

**Decolonization in South African Higher Institutions of Learning: A photovoice study  
with Black students at UCT**

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## **Abstract**

South African Higher Education institutions have been striving for decolonization, yet this transformation has largely been criticized as weak structural redress. Universities, especially Historically White Institutions (HWI) have only made attempts in redressing with affirmative action and little symbolic change. Despite recent Fallist protests, 2015-2017 which have catalysed debate and discourse around decolonization. These spaces remain violently exclusionary, through structural racism, sexism and epistemic 'othering'. This paper examines Black students meaning and understanding of decolonization at the University of Cape Town, a previously HWI, framed through the analysed results of a photo-voice study. The analysed data was drawn from photo-stories and focus groups. In understanding the construct better, this thesis argues that in placing Black students' perspectives centrefold, institutions can develop appropriate and efficient policies to enact changes on these sites: resulting in real transformation. The findings suggest that Decolonization means an ongoing, conscious-raising process, that aims to break and challenge norms such as 'Knowledge Neutrality' and 'Black Excellence' and reclaim spaces through collective action. Decolonization in academia goes simply beyond racial redress and aims to connect the centre of knowledge production with the society it produces this knowledge for.

**Key words:** *Decolonization, Black students, photo-voice, higher institutions, transformation, inclusivity, education, meaning.*

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Decolonization is defined as a process of reversing the effects of colonialism. Though the colonization period is over, its effects are still firmly in power determining how people view themselves and others, defining common goals society governs itself towards, and the production and power of knowledge based on the monolithic view of Eurocentric knowledge (Maldonado-Torres, 2007). Decolonization can be seen as the decentring of hegemonic Euro-American centric thought and moving towards a more polycentric view (Oyedemi, 2018). Decolonization is a political, social and epistemic process that seeks to critically analyse the authoritative structures of knowledge and their relationship to power (Zembylas, 2018).

Decolonization is a multi-faceted concept. Much of the literature finds that it is built around de-constructing academia- the curriculum being taught and researched, the language-medium of delivery, structures and institutional ideologies (Mangu, 2017; Oyedemi, 2018; Salvo, 2018). Predominantly, the literature looks at decolonization in Canada, Latin America and Oceania (Lander, 2000; Matsunaga, 2016; Zavala, 2013). Decolonization of knowledge production in Latin America academia, was driven by questioning the relevance and validity of the positivist paradigm in social science practices (Fals, 2006). Decolonization in New Zealand involved successful ways of including indigenous people, defined as pedagogical decolonization, encompassing aspects of finance, curriculum reform and drawing attention to dialogical and moral aspects of schooling (Manu'atu & Kēpa, 2008; Zavala, 2013). African literature incorporates what pedagogical decolonization 'ought to do' or should be like (Morreira, 2017; Oyedemi, 2018; Salvo, 2018). However, there is less literature in comparison specifically measuring the praxis and practicality of decolonization.

Decolonization aims to reclaim public spaces and is the re-arrangement of spatial relations (Fanon, 1963). The eradication of the Rhodes statue provides evidence that reclamation is an aspect of decolonization with a consciousness-raising effect (Ndelu, Dlakavu, & Boswell, 2017). Ngugi wa Thiongo (1992) describes decolonization as an ever-ongoing process of "seeing ourselves clearly" (p.85). For Ngugi wa Thiongo, decolonization is a project of re-centring Africa. This involves challenging the assumption that the West is the valid central repository of African knowledge and culture (Ngugi wa Thiong'o, 1992). It is about rejecting the idea that African knowledge is tautological to a critique of Western Knowledge. Decolonization aims to challenge the Eurocentric hegemony of knowledge. By unmasking, unveiling and revealing, decolonization problematizes Eurocentric rhetoric of progress, neutrality, fraternity and liberty (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2019). Decolonising the mind entails psychological emancipation. Black consciousness is the psychological emancipation process

that seeks to free Black people from the chains of coloniality, and changing how they value and perceive Blackness: Restoring Black peoples agency (Biko, 1987)

This study aims at thus articulating the subjective experience of Black<sup>1</sup> students in a historically white institution (HWI) in a Fallist Era of decolonization. It is anticipated that this study will not only enrich the theoretical insights of how Black students perceive the knowledge production, supplication and representation at university, but also further the multiple understandings and conceptions of what it means to decolonize to Black students. Which can potentially influence relevant decision and policy makers at the University in making decisions with regards to decolonization and transformation.

### **The necessity and importance of Decolonization in Academia**

It is essential to understand the need for decolonization in academia, as academic perspectives are often accused of epistemic injustice, a cognitive injustice (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018). An epistemic injustice constitutes an ethical injustice to a human, when institutions/organisations/society wrong someone specifically in their capacity as a knower (Fricker, 2007). Fricker (2007) posits the concept of *hermeneutic injustice*; this is when one's experience is not understood (by themselves or others) due to the unavailability of relevant concepts and epistemologies. This is argued to be ethically wrong as it denies individuals knowledge that is relevant to their experience, it denies their capacity to effectively reason, and reason is enmeshed within one's humanity. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018) argues that epistemic freedom is an essential prerequisite of other freedoms (political, economic and cultural).

This speaks to the need for including all different canons of knowledge in the academic project. However, in South Africa, inclusion and exclusion is not tautological to access vs. non-access, neither is it a matter of student academic support; but more to do with the rules of knowledge formation, representation and validation of various kinds of epistemologies (Keet, 2014). This has ramifications for who counts as a valid knower and who does-not.

Much of the knowledge perpetuated in higher institutions is of the hegemonic Euro-centric cannon inherited from colonisation, which can lead to the reproduction of theories and practices that are unethical. Debates around academic decolonization regards the relevancy of the knowledge. Academic decolonization involves re-examining the epistemologies, methodologies and ideologies in regards to not only what is taught, but also doctrines governing research (Ratele et al., 2018).

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<sup>1</sup> The term "Black" in this project is used to refer to individuals from the designated groups "black African", "Indian" and "coloured" in South Africa. I do not aim to essentialise these identities and understand there exists multiple facets of these racial identities

## **Decolonization in Higher Learning Institutions in South Africa**

### *Demographic change and Affirmative Action*

Decolonization and transformation have been the forefront agenda of higher learning institutions in South Africa. In an aim to increase transformation and inclusivity, HWIs have been mandated to redress their racial inequalities by increasing their intake of marginalized groups (Cornell & Kessi, 2017; Walker, 2005). The Fallist movement sparked protests in university campuses across South Africa, catalysing debates and discussions around creating a more inclusive university and decoloniality (Ebrahim, 2018; Khan, 2017). The Fallist movement was *driven* by the *language* of decoloniality (Keet, Sattarzadeh, & Munene, 2017).

Much of the literature regarding transformation and inclusivity at higher institutions argues that the effect of affirmative action has been superficial, in aiming to achieve inclusivity. Although affirmative action has redressed racial statistical indifferences at HWIs as a result of the Apartheid legacy (Bock, 2015). Durrheim, Trotter, Piper, & Manicom, (2004) found that despite attempts at racial demographic redress, students still experienced University of Natal as highly discriminatory. Walker (2005) found racism to be propagated institutionally at a previously Afrikaans university. Researchers argue that though black students have been allowed into these previously prohibited spaces, their acceptance is tautological to statistical inclusion, not cultural inclusion (Daniels & Damons, 2011; Kessi & Cornell, 2015). This reinforces the lived experience of being an ‘other’ in black students bringing much doubt to their self-efficacy, as they battle with the notion, that their acceptance to university was not of their own merit, but in order to fulfill government mandated racial quotas (Cornell & Kessi, 2017) .

Decoloniality entails individuals feeling that they derived positions and accolades based on personal merit and not government mandated statistical inclusion. Institutionally, Maseti (2018) posits that as a young black female academic, she must be extra assiduous with her work, to justify that she deserves her position. The lack of black academic staff can reinforce students feeling of exclusion; On a symbolic level it displays the ceilings and the positions to which blacks can aspire to in these institutions (Kessi & Cornell, 2015). Mangcu, (2017) argues that inclusion of more blacks in the professorship will constitute change.

