

A Critical Fanonian Understanding of Black Student Identities at Rhodes University, South Africa

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Abstract

South African history is rooted in racial identities, inequalities and injustices, which the post-apartheid government has sought to address for twenty years since 1994. The transition to a post-apartheid society though has been a difficult one with the social structure and everyday life still marked by the racial past. Though racial classifications on an official basis no longer exist, racial identities continue to pervade the country. Of particular significance to this thesis are black identities including the possibility of black inferiority, which I examine in relation to black postgraduate university students in contemporary South Africa, specifically at Rhodes University.

In examining this topic, I draw extensively on the work of Frantz Fanon, who wrote about both colonial society and the emerging post-colonial experience. Fanon was a young black intellectual whose work was in part based on his own experiences of being a once-colonised black person in a world which he perceived as being dominated by whiteness. In his work he expresses his own perceptions of whiteness and how the black identity has come to be shaped by and around this dominant white foundation. Fanon extensively discussed the lives of black intellectuals and elites, and demonstrated how the black identity becomes shaped by and around the world of whiteness. In doing so, he raised a range of themes, such as black inferiority, mimicry and double consciousness.

I draw upon the work of Fanon in a critically sympathetic manner to delve into the experiences of black postgraduate students as they negotiate their way through a university setting dominated by a white institutional culture. I bring to the fore the argument that the racial identities of these students is not fixed and sutured but, rather, is marked by considerable fluidity and ambiguity such that black identity must be understood not just as a state of being but also as a process of becoming.

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I've often kicked myself wondering why I chose such an arbitrary thesis topic and not something more practical. Questioning the meaning of black identity in contemporary South Africa is a seemingly 'old and tired' but greatly delicate topic about which I believed hardly anyone gave much consideration. But I pursued it anyways to make some sense of my own life at the very least. Needless to say the journey towards completing this thesis was never easy as I've often been faced with challenges and doubts from both others and myself. However there have been a select few individuals whose guidance and support have led to this final product.

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Acronyms

ANC – African National Congress

AZAPO – Azania People’s Organisation

BBM – BlackBerry Messenger

BCM – Black Consciousness Movement

BEE – Black Economic Empowerment

BI – Black Identity

BPC – Black People’s Convention

BSAE – Black South African English

BSM – Black Student Movement

EFF – Economic Freedom Fighters

NUSAS – National Union of South African Students

PAC – Pan-African Congress

SASM – South African Student’s Movement

SASO – South African Student’s Organization

SSRC – Soweto Student’s Representative Council

UCT – University of Cape Town

UDF – United Democratic Front

UFS – University of Free State

UKZN – University of KwaZulu Natal

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Chapter One: Introduction and Methodology

1.1 Introduction

This thesis explores a critical Fanonian perspective of 'black' identity at Rhodes University. The works of Frantz Fanon while vast also maintain great significance specifically pertaining to post-colonial identity. Fanon encompassed certain beliefs about post-colonial black identity. This thesis adopts the same Fanonian approach and analyses the meaning of 'blackness' according to the lived experiences of black South African post graduate students at Rhodes University. The main goal of which is to determine whether Fanon is still applicable to the study of the black experience in post-apartheid South Africa.

The introduction of this thesis briefly discusses the main themes of Fanon's work which he believed to greatly define post-colonial blackness. Furthermore it is a condensed version stating the motivation for why Fanon may still be applicable to the study of post-apartheid South Africa. The remainder of this thesis will then consist of outlining the research objectives and methodology before concluding with an overview of the thesis structure.

1.2 Fanon and Black Identity

In relation to the colonial experience, Fanon (2008) identifies – in *Black Skin, White Masks* – Manichean practices which set the socio-spatial boundaries between the native and the colonialist and which also served as a basis for the hierarchical colonial order. The experiential phenomenology of 'native consciousness' which Fanon speaks about focuses on the question of black inferiority in which the native, in living the black experience of both geographical and economic condemnation under colonial rule, simultaneously embodies and manifests this same condemnation in and through his or her epidermal surface. As a result, natives feel inferior because of the blackness of their skin and all the negative connotations associated with blackness. In discussing inferiority, Fanon uses W.E.B Du Bois' concept of double consciousness to offer his own analysis of the black intellectual, namely, a crisis of identity in which the black colonized are lost in a seeming abyss in which they are torn between aspirations to achieve whiteness and the reality of being non-white.

Besides the colonial encounter, Fanon (2001) – in *Wretched of the Earth* – examines the early years of decolonization in Africa and posits it as a failure for not creating a liberating identity for the now decolonizing ‘native’. Instead, Fanon believes that a Manichean-style colonial ruling structure was being reproduced in new forms under the control of an African elite (who symbolically represented whiteness) while the marginalized native (or the damned of the earth) continued to be subordinated and subjected to demeaning and dehumanizing practices. This involves an incomplete or even truncated resolution of the master-servant colonial dialectic which retains the form of the Manichean dialectic and simply alters its content. This thesis explores these very themes and beliefs that Fanon had about the black experience, with particular emphasis on inferiority, mimicry and double consciousness, and whether or not Fanon is still applicable to the study of postcolonial South African blackness.

Sardar (1986) argues that the significance of Fanon’s work is that it is a memoir to anyone who has had to live under colonial rule and be exposed simultaneously to Western humanism, modernism and civilization. More so, it is personal journey of self-discovery, which – given Fanon’s critique of post-colonial society – is as relevant today as it was under colonialism (Sartre 1967, 2001). This journey requires countering a way of reasoning and ‘truth’ based upon a colonial paradigm of knowledge which is believed to have largely de-humanized the colonized (Penney 2004, Judy 1996, and Gordon 1996). In other words, it entails challenging the colonial dialectics of identity, notably the ‘colonial gaze’ and the ways in which identities were formed in and around this gaze (of which an identity of black inferiority is prominent) (Moulard-Leonard 2005 and Schmitt 1996). Therefore, when it comes to the identity of the post-colonized, Fanon’s insistence that black people be given the space for self-discovery by creating lived and rooted meanings from their own experiences (as opposed to meaning being imposed upon them as before) remains critically significant (Gibson 1999, Pithouse 2003, and Serequeberhan 1996). Blackness, and the ongoing search for blackness, must be understood not in essentialist terms but as contingent on practices, experiences and narratives as historically and spatially structured.

Due to its history of Manichean practices under colonialism and further systemic racial domination under segregation and apartheid, South Africa has its own sets of historical experiences centering on blackness, especially black inferiority. In many ways, the post-apartheid transition mimics and reflects earlier post-colonial transitions in Africa as discussed by

Fanon (Gibson, 2001), particularly those countries which are former settler colonies. Race (now officially population groups) remains very significant in post-apartheid South Africa. This apparent fixation with racial identities, including black identity, is indeed embedded in state policies and programmes in the form for instance of affirmative action and black economic empowerment, as a means for historical redress. More importantly, on a daily experiential basis, it is central to defining, delimiting, living and expressing identity in contemporary South Africa, in part because people continue to use familiar and trusted apartheid-style ways of thinking to classify and make sense of their everyday lives (Maré 2013, Motseme 2002, Vincent 2008, and Geertsema 2004). Overall, South Africa continues to embody the structures, identities and practices of blackness in a multiplicity of ways, some of which possibly entail many of the themes essential to Fanon's work (Polgreen, 2012). In this respect, Gibson (1999) stresses the need to focus on the everyday social experiences of being black in South Africa and, additionally, claims that South Africa has yet to confront both the past and the future in pursuing a humanism which transcends Manichaeism.

In relation to my specific study, research on black identity at tertiary educational institutions in South Africa is limited. However, these institutional settings are important because they are sites where forms of black identity in South Africa are shaped and experienced. This is because apartheid created highly politicized ideas of race and identity when it came to education, and because significant challenges remain in seeking to address questions about racial identity in sites of higher learning. In the new multi-racial universities, such as Rhodes University, the framing and living of black identities are of critical significance given that these sites were once governed by prejudiced ideas of identity and may very well remain with pronounced colonial and white institutional cultures (Goldschmidt, 2003).

Much like Fanon's own personal experiences, students from black backgrounds at universities in South Africa may also experience an internal struggle between trying to attain or maintain the culture of the former oppressor while retaining or even consolidating ties and identifying with the formerly oppressed. This may partly exist because many dominant institutional orders, like that of universities, could possibly either alienate students who fit uncomfortably or 'uncritically assimilate' students into prevailing institutional practices and discourses (Bangenji and Kapp, 2005:1). If this is the case then current educational systems could very well be said to not promote or celebrate black South African culture and as a result black

students may feel ashamed of their identity, history and language (Orievulu 2012, and Mngxitama 2011). The increasing inter-racial contact taking place at South African universities (at least the formerly white ones) may not be leading to a unified nation but instead may reproduce segregation and reinforce divisions, because whiteness may still continue to be privileged over blackness (Vincent, 2008). In spite of this, the redefining of black student identities should not be seen as a marginalised defensive struggle but rather as a potential for creativity and a new sense of self which could shape a more inclusive higher education institution (Walker 2005, and Bangeni and Kapp 2005).

Though drawing significantly on the work of Fanon for the thesis, there are a number of criticisms of Fanon which shall be taken into account to gain a more nuanced understanding of black identity amongst university students. The theoretical perspective adopted does not treat blackness as fixed (as a state of being) but rather as fluid (as a process of becoming). Blackness is not a state to be discovered or rediscovered but is a journey of unknown discoveries under concrete historical and spatial conditions. Hence, blackness as understood a-historically does not exist, and blackness and black identity (like all identities) are invariably marked by multiplicities and internal tensions (Monahan, 2013).

1.3 Thesis Objective

The main objective of this thesis is to identify, understand and explain ‘blackness’ amongst black post-graduate students of Rhodes University from a critical Fanonian perspective. Secondary objectives of this research include:

- a) Studying the racially-based institutional practices and culture of Rhodes University;
- b) Identifying and understanding the paradoxical character and multiple dimensions of identities amongst black students; and
- c) Identifying possible kinds of inferiority as lived experience amongst students;
- d) Evaluating the ongoing relevance of Fanon for post-colonial societies, or in the case of South Africa, post-apartheid society.

1.4 Research Methods

This section outlines the research methods used in pursuing the above mentioned objectives, including the challenges faced during the research.

The study focused on black South African post-graduate students at Rhodes University in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa. Historically, prior to the end of apartheid in 1994, Rhodes was a whites-only English speaking university. Black students were allowed to attend Rhodes only if a black university did not offer a particular academic programme which was available at Rhodes and, even then, a special government permit was required. The university has been significantly deracialised since 1994, such that about one-half of the overall student body consists of black students (Rhodes University, 2011). The question of race continues to resonate at Rhodes and the university's policies, programmes and practices at times raise and address contentious issues around race (Hendricks and Vale, 2005).

Rhodes University was selected as the site for the study in the main because of convenience and accessibility, as I study at Rhodes. Rhodes is not necessarily representative of universities in South Africa today as a whole, including with specific reference to the former whites-only English-speaking universities. Generally speaking, compared to this latter grouping of universities, Rhodes historically had a more conservative student body at least politically. It is also a residential university situated in the town of Grahamstown so that the vast majority of students are from outside Grahamstown; they therefore not only pay for tuition but also for university-provided accommodation. Hence, it is comparatively more expensive university to attend and this may have implications for the class-background of the student body. With the restructuring of higher education in post-apartheid South Africa, which sought to consolidate together apartheid-style universities, Rhodes is one of the few apartheid universities which did not amalgamate with a 'non-white' university. Rather, it lost its East London branch to the former homeland university called University of Fort Hare. I make no claim then that Rhodes University represents, in any strong statistical sense, universities in present-day South Africa.

Considering that the main objective of the thesis relates to identifying and understanding social identities, (specifically racial identities) in terms of lived experiences, the research methodology pursued was largely qualitative. Thus the methodology embodied a broadly interpretive sociological paradigm because it focused on subjective and inter-subjective meanings as 'fixed' in and through identity (Terre Blanche et al. 2006). A purposeful non-

random sampling method specifically involving postgraduate students was deployed. Postgraduate students, rather than undergraduate students, were considered crucial due to their abundant experience of campus social life at Rhodes and, furthermore, because they are budding intellectuals, Fanon's theory of blackness (premised on the dilemma of the post-colonial black intellectual) seemed particularly pertinent to them. Again, because of the use of non-random sampling, there is no claim that the black students studied are representative of a wider universe, even of post-graduate black students at Rhodes. However, the themes addressed in the lives, experiences and identities of the studied students invariably resonate in some way, and to some degree, with those of black university students in South Africa more generally.

The qualitative approach allowed me "to study selected issues in depth, openness, and detail" (Terre Blanche et al. 2006:47) and hence facilitated a nuanced understanding of the students' experientially-based identities. The specific research techniques used are as follows:

- a) In-depth interviews with twenty post-graduate students. The interviews (see Appendix 1 for interview schedule) discussed the students' own experiences of blackness and the importance of race to their everyday lives. Such a technique enabled the students to think about their experiences in an open, reflective and critical manner (MacDougall and Fudge 2001, and Neuman 2000).
- b) One focus group discussion with three post-graduate students (selected amongst the twenty students, based on availability) (see Appendix 2 for focus group discussion guideline). This group facilitated an understanding of identity as a shared and inter-subjective experience rather than as strictly subjective (Chiseri-Strater 1996, Kitzinger 1995, Merriam et al. 2001, and Morgan 1996). This discussion aroused debate and it fleshed out particular dimensions of black identity and possibly inferiority.

The fieldwork was completely arranged and conducted by myself. My first attempt at getting participants was through social networks on the internet. While this method did attract a few interested participants, more were needed and so many others were referred to me by the existing group of participants, otherwise known as convenience sampling (Terre Blanche et al. 2006: 139). The interviews and focus group discussion took place at the Rhodes University Main Library from April to August 2014, with the written consent of the participants (see Appendix 3 and 4 for consent forms for interviews and focus group respectively). I also tape-recorded and transcribed all discussions in the field, which were conducted in English.

In terms of data analysis, the qualitative fieldwork evidence was categorised and re-categorised according to themes arising from the field (Salkind, 2012). It was at times difficult to disentangle the evidence and to neatly place particular pieces of evidence into specific themes, as particular pieces often spoke to more than one theme – a point which will become clearer in the fieldwork-based chapters (Salkind, 2012). I also sought to categorise the fieldwork evidence from the themes ingrained in Fanon’s work and I was immediately struck by the overlap in thematic presence and the concrete record in front of me of the ongoing relevance of Fanon’s work for contemporary post-colonial studies. In the end, key themes such as inferiority, double consciousness and mimicry (all found in Fanon’s writings) played a significant role in the classification and analysis of my fieldwork evidence from Rhodes University.

Despite my best efforts, certain challenges did arise when conducting the fieldwork. I only managed to recruit 20 participants despite my urge for more. More research subjects may have produced a deeper and more diverse understanding, but conflicting time-schedules of the participants as well as other academic commitments made the procedure difficult. However, I do believe that – even after twenty interviews – the fieldwork evidence was becoming saturated. What was also a great challenge was the delicate nature of the thesis topic itself and how questioning the notion of blackness and its possible link to inferiority was at times slightly offensive to some participants.

More so the fact that I myself am not outwardly black may have affected the evidence collected in the sense of how open and honest the students may have been, or at least how they positioned themselves vis-à-vis me on the basis of their racial categorisation of me. As stated by Bourke et al. (2009:95), “[n]otions of difference, perceived through our bodies as they interact with other bodies, can often complicate these experiences in the ‘field’.” With Bourke et al.’s thoughts in mind, there was some degree of hesitance amongst the participants as they were very careful not to offend me when referring to their own perceptions of whites (despite my reassuring them of my neutrality and my desire for honesty).

My own personal racial identity, or rather the race they perceived me as being, definitely had an effect on the focus group discussion as well, I was constantly gestured towards when the participants referred to white people, I found this to be rather amusing as I personally do not classify myself as being white. In fact, some participants themselves were puzzled trying to decipher my race with some even blatantly asking me up front. And even after explaining my

heritage, including the fact that I am not South African or that my family is generally not from Africa, some participants still classified me as white in a typical South African manner. Although we were different in terms of race, as well as nationality, we shared the commonality of being post-graduate students at the same university. It was this common factor that I feel put the participants at ease and made them open up easily and, as well, some of them were already acquainted with the work of Frantz Fanon and this sparked an interest when I at times spoke about the work of Fanon. Thus, there were certain factors which facilitated the fieldwork research (Egharevba, 2010).

Throughout the entire research process, and notably during the fieldwork, I was very sensitive to the issue of my positionality as a researcher vis-à-vis black university students with regard to identity and I endeavoured to ensure the reliability and validity of the evidence collected (Kobayashi 1994, Richard 2007, and Saville Young 2011) by taking into consideration the issue of researcher positionality under fieldwork conditions. I have also read and understood the Rhodes University ethical guidelines for research and have consulted and made use of other material with regards to the ethical handling of research (Burgess, 1993).

1.5 Thesis Outline

In this last section, I briefly outline the structure of the thesis.

Chapter two provides the theoretical framing for the thesis. I introduce and elaborate upon the work of Frantz Fanon and his theory of blackness, including notions of inferiority, mimicry and double consciousness. I recognise Fanon's work is not without its faults and therefore I seek to enhance it by drawing upon other theoretical work to articulate what I call a critical Fanonian perspective.

Chapter three likewise provides context for my specific study by examining the question of race in South Africa (both before and after 1994) and showing the continuing relevance of race to the post-apartheid condition. Then, more specifically, I go on to consider race as it is embedded in the educational system in South Africa, again both pre-1994 and during the post-apartheid period. This assists in locating my study of postgraduate black university students in contemporary South Africa.

Chapters four and five discuss my fieldwork results and findings from Rhodes University. In chapter four I provide a general overview of the research findings by addressing

questions of blackness and whiteness as articulated by the students and giving a sense of the commonalities and differences between students in this regard. Chapter five addresses more particular themes about black identity, particularly themes which arise from the experiences of the students themselves. It shows the sheer complexity and nuanced character of the black identities of the students, and the fact that these identities are in motion as the students struggle to make sense of the world around them.

Finally, in chapter six, I provide a synthetic and coherent overview of (and conclusion to) the thesis by integrating the theory and evidence on racial identities as discussed in previous chapters. It also emphasises the contribution of the thesis to existing knowledge around identity in the light of the critical Fanonian perspective adopted and the ways in which this perspective can be further refined.

Chapter Two: A Fanonian Perspective

2.1 Introduction

Fanon spoke greatly about his experience of being black in a world which he believed to be predominantly structured from a dominant white perspective. He believed that the black identity comprised of inferiority, mimicry and double consciousness, with blacks aspiring to achieve whiteness through a variety of practices and beliefs. The significance of Fanon is how he analyses the black identity both from a personal-psychological and a structural-social perspective, and the possible ways in which his work can be still used in making sense of more contemporary meanings of black identities. Despite Fanon's insightful attempts in historically and structurally explaining black identity as a result of the injustices of the colonial past, his work is not without criticism. Generally speaking, as articulated and developed throughout this chapter, I adopt a broad Fanonian perspective in this thesis while also recognising problematic elements in his work and taking on board the thoughts of other theoretical work on racial identities and blackness.

2.2 Introducing Fanon

Fanon is a humanist who seeks a new political and humane direction for the other (i.e. the black person) away from and far beyond the dominant white arrangements and norms. He is considered to be a voice of (and for) the oppressed and the marginalised because he expresses the sentiments and experiences of being the other. In effect, the other is the undesirable, the inferior and the wretched or damned of the earth – the other is black. Fanon offers both structural and experiential explanations for the colonial and post-colonial existence of blackness and whiteness and in particular for the inferiority of blackness, which is encapsulated in his notion of a Manichean dualism. Writing from his own personal experiences alongside analytical vigour (notably in *Black Skin, White Masks* and *The Wretched of the Earth*) Fanon allows us to understand blackness in its diverse complexity.

The Wretched of the Earth offers a structural explanation for the continuing relevance and inferiority of blackness in post-colonial African states, while *Black Skin, White Masks* offers

a more personal insight into the psychology of the black person living within Manichean structures. Fanon further offers a solution, namely, to break free from Manichean discourses which dichotomise humanity and to formulate and form new ways of being in the world which are more inclusive and humane. In the meantime, though, and under the prevailing circumstances examined by Fanon, he brings to the fore the significance of racial identities and belonging and the ways in which this is underpinned by power differentials emerging during the colonial encounter.

The colonial condition in Africa is entrenched in Manichean practices, which has historical roots in a gnostic-Christian world religion pre-dating the colonisation of Africa (Van Oort, 2009:126). Fanon (2001:31) himself states, “The colonial world is a Manichean world”. In the colonial Manichaeism, black is literally and figuratively kept away from white and in there is a hierarchical importance embodied in the colour of the epidermal surface or skin (Fanon, 2001:29). Hence there is a division of life and being between black and white based on the divine belief that white represents superiority, as if whiteness was the norm and ideal state intended for humankind by God. The most intriguing aspect of Manichaeism is its strongly-held discourse and practice of dualism – the belief in two polar opposites (one good, and the other evil). Inscribed within and mapped onto this dualism, in the case of colonialism, is the dichotomy between light and dark, or white and black.

In becoming an important force intrinsic to colonisation and colonialism, Manichaeism involved the very coming into existence of black and white as socially- and historically-emergent identities which ironically contradicted and validated each other’s existence simultaneously. Everything white by definition was not black, and vice versa (in this sense, they sit across from each other in all aspects of life); but the very existence of each necessitated the existence of the other. This mutual exclusion though was founded not simply on difference but on hierarchy. The presence of difference speaks to the existence of classification and identity (whiteness and blackness). The difference was however ordered in a hierarchical manner. Fundamentally, colonialism was built upon a racial hierarchy in and through the Manichean dichotomy. Fanon makes the point that these forms of identification have a structural basis (in the political economy of colonialism) such that “one is rich as one is white and one is white as one is rich” (Fanon, 2001:31). But ultimately Manichean identities are embedded in lived experiences, subjectivities and psyches leading to the colonial being becoming saturated with ‘race’ as an all-

encompassing identity. But, as indicated, white is embedded in colonial society as the simultaneous norm and ideal by which all else is ‘assessed’, as demonstrated in the concept of the colonial gaze.

The concept of a gaze, and particularly the colonial white gaze, is the means by which whiteness and blackness as identities are constructed and constantly reproduced and reinforced through surveillance – but, in this case, quite explicit surveillance of the other. The gaze then is the view of the world from the colonialist’s perspective and is rife with ethnocentrism. This is effectively the only world because the whole world is from the colonialist’s view. As a result, it represents truth and is the only truth. After all, white represents (and indeed is) civility and black represents or is savagery. This means that “[t]he black soul is a white man’s artifact” (Fanon, 2008:6) which came into existence through the colonial encounter and gaze. Blacks exist, but their existence only has meaning and significance through the objectification and dehumanisation of the gaze. In other words, blacks exist because of, and for, whites. Thus the black identity under colonialism was riddled with negative connotations that placed black people in oppressive and inferior circumstances. Apart from inferiority, another significant feature of black identity was mimicry which he describes as the commonly-held aspiration to be white, or rather to ‘achieve whiteness’. In Fanon’s words, “[w]hite civilization and European culture have forced an existential deviation on the Negro” (Fanon, 2008:6). These two dimensions, of inferiority and mimicry, are common themes running throughout this chapter.

Besides the colonial condition in Africa, Fanon also examined the newly-emerging post-independent nations in Africa which arose after protracted and bitter anti-colonial struggles. For Fanon, the end of colonialism was not bringing about a new human condition or humanity, or new non-hierarchical identities, consistent with the kind of human liberation and emancipation for which he had longed, hoped and in fact struggled. In analysing liberation struggles in Africa, Fanon had an ambivalent attitude towards the then-existing Afro-centric and Nativist discourses and movements. Though these sought to re-define and re-value blackness in a positive light, they ultimately turned to some romanticised and essentialised pre-colonial past and remained trapped within a Manichean dualism. Differences would simply be re-inscribed in new forms without contributing to the building of a new anti-identitarian ‘man’. Fanon also examined the new actually-existing post-independent governments in Africa and he did so in a highly-critical manner.

The post-colonial black elites brought about – albeit unevenly – civil and political liberties denied the other under conditions of colonialism, but they were failing miserably in freeing the other from the emotional and mental complexes of the past. In integrating their national economies into the neo-colonial global economy in a subordinate fashion, the black elites (according to Fanon) were simply regurgitating the same imperialist ways which placed black people in an unfavorable and degrading light. As a result, after independence, blackness is still regarded as a lower form of life and the road to emancipation is simply a journey towards whiteness – white culture, white language, white dress and white governance to name a few. The colonial condition in many ways was being reproduced, with the new black elites – in inspiring to whiteness – merely mimicking the former white elites and gazing down disapprovingly upon the wretched of the earth in a kind of post-colonial Manichaeism.

Nevertheless, Fanon (2008:7) does display some empathy for the new elite with his notion of the double consciousness. It is here seemingly where the true meaning of post-colonial blackness is revealed as the post-colonial black ‘man’ (at least the elite and self-professed intellectuals amongst them) is caught up in a social space located between two worlds to which they are a stranger in both. These blacks are to be differentiated from the wretched blacks living in squalor but they all (elite and wretched) share blackness. At the same time, the former stand on the margins of whiteness. The black intellectual or elite is merely a wanderer between two worlds, torn between the need to succeed (by mimicking whiteness) and the longing for the black familiar and sameness (the double consciousness). This is the mark of a lonely being, part of two worlds but ultimately part of no world, with no clearly-definable identity in post-colonial society.

Black intellectuals were often at the forefront in the fight for liberation in Africa, and they regularly articulated mainstream liberal values focusing on political and civil rights. Any deeply-rooted Afro-centric ideals animating the anti-colonial movements, which may have led to post-colonial processes re-valuing blackness as a group identity on a significant scale, alongside in uneasy tension the assertion of individual liberties and rights, was not forthcoming. Nor were the popular struggles as embedded in the anti-colonial struggles continued post-independence as, for the elites, liberation had been won for one and all on the date of independence. For Fanon, this abandonment of historical struggles arose because of the increasing integration of post-colonial states – as driven by the new and self-accumulating elites – of post-colonial African states into the neo-colonial global political economy.

One of the greatest misfortunes, from Fanon's viewpoint, was that the new elites saw no need to further liberate the black mind. It was as if freedom and liberation were lucid concepts devoid of any ambiguity, as if Euro-centric discourses and paradigms pertaining to these concepts were no longer Euro-centric but were universally valid. Because of this, it had come to the point already, in the early post-colonial period, where the post-colonised 'masses' no longer thought for themselves because others were (and in fact should) doing the thinking for them (Fanon, 2001:166), including the elite as proxies for neo-colonialism. This simply becomes a new and more troubling form of mental slavery, in which the intellect of the 'masses' (on non-elites) is demeaned and unworthy of consideration in building the new nation. In the end, the popular intellect is repressed and is unable to be publicly articulated and valued.

It is for this reason that Fanon believed decolonisation to be a failed revolution because it did not liberate the post-colonial mind from the Manichean dichotomy. All mindsets and psyches remain polluted and entrapped because Manichean infrastructures and practices continue to reproduce blackness in a colonial-like condition as if were a lower form of life and existence. The post-colonial elites, in capturing the colonial state, use this state to supposedly bring about the new liberated human, but Fanon argues that this is more about reproducing than transforming existing structures. The new humanity cannot be constructed through the same socio-political (colonial) system that once oppressed 'the other' (Fanon, 2001). In this way, the new elite distance themselves from 'the masses' and in effect other them despite the shared epidermal surface.

Colonial and post-colonial African society share common dimensions, according to Fanon, because of the reproduction of the colonial condition in new forms (or new Manichaeism). These dimensions include the mimicry of white culture, the devaluing of blackness and black inferiority. The crucial difference which Fanon points out is that, under colonialism, black subjects were legally and formally oppressed through legitimised racially-based socio-political arrangements and therefore they were expected to accept the prevailing social order and Manichean practices. Post-colonial society, almost by definition, was designed to break free from these formal arrangements and practices but instead they became inscribed in a new-colonial order marked more by continuity than rupture with the past. Before there may have been an excuse for the un-liberated condition of blackness and for the very existence of blackness as socially-constructed, but this was not supposed the case subsequent to political

independence. According to Fanon (2001:199), African leaders and black intellectuals were all too willing and able to pawn their responsibility to realise the freedom and liberation of the black 'masses' in exchange for accommodation with (and integration into) the post-colonial world order (a white world) and the chances of private accumulation this facilitated. Fanon (2001:149) encapsulated this positioning of the new elite as "intellectual laziness".

