Movement at the universities. This was a powerful strategy against the thesis of white racism (Biko 1978). For instance, it was because of such organisation that organised the learners of 1976 to protest against apartheid educational policies. Nevertheless, the apartheid government response towards protesters resulted in brutality that claimed the lives of many young South African learners who were calling for the African emancipation and equality in education.

It is interesting to mention that although there were already many trained South African social workers during apartheid, they were consumed by the apartheid government (Smith 2010), thus could not respond to African' societal needs and brutality. This suggests that, although social work meant to alleviate human suffering (Smith 2013), it could not rescue Africans from oppression. The Social Workers at that time were used as a state instrument, thus not supporting any movement struggle of the Africans (Smith 2014). Some African Social Workers were, however, not happy with the setting; as a result, they went behind the apartheid government and supported African students' political movement and societies.

According to Patel (2005), community work led by Social Workers such as political movements did have a transformative character in challenging apartheid social welfare. For instance, a South African Black Social Workers Association and Social Workers participated in two-day first protest action against apartheid in Cape Town in 1980 (Smith 2014). Another example of Social Workers resisting apartheid is found in the activities of Build a Better Society, where Social Workers were working in the Cape flats and beyond in mobilising and conscientising African people about fundamental human rights and community advancements (Ibid). These activities and others led to a just social welfare education after 1994 (Ibid).



#### **2.2.4. History of South African social work education and practice**

South African social work education is not free from the injustices of the past since it is the very product of colonialism and apartheid (Smith 2008). Social Work emerged from the West (USA and United Kingdom) during the twentieth century (Kreitzer, Abukari, Antonio, Mensah & Kwaku 2009). Emily Hobhouse (from Britain) was said to be the first Social Worker in South Africa, focusing on the poor white South African women and children (Smith 2014). The first African professional Social Worker produced in South Africa was Charlotte Maxeke, who became the first South African Social Worker in 1902. However, Maxeke did not obtain her qualification in South African schools, but she studied at Wilberforce University in the USA (Smith 2014; South African history online 2018).

Apartheid social work education and practice were characterised by discrimination principles (Mamphiswa & Noyoo 2016). The apartheid government refused to take care of African people's welfare. Apartheid systems assumed that Africans should look after themselves through each other's support and the government would intervene only if they fail (residual approach) (Patel 2005; Mamphiswa & Noyoo 2016). Although African poverty and developmental needs continued in South Africa, which called for a training need for more Social workers, the hardship for Africans and Whites were dealt with differently since whites' poverty was the primary focus of the state (Smith 2014). The Department of Welfare was also established in 1927 as a Whites' people's welfare to absorb trained Social Workers (Patel 2005; Smith 2014).

Due to growth in poverty for Africans, the next move was to train African Social Workers to focus on African problems. At that time, the prominent school was Jan Hofmeyr School of Social work in Johannesburg (Smith 2014), where Winnie Madikizela Mandela was also trained as a Social Worker. However, Social work training of Africans was characterised by a lack of institutional access, resources, and infrastructure. Furthermore, since the Jan Hofmeyr college encouraged political freedom for Africans and fought against the uprooting of ancient life in the name of civilisation, it posed a threat to state ideologies (Ibid). The college was then closed (Smith 2014). Other institutions such as Stellenbosch offering social work qualifications under apartheid ideologies were established. Social work education had to comply with the colonial and apartheid policies such as separate higher education institutions and different services for different races (ibid).

Social work education and practice assumed a non-inclusive system (Mamphiswana & Noyoo 2016). Its curricula also did not consider the needs of the larger African population (Kreitzer 2012). The social work education was concerned about the highly skilled therapist to deal with the first world-class social problems. As a result, the fundamental issues of Africans, such as poverty and unemployment, were not considered in social work training (Mamphiswana & Noyoo 2016), hence social work practitioners fail to respond to challenges facing the African population. This is because social work education was formulated for the contradictory purpose of empowering minority White people and disempowering majority group of Africans. This suggests that social work education and practice were not channeled to address social injustice (Kasiram 2009). Even the curriculum content was based on British and American epistemologies and pedagogies, focusing on the clinical approach (Smith 2014). Thus, social work training and profession was meant to maintain the status quo of philanthropic intervention (for Whites) (Patel 2005) and was formalised by the state through establishing training institutions.

There was no uniformity in South African universities in social work curricula (Mamphiswana & Noyoo 2016). Although the South African Council of Social Service Profession set requirements for social work education and training in South Africa, for every university to formulate its curriculum (Ibid). It can be acknowledged that even in developed countries, there is no curriculum uniform (Ibid). Nevertheless, in a country such as South Africa that is highly characterised by historical institutional discrimination, lack of uniformity was designed to differentiate African education from that of other racial groups (ibid).

The high focus on individualism during apartheid undermined family responsibility and kinships (Smith 2014). The collective responsibility is the fundamental African ideology. The individual focus also marks the disruption of pre-colonial African culture, which focused on reciprocity and communalism. Thus, the colonial and apartheid education system did not encourage African graduates' liberation of critical thinking and analyst of oppression, instead this education foster alienation of graduates from their societies.

### **2.3. DEMOCRATIC TRANSFORMATIVE ENCOUNTERS IN SOUTH AFRICAN HIGHER EDUCATION**

The end of apartheid in South Africa forced HEIs to formulate new policies aimed at inclusive higher education. The promotion of racial integration and acculturation of historically white

universities has been the focus of South African government legislation (Bazana & Mogotsi, 2017). For instance, the University of Kwa Zulu-Natal (UKZN) was merged between Durban-Westville, (historically disadvantaged) and the University of Natal (historically advantaged) on January 1, 2004 (Webbstock 2006). These were changes necessary for transformation.

### **2.3.1. Social work education and transformation**

To a certain extent, social work education and practice have also managed to dismantle some injustices of the past. For example, social work is the first profession with representatives, based on equity employment of social work academics (Gray & Lombard 2008). Social Work Education was also transformed from focusing on casework to developmental social welfare since it moved from apartheid to multiracial democracy (Smith 2014). Thus, past inequalities were addressed by equally making all clients participate in their development (Ibid). Social work was also the first professional discipline that managed to register minimum national standard for its bachelor's degree with the National Qualifications Framework (under National Qualifications Act no. 67 of 2008) (Gray & Lombard 2008). Thus, the four-year Bachelor of Social Work is standardised to all 17 South African universities (Ibid).

Despite the aforementioned transformations (and some not specified), African-centered epistemological access is still a concern in an African university and in social work academia due to Eurocentric domination. This suggests historical legacies as still influencing HE in South Africa.

## **2.4. COLONIAL AND APARTHEID LEGACIES IN POST-APARTHEID SOUTH AFRICAN HIGHER EDUCATION**

### **2.4.1 Coloniality in South/ African universities**

The apartheid regime has ended in the ideal rather than in material sense (Smith 2010) in South African HE. Although democracy has taken a lead in the country, European social practices and knowledge still dominate in the academy. This demonstrate the South African socio-political context of enquality. Structures and locations of South African universities remain the reflection of white supremacy and colonial orders (Mbembe 2016). This makes true freedom and equality to remain a farfetched dream in HE.

African universities have more partnerships with the European empire than within the continent (Maringe & Ojo 2017). Partnerships have become a new strategy for preserving Western domination in Africa (Ibid). As a result, African scholars still idealise the Western academy. For instance, Maringe and Ojo (2017) argued that most African scholars prefer to take their sabbatical in Western countries; university staff prefers to have their research journals published in European countries and overseas. Local journals are perceived as inferior and having low impact considerations. Overseas agencies control the funding of research. Thus, retaining to the empire remains uppermost. White staff members migrated back to the empire and African staff members followed them with time, leaving African institutions under staff (Naidoo & Kasiram 2006; Maringe & Ojo 2017). Tuition language in universities has not changed; it remains the same as it was during the colonial time (Ibid). This justifies why local languages are seen as necessary, but they have not been developed and implemented to any significant extent in African academia (Makhanya & Zibane 2020).

The neoliberal approach that promotes capitalism has increased high rate of poverty and limited access to higher education for previously disadvantaged students. Expansion of African students' access has been capped with limited funding, diminishing resources, and poor working conditions (Maringe & Ojo 2017). Thus, financial feasibility, mission alignment and students' demands are still of concern (Kasiram 2009; Bozalek & Boughey 2012). This increases students' unrest demanding funding and improved learning and living environments (Maringe & Ojo 2017).

There is massification in South African universities which infringe student access. Large class sizes characterise African universities, and vacancy rates increased (Maringe & Ojo 2017). Honorine (2013) argued that, although there is high matric pass rate in democratic South Africa, students still struggle to get into universities. The high number of students passing matric does not mean guaranteed access to HEIs (ibid). It has also been argued that the increasing number of learners passing matric has been favoured by the continuous lowering of pass rate standards in basic education (ibid). This then increases the high number of students who approach universities for academic spaces, nurturing massification, and difficult access. For instance, due to issues of massification, one parent died at the University of Johannesburg during a stampede number of students who scrambled to enrol (Hanorine 2013). The increasing massification is the result of the fact that all learners who have passed matric want universities only, other than vocational colleges.

The South African Minister of Higher Education has indicated that, although vocational colleges may not have prestige like universities, it does provide training of qualified workers with special skills that the country lacks (Hanorine 2013). However, this study argues that vocational colleges in KZN/in South Africa do not offer social work education programs. This force learners interested in the profession to continuously seek enrolment at the university's limited spaces. Thus, conundrums remain in South African higher education.

#### **2.4.2. Coloniality in Social Work education and practice**

One of the interests of this study is generated by Bozalek and Boughey (2012) concern about how to make higher education inclusive in South Africa. Most literature has focused on the inclusive approach to social work education and practice. For example, Dumbrill and Green (2008) argued that, despite the commitment to inclusion and diversity, social work continues to be taught in Eurocentric philosophies that colonise the indigenous knowledge system. Dumbrill and Green (2008) viewed decolonisation as necessary for anti-oppressive practice, social inclusion, and knowing how European knowledge has dominated the academy. Tamburro (2013) also asserted that the current social work training and practice should be evaluated to avoid colonial theories and approaches. Crampton (2015) also found that decolonising social work training and practice requires identifying destructive beliefs and practices, learning from successful decolonisation approaches, and integrating indigenous knowledge with non-indigenous for best social work intervention.

There is a lack of conception and lack of consultation on the transformation process between academics and practitioners and between universities and departments of social development, which frustrate students, particularly during their field practice (Gray & Lombard 2008). Such experiences infringe on social work education and practice and demoralise students' motivation to continue into being registered as professional Social Workers (ibid). In addition, the lack of finances also poses a challenge for appointing tutors who are academically ready to support students' academic wellbeing (Ibid). Thus, epistemological access in social work education remains a far-fetched dream. This is a call against social injustice in social work education and practice.

In South African education, socially unjust and inequality have led to a lack of equal participation in knowledge-making and unequal power relations. Different power domination impacts university curriculum formulation and inclusive pedagogies. Curriculum planning is

not a neutral activity, and it is political since it reflects those who have power in society (Freire 1970). Those in power also control what knowledge to be included in a curriculum and what knowledge to be excluded (Freire 2005). As a result of epistemological and pedagogical injustice, those who were excluded from quality education during apartheid remain excluded.

### **2.4.3. Constitutional discourse in higher education**

The African National Congress and its allies formed the Freedom Charter of 1955 which highlighted that "education shall be free, compulsory, universal and equal for all children; higher education and technical training shall be opened to all by means of state allowances and scholarships awarded based on merit." The 1996 South African Constitution then approved a law ordering that all citizens "have the right to basic education, including adult basic education" (section 29). However, when it comes to higher education, the Constitution indicated that "higher education, which the state, through reasonable measures, must make progressively available and accessible." Therefore, unlike the basic education, the right to further education was not made; instead, the Constitution provides that, further education must be ensured to be "available and accessible." As a result, higher education in South Africa is available and accessible to those who have financial means. The availability and accessibility of higher education have thus neglected aspects of inclusion of the disadvantaged groups.

1994 marked the transformation of South African societies, ending apartheid and encouraging democratic free society for all. In 1996, the South African Constitution was adopted, ensuring rights for all. Chapter 1 of the Constitution encourages the protection of human dignity, equality of all citizens, official use of 11 South African languages. Section 29 also states that everyone has a right to receive education in the language of their choice. It also emphasises educational equity and the need to repeal past racially discriminatory laws and practices.

The question, therefore, is whether the discrimination of African students at the university (as stipulated in the findings of this study) based on academic language, epistemological and pedagogical access (see chapter five) is justifiable and constitutional. Section 9 of the Constitution stipulates that everyone has the right to be respected and all people are equal before the law (Constitution of South Africa 108 of 1996; Beyl 2013). Equality also implies that the state may not directly or indirectly unfairly discriminate against anyone on any grounds, including race, culture, gender and status (Constitution of South Africa, Section 9(3); Makhanya 2016). This is referred to as formal equality (Bonthuys 2006). The Constitution also states that discrimination in terms of any of the above-mentioned grounds is unfair unless it is

established as fair (Section 9(5)). This is referred to as substantive equality (Bonthuys 2006). The question then is whether discrimination of African students at the universities on the basis of quality access is fair.

In terms of Section 36 (1) of the Constitution, the limitation of rights must be reasonable and justifiable in an open and democratic society based on human dignity, equality and freedom. In considering the limitation of a right, the following factors have to be considered; the nature of the right, the importance of the purpose of the limitation, the nature, and extent of the limitation, relationship between the limitation and its purpose and less restrictive means to achieve the purpose (Section 36(1) (a-e)). Based on the above discussions, it can be concluded that the colonial South African education has unfair limitations to African students in terms of academic language, epistemological and pedagogical access. The limitation is not constitutional and justifiable in a democratic South African society. The 2015/2016 student's movement has also supported the existence of these inadequacies.

The above arguments imply that South African higher education is standing on the brink of two choices. It needs to decide whether to maintain the status quo of being colonial and Western-dominated, or to embark on training youth for transformation and decolonial motives that will make the country and the continent to live its full potential. The focus is on African centeredness. Decolonisation, however, does not mean "throwing away the bathwater with the baby" (Maringe & Ojo 2017,38). South Africa is a part of the world as the world is incomplete without South Africa (ibid). Thus South/ African universities need three methods to engage knowledge in higher education. These are: the knowledge system enabling African students to understand the richness, complexity of African identity and embrace it; the pedagogical system that challenge the notion of knowledge as given and static but the one that promotes diversity, fluidity and contextual relevance; and a need for an African education that is local-focused but global engaged (Ibid). This suggests a need for the incorporation of clauses in the Constitution of the country that ensures sustainable decolonial academia.

#### **2.4.4. Language policy discourse in South African universities**

The language policy framework in higher education emanates from Section 27(2) of the Higher Education Act of 1997. After the demise of apartheid in 1994, South Africa, through its Constitution, boldly recognised and promoted parity of all official languages in public education institutions. Section 29 (2) of the Bill of Rights explicitly stipulates that 'everyone

has the right to receive education in the official language or languages of their choice in public institutions where that education is reasonably practicable' (Constitution of the Republic of South Africa 1996). The language policy framework of 2002 was developed to coordinate the language of instruction at the university. But in this framework, the minister acknowledged the dominant reliability of English and Afrikaans' tuition languages as the status quo that needs to be maintained until other South African languages are developed to equal competency (LPHD 2002). Twenty-five years later, African students are still calling for linguistic diversity in higher education institutions (HEIs) (Makhanya & Zibane 2020). This suggests that colonial languages are preserved in South African universities. Kaschula (2013) thus view South African universities' promotion of mother tongue languages as limited largely to formal academic engagements. Indigenous languages remain on the periphery, not at the center of learning and teaching in South African HEIs. Where visible, they exist as university language policy documents or taught as subjects but not as a medium of instruction.

South African universities have been proven to be struggling to shake off the vestiges of the colonial legacy (Mutasa 2015). Evidently, English as a colonial language is the language of power in post-apartheid South Africa. English dominates in all aspects of life in South African universities (ibid). In fact, there is a lack of appreciation of indigenous languages in HEIs (Wa Thiong'o 2006). This lack of appreciation emanates from the colonial system and the apartheid regime, which embraced European knowledge systems at the expense of indigenous knowledge (ibid). African languages are often portrayed as barbaric and useless in developing African people (Le Grange 2014). In a study conducted by Mutasa (2015), he found that "generally there is scepticism about the effectiveness of teaching content subjects such as history or geography through indigenous African languages." In many instances, the same academics who preach about the importance of indigenous African languages at conferences and on other platforms do not practice what they preach (ibid). In Mamphiswana and Noyoo (2016) view, the dominance of English in South African HEIs as an academic language hinders effective teaching and learning for African students.

The development of South African universities in post-colonial society has suppressed African students' needs by idealising colonial languages in modern society. English is often perceived as a global language that can enhance students' economic prospects and contribute to their competitiveness in labour markets (Makhanya & Zibane 2020). In this way, the English language is used to preserve coloniality by being embedded in the realms that enforce control,



domination, and exploitation under the impression of being a "salvation language," representing progress and good for everyone (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2015, 487). The fact that multilingual groups are enrolling at the university, but the academic program is still offered in a single language implies that HE in South Africa is still based on racial lines (Reddy 2006). As a result, the English language continues to be a barrier to access and success among African students at the university (DHET 2018).

The none progressive education policies in South Africa and the struggle for inclusive, multicultural, and multilingual HE is far from being over. In 2018, the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) released the Language Policy of Higher Education (LPHE) to encourage the development of African languages as a medium of instruction at South African universities (Department of Education 2018). This policy argues that post-apartheid HE should be characterised by accelerating cultural and linguistically diverse and that it should allow, promote, and respect all official languages (ibid.). The policy has thus strongly encouraged universities to provide for the learning of South African languages to encourage unity, enabling South Africans to have the freedom to exercise any of their eleven languages in different contexts. However, policies alone or policy without implementation cannot achieve inclusive education. Authors such as Kaschula et al. (2009) hold that inclusion and multilingual practice in Higher Education Institutions can be achieved through a deep understanding of all cultures.

It is important to note that when I speak of advancing indigenous languages in HEIs, I acknowledge the technical and financial limitations by proclaiming that tough decisions, choices and cost factors have to be considered for the development of mother-tongue languages (Council on Higher Education 2001; Zikode 2017). However, instead of developing African languages in South African universities, all HE institutions have special courses to improve students' proficiency in English for academic literacy (CHE 2001). Such programs are an effective mechanism for maintaining English as a language of power in South Africa. There are few, if any, courses that aim to improve students' development in mother tongue languages.

## **2.6. AFRICANISATION, DECONSTRUCTION, AND DECOLONISATION OF SOUTH AFRICAN HIGHER EDUCATION**

### **2.6.1. Decolonising African identity in higher education**

The issue of “who is an African” has been a significant identity discussion in the African scholarship. Identity is crucial in human life since it reflects a person's meaning and role in different contexts; hence Africans need to define their identity (Muendane 2007). However, it is important for Africans to determine who defines their identity, oneself, or others. If a person accepts the definition given by others, one cannot escape serving and working in fulfilling the interests of these who defined one's identity (Muendane 2007; Lushaba 2017). This is because people define others in terms of their interests. This means that, for liberation and sustainable decoloniality, Africans from the South should refuse to accept the colonial and apartheid definition of their identity imposed by the oppressors.

No liberation can be produced out of identity that is defined by others since liberation start with self-definition and determination. For some years, Africans were defined by Europeans, and to this day, they continue to use the imposed identities on them (Muendane 2007). For instance, there is a notion that South African languages such as isiZulu, Xhosa, Sotho, Tsonga, and Venda, to mention the few, are barbaric; thus, the language of the oppressor (English) is the only solution for civilisation/modernity in higher education (Coetzee-de Vos 2019). However, the findings of this study revealed that the oppression of African identity (see chapter 5) through colonial language domination in academia enforce the exclusion of African emancipation at the university.

There is thus a need for African emancipation through an African defined African identity. It is only by the liberation of the mind where “Africans can truly own and enjoy the fruits produced by their motherland” and restore their dignity (Muendane 2007,2). But, how do Africans expect to define their identity because they still use Eurocentric directions, and they analyse their issues from the Western point of view (Ibid)? This is the reason why Africans become easily intimidated. Africans build on foundations constructed for them by Europeans (Lushaba 2017). Unless Africans detached themselves from such norms, African identity would remain stipulated based on the colonisers interests.

Muendane (2007) made an example that one would not allow people to call one John when one is Sipho. In demonstrating how Europeans dehumanised the value of Africans, whenever it was a challenge for a White employer or government official to call African name, an African carrying a name was given a European name (Ibid). In chapter five of this study, participants have also defined and understood colonialism based on the lost identity and naming of Africans by Europeans (see chapter 5). Such findings suggest a need to draw some boundaries in defining the African identity.

Colonialists defined African identity for their interests, which missioned to dehumanise Africans. But they failed after realising that Africans do not communicate like animals, then they shifted to call Africans Kaffirs (Muendane 2007). However, they also realised that after all, Africans are humans, then they were referred to as human beings of a different colour, an inferior one, associated with gloom and obscurity (Ibid). For these associates, Africans were labeled as Boesman, Natives, Non- Europeans, Bantus, blacks, and ethnics, and so on (Ibid). Africans have always been Africans, but imperialists refuse to call them that. The problem is not so much that Africans were given identities, but Africans accepted these identities (Lushaba 2017). Africans should be reminded that colonialists were never casual in their labels; they were to serve a purpose. Thus, if Africans are serious about defining their identities, they should avoid casual labels when defining themselves (Muendane 2007).

The definition of African identity in this study does not aim to exclude none Africans. Muendane (2007, 6) argued that non-Africans who want to be identified with Africans should be prepared to commit "emotional suicide," which means that none Africans should abandon Eurocentric or foreign value systems and embrace African values (Ibid). To be an African is also to be against all forms of oppression, racism, classism, homophobia, patriarchy, and white racial domination (Zibane 2018). Africans value interpersonal relationships more than individualism; hence, the Africans believe that "a person is successful when he/she contributes to the success of others and engages in collective identification with problem-solving" (Zibane 2018,37). This means that Africans are determined by their identity and tradition.

### **2.6.2. Africanisation and deconstruction in higher education**

Africanisation is the regeneration of what was good and respected in African culture, with the assertion of rights and interest of Africans (Urc, cited in Zibane 2018). However, this study does not call for Africanisation in the sense of living in the past. The study acknowledges the

evolving of societies and generations; thus, it calls for centeredness of African interest and values for context-specific academia. In his book called "Education for Self-reliance," Julius Nyerere (1968, 268) elaborated on the importance of contextualisation in education as follows;

The educational systems in different kinds of societies in the world have been and are very different in organisation and content. They are different because the societies providing education are different because education, whether formal or informal, has a purpose. That purpose is to transmit from one generation to the next the accumulated wisdom and knowledge of society and to prepare the young people for their future membership and active participation in its maintenance and development.

The above extract suggests a need for African education and its foundations to be based on the identities, traditions, and languages of its country for relevance, inclusion, and recognition in the global arenas of knowledge production. Africanisation thus encourages context-specific education. Makgoba (1997), also viewed Africanisation as a process of inclusion and contextualisation through affirming African cultures and identity in the world community of knowledge. Based on the colonialism and apartheid history, the South African higher education contextualisation and Afrocentricity can be made possible by deconstruction and decolonisation. Thus Africanisation, deconstruction and decolonisation are the concepts used in this study as a response to existing colonial practices in South African higher education.

Deconstruction is the process of analysing sensitive perspectives and aiming to marginalise voices and biased knowledge (Sands & Nuccio, cited in Zibane 2017). The deconstruction process allows biased knowledge to be altered by reconstructing the truth and including voices of the disempowered population (Ibid). For example, as South Africa celebrates democracy, freedom for everyone, and equal participation, the 2015/2016 students' movement resembled the still existing colonial legacies in HE. This calls for government and institutional authorities to come at the level of African students to capture their voices of concern and reconstruct relevant systems in HE. Thus, there is a need to acknowledge, validate, and responds to the decolonial demands of the previously marginalised population.

Deconstruction requires African students "not to accept the given constructs" instead; they should look at them in relation to their social, historical, and political context (Sands & Nuccio, cited in Zibane 2018, 19). There is thus a need for deconstructing cultures governing higher

education in South Africa. Through the process of deconstruction, the marginal voices must be moved to the center. An inclusive understanding of reality will emerge from such centeredness. This means that university education needs to do away with narrow perspectives emanating only from the privileged while excluding the majority. If individual participants in Higher Institutions of learning in South Africa embark in the process of deconstruction, the missing and marginalised voices will begin to be heard and become a significant part in the process of sustainable transformation (Maringe & Ojo 2017) and decolonial higher education. This suggests a need for a paradigm shift in higher education (Zibane 2018).

The African knowledge and experiences will never play a significant part in world views unless there is an active awareness and conscious board of stakeholders in decolonising South African higher education. This will create what Capra (cited in Zibane 2018, 20) calls a paradigm shift, which implies "a profound change in the thoughts, perceptions, and values that form a particular vision of reality." This suggests that paradigms are socially constructed by humans and can be changed and reconstructed (Gray, et al. 2014). Zibane (2018) also stipulate that paradigm shift allows us to make necessary transitions in exploring alternative paradigms that represent many human interests, needs, and perceptions not addressed in the dominant paradigm. Deconstruction of taken for granted practices and paradigms will thus facilitate an effective decolonisation process of higher education in South Africa.

### **2.6.3. Decolonising Social work education at the South African university**

South Africa, like other African countries, is facing the responsibility of discarding western social work character, but the South African condition is more complicated due to the apartheid regime, which was the most brutal racial domination (Mamphiswana & Noyoo 2016). The decolonisation of the Social Work curriculum calls for continuity in analysing programs and exalt those that are socially representative and culturally inclusive to decolonise the African minds and self-esteem and challenge the colonial practice (Abdi 2006). The social work education and practice need to be based on the inclusive needs and interests of Africans, and the selected content of the curriculum should be based on the life experiences of African students and their communities. Hence Maringe and Ojo (2017) argued that the African curriculum should value the centeredness of the 'indigenous knowledge system.'

Social work education needs to ensure that theory corresponds with practice and remember the fact that past curricula emanated from the West. It thus needs to be replaced by African settings

(Mamphiswana & Noyoo 2016). South African Social Workers should also develop their cumulative knowledge and enter into a process of refining their practice skills (ibid). The African problems should be dealt with in ways that are relevant to African Social Workers and community members. Such behavior will give meaning to indigenisation (Ibid) and context-relevant education.

There is a need for South African universities to challenge teaching and learning methods for relevance and applicability. Nakata et al. (2012) proposed that students in lecture venues must engage with more sophisticated theoretical dilemmas, understand the conceptual limit of their thinking and be able to critically engage proposition within their own experiences. This suggests a need for social work academia that encourages Africans to reach their full potential and humanity. Bozalek (2011) also suggests the importance of engagement opportunities with South African students to develop their relevant alternative learning and knowledge through participatory learning and action. Thus, a decolonised education should prioritise ‘emancipatory and liberating pedagogies’ (Maringe & Ojo 2017,36).

## **2.7. GLOBALISATION AND (DE) COLONISATION IN SOUTH AFRICAN HE**

Globalisation has been the driving force in South African universities. Globalisation is, however, governed by Eurocentric cultures (Mignolo 2011), which compels the competence of African universities to be benchmarked against the European perspectives (Jooste & Heleta 2016). As a result, African students’ and their cultures are incongruent with globalisation and university cultures (Pather et al. 2017). This emanates from the global and university norms which underplayed African values and interests as not counted and considered in the construction of a competent African global scholar (Ibid). This suggests that globalisation is founded in practices of inequality and injustice. Jooste and Heleta (2017) thus suggested that the concept of globalisation must not be desired in South African HE. The authors asserted that students should be equipped with the actual practical experiences of the real world that is not fair and that is not open to all. South African deep historical injustices and current inequalities (ibid) are ignored due to this buzzword that enforces colonial practice. As a result, although universities have established colonial studies as a field, the decolonised South African university is not evidence (SA universities and Global context 2016). Thus, globalisation can be blamed as the terrain that makes decolonial education in African universities impractical.

Maringe and Ojo (2017, 25) similarly viewed the development of higher education in Africa as competing under two contexts. i.e., the global demands force universities to respond to 'neoliberalism' centred on the "narratives of marketisation, internationalisation and managerialism". This focus increases African higher education "peripheralisation", since Africa's contribution in the global world is measured on their role against the perceived powerful, rich Northern countries (ibid). On the other hand, universities in Africa are rediscovering the lost identity through colonialism in the African continent (ibid).

This study argues that the new dispensations of South African higher education must acknowledge the uniqueness (historically, cultural and geographical) of the African continent. Global African competent scholars must be produced out of this uniqueness of the continent (Lumumba 2017). Therefore, African higher education must embrace Africa in the intellectual development of scholars and academics (Ndlovu-Gatshen 2018). This study thus suggests that, for South African universities to be part of globalisation, it must participate as producers of unique African epistemologies than being consumers of European ideas. This focus will nurture a contextually relevant and African centred higher education.