### *Institutional Culture and Symbolic Exclusion*

Decolonization speaks to the need for inclusion. This is evidenced by different groups such as Blacks, womxn, queer and the LGBTQI+ community being included in the Fallist movement (Khan, 2017). Firstly, PatriarchyMustFall emerged, as a challenge to cisheteronormative patriarchy in the Fallist movement, campus environs and in the broader society (Ndelu et al., 2017). Secondly, the need for valid representations at different hierarchal



levels of academia. This involves representation beyond tokenism. One study found that Coloured female students at Stellenbosch university felt that their inclusion in university committees and boards was simply tokenism (Daniels & Damons, 2011).

The language in which the curriculum is delivered in and the university environment influences the feelings of belonging of students. African languages remain side-lined (Aslam, 2018) and the lack of iconography and symbols that acknowledge the existence & contributions of Black students, further alienates them in these institutions (Boonzaier & Mhkize, 2018).

#### Knowledge frameworks and curriculum

The curriculum taught in higher institutions throughout South Africa has a Euro-American centric standing and defines this as the universal canon of knowledge. This has an alienation factor to students as students are unable to relate the content they learn and their lived daily experiences (Cornell & Kessi, 2017), an epistemic ‘othering’ (Keet, 2014). Pillay & Kramers (2003) propose that hegemonic psychology’s lack of regard towards black working-class issues further alienates black students. At the Macro level, this leads to the client-patient mismatch and furthers the inequities experienced within South Africa psychotherapy with regards to access to psychological resources (HPCSA, 2017). These debates accentuate the need for debates and discourses around decolonization to take practical action as they have ramifications for South African society (Griffiths, 2019).

Much of the literature regards the theoretical and philosophical underpinnings that decoloniality in South Africa should follow and agrees that, decoloniality should seek to redefine what is considered knowledge, equally valuing indigenous knowledge (Le Grange, 2016; Oyedemi, 2018; Salvo, 2018). Kessi & Boonzaier (2018) posit that a decolonial feminist approach to psychology and its research conduct will develop its current relevancy. This approach is invaluable as it aims at tackling structural racism, occupation of spaces, and the identity-related impact of colonialism and dispossession (Kessi & Boonzaier, 2018). Le Grange (2016), argues that decolonization of the curriculum entails emancipating our thoughts from cartesian dualism, as this essentializes all humans to be the same. Moreover, he argues that decolonization should take an Ubuntu philosophy as its centre (Le Grange, 2016). Conversely, Oyedemi (2018) proposes that decolonization of the South African academe should take a polycentric approach. Although decoloniality is a heavily needed discourse, Keet & Munene (2017) warn that we must be cautious that decoloniality does not fall into being simple rhetoric, but be a praxis in its own right. “Not because it does not have the resources or imaginative capacities, but because the social structure of the academy will disallow it to become a productive reference point” (Keet et al., 2017, p. 4).

### Coping Strategies

The culture within HWI perpetuates negative stereotypes of Black Students fuelled by insituational racism (Cornell & Kessi, 2017). Fanon (1963) argues that racist environments can create an inferiority complex: A psychological problem arises from a social problem of unequal power. Studies have found that Black students coping strategy involved working hard to disprove stereotypes and persisting in the face of discrimination (Cornell & Kessi, 2017; Griffith, Hurd, & Hussain, 2019). Mcgee & Stovall (2015) caution that rather than praising students for their resilience it is important to consider the negative psychosocial impacts of this strategy. Thus although this coping strategy yields academic success, it may be associated with a psychological toll (Griffith et al., 2019). Mcgee (2015) asserts that utilizing this method against negative stereotypes may serve as a motivation, but may equally be psychologically distressing by manifesting anxiety and a compulsive work ethic (Aslam, 2018). Grantham, (2003) terms this strategy as the “Prove them Wrong Syndrome” (p.6). Disproving stereotypes often involves students having to prove their proximity to whiteness or ‘becoming white’ to fit in (Cornell & Kessi, 2017).

In overview, decolonization is a challenge to the effects of colonialism. Effects that have subjected and entrapped the knowledge creation, establishment and valuation of Black people’s own ways of knowing and doing. Recent Fallist protests, 2015-2017 have revitalised debate and discourse around decolonization. There has been much writing covering the ideologies and philosophies that should govern the process and descriptions of student identifications within these systems of oppression. Further research needs to engage with how Black students define decolonization in order to guide the practice of decolonization.

### **Rationale, Aims and Objectives**

#### **Aim**

This study aimed to articulate the subjective meaning of decolonization amongst Black students at the University of Cape Town.

The rationale behind this project was that there exist visibly marked attempts at decolonizing UCT. Commencing with the removal of the Rhodes statue and institutionalisation of discourses around decolonization. 2018 also saw the appointment of Black woman Vice Chancellor (Pitt, 2018). However there exists limited literature looking at the progress of academic decolonization at a HWI within the Fallist Era. Furthermore, this project aimed to empower Black students and provide them with a space, to not only highlight their experiences but also actively contribute to transformation and decolonization at UCT.

#### **Main Research Question;**

What does decolonization in HWI mean to Black students at UCT?

### **Sub-Questions:**

1. How academically included do Black students feel at UCT within the Fallist Era?
2. How do Black students' cope with and/or resist experiences of marginalization at UCT?
3. How are Black Students identities shaped by their experience of attending UCT?
4. What do Black students perceive are the institutional possibilities and constraints for decolonizing UCT?

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework that underpins this work is a decolonial framework. Decolonization research does not have one common definition. Decolonization research is performative, it is entrenched within activism (Held, 2019). A general theme of decolonized research works within the philosophy that non-western forms of epistemology are excluded and marginalized, stripping knowers of their agency (Keet, 2014; Oyedemi, 2018; Salvo, 2018). Decolonising methodologies are moreover informed by critical theoretical approaches in their aim to de-construct hegemonic knowledge and transforming power relations (Salvo,2018).

This research falls under the Critical construction paradigm. This paradigm holds that knowledge is temporally and culturally situated, thus knowledge and phenomena are socially constructed in an interaction between culture, institutions and historical contexts (Steinberg, 2014). It is relevant to this research, as it aims to explore how students construct their experience of decolonization (Freire, 2000; Steinberg, 2014).

### **Methods**

#### **Research Design**

Qualitative research is a scientific method of examining subjective data (Smith, 2008). Qualitative research was best suited for this investigation. As the study aimed to explore the subjective constructions and understandings of decolonization amongst Black students. Qualitative research aims to be descriptive, revealing themes that help in creating a deeper understanding of subjective interpretation of experiencing a specific phenomenon (Passer et al., 2012).

There is no one way to conduct decolonized research. Decolonized research however aims to empower the marginalised groups through breaking down the hierarchical research process and making participants, active members in the research as co-researchers. Decolonized research recognizes the power imbalances enmeshed within academia.

In summary when conducting the research, it was imperative that the research design employed, fully enabled Black students to express their subjective feeling of inclusion and

belonging within a HWI while simultaneously empowering the marginalised and raising awareness to the academic inclusionary realities of Black students.

### **Participatory Action Research**

Participatory Action Research (PAR) is a qualitative research process, that is markedly a collaborative research process. It is aimed at challenging the power dynamics within research and knowledge production and between the researcher and the researched (McIntyre, 2008).

With an action praxis, that is faithful to empowerment through consciousness-raising; it aims to create practical and contextual solutions that simultaneously emancipates the marginalised population. Participants are viewed as co-researchers with equal contribution to the research; research thus becomes co-constructed between co-researchers and the researcher-facilitator (McIntyre, 2008).

### **Photovoice.**

The data collected for this project was through photovoice methodologies. Photovoice is a form of participatory action research that is utilized within qualitative research. It is a community based method that focuses on empowering marginalised groups by highlighting overshadowed and under-looked experiences, in an aim to bring practical real change through consciousness-raising (Wang & Burris, 1997). The method entails collecting photographs and their stories created by the participants themselves about their lived experiences. Study co-researchers (participants) are equipped with cameras and are requested to take pictures and tell stories in their environment related to their topic of interest (Harley, Hunn, Elliott, & Canfield, 2015; Wang, 2006).