Therefore, we are still living with the imposed inferiority of blackness, though not legally imposed. This begs many questions such as: why do blacks still live with and within a paradigm of knowledge that depreciates their livelihoods and very existence? Are there any efforts to form alternative truths and knowledges based on the uniquely lived experience of blackness (and, if so, in what ways)? Such perplexing questions fuel the need for further investigation into Fanon's thoughts and claims, as well as their relevance to post-colonial societies in Africa long after Fanon analysed the early post-colonial condition. Fanon strongly believed in the possibility of another form of human existence, a humane existence, which was forward-looking and would transcend the categorizations, identities and subjectivities of the past and present. The present is trapped in the past. Fanon clearly shows that the negative connotations of "global compartmentalisation" are still holding black people back, not just from the central white politic, but also from themselves and each other (Fanon, 2001:40). The future (the new 'man') is not to be discovered temporally in the past (for instance, by discovering a pre-colonial African essentialism) or spatially beyond Africa in the world of whiteness (looking to white Europe for all the answers) (Fanon, 2001:255). The new 'man', which may entail new forms of identities or even non-identities, is emergent and must arise afresh in and through ongoing struggles for liberation (Fanon, 2001:255).

2.3 Merits of Fanon

Fanon's work remains influential within academic circles and has been subjected to a range of interpretations as well as criticisms. A number of scholars, as outlined below, have adopted Fanon-influenced (or Fanonian) perspectives which seek to grapple analytically with the complexities of race, identity and blackness in the context of both colonialism and post-colonialism. Some of these have brought to light newly-emerging concerns which Fanon did not (and could not have expected to) fully anticipate and appreciate when writing half a century ago, because of significant changes globally and within Africa. The purpose of this section is to show

the ways in which scholars have drawn upon the thoughts of Fanon and thereby demonstrate the enduring relevance of Fanon's claims.

Fanon's work has been incorporated into and used in the work of post-colonial theory, notably the work of leading post-colonial scholar and comparative linguist Edward Said, with specific regard to his identification and unpacking of the discourse of Orientalism. In also drawing upon the work of Foucault, Said (1978) highlights the relationship between dominant paradigms of knowledge and truth, cultural and intellectual hegemony, and the power of colonialism and empire. One culture, namely the dominant Occident (or Western) culture, has the will and power to decide what is knowledge and truth (in a strongly Manichean way), and this frames and justifies colonial-style interventions in the Orient. Though Said focuses primarily on the Orientalist discourse, he does refer to the derogatory images and depictions of Africa which were intrinsic to the colonial scramble for Africa. The colonial discourse ties in with Fanon's notion of the colonial gaze, which constructs Africa as befitting of subordination and domination. Like Fanon argues, only one self-evident truth (the white truth) is posited and acknowledged to exist and this is universalised through colonial and neo-colonial force to paint the other in demonic colours.

There is a hypocrisy that is rife in this dominant, Western and white, discursive structure, a Manichean framing which promotes itself (as pure and unadulterated) and which condemns the other (Orient and Africa). The sheer hypocrisy of the white West can be seen in the Fanonian perspective of Bernasconi (2004), who examines the significance of violence in Fanon's work. According to modern (white) ideals, one of the greatest problems within Fanon's work is said to be his glorification of violence in the anti-colonial struggle. Leaving aside any inquiry of the exact place and status of violence in Fanon's analysis, it is quite clear that the imperial west was founded upon a history of violence. Of course, this is justified through circular reasoning: for example, Africa is constructed and imagined as beastly and it only knows and respects the language of force, therefore violent subjugation is a necessity. Fanon of course saw through this, namely, to carve out world empires with violence and then to condemn the other for its apparent barbaric tendencies in the use of anti-colonial violence is a global double standard. Again, this takes us back to a central point of Fanon, in which the truths of the west are portrayed as universal truths when in fact they are particular truths masquerading as universals (or the desires

of the white West). Thus, scholars drawing upon Fanon (like Fanon himself) speak out against this very real but ultimately fraudulent universal.

Though the Manichean discourse differentiates between whiteness and blackness in a stark form, Fanon was aware of internal differentiation within the black identity, and this has been further developed by others with respect to post-colonial society (Williams and Yousaf, 2013:124). Fanon spoke in particular about the division between the accumulating new elite (as embodying expertise and intellectualism) and the subordinate and voiceless damned of the earth living a miserable existence. This as well as other possible distinctions speak to the heterogeneity within blackness and undercut any notion of essentialism vis-à-vis black existence and identity. Blackness as such does not exist or at least does not exist in any pure form. Rather, the experiences and practices of being black in the world are subject to considerable social, historical and spatial variation.

Fanon is adamant that the overall identity and experience of being black is one of inferiority and mimicry albeit this takes on different form (Pithouse, 2003). At the same time, in recognising different modes and experiences of being black, he challenges the universalising white truths embodied in the post-colonial elites. With the intimate relationship between experience, subjectivity, knowledge and truth, there are many truths as opposed to just one (Mba, 2013). In arguing for the other (in this case, the wretched other), Fanon is asserting that different truths exist but that some truths assert themselves over others and drown out the other. Though Fanon may not be arguing for the co-existence and accommodation of all truths, he is at least returning the gaze by acknowledging, respecting, embracing and proclaiming the truth of the subordinate other and thus starting with an axiom of many truths in the world. With respect to post-colonial Africa, this proclamation is not about defending blackness *per se* but of stating the case for a privileging of the voices of the marginalised and excluded (those deemed inferior, but not from Fanon's vantage point).

This of course brings to the fore the heavy gravity of the colonial past and its resounding effects on the present. There is the urgent need to demolish the colonial structures and practices ingrained in the post-colonial present (including the association of blackness with inferiority), and this would entail the white world genuinely confronting its ghostly colonial past as well as its will to dominate others by universalising its whiteness (Gates, 1991:458). Post-colonial

societies are still struggling with the effects of the former colonial empires, including with reference to forms of identity and nation-building.

With regard to racial identity, a kind of tenseness and ambiguity prevails, as the post-colonial citizen is both defined and not defined by the former colonial order (Said, 1989). For example, in the case of former settler societies, racial categorisations as a formal basis for oppressive practices no longer exist. But racial identities, inequalities and experiences abound in society and remain institutionalised in many spheres of social life. Manichean discourses along the strict lines of racial identity (as under colonialism) are ripe but only privately expressed. Ironically, from the perspective of Manichean whites, to raise and address race publicly is to harp unnecessarily on the colonial past (or in the case of South Africa, the apartheid past). For them, race is a taboo subject because it breeds so-called reverse racism. Overall, a dilemma seems to exist: of being forbidden from acknowledging race and its current significance, at a time when human experience remains fundamentally shaped by race (Monahan, 2013). At the same time, the post-colonial elites rarely tackle the socio-economic conditions underpinning racialised experiences because of integration into the neo-colonial (and neo-liberal) world order.

Fanon clearly shows that any form of Manichean dualism enslaves all humanity by virtue of de-humanising all within it: white and black, elite and wretched. All are tightly encased within their fixed identities which smother any possibility of human creativity. But, beyond this, Fanon's work is in particular a memoir to the black colonial oppressed and to the post-colonial wretched of the earth, all of whom were or are exposed to (and demeaned by) white and Western humanism, modernism and civilisation (Sardar, 1986). All humans (including the 'othered') are deserving of respect and dignity, and Fanon seeks to build the intellectual ground on which the other are recognised as such and are granted the right to define their own truths. When it comes to the post-colonial other, Fanon therefore insists that the damned of the earth be given the space (or perhaps more correctly produce the space themselves) for self-discovery by creating lived and rooted meanings and truths from their own experiences (as opposed to truths imposed upon them from above); and this is a point which has contemporary significance (Gibson 1999, Pithouse 2003, and Serequeberhan 1996).

This entails a personal and collective journey of self-realisation. More specifically, given Fanon's critique of the social structures and hegemonic discourses of post-colonial society, it requires countering a way of reasoning and 'truth' based upon a colonial-style paradigm of

knowledge which continues to de-humanise by distinguishing between levels of humanity (Penney 2004, Judy 1996, and Gordon 1996). In other words, it entails challenging the ongoing prevalence of a colonial-dualistic framing of identity, and the now elite-based gaze which discursively posits post-colonial identities which places marginalised and voiceless blacks in positions of material and mental inferiority (Moulard-Leonard 2005, and Schmitt 1996). It also requires confronting modes of domination through various localised means of social and political struggle (Sartre, 2001).

This thesis is specifically concerned with the question of black identity and it is clear that Fanon's work is of great importance in this regard. In the end, for Fanon, the meaning and existence of blackness (and, in many instances the ongoing search for blackness) cannot be understood in essentialist terms as racial identity is socially-constructed. Blackness, in all its manifestations, is contingent upon practices, experiences and narratives as historically- and spatially-structured (Monahan 2013, and Nagel 1994). Fanon undoubtedly recognised the un-sutured and fluid character of blackness and the non-binary character of racial identities. He was not unfamiliar with hybridity and creolisation, as well as the interdependent and intertwined cultures and histories of so-called different racial groupings (Said, 1993:19), such that an 'authentic' identity would be a contradiction in terms (Nicholls, 2011). As I explore in the next section, Fanon may not have captured the question of identity in all its complexities.

2.4 Possible Limitations of Fanon

Though drawing significantly on the work of Fanon for this thesis, there are a number of criticisms of Fanon which shall be taken into account to gain a more nuanced understanding of black identity (specifically amongst university students, and as based on their own self-articulations and lived experiences). Fanon therefore is seen as providing a necessary but insufficient analytical framework for understanding black identity. In the end, the criticisms offered (or limitations found) do not provide an overall critique of Fanon but rather a means to enhance his ideas such that the perspective used in the thesis can still be considered as a Fanonian one.

There are two criticisms of Fanon which are important but I do not consider them as particularly pertinent for this thesis. The first criticism relates to his apparent glorification of violence as a method of struggle, which has led at times to his overall body of work being

dismissed as irrelevant (San Juan, Jr. 1999). This status of violence in Fanon's arguments are quite complex and I do dwell upon this because violence is not a key focus of my study. A second criticism also argues for the irrelevance of Fanon, based on context and time. It is sometimes claimed that the significance of Fanon to contemporary conditions is dubious because Fanon speaks to a different, early post-colonial, period prior for instance to the rise of neo-liberal restructuring globally (Mowitz, 1999). While there may be some merit in addressing this criticism, it would entail a prolonged and distracting diversion into the sociology of knowledge. Hopefully, by discussing Fanon in a balanced fashion (including the pros and cons of his work), I thereby demonstrate the relevance of Fanon and the particular points from his theoretical corpus which transcend time and space.

In this regard, I refer to the question of the extent to which race continues to constitute (or even constitutes) an important form of identity and subjectivity. The anti-colonial struggles in Africa (in either settler or non-settler nations) were racially-based struggles in the main, and obviously for legitimate reasons. But, in being in large part about race, other forms of identity and struggle were marginalised or at least downplayed, including along class and gender lines (Bergner, 1995:85). Fanon of course does not totally deny their significance; in fact, his analysis of post-colonial Africa with its division between elites and the wretched, speaks to the relevance of class-based divisions (and these divisions are increasingly pertinent as a basis for understanding post-colonial Africa). Despite this, and of course this is applicable to scores of other theorists, Fanon does not provide any kind of theory of intersection of class, race and gender. And hence arguments sometimes are made that Fanon is guilty of generalising black identity and experience without a nuanced regard for historical and spatial context (Gauch, 2002:120); and that he therefore essentialises the 'native'. In this vein, it is also claimed that Fanon understates the importance of cultural variation within race by focusing exclusively on race a-historically (Haddour, 2005) and thus assuming the existence of a common uncomplicated racial identity when in fact there are diverse and fluctuating racial identities which are not clearly bounded as discrete social entities. Though this criticism of Fanon is open to continuing debate, the key point here is that the multiplicity of social identities (and in all their fluidity) must be unpacked in order to facilitate a comprehensive understanding of the human condition.

This raises critical questions about identity and Fanon's position on the importance of social difference and identity. From his humanist perspective, he calls for a new 'man' which is

to denote a new way of life without the Manichean beliefs and practices of the past. But this has been interpreted to mean a new 'skin', which would mean an ongoing insistence on identity and categorisation (Gauch, 2002:125). Fanon is seen then as encouraging a future without racial categorisation but not a world without any form categorisation (including creolity); a world full of difference but not with the objectification and dehumanisation of difference as currently exists. Insofar as difference becomes encapsulated in identity, even the existence of a multiplicity of identities (or multiple 'skins') embodied in one individual, this serves as a basis for imprisoning human creativity and ingenuity. Thus, it may be argued that Fanon does not take his argument far enough in calling for an anti-identitarian world.

One questionable argument by Fanon relates to the notion of the 'double consciousness' and particularly whether dual (or even multiple) racially-based identities involve the lonely and confusing identity crisis which Fanon seems to imply (Bhabha 1986, and Majavu 2008). This notion in fact did not originate with Fanon but with du Bois (Moore, 2005:752) who defined double consciousness as the experience amongst American Negroes of a 'two-ness' within the self – the realisation and acknowledgement of belonging to two worlds and cultures (of black Africa and white America) with two seemingly un-reconcilable longings etched within their very identity and existence. In the context of Africa, Fanon spoke more specifically about the identity of black intellectuals, as being effectively crippled emotionally from this two-ness (caught between a belonging to Africa and a striving for white civility, and in a constant disabling internal struggle to find a place in this world). This place, for Fanon, is a lonely void in which the black intellectual is both everywhere and nowhere, never truly belonging or being accepted by blacks and whites. The problem with this argument is that, the condition of double consciousness may not be particularly uncommon or even inhibiting in terms of negotiating your way through the world. Certainly, any internal or cross-border migration regularly entails processes akin to what Fanon is speaking about – namely, the internalisation and adoption of multiple cultural tropes and practices (and often without any racial connotations), leading to diverse and complex statuses of hybridity which could be said to increasingly mark (and not plague) the human condition. Thus, a 'double consciousness' should not be conceptualised as a deviant form of racial (or other) identity.

Fanon clearly writes rather angrily about the racial injustices of the past and its crippling effects for post-colonial Africa. In doing so, it may be that his claims about black identity reflect

his own troubling racial experiences in multiple social settings, and that he is universalising his own particular experiences (and presenting them as the black experience) as he claims colonialists do in universalising, through the white gaze, their understandings of the world. If there is some truth in his work, then it may be that he is simply highlighting the inferiority complex of black intellectuals like himself (Hiddleston, 2008:3). There is a class dynamic here as well, such that if black inferiority exists amongst the popular classes (the wretched) in Africa then it is unlikely that Fanon captured it experientially or analytically. For Fanon to universalise his experiences in such a way and then to speak seemingly on behalf of the wretched as almost a representative of them, may reflect a form of elitism on his part which serves only to deny the wretched voice and subjectivity.

Additionally, the very degrading ‘othering’ which Fanon writes about (the othering of blacks by whites) is reproduced in his work by othering the whites – by objectifying them as inherently racist self-righteous masters (and therefore contribution to reproducing the Manichean dualism). In a related matter, it has been claimed that Fanon does not fully appreciate that the colonial gaze alone is insufficient to understand the self-identities of blacks – perhaps even the inferiority complex says less about the prevalence of the gaze and more about the entire pressure blacks place upon themselves (San Juan Jr. 1999:135). In this regard, it is argued that Fanon’s use of the notion of an inferiority complex is marked by considerable ambiguity and un-clarity (including the grounds on which to ‘measure’ it) (Majavu, 2008).

Fanon clearly is not without fault. One of the problems in assessing the pros and cons of Fanon’s work are the many different interpretations which have been offered of his thoughts. The key area of interest for this thesis is around black identity and specifically black inferiority, which are points I discuss in some detail in the following sections. In the end, I would claim that Fanon does not essentialise black identity and the condition of blackness, that he is sensitive to the contingencies of space and time, and that it is possible to incorporate the existence of multiple and fluid social identities (including racial identities) in his broad framing of the post-colonial condition (Alessandrini, 1999).

2.5 Unpacking Black Identity

This section further examines the complexity of black identity, black identities and specifically black inferiority by addressing themes and thoughts which are consistent with or develop

Fanon's claims. This will entail reference to non-Fanonian literature designed to bolster a broadly Fanonian perspective. The purpose is to formulate a critical Fanonian perspective on black identities. It is both critical and Fanonian in the sense that, while situated within Fanon's work, the perspective stretches the limits of this work without going beyond it. This perspective will be used to facilitate an understanding of the case-study evidence presented later in the thesis. After all, even after the end of colonial (and the end of apartheid twenty years ago), black people continue to journey along the road to experiential self-discovery (Onyeani 2000, Jordan and Hernandez-Reif 2009, Burrell 2010). Themes raised in this section focus on inferiority, mimicry and double consciousness.

2.5.1 Heterogeneity and Fluidity

There is no set universal black identity to which all black people around the world unproblematically subscribe or within which their racial identities can be neatly encapsulated. Black identity as such can be said to not exist, as it is an abstract category. Black identities exist and these are heterogeneous by varying across space and time under specific contingent circumstances. These racial identities, like all social identities, are un-sutured and in a constant state of flux, such that studying black identities requires a deep sensitivity to these fluid and unbounded complexities. As well, though racial identities do categorise, classify and objectify, and thereby possibly stabilise social situations, they are simultaneously rich in meaning, subjectivity and agency (which in part explains their fluidity) (Phillips and Potter, 2006:311). In this sense, identities are also in state of becoming. It is unlikely that Fanon fully appreciated this, as he was in large part immersed in the political exigencies and imperatives of his time, including the need to overthrow white colonial rule. Because of this, he tends to reduce racial identities to polar opposites (as if the Manichean dualism, as reflected in the white gaze, in fact captured the complexities of racial identities on the ground). Black identity, in this regard, should not be understood in such antagonistic terms vis-à-vis whiteness, or at least blackness should be seen as incorporating the white world (as the social world invariably becomes embodied in some way in all of us). Black identities, in this way, become the embodied and bodily manifestation of the complex series of colonial and ongoing post-colonial encounters involving the black man in the white world (and the white world in the black man) (Mercer, 1987:34).

Black identities represent the multiplicity and multiple lives of black people, acknowledging that the experiences of blackness take on different and diverse forms. Martin, (2010:235) argues that blackness is “in many ways the product of contradictions, which involves treating the collectivity of individuals who identify themselves as black as a generic group despite their social, economic, political, and cultural differences”. Despite the reference to the existence of a generic group, it is ultimately the questions of difference and contradiction that embody the black experience. The heterogeneity of blackness therefore must be brought to the fore in any analysis of black identity, such that the experience of being black in the world cannot be read off from specific black experiences. As Fanon himself indicated, there is no intrinsic intention or desire amongst black people to form their own collective knowledge and identity. The black collective does not exist in-and-of-itself. If it does come into existence, it does so through recognition of the historical past (for instance, a shared history of victimhood) and the recognition through struggle of overturning the past. Its creation is not pre-determined or inevitable but is a historical task.

Black intellectuals and elites possibly experience the un-collective experience of blackness most strongly, as they encounter at times animosity and rejection not only from the white public but also from within the black polity (Khana and Harris, 2010:641). Related to this, the mimicry of ‘whiteness’ on the part of some blacks foments dissension within the black collective, by which some black identities (particularly elites) are closer to aligning themselves with whiteness than others. The blackness of the intellectual is riddled with contradictions and tensions (the double consciousness), as the intellectual maneuvers in and between two worlds, often wearing different hats (or skins) to suit the appropriate occasion. Much like Fanon, Moore (2005:752) thus states: “Essentially, double consciousness is adaptive as a survival technique, but it can be considered maladaptive because it can generate mental conflict.” As indicated previously, any uniqueness said to be located within the double consciousness of the black intellectual should not be overplayed, as all individuals are a mixed array of identities (and not just racial identities) leading to varying degrees of internal turmoil.

It could be argued though that the black intellectual experiences this turmoil in a particularly pronounced fashion, particularly in a society which is animated by ongoing racial practices and conflicts. In the end, racial identities (as social constructs) are alive and well insofar as the world gives meaning to epidermal surfaces and therefore attaches social and

political significance to them (Nayak 2006, and Campbell and Oakes 1993). Race then only has meaning because we will it through racially-based vocabularies, discourses and practices, and hence we also will its effects including outright racism, insidious racism and racial subordination and inferiority. Of course, in many cases, this entails positing the existence of separate races for purely political reasons, such as recognising racial identities in order to legitimise the claim to resources in society (Chari, 2004), whether under conditions of colonialism in the case of whites or in post-colonial society with reference to so-called reverse discrimination, affirmative action or black empowerment. The latter set of programmes seek to overcome the racial legacies of the past, but highlight the continued importance of racial identification in the present though apparently simultaneously seeking to undo racial classification in the future. Whether they simply reinforce racial stereotypes or revalue blackness remains unclear (Smith, 2013) but, in the end, they may simply involve the increasing incorporation of blacks into a liberal world dominated by black elites and their white neo-colonial allies (Thomas, 2002).

What does seem clear is that racial identities are regularly experienced in fixed and static and as encompassing our very being, at least in racial societies like South Africa. Though, analytically, I argue that all identities (including racial) are fluid and un-sutured, we do not necessarily experience our whiteness or blackness in this way. Again, the uncertainty and ambiguity of racial identities may be most prevalent amongst black intellectuals, and hence the importance of this thesis. The questions that young black intellectuals face when it comes to making sense of their own identities are marked by complexities and perplexities and cause considerable anxiety for them. They continue to live in a white world and are faced with merely accepting the established norms and protocols of white society or charting and creating a more indeterminate and confused (but perhaps more fulfilling) sense of their blackness and self-worth (Thomas 2002, and Langston 1997). Whatever path or paths they pursue will require engaging with an inherited inferiority complex and a white culture which values whiteness over blackness.

2.5.2 Inferiority of black identities

A black inferiority complex has been well-demonstrated amongst young black Americans, notably in the social experiment known as Clark Doll Test, and it has been repeated in a range of social settings beyond the United States (Jordan and Hernandez-Reif, 2009). The Clark Doll test was an experiment conducted amongst a group of young (both black and white) children in which they were asked to describe the two dolls presented before them, one of which was black

and the other white. The point of the social experiment was to identify the connotations of blackness and whiteness for these children. Astonishingly, black children spoke about the black dolls in a highly negative light, with terms such as stupid and ugly to designate their qualities. In doing so, they were constructing and articulating a self-image of themselves as inferior at such a tender age, and presumably as a result of socialisation in the home, school, with peers and through television. This development of a sense of racial-self did not emerge explicitly and consciously, but nevertheless it had been firmly embedded in their consciousness.

A basic definition of self-esteem, which relates to the question of inferiority as understood in terms of subjective meaning, is the perception one has of oneself. More specifically, this entails “the summary judgment of the collected separate assessments of one’s self-meaning, self-identity, self-image, and self-concepts” (Bailey, 2003:393). Though it is possible to understand inferiority objectively in terms of an analysis of the existing socio-political structure and associated practices (for example, a system of racial domination), the focus here is on inferiority as a subjective complex laden with meanings. The structural conditions existing as well as historical legacies clearly shape subjective understandings of oneself. One must first understand the structural conditions underpinning black inferiority before one can understand its effects and, in this light, the following chapter is designed to provide the structural and historical for black university students in contemporary South Africa. Therefore Oliver who refers broadly to the “interrelationship between structural pressures and cultural adaptations” in which the white world and various racial practices condition black subjectivities and the way in which black subjects live in the white world (Oliver, 1989:17). But black identities, and specifically black self-imageries, are no way reducible to (or fully ensnared in) structural contexts and conditions, as black subjects negotiate and manoeuvre their way through the world of whiteness.

With this in mind, black inferiority is a negative feeling of self and worth arising from one’s blackness. It may even involve being uncomfortable with one’s epidermal surface (or in one’s skin) or – even more far-reaching – self-hatred, accompanied by a constant comparison with the other (whiteness) and a longing to be the other. Fanon offers structural and historical reasons for this, and emphasises that inferiority is marked by considerable anxiety and the aspiration to be white, as if whiteness was a form of redemption. At the same time, what it means to be black in the white world, and the ways in which blacks position and re-position themselves

in this world, may at least implicitly involve challenging whiteness and re-valuing and re-signifying blackness in a positive and life-affirming manner – in a manner which does not deny blackness but ensures that blackness finds its own way into existence by asserting and confirming its intrinsic dignity.

Black inferiority exists and is reproduced in both the private and public spheres, in the latter instance often through the symbolism and images in the media and language more broadly (Kaplan 1999, and Chekri 2006). The images propagated, often unintentionally, remain rooted in the Manichean discourse and lead to the experience of black inferiority being riddled with trauma. To be black in a white world is to be traumatised by one's blackness and this leads to constant questioning – through internal conversations – of one's very being in the world. With negative imagery of blackness circulating widely in the public sphere (such as the seeming inherent link between blackness and danger), even encounters of whites with black people becomes traumatic for the former as well as for the latter (Kaplan, 1999:146). In fact, Fanon's work (particularly *Black Skin, White Masks*) is a large part of his public articulation and expression of the personal lived trauma of blackness. Additionally, encounters with black people are not just traumatic for whites but for black people themselves. As Forsythe (1970:3) claims, in a manner consistent with Fanon, the black 'man' is "constantly trying to run away from his own individuality and to annihilate his presence". This trauma, arising from being categorised as different and to be avoided and feared, speaks to and embodies the self-image of black inferiority, as not fitting into the white world as whole beings worthy of human dignity.

This is currently being reinforced through the digital divide which is constructed often along racial lines. There is said to be a technological and digital divide amongst black and white, "due to the connotations surrounding technology, namely that technology is associated with whites and progress and development and modernity while blacks are more associated with culture, tradition, nature and primitiveness" (Hobson, 2008:111). This technicist understanding of blackness and whiteness has a long history, and traditionally the technological divide has had gender connotations as well. It is also more broadly related to modernist thinking, with modernity and civility associated with the white industrial revolutions of Europe (despite the fact that the black Haitian revolution had a more emancipatory thrust, comparatively speaking). In the case of technology, the prevailing discourse surrounding it begins with the resounding assumption that black people are technologically inferior either intellectually or economically

and hence are unable to partake in technological advances without expert (read ‘white’) advice and assistance. It is then the duty of the white savoir to bring technology to ‘the blacks’. A similar discourse arises in the case of farming and agriculture, at least in South Africa – blacks receiving land under the state’s land reform programme now require a white mentor to teach them the modern and efficient (read ‘white’) ways of farming. Such constructions of whiteness and blackness exist worldwide. In the United States, the media’s ideal images of success in life focus on whiteness, which blacks are expected to emulate. As Oliver (1989:19) argues more generally, “America’s cultural ideology has been deliberately designed to glorify whiteness and to denigrate blackness. Consequently, this process has led to the cultural annihilation of Black Americans”. This leads to blacks defining themselves not in terms of what they are, but in terms of what they are not (white).

2.5.3 Black Identities, Class and Consumerism

The relationship between race and class, and how they articulate and intersect, remains controversial. If race though is to be taken seriously, it cannot be understood analytically as simply a manifestation of class, class relations and class domination. Race has its own set of condition of existence irreducible to class. However, race and racial identities always exist under specific material conditions. In this regard, Fanon’s (2008: 36) statement that “one is white as one is rich, as one is beautiful, as one is intelligent” certainly poses the possibility of an overlap between racial identities and class inequalities, with racial inferiority (at least understood objectively) often having a pronounced class basis to it. At the same time, under post-colonial conditions, it is generally recognised that class distinctions within racial groups has becoming increasingly prevalent, as Fanon highlights with the division between elites and the damned.

Slavery and colonialism, as economic and political systems, demonstrate the intersection between class and race, and the ways in which this facilitated a mentality of submissiveness amongst blacks. Regimes of oppression in general need ways of making the oppressed compliant and acts of state coercion in themselves are normally not sufficient. Oppression entails attempts to legitimise the system or, at least, the oppressed require constant reminders of the prevailing social hierarchy and its importance. Even the most coercive form of oppression does not simply involve physically subduing the other. Some sort of cultural hegemony normally exists to justify the deserving of ill-treatment in the subjected other, or possibly ways of integrating the other into

the system of oppression prevail so that the other complies with (if not consents to) domination. As noted, this regularly entails appealing to a Manichean discourse which posits the existence of blackness as inferiority.