Currently, African universities are restructuring their curricula and training programs to meet global markets and requirements (Mail and Guardian 2015). Asante (2003,2) argued that a relevant African education needs "a mode of thought and action in which the centrality of African interests, values, and perspectives predominate." Seepe (2004,12) is also of the view that "truly South African universities need to ensure that the African student and his or her experiences are placed at the center of the curriculum." This is an absolute call for Afrocentricity and anti-colonial practice not only in HE but in a broader spectrum of the African societal structures.

The discourse of this study is on context-specific transformation through decoloniality. The researcher, however, acknowledges that certain scholars are against this call. They argue that African centeredness for context-specific decolonisation presents itself as against the notion of interconnectedness, which is the driving force of globalisation. For instance, Jorgensen (2010) problematise context-specific and culturally embedded knowledge and argued that it hinders the construction of different perspectives, which further alienates Africans in the global arena. Nevertheless, Maringe and Ojo (2017) argued that nurturing contextual relevance is the basis of sustainable globalisation in South African education. They argued that African higher

education could no longer maintain the global status quo, "its peripheralisation in the global context of the academy largely due to failure to imitate the western blueprints of higher education provides an opportunity to be more assertive about the transformation it requires" (Maringe & Ojo 2017,25). Thus, in the new dispensations of the country, there is a need for African higher education to focus inwardly and outwardly (Grosfogual 2020) in dealing with African problems. This means that, there is a need for an African university to value the African means of knowledge production and transmission while participating in the global scholarship.

## **2.8. CONCLUSION**

Given the scope of this research, the reviewed literature has focused on higher education with regards to issues of (de) coloniality. It also focused on arguments, domination, and interactions with regards to historical contexts of the country and HE. The literature shared insight into the pre-colonial historical background of African higher education. Such exploration has revealed that colonialism and apartheid have played a destroying role (in the African knowledge system) to the construction of South African higher education. And although colonialism was dismantled, colonial practices gave birth to apartheid, which carried the agenda of racial segregation in the development of HE.

The Democratic legislative frameworks tried to promote equality in HE, but the decolonial university and education is a farfetched dream in South Africa. Therefore, the unjust social work curriculum and university cultures suggest colonial practices as still influencing African students' experiences in HE. There is thus a need for the African university to focus on decolonisation, deconstruction, and Africanisation of African education for context-specific academia. The focus should be on the centeredness and inclusion of African ideas and interest in the politics of knowledge production. The study thus recommends HEIs in general and social work education in particular, to value contextualisation, inclusiveness, and Afrocentricity for anti-colonial African academia.

The next chapter discusses the methodological process of the study.



## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **CONDUCTING RESEARCH**

#### **3.1. INTRODUCTION**

Despite the political defeat of apartheid in South Africa (SA) following the first democratic elections in April 1994, victory against the ideology of colonial higher education (HE) is still an unrealised dream. Indeed, neither the restructuring agenda of the Department of Higher Education, nor its future vision of education for all has been sufficient to transform the HE system in SA. Formal education in SA continues to embrace European philosophical approaches at the expense of indigenous knowledge systems (IKS) (Abdi 2006). In addition, the exclusion of IKS leads to the marginalisation of African epistemologies and philosophies, which are portrayed as useless and barbaric in developing local African communities (ibid).

This research study is aimed at understanding the decolonial experiences of African students with regard to HE in KwaZulu-Natal (KZN). In chapter one of this study, I presented a detailed report of the voices that are calling for the decolonialisation of education that is relevant to the lived experiences of local African communities. In this regard, Abdi (2006) has argued that to decolonise European educational philosophies, it is important to rely on IKS, culture, and language to furnish the African continent with a contextually-relevant education.

This study also views African-centred education as an engagement with African students. Scholars such as Bozelek (2011), Kreitzer and Mupedziswa (2014), and Crampton (2015) highlight the importance of engagement with South African students to develop alternative learning and knowledge approaches through participatory learning and action. It is, therefore in the interest of this present study to provide African students with opportunities to define a relevant and decolonial social work education. Correspondingly, this study seeks to develop an inclusive and contextually relevant social work education that is rooted in the experiences and knowledge of the African people.

The social work profession is one of the professions that is believed to liberate the oppressed, enforce social justice, and seek human rights for all people (Patel 2015). However, it is often criticised for its Western and colonial roots which often suppresses African-centred education and practice (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2016). Social work education thus agonises from the perspective of existing histories in the present South African HE milieu. According to Maphiswana and Noyoo (2016), SA, as with other African countries is faced with the challenge of discarding Western-oriented social work. This means that South African HE authorities have

the burden of Africanising previously Westernised social work education approaches (Masoga 2018). Social work education should also ensure that theory corresponds to practice and remember the fact that past curricula were borrowed from Western to be replaced by the African context (Ibid). This study thus holds the view that inclusive, context-specific social work education should be informed by researching the (de) colonial experiences and perceptions of African students.

This chapter focuses on the methods adopted in exploring graduates' experiences of (de) coloniality and their understanding of (de) colonial South African higher education. The chapter begins by reflecting on how the social constructionism and critical perspective as research paradigms for this study provided opportunities for the exploration of the (de) colonial experiences of recent social work graduates and social work practitioners. In this chapter, the researcher has also demonstrated how she co-constructed her own university experience in the engagement with participants to be able to respond to the different realities during data collection. Sampling strategy; data collection techniques and data analysis are also described. The chapter continues to discuss the trustworthiness of the research and the limitations of the study. The discussion concludes by reflecting on research as the intervention.

### **3.2. RESEARCH PARADIGM**

The research paradigms for this present study are social constructionism and critical perspective approach. Terre Blanche, Durrheim and Painter (2006) argue that a paradigm provides a rationale for research and commits the researcher to certain methods of data collection and interpretation. The research paradigm is central to the design of this study. It impacts on the nature of the research question, that is, what to be studied, and on the manner in which the research objectives are to be studied.

The paradigm of social construction is understood as a framework that explores jointly-constructed meanings and assumptions of reality based on people interacting with one another and their environment (Teater 2010; Andrews 2012). The social constructionism paradigm also considers people as being influenced by their social world through their inherent interaction and interconnectedness (Burr 1995; Andrews 2012). As a research framework, the paradigm of social construction explores how individuals create knowledge, make sense of the world around them and construct reality and a view of themselves, based on their history, geopolitical, socio-economic, and cultural factors (Berger & Luckman 1991; Young & Collin 2004; Creswell 2007; Teater 2010; Andrews 2012). Social constructionism thus asserts that there is

neither objective reality nor objective truth reality, but that reality is constructed from an individual's lived experience and perceptions (Mavingira 2012; Teater 2010). African students' perspectives of decolonial HE, as observed in this study, emanate from their social context and lived experiences.

Social constructionism further anticipates that a great deal of life exists due to social and interpersonal influences (Gergen 1999; Burr 1995). This paradigm suggests that the knowledge we attain from our history and culture is "sustained by social processes" (Burr 1995, 2). What we perceive as truth is not based on an objective reality of the world, but on social processes such as the daily interaction of people based on their history, location, and culture (Mallon 2007; Burr 1995). Through interaction and relationships with others, individuals construct their own beliefs and knowledge. In this present study, students' experiences are viewed as the interaction products of their history, culture, and politics.

Burr (1995), Young and Collin (2004) and Teater (2010) all agree that social constructionism requires a critical engagement comprised of the following broad concepts: a critical stance on taken for granted knowledge; historical and cultural specificity; knowledge as sustained by a social process; knowledge and social action as going together; and language as a form of interaction.

When scholars speak of a "critical stance on taken for granted knowledge" (Burr 1995, 2), they refer to the need to take a "suspicious and unbiased" stance and observation of the social world, because it creates our reality and understanding of the world around us (i.e., the way we make sense of ourselves). Critical engagement in this study implies that the taken for granted epistemological and pedagogical distribution of the curriculum to African students must be unbiasedly analysed to capture the influence of the social world that has constructed it.

The other aspect of social constructionism that informed this study is the value of language in human progress; this, too is also considered a vital instrument in knowledge production, transmission, and sustainability. Teater (2010) argues that social constructionism among other forms of communication focuses on spoken language. Burr (1995,13) also argues that we are born into a world where the "framework and categories of culture already exist, and [are] reproduced" every day by everyone sharing the same language and culture. These frameworks and categories also demonstrate the politics of power in knowledge production and

management (ibid). Accordingly, the present study considers decolonial perspectives in HE as being embedded in sustained forms of communication.

The paradigm of social constructionism also focuses on power domination and dominant-subordinate relations that exist in the construction of the social world (Teater 2010). The framework thus provides resistance in unequal power domination (ibid). This paradigm has been valuable in analysing power relations under which participants operate. Social constructionism was also adopted in this study for its ability to resist the notion of inevitable forms of oppression and gives room for power analysis, which allows both the oppressor and the oppressed to critically analyse their use of power to critically perceive the way they exist in the world in which they find themselves (Andrews 2012). This means that social constructionism acknowledges the politics of power in constructed societal norms that need to be challenged for a shared construction of reality. The (de) colonial African students' experiences in this study are thus perceived as the product of power that needs to be interrogated for inclusive HE.

The paradigm of social construction also governed my journey in conducting this research. As much as I was the only researcher in this study, I never traveled this landscape alone. I worked with a network of people. I had people who helped me with the recruitment of participants, as well as research assistants who helped me during data collection and the routine tasks of arranging the venue and preparing refreshments. Theoretically and practically, this working with a number of people was influenced by the social constructionism paradigm. Social constructionism emphasizes collaboration and interaction more than individualism in attaining a common goal (Teater 2012). I also requested two research assistants who were not group participants but assisted with the necessary administrative functions.

The components of critical perspective paradigm were also adopted in this study. This paradigm concerns not with 'describing and explaining a given aspect of reality only, but rather with discovering what aspect of reality means to social actors/ participants (Blyler 1998: 36). Thus participants constructed meaning of their experiences based on their social worlds was closely analysed. This allowed the researcher to engage with literature, data and findings based on realities and lived experiences of social work graduates. Thompson (2017) also suggested that, critical engaging with participants realities is a form of emancipation and empowerment.

### **3.3. RESEARCH DESIGN**

The design of this research is a case study. A case study is defined as a research enquiry that investigates a specific contemporary phenomenon within a real-life context over a given period of time, using multiple sources of evidence (Fidel 1984; Alnaim 2015; Harrison, Birks, Franklin & Mills 2017). The use of a case study research design allows for the compiling of comprehensive, systematic, and in-depth information related to a single unit of analysis (Morojele 2009; Garcia 2012; Alnaim 2015). This implies that a case study is based on exploring a single/specific subject within its context for investigation using different data collection methods. This research design was chosen for this study because it allows for the combination of a wide range of data collection methods, including informal conversations, individual interviews, as well as focus groups (Whitehead 2004; Gobo 2008; Sclafani 2017). The design also allowed the researcher to conduct an open and flexible investigation of participants' experiences of the social work programme.

A case study was important to use in this study of (de)colonial education. Experiences of participants needed to be captured using multiple sources of evidence (Yin 1989) that provides an in-depth illustration of a phenomenon in action (Cohen et al., 2007). Scholars such as Demetrio (2009 cited in Alnaim 2015, 2) also argue that the “case study method facilitates realising how the format of the events was shaped and what are the real needs of its which are better to be explored even by further researchers.” Case study methodology thus provides clarification of certain instances within a “real life context” (Alnaim 2015, 2). It was thus important for this study to explore the perspectives and opinions of African graduates of the social work programme at Hibiscus University (HU) using case study design to “realistically and articulately” (Alnaim 2015, 2) explain the specific elements of a (de)colonial curriculum.

### **3.4. SAMPLING**

The sampling methods used in this study were purposive and snowball sampling (Rubin & Babbie 1993; Babbie & Mouton 2001). Purposive sampling was conducted by selecting participants who provided information and understanding by meeting a sampling criterion (Rubin & Babbie 1993; Babbie & Mouton 2001; Davies 2007). Snowball sampling was useful where participants were difficult to locate (Ibid). These two sampling methods allowed the researcher to interact only with African graduates in the discipline of social work.

In their study on decolonising HE in Africa, Mampane, Omidire, and Aluko (2018), also utilised a purposive sampling methodology in their examination of student perspectives. Ramson (2015) has also argued that it was vital to adopt snowball and purposive sampling in her study that focused on Ph.D. candidates' experiences of theory, in order to locate participants that were able to provide specific knowledge for the study. Purposive and snowball sampling are thus relevant to studies that explore students' experiences. Accordingly, this study of (de) coloniality in higher education also adopted purposive and snowball sampling to ensure the collection of perspectives centred only on social work graduates' experiences at HU.

The recruitment of the research participants for this study was not a straightforward process. The researcher made use of different professional networks to help her in the recruitment process of participants. Postgraduate social work students were recruited during the postgraduate workshop held by the Social Work Department at HU for their MA and Ph.D. students at the beginning of the academic year. Social work graduates who were registered as postgraduate students of other disciplines were also recruited. Graduates who were social work practitioners were recruited from the group of practitioners who were employed by the university as part-time fieldwork supervisors for student social workers in practice. An academic who was a coordinator of this group of practitioners was instrumental during the recruitment phase.

While both sampling techniques were used to locate participants, who had an in-depth understanding and information about the subject matter, the combined use was to achieve a specific purpose. In particular, purposive sampling was used with the aim of seeking information solely from participants who were social work graduates from HU. Snowball sampling was used with the aim of locating prospective participants through referrals. In addition, snowball sampling focused on hard-to-locate participants and made use of purposively selected participants by asking them to provide information to locate other relevant participants (Rubin & Babbie 2013). Snowball sampling allowed participants to provide access to potential participants who met the study criteria (Corey 2009) and relied on their social networks in order to identify other potential participants (Guest et al., 2013). Of the twenty-two (22) participants who participated in the research study, ten (10) had recently graduated from HU, and twelve (12) were social work practitioners. The selection criteria of participants was as follows:

- i. African social work graduates who studied at HU;

- ii. Graduates who had recently graduated and were currently registered for post-graduate studies;
- iii. Social work practitioners who had been in the field with two or more years of experience;
- iv. Both females and males were recruited.

### **3.4.1. PROFILES OF PARTICIPANTS**

This section provides profiles of the twenty-two (22) participants that were either individually interviewed and/or participated in the focus group discussions. Pseudonyms are used for the purpose of protecting the confidentiality and anonymity of all the research participants. Accordingly, the name of the university, the participants, and the locations have been changed in terms of applied field research ethics.<sup>3</sup>

#### **3.4.1.1. Postgraduate students**

- i. Sihle is a 25-year-old male, originally from the small rural town of Pongolo, Zululand, located in Northern KZN. His home language is isiZulu. He registered for the Bachelor of Community Development at HU in 2012. He changed curriculum and registered for the Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) degree in 2013. He was also admitted at the university residence in 2012. Sihle obtained a scholarship from the Department of Social Development (DSD) for his study fees in 2012. He graduated in 2017. He is currently registered for a Masters in Child Law and Protection (MCLP). Sihle also works as a tutor in the discipline of social work at HU.
- ii. Phili is a 22-year-old female, originally from the city of Pietermaritzburg, KZN. Her home language is isiZulu. She registered for the BSW degree at HU in 2014 and for university residence in 2015. She also obtained a DSD scholarship in 2015 for her study fees. She graduated in 2018. Currently, Phili is a Masters student in Population Studies and is unemployed.
- iii. Siyo is a 26-year-old male, originally from High Flats, located in Sisonke District Municipal area, KZN. His home language is isiZulu. He registered for the BSW degree in 2014 and for university residence in 2015. He obtained financial assistance through

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<sup>3</sup> See, Section 3.7. Ethical considerations.

the National Student Funding Scheme (NESFAS) from 2015 to completion. He graduated in 2018. Currently, Siyo is a Masters student in Development Studies and is unemployed.

- iv. Toto is a 22-year-old male, originally from KwaMaphumulo, located in ILembe District Municipal area, KZN. His home language is isiZulu. He registered for the BSW degree in 2014 and for university residence in 2015. His study fees were covered by a DSD scholarship. He graduated in 2018. Currently, he is an MCLP student. Toto is also employed as a tutor in the discipline of social work at HU.
- v. Zama is a 22-year-old female, originally from Manguza, a rural community located in uMkhanyakude District Municipal area, Northern KZN. Her home language is isiZulu. She registered for the BSW degree in 2014 and for university residence in 2016. She obtained financial assistance from NSFAS in 2016 to completion. She graduated in 2018. Zama is currently a registered Masters student in Population Studies and is unemployed.
- vi. Melo is a 23-year-old female and is originally from the city of Newcastle, KZN. Her home language is isiZulu. She registered for the BSW degree in 2013 and for university residence in 2014. Her study fees were covered by a DSD scholarship, which she obtained in 2014. She graduated in 2018 and is currently a registered Masters student in Development Studies. Melo is also employed as a social work student's fieldwork supervisor.
- vii. Mami is a 23-year-old female, originally from the Eastern Cape but grew up in uMlazi, South West of Durban, KZN. She speaks isiZulu and isiXhosa as her home language. She registered for the BSW degree in 2014 and university residence in 2015. She had multiple sources of funding assistance, which included a bursary, NSFAS and DSD scholarship from 2015. In 2017 however, only the DSD scholarship funded her studies. She graduated in 2018 and is currently a registered Masters student in Social Work. Mami is also employed as a tutor in the discipline of social work at HU.
- viii. Phumi is a 26-year-old female, originally from Eshowe, King Cetshwayo District Municipality area, KZN. Her home language is isiZulu. She registered for the BSW



degree in 2012 and university residence in 2013. She obtained a DSD scholarship in 2013 which covered her study costs to completion. She graduated in 2017 and is currently a registered Masters student in Development Studies. She is also vocationally employed at Westville Correctional Services as a Social Worker, facilitating victim-offender mediation dialogue (VOM-D).

- ix. Siri is a 22-year-old male, originally from Folweni, South of Durban, KZN. His home language is isiZulu. He registered in 2014 for the BSW degree and university residence in 2015. She obtained a DSD scholarship from 2015 to 2017. Siri graduated in 2018 and is currently a registered Masters student in Population Studies. He is also employed as a student library assistant at HU.
- x. Ngco is a 23-year-old female, originally from Camperdown, located in uMgungundlovu District Municipal area, KZN. Her home language is isiZulu. She registered for the BSW degree in 2014 and for university accommodation in 2015. Her study fees were funded by NSFAS. She graduated in 2018. Ngco is currently a registered Masters student in Development Studies. She is also employed as resident assistant in one of the HU student residences.

#### **3.4.1.2. Social work practitioners**

- i. Thato is a 29-year-old male, originally from Zimbabwe, but currently lives in Durban, KZN. His home language is Shona, but he fluently speaks isiZulu. He registered for the BSW degree in 2010 and for residence during the same year. His studies were funded by a scholarship from Zimbabwe to completion. He graduated in 2014. He also registered and graduated for Social Work Masters in 2016. Currently, Thato is a Ph.D. candidate, a contract social work lecturer, and a senior tutor in the discipline of social work at HU.
- ii. Sagu is a 27-year-old male, originally from Hluhluwe, located in the uMkhanyakude District Municipal area, KZN. His home language is isiZulu. He registered for the BSW degree in 2011. His year of admission at the university residence and funding source is unknown. He graduated in 2015 and is currently a registered B.Ed. student in one of the KZN universities and is employed as a part-time social worker in an NGO.

- iii. Simbo is a 30-year-old male, originally from Mid Illovo, located in the uMgungundlovu District Municipal area, KZN. His home language is isiZulu. He registered for the Bachelor of psychology degree in 2010. Following a change of curriculum, he registered for the BSW degree in 2011 and for university residence in the same year. He obtained financial assistance from NESFAS in 2011 to completion. He graduated with a BSW degree in 2015. He went on to earn an Honours in Psychology in 2016. He is currently a registered Masters student in the discipline of psychology and serves as a senior tutor in the discipline of social work. He is also employed as a contract lecturer at HU. Simbo is also employed as a Social Worker for VOM-D at Westville Correctional Services.
- iv. Khomi is a 26-year-old female, originally from the city of Pietermaritzburg, KZN. Her home language is isiZulu. She registered for the BSW degree in 2011 and was provided with university accommodation in the same year. She self-funded her studies. She graduated with a BSW degree in 2015. She also earned an Honours in Business Management from one of the KZN universities. Khomi was employed as a professional social worker at the KZN Department of Health from 2015 but resigned in 2017 because of her spiritual calling to take up missionary work.
- v. Notsha is a 25-year-old female, originally from Nongoma, Zululand, KZN. Her home language is isiZulu. She registered for the BSW degree in 2011 and for university residence in 2012. The NSFAS funded her studies to completion. She graduated with a BSW degree in 2015. She also graduated with a Masters in Criminology in 2016. Notsha is currently vocationally employed as a Social Worker, facilitating Victim Offender Mediation Dialogue at Westville Correctional Services.
- vi. Don is a 38-year-old female, originally from Kenya, but currently resides in Glenmore, a residential suburb of Durban, KZN. Her home language is English. She registered for the BSW degree in 2011 but did not live in the university residence. She self-funded her studies and graduated in 2015. Currently, Don is registered for the MCLP and is employed as a tutor and field supervisor in the discipline of social work at HU.
- vii. Thinti is a 26-year-old female, originally from Port Shepstone, located in Ugu District Municipal area, KZN. Her home language is isiZulu. She registered for the BSW degree

in 2011 and for university residence in 2012. Her study fees were covered by a DSD scholarship. She graduated in 2015 with a BSW degree. In 2016, she graduated with a Masters in Social Work. In 2018, she also graduated for a second Social Work Masters from a university in the United Kingdom (UK). She is currently registered as a Ph.D. candidate and employed as a researcher at the Durban Research Institute Company.

- viii. Thume is a 26-year-old female, originally from Richmond, located in the KZN Midlands. Her home language is isiZulu. She registered for the BSW degree in 2011 and for university residence in 2012. NSFAS funded her studies to completion. She graduated with a BSW degree in 2015. She also graduated with an Honours in Community Development in 2017. Currently, she is registered as a Masters student in development studies. Thume is also employed as a Social Worker, facilitating Victim-Offender Mediation at Westville Correctional Services.
- ix. Lima is a 27-year-old male, originally from KwaMaphumulo, located in iLembe District Municipal area, KZN. His home language is isiZulu. He registered for the BSW degree in 2011 and for university residence in the same year. The NSFAS covered his study fees to completion. He graduated with a BSW degree in 2015. He also graduated with an Honours in Community Development in 2016. He is currently registered as a Masters student in community development. Lima is employed as an Academic Development officer in the School of Built Environment Studies at HU.
- x. Theka is a 25-year-old female, originally from Pietermaritzburg. Her home language is isiZulu. She registered for the BSW degree in 2011 and for university residence in 2012. NSFAS covered her study costs to completion. She graduated in 2015. Theka is currently employed as a contract social worker at the Department of Social Development.
- xi. Nox is a 35-year-old female, originally from KwaMaphumulo, located in iLembe District Municipal area, KZN. Her home language is isiZulu. She registered for the BSW degree in 2010 and for university residence in 2011. NSFAS covered her study fees. She graduated with a BSW degree in 2015. She also graduated with a Masters in Social Work in 2017 and is currently registered as a Ph.D. candidate and a contract

lecturer in the social work department at HU. Nox also works as a Social Worker, facilitating VOM-D at Westville Correctional Services.

- xii. Sida is a 29-year-old female, originally from Pretoria, but resides in Bluff, located in eThekweni Municipal area, KZN. While her home language is Tsonga, Sida speaks isiZulu fluently. She registered for the BSW degree in 2010 and did not reside in the university residence. NSFAS funded her studies to completion. She graduated with a BSW degree in 2014. She also graduated with a Masters in Social Work in 2018. Sida is currently employed as a Social Worker, facilitating Victim-Offender Mediation at Westville Correctional Services.

### **3.5. DATA COLLECTION**

In order to explore the experiences and opinions of the research participants and their understanding of decoloniality, this present study employed individual in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. These two methods are widely used in qualitative research because of their ability to provide deep information and stories of the lived experiences of the participants (Guest et al., 2013). Furthermore, in qualitative studies, the use of in-depth interviews and focus group discussion promotes naturalness and spontaneity, flexibility and control of the environment (Babbie & Mount 2001). These two methods were important to use in this study of (de) coloniality for participatory methodologies (range of activities of participation). According to Bozelek (2012), participatory methods are valued as strategies for giving students an active and influential role in discussions concerning their education. In-depth interviews and focus groups also provided important elements of Afrocentricity in this study by focusing on the perspectives and opinions emanating from the African students in the discussion of their education.

The language of communication and its use was also an important component of this study. The researcher was vigilant about how language is used to dominate or silence individuals. Teater (2012) also argues that interaction is determined by a shared language that demonstrates the issues of power. As such, during the planning phase of this research, I decided to conduct both the individual interviews and focus group discussions in both isiZulu and English language. The choice of these two languages was based on my own home language and, more importantly, the home language of the research participants, which was predominantly isiZulu. Practically, isiZulu became the dominant language during data collection. The use of isiZulu

during the focus group discussions was also used as one of the strategies towards building rapport among the research participants and between the research participants and the researcher. As Nelson Mandela has argued, “If you talk to a man in a language he understands, that goes to his head. If you talk to him in his language that goes to his heart” (Nelson Mandela Foundation 2011).<sup>4</sup>

### **3.5.1. Focus groups with participants**

The first stage of data collection comprised of focus group interviews with a group of postgraduate students and a group of practitioners. Each group had one session. The reason for beginning with focus group discussions was to capture different personal and group feelings of the research participants about the topic and their opinions through interaction (Acocella 2012). In this study, groups also provided a broader range of information and offered an opportunity to seek clarification on specific themes to be explored during individual interviews. Focus groups also allowed the researcher to develop a rapport (i.e., the formulation of a close relationship where the researcher and participants understand each other’s ideas and improve their communication) with each of the participants. Bartkowiak (2012); Zakaria and Mustamal (2014) state that, individual interviews should be conducted only when the researcher and the participants are comfortable with each other, to improve interaction and communication. Group interviews were also used as platforms to recruit participants for individual interviews. One focus group was conducted with each set of participants, and developing a rapport with them was also a process. This process was achieved through prolonged engagements. Group interviews lasted for about one hour and a half to two hours each.

To energise the participants and as a way of introducing the focus of the study, the researcher began with an icebreaker activity. The icebreaker activity required the research participants to each write their names on a piece of paper (or what they would like to be called during the group discussions), and drop it on the floor. Each member then had to choose a name sticker, guess the owner, and return the name to the owner. The purpose of this activity was to enable participants to become comfortable with each other for improved interaction. The number of questions about the activity were asked. After further discussion, the researcher introduced the issue of (de) coloniality by asking questions relating to participants' experiences during university life.

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<sup>4</sup> The use of gender-exclusive language in this quotation is noted by the present researcher.

As the conversation proceeded, some participants ask the researcher of her university experience. By so doing, they wanted to check any changes against what they had communicated as their own accounts of university life. Although such questions created an uneasiness to the researcher since she wanted to appear neutral to the participants and allow them to belong to any side of the argument they prefer. The researcher realised that sharing her views enabled the participants to not feel as if they were being interrogated. A consequence of this was that the participants shared more stories of decolonialisation in instances where the researcher shared her views than when she was asking questions.

Ramazanoglu and Holland (2002, 159) have argued that a researcher can use her/his power by conducting research as a “collaborative interactional process” through joint inputs from both the researcher and the research participants. This was also in line with the social constructionism paradigm, which appreciates collaborative interaction for the construction of reality. This collaborative approach can also be perceived as a decolonial discourse where participants are made to freely engage in issues of their own education than being dominated by the already made fixed questions of the researcher. The researcher observed that by employing this approach, new discussions and directions were opened up. Sometimes a researcher would not start to probe, but participants would lead the discussion by introducing new topics of interest but relevant to the study - which led to the productivity of the focus groups.

### **3.5.2. Individual semi-structured interviews with participants**

Once individual appointments were made with each of the twenty-two (22) research participants, the interviews commenced. On the participants’ requests, interviews were conducted in venues chosen by the participants. These were university residences, researcher’s office, participants’ houses, and offices. The participants wanted the interviews to take place in their places of comfort and safety. Olmann (2016) also highlights the importance of participants to feel safe during interviews. Interviews needed to be conducted in times and places most convenient for participants (Ibid). This was also in line with the principles adopted in this study. Respect was shown for the dignity of each of the participants, as well as justice, beneficence, and non-maleficence, thereby ensuring that no harm was experienced by any of

the interviewees.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, comfortability was a priority to ensure that participants were at ease during interviews.

Before each interview began, each participant was reminded about the purpose of the study and of the interview. Even after all such preparation, some of the selected participants expressed doubt as to their suitability as participants of the research study. Some of the participants expressed the view that they were not knowledgeable about the subject matter, while still others wanted the researcher to provide them with questionnaires or questions before each interview began. The researcher assured the participants that there were no right or wrong answers because each story was subjective and different. Babbie and Mouton (2001), Terre Blanche, Durrheim and Painter (2006) highlights that the flexible nature of qualitative research is meant to allow the researcher to dig much deeper into human experiences based on participants' feelings and opinions.