Photovoice is of particular benefit for this research as it can assist in dealing with sensitive issues and topics- such as inclusion in spaces, institutional representation, and feelings of being a valid knower (Wang & Burris, 1997). The immediacy and power of images in representing ideals and feelings that are difficult to convey adequately in words can be represented and spark unconscious social change. Photovoice is also aimed to at reaching policy makers and the general public through the photography exhibitions (Wang, 2006).

Photovoice was most relevant to this study, as it is consistent with the decolonial paradigm that emphasizes the empowerment of disenfranchised groups to refine and change their own realities (Harley et al., 2015). It empowers participants to become active actors in instrumenting change in their lived environments. Moreover photovoice methodologies have been used before with young South Africans engaging them in a variety of issues including social change, belonging and identity politics (Cornell & Kessi, 2017; Shefer, Strebel, Ngabaza, & Clowes, 2018).

## Participants

Participants were 6 full-time students at UCT, 4 undergraduate and 2 postgraduate students. Representing 4 out of 6 of the UCT faculties, were 2 female students and 4 male students. In the recruitment and conducting of this study, the term ‘Black’ was to represent individuals from the various groups of ‘black African’, ‘Coloured’ and ‘Indian’ however recruited participants for this study all identified as ‘black African’. With regards to nationality demographics, 3 of the participants were South African, 1 Zimbabwean, 1 Malawian and 1 Kenyan. Participants represented the different levels of study (from second year to postgraduate honours level).

The method of purposive sampling was employed for the purposes of this study. This is because purposive sampling ensures that the selection of participants is in line with the aims of the study to investigate the experiences of black students in the fallist era (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, Rukayya, 2016). ‘Word of mouth’ was another strategy employed to recruit participants.

The academic registration date prerequisite of 2018 or prior was to ensure that participants not only adequately experienced life at UCT but also had some familiarity with discourses and praxis of decolonization at UCT. As these students were best placed to articulate how much change had occurred within the Fallist era.

Detailed demographic information is displayed in the following table. In keeping participants identity anonymous, their assigned pseudo-names are not linked with the data in the table.

**Table 1**

*Participants details*

Participant	Gender	Faculty	Year Academically Registered
1	Male	Commerce	2016
2	Male	Science	2015
3	Female	Humanities	2018
4	Male	Commerce	2016
5	Female	Humanities	2016
6	Male	Law	2017

A flyer (see *appendix C*) was used as the primary method of recruitment. The flyer was posted across notice boards in different faculties of both UCT Upper and Middle Campuses.

Interested participants then completed an online survey establishing their eligibility for the research.

### **Data Collection Tools and Procedures**

**Phase 1: Focus Groups-** Focus groups are suitable for pointing out unexpected aspects of a social phenomenon: interactions between participants pushes them to consider and reflect on the multiple facets of a phenomenon (Acocella, 2012). Moreover, they maximise the collection of high quality data in restrictive research time frames (Acocella, 2012). The purpose was to facilitate a conversation and reflection on the meaning of decolonization. These meetings were held in the Psychology department of UCT. Participants were provided with consent forms explaining the purpose of the project and the level of commitment expected from them. The first focus group meeting was 73 minutes long and had the objective of conscious raising. This focus group was guided by a list of questions (see *appendix D*). The second focus group whereby participants reported back their photo stories to the group was approximately 62 minutes long.

**Phase 2: Training and Planning-** Participants were trained in basic photography practice, including framing, lighting and basic ethical standards in photography. This training took place immediately after the first focus group. Following the technical training, participants were given an opportunity to reflect on the focus group discussion on decolonization and come up with ideas for their own photo-stories. Participants were provided with examples of other photo-voice projects displayed in Hub for Decolonial Feminist Psychologies in Africa (housed in the Psychology Department) to have a sense of the photography agency they had. Participants utilized their camera-phones to take pictures as they are the “Ubiquitous Camera” (Kindberg, Spasojevic, Fleck, & Sellen, 2005, p. 48). Camera phones are almost ever-present in environments that people typically did not have cameras (Kindberg et al., 2005). This allowed for a more instant and fluid way to capture various manifestations of decolonization. Participants were encouraged to caption their pictures, providing a narrative to the story which is guided by the research project’s theme.

**Phase 3: Production** Participants had one month to capture their pictures and create their photo stories providing them with ample time to reflect and adequately frame the stories they wished to tell (Kessi, Kaminer, Boonzaier, & Learmonth, 2019). A limit of 3 photographs per participant was decided, in order to maximise display space and cost restrictions.

### **Data Analysis**

The data analysed comprised of the focus group transcriptions, the photographs and photo-stories. Thematic analysis was utilized to derive emergent themes and patterns within the dataset. Thematic analysis is best suited for understanding multi-dimensional constructs

such as decolonization. This entailed familiarization with the data, generating initial codes , searching for themes , reviewing themes , defining and naming themes and finally production of this report (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The data was transcribed then read and re-read, the captions and the photographs were examined. The data was coded. Codes such as ‘neutrality of science’ and ‘community serving knowledge’ despite seeming different are two sides of the same theme ‘Curriculum relevancy’. A table displaying this is available in the appendix (*see appendix E*).

## **Ethical Considerations**

### **Informed Consent and Confidentiality**

Ethics for this study was granted by the Humanities Departmental Ethics Committee and Department of Student Affairs (*see appendix G*). Informed consent is an understanding that the participant has been provided with all relevant information with regards to the nature and conduct of the research prior to the data collection process. Participants were provided with consent forms (*see appendix A*), which the researcher read through together with the participants: detailing the research’s purpose, its procedure, data analysis methods employed and issues surrounding ethics. As participants were critically evaluating the academia, this necessitated that their identity was to be protected to ensure that contributing to this project would not jeopardize their academic career, as the results of this study may be exhibited to senior university officials. To protect their anonymity, pseudonyms were provided. Moreover, within the focus groups confidentiality could not be absolutely ensured, thus an environment that fosters mutual respect and creates minimal risk was established.

### **Ethical issues relating to secondary participants**

Photovoice deals with images of individuals, which creates issues of privacy and confidentiality. Where participants took direct photographs of others, verbal consent was obtained from these secondary participants where necessary. None of the subjects photographed were minors or degraded the integrity of those individuals. Moreover, the privacy of the images was ensured by storing the images on a password protected computer in an encrypted file.

### **Risk and Benefits to Subjects**

Risk is a multi-faceted concept that includes threat to personal safety (environments in which it is safe to photograph) and emotional distress (Willig, 2001). Participants experienced minimal risk in participating in this research. This study did recognise that speaking on themes of inclusion might cause some emotional distress in participants. None of the participants utilized the advertised help services if they felt emotional distress from participation (*see appendix F*). Benefits of participating include conscious-raising of participants in

understanding decolonization. Participants were provided with direct influence in the building of this research. Providing them with an avenue to centre, highlight and share their experience. Moreover, participants identified important sites of decolonization, by framing these sites in pictures, policy makers have a more student focused frame of the decolonization project.

### **Actions and Competence of Researchers**

Participants were trained in photography and were trained in the ethics surrounding taking pictures. Due to the visual nature of the data issues of invasion of privacy, consent of subjects, and ownership of photos were highlighted (Wang & Redwood-Jones, 2001). Participants were trained to identify the contexts in which verbal consent from subjects was to be obtained. With photovoice it was of importance that participants understand that they are acting as co-researchers.

### **Debriefing of participants**

After the third meeting the participants were debriefed on the study. This provided participants an opportunity to reflect on their role and experiences as co-researchers.

### **Reflexivity**

Reflexivity is a continuous process whereby the researcher is aware and reflects how their individual positionality in society (race, class, religion, structural positionality) defines questions derived, participant responses, data collection and analytical tools employed (Berger, 2015). I am a black heterosexual international student from Kenya, who was first academically registered at UCT in 2016. I witnessed the Fallist movement to be a catalyst for transformation and decolonization.

My identity as a Black African allowed for participants to see me as one of their own, which made it easier for my participants to speak about their experiences in a relational manner. I have an insider-outsider perspective (Berger, 2015). While I am African, I am not of South African nationality. My experience at UCT has been polarising where I have been part of two different departments Psychology and Philosophy (both largely populated with white students) which teachings are derived from a Eurocentric cannon of knowledge. This limited my understanding of decolonization to curriculum change. Participants highlighted that learning in local languages was part of the decolonization of the curriculum, I was initially blind to this as my experience of learning in Kenya was always in English and I never saw or questioned how this was inherently problematic and epistemically ‘othering’.