Even under post-colonial or ‘modern’ conditions, black inferiority is still posited, as shown with reference to the theme of technology. But, for the rising black elite (or more broadly, the so-called black middle class), the self-image of black inferiority is increasingly framed in terms of consumerism. Blackness remains inferior, but now the white world is offering a way out of this by encouraging the acquisition of commodities and a life-style associated with whiteness (and therefore to make black look white, sometimes literally). It is now possible to buy one’s way out of blackness and become integrated into the prosperous world of whiteness. This is what Burrell (2010: xii) calls “the masterful marketing of the myth of black inferiority to justify slavery within a [post-colonial] democracy”. For the middling blacks, the road to becoming a fully-fledged citizen in post-colonial liberal democracies is said to be paved with commodities and consumerism. This clearly has a class dimension to it but it draws upon the racial hierarchy. It may appear like a standard marketing strategy of turning wants into needs, but it has clear racial undertones in speaking implicitly to the conditions of mimicry and double consciousness embedded in the lives of aspiring blacks. Of course, insofar as the nirvana of white prosperity is beyond one’s reach, this only serves to reinforce the complex of inferiority which consumerism is meant to undermine.

This therefore involves two elements, which combined are meant to designate the process of becoming a citizen: first of all, constantly portraying blackness as a condition of sub-citizenship and devoid of humanity (to be a citizen and to be human is, ultimately, to be a consumer); and, secondly, by marketing bombardment, selling products to these black citizens-to-be as a form of redemption from their fallen state. Whites, even poor whites, do not need such redemption as they are white before they are poor; they thus do not need to demonstrate their whiteness. Further, the commodities sold are not just any commodities, they are commodities manufactured within the culture and economy of the white world. To aspire and achieve whiteness is to pursue consumerism and the white branding of the consumerist culture, and thereby to mimic the successful, beautiful and triumphant whiteness embedded within the hegemonic culture. Commodities become it seems a means of liberation, or perhaps a way of trying to mask the trauma of low black self-esteem (Burrell, 2010:141). For Onyeani (2000), this

implies consumption devoid of productive capacity, leading to the notion of ‘a rich black’ but not ‘a wealthy black’: “I am frightened and disgusted at the same time, at a people who produce nothing and consume everything” (Onyeani, 2000: xvii). They thus remain, as non-producers, ‘economic slaves’ at the mercy of a white-driven economy and therefore subordinate and victim to the white ‘other’ (Nini, 2013).

The claim here, which is relevant to the case study of elite black university students, is that the growth of a consumerist black middle class entails a form of integration into white culture and hence is bound to lead to a reshaping of black identities (which may simply involve re-inscribing black inferiority complexes in new and varying ways) (Khana and Harris, 2010:667). This is certainly not the kind of new ‘man’ which Fanon envisaged. White culture denotes a culture of wealth and mimicking this entails the commodification of blackness (Moore, 2005:760), although this may bring about changes to white culture. Nevertheless, as Martin (2010:236) laments, this leads to a universally-acknowledged truth that white culture becomes the measuring rod for success in life: “In America, this norm [or truth] is usually defined as White, thin, male, young, heterosexual, Christian, and financially secure. When all black Americans compare themselves to this mythical norm, they come up short and are automatically positioned as outsiders in a white-dominated society”. Due to the fragile and traumatic character of the black self, consumerism provides at least an indeterminate way forward (or a more coherent and measurable sense of self). As Zepf (2010:146) puts it, the marketing/commodity promise represents “a symbolic fulfillment of those hidden longings that became unconscious in the past rather than a real fulfillment”.

This is accomplished without challenging necessarily the hegemony of whiteness. At the same time, it may entail a kind of strategic assimilation by middle class blacks into white consumerism, as an attempt to take on a shade of whiteness to ensure some level of acceptance into the white world by becoming respectable citizens with a refined status mimicking the status of whiteness (Martin, 2010:238). In the end, then, white culture is not only the measuring rod for wealth but for prestige as well. It almost seems reminiscent of the notion under apartheid of Chinese people being designated as honorary whites (not quite white but as close to whiteness as possible for the other). In this regard, middle class blacks in the era of heightened consumerism display a strong and fluctuating blend of mimicry, hybridity and double consciousness, all of which speak to the profound ambiguity of being black in middling white society. Cornell West

(1990:107), in the case of the United States, has argued that “[t]here are four basic options for people of color interested in representation if they are to survive and thrive as serious practitioners of their craft: become white, reject whiteness, assimilate only out of necessity, or become a catalyst in which you embrace the new while remembering your roots”. These however may not be inherently mutually-exclusive options, and my discussion so far is suggestive of this, at least with reference to middle class blacks. The case study of Rhodes University explores this more fully, namely, the idea that blackness may at times be a complex mixture of some or all of these options. In other words, and because of its processual character, black identity (and inferiority) cannot be so neatly categorised and enclosed.

2.6 Racialised Educational Systems

One critical dimension to black identities and inferiorities, which speaks to the focus of the thesis, is education. Undoubtedly, educational systems the world over are biased in terms of race, for instance by streaming along racial (and other social fault) lines, thus leading to differential educational attainment with reference to a range of social identities. Critical to this is the pedagogical content, format and methodologies ingrained within the schooling system, including universities. While this thesis is not a study of universities and their relationship to the prevalence and shaping of racial inequalities and identities, the university setting is obviously of some significance in making sense of identity formation amongst the black students under study, as the pre-university education which they encountered before entering university.

In terms of content, the educational system continues to prioritise if not glorify white culture, white history and white achievements, and the institutional culture of this system is often uncomfortable and alienating for black students (or for people of colour more broadly). Many current educational systems (and this will be demonstrated in the case of South Africa in the next chapter) still practice a colonial-style education (Onyeani, 2000:138). On a similar note, with its own history of racial oppression, Oliver thus argues for the United States:

The same educational process which inspires and stimulates the oppressor with the thought that he is everything and has accomplished everything worthwhile, depresses and crushes at the same time the spark of genius in the Negro by making him feel that his race does not amount to much and never will measure up to the standards of other peoples. The Negro thus educated is a hopeless liability of the race (Oliver, 1989:35).

Despite equalities of education opportunities and racial integration in schools in many places, the vast racial differences in the conditions of existence (or socio-economic conditions) as well as the historical legacies of racial oppression are to the detriment of the other. Further, despite discursive claims that the educational system is an unbiased sorting mechanism, institutional biases within the education system disadvantage the other. The educational playing field is anything but flat (Moran, 2005:59).

In situations such as these, it is not usual that blame for differential educational attainment in terms of race involves blaming the victim – the student (and his or her family, or even race for that matter) is supposed to take responsibility for the failure to achieve and succeed. This contributes greatly to a racially-based inferiority complex, which is constantly reinforced. What Kebede (2001:540) says about colonial education is similarly applicable to post-colonial education: “Not only does this inferiority complex paralyze all the dynamic forces of the colonized world, but it also institutes a permanent state of dependency, which further aggravates the inability of colonized peoples to effect the necessary changes to go out of their misery and peripheral existence”. A term used at times to designate this process is “educated to feel inferior” (Umez, n.d.), which is mind un-liberated from the shackles of colonialism.

The hegemonic white culture animating the educational system effectively marginalises the voice of the other, suppressing its history and heroes. In this respect, Oliver (1989:20) notes: “Hence, the failure of Blacks to develop an Afrocentric cultural ideology has prevented Blacks from developing the sort of collective philosophy, definitions, cultural traditions, and institutions that other American racial and ethnic groups have established in order to facilitate their survival and progress in American society”. Afro-centric ideas, from the perspective of the hegemonic discourse, are framed by a Manichean discourse in which white culture is considered as constantly present and dynamic while the ideas of the ‘other’ belong to the past and shown remain the past (or should be studied, and hence not form the basis of modern forms of reasoning and rationality). In this context, the black student may experience a world without historical roots and grapple with anchoring his or present firmly in a known and acknowledged past. This makes it difficult for black students to have and retain a fixed identity or, at the most, their racial identity remains defined and entrapped within the legacy and agency of the hegemonic white system (with inferiority being an almost inevitable result) (Onyeani, 2000:4).

On a similar note, any progress that has been made (for instance, though more inclusive systems of education) in developing some form of post-colonial or post-liberation blackness is not nearly enough to thwart the extent of pre-existing perceptions and beliefs under Manichean rule and structure, as noticed by Sigelman and Tuch (1997) with their comment on affirmative action: “If blacks’ support for affirmative action is linked to their metastereotypes, then racial differences in policy views may reflect in part blacks’ disinclination to believe that whites who view them so negatively will act in good faith on key racial issues” (Sigelman and Tuch, 1997:100).

2.7 Conclusion

Fanon’s contribution to understanding black identity and inferiority clearly comes out in this chapter, particularly his insider’s perspective on the identities of black intellectuals and elites. I draw critically but sympathetically on the work of Fanon in this thesis, recognising both the strengths and weaknesses of his work. The purpose of the thesis is not to prove Fanon right or wrong, but it uses Fanon in a critical way in order to facilitate a nuanced understanding of black university student identities. It follows from this chapter that identity as such (and black identity more specifically) is a complex and ambiguous social phenomenon which is not static and tightly enclosed but is fluid and largely un-sutured. This means that racial identities, particularly black identities, are constantly in a state of becoming. Fanon’s work is undoubtedly of use for this thesis but it is now necessary to move beyond the realm of the theoretical (or the theoretical framing for the thesis) to a more specific and substantive examination of race and racial identities in South Africa and the educational system in particular – as a further framing for the study of black students at Rhodes University in contemporary South Africa. I do this in the next chapter.

Chapter Three: Race, Identity and Universities in South Africa

3.1 Introduction

South Africa has a deeply entrenched racial history in which racial identities were not simply lived realities but also formal and official classifications. Despite efforts by the post-apartheid government to transcend this ill-fated past, the transition away from apartheid has proven to be a long and difficult process such that themes pertaining to race and identity still have prominence in many institutional spheres of South African society and in day-to-day life itself. Addressing the main thesis' objective thus requires a discussion of race in both pre-1994 and post-apartheid South Africa, as I do in this chapter.

Discussing, more specifically, the educational system in South Africa – and particularly university education – is also critical to framing the particular focus of this thesis, and hence this chapter also discusses some of the prevailing literature on this topic insofar as it resonates with questions around black identities. Apartheid, and the Segregation period before it, created highly politicised ideas of race and identity when it came to education, and significant challenges prevail within the current schooling system in South Africa. The tertiary educational sector, which is rooted historically in white colonial institutional cultures, continues to face serious problems in terms of racial identities despite significant post-apartheid restructuring in the country (Goldschmidt, 2003), as this chapter shows.

3.2 A Fanonian Perspective on South Africa

Before considering black identities with regard to South African history and society (in the following two sections), I outline a broad Fanonian perspective on South Africa as articulated by the foremost Fanonian writer on South Africa, Nigel Gibson (Gibson 2009, 2011), which is consistent with many of the broader arguments from a critical Fanonian perspective outlined in the previous chapter. Fanon's work spoke directly to the colonial dialectic of master and slave and, this is pertinent to the settler colonial history of South Africa and to the contemporary re-inscribing of colonial-type conditions in today's South African society.

One of Fanon's major criticisms of post-colonial societies was that the new black elites failed to create a new way for the formerly oppressed. In arguing this, it is sometimes claimed (as indicated in the previous chapter) that Fanon overstressed elitist arrangements and groups in understanding the dynamics of (and forces for) social change, and thereby marginalised the oppressed themselves and underplayed the importance of agency-from-below. This criticism, from Gibson's perspective, seems somewhat harsh considering Fanon's recognition of empowerment of the marginalised (and wretched) masses (which have been betrayed by the nationalist movements across Africa). In this regard, the actualisation of a progressive and indeed revolutionary consciousness amongst the disrespected classes does not entail elite-driven processes (of empowering from above) but the unfolding of the experiential and rooted practices and activities of these classes. For Gibson, such humanistic thoughts make Fanon's work extremely relevant to South African history and society.

During the segregation and apartheid periods, as Gibson (2011) shows, blackness symbolised a state of non-being as codified for example in the notion of 'non-white'. This was the social and, indeed, human condition divorced from any grain of dignity. The struggle against apartheid, which widened and deepened during the 1980s (and which had elements of BCM contained within it, including amongst the black secondary students) was a struggle for dignity and respectability. This condition, since 1994, continues to exist – it has only changed its form. The current blackness, in the new South Africa, is shackness (or the wretched conditions of the masses, as vividly expressed in shacks, informal settlements and slums). The elites (both black and white) gaze upon the condition of shackness, and keep their social distance in doing so. This is of critical significance for this thesis, because of the complex positioning of black university students (who come from diverse backgrounds) in the elite-shackness Manichean-like dichotomy.

From the time that apartheid ended, and even during the transition period in the early 1990s, black South African elites generally adopted the same socio-political arrangements and practices left behind by their white predecessors. These new elites, who were part of the struggle for liberation, now seem to be indirectly oppressing 'their' people, with the ex-liberation movement (now ruling party) seemingly more concerned about self-enrichment than redistribution (as expressed the pervasiveness of tender-preuners, involving the shady issuing of state tenders). These elites, regularly living in former white urban residential areas (and even in

private estates surrounded by every security measure imaginable), appear to lack any empathy and understanding for their non-elite black counterparts when it comes to the latter's inclusion in the body politic (Gibson, 2009:12). The fact that the deaths at the Marikana Mine were labeled by the ruling party as a terrible tragedy and not an outright massacre speaks to this.

This is far from the humanism of Fanon, who spoke to the need to listen to (and not just hear) the experiential accounts of the wretched. After all, the wretched are poor but not stupid. This is probably most clearly articulated in the views within the shack dwellers movement of *Abahlali baseMjondolo* (Gibson 2011), which claims the human dignity of shack-dwellers and their capacity to think and act without the intrusive interventions of elite groups. The denial of voice is the denial of dignity. The claim by the ruling party elite that they represent the interests of the masses (and give voice to their concerns) is in effect a façade, and a denial of the human agency of those living the wretched condition of shackness. This goes contrary to the very notion of liberation and, from Fanon's perspective, is the epitome of betrayal (Gibson, 2012: 53).

3.3 Historical Formation of Black Identity in South Africa (to 1994)

In this section, I do not provide a systematic narrative of South African history but offer commentary on points critical to understanding black identity formation in the country. In what is now known as South Africa, the first encounter with European empire-building was at the tip of the continent, namely, the cape. The first Dutch settlers arrived in 1652 primarily as traders, envisaging the cape initially as an ideal stopping-point on route to the east but soon establishing a settlement. The cape soon became known as the Cape Colony under the control of the Dutch East India Company. Other settlers, including the British, were to follow. Considerable conflict ensued between the British and Dutch settlers over an extended period (and into the 1890s most dramatically). Also, white expansion into the interior and along the coast took place, leading in many instances to massive dispossession of land held by indigenous (black) peoples and intense battles and wars between them and the white settlers (including in the early 1800s in the area where Rhodes University is now situated).

Like elsewhere on the continent, missionaries also arrived and they came with the clear intention of preaching the beliefs and practices of Christianity to the indigenous people (the heathens in colonial language) and thereby converting them. Thus, the colonial project in South Africa was intertwined with Christian evangelism and the concerted attempt at incorporating the

indigenous people not only into a new political and economic order but also a spiritual and moral one (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1986). The emerging identity of the indigenous people, as propagated through missionary zeal, was effectively that of a lower form of social life and humanity, with their sole purpose of existence being servitude to foreign invaders.

The ‘discovery’ of minerals such as diamonds in Kimberley and gold in Johannesburg, the establishment of white-owned agricultural endeavours throughout large swathes of the occupied land, the undercutting of indigenous agriculture and the migrant labour system, together facilitated the emergence and consolidation of a racially-based economy of servitude, as formulated in the Union of South Africa in 1910 (Saul and Gelb, 1981). This was in large part a coercively-built system of control and domination, but Christian missionaries and churches also sought to subdue and subordinate the indigenous population by justifying the new colonial order as almost God-sent (as a form of cultural imperialism over the dark-skinned Natives). In the end, the establishment of the Union involved a complex mix of coercion, compliance and at times consent, with the colonialists and missionaries regularly reinforcing the efforts of each other (and even being un-distinguishable from each other).

The colonial experience for indigenous people in the pre-1910 period was not a homogenous and shared experience (Comaroff, 1989), as different groupings of indigenous people became incorporated into the colonial system at different times and places, under different conditions and in different ways. Forms and levels of contact and integration with the European churches varied considerably, as did the retention of pre-colonial spiritual beliefs. And, even though the Union subsumed all indigenous peoples (or Natives) under one colonial-like state (a racially-segregationist state), there were significant ancestral, ethnic and cultural differences within the Native population which, of course, the white-led government eventually sought to emphasise and reinforce. No one common black identity existed.

Nevertheless, beyond all doubt, a Manichean discourse – of the crudest form imaginable – effectively divided the South African population along clear racial lines. This discourse was not merely articulated by churches, but also by – amongst others – traders, colonial officials and ordinary white settlers (Marais, 1994). In this way, as Comaroff (1998:321) argues, the colonial setup involves “the construction, objectification, and negotiation of difference”. It should be highlighted though that this difference, as a racially-constructed dualism, was a difference built upon a hierarchal arrangement of humankind in which the colonial subject (as the undesirable

other) was in fact an object and existed to serve the colonial masters. This became duly incorporated into the Union through the denial of the right to vote for Natives, as they were considered as devoid of citizenship. They were deemed not as political subjects but as labouring subjects (or servants of the masters).

Drawing the connections between South African colonialism and a racial order (along with of course the dehumanising gaze) does not necessarily imply that colonialism was the birthplace of racism and othering. Indeed, the differentiation and hierarchal ordering of humanity pre-dates colonialism. In this regard, Guinier (2004:8) claims that racism, “meaning the maintenance of, and acquiescence in, racialised hierarchies governing resource distribution” has not existed (as indicated above) “simply through evil or irrational prejudice; it has been an artifact of geographic, political, and economic interests”. The point is that such racialised arrangements are not reducible to colonialism at least Europe-led colonialism. It may be that colonialism in Africa, and notably white settler colonialism in South Africa (and other white settler regimes in the region), took the racial Manichean social order to an all-new level, as the systems of segregation and apartheid in the case of South Africa likely demonstrate.

The history of both the segregation period (1910 to 1948) and the apartheid period (1948-1994) in South Africa is very well-documented. The segregation period institutionalised the racial order, such as the setting aside of land for Native Reserves as a means of ensuring a supply of cheap black labour for the mines and white farms, controlling black urbanisation through the influx control system and inhibiting permanent tenure for blacks in so-called white urban areas. Though there was some tension within the white citizenry about the form the racialised system should take, including a revolt by white workers to ensure protection against upward black worker mobility by way of the job colour bar, there was a broad consensus about the necessity and justification for segregationist policies. Apartheid, which emerged from the victory of the National Party in 1948, should not be seen as a watershed in South African history, as it simply reinforced the prevailing system of racial domination – including intensifying influx control measures and introducing the homeland (previously Reserve) system. Segregation was taken to extreme forms in all areas of life – social, economic and political (Seekings, 2008). Therefore, Apartheid sought to bring about a totalising Manichean order in South Africa. Because of this, any attempts to forge intra-class alliances across the racial divide in large part failed, despite the formation of the Congress Alliance in the 1950s.

During the 1970s, and as a result of economic constraints and crises, and rising social and political instability, Apartheid began to be reformed – for instance, influx control was loosened and black trade union activity was legalised. But the grand system of apartheid (separate development) continued to be pursued with significant vigour. A less racialised, and more liberal, political economy began to emerge, which eventually led to the transition period in the early 1990s and the non-racial national elections in 1994. During much of this time, the apartheid state had sought to facilitate the development of a black middle class, as a bulwark against revolution and to ensure reformist-type change. This was done haltingly in order to maintain control over its growth.

Black opposition to segregation was in large part led by the black elite (teachers, preachers, traders and so forth), though small in number and often mission-educated. Thus, many of the political organisations of the time (including the African National Congress) tended to reflect the respectability and civility of the rising middle class in terms of demands for incorporation into the existing racial system as ‘educated Natives’. They may have aspired to incorporate ‘the masses’ into a class alliance and form a national movement but they were not nationalist in orientation. The massive upsurge of strike activity amongst black workers in the 1940s radicalised the elite-driven political organisations, with the African National Congress (ANC) initiating, for instance, the Defiance Campaign in the 1950s. The split between the ANC and the Pan-African Congress (PAC) in the early 1960s led to significant questions about the form of political struggle, with the latter adopting a more Nativist direction and thereby excluding whites. It may be argued that the PAC was simply working within the Manichean dualism but altering the content of it by revaluing and asserting the agency of blackness. But it was often couched in tactical terms as a methodology of struggle. From the 1970s, ‘the struggle’ occupied centre stage across the South African urban landscape, through the trade union federations, student organisations and town-based community organisations (leading to the formation of the United Democratic Front (UDF) in the early 1980s and the effort to make South Africa ungovernable).

Undoubtedly, in tracing the development of segregation and apartheid and the struggles against racial domination, it becomes clear that there was no one black identity. Certainly, the black elite and middle classes often distanced themselves (socially if not politically) from the working classes and aspired to become acceptable members of civilised South African society.

An intriguing development, and one which is important to this thesis in that it speaks to the existence of an intellectual elite, is the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) starting in the late 1960s – led by black university students, who were confined primarily to black universities located in the homelands. In comparative terms, this was a movement led by young black elites who were able to enter the tertiary education system against all odds. Also of interest is that the movement was directly influenced by the thoughts of Fanon, along with others.

According to the BCM, the black identity *per se* in South Africa embodied inferiority, submissiveness and dependency on and servitude to whites. Though challenging the oppressive system of apartheid as a whole, in many ways the movement spoke specifically to the insecurity of black intellectuals. The BCM, as a movement founded by Steve Biko and others, entailed a concerted attempt to reevaluate and rejuvenate the condition of blackness, and to become proud of the dark epidermal surface in which ‘the other’ were contained by racial domination. In trying to distance itself and break free from the paternalistic influence of white liberals over the political formations of blacks, the BCM highlighted the importance of black unity and solidarity against apartheid – as epitomised in the notion ‘black man you are on your own’. In fact, it was lower level of education enforced upon blacks that brought the political movement

In conceptualising the existence of black inferiority, the BCM focused on cultural and ideological domination *vis-à-vis* the minds of blacks and hence the prevalence of mental inferiority. It considered the Bantu education system as critical to this inferiority, such that the BCM arose in the context of a critique of this educational system (a system which the BCM adherents were deeply embedded). As a result, in a kind of Fanon-like analysis of the black psyche, the minds of the oppressed needed liberation and this would form the basis for more material and structural forms of liberation. Thus, what set the BCM apart from other political organisations of the time (such as the black trade union movement) was its commitment to a new, more-rooted, paradigm of knowledge (or discourse) based on the lived experiences of the oppressed, a paradigm which returned the gaze so to speak in order to formulate and envisage a new way of being in the world. Again, like the PAC, it might be claimed that the BCM was simply turning the Manichean dualism on its head and asserting blackness not just against but over whiteness. Though there may be some truth to this, the BCM saw this as part of longer-term process in some ways equivalent to the new way (or the new human) which Fanon spoke about so passionately.

In any case, undoubtedly, the BCM fought against Manichaeism by challenging the racist order and by providing black people with the opportunity to voice their own concerns and to write their own history. This becomes clear in the way in which Biko articulated the purpose of the BCM:

Black Consciousness is in essence the realisation by the black [man] of the need to rally together with his brothers around the cause of their operation - the blackness of their skin - and to operate as a group in order to rid themselves of the shackles that bind them to perpetual servitude. It seeks to demonstrate the lie that black is an aberration from the 'normal' which is white. It is a manifestation of a new realisation that by seeking to run away from them and to emulate the white man, blacks are insulting the intelligence of whoever created them black. Black Consciousness therefore takes cognizance of the deliberateness of God's plan in creating black people black. It seeks to infuse the black community with a new-found pride in themselves, their efforts, their value systems, their culture, their religion and their outlook to life (quoted in Hirschmann, 1990:3-4).

Thus, the BCM did not entail incorporating its mostly elite membership into the existing white order by seeking to emulate the whites. It was not a matter of a racial partnership or elite (cross-race) pact, as it was embedded philosophically in a fundamental questioning of what it means to be human in a world which in the future would not hinge upon identities and identity politics.

Why the BCM withered away in the 1980s need not concern us here, though there have many reasons for this decline (Howarth 1997, Davis 2013, and Gibson 1988). Any enduring relevance of the BCM philosophy for South Africa today may be open to considerable debate. Certainly there are BCM-like philosophies still in existence, even though these may be grounded in organisational formations – like the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) – which Biko would likely find troubling. Nevertheless, one cannot deny the significance it once held. Dlanga (2013), in recently commemorating Steve Biko's death, states:

And as black people, we need to do our best to excel in every human endeavor we enter into. That should be the new black consciousness. It would be the best way to honor Steve Biko. His mission in life was to make the black person realise that he or she was not inferior to any other race on planet earth – that he or she was equal to everybody.

Black identity in South Africa had indeed moved significantly from conditions of servitude since the days of pre-1910 colonialism but racial identities, practices and ideas continue to be the

hallmark of post-Apartheid South African society. Race may be officially of the books, everyday lived experience continues to be saturated with race, as people continue to self-reflect and reflect upon the world around in very racially-inclined ways. I now turn to this, in the next section.

3.4 Racialised thinking and practices in post-Apartheid South Africa

Significant debates exist as to whether the post-1994 period in South Africa represents a period of continuity or discontinuity with the past. Certainly, important changes have taken place, including the granting of full civil and political rights to all as well as redistributive programmes such the social grant system and land reform. At the same time, the grand colonial condition (of white South Africa and Bantustans) for all intents and purposes is simply being reproduced in new forms. Apartheid also ended at a time of neo-liberal ascendancy globally, with the post-apartheid state seeking to integrate the national economy into the global neo-liberal economy and pursuing standard neo-liberal packages around macro-economic stability at home. Under the neo-liberal mantra, people are constructed discursively as individuals and specifically as individual consumers.

In the case of South Africa, this discursive framing sits uneasily with lived realities. Even officially, while races are no longer recognised, population groupings (the old racial categories) do; and population groupings are embedded in such policies as affirmative action and Black Economic Empowerment (BEE). Open discussions and debates about race do not exist in any meaningful way in the public sphere, as if race no longer resonates in contemporary South Africa. But, in terms of their daily lives, South Africans (at least implicitly) are fixated with group identity and race specifically. On a daily experiential basis, race is central to defining, delimiting, living and expressing identity in contemporary South Africa, in part because people continue to use familiar and trusted apartheid-style ways of thinking to classify and make sense of their everyday lives (Maré 2013, Motseme 2002, Vincent 2008, and Geertsema 2004). In this way, it could be argued that black identities in contemporary South Africa are an ambivalent and fluctuating mixture of the injustices of the past, the realities of the past and the hopes for the future.

Overall, South Africa continues to embody the structures, identities and practices of blackness in a multiplicity of ways, some of which possibly entail black inferiority (Polgreen, 2012). In this respect, Gibson (1999) stresses the need to focus analytically on the everyday

social experiences of being black in South Africa and, additionally, he claims that South Africa has yet to confront the past, present and future in pursuing a humanism which transcends Manichaeism. Race is certainly not the sole abiding identity in the so-called new South Africa, but it remains critical despite attempts at rectifying the racially-based injustices of the past (which generally have been miserably wanting) and by a ruling party that claims to represent the interests of ultimately Fanon's wretched. Black economic empowerment programmes, to give but one example, have tended to benefit the accumulating black classes and not the urban and rural damned (Burger and Jafta, 2010).

One story which demonstrates the enduring legacy of the crudest forms of racial categorisation, and which caused considerable public outrage, was the 1983 story of Lize Venter who was abandoned near Pretoria as a 12 day old baby. In this particular case, South African police officials sought to send out a description of the baby so that the baby's family may come forward. In doing so, they indicated that they determined the race of the baby by running a pencil through the infant's hair (Ratele and Laubscher, 2010). Under apartheid, and before it, this was a standard way of identifying the racial make-up of a person. Indeed, one of the ways in which whites would distinguish their whiteness from in particular coloureds (people of mixed race) was by the ease in which a pencil would guide through their hair (unlike the kinky hair of coloureds). Even today, the texture of straight hair remains a symbol of whiteness and at times is aspired to by others. Categories of hair texture are thus not simply descriptive but have significant moral connotations which speak volumes about the prevalence of racial markers and tropes under post-apartheid conditions.

This is but one seemingly insignificant case which highlights the potential of social and political risk: namely, in thinking and acting by way of racialised categories of identities, the long-term divides between white and black are reproduced and reinforced (Geertsema, 2004). But the example of hair texture is also symbolic of the class restructuring of post-apartheid society, with the barriers for the ascendancy of the black middle classes coming down since 1994 and new opportunities for accumulation emerging (in both the corporate world and the state bureaucracy). Insofar as the black middle classes and elite model their present and future along the lines of whiteness, and aspire to whiteness (through consumerism and lifestyle) there may be convergence of white and black middle-classes (though often maintaining their social distance).