It was also outlined that there were no questions; it just general themes that the researcher would like to cover. Otherwise participants were to direct the interview through expressions. To diffuse not knowing fear, the researcher began the interviews with questions that were personal and relevant to the participants' background. Such questions ensured that the participants relaxed, and some even laughed when talking about their childhood education. In that manner, conversations were built up to university life. Tears and dissatisfaction were shared from most participants when the conversation was to transit to university journeys. Some participants communicated the opposite. In some instances, there was so much fun and energy on what was said.

### **3.6. METHODS OF DATA ANALYSIS**

Rubin and Rubin (2005) argue that data analysis involves a process of ordering, creating structures, and constructing meanings from the research data collected. In this study, thematic content and discourse analysis were used to arrange data. The study began the analysis of data during the literature review. It continued through to the writing stage of this study when the researcher completed the final report. Initially, as the interviews were continuing, preliminary analysis of data was conducted, which gave the researcher an indication of how to redesign the

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<sup>5</sup> See, Section 3.7. Ethical considerations.

research questions if it were deemed necessary, and which of the central themes it was important to focus on.

### **3.6.1. Thematic content analysis**

According to Braun and Clarke (2006), a thematic analysis interprets data through identifying, analysing and reporting patterns or themes within the collected data. The thematic content analysis describes data in rich detail in relation to the research topic (2006). Thematic analysis is thus regarded as a process of identifying patterns with collected data in the qualitative study (Maguire & Delahunt 2017). In terms of this present study, data was analysed through emerging themes found in the interview transcripts to better enable capturing the communicated experiences of the research participants. The use of thematic content analysis led to a better understanding of (de)colonial processes in social work education. The five steps suggested by Terre Blanche et al., (2006, 322-326) were adopted, namely: familiarization and immersion, inducing themes; coding; elaboration; interpretation, and checking.

#### **3.6.1.1. Familiarisation and immersion**

After the interviews were completed, the researcher proceeded with translation and transcribing the data. Data was arranged to be stored in a similar format to allow material analysis. The data was then labeled with specific codes for the purpose of reference so that the researcher could also be able to travel forward and backward in the data (i.e., an iterative process) (Anderson 2009). The researcher then familiarised herself with the transcripts and recorded interviews, as suggested by Maguire and Delahunt (2017). The transcripts were read a number of times in order to organise and understand data (Terre Blanche et al., 2006).

The analysis commenced by reading transcripts and re-arranging data into different categories. As the researcher worked through the transcripts, it was soon realised that the actual interviews were relived as the researcher immersed herself in the material. This is because the researcher began to visualise the individual participants' voices, facial expressions, and postures (Anderson 2009). The researcher's interviews and deep interaction with participants left an indelible mark in memory. Especially for in-depth individual interviews, because participants account as they were describing events and hurtful experiences touched a researcher in a certain way.



#### **3.6.1.2. Inducing themes**

The interview guide themes were used as a starting point. This was refined by identifying additional emerging themes. Themes were created by identifying the recurrence of specific instances in the material (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). The researcher categorised the material into themes and checked how the different themes were interrelating. This gave a fresh view of the data and allowed for careful comparison of sections that appeared to belong together (Ibid).

#### **3.6.1.3. Coding**

The researcher marked the relevant sections of data and allocated codes. Coding was done on both the hard and electronic copies by highlighting relevant texts. Maguire and Delahunt (2017) also suggest that coding is performed to allocate meaning and systematic understanding of collected data. In this study, open coding was also adopted since the study did not have pre-set of codes; instead, codes were developed in the coding process (ibid).

#### **3.6.1.4. Elaboration**

Through engagement with an academic supervisor, the researcher refined themes and sub-themes. This gave a fresh view of the coded data and allowed for careful comparison of themes and codes that appeared to belong together. In this aspect, a researcher also works with the coded transcripts/themes to re-arrange data and organise data into broader themes (Maguire & Delahunt 2017). At this stage, the context and meaning of themes in relation to the study were also assured.

#### **3.6.1.5. Interpretation and checking**

Interpretation and checking of data were performed by trying to fix weak points (lacked information). This was achieved by interpreting data against each other, the literature review, objectives, context, theoretical framework, and underlying assumptions of the study. Maguire and Delahunt (2017) also advise that the checking stage should consist of reviewing the final interpreted data and developed themes to confirm if they make sense.

After the researcher had obtained the overall grasp of the text and its structure that was found through thematic and content analysis, another level of data through discourse analysis was uncovered.

### **3.6.2. Discourse analysis**

Discourse analysis is a qualitative method of data analysis that explores the use of language, word choice, non-verbal and verbal speech in the collected data (Gee 1999). According to Shanthi, Wah, and Lajium (2015,159), discourse analyses focuses on the “natural occurring of language” so as to understand human interaction and experiences. The language itself is not useful, but it is within the mutually-shared interactions that meanings are created (ibid). Discourse analysis thus involves what participants say, how they say it, their tone, use of passive or active voice, body language, sequencing of the information, and their choices of words (Drid 2010). In the process of discourse analysis, a researcher views the text as comprising of different layers. Each of these different layers contains multiple meanings, all of which are connected and influence one another. Mogashoa (2014) also argues that discourse analysis analyses texts, interactions, and social practices at all levels of human interaction. This is also inline with social constructionism paradigm which values the influence of peoples interaction with their social worlds (Burr 1995; Andrews 2012).

Mogashoa (2014, 102) goes on to argue that, since discourse analysis is “interpretive and deconstructing” it has no rigid specific guidelines to follow. Instead, it is the analysis of patterns in language, including spoken and written text, which matters (Drid 2010). Within discourse analysis, language is thus perceived as action (Wood & Kruger 2000, cited in Shanthi et al., 2015,163). Language is not seen as having a single rigid meaning but varies according to different contexts and meanings constructed by users (Gee 1999). It is also used to reveal the motivational politic involved in arguments and engagements (ibid). According to Morgan (2010, cited in Mogashoa 2014), discourse analysis is a means of discovering the unspoken language and acknowledging certain aspects of human behavior. The use of language reveals the beliefs of the participant, position, and ideas embedded in the spoken and unspoken words. In this study, the researcher adopted discourse analysis to explore participants’ meanings of language and communication, considering context, processes, and practices of these meanings (van Dijk 2001). As Griffin (2007) has further indicated, when people interact and talk to one another, the world gets constructed. This also relate to social constructinism approach which view language as a vital instrument for knowledge transmission.

In the process of discourse analysis, the researcher completely immersed herself in transcribed data looking for linguistic meaning that was embedded in the participants’ communication. The researcher looked closely at the way language was used, the participants’ choice of words, and

how participants expressed what they said. The researcher also immersed herself in the transcribed data, searching out any symbolic discourse, such as words and phrases, and marked the indications which revealed a different aspect of the subject investigated. Discourse makers were highlighted in the form of words and phrases. Discourse makers that appeared to belong in one theme were also labeled. As recommended by Magashoa (2014), the researcher engaged with what was said in order to grasp the emotional changes of tone, avoidances, silences, contradictions, and inconsistencies.

Discourse analysis thus contributed to exploring the (de)colonial experiences of participants in their own words and allowed the researcher to remain true with respect to the analysis of participants' stories. Shanthi, Wah, and Lajium (2015) also agree that discourse analysis allows capturing of language nature in any social context. In this study, the use of different methods of data collection, such as recording and note-taking were utilised to ensure the truthiness of the transcripts for legitimate reflection on the true stories of participants and to be able to interrogate the choice of words and language used without losing the context.

### **3.7. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

The essential purpose of ethical consideration in research is to protect the welfare and the rights of research participants. Babbie and Mouton (2001) emphasise that the researcher's right to search for information should not compromise the right to privacy of the participants. In this study, the interviews were conducted after ethical clearance from the University of KwaZulu-Natal Ethics Committee had been received. Written permission to conduct interviews was also obtained from each of the participants. Participants were first informed about the purpose of the interview and were given the opportunity to ask questions about the research.<sup>6</sup> The interview transcripts are preserved in a password-protected document, and the digital voice recordings are locked in a secure cabinet in the School's Post-Graduate Office to increase the efficiency of the data analysis (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). In terms of research ethics, all transcripts and digital voice recordings will be destroyed after a period of five years.

Wassenaar (2006) contends that, most commonly, research ethics draws on principle ethics and proposes that the following principles are used to inform research practice: respect for the autonomy and dignity of persons, non-maleficence, beneficence, and justice. These principles

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<sup>6</sup> See, Appendix 2.

were used to structure this section. Those ethical considerations were also observed during the research journey:

### **3.7.1. Autonomy and respect for the dignity of persons**

According to Wassenaar (2006), this principle encourages voluntarily, and informed consent, protection of individual and institutional confidentiality, the right to withdraw from a study at any point are all means of protecting the autonomy of research participants, and show respect for their dignity.<sup>7</sup> Because the majority of participants were isiZulu speaking, respect for the autonomy and the dignity of persons also required that the consent forms be communicated in English and isiZulu, as the chosen languages of communication that were easily understood by both participants and researcher.

In the informed consent forms, the participants were informed that they could withdraw at any stage of the research. In addition, they were assured that all identifiable and personal research information will remain confidential. Individual participants and institutions will all remain anonymous. This was ensured through the use of pseudonyms and where possible, by altering identifying places and people that might expose participants, institutions and the community (Gobo 2008). While this facilitated openness of the participants during their participation in the study, it must be noted that in a case study, there will remain a risk that, in some instances, discerning readers may be able to work out the identities of particular research participants. It is for this reason that the issue of confidentiality is also related to the principle of non-maleficence, which is discussed next.

### **3.7.2. Non-maleficence**

The ethical principle of non-maleficence requires the researcher to ensure that no harm and no wrong be directly or indirectly inflicted on research participants due to their participation in a study (Wassenaar 2006). Harm can include emotional trauma, stigma, or victimisation that participants can experience due to their participation in a study (ibid). The use of pseudonyms and the change of identifiers was implemented to ensure the confidentiality and non-victimisation of participants. In this study, the possible challenge was that confidentiality in the case study of the university could be of concern. Therefore this was carefully explained to each of the participants and was further communicated in the informed consent. Wassenaar

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<sup>7</sup> See, Appendix 2 Informed Consent Forms.

(2006) further argues that the research should avoid and minimise harm and wrong by carefully identifying study risks, harm, and possible costs to participants. Due to the nature of the topic, it was unlikely for the participants to experience harm, but arrangements were made should this take place. Referrals to the university counselling clinic were also planned through arrangements made with the Department of Psychology.

### **3.7.3. Beneficence**

According to Wassenaar (2006), the principle of beneficence obliges the researcher to attempt to maximise the benefits for participants' participation in the study. In this study, students were given an opportunity to express their experiences with regard to the university curriculum. Students were given a chance to voice their perceptions, which might not have happened before.

### **3.7.4. Justice**

The ethical principle of justice requires equity and fairness in all stages of research (Wassenaar 2006). Research justice includes fair participant selection rather than relying on convenience sampling (Ibid). This means that justice is achieved through fairness, both in the sampling strategy and collection of data. In consideration of this principle, there was a fair selection of participants by using purposive and snowball sampling. These sampling strategies were positioned to recruit any postgraduate students and professional social workers who had studied for the BSW degree at HU. Fairness was also applied during data collection by conducting interviews after achieving ethical clearance from the Research Committee at the university. Consent was also obtained from participants. Methods of confidentiality were adopted, as discussed above.

Wassenaar (2006, 68) also argues that it is the obligation of a researcher to provide "care and support" to distressed participants harmed by the study. Although the researcher in this study did not expect to encounter any traumatic event that needed external intervention, there were instances of provoked emotions that needed social work skills and crisis intervention. Crisis intervention was thus conducted by the researcher, providing short term and immediate support to three participants that had provoked emotions (Blalock 2014).

The researcher provided support and care to those participants who become distressed or harmed by the research through her capacity as a Social Work professional. As recommended

by Haigh and Witham (2015) after noticing that a participant was becoming emotionally distressed and in tears, the interviews were immediately brought to a halt. A participant would then be encouraged to feel free to share her/his thoughts and feelings (ibid). The researcher also confirmed if the participant was ready to continue with the interview or contact the Student Counselling Centre at HU.

While all three of the participants reported that they were ready to continue with the interviews, the researcher alerted them to feel free to withdraw should they experience discomfort with certain questions that might be asked. The researcher also allowed a period of short silence as participants gathered their thoughts and their emotions. Drinking water, tissues and face wipes were offered, which the researcher made available throughout the data collection process. Participants were also requested to contact the researcher should they experience further distress after the interview so that they could be referred. Haigh and Witham (2015) also indicate the importance of encouraging distressed participants to contact a researcher should they feel more distraught as time goes on, so as to minimise harm.

Scholars such as Blalock (2014) and Haigh and Witham (2015) further argue that it is important for a researcher to consider other forms of support such as following-up a distressed participant to ensure her/his psychological and emotional wellbeing. The researcher in this study requested permission from distressed participants to be able to do follow-up through contacting them and all three participants gave their permission.

### **3.8. TRUSTWORTHINESS OF THE STUDY**

In this study, objectivity, which implies justice and truthiness' of the study (Babbie & Mouton 2001) was achieved through adopting the trustworthiness process. According to Babbie and Mouton (2001), trustworthiness focuses on the researcher persuading the audience that her/his findings of the study are worth paying attention to. The trustworthiness of this study was, therefore achieved using the concepts of credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability (Babbie & Mouton 2001; Riet & Durrheim 2006).

#### **3.8.1. Credibility**

Credibility is the concern that the conducted research will reach a sound/valid conclusion (Riet & Durrheim 2006). It is about how one can establish confidence in the truth of the findings of a particular enquiry for the respondents and the context in which the enquiry was carried out

(Babbie & Mouton 2001). For Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999), credibility is achieved when the findings are convincing and believable. In this study, credibility was achieved through prolonged engagement with the participants, in-depth interviews, and “referential adequacy” through the use of different materials to document the research findings such as digital audio recordings and noting nonverbal communication (Babbie & Mouton 2001, 277). In addition, no close friends, relatives, and family members were interviewed. The digitally recorded interviews and typed transcripts are kept in a secure place, and all collected data was peer-reviewed by the academic supervisor.

### **3.8.2. Transferability**

According to Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999) and Creswell (2007), a rich, thick description allows the reader to decide about transferability. In this study, the data collection process is described in detail. Purposive sampling was used to give the reader details of the subject of enquiry. Scholars such as Mouton (2001), Shenton (2004), Riet and Durrheim (2006), all agree that transferability can be obtained from a rich and detailed description of the fieldwork context (which are interviews in this study) and purposive sampling used to provide the reader with a detailed account of the specific context of the study.

### **3.8.3. Dependability**

Dependability relies on the degree to which the study result is repeatable (Riet & Durrheim 2006). According to Babbie and Mouton (2001), dependability is how one can determine whether the findings of an enquiry could be repeated if the enquiry were replicated with the same/or similar respondents in the same/or similar context. Dependability is thus achieved by detailed descriptions that show certain actions and opinions that are developed in and out of contextual interaction (Terre Blanche & Durrheim 1999). This methodology chapter provides the reader with detailed descriptions of the methods used to collect and analyse data. The use of such an in-depth methodology discussion allows the reader to decide on the dependability of the enquiry.

### **3.8.4. Conformability**

Conformability is how one can establish the degree to which the findings of an enquiry are determined by the respondents and the conditions of enquiry and not the biases, motivations, interests, or perspectives of the enquirer (Babbie & Mouton 2001). An audit trail (Lietz et al., 2006) was kept throughout the data analysis process to clearly describe the steps the researcher

took in conducting the research. As suggested by Babbie and Mouton (2001), the following audit trails were kept in order to achieve conformability: raw data such as written field notes and recorded interviews; data reduction and analysis products such as summaries and condensed notes; data reconstruction and synthesis products such as developed themes, conclusions, and final report; material relating to intentions and dispositions such as proposal; and instrument development information such as initial preliminary interview schedule forms.

### **3.9. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

Despite the prospective benefits of the study and its contribution to the body of knowledge, the study does not represent all universities and African graduates in South Africa. Only twenty-two (22) participants from HU participated in the study. This implies that the findings are limited to the experiences of these participants only and not those of a broader society. Although increasing the sample of the study would have provided a broader perspective, the small sample size was in keeping with the qualitative paradigm. Jackson, Drummond, and Camara (2007) also argue that qualitative studies should encourage microfocus (i.e., small numbers) in sampling so as to conduct in-depth discussions of the phenomenon. That also allows a close analysis of data in a particular context for rich descriptions (Cropley 2015).

The other limitation of the study is that the information on the research topic is limited to the views of post graduate students and practitioners, not those of lecturers and university management personnel. Although interviewing staff and university management would have given a more holistic representation, this was outside the scope of the present study.

Finally, the researcher's own experience of university exclusion might have influenced data analysis and data collection. Social work professional principles and skills were implemented to minimise limitations. These included: self-awareness, critical social work, genuine and client-centered approaches, so that the researcher could remember that it was not about her own experience, but the focus was on study participants' perspectives.

### **3.10. RESEARCH AS INTERVENTION**

A qualitative study such as this one, which explores lived experiences, can be considered as an intervention to both participants and their context. This is because participants are given an opportunity to communicate their experiences, which can be documented. Scholars such as Pattman and Bhana (2009), Anderson (2010) and Swartz (2011) have confirmed that giving young people an opportunity to talk and to be listen is an intervention itself. Coming together



therefore in a safe environment gave participants in this study the opportunity to voice their experiences. Swartz (2011) also argues that people experience benefits in the process of being listened to by an interested person and to be asked endless questions.

As demonstrated in the data collection section above, the prolonged time of the interviews and deep information shared by the participants revealed a certain trust created between the researcher and the participants, an occurrence which ably demonstrated the researcher's interest in the participants' stories. Students and practitioners alike took advantage of the environment and space, which allowed the validation of their voices, which is not normally provided in academic environments and workspaces.

Beyond providing a friendly and enabling environment that allowed the validation of the participants' voices, this study adds to the body of researched literature on the experiences of African students in South African universities. This has the potential to contribute to relevant social work curriculum and transformation in HE. This is because the study provides an understanding of local experiences and perceptions. The knowledge gained from the research can also be used by a range of stakeholders in issues with which the study is concerned, such as social work education policymakers, HU management, HU lecturers, students, and social work practitioners. Egger (2012) also found that social science research can assist in reforming sectors that are critical by identifying challenges and providing possible solutions for socio-economic issues.

### **3.11. CONCLUSION**

This chapter has communicated the journey the researcher traveled in understanding African students' experiences of (de)colonisation in social work education, and what it means for inclusive and transformed curriculum in the context of South African HE. Even though the chapter acknowledges some of the limitations within the adopted methodology of the study, but the use of case study offered the researcher an opportunity to use a variety of data collection such as informal conversations, in-depth focus groups, and semi-structured individual interviews, for rich and in-depth context-specific information. Other methodologies could not have provided a room for the collection of such deep information. Therefore, a methodology choice gave "voice" to participants and considered them as active agents in issues of decolonisation in higher education.

The choice of a theoretical framework, ethical considerations, methodologies, and all associated principles adopted in this study viewed research as personal, emotional, and relational (Zibane 2017). The use of thematic content and discourse analysis ensured the proper capturing of participants' voices, with close interrogation of chosen language and communication when expressing their experiences and perceptions. This was to ensure that the final product of the research study was centred on the shared experiences and perceptions of African students.

The next chapters focus on data analysis and discussion of results.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **THE COLONIAL LEGACY IN THE EVERYDAY LIVES OF AFRICAN STUDENTS AT THE UNIVERSITY**

#### **4.1. INTRODUCTION**

The focus of this chapter is on the research participants' perception and understanding of colonialism and colonial experiences at a university in post-apartheid South Africa. The focus of this chapter emanates from the broader focus of this study, which is built upon the experiences of African graduates with regard to their understanding and experiences of (de)coloniality in social work education at a South African university. Furthermore, the focus of this chapter is influenced by the assertion of the Council of Higher Education (CHE) (2015) that says, in order to promote the development of holistic social work education, schools of social work education need to acknowledge the historical context of the country. This chapter, therefore, acknowledges that students are often modeled by their historical context, their social positioning, and the socio-economic aspects of the society in which they live. Nandy (cited in Connell 2007, 190) has similarly argued that "personal is political, thus larger structures are implicated in personal experiences." This is also the notion of the Afrocentric paradigm (against Western individualism), which values the influence of context in individual perspectives (Asante 2014; Lumumba 2016). By pointing to the importance of acknowledging that individual perspectives are often influenced by social context, this chapter will thus explore the contemporary influence of coloniality in the experiences of African university students. In this regard, it is important to note that such positioning does not imply that individuals in this present study do not hold unique, individualistic perspectives; nevertheless, this chapter acknowledges such meanings and perspectives as being socially constructed.

Despite the demise of colonialism and apartheid, traces of their stubborn histories are engraved in the institutions of higher learning in South Africa. This persistence of colonial history was identified in 1965 by the Ghanaian revolutionary leader, Kwame Nkrumah, the first prime minister and president of Ghana and the father of Pan-Africanism. Nkrumah viewed the continuation of the colonial process as neo-colonialism, which means the continuous influential control (by colonisers) of formerly colonised countries and their resources. Anibal Quijono (2000) also coined the term 'coloniality,' which suggests the continuity of colonialism. Mignolo (2016) similarly viewed colonialism as not over, but instead as located all over. This implies that colonial processes are still maintained in different forms. Correspondingly,

Maringe (2015) have argued that due to the persistence of coloniality, much still remains untransformed, particularly in universities. This suggest that, ‘the chronological ending of the geopolitical arrangements of colonisation did not mean the end of colonialism or coloniality’ (Smith & Nathan 2018). As a consequence of this, the discourse of this chapter is on understanding coloniality in a university context, and this understanding is based on the lived experiences of African social work graduates.

In articulating the research participants’ narratives about colonialism, this chapter begins by exploring the different meanings that African graduates attach to colonialism as a concept, particularly within the context of the university. The researcher believes that the exploration of the participants’ definitions of colonialism and the meanings they attached to those definitions formed the basis of many interesting discussions in this research study. It also gave room for participants to express their aspirations for post-colonial higher education<sup>8</sup>. Theoretically, this approach of capping the meaning of historical contexts in a contemporary discussion is the basis of social constructionism and an anti-colonial discursive framework. These two approaches acknowledge that history has constructed present experience and forms an essential foundation of the desired future (Simmons & Dei 2012; Teater 2012). Thus ‘without understanding the effects of colonisation, social workers, many of whom will work with indigenous clients, will be less prepared to encourage positive change’ (Tamburro 2013, 1).

Building upon the meaning that the research participants attached to colonialism, the second section of the chapter is based on the research participants’ experiences at the university. The participants furthered their discussion by reciting the battles they fought to be part of the Hibiscus University (HU). The research participants spoke heartily about their struggles for access to the university, struggles against academic and financial exclusion, and struggles against discourses of colonial university space and culture. Mignolo (2014), Oelofsen (2015), and Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018) have argued that such experiences are the products of colonialism in contemporary universities. As a consequence, there remains a concealed and maintained coloniality at HU.

The main arguments of this chapter concern the inherited colonial practice in South African universities, which facilitates the exclusion of African students. This chapter is also against the

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<sup>8</sup> For further discussion, see: chapter six.

discourse that makes colonial practices in South African higher education, both permissible and invisible. Having said that, it should be noted that the discussions in this chapter highlight the fact that African students are not a homogenous group (Zibane 2017). They are acknowledged to be self-directed individuals who have accumulated a foundation of life experiences, knowledge, skills, values, and culture, based on their historical and societal background. Accordingly, their perspectives and understandings of colonialism reflect their different experiences, exposure, and context (Kreitzer 2012). Furthermore, African students' higher educational experiences are not fixed or exclusive but are fluid, emanating from their interaction with multidimensional factors (Ibid).

## **4.2. MEANING OF COLONIALISM: AFRICAN GRADUATES' PERSPECTIVES**

The discussions during the focus group began with a question on the research participants' understanding and perception of colonialism. What became particularly evident was how they understood the interrelationship between colonialism and Eurocentrism (i.e., domination by Europe). In describing colonialism, the following concepts emerged: white supremacy, domination, marginalisation, oppression, lost identity, misrepresentation, and Eurocentric indoctrination.

### **4.2.1. White supremacy, domination, and marginalisation of Africans**

The group discussion began by asking the research participants to define colonialism. The first part on the definitions of colonialism began with the participants mentioning any word or words that came to mind when hearing the word 'colonialism.' The following responses were among those reported:

*Sida: White person and domination.*

*Nox: Oppression of Black people.*

*Ngco: Inversion of our land by Whites.*

*Khomi: Racism.*

*Don: Rule by foreigners coming to your country and take over everything.*

The concepts and statements used above indicate that the participants in this study understood colonialism as an oppressive system that came with white people to dominate Africans. To further engage with the above discussion, the following dialogue with the research participants took place:

*Researcher: Mhhh, I hear you. Sida, when defining colonialism, you mentioned a “white person.” How do you relate white people with colonialism?*

*Sida: You are asking the obvious. Colonisers are Whites and there is no African person who is a coloniser. Colonisation came with white people.*

*Zama: Thembelihle (researcher), we all know that there are no white people who are Africans. They all came from the West to oppress African people. They came as colonisers, and they gave us things that they think fit us ... thinking what they gave us is what we deserve. You remember that people were forcefully given English names. This was to make things easy for white people, and we [Africans] were powerless, we were not permitted to do or say anything, we just accepted everything.*

*Toto: I agree with Zama, colonisation means being brainwashed. You do not look at the situation as it is, but you look at it based on the way you were told it is. For an African person, there was that belief that African people are incapable, and most of us believe that. We were given names, and you could not refuse the name given to you. There was no chance to be called by the name you prefer ... that also showed racism.*

*Researcher: Am I right to say that you are suggesting that colonialism involves power, the domination of one race by the other?*

*Phumi: (Laughing) Thembe [researcher] is romanticising this with fancy words. I think colonialism was a brutal system that was just there to marginalise us. Not just power, but violent domination and dehumanising of the African race in multiple ways.*

*Mami: True madam [referring to Phumi], and they [colonisers] succeeded with their colonial domination because, during the time of colonisation, African people were not allowed to have their own mind. Having our own mind-sets and ideas were not possible. Things were imposed on us, and we had to act the way colonisers wanted us to act ... ey kudlaliwe ngathi (we were played).*

*Researcher: [Siri raised his hand], I can see that Siri would also like to say something about this ... what do you think?*

*Siri: Hey guys. what you are saying is very true and it still happening and evident even at the present time. This colonialism thing is programmed in our minds. Like for us Africans; a person who believes in ancestors is viewed as not yet civilised. And that is the impact of colonialism. It also reveals how brainwashed we are, as Mami indicated. Because we are no longer entertaining the customs of Africans. We have abandoned our rituals that demonstrate who we are as Africans. It seems as if there is something wrong with you or you are left backward if you still celebrate African rituals. I think it even worse here at the university. Africans behave like white people.*

‘Whiteness,’ ‘supremacy,’ ‘racism,’ and ‘power’ are the terms that featured strongly in the participants’ definition of colonialism. For the participants, these terms formed the basis of colonialism. They perceived colonialism as being an organised and brutal system designed to brainwash and dominate African people. Research participant Toto made it clear that, because of this system, Africans’ views of themselves are based on

the interests of their colonisers. Similar to the views of the participants, Teater (2012) has argued that there are certain worldviews that are not naturally inherited by African students but are colonially constructed through interaction with one another and the world of their colonisers. In this way, the worldview, interests, values, culture, and beliefs of Africans become marginalised.

Research participant Siri spoke about the marginalisation of African rituals. He recognised that marginalisation was enforced through the process of colonialism. In addition, he highlighted the university as the perpetrator of coloniality with Africans adopting white people's ways of being. Such arguments reveal the university as still privileging whites and European customs. Similar to this present study, Borocz and Saker (2012,1) have also argued against coloniality as a continuous and systematic framing of the colonised population as the backward, inferior, dehumanised 'other' of the enlightened European/whites' 'self' and the use of the discourses of scientific racism to this end. This reveals that African students at the university are made to feel inferior by idealising white hegemony (Kreitzer 2012). As a result, the university privileges the interests of white people at the expense of African cultures (Daniel 2018).