Where I viewed setting up of incorporation of African literature to constitute enough decolonized change. Participants countered my view as shallow and these attempts were deemed to be ‘aesthetics and did not materialize to real change. Moreover, my Identity as a



heterosexual male may have led to data analysis and constructions of decolonization that are unconscious of cisheteronormative norms, gendered discourses and experiences of womxn.

My identity as an international post-graduate student has privileged me in feeling secure in my position and place at UCT. I have been treated differently from other local Black students as I have a ‘foreign accent’, which may have influenced my perceptions of decolonization and feelings of inclusivity. Whereas 4 out of 6 participants are still undergraduate students, their feelings of belonging and coping strategies may be inherently different. My middle-class positionality has shielded me from the material and social challenges that many Black students face at HWI. I did not attempt to be objective when conducting this research. Attempting to hold a neutral stance would simply reify the complex power dynamics between researcher and researched.

### **Results and Analysis**

Four themes were derived, describing the meaning of decolonization to Black students at UCT. Decolonization means:

- 1) Curriculum Relevancy- The two-fold Aspect of Relevancy
- 2) Challenging the norm of ‘Black Excellence’
- 3) Transformation beyond aesthetics- Decolonization in Praxis
  - a) The Co-option of Decolonization
  - b) Representative decision makers
- 4) Reclamation of Spaces

#### **Curriculum Relevancy- The Two-Fold Aspect of Relevancy**

##### *The state of African Knowledges*

Participants expressed that the curriculum was of a hegemonic Euro-centric cannon. They argued that this epistemically ‘others’ them and that African knowledge was highly under-valued:

*This is my second year, the only time I have learnt about Africa itself as a continent, is when I have done African Studies as an elective and it is always a critique of the African version. So, we learn about what Western people say about Africa, the whole economic policies, then we learn about the critique from ONE African academic! (Lerato, FG1)*

In this quote Lerato expresses that African knowledge is only available in courses that are inherently about Africa. She explains that African knowledge is only utilized as a critique of Western theories, more than an independent knowledge cannon. This has been documented in other research (Kessi & Cornell, 2015; Le Grange, 2016).

*The way in which you learn, the way you view Blackness and the things that come out of Blackness needs to shift. It cannot just be an add on to whiteness. Something that is only legitimized when whiteness says okay (Masego, FG1)*

Masego adds onto Lerato's point in presenting African knowledge as a critical perspective rather than a cannon in its own merit. By presenting African knowledge in this way, it creates a view that Blackness can only create knowledge with the approval of whiteness (Biko, 1987; Ngugi wa Thiong'o, 1992).

Tatenda in his Photo-story had a similar view on the marginalisation and misrecognition of African knowledge. He argues that the decolonization project has been slowed down by the continuous demeaning of African knowledge. He explained that there is only one shelf of African scholars in his faculty library on UCT's middle campus.

### **Photograph 1: The Relevant Shelf**



*Caption: The persistent marginalisation of other forms of knowledge impedes on the decolonial agenda quite significantly. This is because knowledge is a very important site for decolonization Thus decolonization entails a removal of the impudent that continue to violently alienate and reject other knowledge forms.*

### **(Tatenda Photo-story 3)**

Tatenda's photo-title highlights the irony of having one shelf of African knowledge in a library based in a university in Africa. He uses the term 'Persistent' to highlight the

continuous hoops and push backs that indigenous forms should hoop through. The term ‘violently alienate’ illustrates how exactly African knowledge is purported as, from a Western perspective, this knowledge is full of stereotypes, prejudices and patronizing views about Africa and it’s people (Heleta, 2016).

Language was also highlighted as an aspect of the curriculum that needed to be decolonized. Participants described the hegemony of English in the academic space as a direct challenge to their knowledge acquisition and engagement:

*In lectures you will find like bright Black students who are in UCT don’t end up articulating themselves cause maybe English is not their first language, you know what I mean, that whole thing if they articulate themselves in a certain way the lecturer will act differently (Lerato, FG1).*

Lerato explains that due to the alienation feeling of Euro-centric English curriculum, students of high capability will avoid participating. This is synonymous with other research results (Aslam, 2018). Black students cannot be themselves, and are forced to adjust to the system, changing their attitudes and behaviour (changing accents in lecture halls) in order to navigate the institution (Kessi & Cornell, 2015).

This Eurocentric curriculum hegemony creates practices and interpretative frames that restrict thinking outside these frames. The hegemony creates an assumption of neutral knowledge (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2019). Discourses such as ‘science is neutral’ were some of the reasons given by participants as to why there was resistance to decolonize the curriculum:

*In the Science Faculty, they try to have this idea that knowledge is impartial, knowledge cannot be biased. All the stuff created in the Science Faculty is for people as well, it is not about knowledge being this impartial thing as what they say about it because where is the knowledge being created and where is it going to, where is it even coming from? So, a lot of times when we are taught, they kind of erase a lot of African influence from the knowledge itself. (Kombo, FG1)*

Kombo mentions that constructing science as neutral, creates resistance discourses for decolonization of the curriculum and positions students who challenge this ideology as irrational. When he says ‘All the stuff created in the Science faculty is for people as well’ highlights the motive for creating knowledge is for self-benefit and academic advancement more than societal betterment.

### Curriculum and community development

Relevancy of curriculum is key. The lack of consideration of Black experiences has alienated students from the communities they come from:

*Even in Africa, UCT was based to be separate from the communities it was meant to serve, the areas that surround and everything like that and even the kind of knowledge we access within the university kind of reflects that, at the end of the day you are going to be moving further and further away from serving, it's almost like you serve yourself through the knowledge you gain in varsity, you serve white people or certain spheres of privilege (Masego FG1).*

Decolonization of curriculum according to participants was not only studying African knowledge, but also studying applicable knowledge that could change every day tangible experiences- knowledge that can service the community. This is the two-fold Aspect of relevancy. Looking beyond what knowledge *is* and studying what knowledge *does*. Decolonized education to them should directly service the ecology it is in. This was portrayed in Masego photo story:

Photograph 2: Decolonization with a view



*Caption: This photo was taken on the Blue route bridge to Kopano and made me think about the space which UCT occupies at the foot of a mountain. The positioning of UCT, and the perspective which many people, particularly those who do not go to or have*

*never attended UCT, seems to reflect an Ivory tower approach both physically and philosophically. UCT's elevated standings in world rankings and the eyes of the communities around it sometimes seems to disconnect it from the communities around it, and oftentimes I doubt who most of the research UCT puts out is for. There seems to be a great deal of socially responsive work in many faculties, but I wonder whether the decolonisation movement will be something which happens in the university space but fails to cross the bridge towards the communities it could serve outside of it.*

**(Masego, Photo-story 3)**

In Masego's picture UCT is both far and barely visible. This highlights the distance and the disconnect between the knowledge it produces and the community around UCT. She doubts the purpose the knowledge production project at UCT is meant to benefit the community around it. She emphasizes the community view of UCT, and how from the outsider perspective the institution is dauntingly disconnected from the community around it.

Aoki (1999) argues that university curriculum should not only focus on theoretical aspects (curriculum-as-planned) but on practical aspects of how it's lived (curriculum-as-lived). Justifying the curriculum-as-lived requires serious examination of how students are experiencing the current university curriculum and using this for a basis of its decolonization (Le Grange, 2016).

Tatenda argued that the curriculum decolonization currently was not enough:

*It's a semantics thing, it's an aesthetic, we are trying to be transformative but it's like we want you to do an assignment on access to justice and we only do it in one week, when in essence access to justice is one of the biggest problems in South Africa* (Tatenda, FG1)

For Tatenda decolonization of curriculum entailed structuring the curriculum to adequately combat the issues and problems of South Africa. He terms decolonization of the curriculum currently as shallow, ineffective and more for a look, than effecting actual change.

Decolonizing the curriculum, disregards Eurocentric and static knowledge orientations and emphasises a symbiotic knowledge dynamism. This aims for practical and applicatory knowledge that can be relevantly applied to Africa outside UCT lecture halls with the aim of social development.