This relates to the end of the struggle against apartheid, which was driven in large part by black unity. Now that ‘the struggle’ is over, a unified black population (as one in the struggle so to speak) is not feasible. This is not to deny the existence of differing and competing factions within the liberation struggle, but at a basic level these factions came together in seeking to overcome racial domination. As stated by Ratele (1998:60): “It is becoming increasingly difficult to hold blackness as a political community together, because of the changes occurring in the politics of bodies and identities, as well as the opening up of and reconfigurations of material and psychological spaces. It is this mood of instability that forces one to ask the how and what of a man”. More so, with the end of imposed identities from above (the system of racial classifications), there is the greater possibility of more agency-based self-defined identities arising, and a multiplicity of them, as opposed to having identities assigned. And social class, as indicated, increasingly comes into play in this context.

Middle-class blacks with all their social privileges have seemingly risen above their blackness and at times it appears that they have in fact escaped all racial categorisation, if only because whiteness remains the norm and racial categories are often reserved exclusively for those who have not entered the world of whiteness (Solomon, 2012). In other words, ‘the other’ is the wretched or damned other. One incident which speaks to the inter-class divisions within blackness involved a prominent young black musician who was refused entry into a well-known bar in Cape Town. Although the musician in question was convinced that she was denied entry into the bar because of her race, a white official assured her that it had less to do with her race and more to do with her presumably under-class status at least from the perspective of the official (Polgreen, 2012). All blacks are constructed as equals with whites constitutionally, but not all blacks are equally equal in terms of social perspectives and practices, with lower black classes being construed as particularly undesirable.

South Africa may be leaning away (if only partially) from racial discourses, for fear that the ongoing acknowledgement of race in turn leads to racism. At times, it appears that race is treated as a trivial matter in comparison to other pressing matters South Africa now faces, such as poverty and unemployment (though these are clearly still structured along racial lines). In fact, it has been argued that South African academics should, in their analyses of the post-apartheid condition, focus on addressing contemporary issues instead of chasing the past (Haffajee, 2013). This claim is hugely problematic given that the current social problems ingrained in the post-

apartheid condition remain deeply structured by the racial legacy and remain animated by it. These problems need to be understood analytically and not hidden away or ignored.

A few years after the end of apartheid, it was suggested that the post-apartheid transition simply mimicked and reflected earlier post-colonial transitions in Africa, as discussed by Fanon (Gibson, 2001), and this would particularly be the case with regard to former settler colonies. In the case of South Africa, 'settlerism' remains embedded in the socio-economic systems of today. In a sense, a paradox exists. In the end, the old apartheid way of thinking and acting has enduring relevance not only as a racial legacy, but as a basis for correcting the injustices of the past. Race does not simply go away or vanish. To address the racial past, it is necessary to recognise explicitly the significance of race and then think and act in racial terms (but not racist terms) to correct the legacy. This is the so-called reverse racism that South African whites are fond of harping on about, criticising it for reproducing the past in the present by maintaining racial antagonisms. However, there remain elements of the white population who continue to consciously articulate a racially-based Manichean perspective and pursue this quite vigorously. A classic example is the all-white town of Orania which, according to its inhabitants, has the lowest crime rates in the country – a phenomenon which they attribute to denying blacks entry or residence in Orania (*The Sowetan Online*, 08 May 2013). This though still has a class element to it, as crime committed by blacks (at least violent crime) is regularly linked to the rabble and undesirables.

In terms of this thesis, the question of social class is of great importance because the research participants occupy a comparatively-speaking elitist status in South African society. Social relationships in South Africa are shaped and characterised by structures and practices underpinned by the unequal distribution of class power and resources. This includes relationships between whites and blacks which, in many instances, borders on the pre-1994 master-servant relationship (Cock, 1980), expressed most vividly in domestic work in private homes, and in farm labour on commercial farms. It is important then to recognise the existence of the intersection of class and race in contemporary South Africa. For example, it would be very dubious to argue that members of the white middle class and black middle class share a common class experience devoid of the significance of race. They may occupy, structurally, the same position in economy and work, but class is not a mere structural category. Consistent with the ways in which Fanon speaks of race, class entails experiences, subjectivities and identities which

are irreducible to structural class positions because of the various fault-lines existing in post-apartheid South Africa. This more experiential conception of class is critical in understanding how black university students make sense of their multiple identities.

Thus, to emphasise, it is not possible to make general comments about blackness and black experiences in post-apartheid South Africa, because of the intersectionality of race and class and other locations and identities (including gender). To identify and understand those who are marginalised, undesirable and without respect (and who experience life as such), at least in terms of hegemonic discourses and practices in contemporary South Africa, involves examining the class-race nexus and the ways in which racial subjectivities are mediated by social class. Some groupings, particularly working people, experience their blackness in a particularly harsh and undignified form, while others do not (Motsemme, 2002). With this in mind, it is difficult to speak about blackness and black identity in an undifferentiated manner. Black working people in South Africa are visualized as un-modern and behind the times, if modernity is associated with whiteness and replicating whiteness. The modernity of the black middle class and elites is not attained automatically or smoothly, as if modernity and blackness are framed as contradictory tendencies (Masilela, 1996). Progressing to whiteness and becoming white-like is a troubling process with a range of hurdles which black elites in South Africa have to jump. The aspiring to whiteness, as a means of being incorporated in the modern world, implies the existence of some kind of social Darwinism in which human progress is measured by the stage reached on the road to the destination called Whiteness. Blacks in South Africa are located at different stages it seems, with some still to leave the starting-line. It is the experiences along this road which must ultimately be identified and examined if sociology is to understand the realities surrounding differential racial experiences (Hammet, 2010).

Other factors come into play when it comes to black identities, which complicate matters further. In the cases of up-and-rising blacks, there tends to be a shift away from a collectivist way of defining identity to a more individualistic, as informed by the Euro-centric way of being in the world – as atomised individuals existing in-and-of themselves in the pursuit of selfish gain and becoming involved in wider set social relationships through contingent life circumstances (Stevens and Lockhat, 1997). Neo-liberal restructuring, and access to more and more consumer goods, reinforces this. Other blacks experienced their lives and relationships on a more communal basis, in which their very being is constituted in and through relationships which have

a strong rootedness in socially-constructed group identities. This relates to, but does not necessarily overlap, with inter-class distinctions within blackness. Additionally, literature suggests that black youth in South Africa today have a more pronounced and inclusive self-defined South African identity, whereas white South African youth think of themselves as not authentically African but rather African by default because of their European ancestry (Norris et al., 2008). The former become people of Africa, while the latter construct themselves as people in Africa, which raises questions about nation-building and nationalism and how this turns into black (and other racial) identities. Lastly, according to Heaven et al. (2000:71), “Afrikaners interpret harmony and security values by emphasising their own uniqueness and cultural exclusivity. Blacks, by contrast, prefer to emphasise cultural diversity and inclusivity.” Black people, in this regard, do not place themselves in ethnic silos (perhaps as a rejection of the divide-and-rule strategy of the apartheid regime), though there is evidence that ethnicity still plays a part in the construction of black identities.

Language also is critical to black identities in current-day South Africa, such that speaking English (including mastery of it and the correct intonation) is regularly positioned as a mark of respectability for black people. The importance of English as a sign of modernity has not however gone unchallenged. Nevertheless, what is defined as Black South African English (BSAE) has emerged and developed (De Klerk, 1999). Usage of the English language, and particularly proper usage of it, may be seen as the gate-way to opportunity within the white world and the globalising world (Ibrahim, 1999). But pursuing a firm grasp of English is regularly a pressure-driven tactical move (or survival tactic) based on utilitarianism; in other words, it is a basis for easing one’s way into the world of whiteness. This does not necessarily entail then a rejection of social, cultural and historical roots, but a form of linguistic creolisation as is reflected in BSAE. As a kind of local dialect, BSAE places particularly elite blacks in an ambiguous world of blackness and whiteness, and thereby possibility the construction of a hybrid racial identity which cannot be neatly delineated or understood. In this sense, it is challenge to fixed identities by disturbing and disrupting them.

Black identities in post-apartheid South Africa are therefore marked by diversity, intersectionality and, as the last point shows, fluidity. All these points are critical in examining the identities of black university students in present-day South Africa. For instance, insofar as black inferiority does exist in particular ways, this would need to be disaggregated as inferiority

(as experienced subjectively) may not result from the question of race exclusively. Further, within the life of any individual, there is a diverse range of social interactions at different times and in different places, with new experiences arising through the immersion of new settings (such as entering into tertiary educational institution).

3.5 Historical Significance of Education in South Africa

Much like many other factors in South African society (and indeed in capitalist societies more broadly), education is a reflection of the broader political economy. In the case of South Africa specifically, the political economy was highly racialised historically. Prior to 1994, education for blacks (in the form of Bantu Education) received only minimal state resources, as blacks were expected to enter the South African economy to serve the interests of white capital (manufacturing, mining and agriculture). The inferiority of black education was at times subject to serious criticism by the rising black elite, including with reference to inadequate funding, insufficient infrastructure and poorly trained teachers.

The values underpinning the entire educational system, particularly at the start of apartheid in 1948, were largely based on the notion of Christian Nationalist Education. In 1949, the relevant documentation pertaining to Christian Nationalist Education argued that “[t]he white South African’s duty to the native is to Christianise him and help him on culturally” (Hirson, 1979:42). What is noticeable is the state’s Manichean and paternalistic discourse focusing on the need for whites to help blacks (‘the other’) or Natives to enter the road to civilisation without ever reaching the final destination (as they were destined to forever lag behind whites in every possible manner, economically and culturally). At school level, this entailed helping the Native (black) child to discover a balance between his or her ‘primitive’ ways and the modern school setting so as to avoid conflict or displacement at home. In the end, Bantu Education (as encapsulated in the Bantu Education Act of 1953) was designed to ensure that black students after leaving school would have the skills and expectations consistent with a future in a white South Africa.

Bantu Education entailed an extremely limited syllabus that intellectually stunted the black student, as it involved more of a technical than an academic education – an issue that concerned the black elite in particular. The purpose then of black education was to equip blacks with the necessarily-limited skills and knowledge to facilitate their entry into the labour market

as submissive workers serving the white economy (Kane-Berman, 1978). According to Hirson (1979:46), black schooling was “inferior, as a matter of principal ... the training recommended would ensure third class status” for blacks in apartheid South Africa. This required separate educational facilities institutionally, with white and black students prohibited from learning together to ensure that white students received a more academically-inclined education consistent with their future role as captains of industry and state elites.

Such educational restrictions placed upon blacks led to significant opposition during the 1950s, as part of a broader struggle against the racial order. Despite strong efforts from the African National Congress and the Congress Alliance to oppose Bantu Education (and separate education as a whole), Bantu Education became all-pervasive in both primary and secondary schools and also became institutionalised at tertiary level. After an initial revolt in 1958 due to the unfair dismissal of university lecturers opposing the impending legislation, the Extension of University Education Act was passed a year later in 1959 through parliament, by which universities were no longer permitted to accept any new black students. Under the grand apartheid design, and the formation of black homelands (or Bantustans), Black university students were increasingly expected to pursue post-secondary education at homeland universities. These restraints placed upon the intellectual development of black students, from primary school to university level, are what propelled massive resistance and opposition carried out by black youth.

In the late 1960s, the Black Consciousness Movement began to emerge through the University Christian Movement and the development of black theology (Kane-Berman, 1978). At first, black university students fought for inclusivity (a form of racial partnership) into the multiracial National Union of South African Students (NUSAS) existing at white universities, particularly the English-speaking universities (including Rhodes). But, because NUSAS was predominantly a white student association, black students felt the need to form their own separate organisation which focused on and catered specifically for their needs. In fact Steve Biko’s infamous words, ‘Black man, you are on your own’, spoke directly to black students at the time who wanted to discover their own way of struggling for inclusion into South African society outside of the influence of white-dominated organisations. The BCM was, ideologically and organizationally, more consistent with the discourses emanating from the PAC than from the ANC.

This new break-away movement, in moving beyond racial partnership and asserting a more nationalist project, was called SASO (South African Students Organisation). This move was criticised by liberal and more radical white elites (including university students) for seemingly denouncing any meaningful role for whites in ‘the struggle’ and for prioritizing the relevance of race (over class) in making sense of the system of apartheid and struggles against it. A sense of unease if not bitterness prevailed amongst these elite whites. Meanwhile, numerous other groups were formed within the commonality of black consciousness, such as the Black Peoples Convention (BPC). Although black consciousness, as articulated by the university students, was influenced by the American black power movement and the works of Fanon, it is an indigenous phenomenon because “it has grown in response to the situation to which black people have been relegated by white racism” (Kane-Berman, 1978:103). In recognising the existence of some kind of black inferiority complex, Black consciousness sought psychological liberation of the black person, the weaning of black people away from dependency on whites, and the uniting of all black people under one political umbrella in the struggle against apartheid.

Intriguingly Black Consciousness and the black consciousness movement began with the youth with, seemingly, a generational gap existing with regard to political militancy. Whereas black youth of the time sought ways to challenge apartheid rule, their parents and elders were more inclined to submit and be acquiescent in the face of the apartheid regime. In fact, the generational gap within the oppressed black population became a source of conflict or at least tension within black communities. The hesitancy on the part of older black working people may have arisen because of their experience of the repressive might of the South African state during the 1960s, and their concern over the possible loss of employment through engaging in strike action or mass stay-aways (Hirson, 1979). This intra-community tension though should not be overplayed particularly given the significant re-emergence of black worker strike action in the early 1970s.

The BCM, though arising through the work of young black elites at university level, soon had resonance beyond black intellectuals as – either directly or indirectly – it influenced the thoughts and practices of secondary and primary school students from working class backgrounds, as exemplified in the formation of the South African Students Movement (SASM). In part, the BCM paved the way for the 1976 Soweto Revolt led by pre-university students in

poor black working class areas, which soon engulfed black townships throughout the country in the struggle against the inhumanity of apartheid. The Soweto Students Representative Council (SSRC) formed soon after the 16th of June march by Soweto students, though aligned to the BCM, sought to pursue its own independent struggle in mobilising amongst township students, and the struggles of the students in Soweto and beyond were meant with massive state coercion.

The BCM and enhanced trade union activity in the first half of the 1970s facilitated a political climate conducive to challenging not only apartheid education but the apartheid system as a whole. In this respect, the significance of BCM was not lost on the apartheid rulers, as the organisations of the BCM were banned, and Biko was arrested and then murdered by the police in 1977. These efforts by the state were in vain, as soon the BCM resurrected itself organisationally in new forms such as the Azania People's Organization (AZAPO) established in 1978 (Ranuga, 1986). By the time of its banning, the BCM probably had become more influential in revaluing discursively what it means to be black, rather than in setting up solid organizational forms to advance the struggles against racial domination. Nevertheless, it created political momentum and became an inspiration for other emerging organisations, though the latter may not have taken on the mantle of black consciousness as such. In this sense, BCM became a moment or turning point marking a threshold in the history of the liberation of South Africa.

At the time of Steve Biko and the BCM, black university students were expected to pursue their educational careers at homeland universities, such as Fort Hare. They were only permitted to attend so-called white universities (such as Rhodes) on condition that the degree they wished to pursue was not available at a homeland university. At Rhodes, this included journalism. While at these white universities, the small number of black students was segregated residentially, and there was significant social segregation between white and black students. At Rhodes, the Black Student Movement (BSM) organised amongst black students while liberal whites remained part of NUSAS. Such a scenario continued to exist at white universities for the balance of apartheid and it was only from the 1990s – with the restructuring of tertiary education by the new ANC government – that specifically black and white universities were discontinued. It is within this restructured tertiary educational environment that this thesis examines questions around black identity and specifically amongst black students at a formally white university.

3.6 Former white universities, institutional culture and black student identities

In the past, education in South Africa including at university level was built upon racial segregation, difference and hierarchy. In the so-called new South Africa, the former racial barriers to education have been removed and all schools and universities are open to all, with black and white students sitting and learning side-by-side. Of course, this is the story from a constitutional and legal point of view as in practice the story is very different indeed. Despite the absence of legal restrictions, attempts at transforming the South African educational system have been marked by numerous challenges. Massive inequalities along racial lines still exist in education, and education for black students (notably from the urban and rural poor) continues to suffer from inadequate facilities, teachers and resources. A significant number of black students from middle-class backgrounds are able to access private schools or former white public schools at pre-university level, and the number of black students at university level remains proportionally small compared to the size of the South African black population.

Even in cases where there is no considerable racial integration, for instance at former white public schools and former white universities, such integration has not happened as smoothly and instantly as expected. Black students often find themselves in an uncomfortable and troubling space at these former white educational institutions. For example, it has been found that black students attending predominantly black universities (in the former homelands) tend to thrive more both academically and socially than those who attend former white institutions (Toni and Olivier, 2004). This raises questions about the character of these white educational institutions and the colonial bias they may still embody, and about how this character relates to (and perhaps undermines) the history, experiences, confidence, self-esteem and identity of black students in negotiating their way into this possibly alienating world.

Attending university for any student, particularly when this entails living apart from the rootedness and familiarity of their home background, is invariably to be marked by considerable anxiety. The individual is on the cusp of adulthood and yet is entering an institutional environment in which the newness of it may be all-pervasive – new social relationships, new responsibilities and new freedoms. Further, students do not enter the university system as blank slates. As Pattman (2010:963) notes: “The public schooling system in South Africa plays a significant role producing and reinforcing ‘racial’ identities and inequalities. This is because the various types of public schools (rural, township, formerly Indian and formerly white) are so

unequal in terms of resources and so different according to the ‘racial’ demographics of their learners and teachers”. These identities are carried with the students, both black and white, as they enter the university system in post-apartheid South Africa.

Universities, like any institutional arrangement, embody a culture of their own which they pass on to their students, though this is often the hegemonic culture against which alternatives may arise as students find their place along with others within the university community. Universities in post-apartheid South Africa, of course, have not emerged out of nowhere and each university (including Rhodes) has its own history which continues to impact on the present. Undoubtedly, in the case of Rhodes specifically as a former white university, there is a deeply-ingrained white culture which is insidious in its presence. This culture is not articulated as such, at least by the others that be, and its existence would be denied by those who think and act almost purely in terms of this cultural repertoire.

It is felt and experienced by ‘the other’, both black lecturers and students. For black students entering a former white university, the transition to tertiary education is also a transition with respect to identity but a very complicated process of identity re-formation as integration with white students is taking place in the context of a white culture (a taken-for-granted culture as if the established norm) (Bangeni and Kapp, 2005). The experiences of a black student at Rhodes, though sharing commonalities with a white student, will invariably have specific dimensions likely beyond the comprehension of the typical white student. Indeed, the self-identities of black students, and their historical rootedness in the familiar, become challenged in part because the more ‘cosmopolitan’ (read ‘white’) influences at the university are not necessarily in line with their sense of being (and with their blackness) in the world. This is particularly problematic if the hegemonic culture is presented, or presents itself, as embodying a logic of assimilation, whereby to engage necessitates succumbing to it (taking on an unadulterated whiteness) in order to survive and succeed.

The problem which many black university students claim to face is that they are accused of becoming white (which they argue is a false accusation) simply by virtue of attending a university along with whites and for learning and using English (in the case of Rhodes at least, as an English-medium university). At the same time, though, to become educated and be educated – in their minds and the minds of others – may be equated with whiteness. This is a case of the double consciousness of which Fanon spoke, with black students aspiring to whiteness through

assimilation but also seeking to assert and defend their 'otherness' despite seemingly immersed in whiteness. This comes across a dual existence and an identity which is uncomfortable in any skin. What the South African university represents to many black students then is the internal struggle which Fanon wrote about, where tensions between maintaining culture and adapting to modern (read, white) times is rampant.

Therefore, similar to Fanon's own personal experiences, students from black backgrounds at former white universities in South Africa regularly experience an internal struggle between trying to attain the culture of the former oppressor while retaining or even consolidating ties and identifying with the formerly oppressed. This exists because many dominant institutional orders in South Africa, like that of universities, either alienate black students who fit uncomfortably within these orders, or these students 'uncritically assimilate' themselves into the prevailing institutional practices and discourses (Bangenji and Kapp, 2005:1). In this context, black students regularly experience a sense of social and intellectual displacement, which might involve distancing themselves from either the whiteness of the university or from their own racialised social history (or adopting a mixture of both).

In this regard, it is critical to note that these universities rarely promote or celebrate black South African cultures and, as such, they often make black students ashamed of their identity, history and language (Orievulu 2012, and Mngxitama 2011). It is as if black students are being reminded of what they are not, as the university curriculum often does not speak directly to their own experiences (Soudien, 2001). With relation to actual academic work, apart from sentiments of confusion and discouragement on the part of black students, negative feelings are expressed about academic courses deemed irrelevant by the students for lack of familiarity (Toni and Olivier, 2004). This is mostly because the university curriculum in the universities is rooted in modernist European ideologies, histories and theories, much to the dismay of black students who have no intimate relationship to this. More so, language is often a problem for many black students in universities because English is not their first language. As a result, black students are almost expected to have a lower form of English and not be able to express themselves particularly well (Toni and Olivier, 2004); and this is often read to imply intellectual incapacities.

The practical implications of all these points are not pre-determined, as it may lead to acceptance or rejection of the prevailing institutional order on the part of black students. One

point is clear though, namely, that the increasing interracial contact and intermingling taking place at South African universities (at least the formerly white ones) may not lead to a unified 'rainbow' nation but instead may simply reproduce segregation and reinforce divisions, due to the fact that whiteness continues to be privileged over blackness (Vincent, 2008). In spite of this, the defining and indeed redefining of black student identities should not be seen as a marginalised defensive struggle but rather as a potential for creativity and a new sense of self which could shape a more inclusive higher education institution (Walker, 2005).

As it stands, and despite the ending of racial segregation under apartheid, clear signs of interracial mingling, integration and acceptance have not been forthcoming in the new South Africa. At times, social interaction between blacks and whites remains as it was previously, as an interaction based upon necessity – at the work place and other spheres of social life including universities (Vincent, 2008). Insofar as social identities entail “belonging to a group that provides people with a framework with which to articulate who they are” (Goldschmidt, 2003:206), such frameworks – and often of a racial kind – exist within the university sphere. At former white universities, as in other institutional settings in South Africa, these frameworks and the identities underpinning them are unstable and in state of flux as black students in particular seek to make sense of themselves within and against the cultural repertoires around them.

It seems clear that the merger of the former apartheid-divided universities since the 1990s has not led to the merger or undermining of everyday racial identities amongst students (white or black), if only because these identities have social histories and are not confined spatially to the university setup in contemporary South Africa. But, certainly, racial identities are being re-inscribed in and through the white university culture. While white students may find the institutional culture as fitting within their comfort zone, or more likely failing to realise that such a culture exists, black students experience its insidious presence. A kind of reciprocal, or mutually-reinforcing, relationship exists between the university and the black students, with the former engaging with the university insofar as the latter engages with the students' social history and self-worth (Breytenbach et al. 2013).

Not all former white universities in South Africa have the same institutional culture, in part reflecting their peculiar histories – with the difference between former Afrikaans-speaking and English-speaking white universities being of particular significance. There have been racial incidents of an alienating and troublesome character for black students at a number of former

Afrikaans universities, such as the University of the Free State (Fairbanks, 2013). At the University of the Free State, some courses are taught exclusively in Afrikaans and this inhibits the academic choices and performance of black students. Further, at one point there was a ‘clash of cultures’ where black male students at the university felt that it was demeaning for them to go through initiation at the university residences they entered because they had already been declared men by their own cultural initiation at home; and thus, for them, this displayed a deep ignorance and sensitivity to black culture (Fairbanks, 2013). Though the university, in awarding degrees, may be the basis on which to rise above the past and the conditions of existence of their parents, this may come at the cost for black students of renegeing on or even denouncing their cultural histories; or, alternatively (as was the case in the incident noted) asserting this cultural history in an act of defiance to the whiteness of the institutional arrangement.

Again, it raises the complex quandary embodied in the identities of black students as they negotiate their way through whiteness. For black students, this might entail the dilemma of sacrificing the past for the sake of the future. The example from the University of Free State (UFS) does not entail blatant racism and, indeed, the racial bias of the former white universities broadly (including Rhodes) is not readily apparent – for this reason, it becomes more difficult to ‘measure’, understand and ultimately confront. But there are incidences of blatant racism and, again, the UFS provides a clear example from the year 2008. On hearing the news that the university management would soon be permitting new black students into residences (and hence racially-mixed residents), two white students created a video in which black female cleaners were made to take part in a degrading initiation, at one point being forced to drink urine while one student said “this is what we think of integration”. Once made public by social media, the video and its creators were met with outrage and sheer disbelief that white youth not even born under apartheid could demonstrate such racism (Fairbanks, 2013). The incident led an open investigation into many South African universities about integration amongst the students and mitigated by the universities themselves.

Racism, in the form of explicit and blatant degradation of black students (and other black staff) is, as indicated, not particularly common as most of the time it manifests itself in subtle ways within the universities institution’s practices. This still entails a process of othering because it is not only about difference but about hierarchical difference with whiteness put on a pedestal as the norm. At times, though, it may simply be a case of adjusting to difference and becoming

familiar with the unknown other. This is manifested in the initial failure of any significant social interaction between black and white students but, with increasing familiarity about ‘the other’ over time, artificial barriers and senses of trepidation slowly become undermined. Again, this may relate back to pre-university socialisation (both in school and outside) – with students coming from very diverse backgrounds and upbringings devoid of racial mingling such that socially-constructed differences along racial lines are valorised and take on the real appearance of natural differences.

Given the overriding significance it seems of race for university students, clearly race will not simply disappear, and ignoring its existence and ramifications also does not mean its demise. In this regard, many of the former white universities, notably the University of Cape Town (UCT) but also Rhodes, have sought to confront race head-on and even to institutionalise the recognition of its significance – not as a basis for perpetuating racism but in order to overcome its legacy (Luescher, 2009). UCT was one of the first universities to experience significant desegregation in its student body since 1994, and the origins of its institutionalisation of race in university governance are found in a deliberate effort to de-privatise any sense of racist marginalisation and hatred (so that these are not treated as simple aberrations) to open up race as a topic of public deliberation in the post-apartheid university. This institutionalisation did not arise naturally but was in fact a product of the struggles of black students for recognition and access to power in a context where the silencing of a discourse around race was said to serve and entrench established (read, white) interests. This has proven quite contentious at UCT (and elsewhere), with white students claiming reverse discrimination and even some black students arguing that their academic success (such as entry into post-graduate studies) is now coming across as arising from racial issues unrelated to their hard work and thus merit (Luescher, 2009).

In this respect, the quest for self-redefinition by black students within the whiteness of the university setting is not undifferentiated, as it is influenced by other identities as well family background and experience and individual biographies (Goldschmidt, 2003:216). Of particular significance in this regard is gender, with black female students at former white universities often required to prove their worth intellectually and hoping to serve as a beacon of hope for other black females (Toni and Olivier, 2004). In fact, just to have been able to enter university is an accomplishment, given that education of females is sometimes devalued by parents compared to that of males. Furthermore, there are seemingly class differences within the black student

university population, with some black students coming from a more elite background (including going the private pre-university school system) (Franchi and Swart, 2003). The more elite black students, with their supposedly proper British English accent, are sometimes called ‘coconuts’ in a derogative way – which implies that they are brown on the outside and, deep down, white on the inside.

At times, the entire black student body is lumped together as if homogeneously coconuts. For instance, at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN), black students (because of their status as university students) are looked at by some in the wider black community as invariably aspiring to whiteness and detached from black culture, which complicates their quest for any sort of racially-based identity (Pattman, 2010). Thus, the crisis of identity for black students is not only mitigated by white culture but also by blacks in wider South African society. Hence black student identities, when their intersection with other identities are brought to the fore, are quite complex and it remains unclear as to whether – in making sense of their themselves – black students remain fixed in their multiple identities or try to posit an existence in excess of or transcending the collective categories (including racial categories) existing in post-apartheid South Africa.

3.7 Conclusion

All this implies that the understanding of inferiority amongst black university students in South Africa today requires a nuanced examination which does not simply assert the existence of inferiority or, if it does exist, claims that it exists in a uniform way (Watson et al. 1995, Phelps et al. 2001, and Clark 2004). And, hence, this alone provides a key rationale for this thesis.