#### **4.2.2. Lost identity and misrepresentation of Africans**

According to Kreitzer (2012, 47) 'identity is the means by which a person, group, nation, or continent defines themselves in terms of their individuality and difference to others'. Similarly, the Cambridge Dictionary (2019) defines 'identity' as being the unique qualities of a certain group of people. This present study understands these unique qualities as being modeled by the historical, political, and socio-economic status of a given society. The research participants in this study also observed the role played by the historical context in the molding of African identities. In particular, they identified the relationship between colonialism and lost identity:

*Researcher: How is identity relate to the concept of colonialism?*

*Melo: Maybe Thembelihle we need to firstly talk about the meaning of identity. For me, identity means your true self such as your biological and geographical origin. For example, I was born in South Africa by African parents who speak isiZulu, therefore I am an African. Colonisers targeted to oppress Africans. So, I think of the process whereby I take your identity, and I give you*



*what I think is suitable. White people oppressed Africans and detected their daily living.*

*Mami: Yes girl, (laughing) honestly speaking, you cannot separate colonialism, oppression and apartheid with a lost identity. I also want to say this was a process of annulment of African people in a sense that whites or Western people changed us and who we are. So, what comes into my mind is fake life. If I think of colonisation, I think that they made us live a fake life. A life they envisioned for us.*

*Researcher: Mami, why are you saying you are living a fake life? What is fake about African people's lives?*

*Mami: Because we had our own ways of living, but when the colonisers came, they said we are uncivilised. The colonisers tried to make a society that is civilised. They came with industrialisation and machinery trying to develop us. But they forged a life they had already envisioned for us.*

*Don: I agree with Mami. Although Africans are the descendants of this country, they are the ones who were oppressed and dominated in their own land. African people were dominated by white people. You have your name Thembelihle and because white people cannot pronounce Thembelihle, they call you 'Resurrection.' That is very offending, that is like taking over your dignity, your pride, everything. Because your identity is your pride and your name demonstrate who you are and where you come from, thus changing somebody's name means taking away her/his identity.*

*Ngco: You know what guys; this thing of colonialism shows how Western people are controlling us. The time they were colonising us, it was like they said leave what you know, and the life you are*

*living, and from now on, this is how you are going to live ...  
When I came to the university, it was like I was living on another  
planet because my lifestyle back home is not relevant to this  
context. That is the impact of colonialism. Hence, if I come to  
university, I have to adopt new different lifestyle.*

In the research extracts above, the participants spoke about the pain and confusion caused by colonialism toward African identities. The imposition of English names, industrialisation, or the so-called ‘civilisation’ to Africans by the colonisers were identified as brutal acts of wiping-out African identities. From the above discussion, it was also clear that Africans had little- or no-choice in resisting such deliberately destructive colonial processes. This resulted in poor self-esteem, identity distortion, and lost pride and dignity for many Africans. According to Prah (2009), colonialism successfully eradicated the values, cultures, and interests of African people through the implementation of Western hegemony. This suppression of African identity by colonisers facilitated and nurtured imperialism. Accordingly, African identity was marginalised (Jorgensen 2010), transformed and dehumanised by the colonisers, to suit the colonial agenda.

It is nevertheless important to note that the discussion in this section does not suggest that modernisation and civilisation inevitably lead to the absolute destruction of African identities. Instead, the research participants’ statements suggest the need to include African perspectives in human progress. The emphasis is, therefore, on African perspectives as alternatives in civilisation (Mignolo 2011). As Connell (2007) has argued, the indigenous people from the South (Africans) have social intellectuality that can be instrumental in modernity and civilisation. Thus, the unique contribution of Africans must be valued in human progress. This will allow the placing of African interest at the center (Asante 2016). This could also be the true foundation of the anti-colonial struggle in African societies.

#### **4.2.3. Eurocentric indoctrination in Africa**

There was a steamy discussion among the research participants concerning Eurocentric indoctrination vis-à-vis colonialism:

*Ngco: University lifestyle is presented as modern and Western, thus  
relevant. So, we actually abandon African norms for adaptation*

*at the university. This shows how colonisers governed African people and treated them to be like robots.*

*Researcher: What do you mean, Ngco, by the term robots?*

*Ngco: Western or European norms dominate the university. Africans thus tend to accept anything that comes from white people and from the west without challenging and questioning it.*

*Toto: That means we consume Western cultures at the university and be fixed to it, without even considering its relevance to the African customs.*

*Phumi: What you are saying guys makes me to think of colonialism as a Western imposition to African people. I can say it's a process where people are programmed to behave, speak and act in a certain way and speak certain words. For example, during the colonial period an African person was taught to say yes to the white man, nothing else besides that ... Programmed to react in a certain way. Serious for the rest of our lives, because, even if we go to the field, we still following that programmed life.*

*Melo: What Phumi says makes me to think of the process of primary, high school and university as sort of being programmed as well. Programmed to undergo these processes such as after university you need to get a job. If you went through these processes you are regarded as successful. I think somehow this is something that was programmed by colonial powers in our minds.*

The choice of terms used by participants above, such as 'robots,' 'programmed,' and 'fixed,' suggest the indoctrinated systems for colonised people in order to be easily dominated and controlled. When research participant Ngco spoke about the robots, she clearly demonstrated the lack of choices that Africans have under colonial-created systems. Such systems enforce dependency on Western hegemony. This suggests that Africans are programmed to uncritically

accept Western interests. In this respect, Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2014) used the term ‘global coloniality’ to refer to forces that have disempowered initiatives from Africa through Western indoctrination. Research participant Melo also made an example of this Western indoctrination through the education process, where people are programmed to follow fixed patterns as a means of success and development (primary, high school, university, and the workplace). In the literature review for this research study,<sup>9</sup> scholars such as Nyerere (1968), Moumouni (1968), Rodney (1982) and Abdi (2006) acknowledge that, before colonialism, African people defined development and progress differently. The responses of the above research participants suggest that colonial powers created systems that seem impossible to live without, and were thus imposed on and adopted by Africans. This research finding suggests that, unless a paradigmatic shift is initiated, the lives of Africans will remain under the power of colonial practice and Eurocentric dominated for the rest of African existence on earth.

#### **4.3. COLONIALITY AND STRUGGLE FOR ACCESS TO THE UNIVERSITY**

Despite the fact that KZN uses the Central Application Office (CAO), where applicants indicate their location, institutional and qualification choice, funding, and resident assistance needs, but access hindrances are still prevalent at HU. The experiences of participants with regard to access are covered in four sub-themes, namely; Struggle to locate the Hibiscus University; Struggle for university admission in the career of choice; Struggle in university residences and Struggle for financial aid.

##### **4.3.1. The struggle to locate the Hibiscus University**

Many of the universities in South Africa are located across large city conurbations. These are the universities that target students from deep rural areas. In a post-colonial society, one would expect an African university to be where the people are. However, students still leave their rural communities in search of university education. During individual conversations about university access, the research participants in this study forcefully spoke about the difficulties they experienced in locating the university in the city environment:

*“For me and my friend it was very hard. It was our first time coming to the big city. We knew nothing about the city. We went to town with our big luggage. Taxi from home dropped us in Market. People told us that Hibiscus taxis are*

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<sup>9</sup> See: Chapter two.

*located at the workshop, far from where we were. We travelled by foot from the market to the workshop. We found the taxi and we went to Hibiscus but it was frustrating” (Sihle).*

*“It was scary, especially when you had never been in a big city. Hlulhuwe is a small town compared to Dubai [pseudonym]. It was scary just to be in a big city. When I saw people in the city, it was as if they would rob me. So, I was scared of everything. I got lost many times not knowing what was happening and even scared to ask. So, it was such a scary experience” (Sagu).*

*“Coming into the new place is always difficult. And for me not being able to speak the language of that place (raising his voice) was a big, big problem. We [Thato and a friend] wanted to go to Hibiscus, so we went to Pitcairn town (pseudonym) and we got lost there. We did not know where to take the taxis to Hibiscus, and we asked people in English. Apparently, the people we asked were giving us the wrong directions. We got lost for hours trying to locate the university” (Thato).*

Coloniality is perpetuated by extracting students from their normalised cultures, people and environments, into the unknown location of the university (Bharuthram 2018). The research participants’ statements above show how the urban location of the university, far away from their African communities, perpetuates the exclusion of poor and disadvantaged students coming from rural areas. Consequently, confusion, getting lost, and fear of an unfamiliar environment characterised their experiences in physically locating HU. When research participant Sihle expressed his frustration in the struggle of moving up and down with luggage trying to locate transport to the university, and research participant Sagu’s fear of an unknown environment, it confirms what Bharuthram (2018) calls the emotional struggles of first-year students at the university.

Despite the demise of colonialism and apartheid, the decentralisation of universities for equal access is not evidence in South Africa. There are no satellite universities in African communities. Thus, following matriculation at high school, students leave their communities in search of a university in the city. For example, about 69% of African students studying at HU are from geographical areas far away from the city and many kilometers from the university

(Ruggunan 2010). As demonstrated in the demographic information,<sup>10</sup> the majority of the research participants in this study are from the rural and township areas of KZN.

The researcher found a link on the interplay of colonial and apartheid governance in the struggles these students experienced. During apartheid, the locations of the institutions of higher learning were established to serve separate race groups (Permegger & Godehart 2007). For African residents, rural and townships communities were excluded, oppressed, controlled, and restricted in all aspects of life. Accordingly, by locating the university far away from rural and township areas, the previous white oligarchic regime underscored their deliberate policy of exclusion with respect to African communities and the marginalisation of poor and disadvantaged students.

#### **4.3.2. The students' struggle for admission into their career of choice**

The colonial-apartheid policies of the past deliberately prohibited and excluded African students from pursuing certain qualifications and careers. As discussed in the literature review of this report,<sup>11</sup> this was influenced by the racial division policies in higher education (Bunting 2006). The apartheid regime separated universities along racial lines, and African students could not enjoy the benefits of the courses offered in white universities (Badat 2007). While it has been twenty-five years since the demise of apartheid and the dawn of South Africa's new democracy, African students still struggle to be admitted into the careers of choice. African graduates in this study complained about their struggle for admission to the qualifications of their choice. In particular, the research participants spoke about their academic admission experiences as being characterised by difficulties, delayed responses, change of qualifications, and long waiting periods:

*“At the university, they said they can’t accept me for Law [LLB]. So, they offered the Bachelor of Social Work (BSW). I was like (raising his voice) “what is social work?” I went to people asking them about it. It is actually not recognised; people think that it’s just those people that do voluntary work, giving people food and stuff. So, I just decided to go to HU and find out*

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<sup>10</sup> See: Chapter three.

<sup>11</sup> See: Chapter two.

*information about this degree. I came here (twisting his lips) at the university and I started doing Social Work but (silence) I did not like it” (Thato).*

*“I was left alone after my friend was accepted in another campus. I sat down in the Hibiscus building, crying tears, sitting alone. One guy that I did not know came and asked if everything was going well. I said things were bad. I explained to him ... he said, since I applied for Social Work, I should take the change of mind form. I think it was R250 by then. He said I should do a late application for CMDV [Community Development]. He said it more or less the same with Social Work. I applied for that, but I had no place to stay. The same guy took me to the SRC offices. One of the SRC members gave me a place to stay. He let me stay with him in his room. I waited for about two weeks, but I did not receive any response from the university. So, I went back home. On my way home, I received a message indicating that I was accepted for CMDV. Then I ended up registering for CMDV in first year and I did a change of curriculum in second year”. (Sihle).*

*“I always wanted to do Social Work. I applied in the first year but I was not accepted. Instead, I was accepted for Psych (Psychology). Actually, the university offered me Psych, I did not apply for it ... then I had to do Social Work in the following year”. (Phili).*

The above research extracts from the participants are representative of some of the academic admission challenges that many of the students face at HU. The above voices highlight how students have become the victims of the struggle for access to their career of choice in post-colonial higher education. What stood out was that some participants had applied for qualifications of their choice, but they were not accepted and were transferred to the Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) qualification, as research participant Thato had indicated. This means that the student’ desires and interests are of little value to staff at the university. Research participants Sihle and Phili also indicated that, although some students had applied for BSW as their first choice, the struggle for access inevitably pushed students to register for other qualifications. This in turn, delays students’ career progress. For example, six participants in this study narrated on how they had to waste one year studying for qualifications that were not of their choice, as they waited to be admitted for the BSW. The participants further related that

the reasons for not being admitted were not explicitly indicated by the university. However, as research participant Siyo laments below, massification, nepotism, and unfamiliarity with the organogram of the university were some of the key influencers:

*Siyo: (Laughing), actually no-one told me specifically why I was not accepted in Social Work in my first year. But I heard some students who were also rejected saying that they were told about the limited spaces. But I knew someone who was admitted after I was rejected. That person was assisted by his family friend who works in the faculty .... This university admission thing is very political.*

*Researcher: It's political in what sense Siyo?*

*Siyo: I am telling you, it's about who you know. For us, because we did not even know who was dealing with admissions, and who the manager is and so on ... we were easily rejected by those we found on the premises wearing university t-shirts.*

The above dialogue suggests a link between the historical and socio-political context of the country and the issues of academic access experienced by students. Bunting (2006) and Badat (2007) have also argued that issues of academic access experienced by students at the university are not neutral from the legacies of colonialism and apartheid. South Africa's colonial and apartheid regimes purposively advanced racial hierarchy, inequality, injustice and division (Bazana & Magosti 2017) across its university system. Hence, poor students, such as research participant Siyo, still feel rejected at the university. As Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2016) has argued, the African universities failure to eradicate coloniality inherited from the West during the colonial period is a hindrance in recognising the true needs of Africans in the universities of Africa. A lack of African access is the characteristic of such colonial policies (Ruggunan 2010). Therefore, higher education continues to function on the foundations of colonial and apartheid racial practice and legislation by limiting student access to the university.



#### 4.3.3. The struggle to obtain university residence accommodation

The struggle for university residence remains a concern, particularly for poor, disadvantaged students. Despite the fact that participants in this study were from outside the city, had applied for a residence prior to their arrival at the university, and were academically accepted, the university failed to provide them with accommodation. The participants who were eventually accommodated also complained about poor living conditions at HU student residences. Moreover, although racial segregation was not an obvious factor, the participants acknowledged that African-dominated residences were more prone to poor living conditions. The research participants expressed their residence struggles in the following ways:

*Phili: I do not even remember how many times I went back and forth in search for accommodation. On the other day when I went to apply for res [residence]. I was told by the administrator that the offices were closed. So, I turned at the gate.*

*Researcher: It was the closing time already?*

*Phili: No, maybe it was around 15h00 and Hibiscus offices close at 16h30.*

*Researcher: Did anyone tell you about the reasons for early closure?*

*Phili: They said there was nothing they could do because they had no spaces in residences, so they closed. I am from Pmb (Pietermaritzburg) by the way, and I had to take a taxi to travel to and from home to campus every day.*

*Researcher: You travelled like that for how long?*

*Phili: [A] few weeks, then I told myself that it is fine, I will stay in the commune [private accommodation]. I obviously had no money to pay for fancy flats that were close to the university. So, I stayed very far from campus, and it was very hard.*

*Researcher: I can see that the accommodation struggle challenged you...*

*Phili: I was very emotionally overwhelmed. What always amazes me, you never see a white person or even an Indian sleeping in these long queues demanding res like all of us. But there are these few staying in res. I am sure they are always attended ... But for us. I got funding in my second year but still I fought for residences up until I used my connections. I requested Silo [pseudonym] who was a friend to [administrator's name], she requested res for me and I got it like that.*

The above dialogue reveals the difficulties experienced by poor and disadvantaged students in their quest for accommodation at the university residences. Research participant Phili's above narrative describes her admission to the university residences as a struggle, characterised by waiting in long queues, denied access, and having to reside in unsafe private accommodation. She also disclosed that nepotism sometimes played a part when it came to access at the university residences. Although the university administrators had told students that there were no spaces available, Phili admitted that communicating with a friend of the same administrator was instrumental to her eventually gaining admission to a university residence. It thus makes sense why students from disadvantaged backgrounds—those who are not connected to any staff member and with no funding—struggle relentlessly to obtain accommodation at a university residence. Similarly, the following research participants narrated how they had to settle for an unsafe living environment after the university refused to accommodate them in an official residence:

*"I had to find a private accommodation [...] there was a club underneath it, you see [...] (Silence) it was not easy [...] I tried to talk with the Department of Housing but they did not care" (Zama).*

*"I was a squatter, I squatted [unlawful residing in residence] with my brother who was doing Law because he was lucky to get funding in the first year when he arrived and he also got res. Us, because we had no funding, so no res, yah, we just stayed like that [...] and it was very hard because squatters are not*

*allowed in residences. So, I was always chased away by the security guards”.*  
(Siyo).

The above research extracts highlight the accommodation process at the university residences as neglecting the needs of the poor. This originates from the issue of funding, which remains an important access factor at HU residences.<sup>12</sup> As a result, poor and disadvantaged students often have to resort to living in non-conducive environments outside of the university. Affordability and poor backgrounds were also noted by the research participants as determining factors when choosing these locations.

Those research participants who were eventually accommodated at university residences regularly complained of poor living conditions. Where residence accommodations were secured, the research participants reported unpleasant living conditions. This was particularly the case in African-dominated residences:

*Khomi: We stayed in Langa residence (pseudonym); we were only Africans. There was not even a single Indian or a white person who was staying there. In that res there was no hot water in the mornings; it had broken showers and toilets ... a lot was not working. Students complained and had a strike because we always reported such conditions but were ignored by Housing. Instead, we were kicked out, and we stayed on the street. We spent a night on the street and they took us to [the] Point Area, in the flat that is dominantly occupied by prostitutes [sex workers]. It was very shocking and scary for me. Some students complained that their beds had blood and stains. But we had a protest on campus about that. The university closed early in the first term of that year because of our protest.*

*Researcher: What you are sharing Khomi, is not imaginable indeed. Thank you for sharing such experience. I wonder if other residences had similar problems or it was ... (Thato jumped in before the researcher completed the sentence)?*

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<sup>12</sup> See: Section 4.3.4.

*Thato: Tjoe tjoe, res is a struggle at Hibiscus. Firstly, you fight hard to be considered and be accommodated. When you get res, you find problems inside. You stay with roommates, sharing fridges and stoves, lots of stealing, no security, no internet, very noisy; you cannot even study, but no one attends to that. I am sure if there were more whites or Indians staying in such residences, bad conditions would have been dealt with...*

*Researcher: What makes you to say that...?*

*Thato: Most of residences that are located inside campus are multi-racial, and they have security guards by their gate; they have matrons who deal with maintenance; students have access to wi-fi and they are not sharing the rooms. All of this does not exist in off-campus university residences. I think it's because these reses are dominated by Africans.*

Although Thato acknowledged that residences are dominated by Africans, but he argued that if other races were also dominant, living conditions would have been better. He argued that this is evident from the different maintenance levels of university residences. He supported this argument by suggesting that on-campus residences were better maintained due to the different racial groups that were accommodated. His assertion corresponds to the findings of Chetty and Knaus (2016) that suggest quality services at university residences as still provided in terms of racial preference. Similarly, the researcher also relates to how she was consistently reminded by the university administration (as residence assistance) to mentor and guide a white student from Germany before she even arrived at the on-campus university residence. This was not the common practice among the rest of the students who stayed at that particular university residence. Despite the fact that all students residing at the university residences came from distanced places, only this particular white student received special attention. Controversially, in a study about safety in student residences conducted by Gobal and van Niekerk (2018), it was argued that race was not a concern in residences, but all students had to endure similar living conditions. Nonetheless, as also argued by Bazana and Makgotsi (2017), participants'

argument in this study reveal African dominated residences and poor students as more neglected.

While the above discussion exposes the neglect of student needs at the university residences, research participant Khomi reported that, even after being admitted into the university residence, some students faced the challenge of being forced to stay in an unfriendly environment, which in turn, increased the frustration of poor and disadvantaged students at the university. Research participant Thato also complained of poor living conditions that did not receive the attention of the university management.

The problem of poor living conditions at university residences is not unique to the research participants of this study. For example, Govender and Clausen (19 March 2018) in the *Sunday Times* newspaper reported that students at UKZN protested against living conditions in their university residences. On 17 August 2018, the *Daily News* newspaper also reported that, despite the fact that they had to pay about R30 000 a year for residence, students still complained about leaking roofs, bed bugs, cold water, and faulty toilets and showers at UKZN student residences. The *Daily News* further reported that while the Student Residence Department was aware of the poor conditions, if students complained, they were callously reminded of their poor backgrounds and told to appreciate the little they were given. On this reporting, it can be argued that South African universities are still governed by elitist concepts of class, power, and domination, which undermines the needs of the poor (Chetty & Knaus 2016).

#### **4.3.4. The struggle for financial aid**

The end of colonialism and apartheid marked the beginning of different funding sources at the universities from government and private organisations. This was to allow access to previously excluded population groups. Irrespective of such efforts, there is still a high number of poor students than the funds available (Mazibela 2015). Thus, the availability of financial aid structures, exclusion of poor students due to inadequate funding remains a struggle at HU. In this study, participants also expressed how their poor backgrounds influenced their dependability on financial aid and career progress:

*Sihle:               The problem I had was to get funding. What was a problem was  
funding. I fought for it throughout the year.*

*Researcher: Why was getting funding such a problem for you?*

*Sihle: I can't tell you what was the problem, because I indicated even in the CAO that I needed funding. I came at the beginning of the year, I appealed for NSFAS, but I did not get funding.*

*Researcher: How did you finance your studies?*

*Sihle: In my second year, I went to request a bursary from DSD [Department of Social Development]. I went myself to Pietermaritzburg. I went there and requested a bursary. Since I had a foster-care grant in high school, I thought it will be easy for me to get a DSD bursary, because DSD are also social workers. When I arrived there, they said, "we cannot give you, because you are doing CMDV, it was going to be better if you were doing Social Work." Their response made me to realise that I should change my degree. I requested to be admitted for Social Work. They heard of Social Work Department and people who were dealing with Social Work applications at the university assisted me. It was still [secretary 1] and [secretary 2]. I went to them and I requested a change of qualification and I was accepted. I ended up doing a BSW degree because I wanted the bursary.*

*Researcher: After changing the qualification, the funding was granted to you?*

*Sihle: Oh yes, I went back to DSD and Mr Ngcobo (pseudonym) wrote and gave me a letter of award on the same day. I submitted that letter to the finance office at the university and they gave me the funding.*

The National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) (and other financial aid schemes) was established in 1997 as a policy framework created to increase funding support of historically

disadvantaged individuals from poor communities. However, the demand for financial assistance remains high, which further limits the availability of funding. As a result, students such as research participant Sihle still suffer financial exclusion at HU. As an orphan, he had no financial means to further his studies and had to rely on financial aid to pay his university fees. He narrated how he had to change his original degree in order to secure funding. This reveals the impact of insufficient financial support at the university and the exclusion of poor and disadvantaged students (Mazibela 2015).

Study debt turns out to be a threat to the career progress for poor graduates. Unpaid debt leads to outstanding fees on student accounts and to the withholding of qualifications. Poor graduates are thus denied their certificates after completing their degree due to unpaid university debt. For example, research participant Sihle reported that although he has graduated for both a Bachelor and Honours degree and is currently studying for a Masters, he does not have his certificates, due to outstanding fees. This negatively impacts his search for employment:

*“I still have that debt to this day, 2012 debt that accumulated in my first year. I do not have my certificates ... my social work degree, and the one for Honours last year. I did not obtain anything as proof that I graduated. It holds me back”.*  
(Sihle).

The above reveals that the academic progress and achievements of poor graduates become futile due to financial hindrances. Sihle’s financial struggle was not unique from other African graduates. In the book titled, ‘the real price of a degree’, Thuthukani Nkosi (2019) lamented on the challenges (financial exclusion and not obtaining degrees) faced by poor youth even after graduation due to outstanding university fees. One can then argue that coloniality is preserved in university through hidden forms of withholding poor graduates from advancing their career in practice (Ibid). Other participants further cried over financial exclusion and funding difficulties at the university as followings:

*“I had a DSD bursary.... but the first year was hard, I did not have funding and I only got a bursary in the second year”.* (Melo).

*“The scholarship assisted me by providing pocket money. But now there was a time when the scholarship was in crisis, for the whole year. I remember that things were just so bad, we didn’t have money. We were even chased out of our residences ... It was almost the end of the semester. The university said they will send us back home and we must not come back for next semester unless the fees are paid. It was bad, (raising his voice); it was bad. It even affected me academically; I started having lower marks” (Thato).*

Research participant Thato reported that financial challenges increased anxiety, exclusion and poor academic performance. The struggle for funding does not only affect HU graduates, but most poor students across other South African universities. According to Mazibela (2015), in 2014, Rhodes University in Makhanda in the Eastern Cape had to inform 130 academically performing students that they were financially excluded and were thus barred from returning to the university the following year. In 2015-2016, the #FeesMustFall movement also underscored lack of funding as a major concern for access at South African universities. During this movement, students were demanding that universities do away with fees, and for the inclusion of disadvantaged African youth. Such demands emanated from the financial exclusion of poor students, which remains evident in South African universities. The fact is that, those universities charging high fees provide quality education only to middle-class students who can afford to pay (Chetty & Knaus 2016).

The above discussion suggests that financial struggle and the alienation of disadvantaged and poor students remain a real problem across South African universities. This discussion highlights fees as the main determiner of access at the university. This is inconsistent with the transformation agenda that aims to redress the racial injustices of the past through the provision of access to tertiary education for previously disadvantaged groups of students (Pandor 2018). Despite the dismantling of racial segregation, previously white privileged institutions still maintain high fee rates (Chetty & Knaus 2016). Such fees hinder access to poor students. This study recommends South African universities to be sensitive to the needs of poor students. Similar to Mbembe (2016) argument, this study argues that the university must be sensitive to the historical context of the country that brought inequalities. Such inequalities are the basis of colonial experiences and exclusion faced by African students at Hibiscus University today. The financial struggles faced by poor families in South Africa was also expressed by one participant in this study as follows:



*“At home, I would tell them that I don’t have money and food. And there was nothing they could do because they didn’t have money as well. So, when I got my NSFAS money, I used to take R200 and send it home for electricity and bread, because my younger siblings were still at school, but they were in primary by then. And because I had gone through the experience of going to school without lunch, I didn’t want my siblings to go through the same thing. So, I sent R200 to them and I would end up with R500 and see how I could work around that since I had to print and make photocopies. This is also because everything we did in Social Work was about printing, community proposals, whatever those thick things; so, I had to have money. I would buy groceries for R300 or R400 which was not enough... So, everything was just hard at res ... So, I felt like the R800 was small, it just finished quickly. I would buy food which finishes in the middle of the month; so, I would be stressed and starved at res”. (Mami).*

Mami above highlights the financial struggle of poor students. Her expression suggests that poor students are the product of the poor family backgrounds that they did not choose. It is, therefore, in the interest of this study to appeal to the institutions of higher learning in South Africa to not act ignorant and blind into the poverty struggles and backgrounds of previously disadvantaged groups of students. Bazana and Makgotsi (2017) argued that financial struggles of poor students are ignored, particularly in historically white universities. This is the legacy of colonial supremacy. This, in turn, reveal the maintenance of a class structure that governed apartheid society- since African students from poor background cannot maintain financial pressures at the university. Therefore, there is a relation between colonial-apartheid periods with the current exclusion experiences of poor students. As also expressed by study participants’, during colonialism, there was the prevention of access for colonial subjects to European spaces (Borocz & Saker 2012) due to class and race. Thus, the financial struggles of poor students at the university demonstrate the maintenance of class domination and colonial hegemony.

#### **4.4. PATRONISING COLONIAL NORMS AT HIBISCUS UNIVERSITY**

##### **4.4.1. Coloniality in the design and the environment of the university**

There was a steamy discussion among participants about the physical structures of the university as a representation of Whiteness. Participants spoke of how they were intimidated by the environment and the buildings of the Hibiscus University:

*Melo: Ey guys (laughing out loud), we are laughing now but during that time it was frustrating ... When the taxi dropped me, I saw the university. I do not know how I can explain this, but it seemed too modernised and I thought a farm girl like me will not be accepted here.*

*Sihle: Listen girl, you are not alone. The surrounding areas, they are like white people areas. So, I was like, where will I stay if I study here? ... But worse, when I entered the university gate ... the taxi dropped me by the main gate (laughing). I saw the tall buildings and I asked myself that, in these tall buildings where will I enter. I asked the security staff. For me, initially, I saw HU in the picture when I was still in matric. I said to myself I want to study there. But when I arrived, sengyaqalaza, sengilahlekelwe nje [I am looking around, lost and confused]. I was just a rural boy coming from a rural area with only a dream.*

*Researcher: What was intimidating about the university environment and its buildings?*

*Sagu: Obvious Thembelihle, like for me, Hlululuwe is a rural area with short houses. Even in our small town, there are no tall buildings ... From my primary to high school, it was just classes in short buildings facing each other ... So, having to come from such an environment to Hibiscus ... I cannot count how many times I got lost in one building looking for classes in my first week at the university .... The whole environment nje it was intimidating and frustrating.*

From the above expressions, it is clear that African students from rural areas found university environment and structures idealising Whites supremacy. Students emanating from African communities found the buildings, structure, and environment of the university as alien. Melo's quotation highlights how African students perceive HU as a space for the Whites and middle-class groups of students. Similarly, Bazana and Mogotsi (2017) argued that Historical White Universities still maintain Whiteness. Sagu argued that such alienations come from what she calls environment and structures of the university that are different from the structural buildings of African communities, as per the pictures below:

*Image 2: structure and environment of the University (left) and High school (right) located in KZN.*



The picture on the left represents one of the university buildings located in KZN and on the right is a High School located in the rural area of KZN. The above pictures also contextualise the drastic differences expressed by Sagu above. The historical legacies presented by the picture on the left is clear. Daniel (2018) similarly argued that, the architecture of the universities are the representation of colonial history and rejection of indigenous norms. For instance, what does the statue of King George (in front of the left picture), who was an English British colonialist (SAHO 2018) has anything to do with the post-colonial African university? This also highlights the preservation of colonial history in African universities. In 2016, criticising Rhodes statue, Mbembe also acknowledged the anti-African structures of the universities in post-colonial regime as perpetuating the un-healing of past wounds. This means that, there is an important colonial role that is still played by the structural design of the university in colonizing indigenous people.