### **Challenging the Norm of 'Black Excellence'** *The Psychological Burden of Black Excellence*

Participants emphasised that the racial climate at UCT creates an environment in which Black students must work harder and for longer hours. Lerato stated "I get the

impression that Black students have to work 10 times harder” (FG1). Lerato explained that the way the system is set up is against Black students’ success. Participants argued that there was a norm of ‘Black Excellence’ placed on Black students by the institution:

Lerato: *There must always be the struggle success story, like my nigga, [All participant exclaims in unison] I’m just trying to get my degree!*

Tatenda: *We have glamourized the struggle. This lady she has a masters, she did her masters and she graduated cum laude undergrad, then she did her masters. She said she had no plans initially, but then because Black excellence is what we all endeavour for, you cannot be an ordinary Black, that chat, you can’t be ordinary and so she just took the masters, then what happened during the Masters? She literally was breaking down, mental issues, guys, kids, Black excellence will kill you and that’s true Black excellence will kill the youth.*

Lerato: *It’s already killing the youth. No one talks about it. No one talks about UCT’s suicidal rate, it’s on the hush-hush (FG 1).*

From the above interaction, it is important to note that implicitly *all* Black students strive for Black excellence. This is reified when Lerato speaks, and all the participants in the focus group in unison finish her sentence. This unanimous exclaim, illustrates how deeply internalised the norm of Black excellence is and highlights the repressed psychological stress that comes with this norm. Suicide ideation is highest among university students in comparison to the general population in South Africa (Bantjes, Phil, Kagee, McGowan, & Steel, 2016). When Tatenda says “Black excellence is what we all endeavour for, you cannot be an ordinary Black.” It’s clear that Black students **need** to differentiate themselves, His use of definitive ‘cannot’ instead of the normative ‘should not’ illustrates how rigid and fixed the academic positionality of Black students in HWI is.

Obam explained that at UCT there are negative stereotypes placed on Black students:

*You are categorized into this space of a Black student. The stereotype is perhaps this is an olive branch lent out to them, this is a ‘redress kid’, this is to just improve the outlook of the university and its actually not on merit (Obam, FG1).*

These stereotypes, Obam explained leads to students internalizing an “inferiority complex” (Obam FG1). These negative stereotypes reproduce ideas that, Blacks are not as

intelligent, Blacks are lazy and are undeserving of their place (Daniels & Damons, 2011; Kessi & Cornell, 2015). This leads students to employ multiple strategies to resist and cope with these negative stereotypes. One strategy that has been widely documented, is resilience and working hard to prove the stereotypes wrong (Aslam, 2018; Cornell & Kessi, 2017; Griffith et al., 2019; McGee & Stovall, 2015). These stereotypes on Black students creates an environment, where Black students consistently face lowered expectation and doubt about their academic ability from their lecturers, tutors, white peers and fellow Black students (Aslam, 2018).

Lerato's photo-story speaks on the academic struggles of Black students. Long study hours on campus and leaving very late have been normalised as 'Black excellence'.

Photograph 3: The Struggle of Black Excellence



*Caption: When most times I take a jammie especially in the evening I see a lot of Black students on the Jammie, I hardly ever see white students on the Jammie. There has not been a huge sense of decolonization in terms of a quality across the board. For me it spoke volumes to how UCT depicts this whole diverse unified society and this is clear exhibit of the haves and the have-nots.*

**(Lerato, Photo-story 3)**

As Lerato explored here, the Jammie, UCT's bus service transport, is full of Black students. In fact, the jammie is so full that there several students standing including Lerato. This picture does not only highlight the material inequalities within UCT, it highlights the racial differences of the academic experience at the same institution (Collins, 1990). Moreover, this picture portrays, "Black students in survival mode" (Masego, FG2).

There are additional burdens placed on Black students once they get into UCT. Due the institutional homogenisation of its student body, Black students are expected to navigate the institution in the same manner despite the existence of material and other inequalities augmented with the lack of institutional support. Aslam (2018) argues that Black students survive by mitigating their lack of know how such as study skills, utilizing library resources as well as language acquisition without institutional support. She further explains that this leads to strict and rigid study routines, involving long hours of studying (Aslam, 2018). This can be linked to the previous theme of curriculum relevancy as students experiencing the curriculum as alienating creates these strict and rigid routines as Black students seek to be recognised as valid knowers and agents of knowledge (Keet, 2014).

Participants emphasized that the norm of Black excellence exhumes excessive pressure on Black students that comes at a cost of their mental health:

*It is taken for granted in such cases that Black students can do it, because Black students do, Black academics are created. But that is the price you pay, but it is expected that everyone should be willing to pay that price. And even when Proff.Phakeng goes around saying, 'Guys stick with the system, become the next generation of Black academics.' Cause of course she is a bastion for how others have done it. But I am asking myself, am I willing to pay that price? Not knowing what price, she has paid, as obviously it is meant to be this continuously inspirational story of overcoming. But also, the other many Black academics who have done the darn most to get there, and I am not saying their apathy is justified but at some stage I am sure your just like I am tired too (Masego, FG 1)*

Masego talks about a price that Black students pay in-order to obtain excellence in the institution. This price is synonymous with mental well-being. She explains that it is extremely difficult for Black students to work extra hard to become Black academics, this becomes mentally strenuous. The anxiety and psychological stress of being resilient and working hard in order to combat negative stereotypes has been documented elsewhere (Griffith et al., 2019; McGee & Stovall, 2015).



### Material Inequalities

Participants argued that HWI mis-understood decolonization as simply removing of financial barriers. They argued that institution does not consider white privilege and the material disparities between Black students and white students as factors influencing their academic experience:

*You want Black kids to graduate, you want Black kids to succeed but you don't even look at Black tax, white lecturers do not even know the concept of Black tax, they do not understand the pressure of being the only graduate or the first graduate in your family. They do not understand that everyone at home is waiting like 'Yoooh first graduate, waiting for that certificate!' Now I am in UCT I have no food, no money. How am I supposed to be passing the course? Everyone at home is waiting for me to break the poverty cycle and they do not think of the mental implications. They just think Black kid works hard, gets into university (Lerato, FG1)*

Lerato explains that Black students face external pressure to succeed, they are often the first to go to university in their family, sometimes faced with material deficiencies such as lack of funds and food, and with all these struggles are expected by the institution to pass the course and graduate. This mis-recognition of the Black experience creates internal pressures to succeed in combating negative stereotypes. Aslam (2018) argues that at the centre of Black student's university experience is an essential misrecognition of who they are and how they access and encounter university studies. Simultaneously the lack of recognizing Black students' external pressures such as 'Black Tax' to succeed, creates an inherent assumption that black and white students' struggles are homogeneous.

### **Transformation beyond aesthetics- Decolonization in Praxis**

#### The Co-option of Decolonization

Participants argued that the steps taken by the institution to decolonize such as setting up of transformation committees has largely been for what they termed 'aesthetics'. Some participants argued that decolonization's meaning has been largely misunderstood and co-opted as a result:

Kombo: *I Think decolonisation is one of those things that people have used propaganda to kind of demonize so like they say decolonization and all of*

*a sudden all of these connotations being placed onto it all of these things that do not exist like white genocide and like white people losing everything that they own, all of these things to delegitimize the idea of decolonization.*

Masego: *I think the terminology of decolonization being hijacked in a transformational or administrative way, putting the word where it needs to be put has also happened whereas we have talked about the demonization but there is a glorification of putting the word there then calling that decolonization. and even the conversation we are having I am not sure we have a grasp of the full effects of coloniality in its totality (FG1).*