The thesis does not seek to examine the relationship between black student identities (and specifically inferiorities) on the one hand and academic performance on the other. Certainly, though, the existence of any negative connotations of black identity (or, more correctly, identities) existing within the hegemonic institutional culture or amongst black students themselves would likely impact negatively on academic performance, or it might even form the basis for striving harder academically to counteract this imposed image and/or self-image. At the same time, at least based on studies in the United States, solid academic work amongst some black students is often stigmatised by fellow black students as ‘being white’, thus perhaps creating a social anxiety that compels black students to underachieve (Fordham and Ogbu,

1986). This would imply that blackness is associated with underachievement in an academic environment, in the eyes of both black and white students, and that black student identity and belonging almost demands underachievement. This type of argument though borders on ‘poverty of culture’ and even racist theories in which blackness is linked, almost naturally, to certain cultural traits and inclinations.

In the end, an understanding of black student inferiority needs to be rooted in sound sociological thinking, and the thesis must be seen in this light, In this regard, and with respect to black students at South African universities, the daunting question can be stated in the following way: “In a time of rapid social and political transition how do students and the university as a key site for identity formation reproduce or challenge race, talk about it directly, or through their silences, and live it educationally and socially as a ‘location of identity?’” (Walker, 2005:131). In the following discussion, based on my fieldwork at Rhodes University, I seek to offer – no matter how tentatively – a vivid answer to this question.

Chapter Four: Being Black at Rhodes University

4.1 Introduction

This and the following chapter (chapter five) discuss the fieldwork-based evidence arising from the study undertaken amongst black postgraduate students at Rhodes University. This chapter discusses racial identities broadly speaking, as articulated by the students themselves, though it does (at least implicitly) raise some of the key themes (mimicry, inferiority and double consciousness) which are covered more fully in chapter five. It becomes clear from this chapter that racial identities amongst the students, and particularly their own self-identities, are marked by significant forms of internal tensions and that there is some ambivalence about the notion of blackness as applied to them. In other words, their black identities are by no means straightforward and uncomplicated. There is also considerable diversity between the students, as I show by focusing on two of the postgraduate students and offering a comparative portrait of their blackness. I first though briefly note key relevant points about Rhodes University and provide profiles of the twenty interviewed students.

4.2 Rhodes University

Rhodes University was founded in 1905 and celebrated its centenary ten years ago. In terms of student numbers, it is the smallest university in the country. It is considered as a public university and receives significant state funding, but significant funding also arises through tuition and other student fees. The university retains its colonial name (named after the foremost colonialist, John Cecil Rhodes) and, despite some debate around this, there is no intention to change the name. Rhodes though has symbolised its recognition of the importance of the struggle against apartheid and past racial injustices by naming for instance the student union building after Stephen Biko and also by naming certain student halls and residences after anti-apartheid activists. In the case of the Biko building, the university stated: “This decision importantly signals the University’s commitment to redress past failings and to promote reconciliation and healing” (Rhodes University, 2014).

Most of the academics at the university, particularly the more senior professorial staff, are white and specifically older white males. In the year 2011 alone there were 159 white academic staff white male as opposed to only 23 black academic staff and, as indicated, most of the latter did not occupy professorial positions (Rhodes University, 2012). Many black academic staff members speak about a pro-colonial streak at the university and an insidious form of racism (amongst both staff and students) such that black academic staff turnover is reasonably high. The university's academic curriculum also tends to focus on teaching and reinforcing systems of thought and theories which emanate from academics in Europe and North America; this being challenged but in any uniform and coordinated manner. The university management has taken a strong stand against racism on occasion but this does not necessarily impact in any meaningful way when it comes to institutional relationships and everyday experiences (for both staff and students).

There are about 7,000 students at Rhodes of which about 25% are postgraduate students (of which a large minority is in fact foreign students). Just over 50% of the postgraduate students (Honours, Masters and PhD students) are black students (including some Indians and Coloureds); at least these are the latest figures as of 2011 (Rhodes University, 2012). Thus, the balance (46%) consists of white postgraduate students. This ratio has existed dating back to 2007 and likely earlier. A larger proportion of the postgraduate students are female, which is also the case with undergraduate students. There are some significant differences in the percentage of black postgraduate students within particular academic departments and the faculties at the university, as the study participants also stressed at times. Financial aid for black students, at least for South African black students, is readily made available by the university and the bursaries and scholarships which are channeled through the university.

Table 4.1 below gives an indication of the social demographics of the fieldwork participants, namely, gender, faculty within which registered and social origins in terms of province. The participants were all black South African postgraduate students ranging from the ages of 21 to 27 years. Black females in the Humanities Faculty, and originating from the Eastern Cape Province, were the overwhelming majority and are disproportionately represented vis-à-vis the university's overall postgraduate black student profile.

Table 4.1: Participants

| Pseudo Name | Gender | Faculty | Province |
|-------------|--------|------------|------------------------------|
| Alexandra | Female | Humanities | Kwazulu Natal |
| Angelina | Female | Humanities | Eastern Cape |
| Ann | Female | Commerce | Eastern Cape |
| Candy | Female | Commerce | Eastern Cape |
| Hannah | Female | Humanities | Free State |
| Karabo | Female | Humanities | Eastern Cape |
| Kelly | Female | Humanities | Eastern Cape |
| Khaleesi | Female | Law | Eastern Cape / Gauteng |
| Metanoia | Male | Humanities | Eastern Cape / Western Cape |
| Mini Mouse | Female | Humanities | Eastern Cape |
| Ngamna | Male | Humanities | Eastern Cape |
| Olivia | Female | Humanities | Gauteng |
| Pearl | Female | Commerce | Gauteng / Limpopo |
| Sandra | Female | Sciences | Eastern Cape |
| Spencer | Male | Humanities | Gauteng |
| Teebag | Male | Humanities | Eastern Cape / Kwazulu Natal |
| Thabo | Male | Humanities | Eastern Cape |
| Thompson | Male | Humanities | Eastern Cape |
| Veronica | Female | Commerce | Western Cape |
| Zodwa | Female | Education | Eastern Cape |

4.3 Defining Blackness

It is first necessary to come to a concrete definition of ‘black’ for purposes of the empirical study. The very term ‘black’ can be, and is, used in an innumerable number of ways, and this makes the further notion of ‘black identity’ so complex. Fanon himself made use of the term ‘black’, such as in his work entitled *Black Skin, White Masks*. Fanon’s very definition of ‘blackness’ had primary reference to the epidermal surface, which is to say that blackness for Fanon relates to a dark skin colour, or perhaps even the darkest skin colour.

This being said, the appeal of Fanon's own understanding of blackness goes beyond just mere skin colour, as Fanon in fact insinuates that it is the symbolic and material meaning embodied in blackness (or the epidermal surface) that determines the life experience of an individual. In this context, because Fanon believed black skin to generally have negative connotations in terms of the hegemonic discourses prevailing in society, the individual inhabiting a black skin would therefore experience discrimination and self-inadequacy. However, as noted earlier, Fanon's notion of blackness has come under a range of criticisms, in part because it is argued that blackness has more complex, diverse, nuanced and ambiguous meanings than Fanon posited.

For this reason, I explored the ways in which black students at Rhodes University define blackness and, more specifically, the manner in which they identified themselves as black. The request for participants for this empirical study was an open and wide call to Rhodes University students. Some participants were approached directly, others were reached through referral by other participants and some voluntarily came forward. Irrespective though of the means by which the participants engaged in the study, by willingly engaging in a study on black student identity they clearly drew upon some sense of blackness (though not necessarily a common understanding of blackness) and their own self-understanding of being black in the world.

In this regard, and in line with Fanon's work, the predominant definition of blackness amongst the students was skin colour, of being encased in a darker or rather the darkest skin colour. However, as will be shown throughout the ensuing discussion, their self-identification as 'black' in terms of epidermal surface only scratches the surface of the complexity of their sense of blackness. The majority of participants nevertheless mainly defined 'blackness' in terms of skin colour. Veronica thus said:

Okay, face value, if you're black - your skin color obviously – then you're a black person, [that is] number one. (Veronica, 13/05/14)

Apart from skin colour, there also seemed to be hints of a shared culture or perhaps lifestyle practices that some of the participants believed to be significant in understanding blackness. To follow on with Veronica's reasoning on the matter:

Then number two I'd say people who act the way, the culture of how black people act...the type of music they like, the way they dress sometimes.

Slang, the language they use when they speak to, and sometimes if they can speak the language itself. (Veronica, 13/05/14)

Besides these two dimensions of blackness, sometimes reference was made to an almost inherently black mentality or way of acting in the world (though this could also be interpreted in cultural terms). As Pearl put it, without though providing any concrete examples:

There's some things I think...that a black person would do that someone from another race would NEVER do! Or, some things that a black person wouldn't do that some people from another race would do! (Pearl, 29/04/14)

This sense of difference, a difference which is not always fully articulated, is rooted in the personal lives of the students:

So it was always on some superficial basis of how they speak, on how they spoke and what they know. And it was always subconscious, I mean as a child I didn't pick out like 'this is a black person', I knew they were different to me and my exposure to white people in the sense of what they knew, how they acted, in the fact that they were quite obedient, and the accent issue. (Khaleesi, 27/04/14)

These understandings of blackness are subjective understandings, deriving from the personal histories of the students concerned, but clearly they resonate with each other such that inter-subjective definitions of blackness exist despite the diversity of personal biographies. These shared understandings though speak only of difference along racial lines, of dark and light skins and of inter-racial differences in culture, language and ways of acting. Blackness, as determined ultimately by skin colour, appears to have its own culture and way of existence (as socially-constructed) leading to individual experiences that are commonly shared amongst all blacks.

But these students' understandings of blackness, as located in their experiences of post-apartheid South African society, do not speak only of difference but also of hierarchy. Their experientially-based conceptions thus consist of negative connotations and perceptions of blackness that disadvantage those trapped in their black epidermal surface. In this respect, to be black means significant financial deprivation and material suffering, in a nearly economically-defined conception of blackness in which poverty is largely used to define blackness. To quote two students:

Someone who is still struggling, still hustling. Some living in very poor conditions, like economic and social conditions...someone who is given aid. (Kelly, 08/05/14)

There are a lot of people out there who associate poverty with, for example our lack of quality education, with being black....'Suffering is suffering, we can't change it.' 'This is who we are'. (TeeBag, 09/04/14)

There are solid reasons for such an economic understanding. South Africa was in the past highly structured along racial lines to such an extent that economic class and racial identity overlapped and were mutually reinforcing. Despite the pronounced emergence of a black elite class over the past twenty years, this race-class historical legacy continues to mark contemporary South African society. Thus, along with epidermal surface and cultural ways, class (and specifically class-based poverty) is a signifier of blackness today. Differences in blackness (including along class lines) are discussed later, but the notion of a class of blackness is quite prevalent. This notion though does not go unchallenged by the students; indeed, their very status as university students goes contrary to such an image of blackness. This image, according to them, is rooted in historical and contemporary realities but it does not encapsulate blackness in all its complexity and diversity. It in fact leads to an incorrect and largely unjust idea of what blackness really is:

And that's even how the world operates, that's really how it is, black man is always at the bottom and white man is at the top and everybody else is in the middle, and you need to ask questions about that. (Thabo, 09/05/14)

A black person from my own understanding, or the way a black person has been portrayed it's been someone who is at the very bottom... (Kelly, 08/05/14)

On the one hand, then, blackness as poverty is 'really how it is'. On the other hand, it is a discursive portrayal which fails to capture internal differences within blackness (or classes of blackness). Despite the importance of understanding blackness from the perspective of the students, it should be highlighted that probing their understandings in certain cases caused considerable unease and discomfort amongst the students. While some participants had a preconceived and set definition of blackness (despite its multiple dimensions as set out above), other participants – in seemingly seeking to come to terms with their own sense of self – found blackness difficult to define in any unambiguous or blanket manner.

Some even found any attempt to do so as somewhat offensive, as it tended to categorise, classify and delimit them in a manner unbefitting of their way in the world:

For me, being a black person is just a matter of pigmentation, because you'll get someone who'll tell me 'you're not black enough' and I'm like I don't know what that means...even they can't define it so I just prefer leaving it or ticking it on as a survey or the color of my skin...but as to how to be a black person there's just too many shades of grey there. (Olivia, 02/05/14)

What we see now is a collection of different identities...as a person I embody different identities within myself especially in my identity, I have resources in me to fashion this one in to me. (Metanoia, 30/05/14)

In part, this reflects an unwillingness to be trapped within the epidermal surface or to be associated with categories or labels (such as blackness) which relinquish one's right and ability to define oneself independent of categories emanating from the past and created by others. This is particularly the case given any possible association made between blackness, poverty and inferiority. This association does not fully encompass what it means to be black and, even further, entails a form of classification (a racial one) which inhibits the capacity to position oneself in the social world. As Pearl aptly put this:

I don't see black people looking at themselves like 'Oh, I feel inferior to whoever', you know. For me personally I believe I can do anything that I want to. I don't think for me race should define me as to, 'no, I can't do this because I'm black' or what not. (Pearl, 29/04/14).

There seems to be a twisted irony so to speak emerging from the students' conceptions of themselves. They are able and apparently willing to engage with the notion of blackness and to identify common traits that provide a set definition of blackness, and of them-selves. But, at the same time, they consider blackness (and racial categorisation more broadly) as hugely problematic in making sense of themselves in the world. I would argue that this may reflect the social changes that are taking place in post-apartheid South Africa and the challenges this is bringing forth with regard to black identity, particularly for and amongst black elites. New meanings and connotations of blackness are being forged when compared to the period of

apartheid, and even the very notion of blackness as a basis for social classification sits uncomfortably with these black students.

It is as if they are in the world (of blackness) but not constituted by the world, as if they are struggling within the world but also seeking to push beyond it. This seemingly contradictory positioning in the world will be reiterated throughout the following discussion, though in the end I claim that this is only an apparent contradiction as it is the crux of the human condition.

4.3.1 'Whiteness' Defined

Consistent with the economic definition of blackness, as articulated by the students, the concept of whiteness was also loosely defined as economic affluence and all the social privileges that go along with this. This conclusion was arrived at particularly through the focus group discussion where participants believed that Rhodes University caters to a particular class marked by whiteness. There was some confusion as to what exactly constitutes 'whiteness' or 'white culture' but a linkage was clearly established between whiteness, an upper class and material affluence:

I think Rhodes embodies a lot of what your upper class, middle class people would be. (Mini Mouse, 13/08/14)

Affluence, I think that's a lot of what I see on campus. (Mini Mouse, 13/08/14)

Rhodes University is believed by the participants to be an affluent institutional environment and, at least indirectly, the students associated this with the embodiment of a 'white culture'. This reinforces the point made earlier that South Africa's past, in which economic affluence was only afforded to one race (namely whites) still resonates in post-apartheid South Africa and in the lives of black university students. Amongst almost all of the participants, 'whiteness' (and white culture and lifestyle) has come to be predominantly equivalent to – or a substitute for – 'richness':

If we're going to be non-dogmatic about it, white culture would then be associated with upper middle class, middle class upper wards. So this privilege that she's talking about, access to cars, fluency, the kind of clothes that you wear, that is, if we're going to be vague, that is white culture because mostly white people have that. (Khaleesi, 13/08/14)

Just as it is asserted that all whites were inherently affluent, an assertion with significant grounding in current lived realities, there was also an assumption amongst all of the participants that all blacks (including elites) are generally on the same economic level (namely, working people) or that they at least fall below whites in the overall class structure of post-apartheid society. In this regard, one student mentioned – in the focus group discussion – a time when she was allocated the task of bringing juice to a social gathering being held by her academic department. She describes the incident as frustrating and offensive because she feels that she was thoughtlessly allocated a task without considering her economic limitations:

I might not have cash! I really do not have that much money! You know, so to so easily take for granted the little things that don't come easily for whoever is maybe a signifier of a white culture. (Khaleesi, 13/08/14)

Another student, Karabo, supported Khaleesi on this point:

I think situations like that somehow make you realize that you're black...that actually I'm black because you look at what you have and you realize that I do not have this money. And it's so easy for them [whites] to say 'bring', without knowing my situation. (Karabo, 13/08/14)

And Khaleesi reiterated this:

Now that you bring Oros [juice] you have to be a certain way of class. You know, 'make sure people enjoy their juice'. (Khaleesi, 13/08/14)

This lack of recognition of (and consideration for) an individual's background seems to be a common experience for the students, something which they consider as inflicted upon them by middle-class whites who tend to assume that race is of no significance for financial security amongst university students.

This sense of oneness amongst the black students, based on a sense of class difference between blackness and whiteness (as if even all black students occupy the same class position let alone the entire black South African population), has some basis in empirical realities. At the same time, though, it likely reflects the shared experiences of alienation within the university's white culture and hence forms a basis for asserting group belonging in the face of these inter-subjective understandings of the world of the university. This was a common trend throughout the research evidence – despite not being of the same economic level, all participants talked as though they were economically and socially disadvantaged. But, as the discussion has already

intimated, this does not imply homogeneity even amongst this small grouping of black students at Rhodes. For example, some participants came from former model-C (or white) schools and lived in formerly-white suburbs while other participants lived in working class areas and attended ‘township schools’ or ‘village schools’.

However, to reiterate, although varying socio-economic levels of blackness exist, there is still a pronounced sense of self and specifically of disadvantage that is felt by virtue of being black. In this respect, there is an overwhelming experience of blackness (as encapsulated in the epidermal surface), and hence Fanon’s claims about blackness (as a phenomenological existence) continue to have great significance for contemporary South Africa. The formal abolition of racial classification and racial discrimination in South Africa since 1994 does not necessarily undercut the existential experience of blackness. This of course does not imply the reproduction of the Manichean dualism under post-apartheid conditions, and particularly the negative connotations of blackness embedded in this dualism. For, as indicated earlier, black students are challenging this by seeking to redefine blackness or at times to move beyond it in terms of some sort of anti-identitarian logic. It remains unclear whether Fanon foresaw such a possibility under post-colonial conditions, though certainly it resonates with the thoughts of Fanon-influenced Biko. In this context, it is important to recognise that blackness and struggles around it are forged under concrete historical and social conditions, and that blackness in contemporary South Africa is possibly taking on new meanings and connotations that Fanon could not have foreseen.

4.4 Constructing the black self and the white other

Before analysing the evidence in terms of three common themes of Fanon’s work, namely inferiority, mimicry and double consciousness, I first examine the construction of blackness and the white other with respect to the black students, in the light of the discussion on blackness and whiteness. Race in itself is nothing more than a social construct that has emerged (and was at times created) for a variety of reasons and purposes, and it has greatly shaped social structures, practices and discourses over extended periods of time. Insofar as Fanon is correct in claiming that racially-based Manichean divisions still thrive under post-colonial conditions (or, in the case of South Africa, post-apartheid conditions), and insofar as these divisions in any way resonate throughout the lived experiences of black students currently at Rhodes University, then it becomes critical to investigate and identify the underpinnings of this, including from the

perspective of the black students themselves. One important dimension to this was the relationship between racially-based perspectives (about the ‘white’ other) and the form and depth of exposure to this other. Any sense of oneness or affinity with the other was in proportion – at least partially – to the nature of the interaction of black students with the other throughout their lives. For instance, students less exposed to inter-racial social interaction prior to entering university tended to have a more negative image of the white other and thus were more inclined to engage in the very act of othering. In turn, this act of othering seemed to have a feedback effect in reproducing social distance along racial lines. Also of significance (and perhaps of more significance) was what could be called the ‘elderly influence’ entailing an indirect form of exposure – this relates to the collective stories and conversations from older relatives and family friends that the students heard while growing up, stories influencing their perceptions of the contemporary white other. Frequently, this would result in the student adopting the views of their elders (as significant others for them). The elderly influence in question came from life experiences that their elders had undergone during the time of apartheid with the pronounced mistreatment of ‘non-whites’, and hence this influence contributed to a process of racial distancing.

Even some students who had been significant exposure to white people (such as at school) therefore displayed unfavourable perceptions of whites. This was in large part due to the conversations heard growing up by their elders of white people and furthermore because of the racial history of South Africa that had been taught to them mainly through school. Hence, the significance of racial exposure was drowned out so to speak by these factors. As one student explained:

But I obviously have heard of stories from my grandfather because he lived in Joburg, he used to work in the mines in Joburg. There he would tell us stories of [how] the white Boer would treat him and how abusive white people were to black people, and like the passports and everything...
(Kelly, 08/05/14)

This influence of these stories should not be underplayed in shaping the students’ mind-set about the white other, because even those students with significant inter-racial interaction never experienced an overtly racist comment or action against them; and yet they demonstrated mistrust of whites. It is also important to note that the racially-based other, from the students’

perspectives, was invariably the white other and not the Indian or Coloured other (which were the other two main racial classifications under apartheid). The question of race therefore was highly dichotomised in the discourses articulated by the students (literally, black or white).

Just as the colonial encounter, as examined by Fanon, formed the basis for the emergence and consolidation of racial categories historically, likewise the direct and indirect interaction of these students with the white other formed the very basis for their conception and identity of themselves as black. Again, this highlights the social construction of racial identities and the realisation of oneself as racially-belonging, as well as indicating the importance of particular social institutions and practices in animating the existence of race. In this regard, the students gained a sense of self-race (and specifically, blackness) from history taught during pre-university schooling, forms of exposure to white people, the media (notably television) and elderly influence. The primary social environment, namely the home environment, clearly had a profound impact on the students in this regard. As Metanoia stated:

So people were like 'some people are just like that', they were saying that some people just come from those racist cultures in their households, that is just how you treat a black person. And then they see it from their parents that ja this is how things are done. So some people aren't lucky enough to learn about the implications of racism and what not...
(Metanoia, 30/05/14)

However, this is not to make some sort of determinist argument, in the sense that early home-based conditioning (including elderly influence) necessarily structures the racially-based discourses and understandings of the black students in a narrow and restricted sense. There is a degree of fluidity in discourses and understandings in the case of the students, perhaps a manifestation of a generational gap where different times warranted different racial attitudes and dynamics:

The people in my generation are...far more aware and far more willing to learn experience and engage than say the people from our previous generation. (MiniMouse, 26/05/14)

Socialisation is not simply an early-life experience as it continues on into university life for these students and, along with the changing conditions of post-apartheid society, this may re-shape

racial understandings of the white other and lead to reconsiderations of what blackness and being black entails.

4.4.1 Life at Rhodes University

In this context, I now discuss the broad experiences of the black students at Rhodes University, before looking at the themes of inferiority, double consciousness and mimicry more specifically. At first sight, it would appear that Rhodes University is understood and interpreted as a safe zone where it is possible to express freely the sense of self and identity as formed in the years prior to entering the university system. Student life at Rhodes University (as a liberal arts institution) is thus located in an institutional space where there is no moral judgement of different ways of being, or practices coercing students to fit into a particular mould – in effect, it is possible to be who you are and what you want to become. As Kelly said:

People are very liberal about stuff here, so I think for me that's what also made me loosen up, because I've found that people aren't judgmental.
(Kelly, 08/05/14)

This implies the existence and acceptance of difference amongst students, but it does not necessarily imply any significant bonding or integration racially within the student body. Assessing the actual form and extent of racial integration on campus would indicate how significant racial identities are when it comes to social relationships and dynamics on campus.

According to the evidence collected from the focus group discussion, cross-race integration occurred in the beginning of the stay at Rhodes University due to the shared experience of being uncertain and scared first year students who relied upon each other to get through the initial harrowing days. Integration occurred mostly amongst students within the same campus residence (or house) where, additionally, they were subject to first-year orientation programmes. It was noted by the students however that these programmes practically coerced the participants into interacting with one another. For black students who did not go through the campus residence system, but lived off-campus (in what are called colloquially as 'digs') throughout their studies, possibilities of integration at a social level were more problematic. Karabo notes this, but also goes on to note other factors:

I think it was difficult for me because I was in digs, and secondly because I didn't know a lot of people, and thirdly because I came from a village...so

I thought 'who am I' in this big institution. So I think I sort of isolated myself from the rest. (Karabo, 13/08/14)

The question of personal history (in this case, from a village) speaks to the existence of diversity amongst the black student body at Rhodes, which is explored more fully later.

Despite the claim generally that Rhodes is a safe zone, it is clear that reference to coercion in the orientation programmes points to and begins to tell a different story in which black students may experience significant discomfort. Khaleesi therefore speaks about how awareness of institutional biases – including the existence of a white culture – at Rhodes became more apparent (though not necessarily more prevalent) as the years of study progress:

Undergrad it was more forced integration I guess because we lived together in res... and then postgrad, 'coz you're more grown up you're more aware of other racial undertones in people's conversations and the way people look at you. (Khaleesi, 13/08/14)

Insofar as social interaction with white students is concerned, this took place out of necessity. It may have led at times to the establishment of friendships but the friendships in question were rather superficial. There seems to be a resounding discomfort around white people, a discomfort that centres on the black students' entrapment within their blackness and how this seemingly contrasts unpleasantly with whiteness:

I'd think, 'Okay, what we gonna talk about? There's nothing in common. Are they gonna like what I like? Am I gonna like what they like?' So maybe I also have that attitude...I can't be friends, like maybe we won't like the same things. (Sandra, 02/06/14)

We've cultured ourselves as such, I think my learning of culture and race was such that 'you are black and Xhosa and you belong here, different from those people'. I've always had a sense of no matter how much a white person smiles to you or smiles with or laughs with you but they will be white and different from you, and they'll probably have their own interests at heart. (Thompson, 08/05/14)

This discomfort and unease, and the prospects for integration across racial identities, was apparently also influenced by the racial positioning displayed by the white other and, in this respect, there was recognition on the part of the black students that the white other (both students

and staff) was not a homogeneous and undifferentiated other. There were differences for instance across academic departments (with some authentically liberal and others less so) and discomfort amongst black students varied accordingly.

There is no claim by the black students that institutional biases against blackness are officially and formally arranged and legitimised at Rhodes, or that these biases are highly motivated. The students unanimously agreed that Rhodes University does not intentionally isolate, marginalise or alienate its black students:

I don't think [Rhodes University] separate[s] black people, maybe it could be that we separate ourselves... (Karabo, 13/08/14)

In fact, Rhodes is seen by the students as catering for them quite adequately – with such opportunities as the extended studies programme (a four year undergraduate programme for black students with a below par pre-university academic record) and academic bursaries (at both undergraduate and graduate levels) in recognition of the financial limitations of many black students with minimal own-funds (i.e. funds from parents) to draw upon. Rhodes does acknowledge the significance of race, but only when speaking out against the racial injustices of the past and the need to rectify this past through specific programmes as noted above:

I think it's usually a contextual dynamic that crops up with particular races or spaces where we actually need to take consideration of race. (Mini Mouse, 13/08/14)

When asked about more insidious forms of racism or racial practices which went contrary to the official non-racialism of Rhodes University, the evidence is rather contradictory and unclear. While some participants could recall acts of racism committed against them that were in fact quite explicit (at least from their perspective), others were rather vague. Apparently, for the Rhodes students, the more explicit acts of racism take place at certain South African university campuses such as the Free State University in Bloemfontein, as Hannah recounted:

Black people walking on campus, group of white people drive by and throw eggs at them....Ja, it's just those kind of things are very common in Bloem, friends of mine that are still in Bloem have those kind of stories. I don't know, not the university but the students will have that mentality of inferiority, like black people are inferior. (Hannah, 09/05/14)

On other campuses, such as Rhodes University, racist acts, if they exist at all, tend to be more implicit:

Another thing about Rhodes is there are racial encounters or whatever. Or if you do feel like you don't like white people or you don't like black people, people don't talk about it or they try not to show it. (Kelly, 08/05/14)

Racism clearly comes in different forms and different degrees of severity. The general impression from the students was that acts of racism at Rhodes University seemed to take on more subtle forms, forms which the white perpetrators themselves would not consider as racism. Whether or not certain attitudes or acts are indeed motivated along racial lines (as a sign of racial prejudice) may be open to debate, and indeed often is amongst black students. At times, there may be a disjuncture between intent and interpretation of a particular statement or practice, with black students trying to resolve this in some way. This becomes an internal struggle for black students, with their constant reassessing of past situations. Indeed, this seems to be a quality of blackness with regards to race in a predominantly white cultural institution. Ann put this ably:

So it's a constant battle in your mind as to why she did that, maybe because I'm black that's why she treated me that way. (Ann, 08/04/14)

The experiences of black students, which may seem untainted by the white hegemonic culture, are deeply troubling for the students. Many of these experiences may not be even covertly racial but that does not undermine their racial connotations for black students. In this regard, there is clearly a racial dynamic at Rhodes which influences the 'colouring' of social relations and which may also have implications for academic opportunities. Thompson spoke about this at length:

Because you're black you won't be invited to the braais and the drinks at The Rat...and that's where the conversations about the opportunities arise. So your white person who is invited to the braai who is told about the bursary or the job opening and not you, because you are totally out that space. You never hear about it, you just see the person getting that appointment. And so that's not necessarily racism but it's your race working against you in a sense that there are certain spaces you can't get into, and those are racially exclusive sometimes. There's a massive rift

between the races at Rhodes, it's massive. And even the higher up you go in terms of educational attainment there's still a massive difference between those two people...most of the time you find the people at the top are white, and they people that are there now that they engage with are mostly white. And so you find that black people are mostly excluded from a variety of things. (Thompson, 08/05/14)

This kind of example given by Thompson, which presumably is repeatedly played out in different places and spaces, does not speak about racism *per se* but about the huge gulf (or 'rift') between whites and blacks at Rhodes University. It is as if white and black exist in different silos, and interact only out of necessity. At the same time, and as a theme discussed in more detail later, the above quotation displays all the main themes to be addressed later (inferiority, a double consciousness and mimicry amongst black students) in which academic progress is inherently linked to whiteness and emulating whiteness despite criticisms about a hegemonic white culture at the university. This comes out clearly in the following quotation, including relating it back to pre-university studies:

Our kids go to school together, black and white...the problem with that interaction is that the black person has to be friends with the white child on the basis of the white value, look at language for instance. The white child never learns Sipho's language, no! Sipho has to learn English to talk to John! And that's very problematic to me...I applaud that kids get to interact more and get to know one another but on whose values does this happen?...as [black people] go up the ladder then they become more or they identify more than doing things more the English way I'd say. (Thabo, 09/05/14)

Thabo though was not necessarily speaking about his own personal experiences, at least in terms of going to school with white pupils. In fact, in the main, the black students interviewed, because of their family and home backgrounds, did not interact with white children or students in the past; and indeed they could not recollect any act of racism against them in their pre-university days. They certainly though had understandings of whiteness from an early age, as indicated earlier.