The discussion above highlight the marginalisation of African students' in the none-familiar environments and the architecture of the university. Participants spoke of the confusion and getting lost as characterised their first-time experience in the White idealising structures of the university. However, Bazana and Mogotsi (2017) also acknowledge diversity within Africans based on class. The middle-class African students, who attended pre-university private schools, adopt more easily to such Western structures than their counter lower class (Ibid). This, in turn, highlights the existing inequalities in post-colonial universities.

Participants' reveal an important role that is played by the structural environment of the university in nurturing coloniality. Thus, the argument of this section support Connell (2007)'s notion of land and design for colonial preservation. Connell (2007) argued about how colonisers used the land to own aboriginal people. She perceived the European indigenous system as believing in people as owning the land, while for African indigenous system, land and design own the people (Ibid). Thus, for Africans land/space construct the sense of who you are. This means that when colonisers took away the land from African people, they took their sense of belonging. African students perceive the colonial space of the university as an alien. The European structures and designs of the university were created for Africans to assimilate Western identities (Connell 2007; Bazana & Magotsi 2017). Therefore, colonizers entered social organized knowledge spaces (such as the University) to become the representation of the society (Connell 2007). This nurtured what Oelofsen calls the colonisation of the intellectual landscape. As also expressed by participants in this study, Connell (2007) further argued that such anti-indigenous structures were created to facilitate social boundaries and exclusions.

The above arguments do not suggest the re-building of universities to demonstrate a pre-colonial African structure. Agada (2013) also argued that it is not the question of casting out the existing structures, but is the question of creativity in advancing African centeredness in the African university. Bazana and Magotsi (2017,13), posed the important question to HWU of 'Where in this university can a black student from a rural area be comfortable to sit and feel at home'? Such a question suggests that, despite universities opening its doors to all racial groups, structural transformations in accommodating indigenous people (previously excluded) is not evident. However, the researcher argues against the term "where" that is used by Bazana and Magotsi above, as it suggests division (Dladla 2020). But the study argues for the rest of the university to be creatively transformed for all groups of students to be comfortable and feel

at home. This will resemble what Mgxithama (2020) calls a revolutionary transformation that is needed in the new democratic dispensations of South African HE.

#### **4.4.2. Colonising university cultures**

Despite the disablement of imperialism in South Africa, hidden colonial cultures exist at the university. There are no legal written notices (as was the case during apartheid) around the HU distinguishing population according to class and race. However, graduates in this study acknowledged the university culture as facilitating marginalisation at HU. Class and age were also one of the instruments used for such alienation. The research participants thus complained about colonial cultures that still exist at the university, which made disadvantaged students to feel excluded:

*Melo: I had a funny experience, well it's funny now ... this thing of there is a white café and lower ground café, a black cafe. When I was new, I used to sit there [at the white cafe], you would have seen me (laughing ... all members laughed). I used to go to the white café and just sit. I would buy at the lower café, buy snacks or what, what ... and go and eat it in the white café.*

*Researcher: What was wrong with that?*

*Melo: I was not aware and I did not see that I did not belong there ... If you remember in 2013, in the white café there were these coconuts girls ... But I did not notice that until someone told me. She said 'mmmm girl, there is a white café and there is a black café ... there are lower grounds LANs and there is fishbowl and what what' ... You remember lower grounds LANs and blue LANs; there were these coconut students. (with a loud voice), I stopped going there (others laughing) because I was told. When I was a first-year student, I did not see anything wrong. I would just sit anywhere in the white café. Honestly, I did not see anything wrong. Even my dress code was very poor.*

*Researcher: What do you mean by the term 'coconuts' Melo?*

- Melo: These rich students; white people and high-class Africans.*
- Siri: (Laughing), after being told about these coconuts spaces what did you do?*
- Melo: (Laughing out loud) obviously I noticed it from there ... But before, I had no reason why I should not sit there up until I was told by my friend that 'eee girl there is a white café and black café,' and I stopped going there. After being told, I also began to notice that it was dominated by white people and a few high-class African students.*
- Researcher: If you unaware and sit in these perceived coconuts spaces, what happens?*
- Mami: You do not need to be told; you will see yourself that you do not belong. For me, tjoe, when I came to university, firstly you are by a white cafe and you like okay coconuts (laughing). And you think that the university is characterised by people with weaves, long hair and all that, people who wear smart clothes. So, you think you have to meet the standard. So, you put yourself under pressure even though there is no pressure.*

The term 'coconuts' (rich or high class students) strongly dominated the statements of the research participants. The above research extracts present the hidden norms of racial and class division and inequality that continues to exclude poor and disadvantaged students at HU. Students still feel they do not belong nor deserve certain benefits offered by the university because of the colour of their skin and their class location. As cited in the above extracts, research participant Melo reported that at HU there are shops, cafés and local area networks (LANs), such as the white café and blue and orange LANs, that were perceived as being 'off limits' to African or underprivileged students. Indeed, the use of the phrase by Melo: "*I was told,*" suggests a normalised culture as a university style that assumingly everyone should have been aware of. Likewise, the phrase, "*I stopped going there,*" also implies that African or poor

students still lack a sense of belonging at the university, due to the maintenance of a culture that excludes the poor and disadvantaged.

It is clear that Africanity is excluded in university cultures. Murithi (2009) argues that, Africanity appreciate communalism and togetherness based on the concept of Ubuntu. Thus individuality, race, and class hegemony at HU can be considered as the basis of Western dominated university, which excludes African interest. Lebakeng, Phalane, and Dalindjebo (2006) perceived White cultures that are maintained in South African universities as the basis of nurturing epistemicide. Epistemicide refers to the destruction of other knowledge systems to privilege Whites' odds (Ibid). Similarly, in early 1964, Malcom Little (later known as Malcom X), also argued that Whites odds exclude the interests of Black Nationalist. In this study, the participants argued that to be accommodated by the university cultures, there was a need for African or poor students to adapt to the 'African' excluding and marginalizing university norms. Bazana and Mogotsi (2017) also argued that HWU (such as HU) still maintains Whiteness cultures, which forces African students to adopt and imitate these cultures; otherwise, they become socially excluded.

What was also in the experiences of participants was the class struggle where Africans are alienating other Africans. These alienations were mainly based on different languages and ethnic groups:

*"I stay in South Africa, well I come from Zambia. Zambia is home and then I went to Europe. I stayed there for a long time and the kind of the environment I found there, it was like mind your own business. And I came to South Africa, I have come with the mentality of the English way and that was very difficult. I am sure people noticed that I would come to class room, seat down and just leave after the lecturer without interacting with anyone. I started associating with Nox because I noticed that she was also on a reserve side. And to meet Mrs Magwaza, [pseudonym] the lecturer, it was worse...Although I had a British mentality as you may think, I am still an African woman and relate to you. It just my culture that was different. But I was picked, knowing that I came from Europe to South Africa and people picked it and that was so problematic for me.... You want to be you and you cannot because at the same time you are trying to fit in the environment. That was just so difficult for me, plus the*

*language and everything. Other students even said to me 'no Don, do not be racists we just cannot speak English', that what I used to get in class. They would say, 'it not that we do not want to talk to you but you love your language'. I also missed my home language. I missed home where I can just go on and on talking my local language. I felt excluded and not belonging to the styles and cultures of the Hibiscus University because of my background" (Don).*

*"They just speak English, I remember this one girl, I spoke with her in isiZulu. I said in Zulu, sawubona sisi unjani? (Hi sister, how are you?). She started to speak English and, in few minutes, later she started to speak with her friend in isiZulu. I was like, because she understands Zulu (Laughing) why she speaks English. At some point the other one, was not from South Africa, she is from one of other African countries. So, I had a problem with her, because some of the words I could not understand, her accent sounded as if she is leaving some words. So, I could not understand her most of the time if she speaks and she was fast, so language was really a problem" (Ngco).*

*"The reality of decolonisation, there is a lot of work to be done... Because you actually look at an African and you just say she is Zulu but she is not from KZN.... We call South Africa a rainbow nation but you guys you do not see that way. You feel like as long as I am an African I should speak Zulu. But that is not the way, we are different...We have a long way to go to decolonise ourselves..." (Thato).*

*"Like for me learning isiZulu was really difficult. Students were calling me ishangane (concept informally used to refer to an Africans who come outside the province or the country) [laughing]. I had to really learn isiZulu. I even told my mother and I was like 'mom please from now on we speak isiZulu in this house', so that I will also be able to speak and be accommodated at the university. My home language is isiTswana...and they called me shangane. They said shangane is a Pretoria tribe that speak Tshwane" (Sida).*

Hibiscus University is located in KZN, and what becomes evident from the extracts above, is the alienation of Africans by Africans due to different tribes and languages. Don expressed



that although she is an African, she is originally from Zambia. She thus preferred to speak English language to be able to communicate with others at the university. However, she was alienated because of her inability to speak isiZulu. The other three participants also highlighted isiZulu as the normalised dominant language for communication at HU. Such a norm alienates Africans from other provinces or from other African countries at the university who are unable to speak the language. This demonstrates the existence of social identities (Bazana & Bogotsi 2017) that marginalise and divide Africans. Similar to the argument made by Connell (2007), the researcher perceives such language norms and its alienations at HU as the legacy of coloniality, which facilitates division, isolation, and oppression.

The above discussion suggests that despite changes in policies of higher education, the new hidden racial, class structures, and colonial cultures are operating. Ruggunan (2010) also argued that racial and class classifications still exist in South African universities. This comes from the White cultures that are maintained at the universities. Historical white institutions are more prevalent in the disorder of maintaining White cultures that are alienating and excluding African students (Ibid). Participants in this study also perceived HU as still maintaining it White idealism. Thus, whiteness is the colonial basis that is maintained by South African universities (Bazana & Mogotsi 2017). In the same way, Heleta (2016) argued that higher education cultures and projects form part of colonial agendas. This increase racial and class inequality that needs to be exposed and challenged in the institutions of higher learning in South Africa.

The other important finding under colonial cultures was the issue of age. Participants perceived age discrimination as an alienating tool among students at the university. Two participants in this study confirmed that being older than the generations attended university facilitated exclusion and a lack of belonging. One participant communicated as follows:

*“To fit in the environment of 20 years old (students) with their own mindsets is difficult. With their style, the language and everything, yaa for me eish it was not easy...I am a mother, being married, being at work and stuff like that, it was not accommodating. I came and joined the class of students very young then me...Most of them were like 15 years younger than me when I joined at that time. ...But just to get into a class of young ones with different mindsets that was traumatizing...” (Nox).*

The above quotes highlight the influence of stages of development theories. Development theories prescribe the achievement of milestones based on age. For example, Erick Erickson (1994) characterised adulthood as based on impacting on the development of others. This stage is perceived as interested in sustaining the productivity obtained in the early years (ibid). This perception is not in line with African perspectives that view development as lifelong (development as based on context), multi-directional (it takes different patterns), and plasticity (change as based on the environment) (Sigelman & Rider 2009). African theories also perceive development as influenced by history and cultural context (Ibid). Thus, the alienation of students based on age at HU is not the basis of African interest.

#### **4.5. CONCLUSION**

This chapter has explored the African graduates understating of colonialism. Based on their understanding and definition of colonialism, participants were able to voice what they perceive as the still existing colonial practices at Hibiscus University. The difficulty in accessing university is explored and revealed in the discourse as a hindrance to the career progress of underprivileged students. Participants expressed colonial university experiences as based on Whites cultures that exclude African interests.

This chapter thus calls for the urgent attention of researchers, workshops, and programs that address inequalities based on power, class, and race in higher education. Although South African universities are on the mission of transformation, negligence of such issues (power, race, and class) will result in the dangers of separating de-colonial and transformed universities from the social contexts of the country and its citizens. The idea is not to make African students' petty cases that cannot adapt to 'white' universities, thus excluded through the provision of individualized groups of support. The focus should be on the systems, structures, and cultures that govern the university. Its inadequacies should be exposed and be the concern of the university community as a whole.

The South African university must be sensitive and acknowledge the historical context of the country and it still existing injustices and inequalities, which mostly affect poor students. Thus, the fundamental question to answer is what will be the meaning of inclusive and de-colonial South African university for African students (see chapter six). And how to answer this question based on the voices and lived experiences of Africans themselves- than from the

intellectuality/academic papers produced by the Western writer or from the African author consumed by Eurocentric ideas.

The next chapter covers colonial legacy in social work education.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **COLONIAL LEGACY IN SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION AND PRACTICE: VOICES OF AFRICAN GRADUATES AT HIBISCUS UNIVERSITY**

#### **5.1. INTRODUCTION**

Chapter four of this study explored the research participants' understanding and conceptualisation of colonialism and colonial practices at Hibiscus University (HU). Building upon such meanings, this chapter will focus on African graduates' learning and teaching experiences who studied social work at HU. These African graduates were post-graduate students who studied social work at the undergraduate level and social work practitioners (see section 3.4 of Chapter 3). This chapter's discussions emanate from data generated through the focus groups and in-depth individual interviews, and the emphasis being on colonial legacies in social work education and practice.

Dladla (2017), has argued that higher education (HE) in South Africa is founded on the historical context of hegemony, racial division, domination and inequality. He further contends that the fundamental concerns are the existing colonial legacies of histories in the present democratic education (*ibid*). Social work education is no different to such historical context of HE in South Africa. According to Tjabane (2012) and Smith and Nathane (2018), social work education and practice is the product of the brutal historical context of colonialism and apartheid in South Africa. Of concern is that colonial elements in education continue to perpetuate exclusion of an African paradigm in academia and thus enforce Euro-centricity and Western domination for academic advancement. Consequently, indigenous knowledge systems are marginalised in institutions of colonisation (Tamburro 2013).

The dominance of colonial legacy in programmes such as social work is concerning, as it arrests the colonial subjects' minds. Consequently, they struggle to cast out race-based inferiority and colonial idealism (Biko 1987). And according to Fanon (1963) and Bharuthram (2018), to deal with such inferiority complex that perpetuates oppressive hegemony, particularly in higher education, there is a need to explore the effect of history on the experiences of students at the university. Thus, it is in the interest of this chapter to explore coloniality in the pedagogies and epistemologies of social work education and practice.

Through the research participants' voices, the chapter highlights the elements of oppression, marginalisation, and exclusion embedded in social work education and practice. The chapter aims to uncover how a Eurocentric curriculum alienates African students, which in turn jeopardises practice in social work. Mathebane and Sekuda (2018) observed that, Western education creates an incongruence between social work education and practice in the South African context. The discussion in this chapter highlights the most visible educational challenges, teaching and learning experiences, and limitations based on colonial social work education at HU.

## **5.2. COLONIALITY IN THE PEDAGOGIES OF TEACHING AND LEARNING**

Despite the transformative policies that allow all students' inclusion in the new dispensations of HEIs, poor students coming from disadvantaged backgrounds still suffer from academic exclusion in South African universities (Mbembe 2016). Research participants in this study also expressed how pedagogical teaching methods and learning in social work education remain colonial, thereby excluding African interests (Kreitzer 2013). The research participants spoke of their learning experiences at the university as characterised by alienation in classroom discussions due to the domination of colonial languages such as English, learning barriers due to technological ignorance, Western-dominated module/s and the absence of a module/s that address the growing unemployment of social work professionals. Below are the discussions emanated from the individual and focus group interviews with research participants at different times and spaces. The transcripts cited below are presented in different styles to show if the discussion emanated from individual or group conversations.

### **5.2.1. African students' experiences with English-dominated classrooms**

A university lecture hall is one of the university spaces that is assumed to promote critical engagement and nurture students' growth and development. Contrary to this assumption, the participants spoke negatively about their university classroom experiences because of the language barrier. The research participants argued against English as the sole medium of teaching and learning in HU's university classroom. They perceived the English language hegemonic domination as being alienating and a hindrance to learning for students coming from disadvantaged schools in African communities. A lack of belonging, non-participation/withdrawal, lack of proper enunciation/elocution, intimidation, insecurity, and incompetency were some of the feelings that characterised the research participants' experience

with the English language usage during class engagements. Some of the research participants expressed how language had become a barrier during classroom discussion as follows:

*“Like here [at the university], a student would raise a hand and say, no sir I think that social constructionism is this. For someone who is hearing the words ‘social constructionism’ for the first time-hearing such big words will tell him or her that you do not belong here and will not want to open his/her mouth. Such big English words when used in class without explanation or translation, you end up not understanding the whole lesson and become intimidated to even ask for clarity. You spend the whole lecture thinking about this constructivism (laughing a sarcastically)” (Phumi).*

*“When you listen to other students, you will be like haa [in amazement] some people are rolling their tongues when they speak English and you feel ashamed that you cannot speak English fluently like Melo (citing one of the participants who speaks English fluently) and others. And that where the problem starts at the university, I cannot fluently speak the English language” (Zama).*

*“If you cannot speak English the way other people speak it, your confidence lacks, you end up feeling that, okay maybe I am not as clever as them...So English is a barrier for engaging in class discussions” (Melo).*

*“Being taught by someone who speak English from the beginning of a lecture till the end was very difficult for me. I hardly followed or understood what was being said. It was difficult to even raise a hand to ask a question or to partake in class discussions. I was also scared and intimidated by my classmates as I thought I was the only one who came from a rural area and who had difficulties with understanding the English language” (Sagu).*

In the above extracts, the participants expressed feelings of confusion, shamefulness, and low self-esteem experienced during lectures due to the language barrier. These feelings resulted in these students being alienated and excluded from participating fully in the lecture sessions. This type of exclusion is historical. For example, in the nineteenth-century, the language was

considered one of the most powerful instruments to destroy peoples' self-esteem (Ncube 2019). Sadly, history is sustained in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Ncube (2019) has questioned the reasons for African education to be rendered according to former colonizers' languages. He argues that, when this is done, Africans lose their sense of being in the consumptions of languages and cultures of the colonial master (ibid). The above extracts also demonstrate that the English language's dominance at the expense of indigenous languages in lecture theatres retards the self-esteem and academic progress of indigenous students at HU. When Phumi above, spoke of how she experienced the term 'social constructionism' as a bombastic English term; she demonstrates how non-English speaking students become alienated in class engagements because of their limited English vocabulary. Likewise, research participants Zama and Melo also highlighted the issue of non-enunciation and poor elocution as alienating experiences that perpetuated poor English communication skills; these in turn generated fear and feelings of incompetency among the participants.

Indeed, the participants' responses in this study concur with Rubio (2007) argument, which suggests that foreign language/s in learning and teaching increase low-self-esteem and anxiety among indigenous students. Such pressure can negatively impact not only the academic progress and learning of students (ibid) but also in practice. When Sagu expressed her fears to ask questions and participate in class discussions, it suggested how social work education at HU fails to equip the very basic skill of social workers which is the ability to effectively communicate with clients in practice (Schenk et al. 2015) for context-specific service delivery.

This study acknowledges the emotions discussed above as possibly being generated from the participants' own insecurities, making them feel inferior and intimidated at the university. However, for universities to be relevant, their responsibilities are to appropriately mentor the students' transition from high school to varsity. There were some research participants who spoke strongly about the different schooling systems in SA as the root cause of their challenges with English language at the university. One of the participants who attended poor impoverished schools in rural areas spoke about how her school less-equipped her with the English language than her upper/middle-class counterparts. The following is what she said:

*“As much as when you are studying at school, they encourage English, but teachers and learners mostly use isiZulu. Even when you communicate with*

*your teacher, in the middle of a conversation, the teacher switch from English to isiZulu. For example, a teacher will be like “sengisho that thing” (referring to that thing). But when you come to university, things are different. Communication is solely English. Now comparing school with the university, there is a big difference, and the problem starts there” (Zama).*

The above extract depicts inconsistency in language/s usage concerning basic education and higher education. This inconsistency in language practice makes the transition from basic education to HE difficult. Zama spoke about the minimal use of English in basic education, which then became a challenge when beginning a culture of learning that is dominated by English language at the university. Zama reported that her basic education experience poorly prepared her for university when it came to language because of the high use of mother-tongue languages in rural basic education. This is a clear indication that universities are still not ready to accommodate indigenous students. However, Maseko and Vale (2016) argue against this notion by pointing that the struggle embedded with the use of foreign languages at the university might not mean that a student came from a poor schooling system. Instead, the student might come from an Afrocentric community that values the African languages which are deemed irrelevant to the university system (ibid). This study thus stresses the importance of a university system that recognizes its students' background and works towards bridging the gap or building from what the students bring to the university.

It is important to note that the experiences of African students are not universal. For example, Mami below expressed how her middle-class background and schooling had positively contributed to her competency in the English language:

*“For me, it was very different. My high school was a multi-racial school and English was a language for teaching and learning. In my high school, it was not like teachers were teaching us English for the sake of just being able to communicate and what not. We were given a lot of novels to read. We read Shakespeare English and learned English as if it was our first language. But the way we were taught English at school, we were not given any other option. We used it in writing all essays—not only for English subject, but for all subjects. What we are experiencing now, for me, it started in high school” (Mami).*



The above extract reveals different social positioning among Africans. Mami studied in a multi-racial school where she was fully immersed in the English language from the lower grades. Her response points to disparity, which for Kotze and du Plessis (2017) reveals the continuing presence of inequality and language prejudice in South African society. While many of the research participants spoke about being ill-prepared for university education, few (three) expressed themselves differently from the rest of the group. It is because of such differences in basic education background that South African universities are called to advance linguistic diversity (Coetzee-de Vos 2019).

In her PhD study, Cakata (2015) found how the decline of indigenous languages in South African HEIs demonstrates the preservation of colonial power and apartheid ideology that governed the country's historical context. The domination of English and/or Afrikaans has perpetuated languages' insignificance in South African HE (ibid). Thus, the English language is one of the preserved colonial practices in South African universities. Coetzee-de Vos (2019) and Lumumba (2019) also emphasise the hegemonic dominance of English language in academia as the maintenance of coloniality and exclusion of diversity in African universities. Therefore, most African students reported experiencing difficulty expressing themselves during class engagements due to English being a foreign language (wa Thiong'o 2006; Cakata 2015). Similarly, the research participants asserted that the inability to conceptualise academic content in English as the medium of instruction inevitably led to their poor academic progress. Thus, many of the participants narrated how their lack of elocution/polished English during academic discussions in the classroom influenced their poor conceptualisation of social work content and poor academic writing skills. Some of the participants expressed themselves as follows:

*“For me, the killer part was writing English as if I was writing isiZulu. I used to mix English sentences with isiZulu. I wrote Zuluish (laughing). That was a thing and that was my problem. And that is unacceptable here—it does not fit with academic writing. Yes, neh—it was a long journey” (Zama).*

*“I think the issue that I had was writing academic work. It was very difficult, because if you did not understand maybe the title, maybe for research to make*

*an example, it just becomes a mess from the beginning. So, for me, writing in English with understanding was very difficult” (Siyo).*

*“The first year is the most difficult level because most people even fail. They do not fail because they are stupid, they fail because of the language. When you have to write the whole essay in English, the lecturer comes and explain everything in English, like there are words if are explained in isiZulu you would know and you will grasp something and understand...unlike in English you just won’t understand. And sometimes you will think you understand and writes...and you will find that it totally a different thing from what you were trying to convey” (Siri).*

The above extracts reveal a poor understanding of academic content and the struggles with academic writing as impediments created by the dominant use of the English. The university’s failure to enhance the writing skills of graduates is of serious concern. Particularly in a profession like social work where report writing is one of the core competencies of the profession and social workers are even tasked with writing reports that inform court decisions. This demonstrates how injustices of colonial language in social work education hinder students' academic progress and their effective service delivery during practice.

This section's discussion suggests that colonial language in social work education has placed unfair limitations on African students in terms of epistemological and pedagogical access. This limitation transit to irrelevant practice in social work. For instance, social workers are expected to analyse individuals within their environment, using the languages and cultures of the clients for proper gathering of information (Schenk et al. 2015). How social work graduates are then expected to master such skill if social work education at the university fails to incorporate and value the indigenous languages of clients and or of students in academic discussions. This demonstrates how practice in settings dominated by indigenous languages remains a challenge for social work graduates trained using English language only. This suggest that, a lack of developing indigenous languages in social work education at HU hinders effective practice for social workers working in indigenous/African communities.

Lack of indigenous language in HE not only affects African students at HU, but is experienced across the globe. The countries that were colonial subjects still fail to develop new

dispensations that completely cut out the practices of colonial languages (Maldonado-Torres 2011). Hence, Western education and language have become globally normalised in post-colonial universities. For example, Zare and Riasati (2012) have observed how the learning of English as a foreign language among Iranian students in Western Asia negatively influenced students' academic progress. This suggests that language can be a form of exclusion that silences some, while simultaneously privileging others. This study thus argues that through colonial language practices in social work education at HU, indigenous students are often robbed of the opportunity to freely exercise their abilities, skills and knowledge since they are limited in expression.

### **5.2.2. Learning barriers due to technological ignorance among poor students**

Demand for quality higher education has increased high reliance on technology as a way of improving academic progress of students and interaction with the university community (Brckalorenz, Heager, Nailos & Rabourn 2013). Technology has thus become the main teaching and learning instrument in HEIs, particularly at HU. Simpson (2015) also suggested reliance on technology as important in dealing with a large number of students in social work classes. Yet, poor students coming from rural areas remain unprepared for such technological pressures (Mthethwa 2018). In one of the focus group discussions, the participants reflected on how they were academically alienated in their first year of study due to their inability to use computers or the internet. Some of the research participants expressed their technological struggles in the following ways:

*Notsha: In high school it was only the learners doing commerce subjects that were allowed in computer labs and trained about the use of computers. So, these learners had a privilege of having computer access.*

*Simbo: What about physics class and others?*

*Notsha: No, it was only learners in commerce that had the opportunity. They [teachers] did not allow us to attend computer trainings. So, I was not familiar with the computer. The worst part is that I was accepted and registered late at HU. So, I did not even attend the orientation. I was honestly clueless.*

*Researcher: Clueless about what?*

*Notsha: About computers, LANS, use of internet...*

*Simbo: That the sad part. Although the university accept students to register late but these students are not catered for in terms of orientation, use of LANS and what not.*

*Notsha: Yes, and I was among those who were unfortunate. So, I registered around March. I registered manual in the faculty office and no one told me what next. But I asked around and people told me about the notice board located in one of Hibiscus building, where you can check your lecture venues and times. I checked that but still I had no one to direct me to the venues and what not and I knew nothing about mentors.*

*Researcher: I hear you; how did that impacted on your learning?*

*Notsha: Tjoe Thembe [researcher], it was a mess (laughing). I think there was a lecture that I was supposed to attend in the morning. My very first lecture. I heard students saying it is/was cancelled. And I was like, why or how did you know it cancelled? And they said I should check my emails. Remember I did not attend the orientation, so I was clueless. I was saying to myself, (laughing) where can I check emails? I did not know. I asked myself, what is an email my God (all group members laughed)?*

*Researcher: How or when did you discover about emails?*

*Notsha: I asked around, asking people where I can check emails. They told me about the LAN and I was like what is that? (Notsha, researcher and group members laughed). So, like I had to learn all these things at the university and it was not easy. Getting into*

*the LAN and not knowing anything about the computer. So, like the whole process was so difficult for me because I did not know. I literally had to learn to type at the university. I just couldn't master all the technological requirements. Up until I literally just learned the typing and the computer from other students. So, I think that was the main challenge for me.*

*Researcher: Mmh, I hear you Notsha and thank you for sharing with us. Did anyone had a similar or different experience?*

*Simbo: I think most of us who comes from rural areas, we had no computer exposure prior to the university, so it was difficult. But it was better for us who registered online during registration period because mentors were there to advise us...*

*Nox: Everything is done in the computer at HU and that made things to be worse. I remember for my first semester when I got my assessment marks. For some results I got 13 marks out of 100. And I was like, am I stupid or what (Laughing)? I was not this stupid at high school, and I wondered how people were thinking of me and I started to train and familiarised myself with the computer and the use of the internet (laughing).*

Participants' expressions above highlight lack of knowledge about the use of computer technology as one of the factors that can negatively influence the academic progress of poor students coming from disadvantaged backgrounds. For Notsha, computer usage at HU led to her confusion due to a lack of prior training. Likewise, Simbo reported that HU had an orientation and registration period where students were exposed and oriented about computer and information technology (IT) use. However, he viewed that support as not developmental and was time-bound. Those who are slow learners or join the university at certain periods are not catered for. Such findings suggest the neglected needs of African students coming from poor backgrounds at HU.