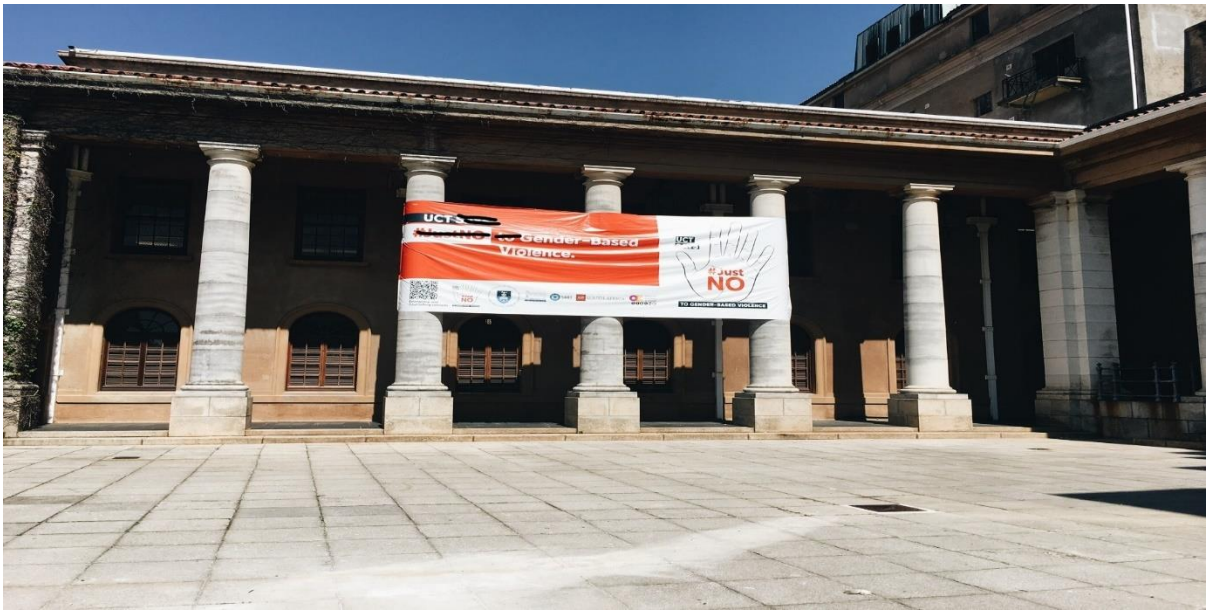
While Kombo and Masego have differing views as to how decolonization is institutionally constructed and purported as, they are similarly linked in highlighting how misunderstandings can create resistance to and subversion of the decolonization project. This fear of decolonization becoming nothing more than a metaphor has been highlighted (Tuck & Yang, 2012). Importantly in a cautionary manner, Masego highlights that as the decolonization project is being conducted and researched, there is still a lack of full grasping of the total effects of coloniality. This highlights that attempts at a decolonization project is a continuously ‘on-going process of change’ (Masego, FG2).

Where decolonization at UCT has been equated to Black leadership, some participants felt that this did not result in tangible real lived changes for the students:

*Even though there is a Black face on top of leadership at UCT, nothing much has changed about the experience that is tangible for the students so a lot of it is for aesthetics might as well be a hashtag or something (Kombo FG1)*

Kombo has been studying at UCT years prior to the transition to Black leadership. Sarcastically he mocks the decolonization efforts by the institution demeaning it to an online hashtag. This highlights Keet et al., (2017) earlier mentioned fear that without properly understanding decolonization it could fall into being simple rhetoric.

Photograph 4: UCT says NO



*Caption: This sign, which was meant to bring awareness to UCT’s stance on Gender-based violence in the midst of Women’s month. What started as a student-embracing PR success soon felt like a strange contradiction hanging next to Sarah Baartman hall. UCT later became a sight of mourning of Uyinene Mrwetyana’s death and soon after, many womxn came up to tell their stories about experiencing GBV while at UCT, within UCT residences, and at the hands on male UCT students. Stories of how the institution, and the rebranded Office for Inclusivity and Change, often made getting justice for sexual violence victims difficult, and shielded the perpetrators, are what I am reminded of when I walk past the sign. I’ve scratched of the catchy phrase hashtag “[UCT] says #JustNo” because when has UCT genuinely said something through their actions and institutions? Or responded to the university itself as a site of violence?*

**(Masego Photo-story 1)**

Masego explains that UCT has been providing “Conveniently well-timed symbolic affirmations that they are with us” (FG2). For her this does not amount to real decolonization for womxn students at the institution. Decolonization aims to challenge cisheteronormative patriarchy on the campus spaces, such as residencies (Khan, 2017). Her editing of the photo explains that by not doing anything, UCT is being complicit and saying “UCT-Gender Based Violence.” The fear highlighted that decolonization could become a metaphor, as Kombo said without tangible change, “might as well be as hashtag or something” (FG1). This highlights the intersectional different experiences in defining and understanding decolonization.

### **Representative Decision Makers**

Participants argued that in the praxis of decolonization, there must be representative decision makers. They felt that decision making was embodied in hegemonic structures as Kombo put it “You are sitting across this old white man” (FG1). Kombo detailed his experience in being in faculty transformation meetings: the decision makers are white. He uses the adjective ‘old’ to highlight the fixed and undeviating nature of these decision makers.

Masego’s photo story illustrates the hegemony and hierarchy in the decolonization project at UCT.

Photograph 5: Members Only



*Caption: I initially saw the signage go up during my daily wait at the Tugwell Jammie stop. What struck me was the idea of “members only” spaces around decision-making at UCT and even the decolonisation process. Mainly, I thought about how it seems to be the purview of select academics and members of the executive to decide how this project will be embarked on. I also thought about the invisible wok of decolonisation, often done by womxn, non-binary people and students who may not be able to reap the rewards the broader project may bring for all students at the university, and the broader space of South African universities. (Masego Photo-story 2)*

Masego communicates that there is still cisheteronormative hierarchy and hegemony in decision making and transformation committees has not changed. Decision makers, (executives and professorship) is still largely white. Moreover, she highlights that certain groups are marginalised in these decision-making spaces, their efforts erased, and their voices silenced. This silencing affects their ability to be part of the decolonization project.

Participants argued that transformation committees recently revitalised, have bureaucratic red tapes that prevent the progression of the decolonization. They highlighted that there was a disconnect between those drafting changes and the constituents who experienced this change:

*You sit with them in the board and we need to change that and they tell you [Mimics white accent] “Oh you have to go through this and that, do that in the next board ...no take it to the right committee, this is the wrong place” This is a big issue, we just told you that students don’t have food and they have insecurity, we need more money for student crisis funding and you are looking at us funny. Why? (Tatenda, FG1)*

Tatenda mimicking of white accent implies the hegemony of the decision makers is white. Moreover, he talks about being looked at funny, despite sharing important human issues. He questions why this is not being taken with the urgency it deserves. This highlights the dehumanisation that Black students experience at HWI (Aslam, 2018).

Participants argued that varying degrees of decolonization had taken place in their different faculties. Mayeso says “In terms of Economics department I think they are trying, and I think that’s because there a lot of black lecturers there, I think it’s close 50:50, if not Black lecturers outweigh white lecturers”(FG1). This increased representation of Black professorship has been argued to constitute decolonisation (Mangu, 2017). Obam emphasized that **how** this is achieved at a HWI has important ramifications for belonging and decolonization. “99% of them in the Economics faculty have studied at UCT, so they are like we shall allow transformation, but it has to be people we taught as compared to white academics who they’ll find from a random university” (Obam, FG1). Obam highlights that ultimately despite increase in Black professorship at UCT, the method of selection and validation is still very white. Biko (1987) also warns of the problem of having decolonial projects *modus operandi* determined by white leadership despite being implicated and privileging from the system “To us their role spells out the totality of the white power structure. The fact that whites are our problem, it is still other whites who want to tell us how to deal with that problem” (p.89).

All participants emphasized in conduction of decoloniality project the student body should influence decision makers. This has been focused on by other scholars (Aslam, 2018; Le Grange, 2016). Decolonization meant coming together and placing Black students’ experiences centrefold in the debate and praxis of decolonization. Kombo’s photo-story illustrates that in coming together, “it shows the power that students have in terms of their voices” (Kombo, FG2).

Photograph 6: Power of Ubuntu



*Caption: You can't see individual people but there is so much power just within the fact there are so many people there. There is the power to change policy, the power to get government to notice things*

**(Kombo, Photo-story 3)**

This picture illustrates that the power to effect change lies within the student's hands. Participants argued that the decolonization project should be driven from a "ground up manner" (Masego, FG2) that places student's experiences centrefold. As Tatenda argued "The university needs to stop thinking of students as their enemies. That is the first point, we are collaborators in this project" (FG1). Much of the literature reifies this position that Black students experiences must be placed centrefold in the decolonization project (Aslam, 2018; Freire, 2000).