In large part, their sense of being black (and what it means to be black) only arose after significant interaction with white people. Pearl articulated this in the following way:

So I went to black school, my teachers were black. You barely had any interaction with white people, I mean they're there but they're few. I think you can even count them. But then, when I came to Johannesburg it was a shock to my system, 'coz now I was in the old model C schools where the majority of the kids there were actually white and I was black. And you could see in the class that you stand out. I think that's when I actually realized that 'whoa, I am black'. You know, when I'm around these whites.
(Pearl, 29/04/14)

Once again, this highlights the social basis for racial identities and the significance of socialisation as a never-ending process in shaping and reinforcing being black in a white world. As intimated already, this socialisation continued at Rhodes. For instance, some black students felt that certain lecturers (who in most part were white lecturers) gave preference to white students especially when it came to the evaluation of student assignments. White lecturers, it is claimed, tend to think that black students are of a lesser academic calibre because it is presumed that English is not their mother tongue or that black students are intellectually limited because of the poor schooling they presumably had because of their blackness. This is seen as part of the insidious racism existing at Rhodes. In light of this, and the overall discussion so far, it would be incorrect to assume that race does not significantly impact on the worlds and lives of black students at Rhodes University. Race and racism – according to the students – had to be explicitly articulated and addressed through open discussions, and not hidden under the carpet as whites tended to do. Black students see race (they feel and experience it) while white students (and lecturers) act as if it has no bearing on reality:

...I just hate the mechanics that white people adopt into other racial groups... 'I don't see race', don't come with that, your mechanics! Come to me as you are to get to know me, and then in a certain time we can then begin to incorporate race in to our conversation. (Mini Mouse, 13/08/14)

An open discussion about racial experiences and the difficulties thereof is inconsistent with the white discourse of race denial and is a discussion whites do not wish to face. It would necessarily confront white privilege and power because, as it stands, whites do not associate their

privilege with their whiteness (after all, according to the white discourse, apartheid ended twenty years ago and race no longer needs to be acknowledged). While whites see their privilege as emanating from individual agency and effort, black students see it as arising from structural privileges. As Khaleesi articulated this dilemma:

That's you [white student] enjoying your privilege, that's it! And white people mostly are allowed to not take responsibility, that's what we need to ask! Those are the questions that we need to be asking. You know let's make it hard because it's hard for everybody else, let's go together.
(Khaleesi, 13/08/14)

Black students speak about an ongoing racial hierarchy white students (according to the black students) see their presence at university as emerging from a non-racial meritocracy in the new post-apartheid society.

All this implies a pronounced and one-sided sense of themselves as black and of being black in a white world. However, this racialised consciousness does not tell the whole story and does not define the totality of their social identity. Opposing tendencies, and the existence of contradictory positionings, are therefore apparent. This paradox involves an absence of feeling black or rather not wanting to acknowledge their blackness, but then having to acknowledge it when in certain situations, especially when in the midst of whiteness:

I don't feel black, I don't wake up and feel black. I don't, but when I'm in my department because English is predominantly white 'coz it was the discipline made for white middle class back then, if not then its considerably changed and the black students there are black scholars that are coming into the place. So I always feel black in the English department, so it's something that it's not always a good feeling to feel black but clearly it's not a good feeling, but you understand that with black comes a class when you're there. (Metanoia, 30/05/14)

It seems then that acknowledging blackness is both important and not important; it is both relevant and irrelevant. This may be contingent on social circumstances or situational but I believe it runs deeper than this. When it comes to black identity amongst students, there is an internal struggle between not wanting to be superficially categorised and the reality of racial experiences and interactions – a struggle within but against the existing situation (or between

being and becoming), and a moving within but seeking to move beyond racial categorisation. This is explored in more detail in the next chapter.

4.5 Comparative Study

A comparative study of two post-graduate students was conducted amongst the already existing group of interviewed participants. Such a comparison gave more historical depth to the question of identities given the becomingness of all identities. It provided a more nuanced understanding of the contingent complexities surrounding black identities (Peacock and Holland 1993, Terre Blanche et al. 2006).

Alexandra is a Zulu female from Durban currently undergoing her Honours in African Languages. Spencer is a Zulu male from Soweto, Johannesburg who was raised by his grandmother and is currently completing his Masters in Politics.

Spencer is definitely from a working class background, as he often mentions the struggle of being a black person and places considerable emphasis on the economics of being a working class black person:

I think my conception of black is usually working class...that's the kind I can relate to, the certain kind of experiences he or she has been through and the kind of life they've come from, what they've achieved in life and what they are now and where they hope to go, that's important. (Spencer, 22/05/14)

Spencer also refers to 'yellow bones' and 'coconuts' as people who are not really 'black' because their upbringing did involve the life struggles of the working class.

Alexandra on the contrary is middle-classed and, based on her personal experiences, she does not feel comfortable defining blackness because she does not agree with 'boxing yourself into a category'. She has clearly experienced confusion and tension with her own identity and what is presumed to be black (or rather how black people should act) hence her now open-ended definition:

Through university life you just realize that you might actually have more in common with a white person than a black person, so for me that's why I find it so difficult to answer this question because there is a set definition of what a black person is...but for me it's just being comfortable, and

being black, the color of my skin and not always feeling the need to justify my blackness. I've tried to move away from it so that's why I don't have a certain way of how a black person is supposed to be. (Alexandra, 20/05/14)

Spencer and Alexandra both demonstrated a need to prove one's self to other people. For Alexandra, this involved trying to prove her blackness to other black people but at the same time trying to fit in with whites. Alexandra states that black people also 'drill it into each other' that you have to be worthy of association with whites. She also demonstrates an anxiety and discomfort when being the only black in any social situation (including an academic one) as though it is nerve-wracking because you have to prove yourself. Spencer though only demonstrated a need to prove himself to other blacks.

Interestingly, both Spencer and Alexandra have received criticism from other blacks for attending Rhodes University:

...they thought that I was thinking that I was better because I happened to go to university and they didn't go to university...I choose not to hang out with them anymore...that's the dislocation of the self in the sense that I can't be myself when I'm with them. (Spencer, 22/05/14)

...when you come back you speak a certain way and now you're considered to be smarter, and how accent also becomes a marker of intelligence, and just how black people receive each other, for me I think that's very problematic... (Alexandra, 20/05/14)

Although quite contradictory, Spencer still insinuates that being black means poverty, although he never necessarily construct his own identity of blackness in this way. Nevertheless, it is the very economic limitations of his background which he claims to significantly influence his experience of Rhodes University student life:

Then you'll see the black guys and the working class black guys, you see them going to the dining hall 6 o' clock, 6:15pm. The idea behind that is that white people have money so they can afford to go to Steers and have dinner at 5pm. So by the time it hits 9:15pm they can call Debonairs, they got money. So there's this idea that white equals privilege. Whereas lots of black people they have no choice but to go to the dining hall at 6:15pm,

so that seconds is only 15 min away. So they can afford to eat seconds and take some bread home, so if they work all the way until 1am in the morning they don't need to call Steers, because that's money. (Spencer, 22/05/14)

Spencer does however state that he has developed a more open mind since being at Rhodes University. But he displays a strong need to help his community and students who come from the same disadvantaged background as he did. This need to help the home community appears to be a particularly common trend amongst black people from the working class. Spencer also demonstrated a discomfort with white people, and states for instance that he has a problem with white people smiling at him. He acquired this racial attitude from elders at home, as did other students interviewed. He claims to have white acquaintances but not white friends.

Alexandra also talks about a difference in being black where not only a skin colour but also language can set you apart. She claims to have learnt this from a young age when she noticed that she did not talk like the other children. However, Alexandra also recalls 'getting stares' from other black people for speaking English. She went to a multi-racial school, and that is why she could speak English (but she also lived in a township for a short period while growing up). Alexandra has noticed xenophobia on campus at Rhodes University, in that it is one thing to be black but then to be black and foreign presents serious problems, as seen here:

...there's this whole race divide but when you're not South African and you're already black then I think there's even more resentment towards you by black people themselves, black students themselves. (Alexandra, 20/05/14)

Alexandra is adamant that students make all sorts of racialised comments behind closed doors, and she goes so far as to acknowledge that blacks do this too. She displays tolerance towards such comments, and is able even to withstand the rather racist comments made by her white friends at Rhodes University who she claims often forget that she (Alexandra) herself is black. This is also a problem for her family at home because they live in a suburb predominantly inhabited by white people, and they still experience explicit acts of racism. However, despite Alexandra's calm demeanour when it comes to race, she also happened to display a prejudiced view of Coloured people. As a child, Alexandra states that she was aspiring to be white because she thought to be white was better:

...Growing up I thought white was great, better than black. That's what I was aspiring towards...and I thought it would allow me to enter other spaces more freely, and it's just, that's how I viewed whiteness.
(Alexandra, 20/05/14)

In spite of her aspirations for whiteness, Alexandra also expressed a pressure to excel because of her blackness, given South African history and her parents' struggle to survive in earlier years. She admits that she used to distance herself from black people as a child. However, in the present, Alexandra states that sometimes it is just a preference of a lifestyle that some may deem to be white, i.e. her preference for a vegetarian lifestyle:

I have friends who go on about how they hate being black, how black people are so embarrassing, and they're actually here at Rhodes as well, and they don't associate themselves with black people. So I think it boils down to the individual, and it's not 'coz we're trying to be white.
(Alexandra, 20/05/14)

Spencer appears to have a different kind of problem when trying to establish his own identity because when it comes to trying to find his roots (and therefore his present) through history it is virtually impossible. He certainly does not turn, as much as Alexandra does, in this respect:

It's the colonialist that came and whatever was happening he recorded it and put it down in the archives. So now it's up to me to reassess myself as a Zulu boy, I have to consult the same despondent archive, the same corrupt undermining colonial archive that no longer is of use to assess myself. (Spencer, 22/05/14)

Despite the differences in their experiences of being black, Alexandra and Spencer still share hopes for the future with regards to non-racialism, hopes that stem from the problems of the present:

It's not something we've really dealt with and South Africans, we just tolerate each other, and that's what happens most of the time. And for you to be accepted into the more white circles is to be a certain way, we cannot lie about that. (Alexandra, 20/05/14)

...I'd rather prefer a confrontational environment like the University of Free State, whereby these incidents of the everyday get exposed to and

come out these racialised incidents, and we get to talk about it, and we get to have a genuine conversation! We get to confrontation, it gets to be heated, because guess what – that’s the history of the country. It was passionate, it was heated, and it was very vicious. I’m not saying we should be vicious now, I’m saying it should be that genuine and it must be that serious for each other that we get to speaking about racial issues at Rhodes and what it means to be properly educated at a previously white institution. (Spencer, 22/05/14)

Alexandra’s story displays a double consciousness, a slight hint of inferiority that she now has seemingly grown out of, as well as an aspiration for whiteness. More so, her exposure to different races because of her class background has made her open minded to some degree. Alexandra appears to struggle more with associating with black people than with white people, and this also shows that she is now trying to re-establish her identity as a black person. Spencer is from a working class background and his experience is one of a financially-challenged black student. He has not had significant exposure to whites in his pre-university life but has found Rhodes University to be liberating and eye-opening. He places much emphasis on class and displays a rigid conception of what defines blackness accordingly. He does not display any sign of inferiority (or least none that he has embraced) but nevertheless experiences an urge to prove himself. Spencer at times is reluctant to define himself as black because he claims to be multi-dimensional, but he also has a very set definition of what blackness based on his own experiences in life.

Clearly, there are both differences and similarities between the two participants of the comparative study. Evidently they are not of the same social class and this plays a significant role in understanding difference. The more economically challenged student seems to display a more set definition of what black is and is quite disapproving of blacks who do not act in this manner. The more affluent student seems to dislike being defined as black because she does not like acting according to that definition because, to her, blackness is a mere epidermal surface which does not delimit a person. As well, though life is materially easier for the more affluent black student, this may entail a more lonely and ambiguous world because this kind of student inhabit two worlds more so than economically-challenged black students. Nevertheless, there are

experiences that all students experience as a black person regardless of class, and this is the commonality that leads to similarities.

4.6 Conclusion

Blackness amongst black postgraduate students at Rhodes University is not homogenous. Though the university celebrates its liberal and inclusive tertiary environment, an atmosphere highlighted by many of the students, the racial legacy of apartheid still haunts the university in terms of institutional culture and everyday experiences – though this may not entail racism *per se*. There are signs of the incorporation of black students at Rhodes and feelings of belonging, but there are also signs of discomfort, frustration and isolation. This was explored in the chapter by discussing the students' thoughts on being black in a white world, their corresponding views on whiteness, and how they seek to position themselves and negotiate their way through this world. It was also shown, though, that the experience of being black at Rhodes is subject to variation and that blackness therefore is marked by diversity. At least implicitly, this chapter raised central themes which are also addressed by Fanon, themes which are explored more explicitly in the next chapter.

Chapter Five: Coming to terms with Blackness at Rhodes – Inferiority, Double Consciousness and Mimicry

5.1 Introduction

This chapter addresses more thematically the experiences of blackness amongst the postgraduate students at Rhodes University. Blackness, for these students, is not an identity which is merely imposed upon them as it is an identity about which they seek to come to terms. In other words, they seek to forge their own black identity but necessarily in a smooth and unproblematic manner. This is seen by focusing explicitly on themes which arose from the fieldwork evidence and which, at the same time, speak to the insights contained in Fanon's work. These themes include primarily inferiority, mimicry and double consciousness. In discussing these in turn and, in doing so, it becomes clear that these students are constructing new meanings and possibilities with respect to contemporary South African blackness.

5.2 Inferiority

Due to the Manichean discourse and symbolism associated with black skin, Fanon delineated the experience of a life lived in a black skin as one marred with shame and inferiority. Because blackness was considered to be a lower form of life, black people would feel an inherent inferiority and also an urge to be liberated (or liberate themselves), possibly even by achieving whiteness. The latter possibility is simply that, a possibility, and other forms of liberation (which would break free of the Manichean dualism) were also available. Furthermore, to speak about achieving whiteness is a difficult theme to pursue, because it entails identifying what exactly it means to 'aspire to whiteness' as well as delimiting the very notion of 'whiteness'; which, from the perspective at least of Rhodes black students, I have sought to outline above.

Claims about inferiority, the forms it takes and the foundations of it, are also not without their controversy. For Fanon, at times it seems that the feeling of racial inferiority defined and encompassed the entire identity and character of the black person; at other times, it appears as one element of blackness though a key one. For the black students in my study, they do not

necessarily even conceptualise themselves first and foremost in racial terms, or in terms of socio-political categories such as race and gender.

When asked to describe them-selves, an overwhelming majority simply described and spoke about their personality, without any reference to social categories. Their self-descriptions, as well, were mostly positive and did not display (even implicitly) any standard of humanity to which they fell-short because of their epidermal surface. Thus negativity and inferiority did not come to the fore in any significant way, as positive and reaffirming self-identities appear to be the order of the day for these students. For this reason, Fanon's notion of inferiority of the black self may not be as grand or self-defining of the black person as he believed it to be, or as it was at the time and place he was writing. This reiterates the importance of spatially- and historically-delimited studies in understanding blackness.

It would appear that there are other factors giving these students a sense of self, factors which are irreducible to race though may be conditioned by race indirectly. In other words, identifying and understanding the epidermal surface may be an important starting point but it can never be the end point in sociological analyses of identity. This is not to claim that race is not a dimension of the students' identity, as it clearly is as the previous chapter indicates. But they only addressed their blackness, and reflected upon, when asked explicitly to do so. In this respect, they were asked directly how they feel about being black, and the responses varied if only slightly. There was also some ambiguity and discomfort in addressing this question.

When it comes to racial attitudes, the statement below best reflects the dangers of inferiority and more so it could also offer a possible explanation to some of the animosity featured in the data so far:

When you are different and you are treated different, you despise yourself but the way you despise yourself you take it to other people...it becomes a displaced self-hatred, you take it out to other people and it's not really a good feeling 'coz you hate anything that is black because it's your reflection. So one thing you come across it instead of beating yourself up you rather treat other people badly, you rather do everything that is really uncool to other people because of the same way you feel. (Metanoia, 30/05/14)

Some participants felt a sense of pride for being black upon reflection of the history of where black South Africans once were – under apartheid – to where they are now. Two students eloquently indicated:

So basically from a young age you're not really happy with being black, you always want to be white or even ke, if you can't be white you want to be black American, because 'if I were a black American', and all those things. But as you grow older and now you're the post 1994 blacks, so the emphasis was now on us! BEE...affirmative action, so I liked that! So it's our time, I think that's where most of us, well the people I knew, that's where most of us are, and then the people after us and then the people after them, they'll be sorted! It's just the time, you have to seize the opportunities, being black is the thing now. You have to be black. (Zodwa, 24/04/14)

To be young, gifted and black is a source of pride and it's something that we need to investigate more. We have the potential, and we have the potential to influence the world and to show the world that it can be more reflective of the people living in it. (Khaleesi, 27/04/14)

Blackness for these students may not have been a long-term feeling and experience of positivity, as it was more of a gradual process arising from emerging adulthood and prospects for the future. But one black student, from a financially limited background, chose to express being black as a struggle, denoting both the history of racial inequality and the material inequalities along racial lines of the present. This does not necessarily imply a sense of shame and inferiority in terms of the student's psyche, as it is more about structural inequalities which continue to prevail and disadvantage black people. The differences in conceptions of blackness between the students may however reflect class differences within the black student body.

What is more intriguing was that the majority of participants took some time to come to terms with the question, either because it was not something that they never thought about (or had not felt required to explicitly articulate their thoughts on) or rather the question itself was rather absurd:

Honestly I don't wish that I was white...but I just feel like 'oh I'm black, so you know'. I feel advantaged and disadvantaged at the same time.

Socially disadvantaged because of the all the white privilege that other white people have, and in terms of language I mean linguistically.
(Angelina, 16/05/14)

While it is the case that to be black is consciously acknowledged and reflected upon at certain times by the students, in the end it appears that – for them – blackness is a lived or experienced reality which does not entail an obligation to regularly reflect upon blackness. Thus, when Angelina says ‘oh, I’m black’, this is her experience talking, not her human reflexivity. Explicit consciousness and self-reflection of race is therefore situational.

Although there was no unambiguous connection drawn between being black and inferiority, the participants did unanimously agree that blackness in South Africa is largely believed (not only by whites, but also by blacks) to be inferior:

I think this is a thing amongst, I’ve actually noticed amongst the black community, right. The view that if a white person had to do it they would do it better. (Pearl, 29/04/14)

Apart from any intellectual and social inferiority, there is also believed to be a physical inferiority where physical features associated with the black person inhabits the realm of ‘ugly’:

A yellow bone is a very light skinned black girl, very light. So there’s this thing that guys would rather go for a yellow bone than a dark skinned girl, even if the dark skinned girl is more beautiful than the light skinned girl. So that’s just the way it is, being light skinned is seen as beautiful. Being dark – you’re ugly. (Pearl, 29/04/14)

There was also some reference made to both local and international pop (black women) icons which seem to want to adopt a ‘white woman’s appearance’. In a globally interactive world, and one in which the black students are engaged constantly in social media, it would appear that they are constantly bombarded with the linkage between whiteness and beauty. They may not come to accept this association (white as a signifier of beauty and – indirectly – of success through stardom), but they are inundated with it. Adopting this association would go far beyond merely adopting white culture and lifestyle, as it would entail becoming white literally rather than simply embodying whiteness:

You know that classic model of what it means to be white, the long hair, the coloured hair, dye your hair in certain ways. I don’t know if that is a

signifier of saying that your culture is inferior but it is a movement, there is a politics that says we're trying to look a certain way, and that certain way looks white. (Khaleesi, 13/08/14)

So I'm seeing that as an obsession as you want to maintain this, you want to hang on to this blackness you have but at the same time you're leaning so far out in to what the European looks like. (Mini Mouse, 13/08/14)

The general impression received is that, if a black person acts white, then this is reasonable because it is a strategic or tactical necessity in seeking to negotiate your way through the white hegemonic culture. However, when a black person chooses to look white, then this is understood as representing an inferiority complex because looking white is not a necessity but rather a tainted desire.

One theme which arose and which was not fully examined for the purposes of this thesis was gender, and thus it requires further investigation. However, there is no doubt that gender, coupled with race, shapes life experiences for the students at Rhodes. For instance, when it came to certain academic departments on campus, it appears that not only race but also gender inhibited intellectual integration into these departments. One of the black female students therefore said:

Generally, female and technology is a negative stereotype as it is, they just don't mix. But now you put black female into the mix and it's like 'Really? What does she know?!' So I feel like you constantly have to prove yourself before they acknowledge you, and when you're black and FEMALE even that just makes it worse. Because 'what do you know? You're black!'
(Ann, 08/04/14)

This implies that black female students carry the double burden of being both black and female, and that they may be excluded from modernity on the basis of both.

Overall, in seeking to address the question of black inferiority, the students seemed to take offense. The participants placed great emphasis on feeling uncomfortable around white people rather than inferior to them because it was believed that white people are so different that to engage with them is a difficult, troubling and alienating experience. Hence, racial difference and not racial hierarchy came to the fore.

More so, there seems to be a hesitancy to interact because of preconceived notions of whiteness:

I just realized how mediocre white intellect is, their racism makes them dumb...you know, their intellect, what they've read in books, those people who were writing those books were racist...I don't see you as being bigger than me, I don't see myself as less than you. I just don't like you next to me...I don't like that you're thinking things that are probably incorrect and harmful. (Khaleesi, 13/08/14)

And besides, what I've noticed is that conversations with white people are different...with a black friend we can talk about life and everything because we relate in a way, but with white people you talk about cats and dogs! (Karabo, 13/08/14)

In this context, an unfavourable opinion of whiteness, and almost a defiance of white culture, is rife amongst the black students, such that there is an unwillingness at times to interact with white students. But white students themselves are also blamed for this inter-racial social distance as they do not make the effort to move beyond their circle of white friends:

But you find that most of us black people we know what happens in white people's homes but you find that a white person does not know what happens in our homes because they do not know about us, because the relationship is so superficial, it's just here and now...but they do not give us the chance to sit with us and to know us better as much as we try to get to know them. (Karabo, 13/08/14)

It would appear then that the absence of social interaction is due to unwillingness on the part of both black and white students to break the social barrier, and this unwillingness may be based more on misunderstandings of each other than on familiarity with each other. Insofar as black students express unwillingness to engage, this arises from a sense of racial difference (and discomfort) and not racial inferiority – at least not from the viewpoint of the black students.

In this regard, the black students point to their own achievements and the achievements of other black South Africans, despite the ongoing limitations on black advancement because of the racial legacy. But there is a two-sided argument with regard to this. Some participants spoke about it in glowing terms. In this light, achievement is not just desirable but also necessary as a

basis for inspiration. More importantly, it is a possibility for black youth today, unlike perhaps under the period of apartheid. Ann outlines these various components of black achievement:

I feel like our generation is different because we want to push the boundaries and we always try do better for ourselves, whereas my parents parent's parents', ja that generation – they never really pushed for more. They never really aspired to be more, maybe because of circumstances and conditions that they lived in, so they settled for what was there. The mentality most of the time is 'Ag, just study, be a teacher or be a nurse.' So there was never anyone saying 'Study and be a lawyer!' (Ann, 08/04/14)

As much as it is about making sure you succeed it's also about dragging along those you grew up with and those you know to make sure we all succeed. It's all about encouraging, motivating and inspiring others in your community, be it just by developing yourself or by giving back...I feel like us black people we grow up in communities where you can't succeed alone and walk away. You have to make sure all of the other people you grew up with also sort of are comfortable. (Ann, 08/04/14)

Successful black South Africans are seen as possessing the resources to help and empower other black South Africans, something which is greatly needed given the extent of poverty in South Africa. As well, the very notion of a successful black South African eradicates the negative connotations of blackness. However, other participants put a different twist on the theme and felt differently when it came to showcasing the successes of black South Africans. One student in particular found it to be rather offensive:

Well, I was questioning the whole thing, like why do they say that, 'oh, this black man!' Why whenever a black person achieves that status they say, 'this black guy in the university council'. Yeah, I think the whole varsity it still has that even though racism is not official. (TeeBag, 09/04/14)

The offense taken is understandable insofar as the celebration of black achievement may be seen as replicating a form of white paternalism: from this perspective, to speak about 'blackness' and 'success' in the same sentence entails a contradictory statement. Insofar as there are actual cases of this (such as Rhodes recently appointing its first black chairperson of the university council),

then this must be shouted from the highest hills. In the above quotation, the very celebration of successful black South Africans is said to simply feed the old stereotype of black incompetence instead of demolishing it. Cases of black achievement are the exception to the rule, and hence prove the rule of black inferiority.

For these students, one final issue which may lead to concerns about the existence of inferiority as tied to blackness is language because certain languages are presumed to be largely associated with blackness. According to the participants, black people are easily identifiable by the language they speak. And, with these languages, come certain connotations for blackness. As Thabo declared:

No one wants to learn an African language nowadays you know because those languages are, those connotations around them are that they're languages for less educated people with very little English. So I think that more and more people, I won't say everyone, but more and more people are inclined to act in a different way and to raise their kids rather differently from how they were raised. (Thabo, 09/05/14)

The significance of the above statement is that it demonstrates the critical nature of language in embodying blackness, as well as the possibility that speaking indigenous languages is a sign of intellectual inferiority. It also speaks to the existence and experience of being socialised in (and into) two different worlds (the privatised home environment of blackness and the white culture permeating educational institutions in the public sphere) and yet, at the same time, not completely belonging in either – the very essence of a double consciousness. Being black in-and-of-itself becomes, in this context, a questionable and ambiguous identity which may not only change over time but may adapt to fit the exigencies of contingent social situations. This becomes a complex process for the black students in which language becomes central to handling this complexity in a manner which does not undermine their sense of dignity and self-worth.

At times, though, it appears that these students experience and even fear the loss of all identity in trying to manage the very multiplicity of their identities. In highlighting the question of language, two students expressed this in the following ways:

Now I'm black, I'm Xhosa[-speaking], I'm female but I'm also middle class, and my middle class status allows me to speak English better than I speak my home language. (Khaleesi, 13/08/14)

I came to an institution that uses English a lot which was not what I was used to where I come from, so I had to adjust and then try as much as I can to work extra hard. But the at the end of the day I cannot say that I feel oppressed or rather not catered for because I cannot express myself well in English or something like that. (Karabo, 13/08/14)

Overall, in reflecting on the discussion in this section, there is no abiding sense of racial inferiority amongst the black students, though there are hints of it in relation to for example material inequalities. The students demonstrate, in their discourses and practices, assertiveness and defiance in the face of any claims about black inferiority. In this respect, they are at one level reclaiming their blackness (and undercutting the Manichean dichotomy in doing so). At another level, though, they remain uncomfortable in their black skin insofar as blackness is seen as embodying their very being: they defend their blackness but, at the same time, they seem to want to discard it to allow their individuality to blossom forth. This complex identity is explored more fully in the next section on double consciousness.