Participants thus spoke of how they worked harder to expose themselves, sought advice and training to learn about the use of IT at the university. This implies how HU reliance on IT for

academic progress becomes the students' burden. Hence participants' (coming from disadvantaged backgrounds) in this study spoke of how they motivated themselves and developed autonomy to move from ignorance to a "technologised" digital world (Kajee & Balfour 2011, 194), thereby improving their proficiency in IT usage.

The struggle with technology reported by the participants during their first year of study at HU challenges the conclusions made by Brckalorenz et al. (2013), who have asserted that the millennial generation group of students (i.e., born between 1982 and 2002) were highly skilled and innovative in their use of IT. In contradistinction, therefore, the findings of this present study suggest significant disparities in the exposure to, and use of IT among students due to different schooling backgrounds. For example, although most of the research participants complained about their technological struggles due to lack of prior training, a minority group of middle/upper-class participants that attended multi-racial schools expressed how their prior IT exposure and training were of significant benefit. One of these participants expressed herself as follows:

*"In my high school there were LANS and internet. It was compulsory for every learner to take a computer subject. There were so many computers in such a way that I would not stand in the queue for a computer as we did at HU. For me there was nothing new when I came at the university regarding computers and the use of internet. (Laughing) I knew my story. Instead I felt like I come from the place of abundance (of computers) to the place of lack due to limited computers at HU" (Khomi).*

Khomi's response above suggested the existence of disparities and inequalities among students at HU. It also implies that the school background of the student plays a fundamental role in the ability to use computers and the internet at the university. In other words, the transitional technological experiences of students in HE is invariably influenced by the schooling system. As similarly argued by Haung, Hood and Yoo (2012), this study indicates that socioeconomic status and class are some of the important factors that influence proficiency in IT use among first-year university students.

The study thus problematises technological investments that ignore inequalities existing in South Africa, particularly in HE. While the country is preparing to enter into the fourth

industrial revolution—indicated by disruptive technologies and trends (Schwab 2016), which will mean high reliance on blended learning (e.g., combined methods of technological and traditional learning and teaching) in HEIs, the legacies of the past that left the majority of the population in disadvantaged positions should equally be the concern of these technological development changes. The biggest concern is the failure of the democratic dispensation to acknowledge the diversity (in background and experiences) of university students. Although Africans and disadvantaged students from poor backgrounds are accepted at the university (unlike during apartheid), the university still fails to address the needs of such disadvantaged groups (Biko 1987; Cakatha 2015; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2018). This in turn, demonstrates how South African universities (particularly HU) are still ill-prepared to accommodate students from diverse social backgrounds. One can thus argue that the technological ignorance expressed by participants in this study, and which for some, contributed to their poor academic progress, represents the exclusion and alienation of disadvantaged students at HU. This exclusion is a concern for practice in social work education.

Social workers work in different fields that require them to be equipped with IT, such as in health care, child care, family care, youth, addiction, substances of abuse, trauma, and bereavement counseling (Schenk, et al. 2015). Thus, in compliance with the requirements of these fields, social workers are expected to conduct administrative tasks, type and produce reports, gather and present information, conduct research, keep records and etc. How social workers are then expected to effectively conduct these duties in practice if social work education at the university ignores the importance of IT training among students. This suggests that social work education at the university needs to ensure that students are technologically equipped and advanced not only for academic success but for proper service delivery in practice.

The discussion of this section, therefore, encourages computer-based tutoring of first-year students, particularly these coming from rural schools. This is to ensure that all students are equally exposed and trained about the use of IT at the university and in practice. Mthethwa (2018) and Kilfoil (2015) also advise that context-based computer training of first-year students at the university has the potential to bridge the technological ignorance gap and produce good academic results for those students coming from disadvantaged schools. To effectively employ technology to improve education, it is thus important to investigate the exposure of students to new digital media and how they use IT. Furthermore, students needing support on the use of

IT at the university must be thoroughly investigated (Brcklorenz et al. 2013; Mthethwa 2018). The impact of new digital technology on academic outcomes must also be taken into consideration and evaluation must be conducted differently based on the socio-economic diversity of students for inclusive academic advancement (ibid). This is vital considering that most African students entering university come from deprived economic backgrounds and poor basic education. Accordingly, there is a need for the establishment of developmental technological support at the university level.

### **5.2.3. Eurocentric\Western-dominated literature in social work module/s**

The White paper on social welfare (1997) suggests that social workers need to focus on enhancing social integration by focusing on people's social context in South African communities. Since the brutal historical hegemony influences the context of the country, this suggests that social work graduates are expected to embark on non-oppressive practices to redress the injustices of the past.

The participants in this study acknowledged that as part of their social work curriculum, there were modules aimed at achieving the transformation agenda of SA. They made an example with a module titled 'Anti-Oppressive Theory and Practice' (AOP). The participants identified this module as having the potential to allow graduates to deal with past injustices. However, participants were critical about the Western literature adopted in this module. This was brought out clearly in the following discussion:

*Ngco: Guys' anti-oppressive theory and practice, I did like that module name but I did not understand all the theories taught. Some were just not applicable to South Africa.*

*Researcher: What do you mean by saying they were not applicable? Is it not the students' responsibility to apply literature into practice?*

*Ngco: Exactly Thembelihle (researcher) and that's where the problem starts. The literature used for that module is not relevant to us here in South Africa. For example, the type of oppressions – what we face in South Africa and the one we were reading about, it was not the same, so I just felt like we were wasting our time...*



*Researcher: Can you be specific with the different oppressions you are talking about?*

*Ngco: I cannot remember all but what got to me, is the one that talks about cultural imperialism.... As Africans, we take pride in our culture and we cannot say everything about our culture is oppressive. Showing respect for our elders and not talking back on them for instance – we do not see that as oppression. But for someone who is outside of the culture it is oppression because that respect is seen as silencing our voices.*

*Siyo: I agree with Ngco. And it not the only module that has this problem. You know as much as the name of the module (AOP) is catching and seem needed in our context based on our history. What is discussed in the content of the module and the authors are too foreign to the South African context.*

*Researcher: I hear you guys. But I wonder what do you mean if you say the content and authors of the modules are foreign? Ngco even spoke about the irrelevant literature in terms of oppression. Please explain these things.*

*Toto: I think what my colleagues are trying to say is, the fact that the prescribed readings of the module are written by Western Authors, so their writings relate more to their context and we do not see link with our experiences. For example, even if I look at the anti-oppressive practice that we did, and those five faces of oppression from Young [book author], they are not in touch or in sync with what is happening on the ground. I remember in my tutorial when we said ‘culture,’ we are referring to something that is a form of oppression. Students just went mad. Students were asking “who is saying my culture is oppressing? Who*

*defines oppression in my culture?" It was Young, who was maybe from Europe.*

*Siyo: To add and to respond to your question Thembe. The issue is the irrelevant content in the module. For instance, if I look at the faces of oppression expressed by Young, even if she talks about exploitation as a form of oppression, she speaks more in terms of mine workers and capitalism. She even uses the US when it comes to oppression through power. She argues that, these who are powerless in the US do not participate in democratic process. Although we might try to link that to the South African context, but we have more pressing issues in South Africa that can be explored as a form of different oppression. For example, in SA we can talk about class, poverty, unemployment, gender-based violence, crime, and HIV&AIDS to mention the few, because that is what we are facing and dealing with during practice.*

The conversation above demonstrates how participants perceived Western literature in the AOP module as irrelevant and foreign to the South African context. Ngco and Siyo were of the view that while anti-oppressive teaching was relevant, the prescribed literature was not African-centred. This was because the module focuses on Western knowledge systems that are not applicable to the experiences of indigenous people in African communities (Smith 2010). The participants thus complained that what was being taught in classroom did not address the real experiences of African people. This prohibits practitioners from practicing in an insightful manner (Naidoo & Kasiram 2006).

Maringe and Ojo (2017) have also argued that while African universities offer local degrees, the content and epistemologies presented in such courses have not changed from colonial idealism. This means that Western European philosophies still dominate the African academy. For example, research participant Toto expressed the view that the propositions contained within the AOP module were against African values, such as perceiving culture as a form of oppression. Its irrelevance to the South African context was particularly highlighted when adopting Western perspectives to analyse the experiences of the African people. Siyo further argued how such Western dominant perspectives in African academia overlook the real

challenges facing indigenous communities. Thus, the participants in this study believed that the Western-dominated module/s in social work education at HU perpetuated the oppression of African perspectives, which begun under Western colonialism and further brutalised under the apartheid administration in South Africa.

Although social workers are required to practice a number of theories, approaches, and models that empower clients within their environments (Schenk, et al. 2015), the above discussion suggests social work education at HU as not allowing the empowerment of African communities due to modules that do not speak to the real experiences of African people. This can be argued to emanate from dehumanization, which leads to the mis-presentation of the African population.

Similarly, Connell (2007) and Dladla (2017) have both argued that the African continent is globally viewed as not having an African philosophy; as a result, African universities rely on Western academic idealism. Matsiqhi (2019) has criticised this notion, arguing that it is the preservation of Western domination as a master narrative in education, which suppresses other perspectives. Therefore, the current study argues that the Western notion of education foisted on African students at HU, hinders self-awareness, understanding, and critical engagement with colonial issues in the South African context. This suggests a need for the development of the social work curriculum that is responsive to the social needs of indigenous communities (Tamburro 2013).

Responding to Young (1990) and her five ‘faces’ or types of oppression (violence, exploitation, marginalisation, powerlessness, and cultural imperialism), research participants argued that the examples used by Young to unpack these faces of oppression are not relevant to the South African system and context. Thus, the lack of context-specific literature (Twikirize & Spitzer, 2019) in the AOP module was a major concern of the participants in this present study.

Despite the stated purpose of the AOP being to, “equip students with the basic knowledge, values and skills required to critically engage with oppression in contemporary South Africa,” the content of the module remains foreign to the South African context. From the prescribed readings in the course outline, its reliance on Western literature is self-evident. While the AOP module draws its literature from outside Africa/South Africa, it aberrantly aims to respond to the forms of oppression in “contemporary South Africa.” Some of the themes covered in the module provide critical analysis of internalised oppression and identify the key structures and dynamics of injustice and oppression in contemporary society (AOP 2017), but the module

literature was entirely of Western origin. Hence participants in this study were critical about the prescribed readings of the module.

Despite the contextual differences, books authored by Iris Young; Derek Clifford and Beverley Burke; Robert Mullaly and Lena Dominelli are prescribed in the AOP module. Iris Young was born and studied in New York in the US, and gained her working experience at the University of Chicago (Amazon 2019). Derek Clifford and Beverley Burke are based at Liverpool University in the United Kingdom (UK) (Macmillan International Higher Education 2019). Clifford's experience was obtained from Australia and the West Indies (Macmillan International Higher Education 2019). Robert Mullaly is from Manitoba University, Manitoba, Canada, and acquired practice experience in Australia (Amazon 2019). In addition, Lena Dominelli is based at Southampton University in the UK (Macmillan International Higher Education 2019). Based on the above author backgrounds, how students are expected to learn about anti-oppressive ethics and values in social work education within contemporary South Africa without utilising any South/African literature. Toto confirms that such foreign academic increased confusion in social work practice education with African communities. The responses of the participants in this section thus establish a need for contextually-relevant literature in social work teaching and learning for de-colonial epistemological access of students (Carelse 2010). Similarly, Gray et al. (2014,112) argued for a need of the social work profession in the contemporary Africa to 'develop teaching material for African social work in the classroom, based on local and regional case studies, so as to develop African curriculum content'.

The above discussion does not contend for the complete exclusion of Western global literature in teaching and learning at HU, but the argument is on the centeredness of African perspectives in social work education. The responses of the research participants suggest that Western philosophies and experiences have little or no applicability or relevance to South African social work education and practice. Similar to Mignolo's (2011) argument, this study thus suggests the need to diversify academic for the inclusion of different philosophies and epistemologies. This is a call for culturally relevant social work education and practice (Kreitzer 2012).

It is important to note that the AOP was not the only module identified by the study participants as having colonial affinities. The intention of specifying the AOP in this section was to reveal the nature and context of the colonial features in the social work modules special concern to

the research participants studying at HU. It is also important to note that, not all the social work modules offered at HU resembled the colonial legacies. But disparities rather than homogeneity exist. For instance, in chapter 7, participants spoke about several modules offered in social work education at HU which reflected the realities of the South African context.

#### **5.2.4. Absence of the module addressing the unemployment of social workers**

The white paper of social welfare (1997) has declared the South African economy as failing to provide employment for those who need work, which increases the poverty vulnerability of households and unsustainable livelihoods. Social work graduates in the country are also not immune to this endemic. During her 2019 state address, Minister of Social Development, Ms Lindiwe Zulu, raised the issue of unemployed social work graduates as a concern for the department and the country. Based on such concerns, one would expect social work education in South African universities to critically respond to issues of unemployment. Participants in this study reported that the modules offered in the social work curriculum at HU did not directly respond to issues of unemployment. They pointed out how the university curriculum did not even provide practical guidance, strategies, or skills that could adequately deal with the issue of unemployment among graduates. The lack of module/s that focused on management, business, and entrepreneurship orientation were the concern of the research participants in this study. This concern was voiced by some participants as follows:

*Siri: I did not understand why lecturers at HU did not prepare us for unemployment. Like the way we were taught it like after graduation we had a certain organisation waiting to employ us. They never told us about unemployment until we were doing third year or fourth year and they were like eish, there is unemployment. Why they [lecturers] did not tell us in first year to go and do other modules that will help us to deal with this issue.*

*Khomi: Business empowerment skills are absent in our modules... I think [name of the lecture] tried it at some point, trying to train us about doing business funding proposals and what not. I think at that point it was not emphasised on us why it was important. We just did it like for few weeks and everyone got over it.*

*Simbo: Even when we did it, it was more like an NGO thing. So, in that way I think we are lacking a lot. Despite high levels of unemployment and poverty that can be addressed by self-reliance of graduates in the country, teaching at the university does not address fundamental aspects in response to unemployment.*

*Researcher: What do you mean by self-reliance and what are these fundamental aspects?*

*Simbo: I mean graduates need to be trained about business ideas, entrepreneurship skills and opportunities. That is lacking in the current education. Everyone comes out at the university looking for employment. If we are all trained to be employees who will be an employer.*

*Khomi: That is very true and it makes me to remember the fact that we did not have a module that speaks about management. How to be a manager, maybe CEO of the business...*

*Simbo: That where self-reliance and empowerment of graduates should come from.*

The discussion above highlights the unemployment of social work graduates as failing to arrest curriculum attention for change at HU. Such expression resembles the sentiments shared by Prof Fikile Mazibuko during a social work discipline community engagement meeting held at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (15 August 2019). According to Mazibuko (2019), the high number of about 7000 unemployed social work graduates<sup>13</sup> calls for the establishment of modules in the university curriculum that addresses the real issues facing South African

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<sup>13</sup> This figure excludes the 5 000 unemployed social workers who studied through the Social Development Scholarship programme. See: Government of South Africa, (2019), Minister Lindiwe Zulu on plight of unemployed social workers. (17 July). Available from: <<https://www.gov.za/speeches/unemployed-social-workers-17-jul-2019-0000/>>. [Accessed: 29 October 2019].

communities. In relation to the high level of unemployment among social work graduates, the research participants also argued that the university was not empowering graduates with business or management skills for financial self-sustainability. This suggests a curriculum or social work education in the democratic dispensation that fails to be contextually-relevant in addressing the country's needs. The participants thus called for introducing a curriculum at HU that invests in developing entrepreneurship education in response to the scourge of unemployment. Indeed, Naidoo and Kasiram (2003, 378) argued for the need to introduce a 'business management module' in social work to deal with challenges facing the profession and the country. This is a call for developmental strategies in addressing unemployment issues (Sewpaul 2001; Kasiram & Thaver 2013). Ijoma and Ndedi (2008) also stressed the important role entrepreneurship education could play in response to the growing pandemic of unemployed graduates. This appeal also finds support in the work of Kariuki (2018) who suggested that the new socioeconomic landscape requires the university to equip youth through entrepreneurship education for new business initiatives and productive team work.

However, the above argument does not suggest the overreached importance of business school graduates over that of other disciplines and/or professions. Instead, the research participants argued for a comprehensive curriculum within social work education that addresses not only the literacy of graduates but places equal focus on financial, entrepreneurship education as well as business management skills. Schenk et al. (2015) also argued that social workers need education and training in a wide range of areas and disciplines for comprehensive practice.

#### **5.4. CONCLUSION**

This chapter focused on social work education and practice in the South African context. The emphasis was upon the colonial legacies in teaching and learning at HU. This chapter's discussion highlighted the nature and struggles of previously disadvantaged students at HU as not delinked from the hidden agendas of coloniality.

The findings discussed in this chapter thus revealed coloniality in education and practice as marginalising the needs of the majority population in the country. For example, while issues of English as the sole language of learning were not addressed, technological ignorance and Western literature capped the alienation of indigenous students at HU, which negatively affected their academic progress. It was further claimed that such alienating education negatively influences practice. Hence, teaching and learning pedagogies, epistemologies and

languages were explored as vital instruments that enforce coloniality in social work education and practice.

It is thus of fundamental importance for universities offering social work education in South Africa to focus on social transformation, not only in terms of access but also in providing an African-centred curriculum. A relevant curriculum can only be obtained from the diversified and active deconstruction of education philosophies and the inclusion of African narratives. There is a need in this post-1994 democratic dispensation for the university to construct a curriculum that is sensitive to African ideas, interests, and needs based on African experiences. Concerns of irrelevant practice due to colonial hegemony in academia can be forgotten in anti-colonial and African-centred teaching and learning.

The following chapter will explore the de-colonial encounters and the desires of African students about a decolonial HE.



## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **TRANSFORMATIVE ENCOUNTERS AND DESIRED DECOLONIAL HIGHER EDUCATION: AFRICAN GRADUATES PERSPECTIVES AT HIBISCUS UNIVERSITY**

#### **6.1. INTRODUCTION**

Chapter four of this report explored the research participants' understanding of coloniality in HE. Chapter five then explored how colonial legacies still influence students' experiences in an African university, particularly in social work education. Such explorations did not suggest the non-existence of certain decolonial and transformative agendas in HEIs of democratic South Africa. A lot has been done and still need to be done in transforming the South African Higher Education. The focus of this chapter is thus on the participants' encountered and desired decolonial transformations at HU. The chapter points to these transformative practices against the colonial hegemony in SA HEI. The focus is thus on transformation and decoloniality in social work education and practice (Bazana & Mogotsi 2017) at HU in the new democratic dispensation of South African HE.

The argument of this chapter embraces the SA HEIs commitment towards the decolonial turn (Maldonado-Torres 2011). Indeed, several scholars such as Biko (1987); Vorster and Quinn (2017); Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018); Twikirize and Spitzer (2019) have similarly acknowledged the essentiality of the decolonial turn in HE since it involves context-relevant multiple transformative activities. Accordingly, Tshepo Madlingozi (2019) recognises the decolonial turn in SA HEIs as a crucial transformative process, which must be influenced by time, space, and context in terms of its relevance. This implies that decolonial and transformative practices in a profession such as social work should derive from the voices and experiences of the people it is designed to serve. This chapter, therefore, explores the perceptions of social work graduates at HU with respect to transformation and decoloniality in social work education and practice.

The chapter is presented in two sections. The first section focuses on the encountered and desired transformation at the university in general. In narrating their encountered transformation, the participants highlighted equity in admissions and the establishment of funding opportunities at HU as strategies that ensured access to all students. Participants further acknowledged the existence of support services for academic development as a transformative encounter that safeguarded their academic well-being at HU. This section thus focuses on

transformations at HU, which have comprehensively addressed the needs of students regarding issues of access and equity.

The second section concentrates on transformative activities and aspired decoloniality in social work education and practice. The discussion of this section particularly highlights teaching philosophies and congruence between academia and practice at HU as the transformative encounters, which influenced critical thinking ability among students and effective service delivery during practice. Multilingualism during class engagements is also explored in this section as the decolonial encounter that allowed for the epistemological access of multicultural students. Accordingly, the participants expressed their desire for further multilingual developments to engulf social work education and practice, ensuring academic access and success. The deliberations of this section thus focus on context-specific decoloniality and transformation in academia.

## **6.2. TRANSFORMATIVE ACTIVITIES AND THE DESIRED DECOLONISED UNIVERSITY**

### **6.2.1. Equity in university admissions**

South African universities have a history of unequal access through racial discrimination perpetrated by the colonialism and apartheid regimes of the past. Under apartheid, African students had limited access to HU as a privileged historical university (for Whites and Indians). This has changed in the democratic era of South African HE. During the individual interviews in this study, each of the research participants appreciated how their applications to study at HU were assessed in terms of their academic merit. The colour of their skin did not determine access and admission at HU. The following are some of the participant's statements with respect to their freedom of access to study at HU:

*“My school teachers assisted me in applying to universities around South Africa. I applied at UCT [University of Cape Town], UJ [University of Johannesburg], WITS [University of the Witwatersrand] and HU. I applied for social work, teaching, and Psychology. I was accepted for all these choices. But I had to choose social work at HU since it provided funding. Whether you are white or black, it no longer counts for admission at HU.” (Siri).*

*“I did not know how to access the university from my rural town. I also did not know how the university applications work until my high school teachers spoke about the CAO [Central Application Office]. People from the Department of Education also came to our school and spoke about the CAO. I was so happy when they told us that we could apply to any university that we want as long as we met the minimum requirements/points. That is how I got to know about HU”. (Thume).*

*“Although my admission at HU was delayed, I was never told that it was because I was an African and that the university was for whites and Indians. The administrator told me that social work had a large volume of applications and that was why the selection process was taking so long. So, I think the colour of your skin no longer matters for admission at the university”. (Lima).*

The above extracts reflect on freedom of access in HE. This is a vital transformation in the new democratic dispensation in SA since colonialism and apartheid were characterised by discriminatory norms of inequality, particularly in HEIs. African students could only attend “Bush” universities (Bozalek & Boughey 2012) and pursue certain approved qualifications. The availability of information through the Central Application Office (CAO) is also perceived in this study as a decolonial strategy for equal access in HE. For instance, Thume described how the CAO enabled her access to HU. The CAO is the centralised application office that allows students to apply to any HEIs in KZN (CAO 2019). The participants thus expressed their appreciation for the establishment of such a structure, which allowed for non-discriminatory access to HE. Siri and Thume further illustrated how school teachers and the Department of Basic Education informed learners about the CAO and consequently increased access to HE. This suggests that both school teachers and officials within the Department of Basic Education act as support structures that enhance students’ access to HEIs. According to Badat (2007), participation in HE has increased due to greater focus being placed on historically-disadvantaged communities. As a result, the enrolment of African students has increased from 473 000 in 1993 to around 737 472 in 2005 (Ibid). Maringe (2015) and Casanova (2018), also maintain that changes in HE have allowed for an increase in the enrolment of African students. This suggests that none racial discrimination in the admission criteria is the transformation and decolonisation in the new democratic dispensation of the South African university, particularly at HU.

### 6.2.2. Equity access through funding support for needy students

During the conversations with participants on funding and access, it became clear that university access is still influenced by the financial status of the student.<sup>14</sup> The participants in this study appreciated how HE and other structures had initiated multiple funding opportunities to ensure university access for poor students. Below, participants reported how their university access was ensured by the availability of different funding sources at HU:

*“I applied for funding in my first year. The DSD [Department of Social Development] responded and funded me in my second year. I also got res [university residence] because of being funded by the DSD” (Phili).*

*“The SRC member took me to the students’ funding office at HU because I was being expelled from the university since I had no money to pay for my outstanding fees. For a full week, I decided not to attend lectures. I sat at SU [Student Union] until one of the SRC members gave me a form for the funding request. He said I should fill it in and take it to the funding office. I did that, and I got NSFAS [National Student Financial Aid Scheme] like that.” (Lima).*

*“In my first year, I did not get any funding. I applied for DSD and NSFAS, but I did not get it [...] This thing of NSFAS paying 70%, and then you pay the 30% came through for people to go back to study in 2015, and I got it. In the second year, I got a bursary. It was a last-minute bursary that my aunt found [...] In my third year, I also got NSFAS. NSFAS only paid for meals and books, and the bursary paid for res and tuition. So, I was covered until my third year. The bursary did not continue to pay for me in my third year because I had NSFAS. I also got DSD in my third year, and NSFAS cancelled. So, everything worked out well. I did not have any financial challenges at the university after that” (Mami).*

Although accessing funding is not always an easy process and has its challenges (as expressed by Lima and Mami), the participants’ expression above suggests that the availability of financial support ensured that students from disadvantaged and impoverished communities had

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<sup>14</sup> See 4.3.3.

access to the university. The participants revealed how HU offered funding support options such as loans, scholarships, and bursaries to support students, mainly those coming from impoverished backgrounds. Such financial support was not available for African students during the apartheid era (Bozalek & Boughey 2012). This suggests the availability of financial aid for needy students at HU as the transformative achievement of HE in the democratic society era. Likewise, Badat (2007) also acknowledges that financial assistance, such as NSFAS, has increased the enrolment of poor students in South African universities.

Without undermining the efforts made by the university to assist needy students, as discussed above, the participants still expressed their desire for financial support to pay for the historical debt of poor students. In this, the participants argued for the need of a decolonised university to acknowledge the poverty status of a country that still marginalises poor students:

*“The university should be aware that students come from different backgrounds. And others that are poor” (Sihle).*

*“I just hope the university can allow the students who are performing well academically to continue with their studies even if they do not have finances. Such students can be required to pay for their university studies once they have graduated and got jobs. By so doing, no one will be financial excluded due to their historical debt at HU.” (Mami).*

*“Although I got NSFAS in my second year, it did not cover my outstanding first-year fees. I think funding support should cover all your current and previous debts” (Lima).*

In the above extracts, the participants expressed their desire for financial support at the university to cover all student debt. In chapter four, the participants expressed how their first-year of the study was hardly supported financially by the university, which in turn further exacerbated the financial exclusion of poor students. Indeed, the presence of historical student debt suggests a fundamental exclusion technique for needy students in South African universities. For instance, in 2020, the UKZN attempted to financially exclude a large number of students who could not pay 15% toward their historical debt (Bhengu 2020). In this study, participants Lima and Mami called for funding support to acknowledge and cover all such

outstanding fees. Thus, the participants suggest a need for the university to take the context and position of the country into consideration. The socio-economic diversity of the African population cannot be ignored in HE. That is why Maringe and Ojo (2017) argue that a historical context of the African Continent demands decolonial African universities to be pro-poor and exercise funding biases for the needy.

One can argue that participants' expressions above and Maringe and Ojo (2017) argument suggest a desire for the African university to degrade access based on financial abilities. But the focus should be on the intellectual capabilities of the student. The 2015/2016 students' movement in South Africa also argued that the financial struggles and disadvantaged backgrounds of students should not count as a hindrance to access the African university. Similarly, participants in this study aspire for South African universities in the new democratic era to open doors of learning not based on class, race, or any discriminating social positioning status, but to all students who have displayed the intellectual and epistemological ability to pursue university education (as suggested by Mami). An African university such as HU needs therefore to reimagine a new identity (Maringe & Ojo 2017,25) that confronts the historically-inherited issues of underdevelopment, marginalisation, and poverty.

### **6.2.3. Student support services for academic development**

The participants in this study acknowledged that HU has several support services that ensure not only students' well-being at the university, but also their academic progress. The availability of a tutorship and mentorship programme, the student counseling centre, a writing place, and the Students Representative Council (SRC) were some of the support structures reported by the participants as existing at HU for the academic development of all students. In this regard, some of the participants expressed how tutors and mentors influenced their academic progress at the university as follows:

*I received an email from the lady saying she was my mentor [...] She is the one who assisted me. I was able to type in the computer from the first semester of my first year because of her. I made sure that if she calls us, I go to her [...] She assisted us with things such as writing styles and font sizes. She is also the one who taught me the computer and showed me the LANs. I did not attend orientation, but the mentor assisted me a lot with academic writing, and she would tell me to type my work and come back with it the next day [...] I used to*

*listen to her very much. Once she says something, I would surely do it, and after I had typed up my work, I would go back to her. She would read my work and give me feedback and guidance. So, assessments were easy because I had a mentor.” (Sihle).*

*There are many support structures at HU. For instance, if the student has a problem s/he is referred either to tutors, mentors, the SRC, ADOs, Clinics, or the Counselling Centre, based on the nature of the problem. Support is there. For example, if I am in mentorship and doing engineering, I know there is someone in a mentorship programme who is doing social work, I will link you with her/him. Or if there is a student whom I know as a mentor who is doing very well in Social Work, I will connect you with her/him. If the student struggles with writing, there is a writing place. So, support is there” (Phumi).*

*The person who improved my well-being at the university was my mentor. My mentor was so supportive. He linked me with different university stakeholders such as the writing place, which assisted me academically. My tutor as well assisted so much with clarifying content that I did not understand in class” (Siya).*

*My first-year tutor had an excellent heart. She made sure that I understood. If I did not participate during discussions in tutorials, she would come to me after class and check if I understood. She would further explain things to me both in English and isiZulu” (Toto).*

Computer training, academic writing support, writing university assessments, and content clarification are expressed by the participants above as some of the essential services rendered by mentors and tutors at HU to enhance students’ academic success. The participants also acknowledged such services as provided guidance, orientation, and educational support to students, mostly to those coming from disadvantaged backgrounds. For example, Sihle expressed how the assistance he received from his mentor encouraged him to attend mentorship sessions and consistently seek guidance, which in turn improved his academic performance. This then suggests that due to their disadvantaged background, African students appreciate in-depth attention and guidance at the university to improve academically. Van Heerden (2009)

has also asserted that support services at the university have the potential to enhance students' performance, eliminate failure, and reduce the student dropout rate. Similarly, the STARS mentorship programme (2019) appreciated mentorship as a student development programme that aims to assist first-year students from high school in adjusting to the university environment by providing emotional and social support to advance their academic understanding and performance. This suggests that support services respond to students' adjustment concerns at the university.