### **Reclamation of Spaces**

Decolonization entails reclamation of spaces (Fanon, 1963). There has been challenging of iconography and symbolism at HWI in South Africa. Participants understood decolonization to mean the taking over of public spheres. Tatenda explained that for him "Decolonization is taking back spaces. So, a lot of spaces that have been predominantly white or white dominated, not just white dominated but spaces that are violent towards Black people" (FG1). Similarly, Mayeso's photo-story explores the idea of decolonization as on-going process

Photograph 7: Decolonization is a process of Reconstruction



(Mayeso, Photo-story 1)

For Mayeso, the re-construction of UCT's most iconic building symbolizes that decolonization does not entail destroying fundamentals but emphasizes an on-going re-examination and a rebuilding of already existing structures centring African knowledge and stories. For some scholars decolonization entails a rebuilding upon existing knowledge, re-centring Africa (Ngugi wa Thiong'o, 1992; Oyedemi, 2018). Mayeso explained that reclamation of spaces was not only important for representational purposes but also for conscious raising effect this has.

This was highlighted in an exchange between Lerato and Mayeso:

Lerato: *With the hall being changed to Sarah Baartman do you think that is helpful with the Black experience in UCT and do you think it's effective in decolonizing the space?*

Mayeso: *There are quite a lot of Black historic figures I did not know about. After walking past the building, I was like who's that? Then I google it and be like oh wow and I'd read their story and it just opened my mind (FG2).*

Lerato questions the tangible effect of renaming buildings in decolonizing the space. For Mayeso, the renaming of buildings was important as it made him conscious to Black stories

and history that he was previously unaware of. Decolonization entails an aspect of consciousness-raising which has an affective dimension to it.

Participants emphasized that decolonization entailed representation beyond the academic environs of UCT. “How do people in Cape Town see UCT?” (Masego, FG2). University sports teams are representational of the academy outside its lecture environs. Heere & James, (2007) posit that team identity can be symbolic representations of other aspects of community and societal ideologies. Obam’s photo story illustrates decolonization beyond the academic space.

Photograph 8: Decolonization by breaking traditional racial barriers through sport



(Obam, Photo-story 3)

In his photo story, Obam and his teammates took a group photo after winning an away game in False Bay. To him this photo illustrated that Blacks playing and feeling included in “a sport that is previously white dominated was a step in the right direction” (Obam, FG2). Participants stressed that reclaimed spaces, should make one feel that they belong. It has been accentuated throughout the literature that decolonization at HWI entails feeling like one belongs (Boonzaier & Mhkize, 2018; Kessi & Cornell, 2015). He further explained that for him UCT rugby felt inclusive, and its decolonized outlook influenced the community and society around UCT. “*I Think it is very inclusive now, but at first there was obviously that tension, you’re from different backgrounds, come from different places and not just from the team but from the opposition as well*” (Obam FG2). Obam highlights that tensions of diversity not only initially existed within the team but was also present in the oppositional teams they faced. Obam accentuated that decolonization involved a societal effect. After the displayed



match, the oppositions fans came and “urged more teams like us and other universities that are inclusive like UCT to come, as the narrative is most of the Super A-League teams are previously fully white-teams” (Obam, FG2). Obam uses the word ‘narrative’ to highlight the norm that the best teams are fully white teams. It is important to note that this encouragement from opposition fans highlights that although there is still a long way to go, decolonization has begun to influence the community outside UCT academic environs.

### **Conclusion**

This photovoice project attempted at understanding the meaning of decolonization to Black students at HWI, The University of Cape Town. This study analysed focus group interviews, photos and photo-stories taken by 6 Black students, representing 4 out of the 6 faculties in the university. Decolonization means making a curriculum that is relevant (Cornell & Kessi, 2017; Ratele et al., 2018). By re-centring African knowledge and establishing it as its own canon, rather than a critique of the Eurocentric cannon, creating a curriculum-as-lived (Aoki, 1999) that deals directly with local societal issues such as “access to justice” (Tatenda, FG 1). Decolonization means challenging the norm of ‘Black Excellence’ which has a psychological cost to Black students making them anxious and have compulsive, extensive and rigid study strategies, in an attempt to prove their place in the University (Griffith et al., 2019; McGee, 2015).

Decolonization means inclusive transformation that recognises the various complex intersecting identities and places students’ experiences centrefold in the project (Aslam, 2018). To these Black student’s decolonization meant reclaiming of spaces, with the renaming of buildings, iconography and other symbology having a conscious raising effect. Moreover, decolonization meant transformation beyond the academic environs and into other spaces such as UCT rugby team. As Kombo best summaries the meaning of decolonization to this group of Black students as:

*Decolonization as a topic is not about white people, like it’s about African people and how we can take our own space and make our space and that is completely devoid of white people, white people can be allies, but that does not mean they are the subject or the focus (Kombo, FG1).*

### **Suggestions for Future research**

Future research should include a larger sample size. This will allow for more diverse and multi-faceted understandings of the meaning of decolonization. Although qualitative data never aims to generalise its findings, including more participants will provide a more diverse lens to the construct and meanings of decolonization.

The psychological effects of combatting negative stereotypes in university should be further explored. Especially in the South African context, as the stereotypes are informed by the legacy of apartheid, therefore, how they are inherently constructed, applied and experienced may differ from how these racial stereotypes are applied in other contexts. Participants emphasised that coping with negative stereotypes through resiliency and working hard came at a psychological price.

Researching the meaning of decolonization in other universities and technikons in South Africa. Especially researching on the meaning of decolonization to Black students at a Historically Black institution (HBU), as the hegemony of white culture is not as highly experienced (despite learning a Eurocentric curriculum). It is assumed that their meaning of decolonization may vastly differ from the results generated here.

### **Limitations of The Study**

Of high note is that decolonization at HWI is not entirely representative of decolonization within all higher institutions within South Africa. Especially recognising that the process of decolonization in HBU will be experienced differently. Thus, these results are only applicable to historically similar universities.

### **Significance of Study**

If higher learning institutions are left unchallenged and unexamined they will maintain hegemonic oppressive structures in place (Watson & Widin, 2015). This research is contributing to South African decolonization research as there is high need for more investigations lending voices to marginalised students and ensuring that their experiences are considered within the transformation and decolonial discourses (Cornell, Ratele, & Kessi, 2016). Moreover, this research places Black students' experiences centrefold to frame sites that decolonization needs to happen in and how the project should be conducted.

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Appendix A  
**Informed Consent Form**

UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN



DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY

### **1. Invitation and Purpose**

You are invited to take part in this study about\_ **Decolonization in South African Higher institutions: A Photovoice Study by Black Students at UCT**

I am an Honours student from the Psychology department at the University of Cape Town. The information gathered in this study will be used for educational purposes. The purpose of this research study is to better understand how Black students understand and view decolonization at UCT, and what this process means to them within the Fallist Era.

During this study, participants are required to take pictures and tell stories with relation to the theme of the research. This will be conducted over a one-month time period. Participants will meet together in focus groups and co-construct meaning and an exhibition will be held at the end of the project to display the findings of this work

### **2. Procedures**

Participants will be trained in photography and ethics surrounding this. They will be provided with a 1-month time line to take their photos and add narratives to these. 3 meetings will be held. One for training, the other for co-construction of meaning and themes around 'Decolonization', and lastly to arrange an exhibition displaying the findings of this work.

### **3. Privacy and Confidentiality**

Any information you share is strictly confidential. You will be anonymous in the display of these research findings.

- Due to the nature of Focus groups interviews, absolute confidentiality **cannot** be guaranteed, but efforts will be made to foster an environment that ensures mutual respect.

- You have the right to request that any information you have shared be removed from the study. Moreover, the focus group meetings will be audio recorded. If you would like the tape-recorder to be switched off at any point of the process, you have the right to request so
- Only the researcher will have access to these photos and they will be kept on a password protected computer.
- After the pictures are analysed Your name will not appear in these analyses. Instead pseudonym created by you, will be used
- The information from the Photovoice Focus Groups will be used to write up a research report and an exhibition of the findings will be displayed across faculties

#### **4.Risks, Discomforts & Inconveniences**

This study poses a low risk of harm to you. You might be inconvenienced by having to give up some free of your time. Should students experience any emotional distress due to participation, they can withdraw their participation and leave the study at any point of the research process.