5.3 Double Consciousness

In order to investigate for the presence of a double consciousness amongst the participants, it is necessary to investigate their experiences at Rhodes University. After all, Fanon spoke of the double consciousness of blackness as the black intellectual or elite in particular living in two different worlds and yet not belonging to either, thereby causing the intellectual to feel disjointed, isolated and alone. Rhodes University was once an all-white university that adhered in large part to apartheid legislation and regulations, and quite likely this history has left a lasting legacy which could mark the experience of the black student.

The black students claimed to have been greatly influenced by their time at Rhodes University as opposed to being completely changed by it. The influence in question mainly entailed their exposure to different people from different backgrounds. There was also a profound sense that, if anything, Rhodes University had led the students to becoming more open-minded than prior to entering university, including a greater awareness and acceptance of social

difference. In contrast, when the participants went home during university breaks, they felt the need to adapt and change in line with the cultural repertoire at home – almost as if they had to become someone else compared to their university-self, or at least to express another side of their self on a situational basis. Whether this necessarily entailed an internal conflict or inner turmoil is not entirely clear.

The existence, and troubling character, of the double consciousness seemed to be more prevalent for the students when going home as opposed to them coming to university initially and then becoming a Rhodes student; as if their primary point of reference was university life. The existing situation at home required the participants to alter themselves to some degree, including with respect to gender and sexuality. For example, one student expressed significant frustration in not being included in some of the traditional practices at home because of her gender:

I wake up for you in the morning, I cook, I clean! I mean, they don't cut me or anything but I still am part of this process so aren't I allowed to know certain things about it? And they're like, 'No, you're a woman.'
(Khaleesi, 27/04/14)

Gender seemed to be a particularly critical factor at home in shaping experiences and in trying (unsuccessfully) to come to formulate a comprehensive and unified sense of self, in large part because of the patriarchal arrangements which are not as pronounced in the university setting. When it comes to the more liberal atmosphere provided by Rhodes University, the more traditional and rigid beliefs around patriarchy are often challenged, but these are confronted once again when at home:

The Xhosa culture it requires that when a boy is 18 you go to the initiation school to get circumcised. By coming here [to Rhodes] you get other boys from other societies, other Xhosa societies within the Eastern Cape, even from Gauteng, but they have not undergone circumcision, but you learn to treat them with respect. So sharing some thoughts with my friends, they've said those things.

You come here, in our society we're not exposed to entity behind people but coming here they've actually said that this has changed how we look

at them, how we treat them as well. So ja I think there has been a significant change in how we look at other things. (Ngamna, 29/05/14)

This does not deny the ongoing significance of patriarchy amongst black students at Rhodes, given in particular the prevalence of patriarchy within the hegemonic white culture itself. The contrast then between university and home life therefore may be variations in the forms which patriarchy exists – but this still requires processes of negotiation when at home on the part of the black students, both male and female.

The complexity of the matter runs deeper when other factors such as class background are taken into consideration. On this topic, for those with a lower class background, attending Rhodes University came as quite a shock because of the affluent lifestyle it tends to embody. In this sense, at least for these students, the question of class complicates their blackness and their integration into a white middle-class university culture. This implies that, in relation to any inferiority they felt, economic inferiority was significant – but given the ongoing intertwining of class and race even in post-apartheid South Africa, this clearly had racial connotations insofar as blackness remains associated with economic marginalisation. As Ann put it:

Sometimes I feel like there are different kinds of black people, so depending on the kind of black person you are life is easier. So you get those people who are from deep rural areas whom generally have a tougher time in life because your accent isn't up to scratch. (Ann, 08/04/14)

For black students from poorer backgrounds, it is quite likely that they feel less aware of any supposed elite status at university as they recognise the social distance between themselves and the hegemonic university culture. They are more firmly rooted in their home culture and may not clearly demonstrate the troubled consciousness that more elite blacks display in affirming their identity. In this respect, it is also economics that has a great influence on the social trajectory a black student may take when at Rhodes University, when it comes to forming relationships within the student body:

I go to a table where there are a lot of white people and they're talking about, 'Oh, last time I was travelling to Paris, I went to Dubai, I went to Mozambique', and I've never been to those places. And when I'm sitting at a table I feel really insecure and unsure, so I'd rather go to a table

where I'd feel less insecure and less sure and have similar topics and similar ground that we could talk about. (Kelly, 08/05/14)

Economic class could also be a factor that transcends race in which black students have divisions and hierarchies amongst themselves because some are economically better off than others:

One thing I've always noticed here at Rhodes...is that this black group or this black elite, you find that they become discriminative of other black people who are not on the same class level. (Kelly, 08/05/14)

It would appear then that, even for the black student body alone, Rhodes University is a mixture of students from a variety of social backgrounds; and their different backgrounds would influence their self-identity in terms of race and class and their forms of engagement with the prevailing institutional culture.

As indicated earlier, there is an overall tendency by black students to flatten and homogenise the black student body (as poor) as well as the white student body (as rich), perhaps in order to simplify the world of the university and make it easier to manage, and to make sense of any acts of alienation or intimidation they experience. Again, this relates back to home environment, particularly for those black students without significant contact with white people. They experienced trepidation when they first arrived at Rhodes because of the vast cultural (and racial) difference between university and home life:

The overwhelming environment and also I was feeling intimidated just because I was around new people with LOTS of white people. (Angelina, 16/05/14)

But, as noted, recognition of particularly class-based intra-black differences amongst the students is evident.

Additionally, one black student in particular claimed to have learned over time that there was no real difference between black people and white people, and that white people can also be financially limited (and academically weak):

And then the minute you meet a white person it's all of those thoughts like 'they're rich and what not', until you get to know the person and then you see not all white people are rich. Shame, not all white people are clever or have something for them...things are changing and when you get to

know them, by them I mean a person who is white, you'll find that actually it's not true. (Zodwa, 24/04/14)

Understandings of blackness and whiteness therefore varied amongst the black students, as did their class background (and gender), and this invariably influenced the form and degree of the double consciousness of students. Identity reconciliation, or coming to terms with conflicting consciousnesses of oneself, was an easier process for some black students compared to others.

Language again comes to the fore in demonstrating the complexities of being black, and displaying a double consciousness, at Rhodes. The journey from one language or dialect to another one is never easy and is made even more difficult and isolating when the institution in which one finds one's self is not of one's mother tongue. Needless to say it is more difficult for some black students than others. What is more important is best described in the words of one of the participants:

Its language that makes me change, its language! Because when I switch to English I'm a different person, whereas when I speak my home language, Xhosa, I'm a different person. (Metanoia, 30/05/14)

There is a double consciousness in these words that elicits the versatility of languages and how one changes (and indeed must change) according to different situations. This could very well affect relationships, as demonstrated here:

My mother is semi-literate so I don't want to speak English with my mother 'coz I believe it would damage our relationship. Because I have seen that in most black households: their kids were sent to so-called model-C schools and they studied with white students and those who were sent to black schools, and they are not treated the same.

The one in a black school is suppressed because he's always gonna speak in Xhosa, and then with Xhosa the language is attached with culture and then the way children speak to elders is different. Whereas when one is speaking in English the culture is divorced, you are divorced from your own culture when you are speaking English so we assume different identities. (Metanoia, 30/05/14)

Participants of the focus group agree that there is a general 'culture' (a white culture) in South Africa that is idealised and to which is therefore aspired. The aspiration in question though

seems to be more out of necessity than desire because this idealised culture is so greatly entrenched and – if anything – has come to be known as the norm and the pathway to success and acceptance. The need to embrace this idealised norm is what denotes a double consciousness which appears at times as a complete change of the self:

There are certain things that you need to compromise as a black person to assimilate into white culture so that, and I closely link that to having to sell your soul, having to trade a bit of your soul just so you can survive in this dominant white culture which just so happens to be the reality of most South Africans regardless of, with the exception of white people...so I think in that respect they still have a lot of monopoly on culture, identity and economics. (Mini Mouse, 13/08/14)

However, with that realisation also comes the desire to want to maintain one's 'authentic' identity or rather what one presumes their identity to be. In recognising, at least implicitly, this double consciousness and its dynamics, the black students felt more inclined towards maintaining their culture:

Personally I don't think I compromise anything, personally, on culture. I still maintain the same things, like even as I say with cultural practices and all, that it's a reality for me. I don't think I've abandoned or decided that something else is better than what I have. I don't hold the same sentiments...and I personally want to be 'lobola-ed' when I get married. (Mini Mouse, 13/08/14)

In this light, being a black student at Rhodes University does not necessarily require a complete change of the self away from pre-university identities and fully integrated into an alien institutional culture. Insofar as a dual consciousness exists, and no doubt it does for these black students, it is not the deeply troubling and tension-riddled experience that Fanon seemed to imply. These students, on the basis of tactical decisions and situational conditions, tend to negotiate their way through the hegemonic culture at Rhodes without forsaking their past and denying who they claim – deep down – to ultimately to be. The double consciousness is managed so to speak to inhibit or suppress any internal turmoil and strife, though certain situations arise (including this study itself) which almost force the black student to come to terms with the inherent tension which always lurks uncomfortably below their epidermal surface. More

specifically, it can be argued that the students face these difficulties of a double consciousness in a blunt and blanket fashion when they go home, while at university they have the opportunity and capacity to smother at times the tensions ingrained in their consciousness, identity and blackness.

5.3.1 Negotiating ‘black taxes’ and ‘coconuts’

There is an assumption or even a stereotype of being black that the students felt compelled to argue against and to disprove. As well, there was pressure not to engage in activities which might be consistent with or fall under the stereotype, and a pressure to not reproduce the negative connotations that have been engraved into blackness for so long. This entails an anxiety and to prove one’s self – as a person – in a multiplicity of everyday situations. All this was eloquently outlined by one student as a ‘black tax’:

My ma has told me, my aunt has told me, all my cousins have told me that when you get to work you’re gonna have to work ten times harder than the rest, if they’re white. And obviously that’s called ‘black tax’ – if you do work that’s up to the same standard as a white person then it’s not recognized, you have to do better! You can’t do less because that means you’re black, you can’t be black. So you constantly have to work twice as hard to be recognized equally. So if you’re here, if the levels of work that you produce is better than the white person that’s when you get treated equally, not when you produce the same quality of work. So there’s this constant need to work more. (Khaleesi, 27/04/14)

Pearl made a similar comment, in the following way:

I feel I have to progress from where my parents stopped. And I feel I always have to work harder to get what I want, you know. There is affirmative action and BEE and those things, but when it comes to the work place it’s very hard for you as a black person to be promoted above a white person. It is very hard unless you are like exceptional, like a genius! I’ve seen it happen to a lot of people around me I feel that yes I have to be an over achiever in everything that I do, and I always have to

go the extra mile – 120%! Not even 110% ‘coz that won’t work in my favor. (Pearl, 29/04/14)

This of course speaks to the existence of an insidious form of racism, including at Rhodes, from the perspective of these black students.

Other students put a different twist on the black tax. They did not deny it, but they nevertheless felt differently about working harder to disprove a stereotype, which they accepted existed. They claimed that, in sometimes putting significant effort into trying to disprove a stereotype, the existing stereotype becomes even more reinforced:

Like I’ve heard of black people be like ‘because I was black I had to work hard’, I don’t feel that pressure. I don’t feel that need to make myself better in the eyes of someone else, the next person should be open to my experiences as a black person or who I am or what my blackness is. (MiniMouse, 26/05/14)

Hannah also felt this way:

I feel like even if I am better at what I am, there’ll always be people who look down on me for whatever reason. So I don’t do it because I feel like I’m a black person, to prove to the world that black people can do it, but I want to do it for myself. (Hannah, 09/05/14)

Irrespective of the views expressed about the black tax it would appear that, to be accepted as worthy of becoming and being a fully-fledged member of the university’s institutional culture, black students had to be whiter than white – though MiniMouse and Hannah sought to distance themselves from this pressure.

This becoming whiter than white reinforced the troubling and often alienating experiences encountered outside the university setting, and this was particularly striking at home. As a result, an awareness of a split identity and dual consciousness became more pronounced. Undoubtedly, based on the fieldwork, some students received a positive reception when going home. There was definitely, in many instances, a great sense of pride amongst the home community that someone emanating from the community would be able to attend university and hopefully help the community and others, just like them, to rise above the prevailing conditions in the community. However, some students were met with severe criticism when they went

home because local people did not like the changes that were happening to them. One of the common critiques is that of being called a ‘coconut’:

They describe a coconut as a black person who is white on the inside, so you’ve got white tendencies...rock music is associated with white people. So if you listen to rock music, or you don’t know how to speak your mother tongue, or you’re always speaking in English, or you’re acting snobbish.
(Pearl, 29/04/14)

The term coconut is used to counter the ‘traditional’ sense of what blackness presumably is. It can be explained as such:

When we say ‘your upbringing is black’ – you went to a public school, English was not your home language...in the suburbs your home language is English, you do it at school, your second additional is Afrikaans, you don’t do any African languages. (TeeBag, 09/04/14)

Apart from personal preferences, mannerisms and activities that are seemingly ‘not black’, there also appears to be disdain from other black people when a black person tends to associate with white people:

First time I went home from being at Rhodes I was told that I was being white...this one incident happened when I was listening to certain music on my phone but that it was ‘white music’. So my friend called me, Sophia, and she is Sotho and she can’t speak Xhosa, so obviously I can’t speak Xhosa with her, and oh – suddenly now you’re speaking English that’s so white of you. So from being called trying to be white to being called a coconut to thinking that you’re better than everyone. (Ann, 08/04/14)

Of course, as the discussion shows, the identities of the black students are considerably more complex and ambiguous than the notion of ‘coconut’ captures. What is further interesting is how, by virtue of simply coming to Rhodes University, a black student is already defined by other black people as being a coconut. This is seemingly attributed to exposure to white people, where one is guilty by association, with the notion of ‘coconut’ being used in a derogatory fashion like perhaps whiteness itself. The apparent dislike if not disdain for whiteness and everything associated with it clearly creates internal tensions for the students which are difficult to resolve easily, if resolvable at all. As two students indicated:

They think I'm coconut because I studied white people at a white university apparently. So now I get those vibes, so sometimes I'm aware now that I'm being treated differently and it unsettles me 'coz I won't really be myself. (Metanoia, 30/05/14)

So people have been like 'you go to Rhodes now, suddenly you speak English'. But you see, the thing is I've always done certain things but now they're being highlighted. (Ann, 08/04/14)

A part of the appeal of the term 'coconut' may be that it is a derogatory name given to black people who have seemingly 'lost touch' with what it means to 'truly' be black. The term itself is somewhat oppressive from the perspective of black students because it possibly limits their possibility of discovering and embracing new meanings of South African blackness.

In this context, some of the students expressed a great dislike for the term and a frustration in their social lives when being labeled as a 'coconut'. What though was a prominent feature is how the students sought to rationalise this negativity towards them, claiming that the label was a reflection of envy on the part of others. I quote three students in this regard:

At some point it is resulted in envy, 'coz some people they want to be in your shoes. And then sometimes I can't help it! I can't help it but it is something that is there, that they are being treated differently, as I'm saying this different person now who's a cheese boy now, coconut. (Metanoia, 30/05/14)

There's a lot of jealousy going around, like especially if you go to the villages – if another black person becomes successful and somebody else becomes jealous, certain things happen to that black person and it's attributed to witchcraft. Which is silly, you know but that's how it is. (Pearl, 29/04/14)

Inferiority, with black people, that just comes back to the black on black hate, and the whole 'oh you're a coconut' and this and this and that, because you feel inferior to another race now you're gonna feel 'weaker' like in your own race just to make yourself feel better. But that's not gonna work out if we really wanna get to a higher stage as black people. (Olivia, 02/05/14)

It seems as though there is an assumed general idea of what blackness is, and that university students do not necessarily fit into this blanket and – in the end – essentialised understanding of being black. This sweeping generalisation of course does not take into account the different and diverse discourses, experiences and practices of black people. For this reason, it can be claimed that blackness in post-apartheid South Africa is marked by contention and that new ways of being black are arising, leading to some dissension amongst blacks themselves.

Together with the black tax, the coconut label places black students in an awkward and uncomfortable space in terms of identity. To be white (or ‘normal’) they need to prove themselves by working harder (the black tax) than white students. But they also have to prove themselves to the black community if they are to be authentically black and not a mere coconut; otherwise they will be subjected to isolation and perhaps discrimination. This is the essence of the double consciousness which haunts the lives and worlds of black students at Rhodes. The problem then is that blackness is not one ‘thing’ – it is neither uniform nor static. It embodies difference and fluidity but, ironically, blackness continues to be universalised and essentialised.

This is demonstrated by Olivia’s experience:

I’m from Joburg so you either speak Sotho, Tswana or Zulu, and in most parts of the Eastern Cape they speak Xhosa, and I didn’t identify with them, so naturally I fell with the white girls. But even then I wasn’t a white person so I didn’t fall into them, one was just like ‘you’re not black’ or ‘you just don’t like being black’ or ‘you’re not black enough’ just in this instance just because I don’t speak the same language. That’s why when someone is like what does being black mean I just rather prefer to be like it’s just a matter of the color of your skin. And ja, the same thing has always been my accent always getting me into trouble with people!
(Olivia, 02/05/14)

For Olivia, she is white and black but, at the same time, she is neither. So, she simplifies the matter by simply reducing blackness to the epidermal surface, a way of managing the ambiguity. However, this invariably leads to a sense of social isolation in which the student does not feel comfortable in either world and therefore is of no world. One may be black in skin, but one may not be the ‘right kind’ of black or not entirely black. There is a pressure in black communities not to become too white yet, at the same time, there is within these same communities the

recognition that the student is becoming successful in and through the white world. Meanwhile, in the white institutional culture of the university, becoming successful is not a smooth process and the black student may forever be deemed as almost-white but never authentically white. Either way, it appears that the black student is damned socially.

The more perplexing aspect then is that becoming a black South African intellectual through university studies entails discrimination both by other blacks outside the university environment and whites within the hegemonic culture of the university. It is as if the students are caught within the ongoing post-apartheid transition, between the known past, the uncertain future and the troubling present. It is this context that the black students are trying to forge an identity and make sense of their blackness. In this context, all they can seemingly do is to be tolerant of the situation as it exists, or in the situations they find themselves:

Go where you're comfortable; so I had an incident where someone was like 'oh you're just always around white people hey! You're that black person!'...Like I think a lot of the comments that come from that come from people who are actually uncomfortable with themselves, uncomfortable to be in a room, an entire room filled with people of a different race, and they just can't be there...I think a lot of it comes from envy. Seeing somebody be able to strive in an environment that's completely different to theirs and them not being able to do it. (Olivia, 02/05/14)

They see this though as part of a broader South African canvas, in which black South Africans defend an authenticity which challenges the blackness and indeed humanity of others from other countries in the region. Though not a central component of their consciousness, and certainly not an element which they incorporate into their identity by posting the existing of the 'black other', they spoke about racism as not being a specifically white characteristic. As Veronica put it bluntly:

I think sometimes we forget that fact that it's not only white people that can be racist, also black people. (Veronica, 13/05/14)

Pearl happened to mention an incident of black-on-black racism that she personally had to endure. Pearl and her Zimbabwean boyfriend were harassed by two black South African men in

Johannesburg because her boyfriend is a foreigner. She describes the incident as both shocking and frightening:

One would think that Joburg is so incorporated that it wouldn't happen. But it happened, it really happened. It happened to a lot of people, even at [the Department of] home affairs, especially at home affairs they're very rude, it's not a friendly place for foreigners. (Pearl, 29/04/14)

What's more, because Pearl knows of the animosity felt towards black foreigners, she also is able to state from her own personal experience the criteria which black South Africans use to classify foreigners. She explains it as a category that even she has faced because of her minority ethnic group:

I don't understand why South Africans all of a sudden think that other foreign people are dark. I mean, I've also been told that I'm foreign. I remember it really irritated me; do South Africans have a certain way that they look? Do other African people have a certain way that they look? So I guess to that preference I looked foreign, but I didn't know that about me. (Pearl, 29/04/14)

One criterion used to categorise foreign blacks is skin colour, whereby foreign black Africans are said to be of a darker skin colour and therefore more undesirable than black South Africans. Evidently, as can be seen from Pearl's account, there is a hierarchy of blackness in South Africa which displays its own Manichean symbolism and the demonisation of other blacks. It is difficult for Pearl and others to fathom, because the light colour of the student coconut (with the white inside presumably shining through) is also seemingly detestable in the eyes of the same black South Africans.

This section has sought to outline the sheer complexity of the consciousness of black students at Rhodes. Perhaps the notion of double consciousness does not capture this complexity, as there seems to be a multiplicity of consciousnesses and even this multiplicity varies between the students. In this context, I now examine the question of mimicry amongst the black students, the third theme discussed subsequent to inferiority and double consciousness.

5.4 Mimicry

Fanon's work implies that the inferiority of being black is so intense that, in a very subconscious way, every black person looks up to 'whiteness' and thus arranges his or her life in the hope of aspiring to and achieving 'whiteness'. This process of mimicry, involving an urge to want to be white by mimicking the actions and lifestyle of whiteness, was explored amongst the black students at Rhodes. From the discussions so far, it is clear that elements of mimicry are embodied in the discourses, perspectives and practices of black students in the context of the prevailing hegemonic white culture at Rhodes. In this regard, there remains an aura around whiteness or at least a general belief that whiteness entails a certain form of well-being and a certain degree of sophistication that is desirable.

Mimicry does not however come across as an all-consuming mentality amongst the students. It is not a dire urge amongst the students to attain whiteness but, given the institutional culture at Rhodes, there is a range of influences which invariably impact on the dreams and aspirations of the students. This socialisation into whiteness is not necessarily explicit or intentional but it takes place nevertheless:

For you to comment on urban culture, or for you to comment on western culture, people will never take on a person from a rural area who does not have any knowledge or any qualification, or who has not been to or has not been socialized into a western westernized education, to come in. And they would have never listened to that person with indigenous knowledge or who has never been to school, who comes into a western university, no one will ever listen to that person! The same indigenous person who does not agree with western ways has to go through western ways for him to be taken seriously. (Kelly, 08/05/14)

So I feel like there's that thing with black people as well, I mean – they become westernized so that they can be taken seriously or so that they can fit in. (Kelly, 08/05/14)

This does not entail an embodied inferiority, or mimicry on a voluntary basis. Rather it is a mimicry arising situationally under specific social conditions, such that pursuing mimicry becomes a tactical 'choice' – whiteness is an inevitable and unavoidable influence at Rhodes and black students question and reject it at their own peril. Hence, it is not a question of consent to

whiteness but of compliance with it. In fact, it may even border on coercion in that the hidden pressures experienced by black students to conform to whiteness as the idealised norm becomes very intense at times. What then resembles mimicry is perhaps more of a survival technique involving adaptation to an institutional environment that requires certain personas. This is best shown by one of the students, using the example of language:

In our country actually because English is the medium of the world you cannot blame coming here to Rhodes specifically and say that it's a problem here, but in South Africa in general. The fact that the medium of instruction is English it's not in any other African language, so in a way yes. I would say we do compromise certain things, even though I think we can move away from that, I mean it's possible to use your own language in South Africa but South African languages are just not given a chance.
(Karabo, 26/05/14)

At the same time, despite the possibility of trying to foreground languages other than English, there is a common observation amongst the black students that black people (at least black elites) are shifting away from their blackness towards whiteness. And this shift is causing not only discomfort but also seemingly outrage amongst the black students, as it tends to imply self-conceptions of black inferiority and the unbridled pursuit of mimicking whiteness. The black students themselves recognise their own responsibility and guilt in the pursuance of whiteness, but they tend to downplay it by claiming that the logic of white institutional culture compels them along this trajectory.

This of course relates back to the theme of a double consciousness and the disjuncture between university and home life, as this trajectory invariably involves internal tensions for the black students. As Ann argued:

We try and prove that we can have our own businesses and so many degrees, but the minute we leave home I feel like we try lock up our culture, our tradition, our ways we were taught at home so much and we try bury that because we try so hard to not be seen as black anymore, because you want to be seen as an individual, you don't want to be seen as the girl with 'black tendencies'. (Ann, 08/04/14)

Insofar as the students were moving along the road to whiteness, they needed to handle this inner turmoil in their own way or bury it deep within themselves – only for it to suddenly arise in situations which highlighted their contradictory positioning in life.

In this regard, when the black students talked about black elites in general (or particular groupings of elites), it seems that they were projecting their own specific challenges onto the circumstances and lives of others. Though the mimicry by others was not always to be criticised and condemned, at times they found it unnerving to see a black person who has ‘lost touch’:

It's because of how they were brought up because of the superiority, because of the ideas, 'white is superior'. And also because of the school which they come from, so they come from schools where they are more heterogeneous with white people and so on. So they're used to the culture now, and I'd say they try to be white in terms of the way they socialize with more white people. (Angelina, 16/05/14)

Black kids today they don't really care about their roots... 'Now I want to be speaking English all day every day, I can't be going to the rural areas now, what will I watch? Who will I talk to? Gosh I need an iPad, I don't want to talk to anyone! I want WhatsApp, I want BBM'...It's true, unfortunately from my perspective. I feel quite a lot of people escaping, and I don't know what they're trying to be but, I don't know what they're destination is. (Zodwa, 24/04/14)

Zodwa's reference to an unknown destination is instructive, because the fieldwork evidence strongly suggests that black students at Rhodes are walking along a pathway (of identity re-formulation) without a pre-determined end. It is this openness, or process of becoming, which is particularly evident amongst the students.

Despite the mimicry which does exist to some degree, and the unease it may cause or even the prevailing reluctance to fully embrace it, there seems to be particular meaning often given to becoming white which entails some kind of acceptance of it. More specifically, mimicry is not necessarily seen as a compromise because the process of mimicry does not involve a mere duplication of an essentialised whiteness. For the black students, it involves a new kind of (still) racialised identity which undermines the stabilised categories of blackness and whiteness, leading to the emergence of almost creole-like identities and cultures which are irreducible to the

epidermal surface. As the students indicate, there are unavoidable white influences that must be taken in to account but this does not constitute a smooth and complete transition along a racial spectrum. Again, language comes to the fore in such claims:

English as a language as Chinua Achebe said there's also our heritage, our colonial heritage that we've claimed 'coz there are a lot of Englishes now. So there's not one English so we've secondnized it in our own way, we have Africanized it. So having read those guys it has helped me not to try to feel inferior or feel inadequate because I cannot speak English like a white person, really I don't have to speak English like a white person.
(Metanoia, 30/05/14)

It is questionable whether the term 'mimicry' in fact captures the full complexity of this process, even as the term was used by Fanon. In this regard, one student contrasted the notion of mimicry with the following condition of existence:

There's nothing like mimicry, if we say that this rigid or stagnant white identity and then we say there's this black rigid stagnant identity that is there if we're talking about mimicry, but it also means that those two identities are uncontaminated, even the whiteness is uncontaminated which is problematic 'coz even white people in Europe have encountered other cultures, they're bound to mimic whatever they have encountered.
(Metanoia, 30/05/14)

I think we're trying to go back to being black in a modern western society, if you get what I'm saying...I think now we don't want to be 'the coconut' as people say, we don't want to be the black person trying to be white. We're trying to be the black people in the Western society. (Sandra, 02/06/14)

What can be gathered from this section therefore is that racial identities, including for the black students at Rhodes, are not unambiguous, fixed and easily delimited. Any claims about an unadulterated whiteness or blackness become problematic in this context. The discourses and practices of the black students highlight the fluidity and situationality of racial identities as they are susceptible to the contingencies of both time and context. There may be even a possible disjuncture between epidermal surfaces on the one hand and racial categorisations on the other

hand, such that new kinds of identities which question 'race' are being implicitly forged through every-day practices. In this respect, this thesis tries to capture the complex meanings of blackness for the time and context of post-apartheid South Africa, at least with reference to black university students at Rhodes University.

5.4.1 Transcendence

Although blackness today in South Africa still retains dimensions of its meanings from the apartheid past, the negativity of blackness is dissipating in part. The once undesirable and damned, in terms of the Manichean dualism, are now being given the right to flourish though the prospects for this flourishing remain exceedingly limited. Nevertheless, for the black students, new opportunities do abound. As Khaleesi said excitedly:

It is SO relevant right now in contemporary South Africa to be black and to be a female. (Khaleesi, 27/04/14)

As a humanist, Fanon hoped for a new world which transcended the boundaries of race as the very notion of race and the structuring of human society along racial lines marked the height of oppression and crippled the oppressed (and the oppressed) in numerous ways. Racial oppression went against the very quest for a dignified human condition.