What also emerges from the above extracts is the multiplicity of support structures existing at HU to ensure the academic enhancement of students. For instance, Phumi emphasised several support structures such as the Students' Counselling Centre, the SRC, and the writing place which exist at HU to ensure the holistic well-being of students. Scott (2016) also perceived support services at the university as the fundamental structures that enhance not only academic performance but also the holistic well-being of the individual student. Indeed, most participants in this study expressed how they have used different support structures at the university to improve academically. For instance, Mami below expressed how the Students' Counselling Centre reinforced her academic success:

*"I noticed that I was too stressed, and I could not cope academically. I think my background, such as the death of my parents and everything, was playing a role. I went to the Student Counselling Centre, where I had sessions with the psychologist. This helped me to ventilate and focus on my studies" (Mami).*

Mami above appreciated how the Student Counselling Centre ensured her well-being and academic focus by providing a safe space to share her feelings. Scott (2016) also perceived the existence of counselling centres in HE as aims to examine and deal with factors that hinder the academic performance of students. Furthermore, several participants valued the role played by SRC for their educational access at the university. This is what one participant had to say:

*"After moving up and down, and starting to lose hope for admission, I was told by someone that I should go to the SU [Student Union] as they could assist me. I was assisted by Bonga [pseudonym]. He was in the SRC at that time. He took me inside MTB [HU building]. We went into Humanities LAN and that is where I was assisted for admission and registration" (Siyo).*



Siyo expresses how the SRC facilitated his admission to the university. Indeed, several discussions in this study reveal that the SRC is a fundamental structure for students' entree and support at the university. The SRC is the body of council established at the university to represent students' needs and communicate with the university management regarding students' requirements. This student body did not exist in the apartheid era. Indeed, Biko (1987) lamented on how student organisations representing the interests of Africans were not allowed and were even abolished at South African universities during the apartheid era. Apartheid government obliterated every activity that aimed at expressing African interests in HE (ibid). Therefore, the endorsement and existence of the SRC structure at HU to represent the needs of disadvantaged students reveal the extent of the decolonial transformation of SA HEI in the democratic era. Similarly, Badat (2007) appreciated the availability of the student body that has been deracialised in SA HEIs to ensure the representation of all students.

### **6.3. TRANSFORMATIVE ENCOUNTERS AND DESIRED SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION AND PRACTICE**

#### **6.3.1. Transformative teaching and learning, critical knowledge, and contextual-relevant practice**

The discussions of this study have been on concerns regarding the Eurocentric domination on curriculum and university cultures in HEIs.<sup>15</sup> This emanates from approaches to colonialism and apartheid (Smith 2013). The introduction of a democratic state brought with it some radical and revolutionary knowledge and practice in African universities (ibid), particularly in social work education as a humanitarian profession. The HU, as a historically-privileged institution, also abides by some of these transformative approaches for social change. This came out clearly during conversations with the participants in this study under three main themes, namely: learner-centred teaching philosophies; congruence between academic and practice, and multilingualism in academic engagements. It can be argued that these decolonial encounters were deliberate attempts against oppressive historical ideologies.

##### **6.3.1.1. Learner-centred teaching philosophies for the pedagogical access of all students**

In this sub-section, the research participants acknowledge some of the endorsed pedagogies of teaching that ensure all students' learning and the applicability of academic content to practice.

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<sup>15</sup> See chapters four and five.

In particular, the participants spoke about teaching philosophies adopted by some academics in social work education at HU that encouraged the educational inclusion of all students as follows:

*“Some lecturers were not oppressing us. I remember that they would say, “answer and say anything.” During class discussions, they would say, “there is no wrong or right answer,” and that was encouraging. They would say constructively if you were wrong. They would not embarrass you by saying you do not make sense. These lecturers tried to ask questions in such a way that you could understand and explain” (Don).*

*“You know Mrs. Doni [pseudonym], as much as people seemed not to like her because she was over-energetic; but I do not know, there is something about the way she teaches her module. Even the module taught by Mrs. Mathins [pseudonym], was so draining. But the way she taught her module, it was excellent. Their modules were complicated, but the way they taught them, it was exciting and drawing you into this thing of I want to listen to this, you know [...] I want to learn. What also made the teaching styles of these lecturers to be interesting was that they ensured the students’ equal participation in different ways and sometimes even by asking us exam questions we would like for examination [...] it was interesting” (Mami).*

*“Some lectures made me look forward to attend their class through their teaching styles, [...] They would ask questions such as “what do you think?” And that makes you to feel that the lecturer acknowledges your presence, and s/he wants you to learn” (Khomi).*

*“Speaking about our experiences in class discussions and debating the relevance of literature was quite interesting. And Mrs. Dolla [pseudonym] allowed that a lot during her lectures” (Thato).*

Teaching philosophies are revealed by participants above as playing a fundamental role in students’ epistemological access (knowledge development and understanding). Langa (2017) also argues that decoloniality of access is incomplete without epistemological access.

Participants' expressions above suggest the teaching philosophy of a lecturer as having the potential to either promote or hinder student's academic inclusion and participation in class engagements. Don, Mami, and Khomi thus appreciated lecturers with teaching philosophies that stressed the importance of engagement, student comfortability, and participation. Spiller (2012) also stated the importance of learner-centred approaches during teaching and learning since they encourage both the teacher and the learner to be involved in education and learn from one another. Indeed, Thato appreciated a teaching style that valued the sharing of real-life experiences. This means that more than encouraging equal participation, learner-centred approaches are about engaging students with what they already know and expands their knowledge (ibid). Similarly, Duron and Giardina (2018) emphasise the importance of teaching philosophies that increase the engagement of students during academic discussions by acknowledging their previous knowledge. Such teaching styles are regarded by the participants in this study as enforcing understanding and academic inclusion. Thus, participants expressions suggest teaching philosophies adopted by some academics at HU as fundamental because they recognise students, as not passive object but as active contributors that come with experiences that can be acknowledged in knowledge development (Lange 2017; Duron & Giardina 2018).

#### **6.3.1.2. Epistemological access through congruence between academia and practice**

The module is an essential aspect of the curriculum that contains teaching and learning materials required to acquire a specific knowledge area. It is thus vital for the module content to be applicable in practice for proper service delivery, particularly in social work. The participants in this study acknowledge certain modules at HU that not only were understandable to the students and applicable to practice, but also fostered students' critical thinking in knowledge application. The participants' acknowledged such modules as transformed and decolonial as follows:

*Zama: The module that spoke about paradigms. I think that was the best content for me. In social work, it helped me or told me that I do not have to accept everything without challenging. It says look at your community style of living. Its focus is on understanding the African paradigm in social work intervention. Look at how African people view things so that you can infiltrate the context of social work and bring about change in the community.*

*Ngco: SOWK 113, by Ms. Smith and Ms. Ngconi [pseudonyms], I do not remember the name of the module. But it was about the writings of Paulo Freire, Antonio Gramsci [authors] I do not remember the third author. I loved that module the most. In that module, the lecturers were encouraging us that, from what we being taught, let us not be a sponge.*

*Researcher: What did they mean by sponge?*

*Ngco: We must not learn, learn, and just suck in the information as it is and do nothing about it. When you learn something, you need to reflect on it, criticise it, you know, to be a critical thinker, you need not to accept all the information you receive as it is. For example, if people say a schizophrenic person shows these signs, you cannot just say ooh obvious it means this one is schizophrenic. Challenge it and say why do you say it is this and that, what about the African cultures and ancestors, and things like that.*

*Toto: Yes, yes. [...]There was also this one which was taught by Mrs. Rothy [pseudonym] [all group members pronounce at the same time] 'anti-oppressive theory.' [laughing] that one I can say okay, it was difficult, but it opened our minds.*

*Researcher: Your colleagues have just criticised that same module with regards to its content. So, it opened-up your mind how?*

*Toto: Yes, I also agree that the module is Eurocentric in content, but its title and some aspects do provide the necessary information we need. Like it explains to you how the oppression takes place. It teaches people how they can challenge oppression. It just needed to be relevant to the African context.*

The above participants acknowledged three modules (Zama identified the human behaviour and social environment module taught in level one; Sida highlighted emancipatory education and the pedagogy of the oppressed also taught in level one, and Toto observed relevant elements in the anti-oppressive theory and practice module offered in level three) as facilitated critical thinking ability among students. The research participants understood these modules as promoting appropriate academic inclusion and practice. Although the anti-oppressive theory and practice module was discussed in chapter six as having colonial elements, Toto found the nature of the module as relevant in equipping graduates to understand oppression. But he still maintains that the module needed to focus on African perspectives. The participants, as active agents, selected and used what was relevant in the module and rejected what they viewed as Eurocentric. Toto's expression resembles what Maringe and Ojo (2017) have called the notion of "not throwing the bathwater with the baby inside." Ngco's expression above further suggests that the relevant modules were not only applicable to practice but also cultivated critical thinking ability among the students. Toto and Mami concurred with such experience as follow:

*"I think tertiary education gave us a new lens, in the sense that it cultivated something in our minds, to be able to view situations differently from the one we grew up seeing or being told about. So, some modules cultivated that in us"*  
(Toto).

*"In primary and in high school, you are taught but are not being moulded to be a critical thinker, to challenge things happening in our societies. You just learn to go into the next class or level. When you come to university, you begin to view things differently. Like to say this thing is not right or this thing I should challenge it. If you are in high school, everything goes exactly as said by the teacher, until you view according to the way you are taught at the university"*  
(Mami).

Module content that encourages students to be able to adopt different perspectives was described by the above participants as cultivating critical thinking skills. The discussion of this section thus affirms that, although issues of decoloniality are subject to the ongoing debate, some social work academics at HU has managed to redefine an inclusive and comprehensive education which enables the access and inclusion of all students. Duron and Giardina (2018) also argued that relevant academic inclusion through module content is meant to increase

students' understanding and ability to integrate practice and academics. Similarly, the participants in this study did perceive relevant modules as eye-opener during practice:

*“Practice was like a revelation for me. Lots of things that I learned could only make sense in practice” (Notsha).*

*“I was at Maphulo [pseudonym] for my placement. It was a good environment. I learned a lot and learned to practice what we were taught at the university” (Don).*

*“I did not understand when I was in my third year. I felt like theory and practice did not mix. But then in my fourth year when I was doing practical work, I began to understand how it all fits” (Theka).*

From Notsha and Don's extracts above, one can argue that relevant and context-specific modules allow the practice to give students the opportunity to observe all that has been learned and taught at the university. This suggests that an academic that speaks to the realities of African people allows for effective service delivery during practice. That is a bottom-up practice approach (Gray, Coates, Bird & Hetherington 2015) influenced by the experiences of people to be served. Thus, for the participants in this study, practice strengthens their theoretical/academic understanding due to transformed teaching and learning. This is why Esau and Keet (2014) value education which cultivates critical responsiveness during practice.

#### **6.3.1.3. Epistemological access in multilingual class engagement**

The research participants appreciated the language policy at HU, which endorses bilingual academic practice during teaching and learning. They thus cherished how some academics and tutors use both isiZulu and English to ensure the academic access of students during class engagements:

*African lecturers that use both English and isiZulu in class makes academic content to be easy and understandable. I think I have realised that Mrs. Mani [pseudonym] is very easy to understand because, in her class, she uses isiZulu sometimes. It was effortless to relate to what she taught, and you would understand [...] that is why I enjoyed her teaching” (Simbo).*

*Getting to know the tutors and mentors helped us. The fact that some spoke isiZulu even during academic engagements encouraged us to understand the academic content easily” (Siyo).*

*I enjoyed attending a class if the lecturer was an African, and s/he could speak isiZulu. This is because I knew that I could ask in isiZulu if I struggled in English, and the lecturer was able to understand.” (Sihle).*

From the above participants’ expressions, it is clear that the inclusion of indigenous language during teaching influences the academic participation of students. For instance, Simbo expressed how the educational content gets easily transmitted if the lecturer’s teaching style values the inclusion of student’s mother-tongue languages during class engagements. Siyo and Sihle also spoke about how the inclusion of indigenous language (IsiZulu) in academic engagements for content clarification allowed epistemological access of the students. This suggests the inclusion of indigenous languages during academic discussions as the fundamental aspect of academic development and success. Coetzee-de Vos (2019) has also argued that multilingual teaching and learning facilitates content understanding among students. It can thus be inferred that the inclusion of indigenous language during teaching adopted by certain social work academics at HU contributed to the academic success of the students. Therefore, all the participants expressed a dire desire for mother-tongue languages to be fully integrated into the everyday life of a university student. They said the following:

*“There are no opportunities that can be limited by the fact that you are not fluent in English. I love to watch things on TV. Even at home, when I was growing up, I used to watch soccer. I once watched on TV soccer players from South Africa going to another country, I think. They were asking them in English, and they were answering in isiZulu, and they were provided with a translator. I checked that, and I said okay, there is no need for a person going “overseas to be bothered by language issues. They must hire somebody there to translate this language of yours, to be able to express yourself in the way you want to” (Sihle).*

*“If I am in Spain or Italy, I need to speak English not isiZulu, but people from France do not use my language even if they come to South Africa, they use their*

*home language. And we pay for the translators who translate their language, to say okay, this person is saying this and that. So, nje, embrace your language and use it whenever you need to communicate freely.” (Siri).*

*“In rural areas, I have observed the white doctors who work there. They do not even bother trying to understand isiZulu. But patients are forced to relate to them. So why should we as Africans always be frustrated when we do not know English” (Toto).*

Participants’ expressions above suggest that to maximise communication skills, opportunities to utilise mother-tongue language should be appreciated. They also desired for other provisions such as translation services, rather than expecting Africans to adopt the foreign language, which limits expression and service delivery. Toto also argued that the development of home languages would allow them (as practitioners) to relate more constructively with the community they are serving. This suggests the development of mother-tongue languages as facilitate effective service delivery in South African communities. Thus, inclusive HE can be encouraged by acknowledging the multicultural and multilingual social position of South Africans. Similarly, Kaschula et al. (2009) maintain that a deeper understanding of all cultures in HE can facilitate inclusion and multilingual practice at the university. The participants thus suggested that the inclusion of mother-tongue language should also be adopted during class discussions to improve African students’ understanding of academic content and their academic performance. For the participants, nothing was more liberating than when they use their mother-tongue. This is what they said:

*“If you use your home language in class, you develop high self-esteem and confidence, even to say something in class. That why it important for our home languages to be valued in academia” (Siri).*

*“I noticed in Mrs. Mani’s class discussions, it was so liberating because she mixed isiZulu and English when teaching. You also understand. The first time I spoke in class was in her lecture, and from there I kept on practicing to speak during discussions in class. But I was only talking in Mrs. Mani’s class because she allowed you, even if you mix languages [...] singing Zulu songs, it felt at home in her class, and you also got a sense of belonging” (Siyo).*



In the above quotations' participants revealed the benefits embedded in the use of their home language (isiZulu) in the class discussion, not only in terms of ease of expression but also as a source of self-confidence and a sense of belonging. Zhoe et al. (2018) also argue that the sense of belonging, self-determination, and freedom of expression is felt if the usage of the mother tongue is encouraged during class discussions. The above participants' expressions also resonate with Abdi (2012) and Maseko (2016) argument that suggests language as not only represents the medium of communication, but it holds people's worldview. This indicates the need for Africans to be given the freedom to access HE through their African languages to challenge colonial domination. The Department of Education (2018) has also recommended that South African universities should adopt language policies that encourage the learning of South African languages to promote unity.

The central aspiration is on the valuing of the African invested mode of knowledge production for sustainable education. This suggests a desire for incorporation, consideration, and validation of indigenous languages as equal partners with the Northern academy. Mamanda Ngozi (2009) has also argued for the impossibilities of learning that emanates from one side, as it demotivates diversity. There is a need for diverse knowledge production and transmission for epistemological relevance in social work education. Thus, the inclusion of indigenous languages in the curriculum is the basis of decolonisation that values the intellectual capacity of the African continent (Oelofsen 2015). This means that decolonial education should be African- cantered to seek to develop indigenous knowledge systems (IKS) through language in academia. Similarly, in his book titled, *Voices of Liberation: Achie Mafeje*, (Pretoria: HSRC Press, 2019), Bongani Nyoka has argued how un-silencing the intellectual voices of indigenous people has the potential to develop relevant and sustainable education in South Africa.

### **6.3.2. The restructuring of the Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) degree**

The participants expressed that the four-year study period to obtain a BSW is unreasonable, delaying career progress among students. They thus suggested the degree to be offered over a period of three years. This is what they said:

*Siri: The BSW degree needs to be restructured. It can be a three-year degree, and if you are still interested in being a social worker,*

*you can pursue your fourth year as an honours and a separate qualification.*

*Zama: I think that will really help; it makes sense. I agree with Siri.*

*Researcher: If I hear you well colleagues, you are saying that the BSW must be three years?*

*Ngco: Yes, I am also saying the same.*

*Researcher: What will happen with the content covered in the fourth level that [...] (Melo jumped in before I could finish).*

*Melo: Even that must be taken into consideration [...] because even what is taught in level four can be infused with some of the things taught in other levels [...] no need for such a long period.*

*Researcher: I hear you, but don't you think that such a squeeze may jeopardise the quality of content being taught?*

*Siri: No, Thembe, it will not [...]. What should happen is, in the first year, it can be all the literature that is relevant to our context, and that will allow us to practice. In the second year and third year, it must be a little bit of theory/literature and more practice. Irrelevant modules must also be removed or infused with other modules.*

In the above extracts, the research participants expressed a desire for the BSW degree to be converted into a three-year qualification. Participants contended that, based upon their experience, they saw no necessity to study an undergraduate programme for four years. Participants seem to be recommending something that once existed in the country. Before the merger of the University of Durban-Westville (UDW) and the University of Natal (UN) on 01 January 2004 (Webbstock 2006), students were studying for the degree over a period of three years. If a student was still interested in specialising in social work, a one-year honours degree

was offered. The participants' expression seems to be in line with the BSW qualification offered by the former UDW. Both the PGS (postgraduate students) and PR (practitioners) group of participants were alike in the quest for the restructuring of the BSW. For instance, one of the PR participants concurred as follows:

*“The way social work is taught, I can say they use old ways that were good then, but now they are out [...] The social work degree needs to be decolonised so that it can be responsive to the current challenges [...] because looking at the current social work profession, it is kind of not relevant to both the students or society. There is a need to restructure this degree because the old structure is irrelevant or outdated [...] Context-specific, African-centred, and decolonised education will come from a restructured degree for relevance at HU” (Simbo).*

The participants in this study called for the CHE to review the BSW degree. Since such recommendations came from both groups of participants (PGS and PR), it might be a concern that needs to receive attention across the country. However, Simbo's expression above indicates that the participants did not understand degree restructuring and quality as the process executed at the National level, and not by HU as the individual university. Thus, HU might not have the authority to restructure degrees. According to the Higher Education Act 101 of 1997, the CHE is responsible for the quality of education offered in South African Universities. The Higher Education Council works with the National Qualifications Frameworks (NQF) 67 of 2008 in ensuring the quality, standard, and requirements of the qualifications. The CHE is also responsible for quality assurance of qualifications (CHE 2015). The present researcher thus diverts the participants' recommendations to these relevant structures.

CHE (2015) suggested that the social work qualification was offered over a period of four years, with an exit NQF Level 8 and 480 credits to ensure intensive learning. For the CHE, the composition of the social work qualification was formulated to meet South African demands based on the injustices of the past (ibid). However, the participants in this study argued that the length, structure, and content of the BSW degree and/or curriculum does not reflect the exact needs of either graduates or the South African people at large. This is the basis of their call for the BSW to be a three-year degree. Indeed, the participants further substantiated their argument by comparing the BSW with other qualifications offered over a three-year period at HU.

However, this study argues that, although some aspects can be learned from other degrees, it is also essential to acknowledge that social work is both a practice-based profession and an academic discipline (IFSW & IASSW 2014), which makes it a challenge to be compared with other degrees/qualifications. Nonetheless, the participants' recommendation is not alien in other contexts or other countries. Some universities offer the BSW over a period of three years. For instance, the Dortmund University of Applied Sciences and Arts in Germany provides the BSW degree over a period of three years (Brützel 2019). This is also the same case at Kent University, Buckinghamshire New University, and the University of Suffolk, to mention the few. Therefore, being mindful of the South African context, this study suggests that South African HE needs to make a comparative attempt for the restructuring of the BSW degree for it to meet the needs of those it seeks to serve.

#### **6.4. CONCLUSION**

This chapter has acknowledged the achieved transformative agendas, as well as African graduates' aspirations of the decolonial African university and social work education. None racial discrimination for access at HU suggested that there are won colonial and apartheid battles in the democratic dispensation of South African HE, although some are provisional, and some need to be qualified. It was thus vital for this study to explore and acknowledge these transformative achievements to encourage the decolonisation process. It was out of these encountered transformations that made the participants realise the anti-colonial and African-centred HE they desire. Thus, participants argued against the minimal transformative accomplishments to not blind the institutions of higher learning of the stubborn and persistent colonial realities still existing in South African universities.

The discussions of this chapter thus suggest a need for HE to change African university and social work education “fundamentally and permanently and design so that it cannot easily return to its original colonial form (Maringe 2015). This focus suggests the need for South African HEIs to confront history for decolonial transformation to change the academia for the better.

The next chapter focus on the conclusions, summary, and implications of the study.

## **CHAPTER SEVEN**

### **SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS**

#### **7.1. INTRODUCTION**

*“A truly South African university needs to ensure that the African student and his or her experiences are placed at the centre of the curriculum” (Seepe 2004,12).*

I begin this chapter with the above quotation as it asserts the understandings and aspirations shared by the study participants in defining a decolonial HE in South Africa. This chapter presents the main findings of the study and major conclusions. These findings and conclusions are informed by the objectives of the study, namely: to explore graduates’ understanding and definition of coloniality within HE; to understand the (de)colonial HE experiences of graduates in social work programme; to explore the graduates’ definition and understanding of a decolonial African university and social work programme; to explore the impact of broader institutional contextual conditions on a social work programme. A brief discussion of how these objectives were met in the study are discussed below under the summary of the study findings. The chapter also highlights the significant contribution of the study in terms of broader knowledge. The chapter concludes by making recommendations and discussing the implications of this study for African universities, social work education, and future research

#### **7.2. SUMMARY OF THE STUDY**

This study presents empirical data from research that explored students’ experiences of (de)coloniality in a post-apartheid South African university located in KZN. Twenty-two (22) social work graduates participated in the study, i.e., ten postgraduates’ students and twelve social work practitioners (see chapter three). Two different groups were recruited to obtain a broader and diverse interpretation of the matter under study. The research participants were recruited using purposive and snowball sampling. Purposive sampling was used to target participants who were able to share their experiences and knowledge of (de)colonial HE. Snowball sampling was used to locate prospective participants. Snowball sampling focused on hard-to-locate participants and relied on referrals, particularly for social work graduates who were furthering their studies in other disciplines. Consequently, the recruitment of research participants for this study was not a straightforward process. Different professional networks and peers were used to help in the process of recruiting participants. This allowed for a fair

selection of participants who shared light on African students' lived experiences at the university.

Theories of decolonisation and Afrocentricity guided the understandings and the knowledge base of this study. These theories were used to advance each other for a clear understanding of (de)colonial HE in the South African context. Rooted in these theories, the study thus suggests that if African systems are not at the centre of South African education, African students will continue to be devalued, marginalised, and excluded by the education system. This argument holds that when African students see themselves as centred and central in their education, they will see themselves as agents, actors, and participants, rather than as marginals on the periphery of education experience (Asante 2009).

The study adopted the social constructionism and critical paradigms. This paradigms allowed for the exploration of how African students in social work academia create knowledge, make sense of the world around them and construct reality and a view of themselves (Teater 2010; Andrews 2012). This position assumed that students' experiences in HE are socially constructed, context-specific, and are based on historical interpretations (Berger & Luckmann 1996; Zibane 2017). The study thus perceives the (de)colonial perspectives of students in HE as influenced by the broader societal structures. It thus acknowledges the interconnectedness and interdependence of the socio-political and structural dynamics of colonialism, apartheid, and education. And this is in line with how Kaspersen (2000,34) perceived society as structuration processes whereby human actions are constructed. This means that perspectives are produced out of the continuous interaction between the individual and the environment. .

Data collection began after ethical clearance was obtained from the University Ethics Committee, and consent received from the participants. The study employed focus group and semi-structured individual interviews as tools for data collection. Once all participants were recruited, there was an information session where the study was discussed, and the prospective participants were given a chance to ask questions pertaining to it. Throughout the interviews, the research participants were respected, and their anonymity assured. Consequently, the group discussions provided a platform to treat the research participants as subjects and not as objects of enquiry (Acocella 2012). Their interests, perspectives, and experiences were at the centre of the study. The interview tool also created an environment that gave a voice to the research participants and treated them as active agents in matters pertaining to their lives (Zibane 2017).

The focus group provided a broader range of information and offered an opportunity to seek clarification on specific themes to be explored during the individual interviews. Most significantly, to obtain in-depth experiences, it was vital to build a rapport with the participants. The focus group was thus instrumental to recruit members for the individual interviews and form a close and relaxed relationship with the participants. Indeed, Zakaria and Musta Amal (2014) state that individual interviews should be conducted only when the researcher and the participants are comfortable with each other to improve interaction and communication. The study thus perceived the participants as experts in their (de)colonial experiences of HE.

The use of in-depth individual interviews and focus group discussions promoted naturalness and spontaneity, flexibility, and control of the environment during data collection (Babbie & Mount 2001). Thus, these two approaches were essential to use in this study of (de)coloniality for participatory methods (to encourage a range of activities for participation). Bozelek (2012) also valued the participatory approach as a strategy for giving students an active and influential role in discussions concerning their education.

### **7.3. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS**

#### **7.3.1. African students' conceptualisation of colonialism and coloniality in South African HE**

The participants in this study understood colonialism and Eurocentrism (domination by Europe) as interrelated. In describing colonialism, the following concepts emerged: White supremacy, domination, marginalisation, oppression, lost identity, misrepresentation, and Eurocentric indoctrination. The research participants perceived colonialism as those endorsed activities that oppress the humanity of African people. Therefore, it became apparent that the research participants viewed colonialism and white hegemony as operating through Western domination for the oppression of the colonised. The participants thus interpreted colonialism as a process of African alienation and imperialism.

The participants' general definitions of colonialism in this study were aligned/similar to the articulation in the literature on colonialism. For instance, Horvath (2006) defines colonialism as a process of dominating other countries through political control. Similarly, Borocz and Sarkar (2012) view colonialism as a practice and worldview that is Eurocentric dominated and its economic, geopolitical, and cultural origins rooted in a widespread European paradigm. The authors further clarify that the process of colonialism involves the imposition and continuous

destruction of indigenous practices for their transformation into European goods and services. This means that African centeredness is suppressed in colonial practice. Colonialism is thus about domination and oppression. For the participants in this study, coloniality is evidence in the university context where Western norms dominate.

The research participants expressed how colonial hegemony and its legacies are still evident in university norms, location, admission, and access, which alienate African students, and their cultures (see chapter four). This suggests HE (the university space) as a critical site to explore historical legacies (Mbembe 2016). For instance, the participants expressed how coloniality is evidence in the university spaces. Some of the spaces mentioned included university coffee shops, LANS, and spaces of entertainment, which were identified as spaces for the racially and class-privileged students. These spaces make African students feel excluded and lack a sense of belonging at the university due to colonial cultures' maintenance. This then suggested that HU, as a historical advantage university, is not yet for the poor and disadvantaged population of South Africa.

The participants' definitions and understanding of coloniality in this study showed that individual students' experiences remain influenced by the historical legacies of alienation and injustice. Most significantly, the study findings indicate that despite the demise of colonialism and apartheid, traces of their stubborn histories are engraved in higher learning institutions in South Africa. The study thus acknowledges the interconnectedness and interdependence of the socio-political and structural dynamics of colonialism still present at the university.

### **7.3.2. African students' experiences of coloniality within social work education and practice**

Different scholars cited in this study, such as Ndlovu-Gatshen, Fanon, and Nyoka, to mention the few, have argued how post-colonial and post-apartheid education in Africa continues to suffer from epistemicide due to Eurocentric perspectives which still dominate African academia (see chapter five). The social work curriculum at HU is also not immune to such an epidemic. This is because social work education and practice is the very product of the brutal historical context of colonialism and apartheid in South Africa (Tjabane 2012; Smith & Nathane 2018). In this study, the participants spoke about elements of oppression, marginalisation, and exclusion embedded in social work education and practice at HU. The Eurocentric curriculum that alienates African cultures and interests and jeopardises practice in



social work, remains influential in HE. Thus, the findings of this study suggest Western education as creating incongruence between social work education and practice in the South African context.

The research participants spoke of their learning experiences at the university as characterised by alienation in classroom discussions due to colonial language/s domination and module/s dominated by Western content. Despite the transformative policies that allow for the inclusion of all students in the new democratic dispensation of HEIs, African students coming from disadvantaged backgrounds still suffer from academic exclusion in South African universities. Eurocentric languages and literature were cited as important tools of coloniality that are still maintained at HU. For instance, the dominance of English as a teaching and learning language at HU was identified by the participants as the colonial legacy of HE. The research participants also expressed how pedagogical methods of teaching and learning in social work education remained colonial, thereby excluding African interests. These findings suggest that literature, theories, knowledge, and language adopted in academia are incongruent with the real experiences of African people in the country. The participants further described how an irrelevant knowledge system had failed to prepare African social work graduates for effective service delivery.

Social work is both a practice-based profession and an academic discipline (IFSW & IASSW 2014). These are two equally-important and connected components of the profession. Social work education is thus influenced by the socio-economic and political dynamics of a given society (Smith 2014; Schenk et al. 2015). This suggests a need for the interconnectedness of what is taught in the classroom and that which takes place in society for effective service delivery. However, this study participants expressed that their practice experience was incongruent with what they had been taught during their academic engagements in the lecture rooms at HU. Thus, they did not experience academic as preparing them to practice in an insightful manner (Esau & Keet 2014). Based on such disjuncture, the research participants called for the literature taught in class to be applicable to the South African context for relevant practice.

The lack of African indigenous language/s, and an African-centred curriculum that is applicable to African communities during practice at HU, suggests colonial education as creates distance between social work graduates and the African people they are to serve in

South Africa. The participants thus argued that education and the university space perpetuate the inferiority complex among African students through the idealism of white and Western superiority (Fanon 1963). This portrays the university's intellectual landscape as the harbour of Western ideas, knowledge, and colonial languages only at the expense of diverse perspectives of the different populations to be served by academia. This suggests coloniality at HU as continuing to perpetuate the exclusion of the African paradigm in academia and the enforcement of Eurocentricity for academic advancement. Consequently, the African knowledge system is marginalised in South African HEIs, particularly at HU.

### **7.3.3. Transformative encounters and desired decolonial higher education**

The argument of this study embraces the South African HEIs commitment to the decolonial turn (Maldonado-Torres 2011). The focus here is at the university and in the social work curriculum. The findings of this study acknowledged the liberty of access at HU, which suggested the demise of racial segregation won by the democratic State in the country. The participants highlighted admissions to the university and qualification of choice, equity access through funding support for needy students, and student support services for academic development as the transformative encounters at HU that ensure access of all students. This suggests that, although HU is an HWU but deliberate racial discrimination and segregation, which governed the apartheid regime, no longer exists in the new democratic dispensation of the university. The democratic dispensation thus encourages the previously deprived and underprivileged multitudes of students to gain access in HE.

The introduction of a democratic State in April 1994, brought with it some radical and revolutionary knowledge and practice in African universities (Smith 2013), particularly in social work education as a humanitarian profession. HU, as a historically-privileged institution, also abides by some of these transformative approaches for social change. This came out clearly during conversations with the participants in this study. The participants spoke about teaching philosophies adopted by some academics in social work education at HU that encouraged the educational inclusion of all students. Such teaching philosophies are fundamental because they perceive students as not passive objects but as active participants that come with experiences that can be acknowledged in knowledge development.

Learner-centered teaching philosophies, congruence between practice and academic (due to some relevant modules), and multilingualism in academic engagements (adopted by some

academics and support staff) were perceived by participants as a decolonial encounter at HU. It can be argued that these decolonial encounters were deliberate attempts against oppressive historical ideologies. This study ruminates on such efforts at HU as the basis of the decolonial turn in social work education for equal access, which needs to be sustained in HE.

This study explored and acknowledged the transformative achievements to encourage the decolonisation process. Exploring encountered transformations also made the participants realise the anti-colonial and African-centred HE they desired. Thus, the participants argued against the minimal transformative accomplishments (stipulated in chapter seven) to not blind the institutions of higher learning of the stubborn and persistent colonial realities in African universities and in social work education. The participants thus called for anti-colonial HE to be mindful of the crippling poverty that marginalises masses of African (poor) students across South Africa.

The participants desired for financial support at the university to cover all student debt, so as to avoid exclusion. As also argued by Maringe and Ojo (2017), the participants called for the African university to be pro-poor by exercising financial biases toward needy students. This suggests a desire for the true African university to allow African students to access university based on their intellectual capabilities, rather than their financial status or poverty background. The financial struggles expressed by the participants that marginalise majority students (as discussed in chapter four) suggests a need for the university to take the context and position of the country into consideration.

The participants further called for the need for social work education to restructure the BSW degree. The participants expressed the view that the four-year study period to obtain a BSW is unreasonable, resulting in delaying the career progress of social work students. Instead, they suggested the degree to be offered over a three-year period. The participants argued that this is the relevant African social work curriculum needed in South Africa for transformation and decoloniality. However, this argument does not suggest absolute detachment with relevant Western ideologies; the focus is on the BSW qualification that reflects the African interests. This is a call for African centeredness in the academy. This resonates with what Maringe and Ojo (2017) call “a need for Africans to think local and engage globally” for a sustainable decoloniality of HE in South Africa.

#### **7.4. THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE STUDY**

This study's critical contribution to broader knowledge is on the enlightenment regarding meanings and understanding of how social work graduates define colonialism and colonality, de-colonialism, and decoloniality. The study has also revealed how the historical context of South Africa has influenced the graduates' HE perspectives and how such views have influenced participants' experiences of social work education and practice. Thus, the university is acknowledged as a significant site from where the legacies of colonialism and apartheid can be traced, observed, challenged, and deconstructed. In particular, the study focused on a single case study of the BSW programme at HU. This suggests the discussion of the (de)colonial university and education as context-specific, multi-directional, and multi-dimensional. It also implies that (de) colonisation in higher education is influenced by time, space, and context.

The adoption of the social constructionism and critical research paradigm in the study of (de) colonality acknowledges the societal factors and its impact on African students' experiences at the university. The study views history, culture, socio-political background, and geographical location as influencing what African social work graduates call their perspectives of a (de)colonised university and education system. Hence, there was a need for the researcher to interpret the participants' (de)colonial expressions in relation to their culture, location, and historical context.

The encouragement and use of both English (colonial language) and isiZulu (as the mother-tongue language) during data collection was a decolonial characteristic that validated the African language/s and knowledge system. The participants reliance on the dominant use of isiZulu during data collection suggested that, African people (graduates) found more comfort, flexibility and confidence in the environment that enables and encourage their tradition.

The choice of study population (African graduates) and reviewed literature which deliberately focused on African authors, without denying the contributions of scholars in the diaspora and/ other none African countries, suggested the importance of African centeredness in every discussion that concerns African people.

The choice of theoretical frameworks (anti-colonial discursive framework and Afrocentric paradigm), focus group discussions, and semi-structured individual interviews suggest a need for (de)colonial studies to engage with African participants as experts and active agents in the construction of decolonial higher education. Thus, the adopted research methods in this study

allowed anti-colonial discursive conversations that were African centred. Such discussions suggest that a decolonial South African university and social work education is embedded in the real experiences and voices of African people.

## **7.5. STUDY IMPLICATIONS**

### **7.5.1. Decolonised transformation in South African universities**

There is a need for policy or legal framework constructions that will focus on deliberate removal of colonial cultures and structures that constantly remind African students of their unpleasant historical context in South African universities. The removal of statues and renaming of buildings that represent the past colonial and apartheid regimes will reflect a true decolonial intellectual landscape (Oelofsen 2015) in South African universities. Mbembe (2016) has also argued that the renaming of buildings at the university and removing colonial statues that often remind African students of colonialism should be the first step of decolonisation in higher education.

The students' movements in South African universities are a constant reminder to HEIs of the still existing stubborn colonialities. For instance, the 2015/2016 mass students' movement against high fees and colonial education at the university was a call for a South African university to be founded on the needs of African students. Furthermore, in 2019 and early 2020, the unperishable and illegal violence that led to the death of a student at Durban University of Technology (DUT) and the burning of cars and buildings at the University of KwaZulu-Natal campuses again revealed the dissatisfaction of African university students. Thus, this study argues that the issues raised by movements should not be treated as the barbaric behaviour of none appreciating poor students deliberately upsetting the harmony of South African universities. Students' movements should be treated as a wakeup call for the decolonial South African higher education. Therefore, students' movements must not be seen simply as behaviour that needs to be punished, but as a platform for higher education to get the definition and desired decolonial university from students' perspectives.

### **7.5.2. Decolonising Social Work Education and Practice**

The participants' experiences of colonial education suggest a need for an expansion of stakeholders in the formulation of the curriculum. The battle of African-centred curriculum should be placed not only at the university structures such as management, lectures, and administrators, but should also be extended to be the concern of students and indigenous

community structures (Raniga & Seepamore 2017). Thus, all community structures within society need to participate in the politics of curriculum production and distribution. The civil societies, traditional leaders, religious organisations, pastors, and other community leaders must be part of the committee that decides on the content for learning at the university.

The involvement of African community stakeholders can be perceived as one of the strategies to address the participants' cry against Eurocentric theories and literature that is irrelevant to the African context. This suggests that universities should be prepared to humble themselves and acknowledge their failure in producing professionals that are well-equipped to deal with the diverse issues facing the country. Instead, the university immerses the students on the philosophies of European and Western societies that create alienation and division between African scholars and African communities.

Accordingly, community structures must be members of a specific task team that aim to build a discursive forum of the curriculum that is based on the real experiences of African people. Raniga and Seepamore (2017) and Bobo and Akhurst (2019) similarly argued for the value of community engagement in decolonising the university curriculum. Baron (2018) also views curriculum as not constructed by the dominant perspectives, but as co-constructed by students, community, and a teacher.

The study also recommends that the university establish committees in each department that ensure the indigenous knowledge system (IKS) in each module and curriculum. Strategies of appreciating and using indigenous philosophies and knowledge must be explored. Indeed, Gray et al. (2014,112) highlighted the need for social work education 'to publish indigenous teaching models and materials, with reflections on evolving practice approaches in different contexts engaging with the specific challenges of the social work profession in Africa'.

Individual lecturers, tutors, and mentors must be trained to incorporate African IKS in every teaching module and class discussion. The social work curriculum focus should be on African centeredness for decolonial practice.

This study considers transformation as not only to mean the high enrolment of African students and funding support, although these aspects are of equal importance. The focus should also be on epistemological access for contextual, relevant curriculum. There is a need for teaching and learning methods that are sensitive to African ideas, cultures, knowledge, and diversified identities. Thus, a bottom-up approach should be adopted to hear the needs of indigenous people for relevant literature taught in class. African writers, authors, academics, and perceived

intelligence of the nation should embark on researching, conducting workshops, seminars, and so on about the real needs of the country. This has the potential to enable African HE to relinquish its fear of abandoning Eurocentric frameworks in analysing the needs of the African people.

Social work academia must comprehensively train graduates to be able to deal with unemployment and poverty issues in the country. The participants suggested that social work professionals should be trained to be employers and to create employment opportunities for others, and not only as employees. This suggests the need for a Social Work curriculum to focus not only on literate but also on comprehensive skills such as business management and entrepreneurship to tackle the diverse issues facing the country.

The current condition of high unemployment within South Africa can be traced from the failure of the university to discard colonial practice. Similarly, Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018) reflected on how African youth was trained during colonialism to be the white employers' instruments. African students were only expected to be employees and always sought existence from their coloniser through employment seeking. This study argues that post-colonial universities cannot afford to use colonial strategies to train African professionals. African youth must be empowered and be taught liberating skills for self-efficiency. This suggests that for South African HEIs to be relevant, new democratic dispensations need “a mode of thought and action in which the centrality of African interests, values, and perspectives predominate” (Asante 2003,2).

### **7.5.3. Intellectualising Indigenous Language/s in African academia**

The colonial language dominating the African academy need not be ignored. South Africa has eleven (11) official languages. But as Coetzee-de Vos (2019) argues, not all South African languages are developed in academia, except for the use of English (a colonial product), and Afrikaans (an apartheid product). Accordingly, first-language speakers of the other nine indigenous languages often experience difficulties due to the absence of multilingual practice in HE. This reveals how the new democratic dispensation of HE has continued to privilege the colonial masters at the expense of indigenous people. Makhanya and Zibane (2020) have thus argued that language practice is still a hindrance to effective teaching and learning for African students in higher education. The domination of English/Afrikaans shows how white students continue to benefit from their white ancestors' unfair privileges through the genocide of

indigenous languages in education. This suggests the need for HEIs to develop African indigenous languages in academia.

South African HEIs should encourage translanguaging in class discussions. This implies that multilingual students and lecturers should be permitted to use integrated communication (mixing of languages) to construct the epistemological meaning of the text. Engagements through translations and interpretations should also be adopted to ensure an enhanced understanding of the content between the lecturer and students during class discussions. However, this study argues against these engagements being centred around the colonial language/s that further oppress the African knowledge systems.

There is thus a need for an African language that will unify Africans in Africa. This suggests English as a European or Western language that cannot unite and develop Africa and Africans. Among many reasons, English as a foreign language does not offer a comprehensive vocabulary that values African knowledge systems. This has made Africa to be inferior and Europe superior. Thus, Africa always begs for existence, approval, and development from Western ideas through language. Because of such attitudes, Lumumba (2019) has argued that the West feels obliged to impose their perspectives on Africa, and Africa deems it necessary to submit. Therefore, Mignolo (2011) explains that the first step of decoloniality should be to delink the former colonies from the colonial masters. This means that the development of indigenous languages in academia should not be compared with that of colonial languages. Cakatha (2015) has also argued that the development of indigenous languages through compatibility with English is not necessary, due to the different content and context these languages serve. Thus, African languages must be independently developed as a unique vernacular of the unique Continent.

The above discussion suggests a need for anti-colonial academia to prioritise indigenous languages. Maringe and Ojo (2017) have also argued for South African universities to adopt developed world countries' strategy since they rely on their home languages as a medium of communication. Nevertheless, while the study acknowledges the diverse languages existing within the country and on the African Continent, diversification does not justify the colonial languages' inheritance for unity. Thus, for context relevance, this study is tempted to suggest what Lumumba (2019) calls the breaking of boundaries within Africa, and be unified in one African language. This implies that, instead of English, the African Continent must explore an



African language of unity. And for multilingualism, each African country, in addition to an African language of unity, must be dominated by its mother tongue language/s in academia. The development of the African language of unity and indigenous languages in countries for translanguaging has the potential to produce relevant graduates that have invested in the languages of their people for effective service delivery. This has the potential to make Africa compete not only as consumers, but also as producers in the global arena. Such direction has the potential to produce African scholars who are locally situated but globally engaged (Maringe & Ojo 2017).

This study draws attention to the universities to commit to the practical implementation of language policies that promote multilingualism for accessible academic programmes and decolonial education in South Africa (DHET 2018). But the study further calls for multilingualism and translanguaging of local indigenous languages within the African Continent. This is where the richness, values, and uniqueness of African people will emanate. The focus is on centeredness and contextual, relevant education through language and African unity. The language policy of the DoE (2002) also suggests that South African universities should develop language policies that encourage the learning of indigenous South African languages to promote unity. Asante (2014) similarly asserts that development and advancement within the African perspective are rooted and explained in terms of people's culture, beliefs, structures, language, and traditions. Thus, a plea is made for academics and administrative staff to explore new techniques and make use of African indigenous languages when communicating with students and colleagues to enhance the quality of education and communication. The government and the educational system's current mission should be to eliminate colonial social unjust conditions and the institutionalised barriers that prevent equal participation in HE. This study thus concurs with Philip and Whitman (2007, cited in Nakata, Nakata, Keech and Bolt, 2012), who argued that focusing on indigenous knowledge is necessary to liberate colonised people and to reinsert indigenous worldviews in academia.

#### **7.5.4. Suggestions for future research**

The researcher outlined the scope (small number) of the study as the limitations of this report (see chapter three). This is because not all South African universities and African students participated in the study, except those attending HU. The study therefore recommends for

future research to include all South/ African universities offering the BSW and all social work disciplines in a South African context. Both quantitative and qualitative methods of enquiry must be adopted. This will allow for the broader application of the research findings. This will also allow the findings of (de)colonial social work education to be interpreted both quantitatively and qualitatively for generalisation and in-depth interpretation and evaluation. Future research must also not be based on the views of African students alone. It must include other racial groups, academics, and university management to obtain broader and diverse perspectives for a holistic picture of the matter.

Community stakeholders such as employers, civil societies, churches, indigenous authorities, and others must be allowed to reflect on social work education and practice. Decolonial higher education understanding of these structures must also be researched and documented. Decolonial discourses in education must also be leveled in such a way that indigenous people in communities can effectively engage. This will allow for the researching of African relevant social work education that speaks to African communities' needs.

The fourth industrial revolution and its ability to respond to Africanisation and decolonisation of social work academia in South Africa need in-depth exploration, discussion, and recommendations. Future research needs to explore how decolonial HE in Africa should be enforced using new technological and revolutionary developments. This is to ensure that global developments capture the needs, interests, and cultures of the African Continent. Most significantly, the wide global spread of COVID-19 makes physical teaching and learning impossible. Universities have thus opted for remote (online) teaching. This suggests new dramatic and unplanned changes in HE. Such changes call for countries such as South Africa to carefully consider the historical context which marginalised the masses. Accordingly, future research must focus on students' diverse and unequal positions at the university to influence the new technological developments in HE. There is also a need for further research to explore how primary and secondary schools could better prepare students for university, especially in the areas of technology. This is to ensure that HE technological transformations are anti-colonial and inclusive.

## **7.6. CONCLUSION**

Research is an intervention through its “analytical possibilities” (Ingrey 2013, 281). The researcher was thus privileged to have conversations with African youth as they interpret their

history of colonialism and apartheid and its influence on HE's current discourses. Their comfortability to voice their views suggested the importance of creating safe environments in HEIs where students' voices can be heard. It was out of such an environment where the liberated voices of (de)coloniality at the university and social work academia were explored and elaborated. During conversations with the participants, it became clear that despite the amount of interest and controversy that (de)colonial HE has evoked in the past and recently, there remains a lack of empirical research on decolonial social work education, particularly in KwaZulu-Natal HEIs. This research thus provided a broad overview of (de)coloniality as the re-construction of African identities in South African HEIs, and this has brought the context of KwaZulu-Natal alive.

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## Appendix 1:



UNIVERSITY OF  
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23 July 2018

Ms Thembelihle Makhanya 211517684

School of Applied Human Sciences

Howard College Campus

Dear Ms Makhanya

Protocol Reference Number : HSS/0680/018D

Project title: Exploring the students' experiences of (de)coloniality: A case study of Social Work programme at a South African University in the Province of KwaZulu-Natal

Full Approval —

Expedited Application In response to your application received 21 June 2018, the Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee has considered the abovementioned application and the protocol has been granted FULL APPROVAL.

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment /modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number.

PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

The ethical clearance certificate is only valid for a period of 3 years from the date of issue.

Thereafter Recertification must be applied for on an annual basis.

I take this opportunity of wishing you everything of the best with your study.

Yours faithfully

Dr Shamila Naidoo (Deputy Chair)

Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

Cc Supervisor: Dr S Zibane cc  
Academic Leader Research:  
Professor Jean Steyn cc School  
Administrators: Ms Ayanda  
Ntuli

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Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

Dr Shenuka Singh (Chair)

Westville Campus, Govan Mbeki Building

Postal Address: Private Bag X54001, Durban 4000

Telephone: +27 (0) 31 260 3587/8350/4557 Facsimile: +27 (0) 31 260 4609 Email:  
[ximbap@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:ximbap@ukzn.ac.za) / [snymanm@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:snymanm@ukzn.ac.za) / [mohunp@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:mohunp@ukzn.ac.za) Website: [www.ukzn.ac.za](http://www.ukzn.ac.za)

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## **Appendix 2 (a): Copy of Informed Consent form**

### **Participants' information sheet**

#### **Study title:**

Exploring the students' experiences of (de) coloniality: A Case Study of Social Work programme at a South African University in the Province of KwaZulu-Natal.

#### **Introduction**

My name is Thembelihle Makhanya, a PhD student in the School of Applied Human Sciences (Social Work) at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. I am conducting the interview as part of my research project. My study is aimed at exploring the students' experiences of (de) coloniality: A Case Study of Social Work programme at a South African University in the Province of KwaZulu-Natal.

#### **Invitation**

You are being invited to take part in a research project. Before you decide, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask me if there is anything unclear or if you need additional information. Take time to decide whether or not you would like to take part.

Thank you for reading this.

#### **Project purpose**

The study purpose is to explore the students' experiences of (de) coloniality: A Case Study of Social Work programme at a South African University in the Province of KwaZulu-Natal.

#### **Nature of participation**

You will be required to participate in a focus group of about two hours and individual interview of about one hour. The transcript of the interview will be stored on my personal computer and it will be destroyed within five years upon completion of my study. Your participation in this study would be strictly confidential. Your name will not be mentioned. If you are willing to be interviewed, you will indicate whether or not you allow the interview to be recorded by the voice recorder.

Should you feel upset during or after the interview, please let me know immediately. I will assist you by referring you for social work services.

Please note that your participation is voluntary. You have the right to withdraw from the study at any stage. There will be no rewards for participation, nor would there be any negative consequences should you decide to withdraw.

**Contact for further information**

For any queries before, during and after the interview, you could contact;

Miss. Thembelihle Makhanya

(researcher)

Cell: 073 6949 327

Email: [211517684@stu.ukzn.ac.za](mailto:211517684@stu.ukzn.ac.za)

Dr. SZibane

University Supervisor

Tel: 031 260 1216.

Email: [Zibanes@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:Zibanes@ukzn.ac.za)

**HSSREC RESEARCH OFFICE**

Full Name: Prem Mohun

HSS Research Office

Govan Bheki Building

Westville Campus

Contact: 0312604557

Email: [mohunp@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:mohunp@ukzn.ac.za)

Thank you for your contribution to the study

**If you wish to obtain information on your rights as a participant, please contact Ms Phumelele Ximba, Research Office, UKZN, on 031 260 3587.**

## **Appendix 2 (b)**

### **DECLARATION OF CONSENT**

#### **Consent form**

I, \_\_\_\_\_ (full names of participant) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project, and I consent to participating in the research project towards exploring the students' experiences of (de) coloniality: A Case Study of Social Work programme at a South African University in the Province of KwaZulu-Natal.

at a South African University conducted by Thembelihle Makhanya (student number: 211517684), PhD Social Work student in the School of Applied Human Sciences at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. I understand the purpose of the study.

I understand that I will be required to participate in a personal interview of about one hour. The interviews will be audio taped and transcribed. The transcripts will be stored on Thembelihle Makhanya's personal computer and voice recorder will be locked in a cabinet. These will be destroyed within five years upon completion of the study. I also understand that:

- ✓ My participation is voluntary.
- ✓ I have the right to withdraw from the research at any stage I want.
- ✓ There will be no rewards for participation, nor will there be any negative consequences should I decide to withdraw.
- ✓ Strict confidentiality and anonymity will be maintained.
- ✓ I will let Thembelihle Makhanya know immediately if I feel upset during or after the interview to request support.

**Please indicate by ticking the appropriate box whether or not you will allow the interview to be recorded.**

	Allow	Disallow
Audio equipment		

My signature below indicates my willingness and permission to participate.

**Signed at** \_\_\_\_\_ (Place) **on** \_\_\_\_\_ (Date)

\_\_\_\_\_ (Signature)

\_\_\_\_\_ (Print name)



### **Appendix 3 (a): Copies of Instruments**

NB: this is just an interview guide for students to be modified after the first interview.

#### **SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE**

##### **DEMOGRAPHIC DATA**

- Age
- Level of study/teaching
- Year of registration with the University/Social work Department
- Area of origin
- Current location during study/teaching period
- Home language
- Race

##### **STUDENTS UNDERSTANDING AND DEFINITION OF COLONIALITY WITHIN HIGHER EDUCATION.**

- Is the university similar to your high school experience, how?
- Does the culture of university education relate to the culture of your community education? How?
- Did the university education make you to desire more to be with your community or more away from it?
- How is your university experience with regard to diversity i.e. culture, gender, race?
- How accommodative/ inclusive is the university to you?
- What was your first experience with university assessments?
- What is your experience with use of language in the university?
- How did you handle your first university challenges?
- What was/ is most exciting about being at the university?
- What was/least exciting about being at the university?

##### **STUDENTS DEFINITION AND UNDERSTANDING OF DECOLONIAL SOCIAL WORK PROGRAM.**

- What is your meaning of being a black African (any race) men/women student social worker?
- Do you get what you expected from the social work course?

- How accommodative is the social work class and modules?
- What you have attained will be applicable to the community you plan to work with?
- What module is most relevant for you? How?
- What module is least relevant for you? How?
- Which language of communication are you most comfortable to use? Why?
- Which method of assessment (assignment, tests, group presentations etc.) do you understand the most? Why?

#### **(DE) COLONIAL HIGHER EDUCATION EXPERIENCES OF STUDENTS IN SOCIAL WORK PROGRAM.**

- Are the modules of the course a of relevant to your background experience?
- Is the language use during class; tutorials and assessments applicable to the community you plan to be working with?
- During lecture and tutorial, do you understand what is being taught?
- Which platform of discussion between class and tutorial do you prefer and why?
- How is your relationship with lectures and tutors?
- How engaging are you during class and tutorial discussions? Why?
- Which module do you understand?
- Which module you do not understand?
- What are your views and experience with books and articles use for learning in Social Work.
- What are your suggestions concerning social work course; modules; teaching; methods of assessments; for it to be more accommodative to you.

#### **THE IMPACT OF BROADER INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXTUAL CONDITIONS ON SOCIAL WORK PROGRAMME**

- What was the #fees must fall # Rhodes must Fall during 2015/2016 student protest?
- For social work education, what do you understand about this movement?
- What was your experience with university entrance requirements; fees; accommodation and cultural impact to social work education
- What was / is your experience with university system such as use of computer; emails; E-learning; robot system;

- What was/is your experience with supporting structures at the university such as mentorship program, writing place; student counselling services and career guidance, HIV and Aids Units; law clinic; disability unity; etc.

## **Appendix 3 (b):**

### **FOCUS GROUP THEMES**

#### **STUDENTS UNDERSTANDING AND DEFINITION OF COLONIALITY WITHIN HIGHER EDUCATION.**

- University VS school experience
- Culture of university education and culture of African community education
- University education encourage desire to be with your community or desired more to be away from it?
- Educational experience with diversity i.e. culture, gender, race.
- Accommodative/ inclusive of university to black African students.
- Experience with university assessments.
- Experience with use of language in the university
- Handling university challenges.
- Most exciting VS least exciting at the university

#### **STUDENTS DEFINITION AND UNDERSTANDING OF DECOLONIAL SOCIAL WORK PROGRAM.**

- Meaning of being an African black (any race) men/women social work
- Relevance of social work course to African black student
- accommodative of social work class and modules
- Most relevant module to community.
- Least relevant module to community.
- Most comfortable language of communication for black African students.
- Impact of using foreign or language not comfortable to use.

#### **(DE) COLONIAL HIGHER EDUCATION EXPERIENCES OF STUDENTS IN SOCIAL WORK PROGRAM.**

- Modules of the course of relevant to African students' background experience.
- It applicability to the community
- language use during class and assessments applicable to the community working with

- Understanding of what is taught during class lecture and tutorial.
- Platform of discussion between class and tut preferred the most.
- Experience with lectures and tutors
- Engagement during class discussions.
- Your views and experience with books and articles use for learning
- Suggestions concerning social work course; module; teaching; methods of assessments; for it to be accommodative to black African student.

### **THE IMPACT OF BROADER INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXTUAL CONDITIONS ON SOCIAL WORK PROGRAMME**

- The #fees must fall # Rhodes must Fall during 2015/2016 student protest.
- For social work education, what do you understand about this movement?
- University entrance requirements; fees; accommodation and cultural impact to social work education
- Experience with university system such as use of computer; emails; E-learning; robot system;
- Experience with mentors and mentorship programme.
- Experience with supporting structures at the university such mentorship; writing place; student counselling services and career guidance, HIV and Aids Units; law clinic; disability unit; etc.