#### **5. Benefits**

Participating in this research will benefit individuals in consciousness raising around decolonization. Providing you a space to explore and expose constructions of decolonization. That may have otherwise overlooked

#### **6. Contacts**

If you have any inquiries, concerns about this study. Kindly contact me 0607044436 Earlvin Owang' (Researcher)

Dr. Shose Kessi, (Supervisor) Department of Psychology at UCT 021 650 4606.

If you have any ethical concerns with this research and want to contact the Ethical Committee please contact Mrs.Rosalind Adams, Department of Psychology at UCT  
rosalind.adams@uct.ac.za

#### **7.Signatures**

*Researcher:* The participant has been informed of the nature and purpose of the procedures described above including any risks involved.

\_\_\_\_\_ Researchers Signature

\_\_\_\_\_ Date

*Co-Researcher:* I have been informed about this research study and understand its purpose. I agree to take part in this research as a co-researcher and consent to participating in this photovoice study. I know that I am free to withdraw from this interview at any time, and that doing so will not disadvantage me in any way.

\_\_\_\_\_ Participant's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_ Date

Audio recording consent

Co-Researcher: I consent to being recorded during the focus group meetings. I agree to have parts of my speech to be used in this study. I am aware that during any time of the session, I have the right to request that the recorder be turned off.

\_\_\_\_\_ Participant's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_ Date

# **WHAT DOES DECOLONIZATION MEAN TO YOU ?**

Research Participants needed for Honours Psychology Project. Photovoice Research Project on the meaning of Decolonization



## **Details of Participation:**

**WHY:** Provide your voice and contribute to the active decolonization debate at UCT

**WHO:** Black Students at UCT

**WHAT:** Photovoice with Black Students

**HOW:** Go to <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/HL229PC> to sign up, or email Researcher on [earlvinowang254@gmail.com](mailto:earlvinowang254@gmail.com)

## Appendix C

### Decolonization project information form

Please fill in this form and complete it. You shall be contacted shortly after by the researcher. All information obtained will remain confidential.

Please note that the eligibility criteria for this project is that One is a University of Cape Town student and was academically registered by 2018 or earlier

***\*1. I understand that the goal of this research is to explore Black students' definitions, attitudes and experience around Decolonization at UCT***

- I agree
- I Do NOT agree

***2. Kindly fill in Your full name and surname***

***3. What is your gender?***

- Female
- Male
- Non-Binary
- Gender-queer
- Trans-gender
- None
- Other (please specify)

***4. Are you a South African Citizen***

- Yes
- No
- Other Nationality (please specify)

**5. Kindly select your race**

- Black
- Coloured
- Indian
- Chinese
- Other (please specify)

**6. Kindly state the year you were academically registered in?**

**7. Select Your current Faculty**

- CHEM
- Commerce
- EBE
- Health Sciences
- Humanities
- Law
- Science

**8. Fill in your contact details**

Name

Email Address

Phone Number

Link to the survey: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/HL229PC>

## Appendix D

### Focus Group Questions

1. What does decolonization mean to you?
2. What does decolonization at UCT look like?
3. How have discourses of decolonization developed in your respectful faculties?
4. There has been some form of decolonization, change in university leadership and transformation committees set up, is this enough?
5. How can HWI university go about decolonization in an inclusive way that takes in Black students' perspective centrefold?
6. Do you think other people at UCT understand what decolonization means?
7. What do you think decolonization means to a HWI university?
8. How academically inclusive has UCT been towards you, since your admission at the institution?
9. Despite revitalization in Decolonization debate, what has *least* changed, or proved to be *most resistant* to transformation at UCT?



## Appendix E

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Codes</b>	<b>Extract Examples</b>
<b>Curriculum Relevancy</b>	1. Westernised curriculum 2. Neutrality of science 3. Community serving Knowledge	<p>“Dominant paradigms of education are predominantly white.” (Tatenda, FG1)</p> <p>“How do people we produce knowledge around or claim to produce knowledge benefit?” (Masego, FG2)</p>
<b>Challenging the norm of ‘Black Excellence’</b>	1. Glamourizing struggle 2. Material inequalities 3. Different experiences for Black students	<p>“I go through a lot of insecurities, financially not even, financially food-wise or even just mentally as I am in spaces that do not allow me to grow” (Tatenda, FG1)</p> <p>“See that’s the difference she can get a 50 and she can get a job, easy.” (Mayeso, FG1)</p> <p>“The new Black academics hired would need to jump through hoops to prove themselves.” (Obam, FG1)</p>
<b>Transformation beyond aesthetics – Decolonization in praxis</b>	1. Silencing of various groups 2. For aesthetics 3. Effects of colonisation	<p>“A lot of it is for aesthetics, especially the transformation committees.” (Kombo, FG1)</p> <p>“We do not fully grasp what colonization did, sometimes we close our eyes to how far it went.” (Tatenda, FG1)</p>
<b>Reclamation of spaces</b>	1. Taking back of spaces that are violent to black people 2. Feeling inclusive in a previously white dominated arena	<p>“The feeling of spaces in terms of how inclusive they are at different times.” (Kombo, FG2)</p> <p>“They did not build this institution for us, this institution is not for us, we are sitting on these chairs they are not supposed to be for us” (Lerato, FG1)</p>

## Appendix F

Should you experience any form of emotional distress from participating in this study. Kindly utilize the available psychological resources.

### **Student Wellness Centre UCT**

The wellness centre offers free short-term counselling and psychotherapy towards students. They are well equipped to deal with issues surrounding adjustment to UCT, social skills, stress and anxiety, as well as dealing with trauma. They have 8 centres throughout all UCT campuses.

#### Contact

Telephone: 021 650 1017

Email: Lerushda.cheddie@uct.ac.za [Lerushda.cheddie@uct.ac.za](mailto:Lerushda.cheddie@uct.ac.za)

UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN



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Department of Psychology

University of Cape Town Rondebosch 7701 South Africa  
Telephone (021) 650 3417  
Fax No. (021) 650 4104

18 July 2019

Earlvin Owang  
Department of Psychology  
University of Cape Town  
Rondebosch 7701

Dear Earlvin

I am pleased to inform you that ethical clearance has been given by an Ethics Review Committee of the Faculty of Humanities for your study, *Decolonization in South African Higher Institutions of Learning: A photovoice study with Black students at UCT*. The reference number is PSY2019-040.

I wish you all the best for your study.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'L Wild'.


Lauren Wild (PhD)  
Associate Professor  
Chair: Ethics Review Committee

University of Cape Town  
ΨPSYCHOLOGY DEPARTMENT  
Upper Campus  
Rondebosch



C6. Will use research assistant/s	<p style="text-align: right;">Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p> <p>If yes- provide a list of names, contact details :</p>
C.7 Research Methodology and Informed consent	<p><b>Research methodology:</b> Qualitative Study- Participation Action Research-(Photovoice)  <b>Informed consent:</b> Consent Forms will be provided to participants to obtain wilful participation</p>
C.8 Ethics clearance status from UCT's Faculty Ethics in Research Committee /Chair (EIRC)	<p>Approved by the UCT EIRC: Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> With amendments: Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>(a) Attach copy of your UCT ethics approval. Attached: Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>(b) State date / Ref. No / Faculty of your UCT ethics approval: 18/07/2019 <input type="checkbox"/> Ref. / Faculty: <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>PSY2019-040</p>

**SECTION D: APPLICANT/S APPROVAL STATUS FOR ACCESS TO STUDENTS FOR RESEARCH PURPOSE**  
*(To be completed by the UCT - ED, DSA or Nominee)*

D.1 APPROVAL STATUS	Approved / With Terms / Not	* Conditional approval with terms		Applicant/s Ref. No.:
	(i) <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Approved (ii) <input type="checkbox"/> With terms (iii) <input type="checkbox"/> Not approved	a) Access to students for this research study must only be undertaken <u>after</u> written ethics approval has been obtained. b) In event any ethics conditions are attached, these must be complied with before access to students.		OWNEAR001 / Mr Earlvin Owang
D.2 APPROVED BY:	Designation	Name	Signature	Date of Approval
	Executive Director Department of Student Affairs	Dr Moonira Khan		21 August 2019