But, in mimicking whiteness, a more humane society will not be forthcoming, and certainly not in the current age of neo-liberalism and consumerism. The rise of a black middle class (and black elite) in South Africa undoubtedly does indicate the dwindling relevance of race in South Africa and intra-class divisions. These elites may be 'leaving' their blackness 'behind' but they are simultaneously becoming incorporated into a world of whiteness dominated by materialism and private gain, in which liberation and freedom is not about 'casting off' the epidermal surface but about the acquisition and possession of commodities. I do not pursue this matter in any depth, and it is definitely an area that needs further investigation. But some students did speak to it:

Like for us it's really economic, it's not even about you being...it's not about you having a PHD, nobody understands that you know! It's not about the paper, it's about you being able to drive home in a car and you being able to build your mother's house and buying THAT furniture. Black people have certain things, you must have a certain kitchen, you know?

To be in a certain class or to be developed. So it's about bringing money, it's about the money. (Ann, 08/04/14)

There is a sense in which it becomes necessary to discard the epidermal surface, or to think and act out whiteness, because to enter into the upper reaches of the South African economy implies quite possibly entering into a world of whiteness. Again, this becomes a tactical maneuver to facilitate entry into the world of material wealth and prosper within it; thus, it is not seen as hypocritical. This is the time for the practical and accommodating route to take, as stated here by Olivia:

If at 21 or 22 you're like you're not gonna sit somewhere where there's a whole lot of white people, what are you gonna do when you get the job of your dreams and it's a company with majority white people? Or just majority Indian people? I mean it just doesn't make sense to me because you don't know what you're gonna be dealt in future. (Olivia, 02/05/14)

Though the magnitude of difference between whiteness and blackness might remain substantial in contemporary South Africa, there is still hope for integration providing the effort is made, though it seems that the effort is almost one-sided. Metanoia put it this way:

It's just connecting with people internally, you channel them and then you break through them and you see things that other people do not see. And sometimes it happens that those experiences are reciprocal and then you become friends like that. Like you become even more like brothers and sisters at some point because of that. As long as we don't come up with the issue of race and class difference and all that, all those things that create people. (Metanoia, 30/05/14)

In the end, this perspective comes across as based on the tenets of racial partnership and hence does not effectively entail any meaningful transcendence of race. It would entail black elites becoming integrated into a white order on the terms set by the white order. Racial struggle is replaced with racial truce, and any compromise made and any necessary shifts in identity become the responsibility of the black elite and not the white elite. It is almost an inter-racial class coalition outside of which stand, at a lengthy distance, the new wretched of the earth (symbolised by shackness and not blackness) in the 'new' South Africa. This would not be an easy and tension-free incorporation into the prevailing race-class order for the black university

students, and ultimately it may be one that they will challenge as they forge ahead in the years ahead in making sense of themselves and the world around them.

5.5 Conclusion

This chapter has offered a refined and nuanced account of the sheer complexity of black identities amongst postgraduate black students at Rhodes University. In this regard, they seem to display many of the key features that Fanon spoke about with reference to black intellectuals and elites. These are students who clearly are not trapped in the discourses and identities of South Africa's past though clearly they are shaped by this history. They exist within the old identities but that is only part of their story. In the end, and in their own particular ways, each of the students (existing in the present) seems to be striving to move beyond the old and to construct new meanings around blackness and thus new black identities. They exist within but, in a process of becoming, are moving against though perhaps not as yet beyond the past and the present. This is not an unproblematic process as it is characterised at times by frustration, anger, intolerance, loneliness. It is a tension-riddled process as are all social processes and the outcome in large measure is indeterminate as these students continue in the years to make their mark on blackness in post-apartheid South Africa.

Chapter Six: Conclusion

6.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a synthetic overview of the thesis and, in particular, seeks to draw the connections between the theoretical framing of the thesis (namely, a critical Fanonian perspective) and the fieldwork-based evidence pertaining to black post-graduate students at Rhodes University. It does not seek to prove or disprove the ongoing relevance of Fanon's thoughts to understanding blackness in the contemporary world (and specifically South Africa) as, in a sympathetically critical way, I have already argued for the relevance of his thinking. Rather, in a more explicit manner than demonstrated in the preceding chapter, I seek to show the ways in which the critical Fanonian framework illuminates the multi-dimensional character of blackness amongst the students. It should be stressed that this framework was used simply as a theoretical guide for understanding blackness and not imposed on the nuanced and complex evidence emerging out of the fieldwork at Rhodes University. Hopefully, by doing so, the thesis will also contribute to deepening our understanding of what constitutes contemporary South African blackness.

This thesis began as a quest to understand empirically the existence of blackness, including black inferiority, by adopting a critical Fanonian perspective. Though considered as increasingly irrelevant or even obsolete by some critics, there was strong reason to believe from the start that Fanon's thinking would be of significant value given that his theoretical work remains widely acclaimed in the academic world. The fieldwork for this thesis, I would argue, provides further justification for this acclaim. But it also (and more broadly speaking) enriches our understanding of blackness in post-apartheid South Africa and – perhaps disturbingly – demonstrates the ongoing significance of racial identities and racial subjectivities in South Africa and therefore the ongoing dynamics of race in a country torn between the effects of the past and the desires for the future. Further, despite any arguments to the effect that conversations surrounding race twenty years after the end of apartheid are (for lack of a better phrase) 'tired and unnecessary', this is not the case. Such conversations, within both the private and public realms, are critical if racial identities from the past are to be addressed in any meaningful way

and not simply reproduced in new forms today. Race remains an important signifier of the basic social constitution of post-apartheid South Africa and resonates in the everyday experiences, subjectivities and practices of millions of South Africans, such that further analytical studies of race are critical to any sociology of contemporary South Africa. This thesis, in its own small way, hopefully contributes to this theoretical endeavour. In this context, I now return to the key themes about blackness discussed throughout the thesis.

6.2 Inferiority

In terms of the hegemonic white order, there is a generally presumed inferiority of blackness, but shared not only by whites as Fanon suggested but also by blacks themselves. The reason for such a stance is that blackness has always been presumed to be inferior due to the racialised nature of colonialism and, in South Africa's case, segregation and apartheid as well. This continues to be a contemporary meaning of blackness that is greatly rooted in racial connotations of the past.

However, though this may have been an abiding concern of Fanon's, the study amongst the postgraduate students did not bring this out as strongly as perhaps I expected. The students did not see themselves as inferior and, if anything, they expressed a determination and defiance against being labelled as such. When they spoke about the existence of black inferiority, they claimed that other blacks (but not they themselves) exhibited inferiority traits. However, though consciously and explicitly denying any sense of personal inferiority, there were hints of lived experiences and practices in their own lives which seem to point to or even constitute black inferiority, albeit on a more subconscious level. For instance, by aspiring to whiteness at times within the university setting, the participants seemed to imply that blackness is associated with inferiority and whiteness with superiority and success. This tends to suggest, deep down, some form of internal turmoil and conflict embedded in the psyche of these black students which remains unresolved.

In a similar vein, there seems to be resistance to social change evident within these students; on the one hand, they challenge the preconceived notions of blackness and, on the other hand, they accept already-existing ideas about blackness – a situation that is both confusing and frustrating for them. These students were born during the so-called transition period (of the early 1990s) leading the end of apartheid in 1994, at a time when the meanings and connotations of blackness (including inferiority) had been firmly established by the pre-existing racial history.

These entrenched meanings do not vanish instantly because of a non-racial post-apartheid Constitution and an end to formal racial classification. Nevertheless, since the end of apartheid, the limiting and degrading meaning of blackness can be (and is being) openly challenged by young black South Africans. But black youth, such as the students at Rhodes, remain caught in this seemingly never-ending period of transition in which the reproduction of past blackness and the construction of a new blackness is in constant tension, and this social tension becomes internalised within the experiences and subjectivities of the students.

The black students expressed a particular disdain for other racial groups, particularly whites. This is not surprising given the events of the South African past, as this generation of students have older family members who lived under apartheid. These members not only suffered from racial oppression, cruelty and violence but likely played a role in struggling against racial domination. This is manifested in a lingering distrust for whites amongst the students. However, this harboring of ill-feelings towards whites, as forcefully imposing their will on others dear to the students, did not undermine a tendency amongst the students to still envisage whiteness as superior. This appears to entail an uncomfortable separation or even a cognitive distance between a collectivity (of whites) and the discursive meaning (of whiteness) (with the former associated with evil and the latter seemingly as less evil and even desirable).

At the same time, the superiority depicted in whiteness was not, for these students, ingrained in the whiteness itself (or in the epidermal surface) but involved the almost inherent association between race and class – in other words, entering the world of whiteness represented the ladder to economic success. This of course relates to the racial past (in which the intertwining of class and race was particularly pronounced) but it also speaks to the post-apartheid condition in which black elites become elites through taking over the reign of power once held by whites (whether in the state or corporate world). There may now be a decreasing overlap between race and class since 1994 but the character of this post-apartheid restructuring – for these black students – seems to reinforce the symbolic connection between whiteness and success.

Any sense of inferiority of blackness amongst these students seems to be challenged by the very presence of these students at a white liberal university, where they become increasingly exposed to white people and recognise the fallibility of whiteness. Simultaneously, as indicated, it entails emulating – or seeking to emulate – whiteness. Either way, there tends to be a disjuncture in racial subjectivities amongst these black students vis-à-vis the subjectivities in

their home communities, such that the students often feel alienated and isolated when in these communities, as if they do not belong. The students feel caught up in two worlds, and perhaps are not fully comfortable in either.

This implies that blackness is not a homogeneous category with reference to inferiority, and even within the category of black students themselves. Certainly, at least from the perspective of home community members, the black students are seen to have an air of superiority surrounding them and, indeed, the black students (to varying degrees) recognise themselves as somehow standing apart and above black working people. In fact, it might be argued convincingly that there is a hierarchy within South African blackness that displays its own Manichean tendencies or, at least, certain forms of prejudice and discrimination exist within blackness. This hierarchy is perhaps first and foremost structured along class lines (as manifested in various levels of wealth), not only between the black students at Rhodes and those outside the university setup but amongst the black students. The social class background of students is a basis for difference and differentiation (and possibly at times discrimination), as background embodies a particular set of values and desires including, in the case of wealthier students, a particular elite sensibility and self-respectability linked to white aspirations. The notion of the coconut status arises quite strongly in this context such that, insofar as coconuts mingle amongst themselves, interaction within the black student body along class lines becomes pronounced. This as well speaks to the diversity within blackness in contemporary South Africa.

Apart from class, there was also a Manichean hierarchy when it came to physical appearances, where light skin is assumed to be more beautiful than dark skin, and where seemingly white features are considered to be more desirable than 'typical black features'. More so, amongst the students, there was at times a disdain for black non-South Africans, as well as a preconceived notion of the embodied appearance of black foreigners in South Africa (which is, very dark). This did not though translate into any clear xenophobic attitudes let alone practices amongst the Rhodes students; but it may entail, implicitly, a discriminatory trend. This does however, once again, speak to the past remaining in the present, with the racial prejudices of the past becoming internalised within blackness or at least South African blackness. Black foreigners are the new black threat in post-apartheid South Africa, just as blacks in apartheid South Africa (who effectively were not actually South African in terms of official discourse) were the black danger for so-called white South Africa and hence needed to be restricted to their separate

bantustan system of governance outside the fortresses of South Africa. There is always the possibility that black elites in the new South Africa may, like the white elites of old, draw such Manichean boundaries (in this case, within blackness). Perhaps Fanon's point can be argued here: that after liberation, one 'species' is merely replaced with another and the cycle continues – the same cycle where the oppressed then become the oppressors such that the Manichean form remains but the content changes

When it comes to inferiority, this generation of black students is the last born under apartheid and the first to grow up under post-apartheid conditions. They have not completely broken free of the past and they are not fully aligned to any clearly-determined future; they are in a situation of extreme possibilities in a troubling world in which they are constantly seeking to discover themselves and, at least implicitly, give blackness new meanings. Inferiority clearly is not a blanket term to be un-problematically applied in a disaggregated fashion. There are different forms, degrees and shades of inferiority; and the kind of inferiority (or inferiorities) displayed by these black students at Rhodes is not static or uniform. There is no unbridled inferiority existing amongst them but, as I have emphasised, there are opposing tendencies which at times tear apart their identities. More than likely, though this requires further study, any inferiority shown or embodied may be highly situational such that the students wear different skins on different occasions; if situational, it is also likely that this does resolve the inner turmoil they experience around their blackness in a white world.

6.3 Double Consciousness

The notion of double consciousness, another central theme for this thesis, is implied in the preceding discussion on inferiority; as, in discussing the theme of inferiority, I highlighted the internal tensions within the subjectivities of the black students such that neither inferiority nor superiority is unambiguously contained in these subjectivities. Fanon's version of a black double consciousness was in part a reflection on his own experiences as a black intellectual. The double consciousness ingrained in the racialised identity of the black intellectual is very central to Fanon's work and this highlights the pertinence of his work to any study of blackness amongst university students in contemporary South Africa. Fanon, in pursuing his theoretical work, in fact became immersed within an academic environment not completely dissimilar to the Rhodes environment in which a dominant white culture prevailed and whiteness was all around him. It is

through this difficult exposure and experience that Fanon himself seems to have come to terms with his own divided consciousness (embodying blackness but consciously or unconsciously acting out whiteness) as though the two tendencies were polar opposites and un-resolvable. The Rhodes students definitely displayed some degree and form of a double consciousness.

It should be noted that, as a general tendency, the students did not drastically alter their way of being as expressed in mannerisms, lifestyles and practices in becoming budding black intellectuals at a previously all-white university. Perhaps in slight contrast to Fanon's leanings, the students did not experience a profound alteration of the self when engaging with the dominant white culture at Rhodes. There was not a sense of abruptness and disjuncture in entering the white tertiary environment, or a clash between races. This was despite the sheer pervasiveness of whiteness at Rhodes. If anything, any abruptness seemed to be softened or tempered by what they conceived as a liberal if not liberating culture at Rhodes: though whiteness prevailed, they experienced the possibility of establishing their own identity (or new identity). They were in the situation (a hegemonic white culture) but they were not necessarily of the situation such that their identities were not reducible to the situation. In a certain way, this facilitated the emergence of a double consciousness as it allowed entry (or further entry) into the ways of whiteness.

But there were variations amongst the students. Any disjuncture and alterations of the self were more prone to occur in the case of students whose social backgrounds and home environment were more 'traditional' (which tended to overlap, but not completely, with a lower class background). These students, in seeking to explore themselves in a predominantly white liberal middle-class world, experienced the distance most profoundly and particularly when they moved to and fro between their community home and their university home. They almost felt discriminated against for either their association with white people or just for attending a formerly all-white university. At times, they felt the need to censor their ways when back home in terms of what they thought, said and practiced so as to conform to the blackness within the community. It is here then where the politics of 'what is black' came fully into play. Or, at least a homogenous and flattened category of blackness is asserted within and by their home communities, so that when these black students fall outside the boundaries of this possibly essentialised notion of blackness, they experience a disconnection within themselves. This discursive reproduction within particularly black working class communities in post-apartheid

South Africa, in which black and white identities are seemingly fixed and are represented as fundamentally different, likely springs from the ongoing racial politics whereby black working class people remain confined to separate (effectively black) townships and interact with whites in largely the same way they did under apartheid. Their interaction with whites is superficial in that it exists out of necessity, such as in the workplace, as does not contribute to a rethinking of racial identities (which would also be the case of middle class white discursive representations of black working people).

This question of diversity within the black student body, and more broadly within the black polity, also speaks of the question of the ‘coconut’ – the assumption that, in the case of this study, certain black students are not really black because their lifestyle and aspirations are not ‘authentically black’ or ‘black enough’. I have constantly questioned this from a theoretical perspective throughout this thesis, but this does not mean that there are such notions of the authentic black ingrained in discourses circulating throughout contemporary South Africa. Again, it may draw upon historical notions of blackness in which the struggle against apartheid was formulated and pursued in highly racialised terms (which, of course, made sense in terms of the racialised logic which animated apartheid society and which relegated all black people to positions of servitude). Those black students who are labeled as ‘coconuts’ seek, if only unconsciously, to transcend this past categorisation of blackness and to breathe life into reformulations of blackness which look to the future. For them, the very notion of ‘coconut’ speaks to the past as it remains trapped within an image of blackness as inferior (implying, as it does, that success means whiteness). This entails resistance and it shuns the possibility of change; and it thereby is a mark of the students’ consciousness while also adding complexity to their way of being black in the world.

All this relates back to an issue which Fanon talked about – for example, when the black intellectual may go home to his or her own people and is treated there like an outsider. And, again, it raises the question of situationality with reference to the acting out or even performance of identities, with censoring of their ways occurring in both situations. The censoring though should not be overplayed as the students in many cases still abide by the ways of their families and communities, and they also became increasingly attuned to the ways of the white culture at Rhodes. But this does bring to the fore the sheer awkwardness of their racialised identities, an

awkwardness which may be intrinsic to identities *per se*. It also implies that the students' identities are fluid and could 'move' along a range of differing trajectories over time.

Overall, the students stated that coming to Rhodes University was a refreshing opportunity for them and in fact it was the first time that they were able to interact with other races in any meaningful manner. In interacting with white students, this does not mean that they were trying to become white or acting as if they were white as a sort of pretense. For them, they were simply socialising and exchanging cultures and experiences. Further, they retained some degree of emotional and social distance, either intentionally or because of a nagging discomfort. They recognised that the prevailing institutional culture was having an effect of them and was allowing them to become something other than who they were, but they did not become subsumed under or within this culture. It is for this reason that the students spoke constantly about being merely influenced and shaped by the prevailing culture at Rhodes in indeterminate ways, and not fitted into pre-existing and fixed ways of being. In fact, to think otherwise would imply that the black students are without agency and simply compromise according to the demands of the prevailing institutional setup. The students in fact sought to challenge (or wished to challenge) elements of this setup, including the use of English (the language of whiteness) as the medium of instruction. Hence, compromise and contestation were inscribed in the racialised identities of these students.

At the same time, because of compromise and contestation, students did not easily glide into the institutional life of Rhodes University. This is evident when the students talked about some of their experiences with racism when with or around white people. In the case of such experiences at Rhodes, these were in the main implicit and insidious and were not recognised as racial or racist utterings or practices by the white students. This is consistent with Fanon's thinking, in which the black intellectual may embody whiteness in certain ways but ultimately will never be seen or acknowledged as white (or as 'one of the crew') by his or her white student friends. There are always distinguishing factors which make the black intellectual feel like an outsider or stranger not only in his or her home black community but also during his or her transient status as a black student at university embodying whiteness. Whether the tension-riddled consciousness of these black students simply reflects the newness of the black intellectual in South Africa about whom all will soon and inevitably become accustomed, or

represents the ongoing condition of the black intellectual which will only be resolved through broader changes in South African society, remains unclear.

As argued earlier, these claims about a double consciousness amongst the black university students must not be understood as unique to them but as representing the human condition *per se*. Undoubtedly, in the case of the students, this form of consciousness has a particular content and is complicated by the racial structuring of South African society in the past and present. For instance, as the black students claim, they regularly need to prove themselves, and to work harder, to be accepted within the hegemonic white culture or Rhodes (as if caught between two worlds – white and black). Insofar as Fanon argued that the double consciousness is specific to the black intellectual, then this is a problematic claim. But it certainly is of great applicability to the young black intellectuals at Rhodes, as this (and the preceding) section show clearly.

In this respect, black students at Rhodes do not want to remain trapped within past stereotyped definitions of blackness (or a generalised category of blackness) and they seek an escape from it. But no matter how hard they try, and academically they feel compelled to work harder than their white counterparts (otherwise they will simply be designated as ‘just another incompetent black’), they are not able to enter fully into the world of whiteness (which they seek to enter not necessarily because of desiring approval from the white world for approval’s sake but because but out of necessity in establishing post-university careers). They feel like objects of a double gaze, from both the black and white worlds and they seek to negotiate their way in and through this dual gaze in finding their feet so to speak.

No person, as part of the human condition, is simply one being or even two beings. In this way, the notion of double consciousness does not fully capture the complexity of the racial identities of the black students. Or, at least, these are not simply two consciousnesses existing separating and coming into tension with each other. They are internally-related in the dialectical sense, and they interact and combine in multiple ways and change over time. The consciousness of these students then is fluid and is always in a state of becoming as they struggle to come to terms with their present and future in post-apartheid South Africa.

6.4 Mimicry

The notion of mimicry (and specifically the mimicry of whites) was, as argued by Fanon, part of the black experience. Under the colonial condition (or segregation and apartheid condition in South Africa), the Manichean dualism meant that the darker-skinned were considered as undesirables and the damned. The colonised black would grow up with the inherent need to aspire to be like the dominant white. This need or rather aspiration was what Fanon called mimicry, where the black colonised would try to achieve his or her own humanity by becoming white – to walk, talk, eat and sleep like a white. This notion of mimicry is of course greatly linked to the other two main themes of Fanon's work as discussed in this thesis, namely, inferiority and a double consciousness. It is because the black colonised feels inferior about his or her own blackness that he or she aspires to be something better. Furthermore it is the realisation that he or she can never truly be white or accepted as a white that leads to a double consciousness. All this was particularly the case for black intellectuals and elites.

The term mimicry, certainly as applied to the black students at Rhodes, is of significance but it does not fully capture the consciousness of these students. Mimicry implies that the norm and the desirable are embodied in whiteness but this is not completely the case for the black students. What appears to be happening amongst the students is a critical acceptance and distance from the hegemonic white culture. They undoubtedly are influenced by it, and they are in particular ways integrated into it, but this does not entail mimicry in any complete sense. As put by some of the students, any mimicry taking place should not be understood as accepting the ways of whiteness but – if anything – complying with it so that they can get on with their lives. Further, they seek to break down the binary between whiteness and blackness and to forge new identities which inevitably entail criticism of the hegemonic white culture. This new identity is encapsulated in the notion of the 'coconut' but, for those considered coconuts, it is not a disparaging term but a mark of a new and authentic identity. New identities are disruptive of the existing order of things and coconuts disrupt – it is a way of being in the world which is not easily categorised in terms of prevailing identities. In being coconuts, they undermine the existing criteria for being both white and black and thus they bring about discomfort for others.

Additionally, for coconuts, what comes as mimicry (or mimicking whites) is more an aspiration to escape the black condition of poverty and marginalisation. The fact that they are prepared to pay the 'black tax' is recognition of their embodiment of blackness and not a

discarding of it. What they seek is post-university success in the world which, historically, is linked to whiteness. This success is only possible in and through the white world but it does not imply, at least for the students, a process of mimicry in the sense of aspiring to be white. As indicated previously, they seek to go beyond the white-black binary. The world of whiteness then is simply the route they must take in order to partake of the wealth of South African society. They work within, against and – if they had their way – beyond the worlds of whiteness and blackness in the pursuit of some kind of non-racial identity (but some kind of identity nevertheless). Possibly, then, in perhaps going beyond race and in engaging in a process of transcending racial classification and identities, they are contributing to the new human that Fanon so passionately spoke about and desired.

Three qualifications though are necessary. First of all, it is not possible to generalise such arguments to the wider black population in South Africa, as mimicry (as with inferiority) likely does prevail in other cases, as even the students argued. Secondly, the students did show signs of mimicry in the sense of associating whiteness with the good things in life such as intelligence, beauty, wealth and honesty. The incredibly strong connection between whiteness and these qualities, as articulated by the students, made it extremely difficult at times to disassociate their desires and aspirations from whiteness. Thirdly, and this of course is a more general claim about the students, there is significant variation amongst the Rhodes students in terms of mimicry (some students were more inclined to consent to whiteness as the norm while others merely complied). Thus, the extent to which the students worked against the dualistic world they inhabit should not be overstated.

6.5 Conclusion

From a critical Fanonian perspective, three main themes – inferiority, mimicry and double consciousness – were examined in this thesis with regard to black post-graduate students at Rhodes University in post-apartheid South Africa.

It seems clear that contemporary South Africa remains in transition and the racial past continues to haunt the present. The fact that ‘post’ is regularly used to describe and literally define present-day South Africa is a sign that the country is heading in an indeterminate and unknown future. This uncertainty, and the forging of a new South Africa, is manifested in the complex and fluid identities of the black students at Rhodes.

Race remains central to contemporary South Africa. Though my intention in this thesis was to capture analytically the blackness embodied in the students at Rhodes, and to unpack their identities and subjectivities in a nuanced manner, what has unintentionally struck me with significant force is the sheer prevalence of racial discourses, identities and practices in South Africa today. Though Fanon's work is relevant to the ongoing racialised character of South African society, and indeed his work has been applied to contemporary restructuring in the country in insightful ways, it is quite likely that Fanon's theoretical corpus needs to be engaged with even more thoughtfully and fruitfully if we are going to come to terms with the race in South Africa. Just as the students work within, against and possibly beyond their inherited identities, we likewise may need to work within, against and possibly beyond the rich theoretical insights that Fanon has bequeathed us if we are to offer a sociological understanding of the racial complexities of South African society. And just as the students are breaking new ground in their reformulation of identities and subjectivities, it is hoped that this thesis will stimulate others to pursue fresh theoretical paths on identities in South Africa and break new ground in doing so.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 - Questions for Individual Interviews

Warm-up Questions

What pseudo name have you chosen?

Where are you from?

What are you studying? Why?

Why did you choose to come to Rhodes?

Briefly describe yourself?

Secondary Questions

- 1) Has being at Rhodes changed you in any way?
- 2) Has being at Rhodes changed any of your friends?
- 3) How do people in your hometown react to you since you've been at university?
- 4) What do people at home say about you being at Rhodes?
- 5) Are you the same person, here and at home(town)?
- 6) From your own understanding, what is a black person?
- 7) How do you feel about being black?
- 8) How do you feel about being black at Rhodes?
- 9) Roughly, how did you become aware that you were black?
- 10) From where did you learn about race? i.e. Primary school? Home? Church?
- 11) Have you heard of any racist encounters here at Rhodes regarding black students?
- 12) Have you heard of any racist encounters in your hometown with black people?
- 13) Do you easily integrate with other races?
- 14) Have you noticed any divisions amongst black students? Which/ what/ where?

Main Questions

- 1) From your experience, is blackness associated with inferiority? In what ways? Who are these people?
- 2) With what do you associate whiteness? So is whiteness therefore associated with superiority? In what ways? By whom?
- 3) What about the other races in South Africa, where do they fit in on the quality scale?
- 4) Being black, do you feel a need to better yourself? Achieve? Behaviour?
- 5) Being black, do you feel a greater pressure to excel at Rhodes? Is it greater felt because you are at university?
- 6) Is modern black identity striving to be white?
- 7) Fanon's claim: BI made up of inferiority and mimicry. Black people trying to be white/achieve whiteness. Do you agree?

Appendix 2 – Questions for Focus Group

Focus Group

- 1) Are you integrated into university or assimilated?
- 2) To what extent does Rhodes re-introduce the divisions of race?
- 3) To what extent do they encourage integration?
- 4) Does Rhodes predominantly embody a 'white' culture?
- 5) Is there such a thing as black inferiority? Is 'white' the ideal?
- 6) As a black person, to succeed in South Africa, do you have to adopt a certain degree of white culture?
- 7) Are black South Africans abandoning their culture and heritage because it is seen as inferior?

Appendix 3 – Letter of Confirmation (Individual Interviews)

Letter of Confirmation

2014

I, _____, student number, _____, have agreed to be interviewed for the Master's thesis of Adriana Mercadal Barroso (g09b1456) under the following conditions:

- My identity is with-held under the use of a pseudo name of my choice.
- I have been informed about the research topic in question.
- I am aware that this is a legitimate research project.
- I am fairly quoted and interpreted.
- Should I choose, a copy of the final thesis will be forwarded to me.

Signature:

Date:

Appendix 4 – Letter of Confirmation (Focus Group)

Letter of Confirmation

I agree to participate in a focus group discussion conducted by Adriana Mercadal Barroso (g09b1456) on the 13 August 2014 under the following conditions:

- 1) My identity is with-held from the public under the use of a pseudo name of my choice.
- 2) I am aware that my identity will be revealed to the fellow participants.
- 3) I have been informed about the research topic in question.
- 4) I am aware that this is a legitimate research project.
- 5) I am fairly quoted and interpreted.
- 6) Should I choose, a copy of the final thesis will be forwarded to me.

Pseudo Name:

*Mini Mouse

*Karabo

*Khaleesi

Signature: