PRIVILEGE AND PRECARITY

– AFRICAN INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN SOUTH AFRICA

by

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A thesis submitted to the University of Birmingham for the degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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June 2023

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ABSTRACT

South African higher education institutions are key sites in which persistent inequalities regarding race, class, and gender in the post-apartheid era have been challenged. However, despite their large presence, international students have often been neglected in these discussions. Focusing on the historically White Rhodes University in Makhanda, Eastern Cape, this thesis examines the ways in which students from the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region experience, interpret, and practice social class as migrants. Using a variety of ethnographic methods and drawing on relevant theories of class, I argue that SADC students' transnational identities are a source of both privilege and precarity in the South/southern African contexts of race and class. As highly regarded students who easily adapt to the middle-class campus environment, they are sometimes misrecognised as particularly privileged. This, however, contradicts their own experience of social and emotional precarity. Families' investment in their children's transnational education creates pressures of success, while encounters with culture shock and xenophobia aggravate SADC students' sense of non-belonging in South Africa. Renegotiations of class between home and South Africa leave them feeling never fully 'at home' in either place, constantly looking for a better future elsewhere. SADC students believe in eventually becoming successful 'future leaders' and facilitating their families' intergenerational class-making projects. Educational migration thus generates regional networks that reproduce class advantages. This thesis makes a significant contribution to the understanding of the pivotal topics of identity, aspiration, and belonging in contemporary South Africa and beyond and offers a fresh lens on social class through the dynamic and fragmentary processes of privilege and precarity.

Keywords: Migration, social class, higher education, race, internationalisation, transformation, South Africa, southern Africa, SADC.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my daughters Matilda and Emilia

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This research was fully funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (grant number 1770684).

I am forever grateful to Alessandro, who has always believed in me perhaps more I than have believed in myself, and to my amazing daughters Matilda and Emilia for all their love and support. I hope I can be a role model to you girls so that you know you can do anything you want in life. *Kiitos* and thank you also to Tuija, Hannu, Roope and the rest of my family both in Finland and the UK who have always been encouraging – not to forget Richie the cat who always reminded me when it was time to take a break.

I sincerely thank my wonderful supervision team: Kate Skinner, Jessica Johnson, and Maxim Bolt for your invaluable intellectual and practical guidance throughout this project (and for putting up with me for seven long years). With your support, I have gained confidence as a researcher and developed a sense of uncompromising rigour. In addition to the current team, Keith Shear helped me get started and Karin Barber assisted me with my research proposal. Everyone else at DASA, past and present, have also been supportive and it has been a pleasure to work in such stimulating environment. Without the generous references provided by Annika Teppo and Jeremy Gould I would not have got this project funded. Thank you also to my viva examiners Leslie Fesenmyer and Crain Soudien for being so thorough and supportive. Your comments and corrections greatly improved my final thesis. William Purkis did an excellent job as my viva chair.

Everyone I have met at Rhodes University during this project has been welcoming. I would not have been able to do my field research without the help of Sally Matthews who went above and beyond with her time and effort to support me. Orla Quinlan and her team at Rhodes University International Office were helpful and accommodating, and I hope my research will benefit your work in the future. Kirk Helliker told me all he knew about the ways in which Rhodes campus has changed since the 1980s and accommodated my (perhaps odd) request to give me a lift to the Settlers Monument. Philippa Irvine kindly let me take over her undergraduate lecture with my mental mapping exercise. Paul Maylam gave me a copy of his book, which I would otherwise not have been able to afford.

During the past seven years, I have had the honour and pleasure to be a part of a wonderful academic community. All my student colleagues past and present at Birmingham, Rhodes and elsewhere have helped by sharing a part of this journey with me. Conferences, seminars, and webinars have been a lifeline for me during the long years of working from home. I have had a great time meeting some amazing people face-to-face and online at the African Studies Association annual meetings in 2020, 2021, and 2022, IMISCOE annual conference 2022 (especially Brittney and Sayaka), and the Migration Conference 2021. Ruth Cheung-Judge and other panel chairs and discussants have provided constructive feedback that has hugely improved my work.

Zinzi Sixaba and Nelson Odume hosted me at the Rhodes University African Studies seminar in July 2022 so I could disseminate my findings with the Rhodes community. Rebekah Lee was a fantastic host at the South Africa Discussion Group seminar at Oxford and a kind and thoughtful editor for my article in the Journal of Southern African Studies. Parvati Raghuram and many, many others have inspired me and made me feel welcome and appreciated in the global academic community.

Cheryth at Erma Court, Michelle at Autumn Leaves, and Alison at Piper's Haven provided me safe and comfortable places to stay in during my fieldwork and acted as impromptu taxis in Makhanda. The actual taxi drivers John, Michelle, and the others at EC Ride Sharing safely drove me around the Eastern Cape and always kept me up to date on South African politics. Everyone else in Makhanda also deserves a thanks for the warm welcome I received and for the fact that I never got mugged.

Finally, a huge thank you goes to all my research participants as this thesis would not exist without you. I wish you all the best in your future endeavours.

N.B. A shorter version of Chapter 5 has been published as Tagliabue, V. V. (2022) 'Too rich to care? Southern African (SADC) international students navigating transnationalism and class at South African universities.' *Journal of Southern African Studies* 48 (1), 5-21.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Identity, aspiration and belonging

South African higher education institutions are key sites in which persistent inequalities regarding race, class, and gender in the post-apartheid era have been challenged. However, despite their large presence, international students at South African universities have often been neglected in these discussions. This thesis investigates the connections between higher education, migration, and social class by foregrounding the experience of international students from the Southern African Development Community (SADC)[1] region studying at Rhodes University in Makhanda,[2] in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa. I will analyse how SADC students experience, interpret, and practice social class while studying in South Africa and how this links to their experiences of migration. These research questions will be explored through ethnographic, theoretical, historical, and comparative analyses in the following five substantive chapters of this thesis.

In this thesis, I show that SADC students experience simultaneous privilege and precarity as they participate in their families' class-making projects through transnational education trajectories. In South Africa, SADC students develop feelings of ambivalence and uncertainty, which they navigate by focusing on their aspirations for a better future.

[1] SADC (pronounced 'sadec') is one of eight African Regional Economic Communities (RECs) recognised by the African Union. SADC currently comprises 16 member states: Angola, Botswana, Comoros, Democratic Republic of Congo, Eswatini, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Seychelles, South Africa, Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. As my research focuses on South Africa, the notion of SADC students in this thesis excludes South African students.

[2] The city changed its name from Grahamstown to Makhanda in June 2018 during my first fieldwork period, following an ongoing trend of 'decolonising' name changes across South Africa. The name Makhanda was chosen to fulfil the prophecy of the 'return of Makhanda ka Nxele' (c. 1870 – 25 December 1819) – a Xhosa warrior, war doctor, philosopher and prophet who died escaping imprisonment on Robben Island (IOL News 2018). Makhanda is (perhaps confusingly) part of the Makana municipality, the name of which is an alternative spelling for Makhanda. In this thesis, I will use the name Makhanda when referring to present day events, Grahamstown in historical contexts, and Makhanda/Grahamstown in certain specific cases in which I refer to a timeframe spanning longer historical periods that also cover the contemporary era.

Narratives of sacrifice and survival thus validate their current struggles. I demonstrate my arguments by presenting different aspects of these educational migrants' experience at Rhodes University relating to the social, spatial, temporal, institutional and societal dimensions of student life. This research project contributes to the wider research fields of higher education, migration, and social class by offering a valuable new lens on debates and concepts of longstanding significance in South Africa and beyond: identity, aspiration and belonging.

Identity. SADC students' narratives highlight a sense of identity misrecognition. As typically high academic achievers, SADC students at Rhodes University appear to adapt easily to the middle-class campus environment, which they call a 'White space'. They are therefore sometimes described as relatively privileged in their South African peers' narratives, which emphasise their own class mobility as historically thwarted by apartheid. However, being portrayed as particularly privileged contradicts SADC students' own understandings and experiences of precarity.

Inequality is a central aspect of the South African societal and higher education context in which students' identity, aspiration, and belonging are shaped by their understandings of who has advantage and disadvantage. Research on South African higher education has been dominated by the questions of apartheid legacy, race, and the way in which Black[3] students often do not feel 'at home' at historically White institutions (e.g., Tabensky & Matthews 2015). Studies discussing the demands for transformation and decolonisation, especially in the context of campus protests such as #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall (e.g., Booysen 2016; Nyamnjoh 2016) have also increasingly raised questions about social class within the higher education framework.

[3] In this thesis, I use the racial categories Black, White, Coloured, Indian etc. as is customary in South Africa. I acknowledge the artificial nature of such categorisation. I have chosen to capitalise these categories to denote their conscious use as racial identifications instead of considering 'race' as a 'natural' or 'neutral' characteristic (see Thúy Nguyên & Pendleton 2020).

Incoming international students to South Africa have not been sufficiently integrated into the transformation debates. Aiming to make higher education more reflective of Black South African students and academics by emphasising local experiences, universities strive for Africanisation of the prevailing structures and curricula. This ideal of local primacy is sometimes juxtaposed with internationalisation of higher education in South Africa (Botha 2010). International students may therefore be seen as necessary for bolstering university finances but not central in the quest for transformation in South African higher education or wider society. This thesis contributes to the budding research that considers the agency of African international students in South African universities (see Kasembeli 2020; Majee 2020; Raghuram et al. 2020) to highlight the importance of South African higher education for the entire region's development.

Focusing on African international students, this thesis makes an intervention in the debates on identity at South African universities by discussing higher education transformation from the point of view of nationality as well as race and class. I problematise the oversimplified understanding of international students as a group alienated from the mainstream student body in South Africa (e.g., Hiralal 2015: 338-340) and beyond (see Starr-Glass 2016), as I argue that SADC students' transnational identities are a source of both privilege and precarity in the South/southern African contexts of race and class.

Aspiration. SADC students' sense of identity misrecognition is connected to the way in which they understand their relative privilege as an outcome of intergenerational aspirations. As families across the southern African region invest heavily in their children's transnational education, this creates expectations of both upward social mobility and social becoming (i.e., becoming a fully recognised member of society). Despite their ongoing challenges, SADC students believe that through transnational education they will eventually become successful 'future leaders' and thus facilitate their families' class-making projects. This thesis contributes to scholarship on social

stratification in Africa by identifying aspiration as an important aspect of class-making that both drives educational pathways and exposes financial precarity.

The concurrent privilege and precarity that international students experience has often left them neglected in the prevailing discourses in migration studies that focus on marginalised (young) people's experiences of endless waiting and 'stuckness' (e.g., Griffiths 2014; Mains 2012). However, this thesis illustrates that SADC students in South Africa conceptualise their migrant lives through similar temporalities. As their migration for educational purposes heightens the family expectations of both upward social mobility and social becoming, these young people find themselves in a 'vital conjuncture' that is characterised by 'structured expectations and uncertain futures' (see Johnson-Hanks 2002: 872). This way, students' temporary but forward-looking university experience can be interpreted within the recurrent themes of hope and aspiration in migration studies (Kleist & Thorsen 2017) and beyond (Miyazaki 2006).

Furthermore, whilst financial precarity is well recognised in the vibrant scholarly literature regarding the 'rise of the African middle classes' (e.g., Melber 2016), the way in which it relates to the dynamic processes of building class identities has not yet been sufficiently analysed (but see James 2015). Recent research has also identified social and emotional well-being as important aspects of precarity in the African context of race, class, age, and education (but see Markovich Morris & Adjei 2021; Soudien 2021). In this thesis, I conceptualise precarity as an experiential insecurity that straddles the notions of economic, social, and emotional well-being.

Moreover, research on African middle classes typically considers migration from an economic point of view focusing on remittances, whereas my thesis argues that cross-border connections have a larger role for the production and consolidation of the region's middle classes. As well as challenging the prevailing national focus of African class analysis, this thesis augments the recent research that combines a transnational perspective with a consideration of age and intergenerational relations in class-making

around the world (e.g., Cheung-Judge 2021; Coe 2020; Kea 2020; Van Geel & Mazzucato 2018 and 2020).

Belonging. SADC students' aspirations for a better future are dampened in South Africa by an acute sense of non-belonging and a class identity mismatch. When these students feel that they cannot fully 'be themselves', they experience diminished self-confidence emerging from their sense of emotional and social precarity, which can be interpreted through recent research on 'ontological insecurity' (see Soudien 2021). Encounters with culture shock and xenophobia highlight their foreignness, whilst navigating unfamiliar moral codes and understandings of race and class further complicates their class-making projects. Any potential privilege that may favour SADC students in the university setting is considered a negative and threatening attribute in the South African society outside of campus.

South Africa's higher education sector is a highly unequal setting in which the questions of identity, aspiration, and belonging become pronounced. However, institutions' physical characteristics are relatively under-studied as factors that reflect and reproduce inequalities of race and class in South African universities. In this thesis, I pay attention to the ways in which students' perceptions of space and spatial inequalities are fragmented along class and race lines, and how this links with the different ways in which students construct their identities on and off campus. This discussion contributes to scholarship regarding studentification of South African urban spaces (see Donaldson et al. 2014; Mzileni 2021; Visser & Kisting 2019) as well as the role of institutional, governmental, and international policy in the international student experience in South Africa (see Kishun 2007; McLellan 2008 and 2009) and beyond (see De Wit 2013; Hudzik 2011).

This thesis uses Bourdieusian analysis to contribute to the discussion of social class at university. To feel 'at home' in middle-class spaces such as universities, students are required to be familiar with the institutional culture and to have a certain habitus to

match the environment (see Bourdieu & Passeron 1977). Previously, scholarship in this tradition has largely focused on the experiences of class identity mismatch known as 'hidden injuries of class' (see Sennett & Cobb 1972) of working-class students who do not easily find a sense of belonging at the university, and thus need to adapt their identities to avoid stigmatisation (e.g., Granfield 1991; Reay et al. 2009 and 2010). My research offers a wider analysis of classed peer relations in higher education as well as the structures and practices that reproduce them.

Although they are generally well received within higher education institutions, international students often face challenges related to cultural differences, language, discrimination, and xenophobia in South African society. These challenges contradict narratives of close regionalisation (e.g., Saurombe 2010) and are consistent with the larger literature on regional migration in southern Africa, which has long described the migrant experience in South Africa as one of precarity and non-belonging (e.g., Nyamnjoh 2006). On the other hand, migration in southern Africa is also seen in terms of expectations of upward social mobility (e.g., Bolt 2015; Groves 2020; Johnson 2017; Kihato 2013). This thesis connects these strands of scholarship by giving attention to the way in which international students are placed in a specific position between the privilege associated with higher education, home community expectations of success, and the experience of precarious 'foreignness' in South Africa.

The way in which SADC students conceptualise their position within migration, social class, and higher education frameworks as ambivalent and never quite 'at home' demonstrates considerable social and emotional precarity. Occupying an ambivalent position in terms of class, age, and nationality, SADC students in South Africa's higher education institutions can thus offer significant insight into the questions of identity, aspiration, and belonging. Rather than representing one monolithic group or culture, SADC students come from countries that have their own histories, which means their perceptions of South Africa are inevitably filtered through prior experiences in their home countries. As well as filling historical and empirical gaps on international student

mobility and wider regional migration patterns in southern Africa, this thesis can thus shed light on the similarities and differences between the ways in which issues around privilege and precarity are conceptualised and experienced across southern Africa.

1.2. SADC students at Rhodes University

Students at Rhodes University responded enthusiastically to my call for participants. Some eagerly stated that they had 'a lot to say' or that they had 'burning issues' regarding their experience as SADC students. Someone complained about the general assumption that international students were rich while, in fact, their families back home had 'empty fridges' because of the sacrifices they were making to support their children studying in South Africa. The problem, however, seemed to be that I would not get 'anything out' of the students because they claimed to have 'no social life' as they were only at Rhodes 'to get their degree and go home'. These initial encounters introduced me to the themes that would recur through the remainder of my research: SADC students' temporary existence, their emphasis on 'getting through', and the notion of having their social class identities misrecognised.

This thesis gives voice to SADC students at the smallest public university in South Africa,[4] the historically White Rhodes University. The institution hosts one of the highest proportions of international students in South African universities (IEASA 2019: 26-27), with rates between 16 and 20% during 2014-2019 (Rhodes University 2019: C7). SADC students are looked at specifically because they form 85% of international students at Rhodes (ibid.). As stipulated by the *SADC Protocol on Education and Training* (SADC 1997: 11), they are treated as home students in terms of fees and accommodation. This, and the fact that SADC students live in a relatively economically and culturally integrated region dominated by South African influence (see Saurombe 2010), makes their experiences of misrecognition appear paradoxical and thus all the more interesting.

[4] In 2018, the total number of students enrolled at Rhodes was 8,153 (Rhodes University 2019: A1).

Southern Africa has one of the highest rates of international student mobility in the world and notably, half of those students stay within the southern African region (Chien & Chiteng Kot 2012: 6, 9). South Africa is the main destination, attracting students especially from Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho, Namibia, and Zimbabwe (ibid.: 11). In 2019, there were a total 59,306 international students studying at South African higher education institutions (CHE 2021: 8). A huge majority, 41,637 (70%) of them originated in SADC countries and a further 10,697 (18%) came from other African states (ibid.). Of the 38,783 international students who were enrolled in contact education (as opposed to distance learning) in South Africa, 10,617 (27%) were from Zimbabwe, 3,137 (8%) from the Democratic Republic of Congo, 2,634 (6.8%) from Lesotho, 2,385 (6.1%) from Namibia, 1,835 (4.7%) from Eswatini, 997 (2.6%) from Zambia, 853 (2.2%) from Botswana and 695 (1.8%) from Malawi (DHET 2019: 16).

These national patterns are broadly consistent with those at Rhodes University.[5] To generate a broader picture of who the international students at Rhodes are, why they are there and what their main points of concern as international students are international students at Rhodes University, I created an anonymous online survey.[6] The responses indicated that international students were drawn to Rhodes by the available programme options (55.7%) as well as institutional reputation (49.2%). They were funded mainly by family investment (71%), but many were also in receipt of bursaries (35.5%). Despite identifying largely as middle class (64.9%), international students reported having financial challenges related to paying university fees (47.5%) and covering living expenses (35.6%). Furthermore, they experienced social and emotional

[5] In 2019, 1,107 of all 1,300 international students at Rhodes University originated in SADC countries, with Zimbabweans representing the largest proportion with 615 students (Rhodes University 2019: C7). The latest detailed numbers are from 2018, when there were 647 students from Zimbabwe, 190 from Namibia, 58 from Eswatini, 54 from Lesotho, 47 from Malawi, 39 from Zambia, 37 from Botswana, 16 from Tanzania, 11 from Mozambique, nine from Mauritius as well as one student each from Angola and the Seychelles (ibid.: C8).

[6] International student survey conducted online via Google Forms, March-July 2022. Respondents were recruited through a mailing list for international students at Rhodes. The survey had 62 respondents and was entirely anonymous. The respondents were 47.5% from Zimbabwe, 9.8% from Malawi, 8.2% from Lesotho, 6.6% each from Eswatini, Namibia and non-SADC African countries, 4.9% from Zambia, 3.3% each from Botswana and non-African countries, and 1.6% each from the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Tanzania.

challenges related to cultural differences (54.2%), mental health (52.5%), language (49.2%) and not feeling 'at home' at Rhodes or South Africa (44.1%). The quick overview generated by this survey pointed to many deeper questions, which were pursued through ethnographic methods.

1.3. Intra-regional migration, class, and higher education in southern Africa

The SADC student experience at Rhodes University is tied to the context of class and educational migration in southern Africa. The region has been profoundly shaped by human mobility, starting from the great migration southwards of the Bantu-speaking peoples in the first millennium AD (Du Pisani 2000: 11-12) and the arrival of European settlers and their Asian servants and slaves from the late 1400s onwards (see Gqola 2018). The discovery of diamonds and gold in South Africa at the end of the 19th century created a labour migration system that had a long-lasting impact on the entire region (Crush 2000: 15) and dominated migration research in southern Africa for most of the 20th century. In post-apartheid South Africa, much research focus has turned to the perceived 'influx' of undocumented regional migrants that followed the new era of democratic rule (Crush 2000: 2). However, migration for other purposes – such as education – has been relatively overlooked (e.g., Wentzel & Tlabela 2006: 79).

Mobility for educational purposes within southern Africa has surged in the past three decades following global trends (see Chien & Chiteng Kot 2012: 1), the end of apartheid rule in South Africa, and the deepening of regional integration in the form of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) (Knight & Woldegiorgis 2017a: 117). The rise of student mobility within southern Africa, as elsewhere, is linked to the way in which higher levels of secondary education increase demand for tertiary education (see Chien & Chiteng Kot 2012: 4). Higher education, however, is not always available, sufficient, or desirable in all southern African countries (see Knight & Woldegiorgis 2017a: 115-117; Mukandala 2012: 6-7). With its expansive university network, South

Africa therefore attracts considerable numbers of young people migrating from the rest of the region to study in the country (Chien & Chiteng Kot 2012: 11).

In the predominant global migration discourse, mobile people are typically viewed through a binary that sets the idea of a 'higher skilled', law-abiding, and hard-working 'good immigrant' against less desirable newcomers such as refugees, undocumented people and 'low skilled' economic migrants (see Zamora 2016: 13). International student mobility is typically characterised by relatively more choice and privilege (Waters 2012) compared to for example economic migrants. As the climate of suspicion towards foreigners in South Africa largely emerges from the perceived threat presented by undocumented immigration, students may indeed be regarded as more desirable migrants (see Raghuram 2013: 140). But even if SADC students do not generally wish to identify with the less desirable migrants, as 'foreigners' they are expected to represent particular national stereotypes in the South African imagination (see Vail 1989).

While research on regional migration to South Africa has largely focused on the ordeals of the most marginalised migrants navigating a hostile environment of xenophobia and precarious livelihoods (e.g., Crush et al. 2017), less attention has been paid to SADC students' experiences of migration. In a country where much of the population has been historically marginalised, questions of belonging, xenophobia, and Afrophobia periodically raise their heads. Although university students are generally better protected from xenophobic violence by the campus environment, as compared to shopkeepers in poor townships,[7] xenophobic tendencies do not always discriminate between social classes (see Hiralal 2015: 333, 341). This thesis explores and analyses the ways in which student migrants from the SADC region experience, interpret and practice social class and how this may change when they migrate to South Africa.

In South Africa, SADC students also enter the world of higher education. Universities today are said to be suffering an identity crisis between elitist ivory towers and

[7] In South Africa, 'township' and 'location' are terms used for urban Black settlements.

multitasking 'engines of development' (Collini 2012: 3, 6). They are increasingly expected to consider questions such as global quality standards, economic viability, and local relevance whilst also fulfilling their more traditional role as knowledge producers and leadership providers (Mukandala 2012: 8-9). In South African higher education, these global challenges are aggravated by unique historical tensions. Colonial era universities had a central role in the gradual consolidation of a racist and discriminatory social order through the creation of seemingly irrefutable scientific knowledge of the 'native' (Soudien 2015: 10, 17-18). To redress this past injustice in the post-apartheid era, many former Whites-only institutions including Rhodes University now focus on transforming their ethos towards the goals of social justice and widening access of formerly disadvantaged groups to higher education (Badat & Sayed 2014). Furthermore, as Botha (2010: 206-207) puts it, public universities such as Rhodes are funded largely by taxpayers, which makes it important for them to emphasise nation-building and 'advancement of our own people and our own country'.

Although recruitment of international students is often seen as an important income generator for universities (e.g., Swartz et al. 2019: 573), the role of international students in South African transformation discourse has remained marginal. For example, the extensive and commendable 550-page edited volume *Transforming transformation in research and teaching at South African universities* by Pattman & Carolissen (2018) that addresses transformation from the viewpoints of race, gender, language, sexuality, disability, and to some extent, class, does not even mention the presence of international students on South African campuses. This absence connects to the primacy of nation-building: educating students from outside of South Africa is often pitched against the urgency to make universities more responsive to local needs (Botha 2010: 207).

This thesis problematises the 'internationalisation versus transformation' discourse at South African universities by highlighting the central role of South African higher education in the continent's human resource development (see MacGregor 2007). To

combat fears of 'brain drain' (ibid.), the country's higher education sector relies on the aspirations and hopes for a better future that families across southern Africa share (Case et al. 2018: 127). Just as universities contribute to making the South African middle classes more racially diverse (Botha 2010: 129), they also (re)produce networks of these educated classes beyond South Africa's borders. In a region where the role of transnational education in class mobility is so central, better understanding the experience of SADC students at South African universities provides important insights into the links between migration, social class, and higher education.

1.4. Methodology and research ethics

By providing rich empirical data and producing deep knowledge, ethnography can offer valuable insight for research that concentrates on the complexity of human lives 'in action' (Murchison 2010: 4). As long as ethnography is carried out in a way that acknowledges its potential to reproduce certain power dynamics (see Le Bourdon 2022; Spivak 1988), it can also be used to give 'a voice to the voiceless' (Murchison 2010: 5) and to 'tell untold stories' (Valenzuela et al. 2015). As generally articulate about their experiences, students are not usually seen as voiceless people in need of a researcher to enable them to be heard. However, focusing on SADC students – a group that sees itself as marginalised in debates on higher education transformation – can 'problematise the ways that individuals and groups constitute and interpret organisations and societies on a daily interactional basis' (Schwartzman 1993: 3). This way, ethnography can expose new dimensions regarding phenomena that are often taken for granted (Gay y Blasco & Wardle 2007: 3).

Whilst data collection through fieldwork remains the core of ethnographic research, the limitations to many contemporary ethnographic projects (such as a part-time PhD) regarding time and funds often require and justify new applications of ethnography (Marcus & Okely 2007: 353). In this project, I acknowledged these limitations by conducting my data collection during 'repetitive, abbreviated visits' to the field (see

Marcus & Okely 2007: 358). This kind of 'yo-yo fieldwork', as Wulff (2002) calls it, can be challenging due to its fragmented temporal and geographical organisation. However, in this project, this approach helped me to track possible changes in my participants' views as well as providing access to students' multiple (including 'off-campus') identities just as conventional ethnography would (see Cashmore et al. 2010: 107).

Furthermore, virtual fieldwork (see Boellstorff et al. 2012) was a useful addition to the project. I used virtual fieldwork both during and between the face-to-face research trips to augment my other data. This entailed staying in touch with some of my research participants via email and Whatsapp and spending countless hours online following Rhodes University, several student groups and a Makhanda residents' forum on social media. The addition of virtual fieldwork helped me to recognise the ways in which students' identities were shaped in interactions with the wider community in Makhanda and elsewhere. Thus, while this kind of integrated yo-yo and virtual fieldwork method may sound like a novelty, it is in line with the classic idea of ethnographic research in that 'the field can never be just a physical site' (Marcus & Okely 2007: 360).

Following Candea (2007: 179), this fragmentary nature of my fieldwork may not have offered a holistic view of SADC students' lives or a full 'closure' to the topics I explored, but it certainly offered a 'window into [their] complexity'. My approach of interspersing face-to-face research with virtual research became especially useful when the project was disrupted by the Covid-19 pandemic at the end of my third fieldwork trip in March 2020. However, the timing of the pandemic meant that I was at a point in my project where I could focus on writing chapters and did not need to be physically in Makhanda. The balance between my face-to-face and virtual fieldwork did not need to be significantly shifted as I only had to move my last planned fieldtrip (from 2021 to July 2022). While many SADC students had to leave Makhanda as Rhodes University closed down and most residences were vacated, staying in touch with my participants was possible throughout the pandemic via email and Whatsapp.

The face-to-face part of my fieldwork took place at Rhodes University during May-June 2018, March 2019, March 2020, and July 2022. The university setting offered good opportunities for ethnographic observation taking place for example in lecture theatres, campus cafes and study spaces (see Valenzuela et al. 2015: 9). Most of my fieldwork in Makhanda was taken up by participant-observation. Due to the way in which students at Rhodes constantly move from place to place during the day, it was useful to anchor myself in one location that would allow me to see as many of them as possible.

I found a suitable place in one academic department's TA's (teaching assistant) office, which also functioned as a hub for tutors (students who support lecture learning by holding compulsory tutorials and marking tutorial assignments). Whenever tutors and other students gathered in the teaching assistant's office, I joined in, chatting to students, observing their conversations, and noting down any interactions in my field notebook. I spent many hours sitting in what became 'my' armchair to the extent that, to my embarrassment, the TA once ordered someone to move off it when I walked in. I also participated in the department's activities, for example by helping to organise students' assignments into files.

In addition to the TA's office, I spent time in the basement of the same department, where a specific space had been set up for postgraduate students to work. This space hosted a more limited number of students as undergraduates did not have access to the basement, which enabled me to get involved in deeper discussions between peers who had studied together for several years, especially as many of them were female like myself. When I got to know some of my participants, I arranged to follow them to their lectures and tutorials and walked with them to the supermarket or had lunch together. After work and at weekends, I occasionally met them at the Rat and Parrot pub where we had meals and drinks – and in 2018, watched several games of the football World Cup. In addition, I spent time observing the university library, cafés, gardens, other common areas, and town spaces such as streets, shops, churches, and restaurants.

Negotiating access to the field and recruiting participants are obvious starting points for any ethnographic fieldwork. Identifying so-called gatekeepers to help negotiate access and find potential participants is an important first step (e.g., Gooch 2013: 120), after which participants can be approached and recruited. In this project, I had made contact with one key gatekeeper before my arrival in Makhanda. This academic member of staff at Rhodes University sent out my call for international students to participate in my research. However, as this gatekeeper's reach was limited to one department, I negotiated with another gatekeeper at the Rhodes University International Office to further distribute my call for participants. Furthermore, I was able to use snowball sampling with the help of a third gatekeeper – the teaching assistant whose office I was allowed to base myself in. This teaching assistant was able to direct any potential participant to talk to me, and as an international student himself, also agreed to participate in my research.

From these three access points, I was able to gather enough participants for my research. Although students are generally seen as easily recruitable and enthusiastic research participants (Engstrom 2012: 410), most SADC students at Rhodes were reluctant to participate in ethnographic observation in their free time, pointing to time restrictions and claims that they 'did not have a social life' (and perhaps due to fears of having their privacy invaded and their subconscious behaviour analysed). Those who were still interested in participating in my research were happy to be observed in the university setting and public spaces around Makhanda, including shops and restaurants – that is, in contexts where they knew that many other people could already see what they did and hear what they said. Yet, whilst not explicitly declining the observation part, most students asked if they could participate by being interviewed. I welcomed this request as interviews are often an important addition to participant-observation in ethnographic studies. In this research project, student interviews became a primary source of data, and they were also a good way of getting more people involved as well as getting to know the ones who would become my key participants.

During May-June 2018, I conducted qualitative semi-structured interviews with 25 students, including one from Botswana, three from Eswatini, two from Lesotho, one from Namibia, one from Zambia, and 17 from Zimbabwe (for a more detailed list of the interviewees' demographic characteristics, see Appendix 1.). The Zimbabwean majority in my sample reflects their large proportion at Rhodes.[8] To gain insight into the ways in which Rhodes University perceives its role in regional student mobility within SADC and how the institution supports its international students, I also conducted interviews with staff members and other university representatives in 2018 and 2020. These people included a senior officer, a junior officer and a graduate student assistant at the Rhodes University International Office, an academic member of staff in my 'home' department, and an International Councillor of the Rhodes University Student Representative Council. All interviews were either recorded with a voice recorder or by using hand-written notes, depending on the preference of the interviewee. Each interview lasted between 30-90 minutes and took place in a neutral, safe, and calm space on Rhodes University campus.

Using multiple methods is a common practice to enhance research rigour and increase the validity of ethnographic research by helping to triangulate the findings (Gooch 2013: 136). In addition to participant-observation (both face-to-face and virtually) and interviews, this project benefited from document analysis, online survey, mental mapping, and focus groups. Document analysis in Chapter 2 in this thesis was used as a critical lens that examines each document in relation to the context of 'power relationships, social, economic and political inequalities' in which they were produced (Mabokela & Mlambo 2017: 783). Mental mapping and focus groups were used to gather data for Chapter 3. During March 2019, I held 11 focus groups in which students were asked to draw maps to illustrate how they perceive their surrounding environment at Rhodes and in Makhanda (see Yu et al. 2018: 1556-1557) and discuss their map-drawing experience.

[8] In 2019, Zimbabwean students constituted 55% of all SADC students at Rhodes (Rhodes University 2019: C7).

Analysis is often understood to take place at the end of the research process, although it should continue throughout research (Hammersley & Atkinson 2007: 158). In this project, a continuous analysis process was essential due to the yo-yo nature of my fieldwork. I was therefore able to analyse the data from each fieldwork period before travelling back to gather more – and often more targeted – data. To analyse my data, I first categorised students' experiences roughly under topics such as migration, higher education, and social class based on etic reasoning (i.e., using social science concepts, which I chose myself). This is a common practice in ethnography as it helps to connect the findings to theoretical literature and identify central themes (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007: 201). I then used emic reasoning (i.e., based on my research participants' own categories) in terms of building my analysis on the issues, concepts, and terminology that SADC students used and talked about (ibid.).

One key challenge for analysis was the question of students' class identification. In the interviews, I asked each SADC student to self-identify their social class background. I then used these self-identifications together with relevant theoretical literature that discusses how exactly for example middle-classness should be defined (e.g., Lentz 2015, 2016 and 2020; Seekings & Nattrass 2005; Southall 2016). The aim of this project was not to determine anyone's social class, but to analyse different meanings students give to issues around privilege and precarity. Still, having some pointers to both the students' class identifications and their material and social conditions (e.g., in terms of parental employment, size of nuclear family unit and schooling background) was important so that I could categorise the data and analyse the theoretical connections of my findings. All chapters in this thesis therefore categorise SADC students along their self-identified class but also leave space for discussion on the different meanings attached to those self-identifications and the ways in which they might be regarded in theoretical literature on social class in the southern African context.

All my research data was manually transcribed. I then categorised and analysed it using the NVivo qualitative data analysis programme, which facilitates active categorisation and extraction of meaningful trends from a multiple platform dataset. To organise data and process my findings, I generated a coding system, which I then used to make comparisons between students' accounts (see Gooch 2013: 137). Irrespective of the technical details of each individual research project, ethnographic analysis should be based on three main principles of comparison, contextualisation and understanding of the role of relationships (Gay y Blasco & Wardle 2007: 4-5). Alongside these broader considerations, the data was analysed via content and discourse analysis that allowed me to not only look at what the participants said or did but what kinds of meanings emerged from the ways in which they constructed their narratives.

Research ethics were considered throughout this project using multiple strategies. All participants were given consent forms to sign before they could participate in this research. The consent form included information on the research process, data management, as well as my contact details for any further questions. The consent forms were accompanied by participant information letters with more details of my project. All participants were given the right to withdraw from my research within three months of their participation, which none of them requested. Participants in this research were not anonymous because they were known to the researcher. However, they were given pseudonyms to disguise their identities. To ensure their confidentiality in the research data, all names and places (other than their country of origin) that might lead to positive identification of a particular participant were changed.

Research data was stored on my personal laptop computer, encrypted according to the University of Birmingham's data protection procedures in a file secured by password. No data was emailed at any point. Back-up of the data was stored on a separate external hard drive, likewise in a password-secured file. The hand-written notes, laptop and external hard drive were stored in a lockable cabinet at the researcher's residence, which was only accessible to the researcher. As per UKRI and University of Birmingham

data policy requirements, the research data will be stored in a secure location (such as a lockable cabinet) for 10 years after the PhD thesis has been submitted.

Reflexivity was central in my efforts to ensure this project was conducted according to good research ethics, as the practical applications of research ethics can only work effectively when combined with constant consideration of bias and perspective. Participants in ethnography are active contributors to the research and have the potential to impact or even control the research process for example by determining the social acceptance of a researcher (see Hammersley and Atkinson 2007: 63-65). In this research, participants' consciousness and agency are noted throughout the chapters as I analyse their narrative tropes in light of my other data. This means that as well as working with the information that my participants offered in their interviews and other interactions with me, I also pay attention to the 'perspectives, […] discursive strategies […] [and] psycho-social dynamics' underlying their accounts and use this insight in my analysis (ibid.: 102-103).

The researcher is the main instrument in an ethnographic study, which implies that their personality, characteristics, and experiences influence the research processes and results (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007: 73; Murchison 2010: 13-14). In this project, I was guided by my own experience as an international student in a regional context, albeit largely different to most of my participants due to my position as a White European mature student. In some situations, students at Rhodes expressed their appreciation for the fact that despite my institutional affiliation, I was non-British and even stated that they could talk about race in my presence because 'at least I was not a *White South African*'. All in all, I found this position to be productive as I was able to understand the workings of the university fairly easily but also able to question specific practices that my participants were accustomed to.

1.5. Structure of the thesis

This thesis comprises five chapters and a conclusion. Each chapter focuses on a key aspect of SADC students' experiences as they navigate the institutional framework of Rhodes University, peer relationships and family expectations, challenges related to their personal development, as well as societal issues related to race and class both in South Africa and their home countries. Together, the five chapters portray young Africans at a turning point of their lives and having to come to terms with questions of privilege and precarity.

Chapter 2, titled **Internationalisation or regional student mobility? Rhodes University and the making of 'an international student' in southern Africa**, draws on law and policy documents, interviews with Rhodes University International Office staff members, as well as a range of secondary literature. The aim is to provide context and historical background to the ethnographic investigations on the SADC student experience in the following chapters. Whilst Rhodes University has been a pioneer in the internationalisation of higher education both in South Africa and on the African continent, there is a disconnect between the lofty ideals of internationalisation and international students' lived experience. Chapter 2 argues that the sense of incomplete or imperfect realisation of internationalisation at South African universities derives from the way in which the concept of internationalisation has been adopted to encompass earlier notions of regional student mobility.

Policy frames university structures and shapes their approaches towards internationalisation. By integrating two big bodies of policy – immigration and higher education – Chapter 2 offers a chronology of policy evolution that explains how regional student mobility to South Africa has been shaped by South Africa's strict immigration policy and decades of institutionalised racial segregation. I will show how international students have been able to circumnavigate this strict policy environment due to their relative class advantage compared to 'low-skilled' migrants. Institutions like Rhodes

University are now encouraged to promote internationalisation and support international students. Yet, they are also expected to prioritise South African students, which leaves internationalisation in an ambivalent position and risks international students being demoted to a secondary status within institutions.

Chapter 3 is titled **The bubble of Rhodes University – Place identity and class in a White space**. This chapter focuses on Rhodes University students' spatial navigations at their institution and in the city, Makhanda, in which it is located. I investigate how students' everyday life worlds are shaped by their relations with the surrounding environment known as 'place identities'. Before I take a closer focus on international students at Rhodes in the following chapters, Chapter 3 considers the class dimension of spatial inclusion and exclusion from the point of view of both international and South African students. Drawing on a range of qualitative empirical data such as participant-observation, interviews, mental maps, and focus group discussions, this chapter illustrates how students perceive Rhodes University and Makhanda as socially contested spaces with multiple and sometimes conflicting claims of ownership. Students' spatial perceptions are linked to their class identities that manifest themselves in different patterns of consumption, movement, and opportunity. At the same time, their practice of identity distinction is restricted by the limited spatial structures of a small institution located in a small town.

The spatial dimensions of Rhodes University and Makhanda both reflect and reinforce inequality. Rhodes University students often identify their institution and the part of the city in which it is located as 'White spaces' and describe their existence as living in a middle-class 'bubble'. Both concepts are connected to ideas of spatial inequalities based on race and class. Students at Rhodes University typically wish to distinguish themselves from the negative aspects of living in what they understand as an exclusionary middle-class space. I argue that students deploy different forms of moral boundary work and place-making to navigate the intersections of 'town and gown' and that these strategies vary according to their levels of economic, social, and cultural capital.

Chapter 4, **'There's life here and there's life there' – Time, migration, and class-making experiences of SADC students**, focuses on the ways in which SADC students in South Africa navigate between the multiple challenges related to their 'life here' (at Rhodes University) and 'life there' (back home). Following prevailing ideals of meritocracy and improvement over time, migration and attending higher education in southern Africa are often connected to expectations of social mobility and social becoming. SADC students often migrate due to limited availability or inadequate quality of higher education in their home countries, becoming what I call 'constrained cosmopolitans'. Aggravated by encounters with culture shock and xenophobia in South Africa, this results in an acute sense of non-belonging and makes the university experience of SADC students one of anxiety and uncertainty.

I argue that the negative experiences of SADC students at Rhodes University testify to a sense of temporal as well as spatial dislocation. This emerges from the integration challenges in their present 'life here' (at university) and the family pressures of 'life there' (back home) that relate to their educational migration and their ambivalent position between childhood and adulthood. To 'get through' their time at Rhodes, SADC students emphasise their temporary existence and use narratives of sacrifice and survival. This way, they can validate their current struggles and maintain hope and aspirations for a more comfortable future *elsewhere,* facilitated by their transnational education experience.

Chapter 5 is titled **Too rich to care? SADC students, protests and identity politics at Rhodes University**. In this chapter, I focus on the 2015-2016 fallist campus protests (such as #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall) that demanded affordable and decolonised university education. International students, including those from SADC countries, were largely invisible during the protests. I argue that this is linked to the way in which they have been neglected in the debate on transformation of higher education due to their transnational identities. As the campus protests concentrated on the plight

of the students identifying as 'poor Black', SADC students faced accusations of being 'too rich to care' about rising fees – something that they firmly rejected.

In this chapter, I show how SADC students had certain specific challenges as immigrants, which they emphasised as a key rationale for not participating in the fallist movements. Furthermore, they were alienated from the protest discourse because of their different moral understandings of race and class. Identifying mainly as middle class, SADC students were misrecognised within the contentious identity politics on South African campuses as particularly privileged. The mismatch between SADC students' self-understandings and the class identities ascribed to them by protesting South African students illustrates that whilst the protests successfully addressed the important question of race and class inequality in South African higher education, they also led to new forms of othering at South African universities.

Chapter 6, **'Where leaders learn' (but others struggle)? Reproduction of class divisions at Rhodes University**, looks at the way in which social class divisions are reproduced at South African universities through institutional peer leadership roles such as tutors and teaching assistants. The positions are typically given to students from middle-class backgrounds as they have the required social and cultural capital to apply for and succeed in these roles. In this chapter, I argue that unlike in many parts of the world where paid employment among students speaks of financial necessity, at Rhodes University it symbolises status and privilege. This way, access to leadership positions divides students into academic 'winners and losers'.

Contrary to common perceptions of international students as a marginalised group, and despite the many challenges that they do face, SADC students are often seen as fitting candidates for institutional roles at Rhodes University. I argue that their experience of precarity and foreignness in the wider South African society is thus temporarily negated within this institutional setting. Peer leadership roles at universities like Rhodes provide students opportunities to form regional middle-class networks with others on similar

career trajectories, through which South African higher education can have a role in creating and reproducing transnational middle classes within the SADC region. Whilst the institutional frameworks at Rhodes appear to be becoming more inclusive, as exemplified by the involvement of SADC students, university structures still reproduce class-based advantage.

The five substantive chapters in this thesis analyse different aspects of the SADC student experience at Rhodes University. The overarching argument throughout the chapters is that SADC students experience simultaneous privilege and precarity, which emerge from their intersecting national and class identities. SADC students' time at Rhodes University is characterised by ambivalence and uncertainty, which they are able to tolerate by focusing on becoming 'future leaders' through the concepts of aspiration and hope. By foregrounding the social, spatial, temporal, institutional and societal dimensions of student life at Rhodes University from a transnational education perspective, I offer a fresh lens on the way in which social inequalities are experienced as dynamic and fragmentary processes of economic, social, and emotional privilege and precarity.

2. INTERNATIONALISATION OR REGIONAL STUDENT MOBILITY? RHODES UNIVERSITY AND THE MAKING OF 'AN INTERNATIONAL STUDENT' IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

2.1. Introduction

Internationalisation of higher education has emerged as a global norm and a desirable activity for universities in the past 30 years. Despite the ideals of inclusivity and diversity that internationalisation has come to signify, international students from Southern African Development Community (SADC) region experience challenges in South Africa. Majee & Ress (2020: 475) argue that regional students are often neglected both in terms of internationalisation and transformation. Subsidised by the South African state, they are 'neither self-funding international customers nor are they the marginalised national students targeted by affirmative policies' (ibid.). In the highly unequal South African higher education context, internationalisation has been implicated in a contest over unevenly distributed privilege and precarity. The focus on domestic social responsibilities within South African universities has therefore sometimes resulted in 'exclusionary nationalistic, xenophobic and racist rhetoric' (Ndofirepi et al. 2017: 62; see also Chapter 5 in this thesis).

This chapter will demonstrate that to better understand the reasons why international students' experiences in South Africa do not neatly fit in the ideals of internationalisation, it is important to recount the policy evolution of student mobility in the country as well as the wider southern African region. The historical backdrop provided in this chapter will set the context for more detailed investigations of international students' experiences in the following chapters. I argue that the incomplete or imperfect realisation of internationalisation at South African universities is a result of historical patterns as the concept itself is fairly new and has been adopted to encompass earlier notions of regional student mobility.

Student mobility within southern Africa is not a new phenomenon, but dates back to the establishment of the first higher education institutions in the region. British colonies in southern Africa were expected to eventually amalgamate with South Africa, and it was thus seen as natural for students from across the region to attend university in South Africa. However, the nature of regional student mobility changed with the consolidation of national identities and borders, which ultimately gave rise to the terminology of 'international students' and 'internationalisation of higher education' as well as the need to govern student mobility. In order to understand the policy environment in which international students operate both in South Africa and in the southern African region, this chapter tracks the evolution of governments' approaches to student mobility during the three distinct periods – colonial, apartheid and post-apartheid – of South Africa's nation-building process.

Regional student mobility to South Africa is framed by two big bodies of policy – immigration and higher education – which govern university structures and shape their approaches towards internationalisation. South Africa's immigration and higher education policies have been reformed several times over the years in response to changing regimes and political agendas. Policy regarding student mobility and internationalisation has thus reflected the fluctuating and often turbulent political conditions by which they have been constructed. While these policy developments have been thoroughly examined in academic writing (e.g., Dodson & Crush 2015; Jowi 2009; Klotz 2012 and 2013; McLellan 2008; Peberdy 1998; Rouhani 2007a), most analyses have focused on either immigration or higher education policy. This chapter integrates the two subject areas into a chronology of policy evolution.

Rhodes University has been a pioneer in the internationalisation of higher education both in South Africa and the African continent, thus providing an interesting setting for analysis of policy implementation. This chapter draws on institutional, national, and regional level law and policy documents, abundant secondary literature as well as interviews with Rhodes University International Office staff members. I will start by

introducing the internationalisation context at Rhodes University and in South African higher education within which international students navigate and will then focus on historical developments in immigration and higher education policy both in South Africa and the wider southern African region.

2.2. Imperfect internationalisation – Understanding the framework for student mobility to Rhodes University

In 2019, South Africa's Department of Higher Education and training published a document titled *Policy Framework for the Internationalisation of Higher Education in South Africa* (DHET 2019). This comprehensive document gives both context to the formulation of a national-level internationalisation policy framework, as well as concrete instructions along which to develop and align institutional policies (ibid.: 19). The Policy Framework declares that internationalisation takes place at the institutional level, and that the role of the state is merely facilitative (ibid.: 27). For individual institutions of higher education such as Rhodes University, this policy entails commitment to embracing internationalisation. However, when engaging with internationalisation processes, universities are tied to national-, regional- and international-level decisions that are ultimately guided by constantly changing domestic and foreign policy missions.

The growing interest in internationalisation of higher education in South Africa reflects the way in which the term has become a globally recited buzzword (see Ndofirepi et al. 2017: 50). In many parts of the world, recruitment of international students has become an important source of revenue for universities as international students often pay higher fees than local students (Deschamps & Lee 2015: 124). In this sense, internationalisation and student mobility are connected to the way in which higher education has become increasingly commodified and commercialised (e.g., Dzvimbo & Moloi 2020).

At Rhodes University, a senior staff member at the International Office emphasises that they are 'not charging fees and making money off the international students.'[9] They further point out that '[i]f that was [their] primary aim, you would probably see a different class of students coming into the university and you would see exclusion of someone else. But that's not the case.'[10] Instead of following a purely economic rationale, they thus refer to internationalisation at the institution as an engine of development with multiple beneficiaries: '[O]ur internationalisation policy […] [is] centred around […] the idea of retaining internationally recognised staff and talent, as well as nurturing an environment in which Rhodes University is richer because of its international diversity.'[11]

This emphasis on human resource development reflects the way in which internationalisation is often adopted by African higher education institutions. This is due to increasing expectations that they should acknowledge both quality standards as well as social and economic impacts in their agenda (Sall & Ndjaye 2007: 47-48). A typical – albeit simplified – view is that globalisation brings with it the negative effect of competition, which can then be countered by the more positive cooperative strategy of internationalisation (De Wit 2013a: 16). The rationale for internationalisation is thus often expressed as a need to prepare students for 'global citizenship' as it is required in the setting of increasing competition (ibid.: 36).

However, it is important to remember that Rhodes University does not represent an entirely new non-commercial model of internationalisation as it does – like all universities in South Africa do – charge tuition fees both off international and South African students. But unlike local students who benefit from state funding schemes, international students are often not eligible for bursaries and are thus more likely to be paying their fees in cash. Indeed, South Africa's higher education sector is an important

[9] Interview with one International Office staff member at Rhodes University, 14 June 2018.
[10] Interview with one International Office staff member at Rhodes University, 14 June 2018.
[11] Interview with one International Office staff member and one post-graduate assistant at Rhodes University, 5 March 2020.

service export (Du Plessis & Fourie 2011), on which universities partly depend for their revenue. In the end, the staff at Rhodes University International Office also admit being 'quite reliant on getting a good cohort of Zimbabwean students coming in'.[12]

Student mobility often mirrors patterns of regional mobility more generally (Maringe 2015: 855). This is also true for southern Africa, where people tend to move unidirectionally from the rest of the region to South Africa. Some South African universities – including Rhodes – have recognised this pattern and adopted a type of internationalisation that focuses on attracting student mobility within a framework of SADC-level regional integration (Knight & Woldegiorgis 2017b: 1). This regional approach has enabled South Africa to become a centre with its own circle of influence despite the country's location in the periphery of the global order (Majee & Ress 2020: 475).[13] This phenomenon compares with another regional higher education hub in the Global South, Singapore, which has constructed an image of itself as 'an exemplar of modernity […] in rising Asia', thus attracting high achieving students from across the region (Collins et al. 2014: 674).

Rhodes University has historically been receptive to international students. In 1946, the university's Senate argued in vain for the admission of Black students not because they wished to enrol non-White South Africans, but rather to be able to accept international students 'from Greece, Turkey, Egypt and the Middle East' as well as to initiate student exchange with American universities (Greyling 2007: 31). During the colonial and apartheid years, Rhodes hosted significant numbers of mainly White students from other African countries, especially Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) (Jansen 2017: 49). This early pattern of regional student mobility has continued strongly until this day as Zimbabweans now constitute roughly 47% of all international students at Rhodes, the difference being that a much larger proportion of them now are Black (Rhodes University 2019: C7, C10). Still, the presence of SADC students did not automatically

[12] Interview with one International Office staff member at Rhodes University, 14 June 2018.
[13] However, some institutions such as University of Cape Town and University of the Witwatersrand have been able to reach wider international reputations as leading African higher education institutions.

result in internationalisation. As late as in 2001, one Dean and professor at Rhodes University maintained that 'anybody who comes from the southern end of Africa [was considered] as local', thus making targeted services for them unnecessary (Rouhani 2007b: 150).

The fall of apartheid and the formation of a closer regional community resulted in a near tripling of SADC students in South Africa between 1992 and 1996 (Ramphele 1999: 5-6).[14] This was also the era when internationalisation first became a global trend in higher education, triggered by a notable increase in student mobility worldwide (De Wit 2013a: 18). Although student mobility is normally understood as just one aspect of internationalisation (Hudzik 2011: 6), the term internationalisation is often used fairly liberally to best suit the purposes of individual institutions (De Wit 2013a: 14). In many institutions such as Rhodes University, the relationship between student mobility and internationalisation has been significant.

After a long history of inbound student mobility, Rhodes University had become one of the leading study destinations in South Africa for SADC students by the 2000s (Ramphele 1999: 12). Internationalisation policy emerged as a response to the needs of these regional students as well as a reaction to the way in which the language of internationalisation had become a global trend. Internationalisation was recognised as a strategic part of the institution in 2001, when Rhodes University initiated setting up an International Office to develop policy and guide internationalisation efforts at the institution (Rhodes University 2005: 2). Amongst other duties, the role of the International Office was defined as a 'contact point and support for international students' (ibid.: 3).

As international offices guide and support international students through various obstacles of application compliance requirements, immigration regulation, and university registration practices, they represent an important link between policy and

[14] From 2400 to 6819 students (Department of Education, cited in Ramphele 1999: 6).

the experience of mobile students. With their mediating role, international office staff have access to first-hand knowledge of the experience of international students, which they can use to influence university-level agenda setting and even wider policy development (Bark 2021: 410-411). Nevertheless, they are often understaffed and under-resourced (Lee et al. 2018: 1990), having to sacrifice the time they would ideally spend supporting international students' adaptation due to the time-consuming immigration administration (Briggs & Ammigan 2017: 1084). Coming from varying backgrounds – both in academia and administration – and having no established training routes or career paths to draw on, international officers are also often underprepared for these demanding duties (De Wit 2013a: 39; Hudzik 2011: 23).

Writing in 2008, Louw & Mayer (2008: 616) argued that despite comprehensive internationalisation policies, international student integration at Rhodes University still relied heavily on one-off orientation training and the influence of living in multi-nationality student residences. This discrepancy between the ideals of internationalisation and its practical implementation is just one example of the challenges that International Office staff at Rhodes share with their colleagues worldwide (see Kishun 2007: 465). Whilst Rhodes International Office staff appreciate the fact that they are dealing with important aspects of students' lives and make efforts to assist their clients, they also recognise that they are at the mercy of wider university bureaucracy as well as national and regional-level policy, as they compete for attention, support, and funding. A junior officer deliberates: 'I don't think it's something the university will allow to get to a point where internationalisation is not happening but obviously it should be a lot more targeted now and that requires money.'[15]

In 2005, Rhodes International Office published the university's first *Internationalisation Policy*, which served as a starting point for formal internationalisation policy and internationalisation debate at the university. The policy mentioned SADC students as a

[15] Interview with one International Office staff member and one post-graduate assistant at Rhodes University, 5 March 2020.

group deserving 'special attention' and stated that an international levy was put in place in order to fund the activities of the International Office (Rhodes University 2005: 2).[16] The role of the university as a provider of higher education to students from the SADC region was further consolidated when the policy was revised in 2011. From the point of view of international students at Rhodes, the recognition of their 'unique challenges, notably in the areas of visa, study permits, medical aid etc.' was especially important, although no assistance was guaranteed even in the updated policy (Rhodes University 2011: 2).

Notably, the revised *Internationalisation Policy* of 2011 also paid attention to the potential effect of internationalisation on South African students (Rhodes University 2011: 1-2). This viewpoint clearly refers to what McLellan (2008: 138) calls the 'national needs within a global context' approach in South African higher education, which aims to secure the primacy of local students' needs whilst engaging in internationalisation activities. At Rhodes as well as other South African universities, transformation at the national level has been the predominant catch phrase since the 1990s (e.g., Matthews & Tabensky 2015: 3). Accordingly, very little attention has been given to internationalisation at Rhodes University outside of the International Office. For example, the 2003 *Rhodes University Equity Policy* only mentions internationalisation in passing as an ambiguous 'commitment to serve and contribute to South Africa and the international community' (Rhodes University 2003: 2).

This idea of potential conflict of interest between local and international students stems from the fears that internationalisation may exacerbate 'brain drain' and loss of cultural identity in Africa (Alemu 2014: 76, 82). Internationalisation in South African higher education is thus sometimes pitched against the Africanisation imperative, which refers to a way of reconnecting with African identity lost during colonial and apartheid rule,

[16] In 2023, the international surcharge for undergraduate students was ZAR 12,017 for SADC students, ZAR 15,348 for students from the rest of Africa and ZAR 17,067 for students from outside of the continent. Graduate student surcharge was lower at ZAR 8,151, ZAR 10,155 and 12,017, respectively. (Rhodes University 2023: 2.)

and therefore seeking relevance in the framework of local realities (Ndofirepi et al. 2017: 56-58). As universities have simultaneously national, regional, continental, and international identities, this makes their ownership 'contested terrain' (ibid.: 47). This means that South African universities have to balance between redressing historical inequalities among South Africans and responding to the demands of global competition (Botha 2010: 206).

A senior member of staff at Rhodes University International Office contemplates the dichotomy between internationalisation and Africanisation: 'Some people here say, "Oh, is there a contradiction in internationalisation and Africanisation" […], I say absolutely not. You got to understand what you're doing in internationalisation, and you can only do it if you understand who you are, and the base in which you are operating, and then you begin to engage exponentially around you with the flow of knowledge.'[17] This logic reflects the way in which Botha (2010: 207) envisages an African identity as a niche and draw factor for South African universities within the international competition setting. Furthermore, Horsthemke (2017) advocates for a transcultural approach that would draw on the 'cultural hybrid' model combining European legacies and African realities, which characterises the current reality in South African higher education. However, this amalgamation is still in progress and remains heavily contested.

Rhodes University has clearly been a forerunner of internationalisation in South African higher education. It is also evident that the term internationalisation has been a fairly recent way of framing what has been a long-running trend of regional student mobility to South Africa. But notwithstanding the attention that Rhodes University has given to its international community, all universities also must adhere to national education and immigration policy when recruiting international students and staff. Listing processes and requirements for obtaining a study permits, police clearance certificates, medical covers and cash deposits, a document titled *International Students of Rhodes University*

[17] Interview with one International Office staff member at Rhodes University International Office, 14 June 2018.

(Rhodes University, undated) fittingly illustrates the discrepancies between the ideals of internationalisation and the legislation governing it. The following three sections will examine the ways in which this inconsistent current framework has emerged from the reciprocal relations between policy-making and regional student mobility within southern Africa.

2.3. The beginnings – Student mobility to South Africa before 1948

South African universities have varied and often controversial histories.[18] The first higher education institution in South Africa was the South African College (now University of Cape Town), which was established during British colonial rule in 1829 (Mabokela 1997: 423). This was followed by the University of Stellenbosch in 1866[19] and the University of Witwatersrand in 1896.[20] A further three institutions (Rhodes University, University of Free State, and University of Pretoria) were founded at the beginning of the 20th century[21] to serve different purposes. For example, Rhodes University, the focus of this thesis, was established in the Eastern Cape to reward the loyalty of the English-speaking settler community in the area, and thus to boost British colonialism and anti-Afrikaner sentiments in the post-South African War[22] environment (Maylam 2005: 14-15).

Since the beginning, the South African higher education system was divided along racial lines and higher education was mainly seen as a privilege of White people (Reddy 2004:

[18] For a comprehensive synopsis and critical analysis of published histories of South African universities, see Strydom (2016).
[19] Stellenbosch University began as Stellenbosch Gymnasium (Stellenbosch University website, undated). Delivering most of its teaching in Afrikaans, Stellenbosch soon became an important institution for the (White) Afrikaans-speaking population, thus acting 'as part of their nationalist cause' (Reddy 2004: 9).
[20] Witwatersrand was originally set up as a School of Mines in Kimberley but was later transferred to Johannesburg in 1904 (University of the Witwatersrand website 2017).
[21] Rhodes University and the University of Free State were inaugurated in 1904, and the University of Pretoria in 1908.
[22] Also known as the Boer War, the Second Boer War or the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902)

9). Although the Cape Colony era universities[23] enjoyed a certain level of autonomy in their internal issues and were in theory able to admit Black students (Moodie 1994: 2-3), these institutions were principally designed to prepare White (male) students for further education abroad – especially in Britain (Mabokela 1997: 423; Netswera & Mathabe 2006: 30). The first Black student in South African higher education was Harold Cressy, who was admitted to the University of Cape Town in 1911 after having been rejected by Rhodes University (Soudien 2015: 15).

On a regional scale, South Africa was already an important centre for higher education during the Cape Colony era. The colonial nature of higher education in South Africa made it characteristically 'international', for example in terms of governance models and use of colonial languages (Jowi 2009: 264-265). As the only providers of higher education in the region, South African universities were important for students from across southern Africa (Morrow 2013: 195). However, international students consisted mainly of White settlers from other British colonies. White Rhodesians were especially attracted to Rhodes University in Grahamstown (now Makhanda), possibly due to the name of the institution (Jansen 2017: 49).

The most famous early international student at Rhodes University was the former leader of Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), Ian Smith, who began his commerce studies at Rhodes in 1938 but interrupted them to join the Second World War (Smith 2008: 33). Returning in 1946, he took on several leadership roles and excelled in rowing (ibid.: 60). Smith is best known for his White supremacist regime in Rhodesia during the period 1964-1979 and the Unilateral Declaration of Independence from Rhodesia's colonial master, Britain, in 1965 (Cornwell 2008: 7, 10).[24] While Rhodes University now proudly promotes the achievements of many of its alumni in the fields of business, law and

[23] University of Cape Town (1829), University of Stellenbosch (1866), University of Witwatersrand (1896), Rhodes University (1904), University of Free State (1904) and University of Pretoria (1908).
[24] Smith's Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI) was provoked by the disintegration of the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, through which Nyasaland (Malawi) and North Rhodesia (Zambia) gained independence in 1964. The UDI was deemed illegal, and Rhodesia's independence remained unrecognised. After years of guerrilla warfare, the country finally gained independence as Zimbabwe in 1980, ending White minority rule.

education, Smith rarely gets mentioned despite being the only graduate yet to become a notable political figure as he 'can hardly be a source of pride for the university' (Maylam 2017: 306).

The roots of higher education for Black South Africans can be traced back to the schools and colleges founded by missionary societies during the colonial era (Ade Ajayi et al. 1996: 31). The first, and perhaps most notable of these was Lovedale College in the Eastern Cape, established in 1841 (Reddy 2004: 10). These Christian missions were well respected throughout southern Africa, and they would draw students from all over the region (e.g., Ranger 1995: 49-50; West 2002: 2). They therefore had a pivotal role in educating Black African elites, many of whom later became important political figures (Dubow 2014: 55; see also Chapter 6 in this thesis).

In most colonial dominions and protectorates across southern Africa and beyond, higher education was thought to 'produce anti-colonial and anti-racist resistance sentiments' amongst Black populations, so they were generally not encouraged to undertake university education (Reddy 2004: 10). However, Black Africans were already actively seeking study opportunities elsewhere (Jowi 2009: 268). The growing numbers of college graduates would in turn increase demand for university education. The first actual university for non-Whites, the South African Native College (now Fort Hare), was only established with the passing of the 1916 University Act (Mabokela 1997: 423).

As the first international students (whether Black or White) relocated from their respective colonies to study in South Africa, they became immigrants and were thus required to adhere to South African immigration policies. In the 19th century, the area that would become South Africa consisted of the British dominions of Cape Colony and Natal as well as the Boer republics of Transvaal and Orange Free State. These territories did not have established borders or border control until the end of the century, and movement of people was fairly free (Klaaren 2018: 24-25). However, politics around

immigration issues were quickly becoming more central in South Africa's nation-building.

In the British dominions, immigration from the mother country was encouraged in order to counterbalance Afrikaner influence, or even to 'out-breed' them (Harper and Constantine 2010: 111, 123). However, the 'quality' of settlers arriving in the colony was important to Britain, which meant that migrants needed to prove their 'respectability' for example through documents and health checks (MacDonald 2012: 13). The 'underlying class-based motives' of British immigration legislation were evident in the requirement for a prospective migrant to also have sufficient means of financial support, and in order to be naturalised, one also had to have knowledge of English (Klotz 2013: 117). Still, immigration to these territories was a fairly simple process for those deemed as British subjects, such as students from other British colonies in Africa (ibid.).

Tensions between Britain and the Boer republics of Transvaal and Orange Free State led to the South African War during 1899-1902 (Peberdy 2009: 31). British victory paved way for a federal arrangement, in which the British colonies and Boer republics were united under one state, the Union of South Africa, in 1910 (ibid.: 32). The settlement between the British and the Boer was based on racial domination, which was also reflected in the new Union's stance on immigration. All four territories had already constructed their individual immigration laws between 1897 and 1907, primarily in response to increasing immigration from India (Klaaren 2018: 24).[25] Although White South Africans – British and Boer – were perhaps still divided in terms of 'race'[26] and class, they were at least connected by their mutual suspicion towards immigrants (Harper & Constantine 2010: 131).

[25] Natal was the first South African territory to have general immigration law in place already in 1897, with Orange Free State following suit in 1899, Cape Colony in 1902 and Transvaal in 1907 (Klaaren 2018: 27).

[26] In the decades leading to the Boer War, the British and the Boers (Afrikaners) had become commonly referred to as the 'two races' of South Africa.

The establishment of the South African Union began an era of tightening immigration control. The first immigration policy of the Union was the 1913 *Immigrants Regulation Act,* which was designed to attract White settlers (Peberdy 1998: 189) while managing non-White – including Asian – immigration (Klotz 2012: 193). Also hoping to curb Jewish immigration, South Africa was also increasingly selective regarding White immigration[27] from the other British colonies as well as Europe (Peberdy 1998: 189), which led to the formulation of the 1930 *Immigration Quota Act* and the 1937 *Aliens Act*. These Acts stipulated that each immigration case was put in front of the Immigration Selection Board, which made discretionary decisions not based on any publicly known criteria (Klotz 2012: 195).

At the same time, the establishment of the South African Union meant that higher education became more regulated and racial segregation in these institutions more formalised. Higher education came under supervision of the central government (Greyling 2007: 36), which made universities statutory bodies regulated by Acts of the South African Parliament (Moodie 1994: 2). This enabled the implementation of a more coherent national higher education policy and was duly followed by the passing of the 1916 *University Act*, which assembled the existing institutions under the examining body of the University of South Africa (UNISA)[28] as university colleges (Moodie 1994: 3). The 1916 *University Act* was followed by amendments (1917, 1918 and 1920), and finally the 1923 *Higher Education Act*.

One of the most important developments of this period between the establishment of the South African Union and the beginning of the apartheid era was the founding of the first higher education institution specifically catering for non-Whites, the South African Native College, which later became known as the University of Fort Hare (Nkabinde

[27] It is worth noticing here that the term White immigration has had different interpretations throughout history, and White immigrants to South Africa have been treated differentially according to their origin, status, religion and so on.
[28] UNISA was, and still is, primarily a correspondence university (Moodie 1994: 4).

1997: 118).[29] For the first time in South African history, higher education provision was thus officially extended to the non-White population (Mabokela 1997: 423). At the same time, Black students now needed ministerial permission if they wished to study at a White university (Greyling 2007: 125). As access to White universities became more difficult, Fort Hare attracted a growing number of Black students from higher status families in the southern African region and beyond (Lodge 2013: 432; Ranger 1995: 49-50; West 2002: 2).

Although it was mainly concerned with Indian immigration, the 1913 *Immigrants Regulation Act* effectively barred all non-White immigrants by labelling them as 'unsuitable' (Peberdy 2009: 48-49). However, foreign Black Africans were needed in the South African Union to supply labour. To enter, they generally needed a valid employment contract, at the end of which they were expected to repatriate (Klotz 2013: 130; 140). Black student migrants, on the other hand, were able to use an exemption practice, which authorised border officials to administer temporary permits based on a variety of reasons, including educational purposes (MacDonald 2012: 41-42; 252). The way in which 'educational honour' was still considered satisfactory grounds for exemption (ibid.: 154) endorses the idea of 'underlying class-based motives' that were already evident in the South African immigration system before the establishment of the Union (see Klotz 2013: 117).

The fact that non-South African Black students were able to immigrate to the South African Union with relative ease confirms that the border control system was 'restrictive but ultimately ambiguous' (see MacDonald 2012: 2). Due to an assumption that the neighbouring territories[30] would eventually be incorporated into South Africa, Black people from these areas did not face significantly stricter regulations or control compared to South African Blacks (Klotz 2013: 140). Furthermore, as Black Africans were excluded from full citizenship and had 'no space in the imagined community' of South

[29] In addition, the correspondence-based University of South Africa (UNISA) was allowed to accept non-White students as social mixing was easily avoided (Mabokela 1997: 423).
[30] Basutoland (Lesotho), Bechuanaland (now Botswana) and Swaziland (Eswatini)

African legislators, Black immigrants were not a central concern for the Union government (Peberdy 2009: 54).

After the introduction of the 1937 *Aliens Act*, non-South African students needed to get a temporary permit authorised by border officials, for which they had to 'confirm their respectability' (Peberdy 2009: 41-42, 284). Once in the country, they also needed to report their 'residential and occupational arrangements every three years' (ibid.: 40). The notion of respectability in South Africa's immigration policy was thus transforming from an implicit assumption of class-based honour connected to one's educational status to an explicit category in immigration policy. Whereas an international student in the Union of South Africa was always assumed to occupy a higher class position than a migrant worker, this gradually changed from being automatically associated with student status to becoming something that one needed to prove. The next section will demonstrate how international student life was increasingly restricted during apartheid rule which, however, was limited in the extent to which it could undermine regional student mobility as a significant constituent in South African higher education.

2.4. Tightening control and the rise of regionalism – Student mobility during apartheid

In the aftermath of the Second World War (1939-1945), White immigration to South Africa had been encouraged following fears of disparities in the racial ratio (Peberdy 1998: 191), but also to alleviate a labour shortage (Klotz 2012: 195). This changed when the National Party (NP) came to power in 1948 and hoped to undermine the British in the eyes of their Afrikaner constituencies (Harper & Constantine 2010: 135). 'Quality' of White immigrants was increasingly emphasised due to concerns about the 'poor White' problem (MacDonald 2012: 39; see also Teppo 2004). Eventually the government managed to push through the *Declaration of Republic* in 1961, in which British and Commonwealth citizens were declared aliens (Peberdy 1998: 191). The Republic was now fully independent in its selection of immigrants. White immigration rates grew

steadily during the apartheid years (Harper & Constantine 2010: 136) despite periodic fluctuations in response to incidents of political unrest in South Africa and decolonisation in other colonies (Peberdy 1998: 191).

Black immigration to South Africa had also been increasing during the first half of the twentieth century. This was due to the practice of 'importing' mine labourers who were exempt from the otherwise strict regulations against non-White immigration (Peberdy 1998: 191). Toughening control measures placed on Black South Africans made recruitment of workers more difficult for companies, which encouraged them to start hiring illegally (Klotz 2013: 142). This made the question of a worker's nationality irrelevant, and thus a discreet flow of non-South Africans started to enter the country's economic life (ibid.).

These inconsistencies in South Africa's seemingly strict regional migration policy were only reversed when colonialism ended in many of the neighbouring states from the early 1960s onwards, thus causing 'fears of terrorism, Black nationalism and communism' (Peberdy 1998: 191). Former international students who had attended Fort Hare during the 1930s and 1940s – including nationalists like Botswana's Seretse Khama and Zambia's Kenneth Kaunda – were now leading their independent states and calling for liberation in the rest of the southern Africa. The close connections that these former students had made with South African liberation activists like Oliver Tambo and Nelson Mandela during their years at Fort Hare caused concern in the apartheid government, which now worried about the risk of insurgents arriving from neighbouring states. It thus became more important for the government to manage and control international students arriving in South Africa.

The 1950s and 1960s marked an 'era of high apartheid' during which White South Africans experienced growth and prosperity, while state control over the lives of non-Whites tightened (Dubow 2014: 99-100). Earlier legislation managing non-White movement such as the 1913 *Lands Act* was consolidated as the 1950 *Group Areas Act*

and the 1959 *Promotion of Bantu Self-government Act* initiated the creation of so-called Homelands, which would eventually strip the Black population of their South African citizenship (Dubow 2014: 64, 105).[31] The experience of international students was increasingly tied to the way in which they were racially classified according to South African legislation. The 1950 *Population Registration Act* allocated every South African into a racial category and obliged Black Africans to carry a pass (Dubow 2014: 37). In 1952, the pass system controlling movements of non-White populations was also extended to foreigners (Klotz 2013: 140). For international students, the toughening apartheid laws in South Africa were perhaps more tangible than immigration regulations, as they dictated the students' living arrangements and everyday social interactions.

According to National Party vision and ideology, education was to create the foundations for a 'new social order' in South Africa based on White domination, racial segregation and 'separate development' (Netswera & Mathabe 2006: 31). In 1953, the government initiated new legislation known as the *Bantu Education Act*, which created separate education systems for each racial group in the country (Mabokela 1997: 423). The idea of racially segregated education provision was extended to higher education in the 1957 *Separate University Education Bill* and the 1958 *Extension of University Education Bill*, which led to the 1959 *Extension of University Education Act*.

Whereas earlier legislation had for example designated Fort Hare as a university for all non-Whites, and made it possible for white universities to refuse access on the basis of race, the new Act formalised this segregation by establishing separate university colleges for each ethnic and/or language group (Moodie 1994: 5, Nkabinde 1997: 118-119).[32] The old White universities and the new 'ethnic' universities were even divided

[31] Also known as Bantustans, these reserves consisted of ten territories designated to each ethnic group as pseudo-independent Homelands. They were designed to exclude the non-White population from South African citizenship and rights by offering them the 'opportunity' to run their own countries.
[32] The main racial categories during apartheid rule were Black, White, Coloured, and Indian. University of the Western Cape was designated for Coloureds and the University College (now University of Durban-Westville) for Indians. The Black category was divided into ethnic subgroups so that Lovedale

into different governing bodies, with the Black institutions being placed under the newly established Department of Bantu Education (Greyling 2007: 56).

Despite the small presence of non-White students, residences and social spaces at White universities such as Rhodes were generally only open to White students (including White non-South Africans). This followed from national guidelines and laws,[33] but also indicated the conservative attitudes of the universities themselves (Dubow 2014: 128). Universities varied in their position regarding racial segregation (both academic and social), and they often used their discretion in the practical implementation of segregation orders (Greyling 2007: 36). Rhodes University presented itself as an autonomous, liberal institution despite the fact that the state had infiltrated into its academic matters through government-appointed positions within the university structures (Beard 2005: 73, 75).

Academics and students at Rhodes faced police harassment and feared having the university's funding cut off in case it engaged in activities that the government perceived to be against its politics (Christie 2005: 148-149). Still, some students and staff – who remained overwhelmingly White – engaged in rigorous research, organisation of protests and campaigns, and symbolic gestures in opposition to government policy (Cock 2005: 93-94). Some used their academic positions and research to try and influence state policy, for example by exposing the harsh realities of the disenfranchised populations and 'demographic follies behind the apartheid ideology' (Bell 2005: 84; Christie 2005: 146). However, Rhodes failed to engage in the events in its immediate surroundings during the late 1970s, when Grahamstown was often at the centre of both cruel law enforcement practices and the bitter struggle against apartheid (Cock 2005: 89).[34]

College (Fort Hare) catered for Xhosas, University of Zululand for Zulus and University of the North (University of Limpopo) for Sotho-Tswanas.

[33] Especially the 1950 *Group Areas Act* and the following amendment acts that designated residential areas for each racial group.

[34] These include cases of death in detention including that of Steve Biko, forced removals, and the inhumane conditions in the resettlement camps, all of which took place in the vicinity of Grahamstown (Cock 2005: 91-92).

As the only university before the 1960s to offer higher education specifically to Black Africans in the region,[35] Fort Hare continued to attract students from the British colonies as far as Kenya and Uganda (Morrow 2013: 195). It therefore had an important role (along with South Africa's younger Black universities) in the creation of just the kind of anti-colonial elites that the South African government had feared (Reddy 2004: 16). This was perceived as a threat to the apartheid government, which in 1950 forbade the university from admitting non-South African students (Moodie 1994: 4). Region-wise, South Africa's tightening grip on its own higher education sector also brought new opportunities. For example, the University of Bechuanaland, Basutoland and Swaziland (UBBS)[36] had a chance to become a regional successor to Fort Hare, but the institution was short-lived and never able to attract a notable number of students before the university broke up into three national institutions in 1975 (Mokopakgosi 2013: 466, 468, 472).[37]

While apartheid was intensifying in South Africa, the newly independent southern African states were organising support for the liberation struggle of the remaining colonies (Hwang 2007: 58). In 1975, Angola, Botswana, Mozambique, Tanzania and Zambia[38] formed the Frontline States (FLS) (Khadiagala 2012: 27), which promoted regional integration in order to decolonise the surviving minority-ruled states in the region – South Africa, South West Africa (Namibia)[39] and Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) (Hwang 2007: 59). After Zimbabwe's independence in 1980, the FLS countries[40] established the Southern African Development Coordination Conference (SADCC) (Hwang 2007: 59, 61).

[35] The only other pre-independence era universities in the region outside of South Africa were the Catholic University College/Roma College (later University of Lesotho) (1945), University of Rhodesia (1952) and University of Lubumbashi, DRC (1955).
[36] UBBS was first established in 1964, and changed its name to the University of Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland (UBLS) after the three countries had gained independence (Mokopakgosi 2013: 466, 468).
[37] See Mokopakgosi (2013) for a more detailed story of UBBS/UBLS.
[38] Nigeria also attended some of the meetings as an informal affiliate (Hwang 2007: 59).
[39] South West Africa had been annexed by South Africa in 1915.
[40] Also joined by Lesotho, Malawi and Swaziland (Eswatini)

Neither FLS nor SADCC imposed any binding policy on their member states. In addition, the documents that they published were more concerned with events in individual countries than intra-regional issues such as migration (Khadiagala 2012: 25). Nevertheless, both organisations recognised the importance of labour migration in the region (Hwang 2007: 58). Furthermore, the founding statement of SADCC, known as the *Lusaka Declaration*, suggested the creation of regional transport and telecommunications infrastructure networks 'as a precondition for genuine and balanced regional integration' (Hwang 2007: 61), which indicates that the organisation considered some cross-border mobility as a vital part of regional cooperation. While FLS and SADCC laid the basis for the establishment of SADC in 1992, their main attention was on decolonisation and actual policy making remained dormant.

In apartheid South Africa, growing popular resistance since the 1960 Sharpeville massacre[41] led to widespread civil unrest and sabotage campaigns, to which the government responded with a state of emergency (Dubow 2014: 74-98). The segregated education system was widely detested among South Africa's Black population, and this growing resistance and political mobilisation eventually led to the 1976 Soweto uprising, which was brutally crushed by the police (Netswera & Mathabe 2006: 32).[42] These were also turbulent times in higher education. For individual universities in South Africa, the consequences of, and attitudes towards policy changes during apartheid depended on their political orientation. While many Black universities as well as the more liberal White universities of Cape Town and Witwatersrand were often openly clashing with state policy, conservative or moderate universities such as Rhodes were more inclined to avoid any controversy (Maylam 2005: 17; Moodie 1994: 8-11).

[41] The Sharpeville massacre, in which 69 people were killed and many more wounded, happened after police opened fire during a protest against the Pass Laws.
[42] The uprising started as a high school protest march in Soweto, Johannesburg, and spread to several other parts of the country. Many of the over 600 victims (mainly shot by the police) were children and young people. (Reddy 2004: 26).

The ethnicity-based segregation within higher education was also proving inefficient and economically unviable (Mabokela & Mlambo 2017: 785), as for example skills shortages started to become apparent in many fields (Netswera & Mathabe 2006: 32). It was thus in the interest of the state to consciously promote the generation of a Black middle class that would act as a moderate force against a united Black resistance movement, and at the same time supply skilled workers (Southall 2014: 302-303). In the Homelands, Black elites were needed to run their 'independent' ethnic areas and therefore to act as a support base for the segregationist ideas of the apartheid government (see Gibbs 2014 and 2020). One central way of encouraging the formation of a Black middle class was to increase the opportunities for Black people to attend higher education (Sehoole 2005: 30). [43]

The ramifications of Bantu Education – together with a range of concurrent events nationally, regionally, and globally –[44] started to gradually destabilise the apartheid status quo. The 1976 Soweto riots were met with global outrage, and this eventually forced the government to reconsider its vindictive approach. Popular resistance grew stronger, and the government started making concessions (albeit cosmetic) towards a less restrictive education model. In 1977, the *Bantu Education Act* was repealed and replaced by *Education and Training Act*, which set up a new Department of Education and Training to administer all non-White education (Netswera & Mathabe 2006: 32; Republic of South Africa 1979: 7, 48).

This period between the Soweto riots and the end of apartheid was exceptional because the direction of student mobility was momentarily reversed. Some South Africans who resisted the apartheid government studied in the newly independent FLS/SADCC countries as well as outside the African continent, as they either chose or were forced

[43] Other measures contributing to the formation of a Black middle class from the mid-1970s onwards included the rights for non-Whites to obtain leaseholds, form business partnerships and engage in financial banking – a strategy sometimes dubbed as 'township stabilisation' (Eidelberg 1999: 55).
[44] These included for example the economic shortcomings of apartheid, collapse of social control, independence and the rise of socialist governments in neighbouring countries, and internal divisions within the ruling apartheid elite (Reddy 2004: 28-29).

to live in exile (e.g., Daniel 2013). It was also a time of academic boycott against apartheid rule (Lodge 2013: 436). Although this boycott was not completely successful or comprehensive in its implementation (Baumert & Botha 2016: 125), it nevertheless reduced the numbers of inbound international academics (presumably including students) from the Global North (Hyslop et al. 2006). However, students from the remaining colonies were still able to come to South African universities. In fact, White Rhodesians constituted almost half of the entire student body at Rhodes University in 1976 and were amongst the strongest conservative voices supporting racial segregation within the institution (Maylam 2017: 208).

Black students were finally allowed back into White universities with the passing of the 1983 *University Amendment Act* (Mabokela & Mlambo 2017: 785).[45] However, in the new atmosphere, this was regarded as insufficient. During the 1980s, the government faced such severe resistance that the country became essentially ungovernable (Sehoole 2005: 27). Currently a judge in South Africa's Constitutional Court, Mbuyiseli Madlanga was a Black student at Rhodes University during the 'complete, complete chaos' of the 1985 State of Emergency in Grahamstown (Constitutional Court Trust Oral History Project 2014: 5). He notes that Black students held their separate demonstrations at the edge of campus and occasionally joined 'local people' in protests that barricaded the motorway running through the city (ibid.). In 1986, the Deputy Minister of Education was compelled to promise education parity within 10 years (Netswera & Mathabe 2006: 32). By the end of the 1980s, the racial segregation system had come to the end of the road, and the country started to prepare for a new era.

[45] This Amendment removed the requirement of obtaining a special permission from the Minister. However, in practice, universities remained segregated until 1994.

2.5. Internationalisation in the era of transformation – Post-apartheid challenges

In 1990, President de Klerk announced the removal of apartheid laws and the unbanning of liberation movements (Sehoole 2005: 44). Yet, educational reforms had to wait until after the first democratic elections. As Netswera & Mathabe (2006: 33) explain, this stalemate in education policy formulation between 1990-1993 was caused by fears of compromising genuine transformation by reforming and reconstructing existing structures. Due to its important role for the future of the country, higher education had several stakeholders, who all wanted to have their say in the shaping of new policy (Sehoole 2005: 46). To boot, policy making in a politically free environment was new to all parties, which made the reorganisation of South Africa's higher education system no easy task (ibid.: 48).

Just like the apartheid regime before it, the new democratic government of South Africa valued higher education as one of its main pillars of nation-building. Previously, White students had been prepared for dominant positions in the country's political, economic, and social system, whilst universities for non-Whites had been set to equip the racially subjugated students for either more marginal roles within South Africa or as leaders of the pseudo-independent Homelands (Gibbs 2020: 297). The 'new' South Africa also needed graduates prepared for leadership positions, but whereas apartheid education had been based on exclusion, the new ideals thus aimed for redress, transformation and massification.[46]

In 1996, the *South African Constitution* defined higher education as a responsibility of the national government (Badat 2004: 5). However, neither the Constitution nor its predecessor, the 1993 *Interim Constitution*, interfered directly in matters related to

[46] Massification in higher education is generally referred to as increasing participation rates. In South Africa, the term is also understood specifically as increasing participation of the previously disadvantaged racial groups. (Reddy 2004: 35).

higher education. A new Ministry of Education was set up in 1994 to cover all educational issues that had previously been divided along racial, ethnic and language lines (Sehoole 2005: 101). In 1997, this ministry published the first post-apartheid legislation governing universities, the *Higher Education Act* (Republic of South Africa 1997: 52).

Regional student mobility experienced substantial growth in the first post-apartheid years (Ramphele 1999: 5-6). Yet, South Africa's higher education policy during the 1990s did not pay much attention to the increasing numbers of international students and intensifying processes of internationalisation.[47] Indeed, the fact that internationalisation was neither recognised in any of the policy formulation debates, nor fully represented in the final *Higher Education Act*, ensured its exclusion in policy for years to come (e.g., McLellan 2008: 131-132; Rouhani 2007a: 473). Ironically, the increasing economic and symbolic importance of international students (McLellan 2009: 287; Rouhani 2007a: 475) was only noted in the Act through the notion that universities could determine different fees for citizens/permanent residents and non-citizens/non-permanent residents (Republic of South Africa 1997: 35-36).

Issues related to student mobility and internationalisation of higher education in post-apartheid South African discussions to date have been subjugated to the transformation and decolonisation imperatives, which has resulted in what McLellan (2008: 138) refers to as the 'national needs within a global context' approach. This means that any attention to international students in policy is normally validated by a declaration that recruiting international students from the SADC region is unlikely to have an adverse impact on access for South African students (e.g., DHET 2019: 21, 22, 25, 30, 65; Ministry of Education 2001: 25). Taking into account the urgency of transformation in South

[47] For a more in-depth analysis on internationalisation in South African higher education policy 1996-2001, see McLellan (2008). In this paper, he argues that internationalisation is present in all examined policy documents implicitly but has not been given adequate direct attention to facilitate the potential of internationalisation as a strategic force for development.

African higher education, this language is understandable, but may hinder recognition of international students' specific challenges in the long run (see Chapter 5 in this thesis).

As well as functioning within the framework of South African higher education policy, international students in South Africa are also governed by national and regional immigration policy. The end of apartheid in 1994 suggested that South Africa would reconnect with the rest of the African continent. The start was promising as 'foreign Africans' who had entered the country before 1986 and stayed for over 10 years were given amnesty with the right to vote (Klotz 2012: 196, Peberdy 1998: 197). However, most foreigners in South Africa remained foreigners. The *Aliens Act*, inaugurated in 1991 by the old regime, continued the apartheid era discourse of tight border control and emphasis on 'detecting, deterring and deporting' unwanted persons (Hicks 1999: 407; Republic of South Africa 1991). All of this was expected to change with the new ANC[48] regime, but the subsequent legislation[49] did little to redirect the discourse towards questions of migrants' human rights (Crush & Dodson 2007; Hicks 1999: 404-405; Klotz 2012: 197).

One central factor in immigration policy formation in the 1990s was that the ruling coalition government, including the Minister of Home Affairs, Mangosuthu Buthelezi,[50] shared an anti-immigrationist position (Crush & Dodson 2007: 437), which then acted as a unifying topic and a diluter of internal tensions within the government (Klotz 2012: 199-200). Any attempt to move towards more liberal immigration policy was blocked. After several amendments to the Act during the 2000s and 2010s (2004, 2007, 2011 and 2014), there was eventually a rhetorical shift to 'better management' of immigration – although a strong emphasis on 'control' remained (Klotz 2012: 203). Although the South African government during this period was mainly concerned about growing

[48] African National Congress
[49] These included the *Aliens Control Amendment Acts* of 1993 and 1995; the 1996 *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa*; and the 2002 *Immigration Act* and its amendment acts in 2004, 2007, 2011 and 2014.
[50] Buthelezi was the Minister between 1994-2004, representing the Inkatha Freedom Party in the coalition government.

undocumented immigration, these tensions and shifts in South African immigration policy were a constant source of uncertainty for documented migrants such as SADC students.

However, as South Africa shed its pariah status and surfaced the international arena of politics in the 1990s, policymaking was no longer merely a national issue. South Africa joined SADC in 1994 soon after the first universal suffrage elections, which meant that the Community of 11 members[51] became a significant global actor with both economic and political clout – but also a renewed dependence on the regional giant, South Africa (Saurombe 2010). Ever since the country was able to join organisations like SADC, SACU[52] and the African Union, South Africa was actively seeking a regional and continental leadership role (ibid.). Instead of gratitude or redress, South Africa's motivation for deepening cooperation with the region seemed to relate to national interest in terms of securing a market base as well as gaining wider influence and acclaim (ibid.). On the other hand, national-level policy in the 'new' South Africa was also now anchored in regional agreements (McLellan 2009: 288-290).

The founding document of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), the 1992 *SADC Declaration and Treaty*, already prioritised education as one of the pillars of its First Strategy (Human resources, science and technology) (SADC 1992: 5-6). In 1997, SADC published the *Protocol on Education and Training*, which entered into force in 2000 after being ratified by nine member states (Hahn 2005: 12).[53] The Protocol stipulates that universities should reserve 5% of their admissions for students from other SADC countries, and that those students should be treated as home students in terms of fees and accommodation (ibid.: 14-15). This notion in the Protocol has been central in consolidating the language of 'SADC students' and thus making it into a specific category within South African and regional education policy. As a legally binding

[51] Angola, Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland (Eswatini), Tanzania, Zimbabwe and Zambia.
[52] Southern African Customs Union
[53] These were Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mauritius, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland (Eswatini), Tanzania and Zimbabwe.

document, the Protocol has a pivotal role in defining regional cooperation in higher education, and its decisions continue to have concrete effects on the lives of students within the region (see following chapters for more detailed discussions on the SADC student experience in South Africa).

Whilst the SADC education Protocol has been successful in setting concrete targets and making a palpable difference in promoting regional student mobility, these processes have been hindered by a lack of consistent SADC-wide regional migration policy. Perhaps following global trends such as the free movement clause in the *Maastricht Treaty*,[54] the 1992 SADC *Declaration and Treaty* included a mention of movement of persons (SADC Secretariat 1993: 6). A workshop on free movement was organised in Harare, Zimbabwe, in 1993, resulting in the *Draft Protocol on the Freedom of Movement of Persons* in 1995 (Dodson & Crush 2015: 6). Yet, South Africa, Botswana and Namibia objected to parts of the proposed Protocol, and eventually pushed through their demand to change 'free movement' into 'facilitation of movement' (Dodson & Crush 2015: 6).

After 13 years of deliberation and altercation between the now 15 member states, the SADC *Protocol on the Facilitation of Movement of Persons* was finally drafted in 2005. However, the idea of free intra-regional migration was reduced to 'hassle-free travel' through the establishment of specified SADC desks at ports of entry (Nyamnjoh & Mususa 2012: 215).[55] No socio-political rights were endorsed in the document, which means that immigrants' rights of residence and establishment still rested on national regulations (Dodson & Crush 2015: 8). In short, the Protocol failed to establish a harmonised regional migration scheme and carry out the idea of regional citizenship (ibid.: 7; Nyamnjoh & Mususa 2012: 215-216). Furthermore, the Protocol is yet to be ratified by a 2/3 majority of SADC member-states, which it needs to come into effect

[54] Freedom of movement and Union citizenship are cornerstones of the *Treaty of Maastricht*, declared by the European Union (EU) in 1992.

[55] In a region of several small, poorly monitored land crossings, and even more informal/illegal crossing sites, this notion of 'ports of entry' presumably refers mainly to international airports, seaports and larger land border crossings.

(Dodson & Crush 2015: 6). Immigration within SADC thus continues to rely on bilateral agreements, rather than Community-level policy (Saurombe 2010: 130).

South Africa is currently in the process of updating its immigration policy based on the *White Paper on Immigration* published in 2017. For international students in South Africa, the most important change proposed is the 7-year work visa granted to those graduating from a South African university (DHA 2017: 118). If ratified, this would impact on SADC students' post-graduation ambitions (see Chapters 4 and 6 in this thesis for further discussion on students' work and future plans). The policy also advocates for a continent-wide removal of visa requirements for all Africans by 2018 [sic], in line with the *African Union Agenda 2063* (DHA2017: 124; African Union 2015) and suggests that migrants who decide to (legally) settle in South Africa should be offered integration support, for example in the form of migration advice and social security (DHA 2017: 138-139).

Whilst South Africa's immigration policy seems to be slow in realising the value and potential of international students, there has been rapid advancement in awareness and recognition of student mobility and general internationalisation in South Africa's higher education policy making since the early 2000s. The first national-level policy specifically on international students in higher education was the *Code of Ethical Practice in the Provision of Education to International Students*, published by the International Education Association of South Africa (IEASA)[56] in 2000. According to the document, institutional infrastructures for international students should include services related to for example accommodation, orientation, language training and 'academic bridging' (IEASA 2000: 3-4). Yet, any matter related to immigration in the document is marked as a responsibility of the individual student and no assistance from the receiving institution in South Africa is guaranteed.

[56] IEASA was established already in 1997 'to respond to international education trends' (IEASA website, undated).

At the beginning of this chapter, I introduced a document published in 2019, which was titled the *Policy Framework for the Internationalisation of Higher Education in South Africa* (DHET 2019). The aim of this chapter has been to unpack the historical background of policies like this in South African higher education. Thus far, the only published academic research concentrating on this new policy framework has concluded that the Framework 'should be welcomed as a milestone for the internationalisation of South African [higher education]' and that it will provide universities 'the necessary freedom to develop diverse internationalisation strategies […] [within] definitive normative standards' (Jooste & Hagenmeier 2022: 16). Nevertheless, the article by Jooste & Hagenmeier (2022) continues the trend of viewing internationalisation as a self-evident norm – despite the fact that one of the authors has previously criticised the way in which the idea of 'global citizenship' as the end goal of higher education internationalisation ignores global inequalities and practical needs in the Global South (Jooste & Heleta 2017).

Furthermore, the 2019 *Policy Framework for the Internationalisation of Higher Education in South Africa* still repeats the mantra of 'national needs within a global context' (see McLellan 2008: 138), which is favoured by the post-apartheid state in its quest for transformation. This South African dilemma is certainly one of those local concerns that Jooste & Heleta (2017) demand be given more attention to when designing internationalisation programmes. Yet, left with the responsibility to develop and implement their own internationalisation, including the time-consuming tasks of monitoring and evaluation (Jooste & Hagenmeier 2022: 10), higher education institutions like Rhodes University will need to keep balancing between the increasing demands of both internationalisation and transformation.

2.6. Conclusions

South Africa's strict immigration policy and decades of institutionalised racial segregation during the 20th century limited especially Black people's opportunities to study in the country. However, policy implementation has not been particularly thorough and international students have been able to circumnavigate strict policy due to their relative class advantage compared to low-skill migrants. South African higher education policy, in turn, has been mainly focused on South African issues, from the supposed 'peril of the educated native' to the questions of transformation and redress. Education has served as an important means to impart cultural and political power and has thus been central in nation-building throughout South Africa's history (Healy-Clancy 2017: 2). This chapter has demonstrated that it has also been a way to expand the country's influence across its borders. With the increasing numbers of international students since the end of apartheid in 1994, language of 'international students' and 'SADC students' and specific policy of internationalisation have become important components of South African university life.

Rhodes University has a reputation of being a forerunner in internationalisation among South African higher education institutions. Yet, tensions in policy are reflected in the experience of the university bureaucrats who have been left in an ambivalent position. On one hand, they are expected to govern all internationalisation and support international students at Rhodes. On the other hand, the institution on its own is not able to negate the ramifications that South Africa's restrictive national immigration policy has on international students and the way in which universities are expected to prioritise South African students. Local efforts to make SADC students feel appreciated and welcome have always been constrained by the obligation to follow national objectives and regulations.

Higher education in Africa – as elsewhere – is yet to fully recognise the idea of global citizenship as an important rationale (Sehoole & de Wit 2014). Still, taking into account

the way in which South African higher education policy emphasises African integration and cooperation, the implicit expectation seems to be that African international students are to receive fair and non-discriminatory treatment (McLellan 2009: 288). Student experience, however, exposes a disconnection with the lofty ideals of internationalisation, as free movement cannot automatically guarantee a sense of belonging (ibid.: 290-291). South African higher education remains a highly unequal context in which students' understandings of identity, aspiration, and belonging are inflicted by uneven distribution of privilege and precarity. Moving beyond the institutional structures of Rhodes University, the following chapters will focus more squarely on the SADC student experience in this framework of internationalisation and student mobility.

3. THE BUBBLE OF RHODES UNIVERSITY – PLACE IDENTITY AND CLASS IN A WHITE SPACE

3.1. Introduction

> '[Makhanda] is good in the sense that there's nothing to do, it's boring. So, the only thing to do is study.'[57]

> '[I]t's good because it has allowed me to grow, but at the same time, in a not very large space, because coming from a place where I was just always with my mother, never went out with friends, never went to birthday parties, never left the gate. So, a huge place like Joburg [Johannesburg], which is a city and there's all fun and busy, would be so overwhelming for me. I've learned so much about myself because it's a small place, but I'm still independent, so I appreciate that about Rhodes [University].'[58]

To understand student experience – or any human experience – it is important to consider the context provided by the physical environment or setting, for the 'geographies in which we live […] are not just dead background or a neutral physical stage for the human drama but are filled with material and imagined forces that affect events and experiences' (Soja 2010: 19). Physical locations thus 'shape our destinies [by providing] contexts in which lives are created' (Chen et al. 2017: 9). However, people also have the power to shape and restructure their physical environment (ibid.: 26). A place, site or building is never merely a material construction, but an inscription of (past and present) power relations (Bourdieu 2018 [1991]: 108). In effect then, it is the 'habitus that makes the habitat' (ibid: 106). Makhanda is unmistakably a student town, and Rhodes University campus is not just a place of study – as a residential campus it also represents home and recreation for many. Thus, space both affects and reflects the life-worlds of students.

[57] Interview with Fadzai from Zimbabwe at Rhodes University, 10 May 2018.
[58] Interview with Busisiwe from Zimbabwe at Rhodes University, 11 May 2018.

Universities are key sites of identity formulation (Johnson & Singleton 2015: 237) in which young people learn to negotiate diversity (Cheng & Holton 2018: 1). With the increasing diversity in higher education – both in post-apartheid South Africa and beyond – it is important to consider 'not just *who* goes to University, but *where* and *how* they experience it' (see Holton & Riley 2013: 62, emphasis in original). Indeed, inclusion is about much more than mere 'presence in existing classrooms' (Ballard, cited in Higham 2012: 499) or mixed residence living (see Holton 2016; Vandeyar & Mohale 2017). As we attach meaning to places, they become central in determining our sense of belongingness (Johnson & Singleton 2015: 237). Thus, to better understand how students' everyday life worlds are shaped by their relations with the surrounding environment known as place identities (see Proshansky 1978: 155), this chapter focuses on Rhodes University students' spatial navigations at their institution and the city, Makhanda, in which it is located.

During my fieldwork at Rhodes University, 'space' and 'place' were commonly repeated catchphrases among students by which they expressed their hopes and concerns. Buchli (2013: 8, 13) has observed a recurring emphasis on materiality within social science research, ranging from artefacts to architecture. Undoubtedly, many of the students at Rhodes have been exposed to this 'return to the material' in their academic studies. They are also likely to have encountered Fanonian post-colonial discourse present at South African university campuses that underlines the ways in which patterns of political power and economic inequality are reflected in the South African landscape (e.g., Pillay 2012).

As the student narratives cited at the beginning of this chapter illustrate, Rhodes University and Makhanda are perceived as provincial and uninteresting spaces, yet also supportive and protective environments. Indeed, students at Rhodes often identify their institution and the part of the city in which it is located as 'White spaces' and describe their existence as living in a middle-class 'bubble'. The use of these phrases points to the ways in which students' place identity is connected to their race and class. South African

higher education is a highly unequal setting in which students' understandings of identity, aspiration, and belonging are tied to the questions of advantage and disadvantage. In this chapter, I argue that students from all class backgrounds use moral boundary work to distinguish themselves from the negative aspects of living in what they understand as an exclusionary middle-class space (see Kato 2011). However, their perceptions, experiences, and ways of deploying moral boundary work at Rhodes University and in Makhanda vary according to their levels of economic, social, and cultural capital (see Bourdieu 1986).

This chapter will explore the spatial framework of both Makhanda and Rhodes University, which together provide the physical and material setting for the student experience. This perspective offers insight into the ways in which social inequalities in higher education are experienced as dynamic and fragmentary processes reproduced through structures and practices. Drawing on a range of qualitative empirical data such as participant-observation, interviews, mental maps and focus group discussions, this chapter illustrates how students perceive Rhodes University and Makhanda as socially contested spaces in which their practice of identity distinction is restricted by the limited spatial structures of a small institution located in a small town. Before I take a closer focus on international students at Rhodes in the following chapters, this chapter considers the class dimension of spatial inclusion and exclusion from the point of view of both international and south African students.

I will first introduce the question of Rhodes University students' place identities through an analysis of the 'Oppi Bus case', in which Rhodes University's proposed termination of a free bus service for students living off campus highlighted spatial inequalities among students. I will then discuss how spatial inequality has evolved in Makhanda/Grahamstown and Rhodes University through time, before moving on to address the ways in which pressing contemporary challenges are affecting the residents of the municipality and the place of students in local life. Finally, I will analyse Rhodes

University students' strategies of moral boundary work and place-making through which they seek to create a positive place identity.

3.2. Rhodes University students and place identity

On Friday afternoon, 22 March 2019, I was waiting for a meeting and sat down at a wooden picnic table in a small courtyard in front of my 'home' department building at Rhodes University, where two South African students were heatedly discussing the future of the 'Oppi Bus'. It had been announced through a statement on a Facebook platform the night before that the bus service for Oppidan[59] students (i.e., those residing off campus) would cease its operations after that Friday. In their statement, the university's Oppidan Committee explained that the buses had been running on full capacity but still unable to meet demand. The vehicles were also regarded as old and in need of maintenance. Therefore, the 'system and infrastructure […] in place [had become] unsustainable, unsafe and failing' (Oppi Oppidan Facebook page, 21 March 2019). The statement also assured students that negotiations over a replacement service were underway, but that any alternative system would not be operational until a further date.

As I knew the students at the table superficially, I decided to join in their conversation. I asked if they were dependent on the bus. This question seemed to open a proverbial can of worms and for the next 15 minutes, I was struggling to write down everything that was said in my little yellow field note diary. The problem with the discontinuation of the Oppi Bus was, in the opinion of these two students, that it would specifically hit the most disadvantaged students – those who have no choice but to live in the townships on the other side of Makhanda. They are also the ones who are the least likely to have reliable internet access at home, so they often spend long evenings at the library

[59] The term Oppidan comes from the Latin word oppidānus, meaning a person living in town (Collins Dictionary 2022). Use of the word in university context derives from traditional English public schools, in which it is used to distinguish 'day boys' from boarders (The Free Dictionary 2022).

finishing assignments. For those who cannot afford a taxi (minibus) fare, walking home after dark would not only take hours but would also be unsafe.

The Oppi Bus case brought up other issues as well. The students pointed out how expensive it was to study at Rhodes. On average, they said, a student pays around R30,000-40,000[60] for their course per year, and if you stay in a university residence, it comes to about R100,000.[61] Those who qualify for NSFAS (the national student allowance scheme) get R4000 a month, but since rents in Makhanda are around R3000, and when you also need to pay for water, electricity, and transport, you will only have R400 left for food. 'So', they asked, 'how do you survive?'. They accused the university of enjoying this kind of 'poverty porn' while having little interest in changing things. In addition, they told me that the institution receives government subsidies for each Black, female, and disabled student.[62] The students could not understand how the university would not be able to afford a bus service. There was even an Oppidan levy[63] in place exactly to cover the services directed to off-campus student, but where was all the money going?

Their conclusion was that it was a simple question of priorities, and that the institution was clearly not interested in the poor Black student. They repeated that the university was 'detrimental to the Black body' and a 'toxic, violent bubble'. They referred to the 2016 #FeesMustFall protests when the university had 'private security shooting at us, actually shooting at us'. Then the students asked me if I had heard of the suicide of an Oppidan student. When I said no, they said 'See? The university is so good at covering

[60] Rhodes University's 'Student Fees Booklet' confirms that in 2019, annual tuition fees ranged from ~R33,000 to ~R59,000 (~£1,655-£2,958) and residence fees from ~R60,000 to ~R71,000 (~£3,008-£3,560) (Rhodes University 2019: 1). In addition, students may need to pay extra fees such as international students' surcharges and examination fees (ibid.: 2, 6).
[61] Staying in residence comes with full board. Accommodation is only offered during term-time and students must vacate their rooms for vacation periods. If they wish to stay in residence, a fee of R118 (~£5.92) per day must be paid (Rhodes University 2019: 12).
[62] Here, the students seem to refer to the government grant for disadvantaged students. However, this grant does not include female and disabled students, but offers incremental support to institutions with a minimum of 40% Black and Coloured students 'who are South African citizens' (DHET 2021: 10).
[63] The Oppidan levy is only payable by students living off campus. In 2019, the levy was R300 (Rhodes University 2019: 4).

up'. They added that the Rhodes counselling service was terrible and that if you tell them that you are suicidal, they just sign you off for two years. 'And what are you going to do then? How is that going to help you? You're sitting at home, doing nothing, you get even more depressed. And your family will be wondering what's going on and they just want you to graduate.'

Whether or not all this emotional offloading in the courtyard was directly connected to the Oppi Bus case, the reaction of these two students illustrates how space is a central axis on which questions of inclusion and exclusion materialise at the university. Indeed, the student experience is not confined to learning in the classroom but emanates from the wider social and cultural context (Montgomery 2010: xii). Those students who have internalised the values and habits of a campus environment during their childhood and schooling are – borrowing Bourdieu's terminology – 'like fish in water', while those who have not been exposed to university culture are more like fish *out* of water (Reay et al. 2009: 1105, 1110, my emphasis). Thus, the higher the level of economic, social, and cultural capital a student already has, the better their chances of fully capitalising on the benefits of their education (Bathmaker et al. 2013: 739; see also Chapter 6 in this thesis).

People from different social backgrounds can experience the same physical space differently (Hurst 2013: 49). Together with my other data, the Oppi Bus case indeed suggests that having a positive place identity at an institution like Rhodes is primarily connected to questions of race and class. Racial segregation at Rhodes University officially ended with the introduction of majority rule in 1994, and Black students now make up almost 80% of the student population (Rhodes University 2019: C1). As social spaces are typically understood to be defined by their demography (Moore & Bell 2017: 103), Rhodes campus might be considered a place much transformed since the apartheid years. However, the students I met at Rhodes unanimously regarded the institution as a 'White space'.

The perception of Rhodes as a White space emanated from the idea that the university's institutional culture was generated by South Africa's White community, which it continues to represent (Matthews & Tabensky 2015: 1-2). Often seen as neutral 'benchmarks for functionality and success' (Moore & Bell 2017: 103), Whiteness and 'White' ways of being are considered the norm in many institutional spaces (Hill 1998: 682; Jackson 1999: 48). Black people entering and navigating these spaces are therefore required to 'perform to be accepted' for example through what are seen as 'White' ideas of clothing and behaviour (Anderson 2015: 13). While this performance may help a person of colour to 'negotiate and sustain their success in these institutions' (Evans & Moore 2015: 440), it does not in itself create a sense of fitting in or feeling 'at home' (Vice 2015: 53). In the long term, this performance of Whiteness may also inhibit transformation as those who resent the existing norm nevertheless tend to accommodate themselves to it, if only reluctantly, superficially, or temporarily.

Space is one of the ways in which racialised inequalities are reproduced (Moore & Bell 2017: 102). Although research on racism often looks at explicit and extraordinary forms of discrimination, it is important to recognise that 'as with all violence, racism is everyday', and thus a part of the normalised landscape (Price 2010: 153). The term 'White space' originates in the United States – another post-segregationist society – and this comparative literature has many connections to South African racially-biased realities. But as opposed to the White institutional spaces in the United States where non-White people are often still in the minority and micro-aggressions characterise the Black experience (Evans & Moore 2015), South Africa and Rhodes University are majority Black, and for the most part, overt racist occurrences have been replaced by 'colour-blind racism' and a 'pathology of politeness' (Njovane 2015: 117, 119; see also Chapter 5 in this thesis).

Race was central, although not the only source of antagonism in students' peer relations and spatial understandings. As well as a White space, many students I spoke to also referred to Rhodes University as a bubble. The bubble was experienced as a contested

social space constructed of conflicting class positions and perceptions (for a more detailed discussion on these frictions, see Chapter 5 in this thesis). The bubble was also portrayed as a symbolic and physical boundary – an elite space disconnected from the harsh realities of its surroundings. Witnessing crime, poverty, and inequality in Makhanda had made many students understand how detached life at Rhodes University was from the lives of many other citizens.

Unlike notions of living in a bubble in previous research on middle-class neighbourhoods (see Butler 2003) and monoethnic student subcultures (see Park 2011), the 'bubble of Rhodes' appeared to be less of an exclusionary social space. Instead, students used the term bubble as a way of making sense of their own place within the perceived middle-class setting (see Kato 2011). Although the term was used unanimously by almost all Rhodes University students, the bubble was perceived in different ways depending on a student's class identity. These differing positions towards the bubble nevertheless affirmed its significance, as the bubble served both to support and restrict students' practice of identity distinction.

Students at Rhodes University used the notions of White space and bubble to refer to the privilege that is associated with Whiteness in South Africa. It was a commonly accepted idea that Black students from higher socio-economic backgrounds were 'more White', which was believed to make their adjustment to university easier (see also Chapters 5 and 6 in this thesis). Rhodes University students' narratives of White space and bubble were therefore connected to the social, political, and economic situation in the country, thus exposing deep anxieties in relation to race and class inequalities. By proposing to end the free Oppi Bus service, the university hit exactly that nerve.

I decided to join in an Oppi Bus emergency meeting that afternoon. Around 2pm, students started to gather at the so-called Purple Square (named after the university's signature colour) in front of the Theatre Café on Rhodes University campus. Most were chatting to their friends and greeting others who were passing by. It was hot, and shady

spots under the trees started to become crowded. The atmosphere was relaxed and happy and it did not have the feel or look of a protest. However, some signs of political sentiment were present in the form of a few Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF)[64] skirts and their trademark red berets. I was one of the very few White faces in the crowd, but I did not feel singled out. There were about 60 or 70 people around.

First, the crowd started singing and some people were also dancing. After the song, the leader of the meeting and the crowd greeted each other with slogans familiar from the days of the anti-apartheid struggle. Then, there was an address by the organiser of the meeting, and a response from the Oppidan Councillor of the Student Representative Council (SRC). The audience was also active in asking further questions, bringing up issues that were very similar to those I had heard earlier from the two students in the courtyard. The SRC tried its best to convince the audience that the issue would be resolved, but it was clear from the responses that most students did not see that as sufficient urgency. Eventually, the leader of the meeting proposed marching to the Administration building to demand immediate action.

The singing started again as students began to climb the little stairs around the corner and across the lawns towards the clock tower, some walking, and some *toyi-toying* (rhythmic protest marching). Still singing, students quickly filled the central entrance hall of the Administration building, the repetitive song echoing beautifully in the corridors. After a while, a lady came out of the office to meet the crowds. The meeting's leader voiced the concerns of the students to the lady, who then replied saying that there would be a temporary service running until the end of term and that they were 'looking into a more permanent solution'. While this reply did not necessarily satisfy all the students, it eventually became clear that their point had been taken and that the termination of service would not be permanent. Crowds started to disperse, and everyone seemed to be moving off to start their weekend. Later, I found out that a replacement bus had indeed been organised, and that a proper bus service had then

[64] A radical left-wing political party.

been put in place by ‘two 22-seater buses running by the hour between 6pm and midnight’ (Rhodes SRC Facebook page, 15 April 2019).



Figure 1. Oppi Bus meeting at the Purple Square.



Figure 2. Oppi Bus meeting inside the Admin building.

The Oppi Bus case was not the first time that spatial inequalities in South Africa manifested themselves through questions around transportation. As one of very few legal forms of resistance that Black South Africans could undertake under apartheid, bus boycotts used to be amongst the most popular ways to protest (Lodge 1979: 29). Apartheid-era spatial segregation had created a distinctive geography in which non-White people were forced to live far away from their employment opportunities (Lucas 2011: 1321), making workers' daily commute – and especially the cost of it – a significant political issue. From the 1944 Alexandra bus boycott to the 1983-1984 East London boycotts, bus protests marked some of the most important moments of the anti-apartheid struggle (Catsam 2007; McCarthy & Swilling 1985) as they 'asserted the right of Africans to protest' (First, cited in Lodge 1979: 12).

As a medium for social change, mobility can reinforce existing inequalities (Schwanen et al. 2015: 123). Just as the apartheid-era bus boycotts were mainly triggered by price

rises (Catsam 2007), poor South Africans today spend a considerable portion of their income on transport (Turok 2001: 2352). Indeed, the spatial legacies of apartheid are present in the way in which poorer people are disadvantaged in terms of transport availability, affordability, time efficiency, and safety (Lucas 2011: 1322). By limiting people's access to social and economic activities, this kind of transport poverty can lead to a lower quality of life and further social exclusion (Delbosc & Currie 2011: 1130). Transport is therefore recognised as a fundamental part of redressing South Africa's spatial injustices (Pirie 2013: 313), although successive governments' efforts to address these have thus far been inadequate (Lucas 2011: 1320).

Among South Africa's university students, transport inequality remains a racialised issue as White and Asian students are much less likely to rely on public transport than their Black African peers (Luke 2018: 140). Underprivileged students have reported the lack of personal transportation as a major source of stress (Schoeman et al. 2015: 170) and some students even miss days at university due to the cost of travel (Lucas 2011: 1328). The way in which students at Rhodes University during the Oppi Bus crisis in 2019 connected the importance of transport with issues around students' wellbeing and academic success is testament to recurrent experiences of race- and class-based injustice. The notion of Rhodes as a White space and a bubble links to both historical and contemporary spatial inequalities at the institution as well as in Makhanda and South Africa. The next section will discuss the origins of these spatial inequalities in more detail.

3.3. Spatial legacies of inequality

Makhanda may first seem enshrouded. With mainly donkeys and cows patrolling the quiet streets, you might wonder where all the town's 140,000 inhabitants are hiding. However, on Sundays, music and singing from the innumerable churches fill the air of the 'City of Saints'. Or, if it happens to be pay day – the last Friday of the month – queues at every bank and post office along High Street can give you a glimpse of a different

story. Makhanda is a town of split identity where people are unsure whether to greet a stranger passing by on the street like in rural settings or adopt a more private and individualistic urban lifestyle. After only a couple of weeks in town, you will be quite likely to run into someone you know in the supermarket or liquor store. As one of my research participants, Zimbabwean self-identified middle-class student Trevor, humorously described, Makhanda is 'like in those movies where there's a small town with a sheriff and what not'.[65]

The spatial experiences of students at Rhodes University are intrinsically related to the historical and contemporary developments in Makhanda/Grahamstown and South Africa, both of which have a remarkable impact on the physical and social space. With segregated residential areas and public services, the apartheid city model was based on a 'compartmentalised and highly legible spatial hierarchy of race, class and access' (Schensul & Heller 2011: 78). During apartheid, White neighbourhoods received significantly more funding than other areas, which is still partly responsible for the overlapping of race, income, and geography in South African cities (Burger et al. 2017: 1102).

Despite efforts to transform the socio-spatial logics of apartheid, cities remain highly polarised (Robins 2002: 684). Tensions often arise from the fact that spaces, which were once designed with White supremacy in mind must now adapt to democratic ways of life (Houssay-Holzshuch & Teppo 2009: 352). Architecture in South African urban spaces still represents European aesthetics whilst lacking in African cultural heritage,[66] which marks them as 'White spaces' in which 'White behaviour' is the norm and Blackness remains suppressed (ibid.: 362, 366).[67] This socio-spatial exclusion thus impedes the ideas of democracy and citizenship (Robins 2002: 667). Spaces may have opened to all

[65] Interview with Trevor from Zimbabwe at Rhodes University, 17 May 2018.
[66] Whilst difficult to define in the context of extensive settler influence, Black architectural aesthetic in southern African often refers to the idea of the 'rural vernacular' of an African homestead with its 'traditional' façade ornamentations (Müller-Friedman 2008: 43).
[67] Here, Houssay-Holzshuch & Teppo refer to South African racialised understandings of 'Black' behaviour characterised by 'loudness, bodily attitudes, [and] clothing'.

South Africans, but spatial desegregation has not always resulted in social integration (Schensul & Heller 2011: 81).

Founded by Colonel Graham in 1812 as a frontier garrison between the British Empire and the Xhosa people (Marshall 2008: 2, 5), Grahamstown was always a physical materialisation of colonial and racial domination. The location of the town was selected so that it would serve as protection against Xhosa attacks while also offering 'good water supply and potentiality for the production of food' (Watts 1957: 26). Grahamstown began as a small hamlet consisting mainly of military personnel but grew quickly with the arrival of the '1820 settlers' from Britain (ibid.: 38). By bringing in their skills and setting up businesses, the 4000-strong settler community transformed Grahamstown into a regional commercial centre (Watts 1957: 38, 40-42; Marshall 2008: 34).

As the physical configuration of Grahamstown developed, social structures in the young community were also shaped, framing the evolution of a town divided by race and class (Marshall 2008). The town's numerous churches and educational institutions guarded the Victorian moral values of Christian ethic, duty, self-restraint, work, and charity (Gibbens 1982: 22). Driven away from their land by the Frontier wars and Mfecane,[68] Black people started arriving in the town in increasing numbers (Moller 2008: 3). Although no regulation to determine a person's residential area according to their race existed at the time (Southey 1984: 190), racially based townships existed as early as 1820 (Marshall 2008: 16). The first Black location known as Fingo Village was established by the municipality in 1848 on the Eastern side of town (Moller 2008: 3).

From mid-19th century onwards, the town began to shift weight from commerce to education (Irvine 2012: 80; Southey 1984: 326, 329). The mining boom in the Transvaal had transformed the economy of the Cape Colony, and the eastward expansion of the British had diminished the role of Grahamstown as an important frontier supply centre

[68] Mfecane refers to a period of widespread migration of people across southern Africa between 1815-1840, provoked in part by the expansion of King Shaka's Zulu Empire.

(Gibbens 1982: 312, 332; Southey 1984: 322, 325). The city's fall from colonial grace resulted in nicknames like 'Ghost Town' and 'Sleepy Hollow' (Gibbens 1982: 17). By the turn of the 20th century, decline in the significance of Grahamstown within the colony meant that growth of the White population was stagnant, and they were eventually outnumbered by the Black population (Southey 1984: 84, 112, 189). More locations started popping up, and neglected by the municipality, they began to get overcrowded and decayed (Gibbens 1982: 238; Southey 1984: 189).

The appalling living conditions in the locations resulted in rising levels of disease and crime, which in turn hardened the White population's attitudes towards Blacks (Gibbens 1982: 239). Disguised as a Victorian concern for health and safety, townspeople started demanding more effective measures to control the locations and their residents (Gibbens 1982: 239-240; Marshall 2008: 55; Southey 1984: 193). After the inauguration of National Party-led apartheid government in 1948, racial segregation in Grahamstown was gradually formalised through policies such as the 1950 *Group Areas Act*, and strict regulations regarding inter-racial social interactions were enforced in both public and private spaces (Irvine 2012: 83-85, 122-123, 130-131).

However, even during the height of apartheid, White townspeople were aware of the injustices taking place around them (Bell 2005: 83; Cock 2005; Roodt 2005: 234). The small size of the city saved it from the strictest forms of spatial segregation of different racial groups during apartheid (see Lemon and Clifford 2005: 8). For example, it was simply unviable to create a separate location for the handful of Indian people in town (Dullabh, cited in Irvine 2012: 84) and the Black communities in the townships were never successfully resettled into Homelands despite attempts by the central government and the City Council to remove them from the urban areas (Moller 2008: 4). On the contrary, numbers of Black in-migrants from the surrounding farms to Grahamstown grew rapidly, attracted by the slack implementation of spatial segregation compared to for example the nearby larger city, Port Elizabeth (Manona 1988: 95).

Today, with little heavy industry or primary production that could offer large scale employment opportunities to those with lower levels of formal education, Makhanda's economy is made vulnerable by a lack of diversification and strong dependency on the service sector that gets most of its impetus from the education industry (Hoefnagels et al. 2022: 6, 9). The prominence of the educational sector and legal industry around the High Court as well as the launching of the National Arts Festival in 1974 and SciFest Africa in 1996 have, however, played an important role in reversing the decline by creating an image of the city as an intellectual and cultural centre during late 20th century (ibid. 2022: 5). Rhodes University has been especially central in this remodelling endeavour. Still, the university's reputation far exceeds that of Makhanda and it is not uncommon for prospective students to get the map out to understand where exactly they are going to study.

Rhodes University is separated from the rest of the town by a wide but quiet dual carriageway. The university buildings consist mainly of one- and two-storey colonial era stone cottages painted in white or cream, occasionally guarded by a solitary person in blue overalls sitting in a chair. A small craft market filled with bead and wire animal figures and perky wooden meerkat statues sits by the Drostdy Arch – a large gate constructed in whitewashed stone, in front of which taxis (local minibuses) make thrillingly sharp U-turns as they drop off students and staff. Through the Arch you get a view over the extensive lawns and monumental fountains towards the university's impressive Administration Building with its distinctive clock tower. Turning to face the other way, you can get a glimpse of the city's main landmark, the Makhanda Cathedral. This is the university campus that its students call the Rhodes bubble.

The physical structures of Rhodes University reflect the intriguing historical developments of the institution. Since its inauguration in 1904, Rhodes University was a racially segregated space, reserved for South Africa's White population (Greyling 2007). The institution was born after years of lobbying by local actors as a symbolic gesture of gratitude to the people of the Eastern Cape for their British imperial sentiment (Currey

1970: 1-12). The physical appearance of the campus was therefore deliberately designed to mimic the Oxbridge style (Mtolo 2017: 9-10). However, the location of the institution in the remote Eastern Cape of South Africa also left its mark – hence the nickname 'Oxford in the bush' (Maylam 2017: 10). Growing out of simple army barracks, the campus of Rhodes University gradually acquired surrounding properties to create a 'residential look' (Mtolo 2017: 10).

At the time of the institution's inauguration, Rhodes had as few as 50 students (Maylam 2017: 27). Their extracurricular lives were constricted by strict Victorian codes of conduct and consisted mainly of society-based activities like debating, drama, music, and religion, as well as sports such as tennis and rugby (ibid.: 28-29). The university acted *in loco parentis* and rules were strict, especially concerning mixing between males and females (ibid.: 75-76). However, Rhodes students were also known for a macho culture that resulted in pranks, vicious initiation practices, and general 'frivolity and rowdiness' (ibid.: 76, 172). Former student and sociology lecturer James Christie (2005: 142) recalls that when he arrived at Rhodes in 1962, most students were living in residences, and those few living in digs (shared housing off campus) were gazed upon with 'envious curiosity'. Socialising took place in the dining halls, the Day Kaif (café in the central square of campus) and student pubs (ibid.: 143).

Although no mentions of a 'bubble' can be found from the early days of Rhodes University, this care-free life of White students was, of course, far removed from the realities of the oppressed majority of the South African population (Satchwell 2005: 170). The first application from a non-White student, George Singh, was rejected in 1933 on the grounds that 'the time [was] not yet ripe for such a change in the policy of the [institution]' (Greyling 2007: 24). To be sure, it took another 50 years before Black students became a visible presence on the Rhodes University campus (Helliker 2005: 193). The arrival of the first Black students on campus in the late 1970s proved problematic, as by law they were required to reside in separate accommodation

(Greyling 2007: 32; Maylam 2005: 203). In 1977, there were 2,568 White, 54 Chinese, 15 Coloured, nine African and two Indian students (Cock 2005: 94).

At first, the few non-Whites had been placed in mixed residences, but in 1979, the men were put into Adamson House and women into Prince Alfred (Desai 2005: 214; Jaffer 2005: 180). These all-Black[69] residences soon became fulcrums for rebellion, and the university administration decided to quietly desegregate accommodation in 1981 (Desai: 217-218). The university administration was vigilant about any anti-apartheid activities, and protests were far less frequent at Rhodes than at the larger universities (Beard 2005: 76; Helliker 2005: 193; Satchwell 2005: 172). Some level of dissent still existed, and Christie (2005: 149) recounts how arriving at a lecture in the 1960s you could sometimes 'find that the prof, lecturer, tutor or a fellow student had been arrested, banned, or had fled the country the night before'.

The 1980s brought large scale anti-apartheid mobilisation and political activism onto the Rhodes University campus (Helliker 2005: 193). The first Black permanent lecturer had been appointed in 1976, and in 1982, there were about 300 non-White students in the student body of just over 3,000 (Greyling 2007: 124, 126). While some Black students were organising protests and holding clandestine political study groups, there was also a growing number of less enthusiastic Black middle-class students who did not want to jeopardise the little advantage that their parents had worked so hard for (Desai 2005: 215-216, 225; Mati 2005: 200, 204).

The end of the decade was tumultuous, and the Rhodes University campus was in a constant state of upheaval until 1990, when the newly elected President De Klerk announced the unbanning of anti-apartheid organisations, which effectively ended apartheid (Greyling 2007: 145-159, 169). With the comprehensive changes at national level, universities now experienced a transition towards a democratic framework. At Rhodes University, this was most noticeable in the changing student and staff

[69] 'Black' here refers to all those labelled as 'non-Whites'.

demographics and the emergence of the post-apartheid 'transformation imperative' (Maylam 2017: 248, 261, 266, 280). However, the multiplex history of the institution has left its mark on the physical makeup of Rhodes, from colonial relics such as the institution's name to the post-1994 expansion of the campus to accommodate growing numbers of students (ibid.: 288-291).

3.4. Students, donkeys and potholes

On the campus of Rhodes University, whitewashed colonial-era houses and more modern buildings rest between manicured lawns and giant banana trees. The institution's elite-ness is emphasised by its location and distance away from the townships of Makhanda (O'Halloran 2018: 24). In addition to university students, this 'elite' side of Makhanda is also populated by uniformed children and teenagers from the town's several reputable – and some of the country's most expensive – private schools (BusinessTech 2019; Hoefnagels et al. 2022: 8). To the south, Rhodes University campus is bordered by the glorious Botanical Gardens. Although formally part of the university, the park serves as a giant outdoor living room for the town community. Students come here to study and have picnics whilst parents teach their children to ride their bikes and dog walkers hike up the hills for fantastic views over town. The park thus serves important 'social, psychological, health, aesthetic, and ecological functions' (see Ward et al. 2010: 55). However, access to the Botanical Gardens for the poorest in the community who reside in the townships of East Makhanda is limited by its physical location in the 'elite' part of town (see ibid.).



Figure 3. Day Kaif.



Figure 4. Rhodes University Library building.

Census data from 2011[70] reported the population of Makhanda as approximately 50,000 people (Frith 2011).[71] The 2011 census declared that almost 73% of the inhabitants of the town proper (i.e., excluding Makhanda East which covers the townships) were Black African, followed by Coloured (~14%) and White (~11%) (Frith 2011). Over 66% of Makhandians reported isiXhosa as their first language, while Afrikaans was spoken as a first language by ~17% and English by ~12% (ibid.). Makhanda East, on the other hand, was nearly 97% Black and 87% isiXhosa speaking. These statistics imply that despite the demise of racial segregation since the 1990s, Makhanda's geography remains somewhat divided along the race lines that were demarcated in apartheid policies (Hoefnagels et al. 2022; Irvine 2012: 113).

In the overcrowded and poorly managed townships of Makhanda East, residents typically come from the lower economic brackets. Despite some improvements in living conditions of the townships, wages are low and unemployment is high, and many residents thus rely on social grants (Freedomhouse 2017: 12-13; Moller 2008: 18, 42-43). Poverty and marginalisation bring about problems like crime, drug and alcohol abuse, diseases such as tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS, and xenophobia (Freedomhouse 2017: 13, 22-23; Jones 2011; Moller 2008: 21; Qambela 2016). This vicious circle of marginalisation is reinforced by issues such as lack of affordable transport and mobile phone usage (Duncan 2013; Jones 2011: 77). Yet, these townships are said to be lively neighbourhoods with active informal social networks (Mukorombindo 2012) and a proud local identity built on past struggles (Wells 2003) as well as ideas of tolerant and diverse urbanity (Edwards 1987).

The paradox of a seemingly tolerant community with recurring xenophobic tendencies in Makhanda East can be explained by the way in which township spaces suffer from

[70] Data from the latest census in February 2022 was not available at the time of writing.
[71] According to the World Population Review (2019), Makhanda is home to 91,548 people, Alternatively, the popular online encyclopaedia, Wikipedia (2023), cites the population number of Makhanda as approximately 140,000, which is the most commonly used – and probably the most widely accepted – estimate.

'contemporary modes of exclusion' (O'Halloran 2018: 22). Like other marginalised people living in for example African American ghettos and French banlieues, South Africa's township dwellers used to have more positive identifications with the spaces they live in through shared identities and political unity (see Wacquant 2007: 70). Rather than signalling justified anti-apartheid resistance, people living in townships and squatter camps are now often belittled and even criminalised in the prevailing neoliberal discourse that emphasises securitisation (Makhulu 2010; Robins 2002). Thus, whilst the township dwellers may be tolerant among themselves, their own alienation is sometimes reflected in a strained relationship with perceived outsiders with whom their space is shared (see Landau 2005).

Despite the sharp local inequalities between Makhanda East and West, the small size of the town makes it a community with shared experiences. This is not a simple 'tale of two cities' but of interconnected 'town and gown' relations. Some students escape the high rental prices of the town centre by staying in the location, thus sharing the daily commute to the campus with those township residents who work at the university as cleaners, cooks, and security guards. For these Makhandians, working for the university is a privilege. Through its commitment to serve the community and thus refusing to outsource workforce, Rhodes University offers sought after security in the fragile employment market. Furthermore, while the more affluent Western parts of Makhanda are unquestionably better off in terms of safety, health and quality of housing, the residents of even the most prestigious suburbs cannot escape some of the problems plaguing the town.

In 2014, the municipality was placed under provincial government administration following years of fiscal mismanagement, but no real improvement has since been made (Freedomhouse 2017: 26; Viedge & Hancocks 2019). Some argue that things are in fact going downhill (Mahr 2019). During my fieldwork periods, the two most pressing and persistent issues were water and electricity. Due to drought, mismanagement and neglect by local and national authorities, the nearby Settlers' Dam that provides water

to the Western part of the city had critically low levels of water and the entire town was running out of water. Severe restrictions were applied throughout the city and some parts suffered from periodic service ruptures. Whereas the water shortages in Cape Town during the same period were reported internationally, the situation in the Eastern Cape went largely unnoticed. The feeling of abandonment experienced by many Makhanda residents was reinforced by the problems in electricity supply. During my fieldwork in 2018-2020, load shedding was becoming more and more frequent. By the time I returned to Makhanda for my 2022 fieldwork period, it had become a daily occurrence dictating mealtimes at homes and lecture arrangements at the university. Makhandians used specialised phone apps to keep up to date with daily power cut schedules. When a friend asked me if there was load shedding in the UK, I had to remind her that only a couple of years ago, they were not normal in South Africa either.

This declining quality of life that derives from eroding infrastructure and services as well as a perceived lack of government attention across South African towns has become 'a major social pressure' (Toerien 2018: 89). Many smaller cities and towns experienced a decline since the Second World War as mining and agricultural outputs dwindled (Donaldson et al. 2012: 121) and people started moving to bigger cities (Atkinson 2009: 273). However, smaller urban centres have also been important drivers of regional development (McKibbin et al. 2012: 391). To some extent, smaller towns are experiencing a revival as they 'reinvent themselves' (Nel et al. 2011: 398) by turning to new activities such as cultural and nature-based tourism (Halseth & Meiklejohn 2009: 295). Furthermore, due to improved communication systems and a slower pace of life compared to larger cities, smaller towns are attracting increasing numbers of (often middle-class) reverse- and retirement migrants (Atkinson 2009: 284; Donaldson et al. 2012: 124; Nel et al. 2011: 397).

The way in which some smaller towns do well whilst others struggle is known as a 'small town paradox' (Toerien 2018: 89). In this sense, Makhanda with its lively education industry can be seen as a success story. However, the town's crumbling infrastructure

tells another story with difficulties not limited to water and electricity. During my fieldwork trips between 2018-2022, roads abounded with potholes so deep that swerving vehicles desperately trying to avoid them were causing danger to pedestrians. At one point, waste collection halted for weeks due to a municipal workers' strike – allegedly provoked by a lack of protective workwear – and fly tipping was commonplace. Roaming donkeys and cows foraged through the piles of rubbish in search of anything remotely edible.



Figure 5. Potholes on South Street, West Hill.



Figure 6. Roaming donkeys on Beaufort Street.

But even in this demoralising situation, local residents were resilient: groups like the Makana Residents' Association, Gift of the Givers, Makana Revive and the Unemployed People's Movement successfully campaigned for example for the deposal of the mayor, and organised emergency water deliveries for the most underprivileged (Mahr 2019; Viedge & Hancocks 2019). In the meantime, one upmarket restaurant in the town centre had taken advantage of the dire situation and sarcastically named itself Pothole and Donkey. Dark humour like this was used both to reinforce a sense of community and to build collective identity as the forgotten but resilient underdog.

Despite the dilapidated state of the town's financial condition and crumbling morale, Makhanda still has a lot to be proud of. The town sustains its image as a centre of

education and culture. The National Arts Festival attracts over 200,000 visitors each year (NAF Admin 2018), which benefits the entire community by providing revenue and employment, as well as promoting cultural diversity (Saayman & Rossouw 2011; Snowball & Antrobus 2001; Van der Vyver & du Plooy-Cilliers 2006). Furthermore, the town was selected as the venue for the Freedom Day celebrations on 27 April 2019, hosting state president Cyril Ramaphosa. But in terms of day-to-day functions, the town is most reliant on Rhodes University.

Students are active agents of social and spatial change, and they are thus a vital link between the university and the city in which the institution is located (Avni & Alfasi 2018: 1250). Historically, so-called town and gown relations in many parts of the world have been somewhat strained (Brockliss 2000). Students were already causing havoc in 11th century Europe, when riots broke out in Bologna and Oxford and prompted some of the troublesome academics to move out and establish new universities in Padua, Paris, and Cambridge (Brockliss 2000: 151; Pickford 1989: 202). In those days, universities were primarily preparing upper-class boys for careers in theology, law, and medicine, and the institutions functioned relatively independently of the surrounding communities (Brockliss 2000: 150, 154). Still, students and staff have always needed the amenities and services offered by the town, and the presence of a university has equally benefitted the town's economy and cultural environment (Bruning et al. 2006: 126; Kim et al. 2006: 191; Massey et al. 2014: 153; Rykun et al. 2015: 363-364).

Increasing student numbers in South Africa since post-1994 massification have made university accommodation insufficient and led to demand on alternative student lodging, creating a phenomenon commonly referred to as studentification (Visser & Kisting 2019: 158-159). In Makhanda, some antagonism has been reported over student housing replacing family homes as well as the development of commercial services, especially with reference to the demolition of properties due to the expansion of the Pepper Grove Mall to accommodate more businesses that primarily serve the student community (Irvine 2014). Real estate prices have soared, creating economic barriers

and contributing to what can be seen as effectively class-based spatial segregation (Irvine 2012: 116). For many Makhandians, the university remains 'something separate […] where they seek employment' (Jaffer 2005: 182).

Studentification of urban areas is sometimes seen as a shorthand for 'neighbourhood decline and demographic imbalances' (Holton & Riley 2013: 63). As temporary residents in their university towns, students often lack commitment to their living environment and interact primarily among themselves, creating student enclaves (Avni & Alfasi 2018: 1249-1250, 1257-1258). Many students in South Africa prefer the freedom of living in off campus 'digs' (shared private rentals), and this is sometimes exploited by landlords offering poor quality for high prices (Donaldson et al. 2014: 177). If students' needs are the only ones catered for, studentification can lead to dysfunctional urban spaces characterised by segregation, loss of services, gentrification, and even increased crime (Avni & Alfasi 2018: 1250; Donaldson et al. 2014: 177-178).

However, students are generally seen as a welcome boost for the local economy of Makhanda. Although students seem to be mainly occupied with their exam results, they also share the concerns about crime, safety, and the dilapidated state of municipal services. Despite the students' temporary existence in Makhanda, this is their city too. The small size of Makhanda and its heavy financial reliance on the educational sector has made cooperation between the city and the university a necessity (Irvine 2012: 110-112; Lancaster 2013: 118-123). Studentification has accelerated racial desegregation in Makhanda as the increasingly diverse student body has started taking up occupancy of rental apartments in the town centre (Irvine 2012: 116; Irvine 2014). Furthermore, the large number of Rhodes University student dissertations on local history also suggests that the 'town' has inspired the 'gown' for over half a century (see Gibbens 1982; Irvine 2012; Lancaster 2013; Marshall 2008; Southey 1984; Watts 1957).

While South African cities are affected by some of the negative aspects of studentification (e.g., Donaldson et al. 2014), they may also benefit from the way in

which students often hold significant spending power and tendency to create lively environments (see Avni & Alfasi 2018: 1251 for Israeli context). Furthermore, students often express active political agency for example by demanding improved municipal services, and can have the power to rejuvenate neighbourhoods, diversify urban communities and strengthen democratic practices (Mzileni 2021: 1030, 1036-1037). Like another small South African university town, Stellenbosch in the Western Cape, Makhanda is too small to sustain a university with its own population only (see Visser & Kisting 2019: 170). With high student numbers in relation to locals, the impacts of studentification in small cities may be highly visible, yet the fact that the topic very rarely causes outcry in public debates suggests that overall, the positives outweigh the negatives (ibid.: 174-175).

Despite a lack of research on the impact of studentification on urban space in South Africa (Donaldson et al. 2014: 177), there is clear evidence that student populations can change social class relations in urban areas (Visser & Kisting 2019: 158). Although students are often classified as middle class, there is also growing awareness of diversity among them, and the 'class-determined geographies of studentification' (Mzileni 2021: 1038). The next section will look more closely at these student geographies to illustrate how students negotiate the spatial dimensions of Rhodes University and Makhanda through their diverse class positions.

3.5. Moral boundaries and place-making

Students' spatial perceptions on a university campus and in the city are often fragmented along class and racial lines (Yu et al. 2018: 1563). Previous research on students' spatial experiences at Rhodes University suggests that students tend to spend most of their time on campus (Mtolo 2017: 17). Although students often remark on the built environment on campus as something reflecting 'British histories' rather than local realities, many still view for example residence life as a positive experience (ibid.: 24, 77). By using an innovative technique of 'mobile interviews' conducted with participants

while walking around campus, Mtolo's research opens an important conversation about how students at Rhodes relate to their surrounding built environment. However, it lacks accounts of students' day-to-day movements at Rhodes University and Makhanda and does not consider students' place identities in terms of classed patterns of mobility and opportunity.

To get a better understanding of where students spend their time and how they experience the spaces around them, I asked students at Rhodes University to provide me with mental maps. This method of drawing one's personal interpretation of the surrounding environment is a relatively novel way in student geography of exposing the underlying patterns and factors that construct students' perceptions of space (Yu et al. 2018: 1556-1557). My specific focus was on examining the ways in which students at Rhodes negotiate perceived class connotations of spaces and how they themselves make class distinctions through spatial strategies. Students participating in this part of my research were given a blank piece of paper on which they were asked to draw a mental map of Makhanda by marking the places that are important to them.

A total of 50 students participated in the mental mapping, and 20 of them also attended focus groups or wrap-up sessions to discuss the exercise. Recruitment for the exercise happened primarily through snowball sampling, so that those who had already been interviewed for this research were approached first, and they were asked to bring their friends. As my research was mainly located within one particular department, most students were from that discipline, which falls into Social Studies in the Faculty of Humanities. In addition, a lecturer in one department within Earth and Environmental Sciences, Faculty of Sciences, agreed to include the mental mapping exercise (without wrap-up) as a part of an undergraduate lecture.

The mapping exercise was done anonymously,[72] but to gain insight on the background of the respondents, each participating student was given a slip of paper to attach to their map. This slip contained five basic demographic questions on their 1. level of study (undergraduate or postgraduate), 2. nationality (South African, SADC or international), 3. gender (female, male or other), 4. race (Black, White, mixed or other) and 5. social class identification (lower class, middle class, upper class or other). The questions and categories were also explained to them verbally, and it was made clear that answering any of the questions was entirely voluntary and that any question could be left blank if they wished to do so. A rudimentary statistical analysis of the demographics indicated that the sample was fairly representative of the Rhodes University student body as a whole,[73] with the exception of a large proportion of non-South African students due to my research focus.[74]

[72] In smaller focus groups, I was able to see students' maps as we discussed them together. Whilst students did not write their names on their maps, I was able to retrieve the maps of two particular students for an analysis in this chapter as their discussion in the focus groups connected to their maps in interesting ways. As in all chapters in this thesis, I use pseudonyms to protect participants' identities.

[73] In 2018, Rhodes University student body was 69% undergraduate, 84% South African and 60% female. The racial composition in 2012 was 69% (Black) African, 21% White, 5% Coloured, and 5% Indian. (Rhodes University 2019: A1, C1-C2, C5-C6, C7). Data on social class is not available but in 2012, 18% of undergraduate students were allocated financial aid. 91% of financial aid recipients were African. (Rhodes University 2013: C11).

[74] 74% of the participating students were undergraduates and 24% were postgraduates. South Africans constituted 46%, SADC students 40% and other internationals 4% of the respondents. The participants were 54% female and 40% male, with no 'other' answers. However, 6% had left this question blank. 60% of the respondents were Black, 28% White, 6% mixed, and 2% other. Students identifying as lower class made up 10% of the participants, middle class students were 68%, upper class 6%, and other 8%.

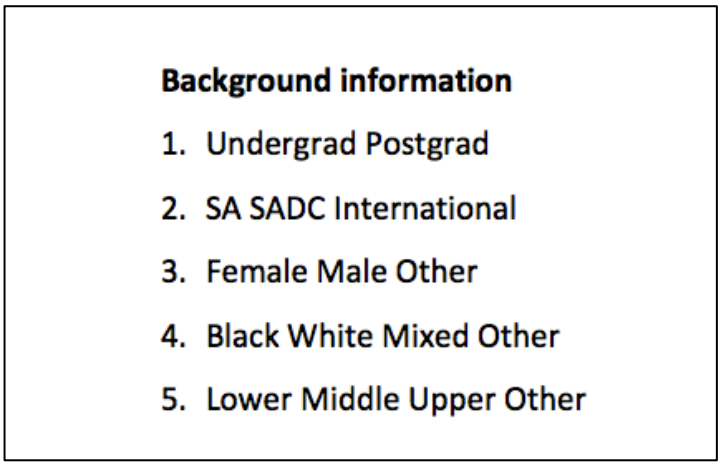


Figure 7. Demographic slip attached to each mental map.

Through a visual assessment, I categorised the mental maps based on which areas of Makhanda were visible and in which proportions. The maps represented roughly three different types. Firstly, maps that were concentrated around Rhodes University with at least half of the places mentioned being located on campus (such as lecture theatres, residences, library and gym) were categorised as 'campus-centred'. Secondly, if at least half of the places mentioned were in the town centre (including digs, restaurants, shops, and churches), those maps were categorised as 'town-centred'. Finally, maps that had at least one mention of a place outside of campus or the town centre (for example, 'Fingo Village' or 'R350 to Bedford') were considered to represent a 'wider view'.

Previous research has pointed out classed, gendered, and racialised patterns in students' experiences of space (Holton & Finn 2018: 427; Wattis 2013: 2427; Yu et al. 2018: 1562). Still, there was no indication that any one demographic factor would dictate the person's map type. The most common map type by 42% was 'town-centred', followed by 'campus-centred' at 32% and 'wider view' at 26%. However, the mental maps and especially the focus group wrap-up sessions did expose interesting patterns of consumption, mobility, and opportunity that had clear connections to students' class identities. In focus group 1, discussion between Ndabezinhle, who identifies as a 'poor' Black male, and William, a self-identified upper middle-class White male, illustrates two very different experiences:

Ndabezinhle: 'I think for me, drawing the map really exposed my existential reality that is my personality and my social class. I don't live in town, and that says a lot about my class. I can't afford to live in town, so I live in the township.'

William: 'I think I'll add in terms of my own social class, it being almost the polar opposite. I have always occupied the typical sort of upper middle-class White male [position], and that is also true when it comes to the drawing of my map. The township is not even included in my map. I've never been in, and I don't think I ever will go. I can afford to go to the same shops that my class would be able to afford, especially in terms of food, that sort of lifestyle.'

Ndabezinhle: 'Just to add to what he was saying. So, I only added Pick n Pay [supermarket] quite late in the map, and I didn't include Nando's, I didn't include KFC, I didn't include that… what's that funny shop, that overnight shop?'

William: 'Spar.'

Ndabezinhle: 'Yes, Spar. I didn't include that. I only included Checkers because that's cheaper… Pick n Pay is far more expensive than Checkers. So, when you go to Checkers, you see people of a different class. When you go to Pick n Pay, even in terms of colour, class, you see different people.' [75]

This conversation between Ndabezinhle and William exposes one way in which students' perceptions of space in Makhanda are fragmented along race and class lines, namely through patterns of consumption. In post-apartheid South Africa, many Black middle-class students live similar lives to William in terms of being able to shop at Pick n Pay and eat at Nando's. As he dismisses certain spaces like Spar, Ndabezinhle expresses a moral position that derives from his feeling of socio-economic alienation. Leaving the expensive shop out of his vocabulary also deletes it from his imaginary and therefore acts as a protective mechanism. By not fully acknowledging a place Ndabezinhle can forget about not being able to afford shopping there.

However, by initiating discussion on the more expensive supermarkets and restaurants in their conversation, Ndabezinhle also challenges William to recognise his privilege and reminds him of a different reality. It thus seems that Ndabezinhle's acute awareness of

[75] Focus group 1, 13 March 2019.

being ‘out-of-habitus’ may materialise itself as antipathy towards the middle-class consensus (see Wattis 2013: 2436), which he connects to the question of taste. Students – like all of us – tend to narrate their experiences in terms of freedom and choice (Holton & Finn 2018: 431). This is illustrated by Ndabezinhle’s further account of the nightclub Prime in town: ‘I’ve been here for like six years, I think I went there once. I didn’t like the music because it’s for certain people, for certain class. […] You know when someone is just a DJ because he knows the owner of the place… just terrible. So, yeah… I’ve heard about [them], but I’m not going to these places’. [76]

[76] Focus group 1, 13 March 2019.

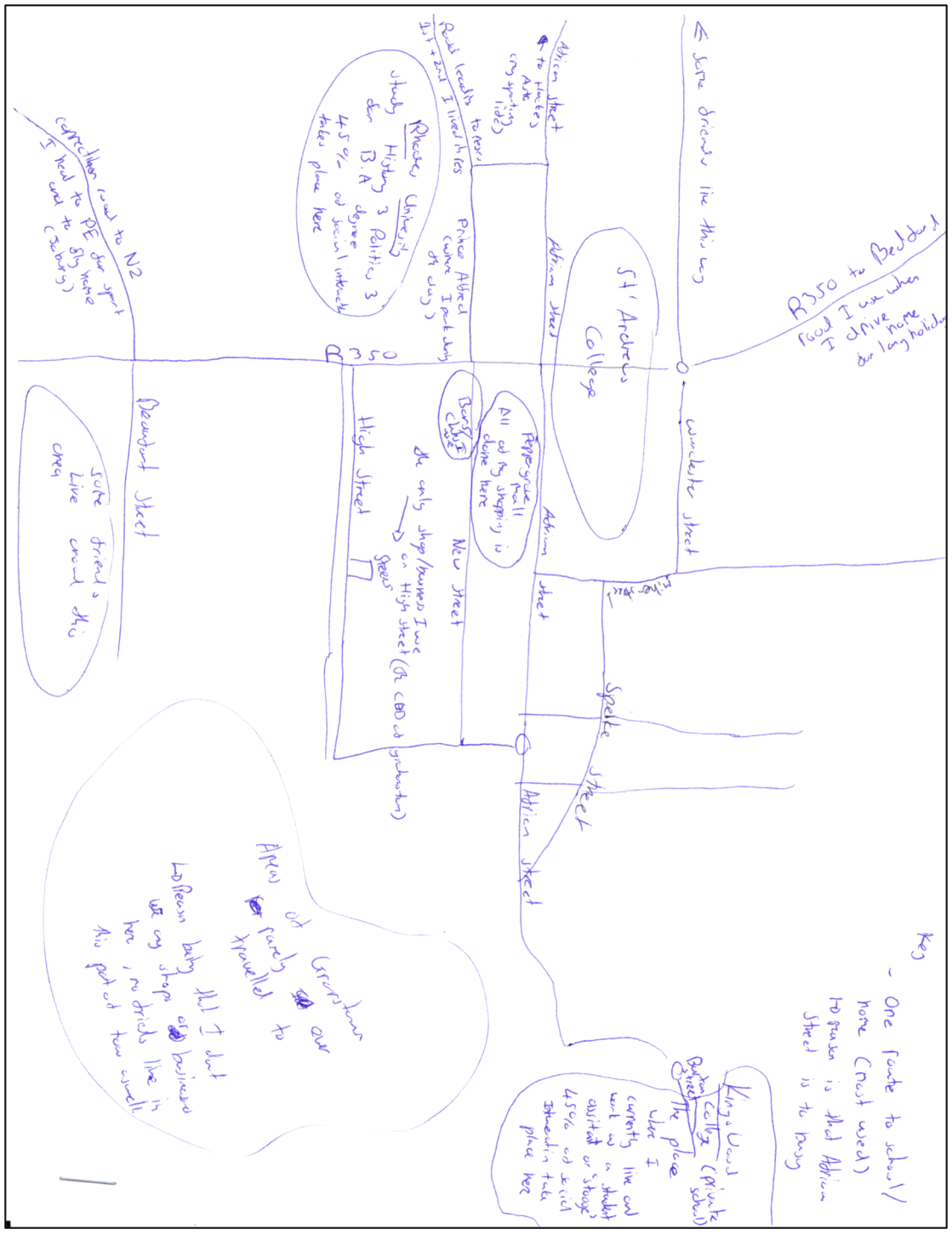


Figure 8. Mental map.

This 'wider view' mental map was drawn by a self-identified upper middle-class White male student, William. In his map, William marks Kingswood College as his place of residence and work (top right corner). He also marks Prince Alfred Street (left side, above 'Rhodes University') as the location where he parks for the day, indicating car ownership. William marks the East side of Makhanda (bottom right) as 'rarely ever travelled to' and states that he has no friends living in that area. He also mentions

several routes out of town, including two different options going home to Johannesburg: R350 (top left) when he drives and N2 (bottom left) when he flies.

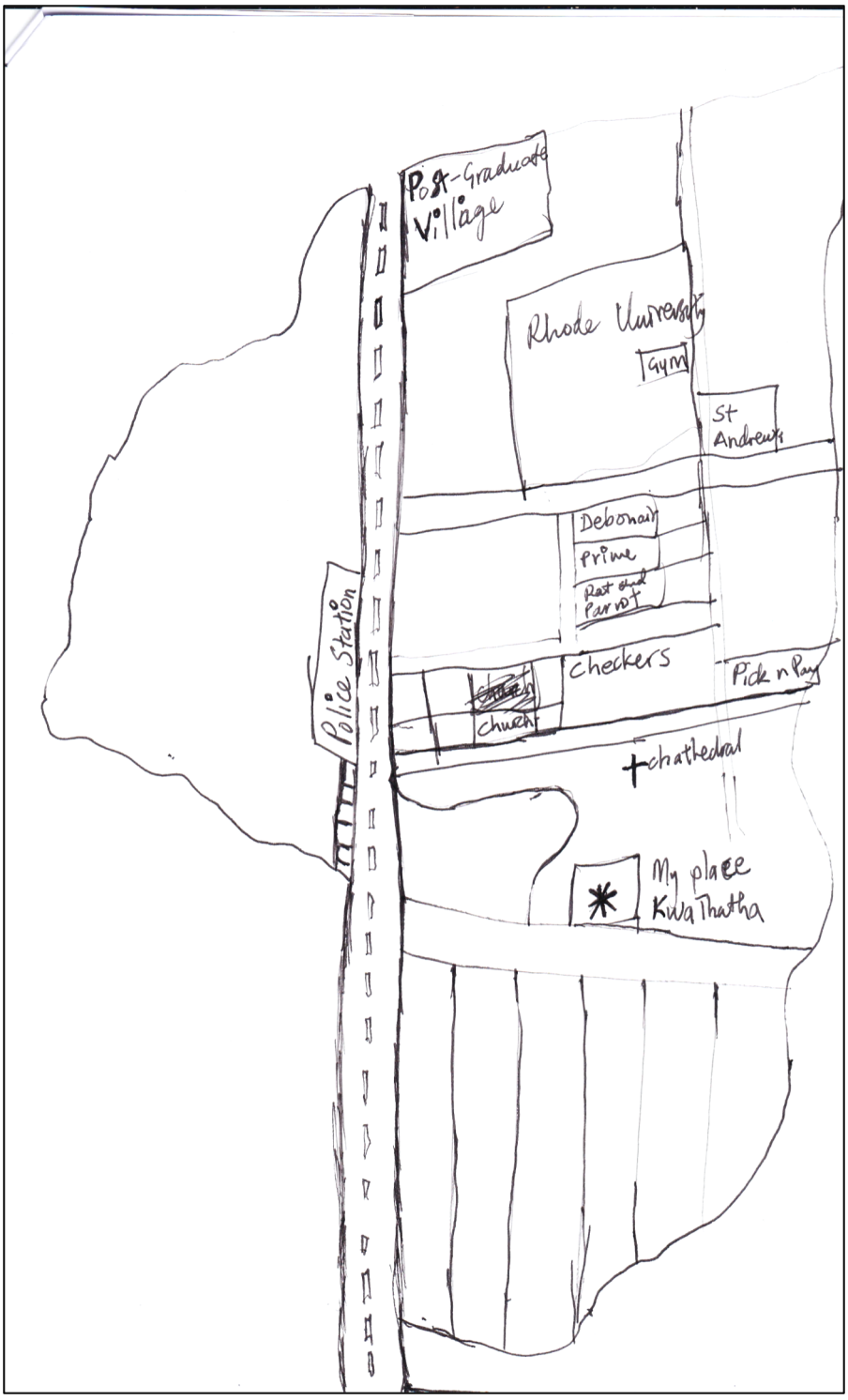


Figure 9. Mental map.

This mental map drawn by a self-identified 'poor' Black male student Ndabezinhle represents a 'wider view' of Makhanda. Unlike many other maps, Ndabezinhle's map is oriented upwards from Makhanda East.

Interestingly, both Ndabezinhle and William produced mental maps with a 'wider view' composition as opposed to 'campus-centred' or 'town-centred'. These maps, although similar in scope, exemplify how differently these two students perceive their surrounding environment. In addition to the consumption habits discussed above, the maps and focus group discussion illustrate how students' class identities affect their patterns of opportunity. In the case of Ndabezinhle and William, their different levels of opportunity are especially visible in terms of accommodation, mobility, and safety.

Ndabezinhle and William both live on the other side of town from campus but in very different settings: William stays at an independent boarding school where he works as a 'stooge' (student assistant). Having a paid job is a sign of William's privilege (see Chapter 6 in this thesis). On the contrary, Ndabezinhle rents a granny flat in the township. Whilst William can go around safely in his own car, Ndabezinhle has to walk, use taxis or the Oppi Bus. In his map, William marks multiple places where his friends live, where he parks his car during the day, as well as connections out of town. Ndabezinhle's map is dominated by a big road (presumably R67/Beaufort Street/Raglan Road) and indicates a police station, which is possibly located on the taxi route between his home and the university. His map includes very few other places in Makhanda. Ndabezinhle's focus group comments explain that the pubs and restaurants that he marked (Debonairs, Prime, Rat and Parrot) are not places he actually goes to. Furthermore, as he described his experience in the classroom as one of social exclusion,[77] this only leaves 'church' and 'gym' as possible sites of positive interactions.

This comparison between Ndabezinhle and William illustrates how the classed differences in these students' living arrangements and mobility affect their spatial perceptions and experiences. Poorer students like Ndabezinhle who commute to

[77] Interview with Ndabezinhle from Zimbabwe at Rhodes University, 21 May 2018.

Rhodes from the township across the town are likely to have 'more expansive perceived boundaries' than students staying in university residences (see Yu et al. 2018: 1567). William lives out of campus and is very mobile, but says he never goes to the township, suggesting that even his mobility has boundaries shaped by his class identity. However, students from wealthier backgrounds – even if they stay on campus – are more likely to be able to spend their weekends by the beach in nearby seaside towns like Port Alfred or Kenton-on-Sea because they either own cars, have access to friends' cars, or can afford to take a private hire (often shared) cab. Therefore, despite their perhaps limited daily movements, their class advantage renders them greater overall geographic flexibility.

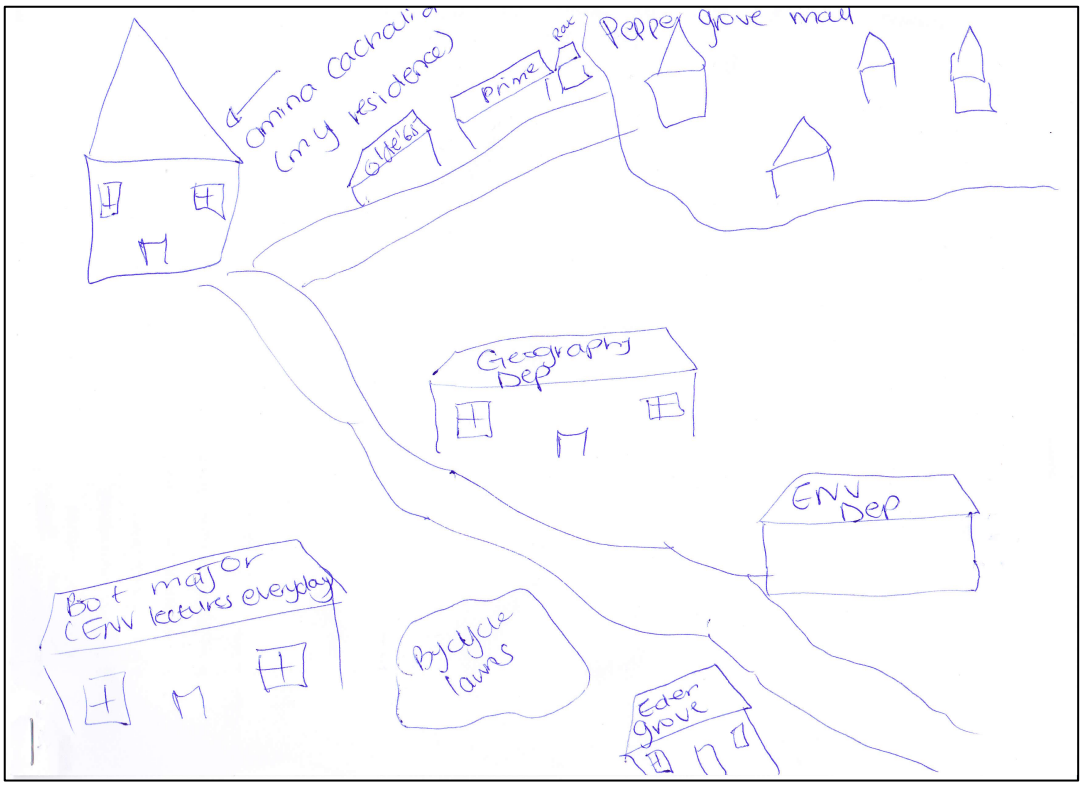


Figure 10. Mental map.

This typical 'campus-centred map' was drawn by a self-identified Black female student, who did not specify her class identity. Most places marked are on campus, with only a small area of town consisting of the Pepper Grove Mall, pub, and two nightclubs visible (top right).



Figure 11. Extract from NVivo data analysis.

This extract from NVivo data analysis on focus groups represents voices of several students across several focus groups and illustrates the 'bubbleness' of their place identities.

Rhodes is still a predominantly residential campus, which means that about half of all students live in one of the twelve halls of residence, colloquially known as reses, each of which consist of three to six houses of 50-120 students (Rhodes University website 2016). Halls are typically single sex although some include both men's and women's houses (ibid.). Residences have fingerprint access systems and sub-wardens keeping an eye on comings and goings. Each hall of residence is served by a dining hall, shared by all houses in one hall (ibid.). Living in residences is care-free but comes with a certain level of oversight by the institution as compared to living in digs.

Rhodes University's location right in the centre of Makhanda, as well as the fact that it is a fenceless university, should in theory be good for town-gown relations (see Pickford 1989: 204). However, many students agreed that there is an invisible boundary between

town and campus.[78] As I was told by two third-year students in a focus group, '[male voice:] "When you're on campus, you feel some sense of security, as opposed to as soon as you cross this road [separating campus from town centre]…" [female voice:] "You don't take your phone out!"'.[79] While students' relative privilege allows them access to the exclusionary campus space (see Yu et al. 2018: 1563-1564), it somehow seems to keep out criminals, hawkers, and beggars. Undoubtedly, this invisible boundary affects ordinary townspeople too, creating a disconnection between the town and the campus.

Whether students live in residences or 'digs', Rhodes University campus is often the centre of their activities. This concentration of one's daily interactions in one social space undoubtedly contributes to the idea of Rhodes as a bubble, which is a term 'both inspired by the spatial characteristics and ascribed to the space' (Kato 2011: 246). However, even 'campus-centred' mental maps typically depicted at least one or two town spaces such as the Rat and Parrot pub or the Pepper Grove mall, which suggests that many students include Makhanda city centre in their idea of bubble. As students' movements in town often focused on spaces of consumption and entertainment, they were mainly limited to the areas that are most presentable areas of town – sometimes dubbed 'tourist bubbles' (see Newman 2002). In the case of Makhanda, students' movements also correspond to the areas can be deemed as White spaces (see Yu et al. 2018: 1561).

The focus group discussions indicated that both male and female students expressed a sense of safety in Makhanda. As previous research has reported gendered patterns in students' spatial perceptions of risk and fear (see Wattis 2013), this seems unusual. However, in the case of Makhanda, this phenomenon connects to the way in which the student bubble extended into the city centre: '[female voice]: "You don't really need to

[78] While the university does employ security guards, they are located in the Campus Security unit on the backside of campus and can be alerted through SOS-buttons found across the campus. Guards are typically seen supervising vehicle access to car parks and do not generally stand guard by the edge of campus. New security measures were introduced after the 2015-2016 #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall protests, when the campus was blockaded and shut down, but no other permanent signs of securitisation remain (O'Halloran 2018: 24; Sempijja & Letlhogile 2021).

[79] Focus group 9, 21 March 2019.

be super street smart here […] compared to, like, Cape Town […] It's not as scary. Like, I'll walk home at 3am from the club to the res alone and feel safe. I mean, something can happen, but probably not." [another female voice]: "It's like family. You walk home from the club; you see people you know."'[80] The way in which these students downplayed risk was connected to their ability to stay within their safe space, which enabled them to consider walking alone at night as compatible with middle-class norms of sensibility. This, of course, was not available to poorer students residing in the township.

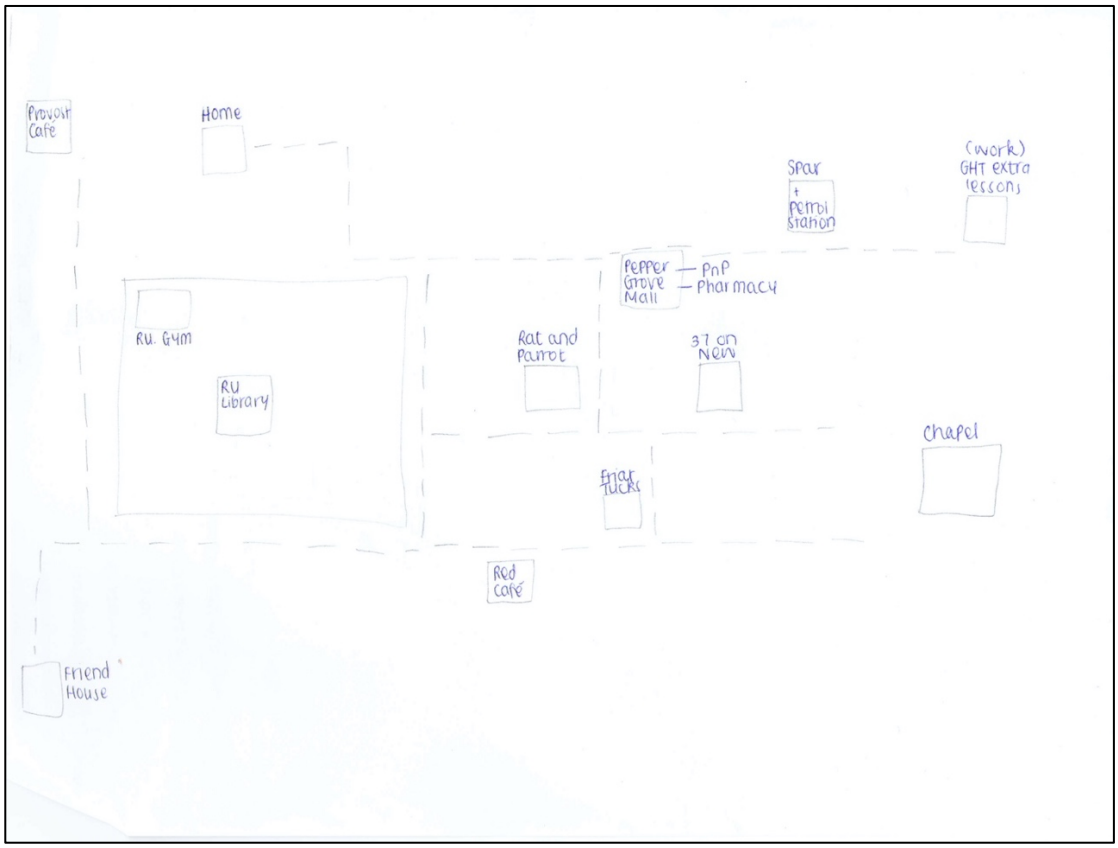


Figure 12. Mental map.

This 'town-centred' mental map was drawn by a self-identified middle-class White female student. As well as showing typical proportions of campus and town spaces, this maps also marks a petrol station, suggesting car ownership, and 'GHT Extra Lessons' labelled as 'work', indicating paid employment (both top right).

[80] Focus group 9, 21 March 2019.

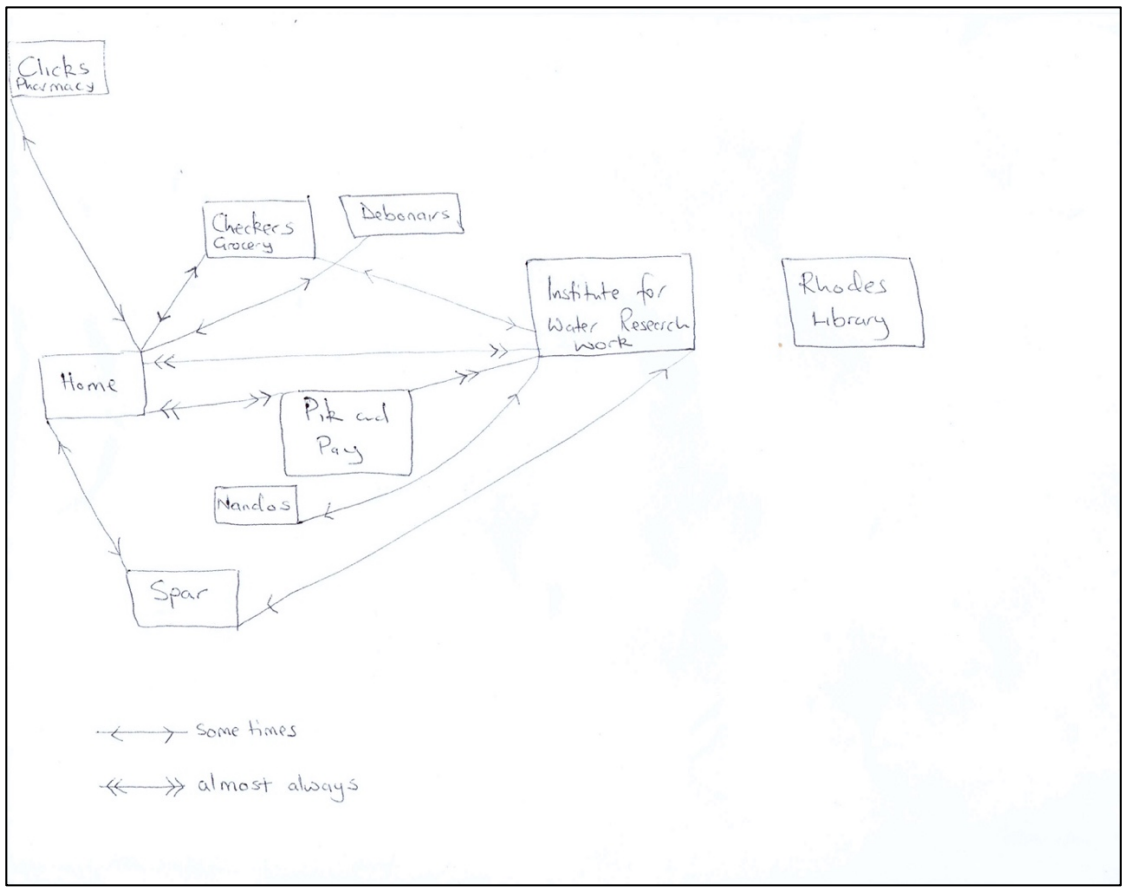


Figure 13. Mental map.

This 'town-centred' mental map drawn by a self-identified middle-class Black male illustrates how few town spaces this postgraduate student frequents even if he lives off campus.

As the 'bubbleness' of Rhodes was seen to be connected to the institution's elite status, it evoked varied sentiments in students. Some students, like those I spoke to about the Oppi Bus case, strongly resented the stark division between the university and the surrounding community, whilst others remained more ambivalent in their positioning towards the bubble. However, almost all students regardless of their class identity expressed a desire to distinguish themselves from the bubble. For this, they used different strategies of physical and symbolic distancing. Some preferred to restrict their social interactions to a chosen few and to spend most of their time on their own, concentrating on their academic studies. Other students recounted narratives about expanding their spatial perceptions beyond the bubble, for example through

participation in community engagement programmes that took them to the township schools to see 'real life'.

The current community engagement programme at Rhodes University was inaugurated by Vice-Chancellor Dr Sizwe Mabizela in 2014 (Maylam 2017: 230, 291). Focusing on collaboration with local schools, the programme offers students opportunities for meaningful interactions outside of campus, skill development, and personal growth (Rhodes University website 2022). Students at Rhodes are drawn to volunteering (as well as off campus activism) out of ideological commitment for social justice, 'out-group solidarity' with the disadvantaged or a 'desire to break out of the university bubble' (see Matthews 2015: 2, 15). The community engagement initiative at Rhodes has, however, been criticised for being 'limited and [doing] little to bridge the vast divide' within the city (Hoefnagels et al. 2022: 10). Privileged students may for example have difficulties in recognising the knowledge and agency of disadvantaged people (Matthews 2015: 8). Thus, crossing physical and class boundaries to 'help' other people may repeat the patterns of 'othering' and perpetuate the division between the student bubble and the local community.

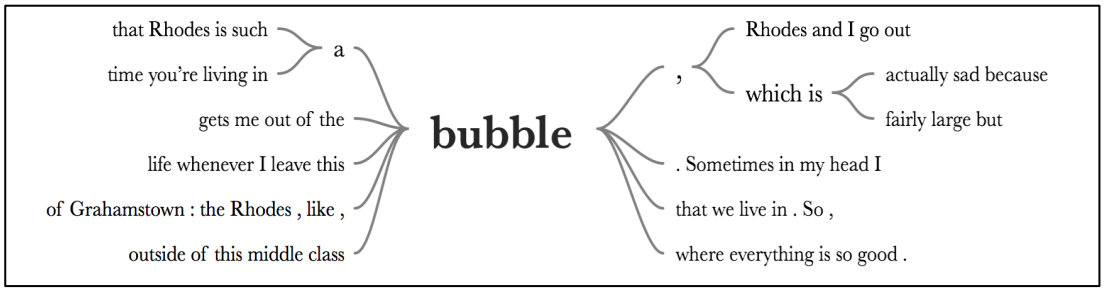


Figure 14. Extract from NVivo data analysis.

This extract from NVivo data analysis on student interviews and focus groups indicates multiple students' reflections on the 'bubble' of Rhodes.

Whether they were withdrawing from social networks or attempting to engage with the wider community, Rhodes University students were nevertheless making deliberate efforts to distinguish themselves from the bubble both physically and symbolically. This way they could acknowledge the existence of the bubble and perhaps express their

criticism towards it, whilst still building their identities in relation to it (see Kato 2011: 254, 260). The bubble thus served as a spatial metaphor for moral boundary work, furnished with narratives of such virtues as honesty, work ethic, personal integrity, and consideration for others (ibid.: 246). For the students at Rhodes University, these values indeed seem central for their perceptions of their institution as a White space and a bubble. Those who turned inwards highlighted their academic diligence, and those reaching out emphasised the need to share their privilege with those less fortunate. In both cases, this boundary work acted to create distance from the bubble and thus to increase their sense of feeling 'at home' in that social space.

Rhodes students' moral boundary work and the way in which they strive to achieve positive place identity is characterised by certain classed strategies of place-making. For many students, the campus is a safe space (Mtolo 2017: 93; see also Terrazas-Carrillo et al. 2017: 72). Notwithstanding their background, students often subscribe to the middle-class values of the institution and then appropriate campus spaces for themselves (Terrazas-Carrillo et al. 2017: 62). This is visible at Rhodes in the way in which students use study spaces, staircases, and teaching assistants' offices as social hangouts, in which they can express themselves and develop their identities (see ibid.: 63). Relatively privileged students may then see community engagement or spending weekends on the beach in Kenton-on-Sea as escapes from this campus bubble. From the perspective of poorer students, however, these activities may seem like mere extensions of the bubble.

Expressing a highly derogatory view of the spaces that many other students frequent without necessarily problematising their lives in the bubble, Ndabezinhle uses his agency and perceived moral superiority to carve himself an alternative social space (see Fesenmyer 2019: 42). Feeling 'out-of-habitus' in the middle-class White space of the Rhodes University campus bubble, he cannot find a physical space on campus in which to feel 'at home'. Therefore, the safe space that he creates to counter his discouraging reality materialises in the form of a 'meaningful imaginary' (see Fesenmyer 2019: 48-49; Garbin 2013: 678-679). This is expressed through the way in which Ndabezinhle

emphasises his superior taste (for example, in terms of nightclubs) and moral boundary work (as a township dweller, he has a strong claim for the 'authenticity' that he links to the virtues of honesty and personal integrity) when contrasted with the bubble of Rhodes (see Kato 2011: 246).

Like Ndabezinhle, many other Rhodes students feel equally alienated from the institutional culture as they may be judged by fellow students for 'transgressing cultural rules' but also fear that too much assimilation to the prevailing norms of the institution may lead to 'loss of self' (Mtolo 2017: 86, 89). Whilst students may be able to some extent create positive place identities in Makhanda through place-making on and off campus, Rhodes University remains an unequal spatial framework in which one's race and class identities inform the extent to which students can successfully feel 'at home' (see Vice 2015). The setting of inequality described in this chapter will be further discussed in the following chapters with the addition of another dimension: SADC students' transnational identities.

3.6. Conclusions

This chapter has demonstrated how the spatial dimensions of Rhodes University and Makhanda both reflect and reinforce inequality (see Schensul and Heller 2011: 78). As students experience their spatial surroundings in a variety of different ways, Rhodes University and Makhanda emerge as socially contested spaces with multiple and sometimes conflicting claims of ownership. I have shown how race and class identities determine the extent to which students may acquire positive place identities in this setting that they describe as a 'bubble' and a 'White space'.

Students at Rhodes use moral boundary work and place-making to navigate the intersections of 'town and gown'. However, the mental mapping exercise described in this chapter illustrated that the ways in which students can practice identity distinction is restricted by the limited spatial structures of a small institution located in a small

town. Indeed, sometimes the only class distinction one can make is a choice between two supermarkets. As well as the small size of Makhanda, both historical and contemporary inequalities regarding race and class, and the subsequent 'bubbleness' of its student community also account for the way in which students' classed perceptions of space lead to different strategies of moral boundary work and place-making.

The transitory social location of Rhodes University students as young adults and temporary residents (see Chapter 4 in this thesis) means that their 'need to gauge their relationship to the dominant norms and values may be more salient' (Kato 2011: 246). Coming back to the concept of appropriated physical space (Bourdieu 2018 [1991]), this chapter concludes that students' habitus is undeniably shaping their habitat in significant ways. Even though the students in this research have perhaps felt like passive spectators in the classed and racialised spatial structures of inclusion and exclusion at their educational institution and in their place of residence, they have in fact actively used different place-making strategies to create sense of being 'at home' in the bubble of Rhodes University.

4. ‘THERE’S LIFE HERE AND THERE’S LIFE THERE’ – TIME, MIGRATION AND CLASS-MAKING EXPERIENCES OF SADC STUDENTS

4.1. Introduction

As new students were beginning their academic studies at Rhodes University in early 2021, they were addressed by the institution’s Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Academic and Student Affairs, Dr ‘Mabokang Monnapula-Mapesela, with these words: ‘[U]niversity is totally different from school and therefore you are required to do things differently, work at a higher level, harder and smarter, as your studies are more complex and demanding. So do not let a day pass without engaging with your studies. Time on task is not only critical, but irreplaceable’ (Monnapula-Mapesela 2021). This communication was likely meant as benevolent motivational advice encouraging students to take ownership of their academic development. However, by linking the ideal of hard work and excellence to the question of individual agency and responsibility, her words reflect a paradigm that shapes the student experience at Rhodes University.

Dr Monnapula-Mapesela is not alone in championing this idea that university students should work hard and excel whilst also being efficient with their time. Fundamentally, this logic echoes the prevailing developmentalist metanarrative of the modern era that underlines improvement over time (Kleist & Jansen 2016: 377). In Africa, these perhaps unrealistic expectations of constant and linear economic and social development have often not been met (e.g., Ferguson 1999), and this perceived lack of progress has sometimes created an impression of the continent as hopelessly stuck in a constant state of ‘waithood’ (Stasik et al. 2020). Thus, seeking coherence within these ‘modernity’s aporias’ (Guyer 2007: 418) also generates perceptions of disappointment and failure.

Education systems around the world typically follow this assumption of linear progression (Huijsmans et al. 2021: 7) in which we are expected to pass through life

stages in a strictly ordered and coherent manner (Johnson-Hanks 2002: 866). As the end of a presumed vertical ladder of formalised education, university represents a gate to adulthood (see Montgomery & Coté 2003). At the same time, higher education values individual aspiration and effort as keys to success and progress (Thomas & Azmitia 2014: 196). University students thus face expectations of both upward social mobility and social becoming – which is understood here in terms of an individual becoming recognised not only as an autonomous actor but also as a full member of the home community and wider society (e.g., Christiansen et al. 2006). This is especially true for students who migrate across borders to attend university.

Student migration from the SADC region to South Africa follows similar patterns to those found in historical analyses that have often presented transnational mobility as a means of class mobility in southern Africa (e.g., Groves 2020). However, the SADC student experience is also markedly different due to the transformed regional geopolitics since the end of apartheid, as well as their differing class backgrounds compared to most labour migrants. Educated and relatively privileged SADC students do not easily fit in the burgeoning literature on youth migration – both in Africa and globally – that focuses on marginalised young people breaking away from feelings of temporal 'stuckness' through spatial strategies (e.g., Mains 2012). However, although SADC students may appear to be progressing in their studies and thus advancing in their lives in an important way, they often expressed negative feelings about their present situations, and saw themselves as temporarily 'stuck' at Rhodes.

In addition to the pressures of success and time that Dr Monnapula-Mapesela articulated in her welcome speech, SADC students face certain specific challenges. They often migrate due to the limited availability or quality of higher education in their home countries, thus becoming what I call 'constrained cosmopolitans'. Furthermore, the reality of SADC students in South Africa does not often match their great expectations, as they report experiences of culture shock and xenophobia, which result in an acute sense of non-belonging. This chapter demonstrates how all these expectations and

challenges shape SADC students' experiences as they navigate between their difficult present 'life here' (at Rhodes University), whilst also constantly renegotiating their social class positions and identities in relation to their 'life there' (back home).

Despite their present difficulties, SADC students place long-term hope in a 'future *elsewhere*' (see Kleist 2017a: 11, 13, emphasis in original) and believe that their transnational education will provide them with the opportunity of upward social mobility. In this chapter, I will show how their ongoing challenges are validated through narratives of sacrifice and survival, which help them retain long-term hope of a better future and to maintain their sense of progress and success. This analysis of migrant students' positionings through space and time contributes to the understanding of the migration and class-making nexus. Contrary to the way in which it is often illustrated by narratives of fairly straightforward upward or downward social mobility, this chapter portrays a more complex process of simultaneous privilege and precarity that straddles the lines between economic, social, and emotional well-being.

4.2. Constrained cosmopolitans? Migration and intergenerational class-making

Considering the way in which the pursuit of well-being drives geographical mobility, it is evident that social class is central to understanding migration (Coe 2020: 161). Migration research regarding southern Africa has historically been disproportionately concentrated on labour migration, which has led to an assumption that migrants come from similar class backgrounds and therefore generated a tendency to emphasise ethnicity over class (Bolt 2015: 12-14). On the other hand, the thriving research on African middle classes also lacks awareness of the importance of migration as a class-making strategy (Kea 2020: 69), as class is typically considered within a national framework (Coe & Pauli 2020: 3-4). Furthermore, research has typically concentrated on downward social mobility when migrating from the Global South to the Global North (Yount-André 2020: 92).

In southern Africa, migration is strongly linked to the expectation of upward social mobility (Kihato 2013: 49-51). Migrants often anticipate some level of financial gain, but at the same time they also face the fear of 'social death' that may ensue from going home 'as nobody' (ibid.: 49; see also Johnson 2017). Beyond economics, more privileged young people often see migration as a pathway to 'becoming somebody' (Cheung-Judge et al. 2020: 4). For example, in the current situation where education does not necessarily guarantee social prestige, migration has become a viable complementary path (van Dijk 2020: 185). Migrating for educational purposes often combines these aspirations of capital accumulation and social becoming. However, this also means that the aspirations created through migration and higher education leave migrant students with immense pressures to succeed. Achieving social prestige is an arduous process and striving for a higher status within a transnational context often requires even more 'strategic juggling' and sacrifice (Yount-André 2020: 96).

Cross-border connections in southern Africa have an important role for the production and consolidation of the region's middle classes, as many families across the region invest heavily in their children's education and view universities as stepping-stones for upward social mobility (see James 2015; Lentz 2016: 29). Young people's educational pathways can thus be understood as part of an intergenerational class-making project (see Kea 2020: 76). The SADC students who participated in this research told me that they were often expected to use their education to benefit the entire family (see also Chapter 6 in this thesis). Indeed, some students struggled with their parents' assumptions of quick financial returns on their investment in their children's education.

Zimbabwean PhD student Theodore, who self-identifies as working class, explains: '[M]y relatives are not very supportive. […] They only ever ask "When are you going to finish? You've been studying too long. We want money." […] They think you're just wasting time.'[81] Another Zimbabwean PhD student, self-identified upper middle-class Mudiwa,

[81] Interview with Theodore from Zimbabwe at Rhodes University, 23 May 2018.

whose family is well connected in business and politics, remembers her friends back home similarly valuing financial gain over education: '[M]y friends there have big houses […] because they're hustlers. They look at me and think "Wow, you're still in school! Why are you still in school? The money is not in South Africa, the money is here [in Zimbabwe]." […] [P]eople think I'm wasting my time, breaking my back.'[82]

The connections, contrasts and conflicts that characterise the negotiations between students and their families and wider home communities expose the important question of our 'relations in time' (Whyte et al. 2008: 1). For some SADC students, going to university was self-evident because of family expectations and perceptions of appropriate career paths. Zimbabwean undergraduate student Trevor, who self-identifies as middle class, articulates: 'From our background, there's really nothing else I could have done with my life, what I could see. I can sing, but there's no future in that, apparently.'[83] This supports the idea that children often perform their parents' social class (Coe & Pauli 2020: 13). When attending university, students then merge their personal ambitions and agency with family histories and expected intergenerational trajectories in order to imagine and plan their futures (see Montgomery & Coté 2003: 149). For example, some SADC students told me that they were studying one subject (often Law) 'for their parents' and another one (typically an Arts subject like Music or Drama) 'for themselves'.

For SADC students, these intergenerational navigations are infused with their experience of having limited agency and control of their spatial existence. Many young people in southern Africa are obliged to migrate to attend university due to structural restrictions in higher education in their home countries (see Dominguez-Whitehead and Sing 2015: 88; Hiralal 2015). International higher education is thus seen as a necessity as well as a privilege (see Waters 2012: 129). Students described to me that competition for university admissions in some SADC states was fierce and institutions could not offer

[82] Interview with Mudiwa from Zimbabwe at Rhodes University, 15 June 2018.
[83] Interview with Trevor from Zimbabwe at Rhodes University, 17 May 2018.

a place for all prospective students. In Zimbabwe, the main university was seen to be more geared towards natural sciences, discouraging those who were hoping to study subjects such as Humanities. Zimbabwean self-identified working-class PhD student Theodore concludes that 'SADC institutions [need to] make their universities welcoming to their own students. Because a lot needs to be done, there's a reason why we are here.'[84]

Most SADC students I interviewed had gone to private schools,[85] where they were exposed to the idea of international higher education. It was primarily in these settings that studying outside one's home country was seen as a status symbol. Universities from countries as far away as Canada would hold open days in the top high schools across southern Africa, clearly well aware of the weaknesses of higher education in the region and utilising this in their student recruitment strategy. In southern African high schools, pupils would colloquially rank the available study destinations according to desirability, as Zimbabwean self-identified middle-class undergraduate student Brenda recounts: 'Everyone was going abroad, so when college applications came, everyone had their sights on America. People actually used to laugh at us South African applicants.'[86] She recalls her mother's words: '[Brenda], I can't afford to take you to America. […] I can afford South Africa, therefore, apply to South Africa'.[87]

Choosing to study outside the African continent was a marker of cultivated taste and this was reserved for the most privileged young people who were able to emphasise their freedom of choice in a similar manner to those youth that Cheung-Judge (2017:

[84] Interview with Theodore from Zimbabwe at Rhodes University, 23 May 2018.
[85] SADC students used the term 'private schools' to refer to education deemed better quality than that offered by 'state schools'. It is, however, important to remember that the private school sectors in many SADC countries are varied and include for example rural mission schools, which SADC students would typically not regard as 'private'. According to the latest data from the World Bank (2022), the rate for secondary school children attending a private institution in Zimbabwe was 77% (in 2012), compared to for example 1% in Lesotho and 2% in Eswatini (both in 2016), and 4% in Botswana (in 2021). The figure for South African children in private secondary education rose from 4% to 51% between 2012-2020. More recent figures for Zimbabwe are, unfortunately, not available.
[86] Interview with Brenda from Zimbabwe at Rhodes University, 11 May 2018.
[87] Interview with Brenda from Zimbabwe at Rhodes University, 11 May 2018.

166) describes as 'elite cosmopolitans'. Although Cheung-Judge's research looks at volunteer tourism, this categorisation has resemblance to international students who are similarly understood as a group with class advantage due to the cost of pursuing education abroad (see Waters 2012: 124). Travel, language proficiency, and cultural competence in multiple settings may all contribute to a person's sense of global citizenship. Indeed, the term cosmopolitanism is often seen as Eurocentric as well promoting 'values and identities associated with privilege', implying certain levels of ease of movement and cultural affluence (Cheung-Judge 2017: 165-166).[88] Although the concept is now commonly reduced to such lifestyle choices as consuming 'cosmopolitan mass-products' (e.g., 'ethnic food' and 'world music') that Beck (cited in Ros i Solé 2013: 333) calls 'banal cosmopolitanism', even this requires a level of cultural capital.

Due to unevenly distributed educational opportunities, many transnationally mobile students do have certain class advantages (Waters 2012: 123), but as the SADC student experience confirms, there are also significant differences within the group. Indeed, Zimbabwean student Brenda's statement above clearly illustrates that those SADC students who had come to South Africa were not exactly using international education as marker of taste – those people were more likely heading off to study in the Global North. Instead, SADC students had moved to South Africa for strategic reasons: it may not have been their dream trajectory, but it was the most viable pathway available to them. Due to this limited spatial agency, SADC students therefore do not quite fit in such migrant categories as 'elite cosmopolitans' (see Cheung-Judge 2017).

As SADC students are drawn to attending university abroad partly due to challenges of higher education in their home countries, their motivations for migration are similar to many other migrants who wish to counter uncertainty in their home country (see Kleist 2017a: 1) or search for a better life elsewhere (see Coe 2020: 161). Distinguishing these 'strategic cosmopolitans' from the 'elite cosmopolitans', Cheung-Judge (2017: 170)

[88] The notion of global citizenship has prompted an alternative idea of Afropolitanism as a multi-local mode of being African in the world (Nyamnjoh 2022: 151, 154).

suggests that they typically use transnational mobility to counter racialised or classed prejudice at home. Contrary to this, SADC students are seeking the best education they could access based on a sense of obligation to support their families' class-making projects. Furthermore, whereas the category of 'strategic cosmopolitans' implies a calculated approach, the transnational trajectory of SADC students at South African universities is characterised by an unintentional chain of events. Because SADC students' experience straddles both types of cosmopolitanism, I have augmented Cheung-Judge's (2017) categorisation, arguing that SADC students can be better described as 'constrained cosmopolitans'.

The 25 SADC students who were interviewed for this research form a diverse group representing different nationalities as well as racial and class backgrounds.[89] Yet, as only one of them – Namibian postgraduate student Hilda – had made a huge leap from rural life of carrying water and working in the fields to international higher education,[90] and a handful of others self-identified as either poor (one student), working class (two students), upper middle class (four students) or upper class (two students), a clear majority of 15 students described their background as middle class. They portrayed nuclear family units of employed parents and relatively few siblings living in suburban houses, with food on the table and shoes to wear.

Despite huge variations in living standards across the SADC region, these elements reflect some of the typical tangible markers associated with a middle-class status in the Global South (see Lentz 2020). While income levels and other material factors can give an idea of who is not explicitly poor, questions of education level, occupation and lifestyle are equally important (Lentz 2015). As West (2002: 2) puts it, middle classes are not necessarily wealthy, but they do tend to share 'similar experiences in education, occupations, family life, consumption, residential patterns and organisational affiliations'.

[89] One interviewee identified as biracial, two were White and 22 were Black.
[90] Whilst refusing to categorise herself background as 'poor', Hilda described the rural setting of her childhood as coming from 'the back end of social life'.

Much of the research on contemporary southern African middle classes has concentrated on their shared values and aspirations through the lens of consumption patterns and life events (e.g., Buire 2014; Freund 2011; Mercer 2014; Pauli 2011; Sumich 2016; Turkon 2009), identifying two central characteristics: a quest for respectability on one hand, and experience of economic precariousness on the other (see also Chapters 5 and 6 in this thesis). As one approach to achieving respectable lifestyles and combatting precariousness, education has become a central strategy of middle-class boundary work (Lentz 2020: 450-451). In southern Africa, attaining education has historically motivated intra-regional migration. During colonialism, missionary schools attracted pupils from all over the region (e.g., West 2002: 2; see also Chapter 2 in this thesis). This basic schooling engendered interest in further education, which in those days was only available in South Africa. Accordingly, there is a long tradition of middle-class people in the region 'topping up' their locally received education in South Africa (see Ranger 1995: 49-50).

Considering the strong links between migration and upward class mobility together with the central role of education in intergenerational class-making helps to understand the multiple pressures of success that SADC students are experiencing (see Kea 2020: 68). Education in southern Africa is valued as a ladder for social mobility more generally (e.g., James 2015; Lentz 2016: 29). Using their personal and family aspirations or 'cultivated ambition', SADC students are hoping to climb further up a ladder of social mobility (see Cheung-Judge 2017: 170). Becoming 'constrained cosmopolitans' as they migrate for education purposes, however, heightens the sense of expectations that these young adults face.

SADC students often described to me how their parents had striven to ensure them the best possible education – preferably in the form of private schools. Some students told me that they were expected to 'do better' or 'go higher' than their parents. Again, this reasoning derives from the prevailing developmentalist metanarrative of the modern

era that values improvement over time (Kleist & Jansen 2016: 377). At the heart of this logic is the traditional notion of life course of linear progression through stages that we expect to be universal, strictly ordered, and coherent (Johnson-Hanks 2002: 866). The emphasis on life course has also shaped education systems into age-graded structures in which linear progression becomes the convention (Huijsmans et al. 2021: 7). University education for many is the pinnacle of their educational passage and therefore a critical stage in their life course.

When students reach higher education, the expectations of linear progress are typically conjoined with a paradigm of meritocracy that promotes a view in which hard work can move *anyone* up on a 'vertical class ladder' (Thomas & Azmitia 2014: 196, my emphasis). However, it is important to understand that the idea of classless meritocracy often obscures the fact that aspirations themselves are products of specific 'social relations, […] contexts and (life)histories' (Huijsmans et al. 2021: 9). More specifically, meritocracy and the centrality of having aspirations have typically been connected to middle-class discourses (James 2015 and 2019; Lentz 2020; Newman 1988), whereas people from disadvantaged backgrounds are depicted as 'having no dreams' or 'living for the day' (Huijsmans et al. 2021: 4).

Indeed, when aspirations are seen as a requirement for success, they become important markers of class and can therefore be harmful when contrasted with the uncertainty regarding their materialisation, for example due to the prospect of post-graduation unemployment (Cheung-Judge 2017: 170). In brief, lack of success can be seen as lack of aspiration, and lack of aspiration can be seen as a personal failure (Huijsmans et al. 2021: 5-6). Furthermore, having aspirations does not guarantee success. Constantly striving for 'the good life' may in fact lead to an experience of 'the ordinary becom[ing] a landfill for overwhelming and impending crises of life-building and expectation' (Berlant 2011:3). For SADC students, their arrival in South Africa was a sobering reminder of the dangers of this 'cruel optimism'.

4.3. 'We are known as aliens' – Culture shock, xenophobia and non-belonging

Moving to South Africa to attend university was an exciting prospect for SADC students. As is common to many migrants (Tedeschi et al. 2022: 611), their expectations of what life in South Africa would be like were often informed by the media. Zimbabwean self-identified middle-class student Brenda describes: 'When you see the representation of South Africa on TV, you see Cape Town, you see Sandton [a wealthy area of Johannesburg], you know. Those are the images you see: South Africa is very elite, it's luxurious, everybody has an *accent*. And also, it's the Rainbow Nation, so I thought I'm going to be that person with the multicultural clique, and I had all these expectations because that's what you see. Even in music, the South African music videos are like so cool, more like American music videos, and then there's like the Zimbabwean music videos, like, wow, shame, you know... It was definitely interesting to see the difference between what was projected as South Africa, and what really is South Africa.'[91]

As Brenda suggests, these imaginings were, however, confronted by the reality of their arrival at Rhodes University. Some SADC students were disappointed when they did not find the glamorous shopping malls of Sandton or the exciting multicultural social circles they had hoped for. Furthermore, this disillusionment was exacerbated by a sense of foreignness. Self-identified upper middle-class PhD student Mudiwa, who flew in from Zimbabwe, elaborates: 'I cried when I arrived in Joburg. I was sad, […] it was overwhelming. It's very different from Zimbabwe in terms of structure, buildings, construction. And I didn't feel at home'.[92] She was one of the students who felt particularly vulnerable because they came to South Africa to start their studies all by themselves while their parents were for example caring for younger siblings at home or preferred to save the cost of travelling. But whether alone or accompanied by family or

[91] Interview with Brenda from Zimbabwe at Rhodes University, 11 May 2018.
[92] Interview with Mudiwa from Zimbabwe at Rhodes University, 15 June 2018.

friends, the act of simply crossing the border into South Africa seemed to mark an important physical and symbolic shift for SADC students.

Arrival in a new environment can be seen as a rite of passage in which the passing of time is central (Murphy-Lejeune 2002: 106). Initially, the migrant student appears a 'sore thumb' – visibly out of place – and then gradually adapts to the new environment and culture through a process of socialisation (ibid.: 104-105). By modifying their behaviour, international students can eventually decrease their 'strangeness' in their own eyes as well as in others' perceptions (ibid.: 124). Despite the close economic and cultural ties between SADC countries and South Africa's regional dominance (Saurombe 2010), SADC students often experienced their arrival in South Africa as a culture shock.

For a large part, SADC students saw their culture shock as an outcome of their own conservatism. Some students, like Zimbabwean self-identified middle-class students Russell and Brenda, described to me how their religious upbringings had given them a moral position that emphasised modesty, respectability, and philanthropy: 'I'm Christian. […] I was always taught to be aware of my privilege. Yes, we're privileged, but be mindful of it. If you're not using the light, switch it off, turn the tap off while you're brushing your teeth'.[93] '[M]y parents are leaders at church, so church folks also come asking, you know, pray for this, we need counselling about this. […] Also, members of the society who don't have the privilege of having food on the table, come and stay for a long time.'[94] However, religion was also a source of conservative attitudes towards such issues as sexuality and alcohol consumption. Arriving at Rhodes University, these students struggled to adapt to the more liberal atmosphere.

SADC students' experiences of cultural clashes at Rhodes University were often triggered by such issues as encountering alternative sexual identities in the public. For example, in Zimbabwe, homosexuality is a criminal offense, and the country's top

[93] Interview with Brenda from Zimbabwe at Rhodes University, 11 May 2018.
[94] Interview with Russell from Zimbabwe at Rhodes University, 25 May 2018.

leadership has long been openly homophobic (Muparamoto 2020), whereas South Africa's constitution guarantees equal rights and protection from discrimination for all citizens (Louw 2005). Despite changing attitudes among African state leaders and institutions, the media still often ignores these developments and concentrates on the persecution of homosexuals on the continent (Epprecht 2013: 1-2). This means that homosexuality remains largely hidden from the daily life of many African citizens (ibid.: 5). However, as Zimbabwean self-identified middle-class undergraduate student Kufara explains, culture shock was also related to everyday issues like manners and dress code: 'People [at Rhodes] wear a lot of things that expose their body parts [and] that was a huge shock when I got here, but I got used to that. And a lot of people smoke, what is what we're not used to in Zim. They smoke a lot, they kiss a lot.'[95]

Although these issues have been identified as challenges for international students in South Africa in earlier research (Hiralal 2015: 338-339), less is known about why SADC students experience such a considerable culture shock when they arrive, and the strategies they use to gradually adapt to the new environment. Zar (2009: 7) notes that international students should experience less alienation in countries that are culturally similar to their home countries. Nevertheless, SADC students' accounts of what they called culture shock demonstrate that cultural differences even between neighbouring countries can cause serious challenges for young migrants' settling. I argue that this connects to the students' expectations as well the fact that their move to South Africa has been imposed by a set of circumstances partly out of their own control. As difficulties often eclipse expectations, the notion of struggle becomes a central narrative of migration (Coe 2020: 163-164). Buthelezi (2009: 73-75) claims that international students arriving in South Africa are aware of the foreseeable struggle and the idea that they will have to adjust and change their behaviour in order to 'survive'. Indeed, students often emphasise having survived the struggle of acculturation (Zar 2009: 64).

[95] Interview with Kufara from Zimbabwe at Rhodes University, 13 June 2018.

For SADC students at Rhodes, accepting the relatively more liberal ambience in South Africa was often a question of unlearning. They understood that confronting discrepancies between one's habitual beliefs and the surrounding social environment was a part of their adjustment process. Still, none of the participating students declared having changed their outlook. Indeed, Van Geel & Mazzucato (2020: 122) have noted that young migrants often draw on their cultural and religious beliefs to navigate through difficult periods abroad. Zimbabwean self-identified middle-class undergraduate student Brenda had failed a compulsory module on gender and sexuality because she had answered the exam questions based on her conservative Christian values, but her reaction was a rare case of open defiance. Another Zimbabwean, self-identified 'poor' PhD student Ndabezinhle, describes what happens with the rest: '[P]eople are trying to cope with a socially desirable kind of behaviour, on one hand, because Rhodes University is quite strict with racism and homophobia. […] In the end of the day, we come together, we are fake, we are pretentious. People are not original. It's a place where socially desirable behaviour is everything. […] [T]here are certain things I wouldn't say in public.'[96]

SADC students seemed to recognise the fact that 'surviving' in today's globalised and diverse societies requires successful participation in multiple social and cultural contexts (Esteban-Guitart & Vila 2015: 18). However, they had often been thrown into the new setting of South African higher education as 'constrained cosmopolitans' because of a lack of opportunities in their home countries. Their conservative values and disappointment in the South African realities imply that SADC students are not always the easily adjusting global citizens that they had perhaps imagined themselves as. Instead, SADC students' migration narratives expose how they must carve out new identities and suppress unwanted ones in order to fit in the South African society and the 'bubble' of Rhodes University (as described in Chapter 3). Perseverance despite difficulties is important because these students have at stake not only their own careers, but also their families' class-making projects. Having to 'survive' culture shock can

[96] Interview with Ndabezinhle from Zimbabwe at Rhodes University, 21 May 2018.

therefore be understood as a self-sacrifice narrative that connects the temporal and ethical notions of expectation and what is considered as 'ideal' (Blanes 2014: 416).

Unlike culture shock, which SADC students could eventually 'survive', the recurrent experiences of national stereotyping and constant fear of xenophobia in South Africa were seen as more detrimental to their wellbeing. It is well known that African migrants in the Western world encounter racism and stereotypes and that this can affect their class status (Coe 2020: 161; Yount-André 2020). Despite the abundance of literature on the prevalence of xenophobic and Afrophobic sentiment in South Africa, less is known about how these phenomena affect the class experiences and identities of regional migrants within Africa. At the same time, research on international students' adjustment in South Africa and elsewhere often concentrates more on their academic achievement than social wellbeing (Dominguez-Whitehead and Sing 2015: 80). As well as direct discrimination, perceived prejudice can also impact their adjustment (ibid.: 81).

Xenophobia refers to a general fear of, or hatred toward, foreigners (Nyamnjoh 2006: 5). In South Africa, these sentiments are often seen to arise from the failure of the post-apartheid state to guarantee 'citizenship, rights and entitlements for the majority [...] beyond constitutional provisions and political rhetoric' (Nyamnjoh & Mususa 2012: 225). Having been systematically othered by the colonial- and apartheid-era restrictions of their movement, South Africa's Black people often have feelings of exclusion that manifest themselves as a struggle to justify one's belonging (ibid.: 217-218). Furthermore, a perpetual culture of violence both in physical and structural forms (from forced removals, unjust laws, and police brutality to the physical resistance of apartheid) means that negative sentiments are easily turned into collective atrocities (Landau 2010: 216; von Holdt 2012: 113-114).

Materialisations of xenophobia vary along different social class contexts so that poorer communities face more threats of violence, whereas in middle-class environments such as higher education institutions, incidents tend to be limited to more subtle cases of

social exclusion (Akande et al. 2018: 4; Murara 2011: 10). These classed dynamics of xenophobia connect to the binary understanding of migration in which wealthy global citizens enjoy the opportunities of mobility in a carefree manner whilst the less privileged experience discrimination and downward social mobility (Yount-André 2020: 92). However, students, such as those from SADC countries studying in South Africa, fall in between this dichotomy (see ibid.). To many young people around the world, transnational mobility is a vital part of the life course, but this is often challenged by the increasingly exclusionary tone of political debates (Cheung-Judge et al. 2020: 1).

Xenophobia is a genuine concern for many Black non-South Africans residing in the country (e.g., Landau 2010 and 2011). Although xenophobic sentiments are generally directed towards undocumented immigrants, they also affect documented migrants such as African international students (Hiralal 2015: 333, 341). International students from the African continent report higher rates of nationality-based discrimination both on-campus (21%) and off-campus (38%) in South Africa compared to international students from elsewhere (15% and 23%, respectively), with the rates for Zimbabwean students even higher at 28% and 48% (Lee 2017: 875-876). Xenophobic sentiments at universities often arise from situations where international students are perceived as a threat due to competition for resources (Lee 2017: 875, 879).

Outside of campus, xenophobic discrimination takes place on public transport, in shopping malls, clinics and hospitals, and even churches, and is likely to include more direct actions such as verbal abuse and even physical attacks (Murara 2011: 94, 102). Although encounters with violent xenophobia in Makhanda were infrequent among SADC students, Zimbabwean self-identified middle-class graduate student Russell had witnessed it first-hand on two separate occasions during the xenophobic attacks of 2015:[97] 'I remember the landlords, they came and told us not to leave our house because there were people coming to ask if there were any foreigners staying in our house. […]

[97] See news report by O'Halloran (2015) for a more detailed discussion of the events of the 2015 xenophobic attacks in Makhanda.

They were going to flush us out and beat us up. […] One day, I was driving with my friend, and we were by the Engen garage on your way out of [town]. We were getting burgers, having one of our shenanigans. Then, there were like stun grenades thrown at us, you know, it was really crazy.'[98] However, it was more common for SADC students to recall perceived discrimination than physical threats.

Previous research has shown that it is typical for Black African international students in South Africa to react to the fear of discrimination by self-regulation and that this can have an adverse impact on their wellbeing (Dominguez-Whitehead & Sing 2015: 87). Students use such strategies as learning the basics of a local language, keeping silent in public spaces, limiting social contacts, modifying physical appearance and changing mobility patterns for example by moving around in groups (Murara 2011: 24, 79, 85). Zimbabwean self-identified upper middle-class PhD student Natsai substantiates this understanding as she describes having changed her behaviour in order to avoid becoming a target of xenophobia: '[M]y Uber account doesn't have my name on it. I will use like a quintessential English name like Christine, and I will not put a picture of myself. […] You are potentially going to be picked up by somebody […] who already has an inherent prejudice towards you. […] Yeah, I'm not willing to take that risk.'[99]

SADC students' experiences of xenophobia understandably contribute to their feelings of non-belonging in South Africa. Although they generally understand the origins of anti-immigrationist sentiments in the country, they are disappointed with the way that xenophobia has not been adequately addressed. Zimbabwean undergraduate student Brenda, who self-identifies as middle class, states provokingly: 'We don't have privileges. Even in the South African Constitution, when they say everyone has a right to equality, we're not part of that! We are known as aliens. There's no legal protection for people like us.'[100] While this is not entirely correct, as South Africa's Constitution does prohibit discrimination of non-nationals (Peberdy 2009: 23), the state has in fact been

[98] Interview with Russell from Zimbabwe at Rhodes University, 25 May 2018.
[99] Interview with Natsai from Zimbabwe at Rhodes University, 25 May 2018.
[100] Interview with Brenda from Zimbabwe at Rhodes University, 11 May 2018.

implicated in fuelling xenophobic violence (Everatt 2011; Mosselson 2010). It is therefore important to acknowledge Brenda's remark as it expresses how legal frameworks are not always reflected in the lived experience of migrants.

Whilst few SADC students had encountered violent threats, many reported accounts of xenophobic stereotyping. Self-identifying as middle class, undergraduate student Busisiwe from Eswatini recalls one such incident at Rhodes: 'I remember when I was in first year, we were having an event, and I had heels and a nice dress on, I had make up on and my hair… And this girl made a comment, […] she said: "I didn't know that people from Swaziland look like this", right. I don't remember the exact words but that's what she was implying, that she was expecting someone very, I don't know, rural? I was supposed to be rural? And if it's rural, what's rural, you know? Someone who's very naïve, coming from a country where there's a King. […] Because of where I'm from, I'm expected to dress a certain way, look a certain way, I'm not supposed to have a certain shoe. Where did I get the money from, you know, because most people are poor in Swaziland.'[101]

Busisiwe's narrative is an example of the way in which stereotyping has become entrenched in public discourse in South Africa since ethnic and racial identities were institutionalised during apartheid (Adhikari 2006: 142). Despite the move to formally non-racialist democracy, it is still common to hear such assumptions as 'Whites are racist', 'Indians are hard-working' or that 'Coloureds are gangsters' (see Talbot & Durrheim 2012: 480). These racial stereotypes of South African groups are sometimes connected to stereotypes of other African nationalities, as is illustrated by the racist view held by some White South Africans that 'our Blacks' (i.e., Black South Africans) are lazier and less intelligent than Black people from elsewhere in Africa (Mudavanhu 2020: 351). This kind of 'counter-othering' may be partly responsible for fuelling xenophobia among Black South Africans (ibid.: 355).

[101] Interview with Busisiwe from Eswatini at Rhodes University, 11 May 2018.

Attitudes toward non-South Africans have become increasingly negative especially among disadvantaged Black communities, in which they are often perceived as criminals and opportunists (Akande et al. 2018: 3, 11-12). This generic migrant stereotype is then augmented by several national stereotypes that depict for example Congolese as car guards (Kariithi 2020: 151), Mozambicans as car thieves, Nigerians as drug dealers and Somalis as corrupt entrepreneurs (Mudavanhu 2020: 341-342). In general, migrants from Botswana, Lesotho and Eswatini are better received than those coming from Zimbabwe and Mozambique, and Black migrants from the rest of the continent are considered 'even less desirable' (Rugunanan 2020: 256). These examples illustrate the way in which stereotypes change along with changing social relations (see Talbot & Durrheim 2012: 489) as ethnic stereotypes among South Africans have been adjoined by national stereotypes after the country has opened up to the world after a long period of insulation.

National and ethnic stereotypes can serve a rationalising and justifying function (Talbot & Durrheim 2012: 489). They were used to justify racial segregation during apartheid and are now cited as a rationale for tight immigration control. Learned through socialisation, stereotypes (including both positive and negative beliefs) may be subconscious, and a person may not always agree with them, but they may still influence one's judgment (Gordijn et al. 2008: 590). Ethnicity or 'tribalism' has become an important part of identity across Africa as it has been emphasised or even reinvented in colonial discourses (see Mamdani 1996). In southern Africa, ethnic differences have become aggravated by the unequal regional relations that originally emerged from the consolidation of a regional capitalist economy based on gold mining and migrant labour (Vail 1989a: 7; see also Donham 2011). After an era of post-colonial state-building that focused on nationalist objectives, demands for ethnic representation are again on the rise (Englund 2004: 2) as ethnicity is considered as a more stable identity during times of economic and political instability (Vail 1989a: 17).

As well as contributing to our understanding of how migrants experience stereotyping in South Africa, Busisiwe's account also illustrates the way in which her interaction was influenced by her own perceptions of how others may view her – known as a meta-stereotype (Gordijn et al. 2008: 589). Later during the same interview, Busisiwe described a change in her meta-stereotype through what she calls her 'coming out' as a Swazi: 'I was so determined. We have a Culture Day [at Rhodes], right. I don't think people had ever seen a Swazi dress, so me and my friend in our first year wanted to dress in our cultural clothing. […] So, we did matching colours in our traditional attire, necklaces, the noisy stuff on our feet. […] [W]e walked on campus in our noisy stuff and yeah, we were so proud. […] And I think everyone was asking to take pictures because they had never seen a Swazi 'come out'. […] And now I just speak my language, and people around me actually now want me to speak it, and they're learning it as well. Once I had a positive outlook on it, everyone around me also changed.'[102]

Busisiwe's national 'coming out' took place in the confines of Rhodes University campus. It was also supported by the institution in the form of organising the Culture Day event, within which she was empowered to express her cultural identity. As discussed in Chapter 3, Rhodes is a space where middle-classness is expected. SADC students mainly come from relatively privileged backgrounds and often comfortably fit in that space. However, this comes at the cost of having to fade their foreignness to the background. Events like the Culture Day allow SADC students to safely assert their national identity so that their multiculturalism does not jeopardise their middle-classness. However, previous research has noted that despite their good intentions, multicultural school events often rely on essentialising and superficial notions of culture such as clothing, food, and music, which may in fact reinforce cultural stereotypes and prevent genuine diversity (Dewilde et al. 2021: 200).

It is possible for members of minority groups to construct positive identities by adopting some stereotypical cultural notions for the duration of the event through what is known

[102] Interview with Busisiwe from Eswatini at Rhodes University, 11 May 2018.

as strategic essentialism (Spivak, cited in Dewilde et al. 2021: 205-206). However, as Busisiwe's two narratives confirm, this strategic essentialism often falls short of genuinely challenging the depoliticised discourses of multiculturalism and the supremacy of the dominant majority (Dewilde et al. 2021: 202, 205-206). One central reason for the limited agency that multicultural events and the use of strategic essentialism provides for migrants and minority groups is the fact that they are often organised as distinct one-off events as opposed to being integrated into the everyday functioning of institutions (ibid.: 198-199). Indeed, it seems that international students at Rhodes are only allowed or encouraged to be 'international' once a year. While Busisiwe was inspired to make some aspects of her national culture part of her everyday life on campus, this seemed to be an exception among SADC students.

South Africa remains an unfriendly environment in which SADC students do not generally wish to stay any longer than necessary. Their feelings of non-belonging thus contribute to a sense of temporariness. As Busisiwe's narrative of 'coming out' as a Swazi illustrates, events like Culture Day can alleviate SADC students' negative experience in South Africa by facilitating personal emancipation and raising awareness of cultural diversity within the institution and country (see Dewilde et al. 2021: 197-198). But overall, her story might also suggest that wearing the traditional Swazi attire could be more acceptable than displaying high heels and make up because it fits better with the prevailing stereotypes that South Africans have of Swazi people. Despite the way in which she had used strategic essentialism to gain national recognition and pride, Busisiwe was ultimately unsuccessful in challenging the essentialist power structures that had her ascribed as 'naïve and rural' (see ibid.: 205-206).

For SADC students, this contradiction of institutional discourse celebrating cultural diversity, and xenophobia in the wider society, creates a temporally disjointed experience in which they are expected to display their nationality during the Culture Day but to conceal it for the rest of the year. As their struggles with the initial culture shock and recurrent fears of discrimination demonstrate, SADC students often feel that

despite their temporary status, they are in a permanent state of being a 'sore thumb' (Murphy-Lejeune 2002: 105). As well as suffering from a spatial disconnection or 'sense of elsewhere' that emerges from feelings of home sickness and non-belonging (Chinyamurindi 2018: 215), their time at Rhodes is therefore also characterised by a sense of temporal dislocation.

4.4. Life here: Vital conjunctures at Rhodes University

The pressures of upward social mobility and feelings of non-belonging discussed in the previous sections influence the way in which SADC students experience their temporal existence at Rhodes University. Due to the confluence of these difficult experiences, SADC students emphasise this 'life here' – their time at Rhodes – as a temporary 'pitstop' and focus on getting on with their lives. Transience and future prospection thus become central to the SADC student experience, as Zimbabwean self-identified middle-class undergraduate student Harrison explains:

> 'I need to work, need to put my things together. And maybe after like three, four, five years here, I'm done. Then I'll go back home or something, to my parents, I'm just here temporarily. But that temporary situation is, like, new, and you have to fight in academics, you're fighting to fit in the community and society and you're also having your own problems. So, it's like, you're pulling everything. I'm not here for these, let me just do my work and leave. Inasmuch as it's a space where you want to make friends, […] it's also a space which makes you think "Nah, I can make it alone. I can just do these things and go back home".'[103]

Although temporality is an important question in migration scholarship (e.g., Cwerner 2001), international students' experiences of time have not been widely researched (Nilsson Folke 2018: 1506). As international students typically spend between six months and five years in their study destination, these temporary sojourners fall between the temporal categories of short-term tourists and permanent migrants (Zar

[103] Interview with Harrison from Zimbabwe at Rhodes University, 9 May 2018.

2009: 1). Their transient existence can result in a time-space experience that Nilsson Folke (2018: 1508) describes as 'directionless time' in which the lived reality differs from one's hopes and desires, leaving the path toward future goals unclear. Similarly, SADC students generally have clear ambitions for their future (see Chapter 6 in this thesis), but the difficult experience of their present moment obscures the presumed clear passage between the present and the future.

SADC students form a relatively privileged group compared to many other migrants whose experiences have paved way for research on migration temporalities such as indefinitely detained asylum seekers (see Griffiths 2014) or youth seeking to escape destitution and 'social death' (see Mains 2012). Superficially, SADC students seem to be progressing in their studies and contributing to their families' upward social mobility. In theory, education and networks provide the social and cultural capital necessary for their social becoming (see Kea 2020: 68). But whereas they may have expected university to be a high point in their lives, SADC students seem to just want to 'get their degree and move on'. It is thus unexpected and intriguing that they express similar narratives of 'stuckness' and 'suspended time' as their less advantaged counterparts. Furthermore, as attending higher education is often viewed as part of a clear life course that contributes to an intergenerational class-making project (see Kea 2020: 76), the temporal dislocation experienced by SADC students appears contradictory.

To better understand this presumed inconsistency in SADC students' experiences, it is therefore important to question the prevailing linear perceptions of time and instead focus on the intersections of time and space through which young people navigate by amalgamating the ideas of 'journey' in migration studies and the notion of 'becoming' in youth research (Cranston 2020: 2-3). As Cheung-Judge et al. (2020: 2) argue, young migrants' experience of 'temporal uncertainty of the future intersects with spatial and material uncertainty of new locations'. In the case of SADC students at Rhodes, this ambivalent position both in terms of time and space also connects to their ongoing identity negotiations (see Van Geel & Mazzucato 2018: 2148). The fact that formal

education is usually completed during youth and young adulthood suggests that age is central for the temporal migration experience of international students (see Cheung-Judge et al. 2020: 3).

For some migrants, the sense of precarity relates to the temporary nature of their immigration permits (see Maury 2022). Although SADC students are required to periodically renew their student visas, and some students have stayed at Rhodes much longer than they originally intended, the sense of spatial and temporal uncertainty in these 'constrained cosmopolitans' seems to emerge from something more fundamental than the repressive structures of immigration governance or the prospect of future immobility. Indeed, their accounts endorse the multiple ways in which migration symbolises identity transformation (see Mains 2012: 137).

Instead of understanding one's migration status as a defining attribute, research is increasingly looking at the ways in which mobility intersects with youth and identity (Cranston 2020: 3, 9). As the migration experience of SADC students coincides with growing up and gaining independence, it is important to reflect on what it means for these students to find themselves in this key life stage whilst also going through their other challenges. Although leaving the parental home (or boarding school) and going to university is generally an exciting phase in life, this also amplifies feelings of loneliness and insecurity for young people migrating on their own. Zimbabwean self-identified middle-class postgraduate student Russell describes:

> '[I]n high school, you didn't have to worry about anything, just go to school and come back, eat, sleep. My uniform would be washed for me. But now, I have to do my own laundry, I have to cook my own food, I have to think about a lot of things. I have to clean, I have to balance a whole other life with academics so it becomes a bit overwhelming. […] What matters is what you learn outside the classroom. How do I manage my social life, my emotional, my mental health, my physical health. It becomes a whole new challenge for you, a whole new avenue on which you grow.'[104]

[104] Interview with Russell from Zimbabwe at Rhodes University, 25 May 2018.

As illustrated by Russell's account, the notion of identity transformation is closely linked to the way in which university is generally understood as the end of a presumed vertical ladder of formalised education and a gate to adulthood (see Montgomery & Coté 2003). Following developmentalist ideas, many students, parents, and educators alike believe that higher education produces fully functioning adults both financially, psychologically, and socially (ibid.). However, these assumptions create uncertainty and doubt in the young people who are also faced with fierce competition for opportunities and the risk of future unemployment (Cheung-Judge 2017: 170) as well as social and psychological challenges (McLeigh & Boberiene 2014). For SADC students, studying at a South African university therefore generates pressures of living up to their parents' expectations of academic success and upward social mobility as well as to their own – and society's – ideas of smooth transition to adulthood.

Instead of relying on earlier 'evolutionist' conceptions of the life course that would perhaps view SADC students' temporal dislocation as an anomaly, I argue that their experience can be better understood as a so-called vital conjuncture (see Johnson-Hanks 2002: 866). Problematising the notion of a linear life course, this concept replaces the idea of distinct life stages with a confluence of key life events (ibid.: 872). In this way, SADC students' time at Rhodes is not an uncontested transition from one stage to another, but rather a vital conjuncture in which they navigate the 'intersections of structured expectations and uncertain futures' (ibid.). Their experience of spatial and temporal dislocation can therefore simply suggest that SADC students are at a turning point in their lives, which highlights the intersections of their age, educational and migration pathways as well as the underlying expectations of contributing to an intergenerational class-making project.

Zimbabwean self-identified middle-class student Harrison describes how these simultaneous pressures create a vital conjuncture:

> ‘As international students, we are living up to society’s expectations, to what we want, we hope, we are living up to some people’s expectations. We’re living in a box where some people have drawn already that you’re supposed to be here. […] I think it’s […] the fear of being left alone when you’re far from home […] so then you ask yourself who’s going to pick me up, like, so who’s going to be on my side. […] [My mum] was the one to push me. Even now, she’ll be telling you “Don’t forget where you come from […] So, push, fight”. […] So, it’s like, if these people are seeing this, so why am I not seeing it in myself. At the end of the day, it’s like, I’m pushing, not to disappoint those people who think there is something I can achieve.’[105]

Harrison’s multifaceted account of living in the present moment shows how the idea of vital conjunctures can counter the recent emphasis on ‘becoming’ and futurity in youth studies, which risks overshadowing the idea of ‘being’ (see Holloway et al. 2019: 467). Furthermore, the lives of young people connect not only to the future but also ‘longer-term histories such as colonialism or postcolonial social practices’ (Radcliffe and Webb, cited in Holloway et al. 2019: 468). As well as emanating from particular social relations and contexts (see Huijsmans et al. 2021: 9), young people’s aspirations are framed by social institutions and are also specific to a certain time (Johnson-Hanks 2002: 872, 878). This may sound as if SADC students have little agency in the vital conjunctures that they find themselves in, but as they live through these ‘durations of uncertainty and potential’ (ibid.: 871), young people are able to shape both their own futures and societal trajectories (Holloway et al. 2019: 468).

The vital conjuncture that SADC students experience while attending Rhodes University exposes an interesting contradiction regarding their aspirations and agency. Social inequalities can be reflected in the differential levels to which one is able to ‘plan and live a life course’ (Bear 2014: 644). This way, the more privilege, the more sense of control we should have over our temporal existence (Atkinson 2017: 645). However, as I have shown in this chapter hitherto, SADC students’ ‘capacity to aspire’ is in fact precisely what creates this ‘consciousness of lack’ (see Pels 2015: 788). The lack of a desirable present existence – at least compared to the prior expectations that the

[105] Interview with Harrison from Zimbabwe at Rhodes University, 9 May 2018.

students had of living and studying in South Africa – then leads to a sense of temporary loss of control. On the other hand, harbouring great aspirations for the future can also devalue the present moment even further, as it becomes 'something that needs to be worked upon' (ibid.: 786; see also Berlant 2011).

4.5. Life there: Negotiating class and imagining futures

The dual nature of a vital conjuncture as a 'duration of uncertainty and potential' (Johnson-Hanks 2002: 871) entails that it can create a sense of temporal dislocation but can also offer the potential to navigate between the intersections of agency, social forces, and change (see Vigh 2009a: 420). Indeed, life 'back home' is linked to SADC students' current 'life here' through their constant renegotiations of their social class identities. When arriving at Rhodes University in South Africa, Zimbabwean self-identified middle-class undergraduate student Harrison was for the first time in his life expected to display certain markers of class advantage, such as language and manners:

> '[W]hen I came here, [the South African students] were like "Ah, you're one of those rich kids from Zimbabwe, you are here like an international student, so, talk to us!". […] [But] when I try to talk to them, they're like "but your English sounds different from other Zimbabweans. Now it's real, now it's deep". […] They first check your background, where you come from, can you speak English fluently, what kind of food stuff do you know, all that stuff. […] [T]here are things that people are expecting you to know already when you come here. […] So, for you, even if you are having language difficulties […], even if you are not used to this, you want to impress them, and you also want to take part. […] [I]t's one of those things, it pushes me.'[106]

In Harrison's narrative, the experience of educational migration connects closely to pressures of upward social mobility and illustrates how his self-proclaimed middle-class identity differs from the expectations of a particular type of middle-classness at Rhodes. Harrison explained that he was not used to speaking English before coming to Rhodes,

[106] Interview with Harrison from Zimbabwe at Rhodes University, 9 May 2018.

as he had gone to a mission school in Zimbabwe, where the main language was Shona. He was also more familiar eating with his hands or with a spoon and felt self-conscious when having to use a knife and a fork in the dining hall at Rhodes. Another Zimbabwean, self-identified upper middle-class PhD student Mudiwa, describes a somewhat contrary experience of feeling devalued in South Africa purely because of her nationality and despite her upper middle-class identity:

> '[W]hen I came here, I'm sorry but I was angry that people thought I was poor, expected me to be poor. I'm not poor, I don't how to be poor, how to speak poor. […] It's not easy to just bite your tongue, that's the flipside of it. There are other stories than the struggling immigrant. […] But there's never been room for me to speak because it's supposed to be a sad story. It's frustrating that even if I take you out for this fancy lunch, you still look down upon me. […] Here, they feel safe, it's their country and all that. For us, that changes.'[107]

Mudiwa's account suggests that understandings of migrants' class statuses in South Africa do not always match migrants' self-perceptions and that one's nationality may be seen as a more important social distinction than their class identity. Albeit contradictory, the statements by these two Zimbabwean students illustrate how the idea of stable social class identities through the life course is often complicated by migration (Coe & Pauli 2020: 3, 9-10). Indeed, SADC students' narratives seem to match those of other migrants who have described 'simultaneous upward and downward social mobility' (Rye 2019: 37).

SADC students' experiences confirm the idea that migrants can occupy multiple statuses in different locations simultaneously (Coe & Pauli 2020: 9-10). Due to the need for constant temporal and transnational renegotiations, migrants' identities are characteristically 'fluid and flexible' (Seo 2019: 190). However, this continuous identity renegotiation can lead to feelings of ambivalence in which migrants can no longer claim belonging either 'here' or 'there' (Rye 2019: 37). Zimbabwean self-identified upper

[107] Interview with Mudiwa from Zimbabwe at Rhodes University, 15 June 2018.

middle-class PhD student Mudiwa delicately captures this ambivalent aspect of migrant temporality:

> '[S]o much of your life is emptied out the moment you cross that border to establish yourself somewhere else. […] [I]t's so much more complicated. Beyond the visa process, beyond everything. Having to establish yourself beyond being an immigrant. […] There's life here and there's life there, it's not linear. […] It's changing in Zimbabwe and it's changing here. You're caught in between. When you go to Zimbabwe, you have to be someone else and something else, and when you come here, you have to be something else. For me, I definitely experience it like that.'[108]

Globally, international students form a diverse group representing 'varying levels of economic, cultural, and social capital' (Darvin & Norton 2014: 112). In their study destinations, they are likely to group together with others from similar class backgrounds and therefore form new classes (ibid.: 113). This seems to be true for SADC students, many of whom depict the friends in their circle as relatively similar in terms of issues like free-time activities, taste, beliefs, and spending money. They explain feeling uncomfortable spending time with people who cannot afford the same things as them or state that they have nothing to talk about with people who are living completely different lifestyles. Some students feel closer in class terms to other international students, as Zimbabwean self-identified middle-class student Brenda conveys: 'With my friends, I think we're on the same level. My friends online-shop. All the packages that come are for the international students. We go out for dinner and that's normal.'[109]

However, SADC students also experience considerable fissures in their class positions between 'here' (at Rhodes) and 'there' (back home). As Pauli (2020: 118) argues, migrants' negotiations between translocal spaces can offer 'insight into change of class position over time'. Tensions can emerge when a migrant becomes accustomed to new ways of life (Carling et al. 2015: 21), which back home may get interpreted as denial or

[108] Interview with Mudiwa from Zimbabwe at Rhodes University, 15 June 2018.
[109] Interview with Brenda from Zimbabwe at Rhodes University, 11 May 2018.

abandonment of their roots. When I ask Zimbabwean self-identified middle-class student Kufara whether she thinks her social class has changed since she came to South Africa, she replies: '[T]he food that I'm buying, basically the cheese and things that I wasn't able to buy at home, but I can buy here because it's cheaper.' However, she notes that this improvement in her purchasing power brought on by her move to South Africa is misunderstood at home: '[G]rowing up, I never liked *sadza* [Zimbabwean staple food made from maize flour]. […] So, when I got here, there was this opportunity not to eat it every day, so I make the most out of it. So, when I go back home, people think, "Oh, now you don't eat this anymore".'[110]

As SADC students' narratives confirm, migrants face expectations both back home and in their new environment (Carling et al. 2015: 21). The separate spaces of 'here' and 'back home' thus come together to create spatial and temporal continuums through 'acts of exchange and reciprocity' (Pauli 2020: 119). SADC students' negotiations between Rhodes University and home become complicated as each place is given both positive and negative attributes. In South Africa, they are expected to hide their foreignness, and in order to 'survive' at Rhodes University, they need to perform their middle-classness. However, they also have certain freedoms being so far from home. Back home, expectations of SADC students' success abroad create a situation in which students often keep quiet about their difficulties because their friends and families have different assumptions of life in 'developed and prosperous' South Africa and therefore rarely understand their struggles. Furthermore, the positive aspect of having close social relationships back home often comes with the negative component of tighter social control (Carling et al. 2015: 22).

Indeed, when travelling back home during university vacation periods, SADC students experience a periodic sense of regression as they are once again in the role of a child and therefore in the sphere of the home community's social control. Self-identified middle-class student Sherry from Zimbabwe explains how a change in her family's living

[110] Interview with Kufara from Zimbabwe at Rhodes University, 13 June 2018.

arrangements occasionally makes her feel that life is now easier in South Africa as compared to back home:

> 'The issue at home is that my parents took in my two cousins, so they're staying with us now, so at home there's never just the four of us. I've had to start sharing my space with other people, so my room is no longer my room, it's the girls' room. I don't have my own space. So, when I'm here [at Rhodes], it's easier, I can just lock my room and just chill, watch as many episodes and be sure that the data bundle isn't completely finished. I cook for myself, there's no one else I need to feed, there are less obligations and I enjoy that.'[111]

Despite the challenges of their 'life here' at Rhodes University, it nevertheless offers SADC students something valuable – freedom and independence. Furthermore, SADC students still believe that their transnational education experience will ultimately provide them with the opportunity of upward social mobility. Because of the difficulties they are facing, they are focused on the future beyond their studies, which, albeit uncertain, is seen as better than their time at Rhodes. This supports the idea that migration is typically shaped by future hopes (Cheung-Judge et al. 2020: 4). The notions of aspiration and future prospection are especially important to migrant students, for whom transnational education is central in '(re)producing social status, cultural capital, and the acquisition of citizenship' (Kea 2020: 68).

Whilst many SADC students have clear career plans (see Chapter 6 in this thesis), they seem to be more uncertain about where these ambitions might take them in spatial terms. However, none of the students participating in this research expressed any interest in staying in Makhanda beyond their studies. Representing various levels of modesty and pragmatism, students see their future selves either back home, somewhere else in South Africa or even further afield. Self-identified upper-class undergraduate student Daniela from Eswatini articulates: 'I don't see myself living here. If I see myself living here, I want to live in P.E. [Port Elizabeth] […] But I want to end up in the US, doing a postgrad or something. Or somewhere in Europe, or even Southeast

[111] Interview with Sherry from Zimbabwe at Rhodes University, 14 May 2018.

Asia – Malaysia or something. […] I'm uncomfortable in South Africa.'[112] Despite his different background, Zimbabwean self-identified working-class PhD student Theodore endorses this ideal of 'elsewhere': 'I think I've lived in South Africa for too long, ten years is just more than enough for me. I feel like I've kind of been narrow-minded because of being in this space for too long.'[113]

To cope in the difficult present moment and to maintain their visions of linear mobility despite a temporary sense of loss of control, SADC students use certain tools of social navigation to connect their immediate struggles to more positive future prospects (see Vigh 2009a: 423). By envisaging their 'life here' as temporary and expressing narratives of sacrifice, persistence and survival, SADC students can diminish the negative impact of the difficult present moment on their identity and future aspirations (see Rye 2019: 39-40; Seo 2019: 202). Although SADC students are relatively more privileged than many other migrants in demoralising situations, they use a similar strategy of putting other aspects of their lives 'on hold' as they focus on their studies, thus placing long-term hope in a 'future *elsewhere*' (see Kleist 2017a: 11, 13, emphasis in original).

This idea of preserving long-term hope may help us to understand why so many SADC students told me they were committed to moving back 'home' at some point in the future (see Kleist 2017a: 12-13) despite the more abundant opportunities in South Africa or in the Global North. Zimbabwean self-identified middle-class student Brenda expresses a rather romanticised vision: 'I definitely want to go back home. […] I hope that as an aspiring lawyer, and as an aspiring political scientist, that I can take these things to my country and help better my country.'[114] By asserting their belonging to the homeland rather than the new environment, migrants can underline an expected upward trajectory whilst downplaying the current uncomfortable experience of being temporarily 'stuck' that they associate with Rhodes University and South Africa, and through which they must 'survive' (see Rye 2019: 37-38).

[112] Interview with Daniela from Eswatini at Rhodes University, 16 May 2018.
[113] Interview with Theodore from Zimbabwe at Rhodes University, 23 May 2018.
[114] Interview with Brenda from Zimbabwe at Rhodes University, 11 May 2018.

Depending on the situation, return migration may been seen as either success or failure (Gmelch, cited in Jeffery & Murison 2011: 132). Migrants often tend to stay longer than they initially intended, in which case a long-term 'back-up plan' to return home may help mitigate any negative feelings or sense of 'permanent temporariness' in the present moment (Baas & Yeoh 2019: 164; Rye 2019: 40). Moreover, SADC students may perceive the potential of return migration as a success because they feel in control of their choice, as they seem to consider their challenges at Rhodes a temporary phase of discomfort and anxiety on an otherwise vertical class ladder. Indeed, planning return migration can be seen as an active engagement with both the past and the future (Carling et al. 2015: 19). As middle- and upper-class youth are more likely to be able to embody 'active' temporalities that emphasise for example planning and taking opportunities (Longo 2018: 401, 408), this idea of future as reasonably controllable is a typical temporality for those with relative class advantage (Atkinson 2017: 659).

Yet, SADC students' future spatial trajectories are tightly connected to their career ambitions. Zambian self-identified middle-class student Samuel portrays a contradiction between his imagined career path in diplomacy and international relations, and his long-term dream of returning to the homeland: 'To be very honest, I understand the path that I'm on and that it requires, it may require me to be in a different place from time to time. So, I'm open to the idea of being here, I'm open to it… however, I would love to go back home. I would love to raise my children there.'[115] Indeed, the ability to plan and control one's future does not make the choice easy, as evidenced by Zimbabwean self-identified upper middle-class PhD student Natsai's dilemma regarding her future options:

> 'I live in a reality, in which, if I decide to create a, or rather put down my foot for the rest of my life here [in South Africa], I will probably have a middle- to upper-class existence. If I move [back] home, I'm going to have a working-class to middle-class existence. […] I'm not sure if I'm willing to sacrifice that comfort and my views, my plans for

[115] Interview with Samuel from Zambia at Rhodes University, 14 June 2018.

> the future in Zimbabwe for the idea of being middle to upper class in South Africa. […] I don't know if it's worth it for me. I want to go home, I want to send my kids to the schools I went to, visit my grandmother on the weekends and do all the things that people who live at home get to do. I don't get to do that, and the older I get, I'm just like I'm not really sure it's worth it.'[116]

In her deliberation, Natsai considers both the social and economic aspects of her possible return as she tries to decide which way to go. Whereas labour migrants are often only able to move 'back home' to retire, SADC students have more agency and can therefore place more value on such issues as social relationships and lifestyle (see Carling et al. 2015: 21). It is also likely that SADC students' ambitions for return migration change as they move on to another life stage, their parents back home need more help, or transitions occur in their home countries (ibid.). For example, the political change that followed the retirement of Zimbabwe's long-term leader, Robert Mugabe, in 2017 (and his death in 2019) may have inspired more Zimbabwean students to dream of a better future in their homeland.

Furthermore, SADC students express clear interest in merging the positive aspects of both their homeland and South Africa in a way that may lead them to follow 'continually circular pathways' (Baas & Yeoh 2019: 164). Zimbabwean self-identified upper middle-class student Simbarashe contemplates: 'I'm hoping to be able to move between the two countries. Learn a lot from South Africa, go back to Zim, try to implement, like, what Zim is capable of holding at the time. Come back, learn some more, go back and literally upgrade with the people, just slow steps together. Get us on the same level and benefit mutually from each other.'[117] Simbarashe's vision matches the idea of 'migration and non-migration as umbilically conjoined', thus referring to a transnational temporality in which places and processes become integrated in time (ibid.: 161-162).

[116] Interview with Natsai from Zimbabwe at Rhodes University, 25 May 2018.
[117] Interview with Simbarashe from Zimbabwe at Rhodes University, 15 June 2018.

As Koundoura (2012: 5) puts it, transnationalism is identified 'by its forms, its negotiation of time, and its production of a space that does not nostalgically point either to that of the nation or to a future devoid of nations'. Historically, migrants have used their social presence or 'meta-presence' in the form of remittances and other possibilities offered by their spatial mobility (Vigh 2009b: 98) to remain part of the family's solidarity group (Kroeker 2020:143). However, transnationalism can also be maintained for example through social networks and political engagement in a way that has the potential to bring about even wider societal changes in the country of origin (Vertovec, cited in Tedeschi et al. 2022: 606).

The idea of transnationalism – as envisaged by Zimbabwean Simbarashe – may challenge the bifocality of 'here' and 'there' (Jeffery & Murison 2011: 136) as it helps keep the migrant within the family sphere even when their migration trajectories do not follow the old patterns of 'settlement, integration and […] eventual return home' (Baas and Yeoh 2019: 162). Indeed, even in the case of return migration, migrants are likely to sustain connections to their former 'host' country through 'reverse transnationalism' (Tedeschi et al. 2022: 613). For SADC students, this type of a transnational future with no fundamental restrictions of time or space may seem especially appealing as they experience such a stark contrast between their challenging present life and an imagined future elsewhere.

4.6. Conclusions

This chapter has discussed the multiple ways in which SADC students' and their families' aspirations of a better life have created expectations of social mobility as well as social becoming, and how these expectations have been challenged by the difficult experience that SADC students have whilst living and studying in South Africa. Together with the key events of migration and transition to adulthood, these experiences form a vital conjuncture that is characterised by both uncertainty and potential. Their sense of a temporary spatial and temporal dislocation at Rhodes suggests that SADC students are

oblivious to what research had determined years ago: that their transition to adulthood was never going to be complete or uncontested (see Johnson-Hanks 2002: 865) and that their expectations of coherence would not match the reality of 'modernity's aporias' (Guyer 2007: 418).

I have shown how SADC students' belief in linear progress stems from a developmentalist metanarrative and is heightened by the way in which their aspirations are located within a social context that emphasises class mobility and meritocracy. As their difficulties in South Africa affect their sense of control of their social becoming, they use narratives of survival and sacrifice to diminish the impact of 'immediate social dangers' whilst imagining 'better futures' (Vigh 2009b: 95, 97). SADC students are relatively privileged migrants and are thus often able to use their resources to create a sense of continuity (Baas & Yeoh 2019: 165). However, their class advantage does not make it an easy journey, but rather one that requires constant social navigation (see Vigh 2009a) using both their own ambitions and their intergenerational negotiations. Even in SADC students' future hopes, the idea of return or onward migration is partly based on so-called 'rejection-based transnationalism', which entails that their experiences of discrimination trigger a desire to identify with the home country rather than South Africa (see Tedeschi et al. 2022: 607; see also Chapter 5 in this thesis).

Guyer (2007: 417) reminds us that the present moment is typically experienced as either 'a luxury or tragedy'. Examining young adults living through a vital conjuncture in the highly unequal context of South Africa higher education is therefore unlikely to provide balanced accounts, as comprehensive narratives only formulate in retrospect (see ibid.: 411, 417). As we often use the future as an end point to determine our 'present course of action' (Miyazaki 2006: 157), it is important to take ideas and experiences of time into account. For migrants like SADC students, their focus on a better future elsewhere is therefore an active rationale for directing their action as well as it is a strategy for making sense of their past and present lives.

5. TOO RICH TO CARE? SADC STUDENTS, PROTESTS AND IDENTITY POLITICS AT RHODES UNIVERSITY[118]

5.1. Introduction

Since the end of apartheid in 1994, abolishing inequalities based on race, class, and gender has become the 'Fanonian moment'[119] for the so-called born free generation in South Africa (Gibson 2017). Tertiary education has been prominent in this pursuit, both in terms of government priorities and as a site of struggle towards transformation. The plight of South African students gained global recognition during the so-called fallist campus movements of #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall in 2015-2016,[120] which demanded affordable and decolonised university education. At historically White universities, these demands were especially associated with the ways in which institutional cultures had not adapted to changing student demographics, making many Black students feel increasingly alienated (see Tabensky & Matthews 2015).

Deriving from students' experiences of Black pain (Ngoasheng & Gachago 2017: 188), the protests put a discourse of identity, intersectionality and belonging firmly at the heart of South African higher education. The following quotations from students and academics, speaking during the fallist campus movements of 2015-2016, highlight the way in which Black pain was conceptualised in the protests and how it was harnessed for political action: '#FeesMustFall isn't just about fees. It's the face of a national revolution that will tackle the mistakes made by our forefathers, the generation of 1976 and the generation of the Freedom Charter. This is the means of steering the wheel

[118] A shorter version of Chapter 5 has been published as Tagliabue, V. V. (2022) 'Too rich to care? Southern African (SADC) international students navigating transnationalism and class at South African universities.' *Journal of Southern African Studies* 48 (1), 5-21.

[119] This refers to the anti-colonial writer Frantz Fanon's phrase: 'each generation must […] discover its mission, fulfil it, or betray it' (Fanon 1968, 209).

[120] Fallism is a decolonial ideology that was the framework behind the student movements in South Africa during 2015-2016 (Ahmed 2019: 147). In addition to #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall, I will discuss the rape protest at Rhodes University known as #RUReferencelist, as this took place during the same time and was regarded by students as a movement within the same ideological framework.

towards eradicating the mental chains of the masters' (Ndelu 2016: 21). 'They don't understand our situation as Black students, they don't represent us' (Maringira & Gukurume 2016: 33-34). 'Who is going to liberate the Black man, to fight for her? It is us Blacks. […] If we don't fight it will be business as usual' (ibid.: 37).

Due to the way in which post-apartheid South African universities have been largely harnessed for nation-building (Healy-Clancy 2017: 2; see also Chapter 2 in this thesis), the perspective of international students on South African campuses has thus far not been adequately accounted for in academia or in the media, especially in the context of the fallist protests. Whilst Ahmed (2019: 117-118) and Isdahl (2016) have discussed students' experiences of exclusion during the protests, neither speaks specifically of international students. Kasembeli (2020), Majee (2020), and Raghuram et al. (2020) have addressed the position of African international students in South African higher education in terms of tuition fees, xenophobia and the tension between transformation and internationalisation. However, none of these studies focuses on the lived experience of international students through interview data.

Institutional diversity strategies within higher education often concentrate on the 'big three' of class, gender, and race identities, whereas transnationalism is more commonly neglected (Hearn & Louvrier 2015: 7,9). On the other hand, research on international student identities typically focuses on nationality without considering students' other intersecting identities (e.g., Carnine 2015). Referring specifically to the considerable Zimbabwean community at Rhodes University, Goga (2018: 80-81) identifies a need to further explore the intersection of race and class with nationality. This chapter will take on that challenge.

The 2015-2016 fallist protests were an example of hardening identity boundaries among students, which led to new forms of othering at South African universities. Students who did not participate in the protests – including many SADC students – were marginalised because they were assumed not to support the fallist objectives. Although SADC

students mainly explained their non-participation with reasons related to their precarious immigration status, they often faced accusations of being 'too rich to care' about rising fees. While identity politics can be useful in challenging dominant structures and questioning prevailing silences at South African universities, it can also create divisions between students who claim – or indeed, are ascribed – certain identities (Kamsteeg 2016).

This chapter maintains that contentious identity politics on South African campuses result from conflicting appeals for recognition (see Taylor 1994; Englund & Nyamnjoh 2004). The fallist protesters' objectives were to gain recognition for the plight of poor Black students and to encourage others to recognise their own privilege (Nyamnjoh 2016: 84, 94). SADC students, on the other hand, were uneasy about being potentially misrecognised as more privileged than they believed themselves to be. This chapter explores these fissures, beginning with a discussion of why and how SADC students felt marginalised by the identity politics of the fallist protests. I then examine how concepts of identity and intersectionality have been deployed in the context of protest discourse at South African universities. I then move on to problematise SADC students' narratives by illustrating how they also contributed to the argumentative climate during the fallist protests. By highlighting the concerns of both these groups, this chapter illuminates the intersections of transnationalism, race and class in South Africa and the SADC region.

5.2. 'The struggle is yours but not really yours' – How campus protests marginalised SADC students

Most SADC students interviewed for this thesis considered economic inequality and insufficient state support for the poorest students as a legitimate rationale for the #FeesMustFall protest, as self-identified middle-class student Busisiwe from Eswatini outlines: 'I understand why fees must fall because I'm raised by single mother, and I can

see how hard it is to pay fees, and fees are high.'[121] As mainly Black Africans, they also understood the reasoning of the #RhodesMustFall demand for universities to make reparations for their colonial past because it was making the increasingly diverse student body uncomfortable and resentful. Concerns for gender equality and women's safety were also taken seriously, and the anti-rape campaign #RUReferenceList[122] had the support of several SADC students. Still, most of them did not actually participate in any of the protests, as conveyed in these accounts by two self-identified middle-class students, Zimbabwean Sherry and Busisiwe from Eswatini, respectively:

> 'It was my first experience of a protest. The thing is, being Zimbabwean and having gone through the 2008 period [of unrest], you don't engage, you don't say anything. You don't go out in the street because you might get into trouble, you disappear. […] I was too scared. Any time I heard singing, I felt anxious. […] Coming to a place where you could really express yourself publicly was mind boggling and scary.'[123]

> 'I felt helpless. I had never seen a protest in my life, never in my years before had I seen guns or such violence, people, students throwing stuff, things burning. In the mornings, I go jogging and I would see on the roads that tyres had been burning and stuff. It was very overwhelming, and I didn't know what to do.'[124]

As evidenced by these narratives, some SADC students felt anxious when protests broke out at Rhodes University during 2015-2016. The danger of violence was either all too familiar or completely alien to them, but in both cases avoiding engagement with the protests seemed to be the preferred response. This issue may not have been fully understood by South African students, who had grown up in a country where risk and sacrifice related to protest were historically important narrative tropes as mass mobilisation eventually helped to terminate apartheid rule (Chance 2015). Furthermore, South African protesters' rights were – at least in theory – protected by the

[121] Interview with Busisiwe from Eswatini at Rhodes University, 11 May 2018.
[122] In April 2016, a list of male students accused of sexual violence at Rhodes University was circulated on social media, instigating an anti-rape campaign known as #RUReferenceList (Jansen 2017: 94-5).
[123] Interview with Sherry from Zimbabwe at Rhodes University, 14 May 2018.
[124] Interview with Busisiwe from Eswatini at Rhodes University, 11 May 2018.

Constitution.[125]

In addition to the bewilderment generated by South African protest culture, SADC students were also apprehensive due to their precarious immigration status, as the following testimony by self-identified middle-class student Busisiwe from Eswatini reveals: 'I couldn't do anything […] [S]ometimes people would get arrested if you walk to the library and haven't done anything. If you get arrested, you go to jail, and if that happened to me, I wouldn't be able to come back and study in South Africa, so that's already my education gone. So, I had to consider that.'[126] SADC students feared that getting a criminal record would mean an effective ban from higher education in South Africa. Given the increasingly strict immigration regulations in many countries worldwide, obtaining a visa anywhere would also likely become more difficult for someone holding a criminal record. For Zimbabwean students, this was an especially terrifying vision due to the dire situation back home, as expressed by self-identified working-class PhD student Fadzai: 'Do you need a lifetime ban of no education outside of the country when your country is just a mess as it is now?'[127]

Finishing their degrees was thus often the highest priority for SADC students who had strict visa timelines for completing their studies, as Fadzai succinctly articulated: '[T]he struggle is yours but not really yours. […] As a foreigner, you have so many things weighed against you, and you have deadlines to meet! You can't be *toyi-toying* on the road for eight hours when you have a thesis that is waiting to be done.'[128] For Fadzai, prioritising her studies was also combined with scepticism about the impact of protesting: 'And we can protest all year, it's not like they're not going to hike the fees. If they want to do it, they'll do it. It's not like standing outside holding placards for a whole month is going to stop them. Understand that your place as a foreign student is very

[125] However, South Africans' trust in the protection of law has eroded since the Marikana massacre of 2012 in which 34 protesting miners were shot dead by the police (Gumede 2015: 327-43).
[126] Interview with Busisiwe from Eswatini, 11 May 2018.
[127] Interview with Fadzai from Zimbabwe at Rhodes University, 10 May 2018.
[128] Interview with Fadzai from Zimbabwe at Rhodes University, 10 May 2018.

delicate and you sit on the fence: do you join, do you not?'[129] SADC students' scepticism concerning the realisation of fee-free education was furthered by suspicions that even if fees were removed, it would only apply to South African students. Some students speculated that removal of fees from local students might result in fee increases for international students to compensate for the lost income (see Raghuram et al. 2020: 1-2 for comparison).

This was not the only point causing detachment between SADC students and South Africans with regard to the protests. Some SADC students like Zimbabwean self-identified upper middle-class PhD student Mudiwa were disappointed by the fact that so few South African students had supported them in earlier protests against xenophobia and felt that there was a lack of reciprocity: '[Y]ou say we should attend these things, but because you're not affected by xenophobia, then you won't come. That's not how it works. […] If we're in solidarity, then let's be in solidarity. Let it not be solidarity [only] for your protest.'[130] Furthermore, news reports from 2015-2016 confirm that many international students across South Africa were concerned about the additional financial cost and visa problems caused by protest interruptions to their study, and uneasy about the protesters' violent strategy and seeming lack of respect for authority (da Silva 2016). Although still scarce, some scholarship has also emerged linking international students' non-participation in the fallist movements to fears of encountering xenophobia (Kasembeli 2020: 11-15).

The greatest objection for the majority of SADC students, however, was the violent means of the protests, and there was simply no sympathy for destructive action. Zimbabwean self-identified middle-class postgraduate student Scott argued: '[Y]ou can't campaign for free education and then go trash one of the buildings. In other universities, they burned down uni buses, they burned down a Law library. I mean gosh, you guys just literally shot yourself in the foot'.[131] Some SADC students, such as

[129] Interview with Fadzai from Zimbabwe at Rhodes University, 10 May 2018.
[130] Interview with Mudiwa from Zimbabwe at Rhodes University, 15 June 2018.
[131] Interview with Scott from Zimbabwe at Rhodes University, 17 May 2018.

Zimbabwean self-identified 'poor' PhD student Ndabezinhle, extended the criticism from the use of violence to South African student politics more generally: 'I don't really believe in student politics in South Africa, where people have to burn down things, insult the vice chancellor to send a message across, I don't believe in that. You see, in South Africa, the loudest and most influential student either lacks information, or has information, but is trying to manipulate other students to advance their careers.'[132]

As conveyed by the above comments, SADC students had manifold reasons for their non-participation in campus protests. Although many South African students were also affected by the disruption caused by the protests (Nyamnjoh 2016: 202-203), this chapter illustrates that international students shared some specific concerns. Raghuram et al. (2020: 98, 101-102) argue that, despite common assumptions, 'not all international students are privileged' and in fact they often face an extra financial burden due to foreign levies and unfavourable economic circumstances in their home countries. Furthermore, Majee (2020: 142) explains that the contradiction between local transformation pressures and global trends of internationalisation restricts SADC students' ability to claim belonging in South African higher education as they fall between the binary of local and global.

Chapter 4 explained how SADC students had arrived in South Africa as 'constrained cosmopolitans' and how they were living through a 'vital conjuncture' of migration and higher education whilst also contributing to their families' class-making projects. South Africa to them was a hostile environment in which they encountered class animosity and xenophobia. These issues were further aggravated during the fallist protests. Building on the idea of belonging and claim-making, I suggest that the genuine concerns of SADC students have generally been misrecognised in the struggle for transformation in South African higher education, which otherwise has attracted a lot of attention in academic and other writing. However, I also argue that some of the SADC students' grievances stem from the divergent ways in which they and the fallist protesters identified

[132] Interview with Ndabezinhle from Zimbabwe at Rhodes University, 21 May 2018.

themselves. Indeed, students were not excluded on the grounds of their nationality or class *per se* but based on how they were perceived to be positioned within the fallist discourse.

SADC students' non-participation in the protests irritated some protesters because they assumed that SADC students were too wealthy to relate to the problems faced by poor students or to be concerned about rising fees. This is illustrated by Zimbabwean self-identified middle-class student Brenda's passionate account of the #RUReferenceList protests:

> '[M]y parents always told me "[Brenda], please make sure you do well, the one thing we want for you is to make us proud". So, I would go to class despite the cost, and then we would have [the #RUReferenceList protesters] come and they're like "Why are you still in class, you're clearly perpetuating rape culture! […]" Sometimes they would get violent, they would throw bottles at us.'[133]

SADC students themselves were insulted by these allegations and felt that the motives for their non-participation had been misunderstood. Brenda's further narrative conveys this fittingly: 'What is wrong with you children? […] You have an opportunity to learn here, and instead of taking advantage of it, you're smashing computers. Just because I go to my lectures doesn't mean I support rape culture. I'm here to get my degree and go back to my country.'[134] Unable to make their voices heard, SADC students withdrew from the protest action and the reasons for their non-participation were left unrecognised.

SADC students' experience of misrecognition was partly related to the transnational nature of their identity. SADC students are not a visible group in South Africa, and they are even considered home students in terms of fees and accommodation (SADC 1997: 11; see also Chapter 2 in this thesis). South Africa to them is not an exotic destination

[133] Interview with Brenda from Zimbabwe at Rhodes University, 11 May 2018.
[134] Interview with Brenda from Zimbabwe at Rhodes University, 11 May 2018.

but a place to go shopping or attend boarding school. Although SADC students generally identified according to their nationality, their lived experience was characteristically transnational.[135] This was reflected in SADC students' self-identification. I argue that with its 'processual and in-becoming character' (see Tedeschi et al. 2022: 603), transnationalism rather than internationalism best describes these young adults who use their cross-border connections to build their identities and thus to confront the prevailing 'local-global dichotomy' (see Majee 2020).

However, in South Africa, this dichotomy was sometimes difficult to escape as the pressure to prioritise the needs of disadvantaged South Africans was immense. Most SADC students interviewed for this thesis emphasised that they were just as affected by the deficiencies of South African higher education as local students. Instead of being entitled and unconcerned, they were restricted by both their specific position as international students and the harsh attitudes of the protesters. This left SADC students feeling misunderstood and unfairly victimised, as poignantly expressed by Zimbabwean self-identified middle-class student Sherry:

> 'The onset [sic] was that they were only fighting for free education for South Africans and international students don't have a say. "If they're here, they can afford it." And I was thinking, you don't know what my parents have to go through [for me] to be here. […] In terms of social class, it placed us on a pedestal that wasn't necessarily true and reflective of where we actually stood.'[136]

Isdahl (2016: 16-21) has identified feelings of exclusion and non-belonging based on gender, language, race, and national origin as reasons for some students' non-participation in the #RhodesMustFall protest. She concludes that the movement 'has certain characteristics that make up its reputation of who belongs. For those who do not match this description, it is a time of grappling with questions of belonging, understanding, and support' (ibid.: 21). According to Ahmed (2019: 117-118), this

[135] For a more detailed discussion on transnationalism, see Tedeschi et al. (2022).
[136] Interview with Sherry from Zimbabwe at Rhodes University, 14 May 2018.

hardening of group identity boundaries within #RhodesMustFall happened partly due to internal fragmentation. I argue that this was further reflected in the movement's worsening relationship with non-participating students, and that this pattern was also repeated during #FeesMustFall and #RUReferenceList.

Despite pan-Africanist rhetoric within fallist thought, international students were never fully included in the movements (Kasembeli 2020).[137] This contradiction suggests that the fallist protesters adopted a characteristically South African form of pan-Africanism that was more focused on a socialist struggle at a national level and solidarity with the rest of the continent rather than on transnational African unity (Kondlo 2009: 49-50). Following this tradition, pan-Africanist thought within the fallist movements was centred around local South African problems like land redistribution and persistent Black poverty (e.g., Maringira & Gukurume 2016: 37, 40). Indeed, it appears that the transnational ideals of pan-Africanism in fallist rhetoric were often only referenced in terms of the decolonial theories of Frantz Fanon and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o – both non-South Africans – and interpreting Steve Biko's Black Consciousness as 'universal Blackness'.

But while international students were largely ignored in the fallist movements, some argue that they were also actively victimised. Despite the efforts by some pan-Africanists within the fallist movements to include international students in the struggle, 'there [wa]s [also] a lot of Afrophobia and xenophobia' (Ahmed 2019: 137-138). The 2015-2016 student protests coincided with xenophobic attacks in Makhanda and across South Africa, and some students became victims of xenophobic violence (Kasembeli 2020: 11). Even within fallist rhetoric, foreigners were occasionally seen to be taking jobs and scholarships from locals (ibid.: 12; Ahmed 2019: 137). Despite their general non-participation in the protests, international students were thus caught in the middle of the fallist politics of identity and belonging.

[137] For example, at Rhodes University, the Black Student Movement (BSM) argued for support for African international students, but this was eclipsed by the more urgent objective of opposing removal of students from their residences during vacation periods (O'Halloran 2016: 189-190).

5.3. Protests and identity politics at South African universities

Identity politics was a central motif in the South African campus protests of 2015-2016. But how did identity politics become such a force behind the fallist protests? And why does a particular type of identity politics make sense to some students at South African universities? Many people identify themselves according to such categories as nationality, race, and gender, and may feel a strong connection to some of them. They may do this in order to understand 'how they differ from others' (Brubaker & Cooper 2000: 4) or to feel part of a 'shared culture' (Hall 1990: 223). This, in turn, can help create a sense of 'permanence amidst manifest change, and of unity amidst manifest diversity' (Brubaker & Cooper 2000: 2). However, identity is a fluid and unstable phenomenon: as situations change, some identifications may become more important than others. Even the categories themselves are not fixed but constantly reinvented (Hall 1990: 224). Identity, therefore, is '[n]ot an essence but a positioning' (ibid.: 226).

Universities are settings in which young people attempt to find their place among their peers, which occasionally generates rivalry and antagonism (e.g., Cowie & Myers 2014). Indeed, Bourdieu has described higher education settings as 'fields of struggle' in which participants compete for 'symbolic mastery' (Bourdieu, cited in Loveday 2015: 1142). They are also sites in which students are 'exposed to new knowledge, skills and ideologies that evoke a sense of consciousness' (Hewlett et al. 2016: 152). In post-apartheid South Africa, a discourse on identity has become pronounced due to apartheid legacies of inequality and discrimination (Bazana & Mogotsi 2017: 2; Ngoasheng & Gachago 2017: 189).

Because higher education in general is expected to be a site of upward social mobility – and in South Africa, often a 'way out of poverty' (Jansen 2017: 32) – universities can also be places where 'the experience of being abject is most pronounced' (Steyn Kotze 2018: 123). This experience of marginalisation has politicised the identities of many South African students and mobilised them to challenge prevailing injustices. South African

universities are therefore especially fertile grounds for identity politics, as they are simultaneously sites of institutional and societal change as well as sites of personal transitions from childhood to adulthood (Franchi & Swart 2003: 212, 229).

Identity politics can be seen as young people's meaning-making of themselves and the surrounding realities (Bazana & Mogotsi 2017: 5). On South African campuses, this meaning-making has sometimes been expressed in an openly frustrated manner, which was especially visible during the 2015-2016 fallist protests. The first one of these protests, the #RhodesMustFall movement, started in March 2015 when a student at the University of Cape Town hurled a bucketful of faeces onto a statue of the imperialist Cecil John Rhodes. The objective of the protest was to highlight the demoralising conditions in which the majority of South Africans live despite the country's progressive Constitution, as well as the persistence of symbolic colonial domination (Mpofu-Walsh 2016: 76 Nyamnjoh 2016: 75).

At Rhodes University, this protest understandably triggered demands for institutional name change (O'Halloral 2016: 188), which, however, were not successful (Meth 2016: 98-99). #RhodesMustFall, as well as the first round of #FeesMustFall protests in October 2015, were both carried out peacefully in Makhanda (ibid.). In April 2016, a list of male students accused of sexual violence was circulated on social media, provoking an anti-rape campaign known as #RUReferenceList (Jansen 2017: 94-95). This movement soon become violent as crowds of students moved across the campus pursuing the alleged perpetrators (ibid.: 95). Police were called onto campus and the entire university was shut down, eventually ending the protests (Meth 2016: 100). However, following a governmental announcement of university fee increases in July 2016, the #FeesMustFall protests restarted in September 2016, and turned violent after the police started shooting rubber bullets during a peaceful protest (ibid.: 102).

The fallist protests are often seen as a part of a worldwide tradition of student movements (Hewlett et al. 2016: 148; Jansen 2017: 24) as well as a continuation of the

anti-apartheid struggles in South Africa – especially the 1976 Soweto uprising (Booysen 2016a: 14, 16). Writing in 2004, Johnson & Jacobs noted that the 'discussion of the content of democratic rights has only just begun' and thus predicted growing 'demands pressing historical claims and […] collective rights' (Johnson & Jacobs 2004: 98-100). Indeed, the end of apartheid in 1994 was 'the opening of the door, not an achievement in its own right' and the fallist protests therefore represented a logical next step in the process of democratisation (Booysen 2016a: 10; Booysen 2016b: 23). This 'unfinished business' was underlined, for example, when students invoked anti-apartheid discourse through songs of struggle (Godsell et al. 2016: 113-114).

For protesting students, the question of democratic rights translated into a lived experience of identity misrecognition. Declining state funding for higher education has resulted in rising tuition fees, which make attending university in South Africa unaffordable for a large part of the population (Bitzer & de Jager 2018: 17-18). Students are therefore often assumed to come from middle-class backgrounds. In reality, however, the student profile has changed significantly since the end of apartheid following governmental massification policies and support initiatives such as the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) (Mabokela 1997: 425).

Despite their growing numbers, many students from poorer backgrounds feel that their experiences are neither understood nor valued – in other words, their existence in higher education institutions is not recognised. This phenomenon, in which disadvantaged students become more expressive about their exclusion when their presence increases, is known as a 'paradox of integration' (Jansen 2017: 65). Experiences of lack of recognition within institutions can amplify students' craving for a 'right to identity', which then often results in identity politics (Englund 2004: 12).

The fallist protests employed theories of Black radical feminism, Black Consciousness and pan-Africanism as building blocks of their collective identity (Ahmed 2019). The protesters related their experience to Fanon's idea of colonialism as structural violence,

which could only be resolved by counterviolence – such as that of the protests.[138] Biko's Black Consciousness, on the other hand, inspired the protesters to lead their own grassroots emancipation struggle rather than relying on conventional politics or channels within White institutions (Ntloedibe 2019). The focus on identity politics and intersectionality came from radical feminists such as the Combahee River Collective who had famously stated in 1977 that 'the most profound and potentially the most radical politics come out of our own identity, rather than working to end someone else's oppression' (Combahee River Collective Statement, cited in Taylor 2007: 19).

As Nyamnjoh (2016: 201) puts it, 'the intersection of class and race in South Africa seldom hides for long'. Indeed, the idea of interlocking oppressions appealed to the born free generation in South Africa, where economic deprivation and cultural disadvantage were connected to intersecting race, class, and gender identities. This feeling of marginalisation also explains the magnitude of antagonism that identity politics induced during the fallist protests. Cunha has argued that 'peaceful protest is a privilege of those safely in the mainstream culture' (Cunha, cited in Godsell et al. 2016: 115), which raises the question of whether 'only non-violent protests [are] valid and moral' (ibid.: 116). Just as decolonisation struggles across the world encouraged feelings of 'shared culture' and 'oneness' for nation-building purposes (Hall 1990: 223), the born free generation in South Africa used identity politics to create what they hoped to be a united moral position against the persistent legacy of apartheid. Yet, this unity was not realised within the fallist movements.

Kamsteeg (2016: 1) argues that different intersectional identities among students 'might help to understand why the transformation concept […] is so ambiguous and contested'. Identity politics has long been accused of accommodating totalising tendencies and relying on invented primordiality,[139] and the fallist protests were no exception. The Black pain-derived identity politics relied on two rather ambivalent and contested identities:

[138] This interpretation became heatedly contested during the protests (e.g., Pithouse 2016).
[139] On national identity, see Calhoun (2007: 45-47).

Blackness and social class. Blackness had different interpretations and 'grades' within the movements (Ahmed 2019: 118, 151) and class-wise, the protesting students represented a range of economic conditions (Webb 2019: 7-8). From an essentialist point of view, this raises the question of whether it was more important to be Black or to be poor. The movements' existence depended on a collective identity, but due to the diversity of the protesters, this was difficult to achieve. It thus became important to consolidate the group boundaries – even if that meant some had to be excluded.

Whilst the fallist protests have often been understood as post-class politics focusing largely on racial identity, this approach neglects the complicated class relations within the student body (Satgar 2016: 214). Along with a large number of deprived students, the protests also attracted some White students (Nyamnjoh 2016: 201) as well as many so-called 'missing middle' students who are excluded from financial support when their parents' earnings exceed a certain threshold, even though they are clearly unable to pay the high fees charged by South African universities (Jansen 2017: 33). Overall, indebtedness of students has been increasing sharply (James 2015; Mpofu-Walsh 2016: 78). Some of the 'missing middle' students have been especially radical in demonstrating their solidarity with poor Black students, which has given the fallist protests a middle-class image (Jansen 2017: 32-34).

This chapter maintains that whilst the class identities of the fallist protesters were complex and diverse, a poor Black identity came to dominate the discourse. The accounts of SADC students interviewed for this chapter indicate that identity boundaries at Rhodes University are often drawn between 'authentic' Blacks and those deemed middle class – often derogatively referred to as 'coconuts'.[140] Similar findings regarding this politics of 'are you Black enough?' have been made in studies about Rhodes University (Barroso 2015; Daki 2018) and other South African higher education institutions (Pattman 2007; Singh & Bhana 2015), as well as in discussions beyond higher

[140] Similar to the term sell-out, coconut is an often denigratory term referring to a Black person who is considered to be 'White on the inside'.

education (Chigumadzi 2015).

The experience of being poor and Black was thus a central theme in the fallist protests raising the dual imperatives of addressing the issue of poverty and harnessing one's identity and agency in order to do so (Godsell & Chikane 2016: 58, 60). The question of who has the right to speak for the poor thus became the context in which a poor Black identity took centre stage as it had the best claim to authenticity (Taylor 1994: 25). This meant that White and middle-class students had to be relegated to an assisting role and even that was conditional on their acknowledgement of their own privilege (Nyamnjoh 2016: 201-202).

Interestingly, South African students from middle-class backgrounds were occasionally able to tap into the discourse of poor Black identity, whereas SADC students generally were not. This may be explained by the fact that South African middle-class students shared with their poorer Black counterparts an intergenerational memory of apartheid and the frustration of being part of the born free generation. Rising fees, inadequate funding opportunities and the ensuing indebtedness in particular had likely rendered the idea of being middle class meaningless to them (Webb 2018: 5). Middle-class South Africans were therefore able to recognise their privilege while at the same time pointing out that the post-apartheid state had failed the born free generation collectively. Most importantly, they were taking a risk by participating in the protests.

By affirming their desire to abolish all inequalities, protesting South African middle-class students refused to identify with the self-interested postcolonial bourgeoisie that Fanon had cautioned about (Gibson 2017: 583). Compared to SADC students, they were also more familiar with the prevailing moral discourse in the country, especially in terms of the rhetoric of race equality and social justice. This meant that they could, for example, use linguistic code-switching (see Motinyane 2018) to downplay their class advantage and to affirm their solidarity with 'authentic' poor Black students. These code-switching opportunities were often more limited for SADC students, who lacked familiarity with

South Africa-specific cultural codes.

According to Ahmed (2019: 118), 'the formation of a collective Black identity [was] a helpful way of articulating the feelings of isolation that Black students encountered'. However, this collective identity was used in a way that also alienated many students. Although social categorisation is something that we all tend to do, it can sometimes lead to groupist thinking and flat stereotyping (Merolla 2016: 420-421). More than any political agenda or self-identification, the paramount divisive feature of the fallist protests seemed to stem precisely from this groupism, which then resulted in identity politics that were violent and retaliatory.

Although seemingly its antithesis, groupism emanates from a flat form of individualism that tends to treat groups 'as collective individuals, and as collections of individuals' (Brubaker 2003: 555). Polarisation in political discourse pushes individuals to form groups of like-minded people which then skews their social interactions (Bosch 2017: 230) and produces further group polarisation (Tosi & Warmke 2016: 211). Interacting within these political 'echo chambers' can encourage virtue signalling and moral grandstanding (ibid.; Wallace et al. 2020), through which like-minded people wish to advertise how well they represent the shared values and virtues of the group or hope to convince outsiders of their group's moral superiority (Tosi & Warmke 2016: 201; Wallace et al. 2020: 578).

The fallist movements dealt with the fundamentally ethical issue of social justice. The contentious identity politics that the protests evoked was thus both a cause and effect of political polarisation, virtue signalling and moral grandstanding. I will now move on to analyse more closely how this moral discourse was experienced and deployed by SADC students at Rhodes University as they navigated their race and class identities within the South African framework.

5.4. 'Everything gets racial very fast and you don't know what hit you' – SADC students' encounters of race and racism in South Africa

The narratives of SADC students interviewed for this thesis portrayed South African understandings of race and class as different from those they had been used to in their home countries. Some SADC students claimed that coming to study in South Africa was the first time that they had to encounter issues of race and racism. For Black students from township or missionary school backgrounds, race had not been a tangible concern in what they described as rather racially homogeneous social circles. On the other hand, those students (from all races) who had been introduced to multiracial life at private schools felt that race had never been a decisive – or divisive – factor.

Remarkably, some students like Zimbabwean self-identified upper middle-class PhD student Natsai seemed to have had a sudden realisation of their own race when arriving in South Africa: 'We used to have abstract conversations about racism when I was younger. You know, like, maybe she was picked for the hockey team because she's White, but it was never anything pointed towards me, or anything personal. So, moving to [South Africa] was actually the first time when I was like, oh my goodness, I am Black.'[141] Students' narratives often had a romanticised tone in which they positioned 'racialised' South Africa as the antithesis of their home countries, as conveyed by another Zimbabwean, self-identified working-class PhD student Fadzai: 'It's only when I'm here that I'm constantly reminded on a daily basis that I'm a Black woman in a space where I'm not necessarily supposed to be, or welcome. It only happens here. When I go home, no, we are one with the people, we are happy.'[142]

Similar claims of non-racialism have been reported in Pierre's (2013: xi) study among Ghanaians, who did not consider race and Blackness as important issues in a country

[141] Interview with Natsai from Zimbabwe at Rhodes University, 25 May 2018.
[142] Interview with Fadzai from Zimbabwe at Rhodes University, 10 May 2018.

that never had a large settler presence. However, Pierre demonstrates that race does matter in all post-colonial societies through the way in which colonialism racialised Black (and other non-White) people into 'native subjects' rather than full citizens and therefore tied their experiences to the racist structures of 'global White supremacy' (ibid.). Ironically, many of the SADC students who described their home countries as colour-blind dreamlands were talking about Zimbabwe – a country previously ruled by a racist settler government. This suggests that while SADC students' shock about the prominence of race in South Africa must be taken seriously, their perspective is influenced by prior experiences and patriotic identity politics.

With the realisation of race also came encounters with racism. While most Black SADC students interviewed for this research described South African racism in fairly abstract terms, there was also evidence of encounters with racist microaggressions.[143] Some felt that in South Africa they were suddenly expected to behave in a certain way according to their race, for example offering to help a White person doing manual labour or giving up their seat in an argument over bus seating arrangements. Again, they contrast this with their home countries, as Zimbabwean self-identified upper middle-class PhD student Mudiwa exemplifies: 'If I'm in Zimbabwe and I'm Black, I don't expect to be treated a certain way, no. […] So, when you enter a restaurant if you're Black, they most certainly look at the way you dress sometimes or the way you're carrying yourself or whatever. Just because if you're upper class, you'll tip more. It's not racial. But here, they still treat you in a certain kind of way.'[144]

Whereas Mudiwa is unable to pinpoint what exactly the 'certain kind of way' entails, another Zimbabwean self-identified upper middle-class PhD student, Natsai, provides a more detailed description of this kind of racist microaggression:

[143] Microaggressions refer to dismissive or offensive every-day linguistic and behavioural patterns that often characterise the Black experience in 'White spaces' (Evans & Moore 2015). See also Chapter 3 in this thesis for discussion on microaggressions and institutional cultures of (formerly) White institutions.
[144] Interview with Mudiwa from Zimbabwe at Rhodes University, 15 June 2018.

> 'I was at the optometrist and my name is [Natsai] Betty. This lady came in the reception and kept saying "Betty". I just assumed there must be someone else called Betty. She then looked at the thingy and was passing around saying "Is this you, is this you?" I said yeah that's me and she was like "Why weren't you responding?" and I said because my name is [Natsai]. She was like "Well I don't know how to pronounce that" but I find that very hard to believe that you can say *Fazadhi* or *Houmousrad* but you can't say [Natsai]! […] If I was French, you would have made the effort! […] [T]he assumption is that if you are of a particular class or race, you can dictate somebody else, how to identify them in the society or how to treat them.'[145]

Interestingly, both of the students who brought up this issue of racist microaggressions were from higher social background families in which they had clearly been socialised to expect respectful treatment. Mudiwa is a daughter of a high-ranking ZANU-PF[146] politician and Natsai comes from a wealthy and well-educated family. It seems that they recall these incidents of racist microaggression so well because their own reactions had escalated the situation to a conflict. In recalling her experience with the optometrist, Natsai acknowledged that it is her class status that has allowed her to question and contest racist microaggressions:

> 'I don't have patience for that stuff. […] Unfortunately, with my personality, I read those things really quickly and I don't let them go. And she's like "Oh no, I just don't know how to pronounce your name". So, I'm like, well, aren't you lucky because I'm here today and I'm gonna teach you so you don't go around calling people things that are not their names. […] So, in that way, I guess, me not having to assert myself because of the different markers of my class, that makes my life easier. But in the absence of that mutual respect, I'm not going to be timid, like call me what you want.'[147]

These students' class privilege may thus have made them especially articulate about their experiences of racist microaggressions, while similar incidents may have gone unreported when the victims were not as emphatic about their rights as Mudiwa and

[145] Interview with Natsai from Zimbabwe at Rhodes University, 25 May 2018.
[146] The Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front has been the ruling party of Zimbabwe since the country's independence in 1980.
[147] Interview with Natsai from Zimbabwe at Rhodes University, 25 May 2018.

Natsai. In the regrettable absence of literature specifically on the role of one's social class identification in recognising and responding to racist microaggression, Ndlovu's (2020: 577-580) descriptions of the experiences of eating out as a middle-class Black person in suburban South Africa offers some insight.[148] Examples such as waiters not trusting the judgement of a Black person with their choice of sushi for dinner – 'That one is not cooked, you know' – illustrate that in South Africa, 'Black' means 'ignorant', and that deviating from that stereotype may lead to conflict (ibid.). My data cautiously suggests that reactions and responses to racialised encounters and racist microaggressions may vary according to a student's personality, class, racial consciousness, and previous experiences, but more research is needed to understand the complexity of the issues and the ways in which they manifest at Rhodes University as well as campuses elsewhere.[149]

As described in Chapter 3, Rhodes University is still a 'White space' where Whiteness is the cultural norm. The experience of race in South Africa was therefore quite different for White SADC students. Two of the 25 students interviewed for this research were White, both from Zimbabwe. Amy, a master's student, was the daughter of a nurse and an accountant from the suburbs of Harare. She described her background as 'very middle class'. Amy spoke openly about her class privilege: 'I went to good schools through my whole life, I'm learning at a university where I can speak […] my first language. There's a lot of ease of access. […] [M]y sister, she didn't come to university, for example, but my parents' friends hired her the second she graduated from high school'.[150] Amy also understood how problematic class was in a South African university setting because 'for people who don't have the ease of access that people in the middle

[148] Ndlovu's (2020) research is based on fictional literature by two self-proclaimed 'Black middle-class' authors. However, according to these authors and Ndlovu, the described experiences are characteristic for the Black middle classes in South Africa.
[149] While some research exists on recognising microaggressions (see Sue 2010) as well on responses available to victims (e.g., Rini 2018; Schoulte et al. 2011), little attention has been given to the possible factors affecting those responses.
[150] Interview with Amy from Zimbabwe at Rhodes University, 12 June 2018.

class will have, it's a very tough system to try and overcome'.[151] Yet, she never mentioned race.

Scott, who was also doing his master's degree, was equally from a comfortable middle-class background and had gone to some of the best private schools in southern Africa. He was very talkative and unreserved, and his account full of virtue signalling:

> 'I've always had friends from all classes. I've never judged a book by its covers, or how much money [one's] parents make. Right now, I've got person messaging me from Zim. He's a teller at a shop. […] I was in Kariba [a recreational park in Zimbabwe][152] for New Years, and he was the one serving me. I'm a fairly jovial, convivial person. I speak a lot of Shona, so I said can I have your number, he said *ja*, and he messaged me. I have no reservations towards that. […] Basketball is a great way to meet people. I go to the court on my own, shoot some hoops. If I meet someone else there, I say "Hey dude, how you doing? I'm [Scott]". […] It also helps that I like to learn languages. It's a great way to get to know someone, you know, "How do you say this in your language?" […] I'm trying to learn Xhosa. I have a couple of people I ask, like the gardeners in the complex.'[153]

Without mentioning it explicitly, Scott nevertheless made sure I understood that he was talking about Black people. Still, he never questioned the power relations between himself and the people he so eagerly hoped to befriend. Despite his genuine curiosity and passion for social interactions, Scott's asserted colour-blindness therefore exposed a self-understanding characterised by the 'casualness' of internalised 'master narrative of Whiteness' (see Steyn 2001: 3, 51, 78, 110). Through his multiracial interactions, Scott seemed well-adapted to 'post-mastery' African Whiteness that is characterised by 'understanding, tolerance, [and] pluralism' (see McDermott Hughes 2010: 141), but his unproblematised colour-blindness did not necessarily confirm the idea that White

[151] Interview with Amy from Zimbabwe at Rhodes University, 12 June 2018.
[152] See McDermott Hughes (2010) for interesting discussion on how the man-made lake, Kariba, has been embraced by the White community in Zimbabwe and helped to give them a sense of belonging in the country.
[153] Interview with Scott from Zimbabwe at Rhodes University, 17 May 2018.

people in Africa were entering a stage of 'post-belonging' in which they would consciously recognise and accept their non-belonging (ibid.: 142).

Amidst the anti-privilege identity politics of the 2015-2016 student protests, White students at Rhodes were facing situations in which they felt targeted because of their race. As two renowned critics of the fallist movements, Achille Mbembe and Francis B. Nyamnjoh (both cited in Ahmed 2019: 121) have argued, the centrality of Black pain in the protest movements emanated from a particular obsession with Whiteness. Following Biko's idea of duality, a Black-only emancipatory struggle was prioritised, and Whites were expected to subsequently organise their own endeavour (Ahmed 2019: 121). Relationships between Black protesters and their White allies were thus often described as 'tricky' and 'awkward' (ibid.: 123).

Scott had been unfortunate to experience this first-hand. He had witnessed protesting students attempting to enter university residences to promote their cause and recruit more protesters. As a sub-warden, Scott along with other residents then decided to block the entrance of his residence building in line with the Vice-Chancellor's orders. 'And then I was accused of being a racist. […] So, it just happened that the majority of the people standing in front of the door [blocking protester access to the residence] were Whites and there weren't that many Black guys around there. […] I thought I was doing my job as a sub-warden, but people thought I was being a racist. Black protesters, White sub-warden – you can see the authoritative problem that might stem from that.'[154] For Scott, his refusal to let the protesters in was guided by the Vice-Chancellor's imperative as well as the desire to guard the safety and sovereignty of the residence he was in charge of. However, this was quickly interpreted as racial partiality.

Being accused of something that is regarded as one of the most deplorable actions in South Africa – racial discrimination – is something most people would avoid at any cost (see Steyn 2001: 105). For example, a shop attendant from a Makhanda health food

[154] Interview with Scott from Zimbabwe at Rhodes University, 17 May 2018.

shop recently wrote on the town residents' Facebook page that a White lady had come in to buy kefir – a fashionable yoghurt drink – but did not know how to ask for it without sounding like she was using 'the K-word' (she was referring to the word *kaffir*, which in South Africa is an old derogatory term for Black people).

This 'walking on eggshells' mentality is, however, not necessarily familiar to those coming from outside of the country. Assimilation to the particularities around race in South Africa thus often happens through trial and error. Most SADC students, regardless of their race, would thus likely agree with Zimbabwean self-identified working-class student, Fadzai, in that: 'South Africa is a very weird country for me because everything gets so racial very fast. You move from zero to sixty in racism and racial issues in three seconds and you don't know what hit you.'[155]

5.5. 'We have to fit in here, we have to act as others' – SADC students' experiences of class in South Africa

For SADC students, class identities and differences at Rhodes University also appeared more pronounced than back home. Many described having not had much contact with people from outside their own social class while growing up in their home countries. The extra cost of studying abroad and the shortage of bursaries available for SADC students meant that South African universities were often out of bounds for less well-off SADC citizens. Coming to university in South Africa, many therefore identified themselves as middle class.

However, students felt that their middle-classness was often mistranslated by their South African peers as being particularly rich or privileged – an assumption that SADC students themselves firmly rejected. Instead, they emphasised that their families had valued education and made financial sacrifices to send their children to South Africa.

[155] Interview with Fadzai from Zimbabwe at Rhodes University, 10 May 2018.

Just like many South Africans (James 2015; Webb 2018: 1-8), families of SADC students had pooled their resources, sold livestock, or taken loans. Furthermore, unfavourable economic conditions in countries like Zimbabwe meant that at home, these middle-class students often found themselves washing out of buckets and had little hope of finding a paid job after graduation.

While these accounts reflected SADC students' pain of misrecognition, they were also moral narratives through which SADC students were hoping to de-emphasise any potential unearned privilege they may have had. But however morally justified their emphasis on resilience and upward mobility may have been, SADC students could not claim Black authenticity in South Africa. Whatever the lived reality of SADC students was back home, at Rhodes they were often seen as bourgeois. Being identified as middle class came with baggage, as the fallist movements adopted Fanon's idea that the post-colonial bourgeoisie would maintain colonial inequalities by becoming an 'internalised master' that promotes its own class interest over the emancipation of the entire nation (Gibson 2017: 583; Mbembe 2016: 33).

Factors such as flying home instead of taking the bus during vacation periods or having the exchange rate on their side were frequently mentioned by SADC students to explain why they felt they were seen as better-off than local South African students. However, one of the most commonly accepted indicators of class privilege was language. A majority of the interviewed SADC students were unable to speak locally dominant African languages, as Sylvie from Lesotho (whose class identification was 'on a scale from 1-10, I would say 4') demonstrates: 'Here, most people speak x… oh, I can't even say it, Xhosa. […] Here, if they see you are a Black person, they assume you understand Xhosa. They'll be walking up to you and they go "click, click, click, click", and I'll be like, what is this person saying?'[156]

On the other hand, many SADC students were confident speakers of English, which they

[156] Interview with Sylvie from Lesotho at Rhodes University, 17 May 2018.

spoke with an unmistakable private school accent. English was therefore the natural language choice for many, which was enough to make some peers accuse SADC students of 'trying to be White'. Self-identified middle-class student Busisiwe from Eswatini describes this linguistic dilemma: 'If I try to speak a local language, I slip into Zulu, and try to switch my [siSwati] t's to z's, but then they say I don't sound right, so what do you want me to do? And if you speak English, then you're going to be called coconut […] So, I thought people are never going to be satisfied.'[157]

Nyamnjoh argues that language has become an important marker of belonging or non-belonging in South Africa (Nyamnjoh 2006) through what Taylor (1994) might call an appeal for recognition. Just as the early European settlers in the Cape named the local indigenous Khoikhoi people 'hottentots'[158] to describe their language as inferior, foreign Blacks are now titled 'makwerekwere'[159] as a way to deny them an intelligible language and remind them of their non-belonging and second-class status in the country (Nyamnjoh 2006: 39). Many immigrants in South Africa therefore do their best to learn a local language in order to avoid harassment from the authorities who often target foreigners (ibid.: 76-77).

For SADC students, this language politics undermined their experience and reminded them of their non-belonging in South Africa. To avoid being picked on for speaking a foreign language, some opted to adjust their language practices, as Zimbabwean self-identified middle-class student Harrison explains: '[W]e now don't even speak to our fellow Zimbabweans in Shona. It's English. If you speak Shona, they just reply back in English. I'm like, come on […], let's speak Shona, and then they're like "Nah, you see, we have to fit in here, we have to act as others".'[160]

Indeed, speaking English in public, rather than a non-local African language, was

[157] Interview with Busisiwe from Eswatini at Rhodes University, 11 May 2018.
[158] 'Hottentot' denotes stuttering.
[159] 'Makwerekwere' (s.) / 'amakwerekwere' (pl.) is a derogatory term used in South Africa for Black foreigners.
[160] Interview with Harrison from Zimbabwe at Rhodes University, 9 May 2018.

sometimes seen as the lesser of two evils if the choice was between Afrophobic discrimination and being called a coconut. Treated as a measure of one's Blackness, language was thus used to exclude those who could not fit into the very limited race-class bracket in which 'local' translated as 'poor but authentic', whilst 'non-local' indicated either a 'rich coconut' or 'poor' in a negative, xenophobic sense.

These different approaches to language at Rhodes University follow a pattern that Bazana & Mogotsi (2017: 6) describe as double consciousness in a historically White educational setting: students studying at an institution that has not been able to rid itself of its colonial history are still required to be 'White' (middle-class) enough to succeed academically, but they are perhaps not 'Black' (working-class) enough to prove their 'authenticity' outside of the classroom. Taylor argues that the ideal of authenticity is connected to our right to recognition because we need the recognition of others to validate our authenticity (Taylor 1994: 25).

In a university setting with conflicting expectations of authenticity, class identity becomes a performance that students can – and sometimes have to – adjust according to the situation in order to circumnavigate the polarisation between being authentic Blacks and coconuts (Merolla 2016: 425). However, this chapter has explained that SADC students were for the most part denied a way out of antagonistic identity politics during the fallist protests because their identification options were limited by others' perceptions of them.

5.6. 'They breathe snowflakes' – SADC students and moral boundary work

In addition to remarking on their different understandings of race and class, SADC students at Rhodes University highlighted how unfamiliar they were with the ways in which moral discourse was deployed in South Africa. They described South Africa as having a climate of belligerence, as exemplified by this observation by self-identified middle-class student Busisiwe from Eswatini: '[T]he society, it's very different. It's a joke

that I always make, but it's quite serious, that every child in South Africa has a right. So, if you do something, "I'm going to go to court, I'm going to sue my parents." In Swazi[land], if you go like, "I have a right in my house," your father will go like, "A right in whose house?"'[161]

Witnessing crime, poverty, and inequality in Makhanda had helped SADC students understand the roots of their South African peers' anger, which they located in the legacy of apartheid. Self-identified middle-class student Russell from Zimbabwe had been shocked to see the reality in which many people in South Africa lived: 'I've never seen such poverty in my life. Even at the height of economic crisis in 2008 in Zimbabwe, when things were really bad, people were not struggling as much as they struggle here in 2018.'[162] But despite their awareness of the persistent problems in post-apartheid South Africa, SADC students did not accept the violence of the anger that these arduous conditions had created.

Rather than the post-apartheid inequality crisis itself, SADC students often interpreted the belligerent climate at Rhodes University as a result of totalising identity politics. Comments like 'South Africans are entitled' and 'South Africans need anger management' were regularly repeated phrases with which SADC students underlined their dislike of what they perceived as South African students' lack of manners and sensitive, self-absorbed outlook. Another student from Eswatini, self-identified upper-class Daniela, declared that these South African students were people who 'breathe snowflakes', adding:

> 'People critique everything. […] Like, I have a problem with this, you know, I'm sitting here and I'm looking at your green dress, and I'm looking at the colour green and the colour green reminds me of the time when I experienced this emotion, and you know… It's a place that, I would say, can easily swallow people. […] 'It's […] a hostile place to

[161] Interview with Busisiwe from Eswatini at Rhodes University, 11 May 2018.
[162] Interview with Russell from Zimbabwe at Rhodes University, 25 May 2018.

> be in, in a sense that people are angry, and you have to understand why. But also, there's like angry and there's like, *yoh*!'[163]

In talking about their experiences of race, class and moral discourse in South Africa, SADC students often underlined their outside-ness. They implied that identity politics is something only happening among South African students and something that they – as outsiders – condemn. By attacking South African students' perceived overreacting and lack of manners, SADC students themselves were thus also contributing to an antagonistic identity politics at Rhodes.

Essentialising identity politics is not just a South African problem but a global phenomenon that feeds on the sense of marginalisation and resentment of many groups around the world that have not benefitted from the post-Cold War world order (Fukuyama 2018: 3-11). Throughout post-colonial Africa, the move to liberal democratic models has also aided the rise of identity-based politics (Baragwanath 2016: 362). Many increasingly experience formal political channels as ineffective, which has diminished conventional forms of participation and given rise to 'contentious politics' (ibid.), especially among younger generations (Bosch 2017: 223). The aggressive identity politics at Rhodes University reflects this contemporary political environment, which therefore cannot be assumed to pertain only to South African students.

The struggles for equality and affordability in South African higher education relate to the historical marginalisation of Black South Africans. The ascent of divisive identity politics during the campus protests was thus connected to the moral discourse of enduring social injustice. Despite largely agreeing with the goals of the fallist movements, SADC students disapproved of the protest tactics because they did not fit their ideas of mannerliness. Their response was therefore characterised by moral grandstanding. The notion of respectability is a key aspect of performing middle-class distinction in southern Africa (e.g., Pauli 2011; West 2002), which SADC students reiterated when they claimed that 'South Africans are entitled' and 'South Africans need

[163] Interview with Daniela from Eswatini at Rhodes University, 16 May 2018.

anger management'. This paradox of criticising others' moral discourse through one's own was possible because SADC students saw themselves as outsiders and this enabled them to deflect the heated question of potential class advantage.

SADC students' claims of their outside-ness contrast the southern African region's distinctive dependency on South Africa going back at least two centuries (Saurombe 2010: 124-131). The expansion of South Africa's economic influence over its neighbours has been seen as political soft power (Ogunnubi & Amao 2016) and even 'regional imperialism' (Taylor 2011). These unequal regional relations are also manifested in the form of regional migration to South Africa, which remains prevalent despite the shift from systematic labour migration to more casual movements (Johnson 2017). It was not uncommon for SADC students to have relatives living in South Africa. Some had even done their schooling in South Africa or followed the South African curriculum in their home countries. At home, they had watched South African TV and listened to South African music, testifying to South Africa's cultural influence in the region.

Considering the close economic and cultural ties between South Africa and the students' home countries, SADC students' assertions of their outside-ness indicate a degree of conscious boundary-making. SADC students' lives in South Africa are located in a context of encounters with unfamiliar practices, especially in terms of morally imbued expressions of race and class. When identifications based on race and class became highly contested during the fallist protests, SADC students seemed to rely on the one distinction that the protesters could not deny: the fact that they were not South African.

The idea of outside-ness was also tied to the way in which their non-belonging in South Africa triggered ideas of 'rejection-based transnationalism' (Tedeschi et al. 2022: 607; see also Chapter 4 in this thesis). Indeed, SADC students consciously built their identities in contrast to rather than within a South African framework. This strategy has to be understood in conjunction with their positionality with respect to race, class, and transnational frameworks. However, it is important to ask whether SADC students have

in fact accepted the fallist challenge of recognising their own privileges or used the assertion of outside-ness to evade the issue altogether.

5.7. Conclusions

The way in which the fallist protests employed the ideas of Black pain and poor Black identity illustrates how intersectionality between race and class has become a central device of distinction in South African higher education. Students identifying as poor Black take ownership of the struggle, which often denies those students who position themselves as middle class the chance to have an input into the transformation discourse if they lack the ability to tap into the shared moral discourse of the prominent majority. As fittingly expressed by Zimbabwean self-identified middle-class student Brenda:

> 'Rhodes doesn't allow people to grow. There's a certain norm, and if you don't fit in that norm, if you don't tick those boxes, you're marginalised. […] I think international students are very marginalised in this space and we are not included in the discussions. There's this tyranny of majority where you have to cater for the most people. You can't talk about some things. […] International students don't have a voice in this space.'[164]

Acknowledging these feelings of SADC students, this chapter has pointed out the often-neglected experiential aspect of international student life at South African universities. Taking into account their specific challenges as immigrants and their different moral understandings of race and class, it is clear that SADC students had their reasons not to participate in the fallist protests. Considering the mismatch between their self-understanding and the class identities ascribed by others, it is reasonable that SADC students felt marginalised by the protest movements. I do not aim to undervalue that experience. Nevertheless, antagonistic identity politics during the protests implicated even those SADC students who made conscious efforts to avoid any involvement.

[164] Interview with Brenda from Zimbabwe at Rhodes University, 11 May 2018.

Identity politics has been a recognisable force in the fight for social justice within the South African higher education system, but the narratives of SADC students have illustrated that it has also led to further othering and animosity within the student community.

Identity is, as Vincent (2005: 114) points out, 'not only something we construct ourselves but is also constructed in the eyes of others'. When confronted with these external perceptions and expectations, our response can be either to reject them or remould ourselves accordingly (ibid.: 115). This chapter has explained why these options have been restricted for many students in South African higher education. Many disadvantaged students in South Africa are seeking a sense of belonging within the 'foreign' institutional culture of formerly White universities. This environment narrows down their identity options, often making the perceived authenticity of poor Black identification the only positive option available. Using authenticity as the essence of their identity, disadvantaged students can take ownership of their identity definition. However, through this logic, they may also narrow the identity options available to others, as happened to SADC students during the fallist protests at Rhodes University.

In 2002, Chipkin argued that the notion of Blackness in post-apartheid South Africa had been radically remodelled or 'displaced', as it turned from representing the liberation struggle to becoming a symbol of patriotism and national sovereignty (Chipkin 2002). Since then, it has likely been reconstructed once again as the country has faced serious challenges, from Marikana massacre to the spectre of state capture.[165] In this context, it is important to ask how changing ideas of Blackness were reflected in the fallist protests, and how they impact the ways in which immigrants in the country are recognised. South African universities are one of the sites in which new ideas of Blackness – and other identities – are emerging. SADC students are a minority that may not have a huge influence on the mainstream narrative regarding university

[165] State capture refers to a corruption scandal revealed in 2016 involving the then South African president, Jacob Zuma, and the influential Gupta family (see Martin & Solomon 2016).

transformation, but their role as 'inbetweeners' certainly highlights the importance of linking debates on post-apartheid social justice to questions of xenophobia and belonging (see Nyamnjoh 2016).

The fallist protests at South African universities indicate that the transformation of higher education discourse is centred around national issues, notably poverty and inequality. South African students live in a reality of 'fragile nationhood filled with contradictions. [They are] integrated, yet separated […] united, yet unreconciled […] free, yet oppressed […] equal, yet unequal […] non-racial, yet live in a racist political reality' (Steyn Kotze & Prevost 2016: 291). When universities settle for Africanisation rather than striving for genuine transformation, unfair advantages are merely transferred from one group to another rather than being fundamentally rejected or reconfigured (Mbembe 2016: 33). At Rhodes University, this has led to the racial, classist and xenophobic antagonism described by SADC students in this chapter. Local students may have benefitted to some extent from a more Africanised curriculum, but the institutional culture remains predominantly White and, ultimately, foreign. Furthermore, some SADC students complain that their South African lecturers and peers have little awareness of what is happening in the wider continent. For them, Africanisation has mainly implied South Africanisation.

One's existence at home can never be fully replicated in a foreign country. Having migrated to South Africa with a different set of cultural and moral codes, SADC students have displaced their familiar class positions. SADC students' frustration with identity politics on South African campuses can therefore be understood as an appeal for recognition of their particular position within an environment that does not easily accept one's right *not* to have an identity (see Hylland Eriksen, cited in Englund 2004: 12, emphasis in original). The realisation of this recognition will likely depend on how South African higher education can first recognise the demands of local students and accordingly deal with the urgent need for transformation at the national level. The next chapter will show how the incomplete process of transformation has, however, helped

those SADC students with middle- and upper-class backgrounds to find sense of belonging within the institutional structures of Rhodes University.

6. 'WHERE LEADERS LEARN' (AND OTHERS STRUGGLE)? REPRODUCTION OF CLASS DIVISIONS AT RHODES UNIVERSITY

6.1. Introduction

'Where leaders learn' is the motto of Rhodes University. The Vice-Chancellor of the institution, Dr Sizwe Mabizela, understands this motto as a rationale for 'producing graduates who are knowledgeable intellectuals, skilled professionals, and critical, caring and compassionate citizens who can contribute to economic and social development and an equitable, just and democratic society' (Mabizela 2018). The Vice-Chancellor seems to suggest that by studying at Rhodes, *anyone* can acquire the right knowledge, skills and moral qualities to become a 'leader'. However, the motto can also be understood conversely as a narrower proposal implying that only *some* Rhodes students become this type of a leader. This version not only sounds more plausible but is supported by previous research as well as the empirical data collected for this thesis.

The idea of higher education as a leveller of social disparities is now generally considered to be outdated. Drawing on Bourdieu's class theory (Bourdieu 2010 [1984] and 1986; Bourdieu & Passeron 1977), scholarship on social class in university settings has often focused on the disadvantages that working-class students experience. Using Bourdieu's terminology, educational sociologists and organisational management scholars have described how students whose class-based world view or habitus does not match the field of university life have fewer tools to succeed and often experience stigma, thus needing to adapt through identity work (e.g., Granfield 1991; Reay et al. 2009 and 2010).

These studies often focus on peer relations and personal microaggressions, but seldom describe the particular ways in which universities as institutions reproduce these class divisions. Although universities may present themselves as meritocratic and therefore classless communities, structural classism also exists at institutional and policy levels, as illustrated for example by unequal access to funding, resources and opportunities (Locke

& Trolian 2018: 65-66, 67). Indeed, Gray et al. (2018: 1245) recommend further research to 'identify processes that institutionalise inequality in higher education'. This chapter will do just that by offering empirical insight into one university in the notoriously unequal higher education system of South Africa.

The focus in most studies of post-apartheid South African higher education has been on concerns over the outcomes of inequality – such as throughput rates and academic achievement patterns – rather than notions of social inclusion and the personal fulfilment of students. 'Underperforming' university students in South Africa remain predominantly Black (Cloete 2014: 1360), which indicates that race and class are still firmly interconnected,[166] and both influence the student experience. The former White universities, like Rhodes, are struggling to transform themselves in order to match the changing racial composition of the student body and the post-apartheid world view that emphasises social justice and equity (Badat & Sayed 2014; Portnoi 2009: 190).[167] Scholarship on the institutional cultures at South African universities has therefore mainly concentrated on race relations and the need for decolonisation and Africanisation (e.g., Tabensky & Matthews 2015 on Rhodes University).

However, pioneers like Kistner (2011) and Higham (2012) have been calling for an expansion of the South African university transformation agenda beyond race and towards questions of economic disparities, as well as unequal levels of academic proficiency and social integration among students. This aim has been boosted by the #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall protests of 2015-2016, which have helped to provoke a boom of academic enquiry into the new class divisions in South African higher education (e.g., Booysen 2016; Nyamnjoh 2016; Webb 2018; see also Chapter 5 in this

[166] This thesis endorses Wolpe's (1988: 2) idea of a 'contingent relationship' between race and class, which argues that neither colonialism nor capitalism on its own can explain the historical evolution of White domination in South Africa.

[167] The former Black universities also share this quest for decolonisation of Euro-centric curricula, as well as having their own challenges, especially in terms of funding and low research output (Bozalek & Boughey 2012: 691-692, 694-696).

thesis). This strand of research has highlighted the need to examine not only academic success but also wider questions of belonging, to which this thesis also contributes.

This chapter looks at the manifestations of social class at university from the perspective of more successful middle- and upper-class students studying at a prestigious historically White university.[168] But why study the privileged? It is known that many underprivileged students struggle academically and socially due to the inherited injustices deep-rooted in South African higher education, and that their experience can have valuable input in making universities more inclusive (Mpofu 2015). Without undermining anyone's hardship, this chapter demonstrates how an analysis of successful students' experiences can illuminate the ways in which class advantage is practised and reproduced at South African universities.

The previous chapter focused on the way in which SADC students felt that their presumed class advantage was detrimental to their peer relations and an obstacle to reaching the ideal of authenticity outside of the university structures. However, within the institutional 'bubble/White space' framework of Rhodes University, class advantage remains a positive identification. Following Bathmaker et al. (2013), this chapter argues that class reproduction at South African universities takes place not only in the classroom and through academic success, but also during the extra-curricular activities and peer leadership roles that middle- and upper-class students acquire with the help of their accumulated cultural and social capital. This focus on employment and leadership opportunities can also highlight the role of South African understandings of work and work ethic in reproducing class inequalities among students at South African universities.

Thus far, the quest to transform and decolonise South African higher education has been a primarily national project. In order to highlight persistent patterns of racialised class

[168] This chapter will focus on those students who self-identify with some level of class advantage that they call either 'middle class' or 'upper class'.

differences, the transformation discourse has set underprivileged Black students in opposition to privileged, mainly White students. This chapter aims to problematise this narrow perception by focusing on the role of international students. Interestingly, the data gathered for this thesis indicates that SADC students at Rhodes University tend to perform well academically and are also well represented in peer leadership roles such as tutors (peer group learning facilitators) and teaching assistants. This contradicts the image often presented in studies both from South Africa (Hiralal 2015: 338-340; McLellan 2009: 291-295; Ramphele 1999; Zar 2009) and other countries around the world (De Araujo 2011; Lee et al. 2004; Mori 2000; Starr-Glass 2016), which picture international students as outsiders struggling to fit in or even discriminated against by local students. This chapter argues that the high number of SADC students in peer leadership positions at Rhodes University illustrates how these international students have used their class advantage in order to excel within institutional structures – regardless of their race and nationality.

As Dr Mabizela's definition of leadership illustrates, the term can be confusing and there is a lack of theoretical consensus around it (Klau 2006: 58-60). The evolution of leadership theory has seen a gradual shift in emphasis from leaders' individual qualities towards a wider analysis of the interpersonal relationships and organisations within which leaders operate (MacNeil 2006: 28). SADC students at Rhodes, whose experiences are discussed in this chapter, occupy institutional leadership roles within the existing power structures of a historically White university, which may limit the transformative effect of their agency.[169] Furthermore, leadership theory often overlooks the intersectional experiences that relate to for example race, class, and gender (Byrd 2009: 582), whereas for Rhodes students, intersectional experiences are often central in their leadership journeys. This chapter thus explores the ways in which students become 'leaders' through negotiations between organisational frameworks, interpersonal relations, and experiences of class.

[169] See Kunene (2013) for discussion on the role of African youth in social change.

In this chapter, I build on the idea of educational institutions as having a key role in nation-building (Healy-Clancy 2017: 2) to show how the prominent role of SADC students in institutional positions at Rhodes University suggests a wider regional story of privilege embedded in the historical trajectories of southern African middle classes. With the continuous accumulation of cultural and social capital through peer leadership roles, successful students may create future middle-class networks that cross the borders of South Africa (McLellan 2009: 289). This chapter therefore further argues that instead of merely providing skills for the region's middle-class youth to be utilised in their home countries (see Solimano 2008) or 'brain-draining' nearby countries of their best educated citizens (Crush et al. 2005; Dube & Rukema 2013), South African higher education in fact has an important role in creating and reproducing transnational middle classes within the SADC region.

6.2. A day in the life of a teaching assistant

Teboho sits in his chair behind a big wooden desk, his immaculate white shirt a stark contrast against the messy backdrop of piled up papers, folders, and cardboard boxes. On the wall, two cloths are folded in half, a vibrant blue one depicting Moshoeshoe I, founder of the Basotho nation (now the Kingdom of Lesotho), and a dark burgundy one portraying King Mswati III, the current King of Eswatini. Next to the cloths, a calendar donated by a bookshop chain proclaims: 'Your future is in your hands. Make your mark'. It is quiet, and Teboho is typing on his desktop computer. But as he himself puts it, this is just the 'calm before the storm', and within an hour his office will be full of students returning assignments, collecting exam results, and requesting Leave of Absence forms (colloquially referred to as LOAs). Teboho greets everyone genuinely, remembering remarkably well their names and attended modules. His interaction style is relaxed yet confident and professional.



Figure 15. Teboho's office.

Cloths depicting Moshoeshoe I and King Mswati III on the wall in Teboho's office.

Teboho is the teaching assistant of one Humanities department at Rhodes University. He is in charge of the administration of departmental modules and tutorials, and his office functions as a peer tutor hub. He is also a master's student, a residence warden and a soccer (football) coach. According to Teboho, leadership positions come naturally to him, and he finds it difficult to reduce his workload – even if it is eating into the time that he has for working on his degree. In high school, he used to be the class representative, swimming captain and SRC president. Coming to Rhodes University, he soon became the media councillor of the pool club, a head student, and a sub-warden (student assisting in the running of a residence).

Teboho describes his own class background as upper class. His father having passed away when Teboho was very young, and his mother being disabled and dependent on the financial assistance of others, Teboho grew up under the wing of his wealthy entrepreneur paternal grandfather. Used to balancing between the simple lifestyle of his mother and the more lavish upbringing he experienced with his paternal family, Teboho claims to be equally familiar with using his fingers to eat pap and boerewors and

dipping his chopsticks into a bowl of ramen. He can talk to anyone and find common ground, and this, he believes, is what makes him a good teaching assistant.

There is certainly a level of evident financial security, but instead of noticeable luxury, Teboho's class manifests itself as a sense of ease and confidence. Having been raised by his grandfather, there was always an element of discipline, and each grandchild was expected not to rely on the family resources. This becomes clear by the way Teboho repeats his grandfather's words: 'I provided shelter, I provided education, I provided every single thing you guys need – now you can go on your own'.[170] Teboho does not seem to engage in much conspicuous consumption. He might have lunch at the nicest restaurants in Makhanda, but sometimes he nearly runs out of his allowance (which he gets from a scholarship and his grandfather) towards the end of the month. He also budgets and tries to save for the future – at the time of my fieldwork, he was looking into buying a car. After a secure childhood, he now feels the pressure of trying out his wings and succeeding in his chosen career using the social and cultural capital gained through his upbringing.

When the students have finally left and the office is quiet again, Teboho has time to catch up with his girlfriend. Daniela is a third-year student in a highly regarded field of study and also a tutor in Teboho's department. She comes from Eswatini, which explains the two folded cloths hanging on the office wall – they symbolise the union of the two people from different countries. Daniela is at home in Teboho's office, and she often spends time on the other side of his desk chatting with other tutors and marking her tutees' assignments. As a child of a wealthy 'self-made' entrepreneur father, Daniela has 'always had a sheltered life, […] always had private education'.[171]

Unlike her partner, Daniela struggled to find her ambition. 'University was not a choice – I was told that I was going. I wanted to act. But my dad was quite realistic about that,

[170] Interview with Teboho from Lesotho at Rhodes University, 24 May 2018.
[171] Interview with Daniela from Eswatini at Rhodes University, 16 May 2018.

and I cried at a restaurant when he told me that I need to pull myself [together]. And then I wanted to go to culinary school, and my dad told me we're not going to pay you to cook food that you can cook in the kitchen, for other people, what kind of life are you going to have? So, I had to settle for something.'[172] Now, she has nonetheless found her calling. She is enjoying her degree and her job as a tutor, which has forced her to interact with people from outside of her own social class. But for her relationship with Teboho, class matters: 'I would never bring home anyone I'm not proud of, but I'm also not going to be dating the gardener's son.'[173]

Of the couple, Daniela is the one with the economic power. Her allowance comes directly from her father who has assumed the role of a financial provider and clearly wants the best for his lastborn child. He also seems to have a tendency for indulgence – as Teboho puts it, 'We have dogs, they have horses.'[174] While she does not need to worry about subsistence, Daniela feels that she must prove she is also academically capable. She feels that because of 'who she is' (referring both to her upper-class background and her position as the TA's girlfriend), her course work gets scrutinised 'through a fine comb'. Therefore, she works hard and has indeed excelled in her studies. Daniela spends most of her time by herself in her upmarket apartment cooking, watching TV series and studying. She tells me repeatedly that she 'has no social life'. This is mainly because she feels that at Rhodes University, her peers judge her for being rich and make her feel uncomfortable for living a nice life. She clearly does not have a sense of belonging at the university, but she has been able to use this detachment to focus on – and excel in – her studies.

Teboho and Daniela have had very different experiences at university. Teboho is outgoing and active, while Daniela has a professional outlook on her tutoring responsibilities but tends to disassociate herself from the university community. Still, facilitated by accumulated social and cultural capital, Daniela and Teboho have

[172] Interview with Daniela from Eswatini at Rhodes University, 16 May 2018.
[173] Interview with Daniela from Eswatini at Rhodes University, 16 May 2018.
[174] Interview with Teboho from Lesotho at Rhodes University, 24 May 2018.

managed to become a power couple in one academic department at Rhodes University. They both qualify as international students and are proud to display their origin though the cloths on the wall. Yet, they do not stick out as being foreigners. Although xenophobic and Afrophobic sentiments sometimes materialise at South African universities (Louw & Mayer 2008: 622; McLellan 2009; Rouhani 2007a and 2007b), no one seems to question who they are and why they are there. This is because the couple have the required habitus to make the university space their own – they speak English with private school accents and are familiar with the institutional culture (see Bourdieu & Passeron 1977).

Furthermore, Teboho is Black and knows some Xhosa, while biracial Daniela, with her light skin, is often mistaken for a White person and therefore not expected to speak a local South African language, especially in formal situations. Still somewhat unexpected in South Africa, they are therefore also an interracial couple. These exceptional elements make the couple an interesting case, which can provide a fresh perspective on the interface of race, class, and nationality in southern Africa. Expanding on the case study of Teboho and Daniela, the rest of this chapter will examine how students' extra-curricular leadership positions are shaped by class divisions at university, and how these peer leadership roles in turn reinforce these class divisions and (re)create transnational networks of privilege.

6.3. Plagiarism, DPs and LOAs – Unequal relations between students and tutors

'Look at your five fingers, they're not all equal' is a proverb that Teboho and Daniela often quote. They both understand class differences as a natural part of life, and this thinking seems to reassure them in their pursuit of excellence. They feel destined (and perhaps sometimes obliged) to follow a path of success set by their parents. Of course, this is not the case with all students holding institutional leadership positions, but at Rhodes University, there seems to be a clear division between tutors and what they call

'students' – their tutees – based on social class. Ever since Pierre Bourdieu's (2010 [1984] and 1986; Bourdieu & Passeron 1977) ground-breaking theorisations of the functioning of class distinction in educational settings, terms such as capital, game, field, and habitus have been used to explain how students possess varying levels of social and cultural capital, which they can mobilise in order to perform academically and manage their peer relations.

Students from lower socio-economic backgrounds are understood to lack the required cultural capital to successfully navigate the norms and values in a higher education environment (Locke & Trolian 2018). This 'out-of-habitus' experience (Reay et al. 2009: 1110) can pose a threat to their identity (Gray et al. 2018), which then causes personal stress and feelings of stigmatisation (Granfield 1991). These young people from lower social backgrounds thus need to reconstruct their identities as students (de Vreeze et al. 2018) within a specific institutional habitus (Reay et al. 2010). This can cause ambivalence as their new and existing identities can be conflicting (ibid.), requiring the use of identity performance and code-switching (Elkins & Hanke 2018). Working-class students' feelings of stigmatisation in higher education settings are often aggravated by unthinking remarks and assumptions made by their middle- and upper-class peers (Locke & Trolian 2018). These microaggressions reveal a subconscious classist bias among university students, in which privilege is normalised whilst working-class students are reminded of their non-belonging (ibid.).

These findings also apply to South African students from less privileged backgrounds. Research on post-1994 higher education has concentrated on the questions of access, redress, and social equity (Moloi et al. 2014), with most research pointing out the failures and challenges in their realisation. While post-apartheid massification of higher education has enabled more students from formerly disadvantaged racial groups to participate in higher education (Bozalek & Boughey 2012: 692; Wangenge-Ouma 2012: 832), access to universities is now often determined by the ability to pay – not only for university studies but also for primary and secondary education at private and

semiprivate institutions (Badat & Sayed 2014: 134-135; Netswera & Mathabe 2006: 33). Those who can afford private education are more likely to get into university (van Broekhuizen et al., cited in Webb 2018) and already possess the necessary academic skills for tertiary level studies (e.g., Steyn 2016).

Writer and academic Jonny Steinberg (cited in Makhulu 2016: 257) has noted that South African universities have become 'theatres of the most intolerable of SA's inequalities [in which] students juggling between staying well fed and paying their fees share classrooms with the gilded children of the top 1%'. As well as determining who gets in and how well they perform academically, a student's class background therefore also affects how they *feel* studying at a university (Vice 2015, my emphasis). This means that middle- and upper-class students at South African universities are able to navigate the institution with confidence, while students from lower socio-economic backgrounds find it more difficult to adjust to academic life. This division into winners and losers creates class-based resentment and animosity within South African higher education, which has been much explored in recent research inspired by the #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall protests of 2015-2016 (e.g., Booysen 2016; Langa et al. 2016; Nyamnjoh 2016; Webb 2018; see also Chapter 5 in this thesis).

A class division between students is also apparent in Teboho's work in his academic department at Rhodes University. An important part of the role of a teaching assistant is dealing with Leave of Absence application forms (LOAs) and Duly Performed (DP) certificates, warnings, and removals. Lectures and tutorials at Rhodes University usually require compulsory minimum attendance, and in case of any absence, a student will need to file an LOA form, normally supported by a doctor's certificate or other proof. If a student has too many unauthorised absences, has failed to submit their assignments on time, or has not received acceptable marks, they will need to be issued a DP warning for that module. [175] If no action is taken after the warning has been given, this may

[175] DP requirements vary by department but are typically between 75-85% attendance and minimum 40% marks in assignments.

eventually result in a DP removal, which means that the student will not be permitted to write their final exam and will have to retake the entire module in order to pass.

For students, submitting LOAs can be stressful, and this is often visible in their behaviour: they linger by the open office door, gazing around hesitatingly, and if they are brave enough to knock, they do it so quietly that Teboho may not always hear. But when he does, he calls them in briskly. Squeezing the form in their hand, the students then walk over to Teboho's desk and quietly explain the grounds for their absence, which range from illness to timetable clashes. While some may simply be apprehensive about an ethnographer being present, most students are also clearly nervous about talking to Teboho. This 24-year-old MA student holds the door between the students and their degree. His disposition, no matter how friendly and approachable, is one of class advantage, and this emerges not only from his institutional role but also his class habitus. For students from lower socio-economic ranks, this encounter is unequal and often unnerving. Their lack of confidence speaks of a 'hidden injury of class' (Sennett & Cobb 1972) – a sense of mismatch between class identities on and off campus – that affects lower-class students' daily interactions with their peers and the members of staff at university (Jack 2016: 9-10).

Another common reason for DP removal at Rhodes University is plagiarism. Many students seem to be unaware of the difference between citing others' work and plagiarising it, or they might not know that reusing their own work is considered self-plagiarism. There are, however, also cases of deliberate plagiarism, in which students present other people's essays as their own assignments. Talking to anyone at Rhodes, it becomes clear that plagiarism is a very common problem that results in a lot of extra work for the teaching staff in the form of attending hearings, as well as being highly stressful for the students themselves. The staff generally believe that the reason for such high levels of plagiarism is the underpreparedness of many students for university studies.[176] This links back to Bourdieu's class theory, as the students who plagiarise may

[176] Interview with an academic member of staff at Rhodes University, 23 May 2018.

not always have the required cultural capital in order to be confident in their academic thinking and writing (Strangfeld 2019).

On the other side of the class divide, tutors are well aware of the pressures facing the underprepared students. Most tutors at Rhodes maintained that they did not work as tutors for the monetary gain but because they wanted to help the students.[177] For the tutors, the struggles of their tutees trigger contradictory emotions. On one submission day, I heard tutors joke about how many DP warnings they were each going to file. However, when I asked if they enjoyed doing that, they cried out appalled, assuring that they were just using dark humour in order to cope with the terrible situation. Tutors at Rhodes are in a challenging position as they are students and teachers at the same time (see Abbot et al. 2018). In their tutoring role, tutors need to balance between providing pastoral care and asserting their 'pedagogic authority' (Bourdieu & Passeron 1977: 11).

As the tutors at Rhodes represent the 'bureaucratic techniques[,] ideology and […] impersonal relationships' of the university, as well as being 'deeply enmeshed within multiplex relationships' of the student body, their position can be described as an intercalary role (Swartz et al. 1966: 44). Although the work of Swartz and the other so-called Manchester School anthropologists is based on the functionings of local-level politics, their theory of social interactions can be also applied to higher education settings. Reviewing a wide range of Manchester School writings, Werbner (1984: 165) explains how people in interhierarchical roles are 'pulled by disparate values and interests' and constantly need to balance between notions of impartiality and authority. He also highlights the need to pay more attention to the 'class alliances' formed through and within social structures (ibid.: 167).

Institutional intercalary positions such as tutoring roles are important for universities because they bridge the student experience with university bureaucracy, and thus

[177] Tutors at Rhodes University are paid R27 per hour (R31 for postgraduate students). Non-South Africans on student visas are allowed to work maximum 20 hours a week, which would give them R540 weekly income (~£30) (Rhodes University 2012).

reproduce institutional culture (Abbot et al. 2018). In the context of South African universities, social class has a central role in this process. Booi et al. (2017) describe how students from suitable middle-class backgrounds are 'groomed' to be the future Black academics that universities so desperately need in order to make claims of transformation. This takes place through 'recruitment practices [that] serve to perpetuate the dominant institutional culture', including tutoring (ibid.: 504). These findings illustrate that students' intercalary roles are in the heart of the process in which South African universities are willing to embrace Africanisation so long as their middle-class disposition remains unchanged.

Furthermore, even when a 'non-traditional' student manages to defy the class bias of recruitment,[178] they may struggle in their tutoring roles, as described to me by a self-identified working-class student, Zimbabwean Fadzai:

> 'Having a tutorial class with students and the undermining is just so clear, in your face. "What could you tell me – a White middle-class boy from a very privileged background who went to private school – when you're just a Black female who claims to have a master's degree? Do you even have the right credentials to be tutoring me?" So, I can really see what you're doing, you're undermining me because I don't come across as the face of intellectualism that you are expecting to get.'[179]

Tutoring programmes are often seen as beneficial for the tutees' academic performance and acculturation into the university (Abbot et al. 2018). Writing on South African universities, Faroa (2017) even argues that by promoting student engagement, tutoring can eventually reduce inequalities within the country's higher education. However, this uncritical view ignores the power relations between students and tutors. Abbot et al. (2018: 246) note that because students often see tutors as more approachable than lecturers, tutoring can enhance the level of communication between students and the university. Yet, they also problematise the embedded hierarchies of tutoring by

[178] Some funding agents require students to commit to tutoring.

[179] Interview with Fadzai from Zimbabwe at Rhodes University, 10 May 2018.

highlighting questions of potential abuse of tutor power and tutors' moral attachment to their tutees (ibid.).

These tutor-student power relations intersect in the narratives of tutors at Rhodes University. While the tutors seem to feel some level of moral superiority when they talk about their tutees, using such words as 'lazy', they justify this by being frustrated with how difficult it is to 'drag the students through their degree'. Teboho connects this parental attitude to the idea of Ubuntu:[180] 'You sort of care for them, you want them to succeed'. But Teboho's version of Ubuntu is guided by his belief in the 'five fingers' metaphor – it is the duty of the more capable students to help the rest (see also Haynes 2012). This is a clear reference to a normative approach on agency that Hursthouse (2001) calls virtue ethics: the tutors want to do good, but in the process, they also want to feel important (see also Chapter 3 on community engagement). Tutoring is therefore also an avenue of personal growth. Daniela refers to this when she says that tutoring 'makes me a better person'.[181]

Coming from predominantly privileged backgrounds, tutors can use the advantage of their class habitus that fits easily in the field and therefore allows them to thrive in the game of academic success and extra-curricular achievement. Access to peer leadership positions then reinforces this class advantage and gives the tutors a moral conviction of the legitimacy of their role. The more privileged students find it easier to apply for tutoring positions, and universities find it more convenient to select students who are already familiar with the academic environment and institutional culture. This, in turn, adds to the cycle of class reproduction in which tutors come from mainly privileged backgrounds and tutoring continues to be seen as a job for those with class advantage (Bathmaker et al. 2013). While the tutors at Rhodes University may not wilfully intend to endorse a class division between themselves and the less privileged students, the classism of selecting certain types of students for leadership roles within the institution

[180] Ubuntu is a concept in African philosophical thought that emphasises human interdependence and is often used as an antonym to Western individualism (Waghid 2020: 300).
[181] Interview with Daniela from Eswatini at Rhodes University, 16 May 2018.

may in fact maintain the status quo and hinder institutional and societal transformation (Booi et al. 2017).

6.4. Precarities of privilege

In many parts of the world, part-time work among students is seen as a necessity mainly for those under financial pressures (Crozier et al. 2008: 173; Elkins & Hanke 2018: 37; Georg 2005: 224; Lehmann 2009: 637). However, work at Rhodes University symbolises status and privilege. Southern Africa has the highest rates of unemployment anywhere in the world, and this is a major cause of poverty and inequality in the region (Nattrass & Seekings 2019: 1). As the job market in South Africa has become highly competitive in the context of high tuition fees and limited student funding, social and cultural capital confers even more significant advantages. In addition, work itself adds to that capital and reinforces a student's class advantage.

Work has a special place in the society in South Africa, where widespread proletarianisation has historically led to a situation in which 'value [is] created only in the workplace' (James 2015: 27). Barchiesi (2016) argues that this attitude to work in South Africa is a racialised phenomenon based on colonial ideas of 'native work ethic', which makes work a moral and rational imperative. In the post-abolition period, wage labour was presented to Black people as a route to respectability and economic emancipation (ibid.: 880), whilst 'idle Blackness' came to be seen as threatening (ibid.: 875). Because the colonial state viewed order and productivity as characteristics of the White world (ibid.: 877), hard work became a marker of progress and civilisation and thus a 'way out of Blackness' (ibid.: 883).

The discourse of work as a moral imperative has also been adopted by the post-apartheid ANC regime (Barchiesi 2016: 889), which has often viewed social assistance programmes (other than those geared towards persons deemed in need of special provision such as children and the elderly) as creators of dependency and laziness

(Nattrass & Seekings 2019: 179). Furthermore, the ongoing move away from labour-intensive development and a growing emphasis on productivity that Nattrass & Seekings (2019) have titled 'decent work fundamentalism' has undermined the role of job creation for the unemployed masses (ibid.: 3, 163). The social impacts of this employment insecurity have then been disguised by the moral value attached to work (Barchiesi 2011: 252). Unemployment, with its direct connections to poverty, inequality, and underdevelopment, is thus seen as one of the most pressing issues in South Africa today (Herbst & Mills 2016). Although universities are occasionally criticised for 'exploiting' tutors as a pool of low-paid labour (e.g., O'Keefe & Courtois 2019), in this situation where prospects of finding employment even after graduation are bleak for most students, work during university studies can be seen as a privilege.

Further evidence of the connections between South African students' engagement in paid work[182] and the privilege related to their race and class is provided in Mpofu's (2015: 582) quantitative research. Whereas over 70% of all White students in Mpofu's study worked during their university studies, the overall rate for non-White students was less than 50% (ibid.). While the rates did not greatly differ for 'rich' (72%) and 'poor' (76%) White students, 'rich' students from all non-White racial groups recorded higher levels of employment (44-46%) than 'poor' students (31-43%) (ibid.).[183] These figures suggest a bias towards White and 'rich' non-White students, and thus contradict the findings from other parts of the world where students most often work due to their relative financial need.

Although the quantitative data for Mpofu's research cannot explain the reasons for these differences, the author associates this race and class bias with 'cultural differences in terms of socialisation [and] habituation in terms of work ethic and the like' and further

[182] This chapter focuses on paid work in the formal sector. Informal small-scale entrepreneurism was, however, also common at Rhodes University during my fieldwork. This was most visible in the way in which students advertised for example hair braiding services and clothing items for sale on social media.
[183] Mpofu's study used quintiles as proxy for class, i.e., 'poor' students represented quintiles 1,2 and 3, and 'rich' students constituted quintiles 4 and 5. The quintile system included variables such as family income, unemployment, and educational level. (Mpofu 2015: 576-577.)

suspects that students from lower socio-economic backgrounds 'spend more time on trying to catch up on their studies' (Mpofu 2015: 582-583). However, according to the data gathered for this thesis, I argue that the reasons behind students' paid work should be examined in conjunction with the outer structures in which the students operate. Many paid roles within Rhodes University as well as paid work positions off campus are (perhaps inadvertently) *designed* for students from more privileged backgrounds, who are thus more likely to find work (see Booi et al. 2017, my emphasis).

Furthermore, structural restrictions can apply even when a student is able to mobilise their cultural and social capital in order to find paid work. One such constraint relates to a student's immigration status. Many countries around the world restrict the amount of paid work allowed for international students, and in South Africa, students on a student visa are allowed to work 20 hours per week but cannot accept a permanent position (Tati 2010: 289-290). This makes tutoring and other temporary campus-based posts especially viable options for the more privileged SADC students at Rhodes University, as it enables them to use their class advantage within the allowance of the regulations.

Teboho works as a teaching assistant five hours per day, four days a week. His other job as a house warden is unpaid but remunerated with free accommodation in a warden's flat. While Teboho and other students in such leadership positions claim that they are not primarily after the monetary compensation that working provides, most admit that it is important to contribute to their own upkeep. Even super-rich Daniela does not see herself idly living off her parents' wealth. Although the couple is unlikely to be consciously working their way 'out of Blackness', the moral value that they place on work as a means towards economic emancipation and respectability echoes Barchiesi's ideas of racialised work ethic (Barchiesi 2016).

Lehmann (2009) argues that in Canada, a strong work ethic is normally more closely associated with working-class students. At Rhodes, however, middle- and upper-class students seem to have adopted similar moral narratives. This way, the students aim to

downplay the role of their class advantage and demonstrate their meritocratic worth (Elkins & Hanke 2018). The emphasis on work ethic in Teboho and Daniela's accounts is also linked to the nature of the privileged classes in southern Africa. Ter Bogt et al. (2004) argue that young people's work ethic develops through interaction with their parents, and that work ethic is more highly valued in lower socio-economic strata. However, as Lentz (2020: 457) further points out, having a working-class background can impact a middle-class person's perceptions of their current status. Despite having spent their childhoods in affluent circumstances, both Teboho and Daniela are still only a generation or two removed from a 'rags to riches' story.

In Teboho's case, it was his grandfather who became a 'self-made millionaire, one of the wealthiest people in the country [of Lesotho]'.[184] Daniela's father, on the other hand, was the illegitimate son of a White farmer and his cook. After having lived in a humble servants' quarters for the first couple of years of his life, he was finally acknowledged by the farmer and given the best education, including an opportunity to study in the United States. Considering this background, it is likely that the importance of work ethic in Teboho and Daniela's narratives also emerges from 'class guilt' as well as a sense of appreciation for the social mobility of earlier generations (see Reay 2005; Sayer 2005; Thomas & Azmitia 2014: 204-205).

Furthermore, whereas Daniela and Teboho represent a tiny minority of the truly affluent, most tutors at Rhodes come from backgrounds that they themselves would describe as middle class (see Chapter 4 in this thesis). Privilege is a relative concept, and in southern Africa, middle classes include a wide range of people from various educational backgrounds and economic conditions (Hellsten 2016: 102; Phadi & Cerruti 2011; Seekings & Nattrass 2005).[185] Four SADC states – Botswana, Lesotho, Namibia and South Africa – are also among the five most unequal countries in the world (Akinkugbe & Wohlmuth 2016: 72), which explains why students from the region are generally

[184] Interview with Teboho from Lesotho at Rhodes University, 24 May 2018.
[185] Indeed, Weiss (2019) argues that the category of 'middle class' has become so vague it has lost its analytical value.

familiar with questions of advantage and disadvantage. In spite of describing herself as middle class, Zimbabwean student Sherry speculated whether there was indeed a middle class in her country, or only 'the haves and the have-nots'.[186]

Although most SADC students interviewed for this thesis hinted that they were more in the 'haves' than the 'have-nots' category, their narratives also touched upon the experience of financial instability and the subsequent fluctuating nature of middle-classness in the global South, where reference groups and class boundaries themselves change over time (Lentz 2020: 449-450). This ambivalence is partly due to the essence of being in the middle (e.g., Ehrenreich 1989; Newman 1988), and partly due to the specific circumstances in the region. Mercer & Lemanski (2020: 429) describe middle-classness in Africa as 'unstable, tenuous [and] context-specific', and argue that this economic precarity is in fact 'distinctive and constitutive' of middle classes in Africa (ibid.: 434). Many SADC students at Rhodes emphasised that even if they came from 'comfortable' backgrounds, they felt that middle-classness was not guaranteed. For example, Fadzai from Zimbabwe described herself as the 'piggy in the middle – either things get better or worse'.[187]

Writing on Angola, Gastrow (2020: 511, 518) explains that aspirations of middle-class living standards are often difficult to realise in a context of low incomes. Especially for those students who grew up in Zimbabwe during the financial crises of the 2000s, the meaning of class advantage had become vague. As self-identified middle-class student Amy from Zimbabwe describes, during the days of hyperinflation, 'you were only allowed to buy two litres of milk every few days and it didn't matter whether you were middle class'.[188] Another Zimbabwean, self-identified upper middle-class PhD student Natsai, elaborates that 'there are lots of people who appear to be middle class but are probably living from pay check to pay check, just because the banking system is no

[186] Interview with Sherry from Zimbabwe at Rhodes University, 14 May 2018.
[187] Interview with Fadzai from Zimbabwe at Rhodes University, 10 May 2018.
[188] Interview with Amy from Zimbabwe at Rhodes University, 12 June 2018.

longer robust and the economy itself […] can't really sustain a growing middle class'.[189] Indeed, Southall (2020: 529) describes the repercussions of authoritarian rule and economic mismanagement in Zimbabwe as the 'demise of the middle classes'. However, even students from countries that had suffered less turmoil than Zimbabwe confirmed the idea that middle-class lifestyles and consumption patterns were always 'at the mercy of ups and downs of the market' (Lentz 2016: 34).

Whilst many SADC students simply described their lives as 'comfortable', there was also an acknowledgement of the 'inbetweenness' of being middle class (Lentz 2016: 41), which was apparent in the way in which students used people around them as reference groups. For example, Zimbabwean self-identified middle-class student Brenda remembered her family handing down their old clothes to their less affluent relatives, but she also remembered 'the rich kids' at high school driving Mini Coopers and planning to study in Europe or America.[190] In this narrative, Brenda actively places herself somewhere between those two groups, which is a clear example of middle-class boundary work. This idea refutes a simplistic categorisation of people into social classes on the grounds of economic or occupational status, and instead highlights the conscious and subconscious efforts of 'doing being middle class' (Lentz 2016: 42).

Education is one such form of boundary work that has an especially central role because it is often seen as an investment in the future and therefore an insurance against unpredictable economic conditions – even when it means taking loans and thus risking the family's financial security (James 2015; Zaloom 2019). As Brenda's further narrative illustrates, education is often viewed through a moral position of meritocracy that justifies sacrifices, including borrowing money, thus legitimising success: 'Most middle-class families, they will send their children abroad, they take out a loan from the bank because education is something that is very valuable in our society, they're willing to work so hard to send their children abroad because the [higher] education system in

[189] Interview with Natsai from Zimbabwe at Rhodes University, 25 May 2018.
[190] Interview with Brenda from Zimbabwe at Rhodes University, 11 May 2018.

Zim is poor.'[191] Education is central for the middle-class experience because it reinforces meritocratic values and achievement (Hull 2020: 559) as opposed to inherited or unearned status. Parents who send their children to the best schools also feel morally validated as they are investing in intergenerational upward mobility instead of the instant gratification from material acquisition (ibid.: 561).

The investment in education is very tangible in the narratives of the SADC students. In the absence of adequate funding options for international students, it often takes a joint effort of the entire extended family to enable these young people to undertake studies at an acclaimed institution in South Africa. Parents of the students work and take loans from relatives, employers and banks, and older siblings contribute as soon as they start earning. Borrowing for children's education appears to be an established procedure, as Zimbabwean self-identified 'middle- towards upper-class' student Simbarashe describes: 'It's a process where my dad applies for a loan at his company, and I send them [the bill for] my fees. Then, they approve the loan and just deduct it from his salary every month until it's fully paid off'.[192] As families with less stable employment would not easily be able to make such arrangements, access to credit is thus a prerogative of middle-class status (James 2015). The concerted effort it takes to access education and use it for the family's long-term advantage relies on a great deal of creativity and perseverance, therefore highlighting the role of agency in middle-class formation and reproduction (Spronk 2020: 477, 485).

Just as having class advantage in the southern African context is not a straightforward phenomenon, even the 'leaders' studying at Rhodes University have their challenges. Competition for institutional positions is harsh, and students' aspirations and expectations are high. Families have invested in the students' education and need them to graduate and find paid work, but the uncertain economic situation in South Africa as well as across the region means that the students' personal aspirations are easily

[191] Interview with Brenda from Zimbabwe at Rhodes University, 11 May 2018.
[192] Interview with Simbarashe from Zimbabwe at Rhodes University, 15 June 2018.

trumped by high rates of unemployment. Middle-class students, such as Zimbabwean Brenda, were acutely aware of this pressure: '[B]ecause of the economic situation, it's hard to find jobs [in Zimbabwe]. So, me coming to Rhodes is also in the hopes that maybe I can find a job here and then sustain myself, instead of learning there for a cheaper price and then I'm unemployed, I'm just a burden?'[193]

For Daniela and Teboho, the success of their parents had created a lifestyle that they were not willing to lose. They had realised that as young adults, it was now up to them to make the right choices and do their best to achieve financial prosperity independent of their parents. Clearly, these second or third generation upper-class students still share 'the fear of falling' of their middle-class peers (Ehrenreich 1989; Neubert 2016: 123). Daniela's thoughts describe this well: 'I've had a lot of stuff handed to me and it's the one thing that scares me a bit. […] I think my dad has almost disadvantaged me as well as advantaged me. […] [W]hen my dad stops paying my rent, am I going to have to downgrade to something else? I always have that at the back of my mind. […] Can I actually sustain what these people have given me?'[194] Furthermore, due to their academic ambitions and the need to distinguish themselves from the family safety net and assert their independence from parents, neither of them wished to take the safe path of continuing their parents' businesses but felt that they had to make their own careers, or, in Teboho's words, 'build my own brand, my own image'.[195]

Notwithstanding their social class, students' pressures of success were intensified by the moral obligation to support their extended families financially (see Dominguez-Whitehead 2017). In the context of unstable economic conditions across Africa, many people rely on the financial support provided by family and friends (Spronk 2020: 477). Better-off relatives thus often become substitutes for reliable social protection programmes. Ngoma (2016: 179) explains that in Africa, 'the responsibility for family members and communities makes middle-class positionality tenuous and precarious'.

[193] Interview with Brenda from Zimbabwe at Rhodes University, 11 May 2018.
[194] Interview with Daniela from Eswatini at Rhodes University, 16 May 2018.
[195] Interview with Teboho from Lesotho at Rhodes University, 24 May 2018.

This is because the more one earns (or is assumed to be earning), the more one is expected to contribute to the upkeep of the extended family. As many SADC students had come to South Africa aided by collective family fundraising, they were rarely in a situation to provide for their extended families back home. Still, living abroad was often seen as a sign of privilege that should be shared with kin (see Kihato 2013: 49-51). Indeed, their education was an investment of support, which the students were expected to reciprocate in the future.

Some students, like Zimbabwean self-identified middle-class student Sherry, described resentment within their family arising from accusations of selfishness and lack of solidarity: '[F]or some people it's like, "Oh, she came back from South Africa! She studies Law in South Africa!" It's changed some people's perceptions of me and my family. There's the expectation that we can afford things, so some family members will ask for A, B, C and D, and if my parents say we can't afford that right now, they're like "Ahh, but your child is in South Africa so what do you mean you can't afford it?"'[196] Spronk (2020: 479), writing on Ghana, confirms this common dilemma for middle-class Africans of finding a balance between 'egoistic' investments in children's education and redistribution within the extended family. However, Durham (2020: 492, 502), writing on Botswana, notes that in reality, selfishness and sociality are not mutually exclusive practices, as wealth tends to circulate among family and friends.

Because of their privileged position, Daniela and Teboho had both seen from close up the mechanisms of family obligations that many students at Rhodes called 'Black tax' (see Mhlongo 2019; Webb 2019) and regarded it as an inevitable burden. Daniela describes: 'I have relatives […] still living in the homestead. My dad probably pays for school fees, but they interact at a distance. They're not at our house every weekend. […] Many of my dad's interactions are to pay for things, which I think is why he's a bit distant from it all. It's like "Hi, how's your wallet?"'.[197] Daniela's example of her father illustrates

[196] Interview with Sherry from Zimbabwe at Rhodes University, 14 May 2018.
[197] Interview with Daniela from Eswatini at Rhodes University, 16 May 2018.

how she feels that the economic disparity within her family had an adverse effect on their social cohesion.

In Teboho's narrative about his family, his grandfather's financial obligations towards the extended family as well as contestation over financial control were clearly the source of some resentment although he tries to see it in a positive light: '[O]ur grandfather would be helping other people [referring to his cousins] 'cause my grandfather's loaded so "Hey, grandad, listen, I'm starting a project, how much you need, oh, 50K, ok, do I get any money out of that, yeah grandad", all of those things. [But] with us [Teboho and his brother] it's almost like "What do you need the money for? How dare you [ask]!" My aunt controls my grandad's finances. […] [S]he almost now rations out his money to each of us but makes sure we get the bare minimum. But I'm alright with that, I mean that's why I have my own job, that's why I'm doing my own thing.'[198]

While most of the students interviewed for this thesis did not plan to directly pay back their parents for their education, they accepted that just as their older siblings were expected to contribute to the education of the younger ones, they too would eventually need to share their income with other family members. SADC students' position as 'constrained cosmopolitans' implied that any privilege they were assumed to have was likely bounded with a sense of social precarity and identity misrecognition (see Chapters 4 and 5 in this thesis). The burden of the so-called 'Black tax' together with the high value placed on work, class-related ideals of meritocracy, opportunities restricted for example by immigration status, and unstable economic prospects explain why even the more privileged students in southern Africa feel the need to work hard in order to avoid downward class mobility.

[198] Interview with Teboho from Lesotho at Rhodes University, 24 May 2018.

6.5. Building region-wide networks of 'leaders'?

University for many young people at Rhodes University, as elsewhere, is a time for building personal and professional relationships (Bathmaker et al. 2013). Although networking is usually an unintended secondary outcome of making friends at university, these connections still often count as social capital that can prove beneficial in finding employment and other opportunities after graduation (ibid.). At Rhodes University, a class divide between those who are likely to fulfil the promise of the institutional motto 'where leaders learn' and the less successful students is also manifesting itself in the way in which networks are built. Institutional peer leadership roles such as teaching assistants, tutors and wardens attract – and are more easily accessible to – students from relatively more privileged backgrounds.

Public institutions such as universities are key sites of middle-class formation (Bolt & Schubert 2022). Furthermore, one of the central functions of universities is the reproduction of dominant (national) elites (Cloete et al. 2018: 611). In Africa, Western-educated elites have used their education for gaining political domination (Bassey 1999: 1). The educated elites are the ones who create educational policies which in turn reproduce the class structures and ideologies for example through academic selection and allocation of bursaries, while alienating and marginalising less privileged students (ibid.: 3, 6). One important aspect of elite formation at universities relates to networking (Cloete et al. 2018: 611). At Rhodes University, similar processes are taking place as students in institutional leadership positions make connections that mainly involve other relatively privileged people. The networks that these young people form are thus firmly middle class in character.

Mercer & Lemanski (2020: 432) note that middle-class life across Africa presents itself as a 'mix of transnational and more localised trajectories'. A strong presence of students from the SADC region at Rhodes University in general, and especially in peer leadership positions, indicates that the networks forming at the institution are indeed transnational

in nature. Within the diverse tutoring circles at Rhodes, friendships are established between students with varied race, gender, and national identities. On multiple occasions, I observed tutors in Teboho's office asking each other about the vocabulary of someone's home language and discussing cultural differences. Yet, tutoring seemed to be a unifying position derived from shared values and anticipated trajectories as 'future leaders'. As identification with the 'White middle-class' institutional culture is a central selection requirement for students in tutoring and other institutional roles (Booi et al. 2017: 501-503), class becomes an important shared factor. SADC students' experience of social precarity and foreignness in the wider South African society is therefore temporarily negated within this institutional setting.

The way in which this kind of individual-level interconnectedness informs region-wide middle-class trajectories remains little known. Although some scholars are now calling for a more transnational perspective to research on African social classes (Lentz 2015), literature on the middle classes across the southern African region has thus far mainly focused on national level developments and characteristics.[199] This narrow focus on the national level is regrettable given the pivotal role of intra-regional migration in shaping social relations within southern Africa (Reitzes 2000: 1). Notwithstanding the shortage of literature explicitly identifying the connections between transnational interactions and class formation in the region, there is strong evidence to suggest that national middle classes and elites in southern Africa have always been interconnected. This is especially evident in the case of education.

Teboho, Daniela and the other students participating in this research are not the first non-South African 'leaders' to graduate from a South African university. The first middle classes in the southern African colonies were mainly formed of the 'assimilated' minority

[199] Andrianampiarivo (2014) has written on Madagascar; Buire (2014) and Gastrow (2020) on Angola; Campling et al. (2011) on the Seychelles; Durham (2020) on Botswana; Freund (2011) on DRC; Simelane (2012) on Eswatini; McCracken (1998) and Riley (2014) on Malawi; Mercer (2014) on Tanzania; Hull (2020), Ndlovu (2020), Seekings & Nattrass (2005) and Southall (2016) on South Africa; Pauli (2011) on Namibia; Ranger (1995), Southall (2020) and West (1995) on Zimbabwe; Resnick (2015) and Scott (1978) on Zambia; Sumich (2016) on Mozambique; Turkon (2009) on Lesotho; and Ulriksen (2012) on Botswana and Mauritius.

who assumed the colonialists' ways and values including religion, language, and practices (Scott 1978: 321; Sumich 2016: 829), and this was generally acquired through Western education – primarily in mission schools (see Comaroff & Comaroff 1991; West 1995: 14, 43, 66-67). In most colonies, local Black populations were generally discouraged from undertaking higher education as it was thought to 'produce anti-colonial and anti-racist resistance sentiments' (Reddy 2004: 10). This led to a lack of schooling opportunities, which in turn sent young African people seeking study opportunities outside of their own countries (Jowi 2009: 268; see also Chapter 2). South African universities and mission schools would therefore draw students from as far as Kenya and Uganda (Massey 2010: 99, 241; Morrow 2013: 195; Ranger 1995: 49-50; West 1995: 2).

Gradually, educational institutions became fulcrums for anti-colonial liberation movements across the region, and many of the students in these institutions eventually ended up forming governments in the newly independent African states (see Reddy 2004: 16; Scott 1978: 321; Sumich 2016: 829). Perhaps the most extraordinary network of future national leaders was formed at the University of Fort Hare in Alice, South Africa, which was the *alma mater* of a list of remarkable political figures in the history of South Africa, including Mangosuthu Buthelezi, Chris Hani, Nelson Mandela, Govan Mbeki, Barney Pityana, Robert Sobukwe, Oliver Tambo and Desmond Tutu, as well as the wider southern African region, including Kenneth Kaunda from Zambia, Seretse Khama from Botswana, Robert Mugabe from Zimbabwe, and Julius Nyerere from Tanzania (Cloete 2018: 615; Massey 2010: 8, 68; Morrow 2013: 204).

Like many students in leadership positions at Rhodes University today, the post-colonial leaders of southern Africa did not always come from particularly wealthy backgrounds (Cloete et al. 2018: 614). However, many of them had a class advantage through their connections to traditional power, native administration, or both (Gibbs 2014: 18, 20). Despite their relatively privileged backgrounds, the lives of many liberation icons were thus characteristically rural. For example, Zambia's first president Kenneth Kaunda

remembers having to fetch water and help with housework as a child (Kaunda 1977: 9), and Zimbabwe's long-term leader Robert Mugabe is said to have been herding cattle with 'a book in one hand and the whip in the other' (Holland 2009: 5). However, schooling was an important stepping-stone for escaping that rural existence. What connects these national leaders and the tutors at today's Rhodes University is therefore the appreciation of education (Gibbs 2014: 18). Even though not all anti-colonial heroes were particularly talented in academic terms (see Parsons et al. 1995: 52 writing on Botswana's Seretse Khama), the time they spent at university was crucial for the entire region.

The pan-African ideals of the anti-colonialist future leaders emerged as much from the liberation imperative of their time as their personal relationships formulated at institutions like Fort Hare (Parsons et al. 1995: 55). Studying at an institution controlled by racist laws that were designed to stop Black people taking full advantage of higher education, the real value of university education thus emanated from transnational peer networking. Gibbs (2014: 2) describes these networks as 'intricate web[s] of regionally-focused kinship' which were reinforced and reproduced by professional links and marriages across colonial borders. Even long after independence from colonial rule, 'elite […] networks […] remain vital to African political life' (ibid.) and regional connections still support many politicians and businesspeople on their way to senior positions (ibid.: 154).

In the case of the Rhodes University students who participated in this research project, it is clear that there were already networks in place before university, and that these networks were conspicuously based on class advantage. Daniela explains: 'And what I've noticed, being at uni, is definitely the school aspect: "Oh, did you go to this school, do you know this person?" You've almost built a web of networking between us that have gone to private schools in South Africa, whether you come from Botswana or Zimbabwe or Swaziland or Mozambique. I don't know if there's a list of private schools our parents have googled where to send their kids to, but there's a set list and you go to one of

those.'[200] Writing on South African middle classes, Ndlovu (2020: 573) confirms the importance of networks formed in schools and universities for middle-class formation. These networks can be informal and based on friendship such as in Daniela's narrative, or they can also take a more formalised shape, such as in the case of alumni associations.

At Rhodes University, alumni have been represented by the Old Rhodian Union (ORU) since 1911 (Rhodes University 2020a). The Old Rhodian Union publishes on its website a list of Old Rhodians, from which it becomes evident that there has been a steady presence of southern African students through the years at Rhodes. From the early listings of 'Old Rhodian News' emerges an image of a well-connected colonial southern Africa, where young White Africans were able to move freely and take up opportunities anywhere in the region (Old Rhodian News 2020a). The first distinctly non-White names appear on the list only in the early 1990s.

The names listed in the 'Old Rhodian News' are often those students who went on to notable achievements (and were thus interested in sending in their updates). Authors are especially well represented, as is illustrated by the mention of two bestselling books, *Baking cakes in Kigali* and *Buddhism for busy people*, both written by former Rhodes students from the southern African region (Old Rhodian News 2020b).[201] On another list, three former SADC students are acknowledged as recent recipients of the university's Distinguished Alumni Awards based on their academic work and leadership in non-governmental organisations (Rhodes University 2016, 2017, 2018). Furthermore, the current Vice-President of the Old Rhodian Union is also a former SADC student who now is an academic member of staff at Rhodes (Rhodes University 2020a, 2020b).

The generations of post-colonial African heads of state as well as the achievements of Rhodes alumni from southern African countries clearly demonstrate that students from the region have long been able to benefit from education acquired in South Africa. With

[200] Interview with Daniela from Eswatini at Rhodes University, 16 May 2018.
[201] The authors of these books are Zambian Gaile Parkin and Zimbabwean-born David Michie, respectively. Parkin graduated from Rhodes in 1975 and Michie in 1981.

reference to the transnational dimensions of African middle classes today, Lentz (2016: 45) has asked 'to what extent can educational achievements and material resources acquired abroad be converted into social status back home, […] and [w]hat reference groups for class status become relevant in transnational circles?'. Despite the 'constrained cosmopolitanism' (see Chapter 4 in this thesis) of the SADC students portrayed in this chapter, this generation of young southern Africans may thus be on their way to becoming the future educated classes – and perhaps even transnational elites – of the region (McLellan 2009: 289).

Due to the one-directional nature of student mobility from southern African countries to South Africa, education acquired in South Africa has often been presented either as an important avenue of skill production for the region's middle-class youth to be utilised in their home countries (see Solimano 2008), or through concerns about South Africa 'brain-draining' these countries of their best educated citizens (Crush et al. 2005; Dube & Rukema 2013). The evidence from Rhodes University suggests that the reality may be more ambiguous than either of these visions. Although three students – Mudiwa, Russell and Tarusikirwa – told me their ambition was to one day become President of Zimbabwe, most SADC students described to me imagined future careers in cutting-edge industry, law, and politics that straddle national borders. Daniela's ultimate dream was to 'prosecute warlords – imagine!',[202] while Teboho dreamt of '[w]orking with international organisations to combat climate change', describing it as his 'sense of purpose'.[203]

For this generation of potential 'future leaders' coming of age in South African higher education institutions, the ideas of home and abroad seem somewhat entangled as they use their accumulated social and cultural capital to navigate transnational spaces (see also Chapter 4). This supports the idea that 'brain circulation' in the southern African region takes place not only in geographic terms but also through the social connections

[202] Interview with Daniela from Eswatini at Rhodes University, 16 May 2018.
[203] Interview with Teboho from Lesotho at Rhodes University, 24 May 2018.

between the region's university-educated young people (Matlapeng 2000: 12). The answer to Lentz's (2016: 45) questions regarding the 'conversion of educational achievements between home and abroad' and 'transnational reference groups' may therefore lie in SADC students' transnational middle-class identity that is flexible and easily adapted both to regional and national settings. By facilitating the emergence of these reference groups, South African higher education institutions can have a role in creating and reproducing regional networks of 'future leaders' within the SADC region – not entirely dissimilar to the role that they played in the times of Kaunda, Khama, and Mugabe, albeit of course in a different historical moment.

6.6. Conclusions

This chapter has argued that students from relatively privileged backgrounds are over-represented in institutional peer leadership roles at South African universities, which reproduces class divisions at the university. I have further argued that as SADC students are well integrated into the successful group of 'leaders' at Rhodes, they challenge the common perceptions of international students as a marginalised group[204] and of migrants as a group with homogeneous – typically lower – class backgrounds (see Bolt 2015: 12). The institutional success story of SADC students validates the sacrifices their families have made to provide their children with the best education available to them.

However, the case of SADC students at Rhodes – as exemplified by Teboho and Daniela – also confirms the idea that international education is a marker of privilege and can act as a reinforcement of that privilege (Waters 2012). Mingling with other students in institutional leadership roles who come primarily from privileged backgrounds (see Booi et al. 2017), SADC students and their South African peers are in a process of creating transnational networks that may one day form a part of new southern African elites (see

[204] For discussions on international students in the South African context, see Hiralal 2015: 338-340; McLellan 2009: 291-295; Ramphele 1999; Zar 2009. Regarding international students in other countries in the world, see De Araujo 2011; Lee et al. 2004; Mori 2000; Starr-Glass 2016.

McLellan 2009: 289). South African higher education therefore has an important role in reproducing class distinction in the entire region.

Whatever the 'future leaders' described in this chapter end up doing with their Rhodes University degrees, they will be an example to many other young southern Africans. Reflecting on the role of privileged Black South Africans, Matthews (2010: 172) notes that they are often expected to be 'aspirational figures' who have the capacity to 'contribute to transformation by challenging racial divisions'. In addition to the obligations towards their families, wealthy Africans are thus also expected to have certain social responsibility towards their race and country. As Matthews (ibid.) points out, it is acceptable for them to show their wealth as long as they also work actively to improve the lives of the poor. This was present in the narratives of SADC students, who were acutely aware of their relative privilege and willing to 'pay back' their families' investments through their future career positions.

However, the students' attitudes to work and their claims of meritocracy are made within the framework of a racialised work ethic and have conservative undertones (see Barchiesi 2016; Marais 2011: 254). To branch out of the question of 'who is going to become the next generation of academics in South Africa' (Portnoi 2009: 203), this chapter has argued that future leaders within and beyond South African universities will consist of the successful Black students who are acculturated into 'White ways' (Booi et al. 2017). Therefore, even if they end up working to combat social problems, these students may have limited transformational qualities as their legitimacy is derived from the institutional structures of class distinction in place at South African universities.

Nyamnjoh (2016) calls attention to the prevailing 'insider/outsider' configuration at South African universities by arguing that the roots of the students' postcolonial anxieties lie in the ways that citizenship and belonging have been contested – and sometimes denied – throughout South Africa's history. This chapter has illustrated how this division is increasingly linked to social class as well as race. Those students who are

able and willing to adopt the prevailing values and practices of universities can use institutional structures to their benefit, which then reproduces class distinctions.

In a historically minority-dominated institution such as Rhodes University, it is perhaps not surprising that outsiders – whether due to their nationality, class status or both – may have an advantage within the organisational structures. SADC students may in fact epitomise the distinction that is expected of successful students in the prevailing division into winners and losers at Rhodes University. This chapter has illustrated that whilst the institutional frameworks at Rhodes appear to be becoming more inclusive as exemplified by the involvement of SADC students, university structures still reproduce class-based advantage.

7. CONCLUSION

7.1. Summary

Southern Africa is one of the most unequal regions in the world (see Akinkugbe & Wohlmuth 2016: 72; Sulla et al. 2022: 1). In this thesis, I have shown that South African universities are deeply imbricated in this inequality because they are at the heart of regional class-making projects. Through a focus on SADC students, and the particular ways in which they experience both privilege and precarity, I have looked at how migrants position themselves in terms of their more 'stable' identities such as race, class, and nationality, yet emphasising that social inequalities are experienced as dynamic and fragmentary processes. I have done this by highlighting the intersections of students' age, educational and migration pathways, and the underlying expectation that students should contribute to their families' intergenerational class-making projects.

Chapter 2 showed how the experiences of SADC students at Rhodes University are shaped by a contradictory framework in which long-standing traditions of educational migration in southern Africa do not easily fit in the more recent discourse of international student mobility. Education is central in South Africa's nation-building (Healy-Clancy 2017: 2), which has led to a 'national needs within a global context' approach in the country's higher education sector (McLellan 2008: 138). However, I demonstrated that South African higher education also has influence across its borders through incoming international students. Located in the periphery of the global ranking of universities (Majee & Ress 2020: 475), South African institutions such as Rhodes University act as regional stepping-stones in the class-building projects of those educational migrants I call 'constrained cosmopolitans'.

Universities are key sites of young people's identity formulation (Johnson and Singleton 2015: 237). In Chapter 3, I illustrated that both international and South African students at Rhodes University are building their identities whilst navigating a turbulent campus

environment in which different groups claim belonging. The way in which students describe Rhodes and Makhanda as 'White spaces' and middle-class 'bubbles' points to distinct patterns of inclusion and exclusion based on race and class. I showed how creating a sense of being 'at home' requires moral boundary work and place-making, but also how these strategies vary according to students' levels of economic, social, and cultural capital. Students' relations with their surrounding environment thus both reflect and reinforce inequality (see Schensul & Heller 2011: 78).

Being an international student in this already contested social space is not always welcomed as anti-immigrationist attitudes in the wider South African society are also reflected on university campuses (Hiralal 2015: 333, 341). Chapter 4 discussed the ways in which the threats of national stereotyping and xenophobia give SADC students at Rhodes University an acute sense of non-belonging. Whilst navigating these challenges in South Africa, SADC students also face family pressures of success that simultaneously connect them to life back home. I showed how the combination of uncertainty and potential (Johnson-Hanks 2002: 871) that SADC students experience in their present lives contributes to a sense of temporal as well as spatial dislocation. Ongoing renegotiations of class between home and South Africa complicate SADC students' identities and leave them feeling never fully 'at home' in either place, and constantly looking for a better future elsewhere.

Chapter 5 illustrated how the 2015-2016 fallist student protests in particular highlighted SADC students' non-belonging. In the context of uncompromising anti-privilege identity politics resulting from conflicting appeals for recognition (see Taylor 1994; Englund & Nyamnjoh 2004), SADC students were assumed to be 'too rich to care' about the protests. I demonstrated that as their own reasoning for non-participation was based on the restrictions they faced as immigrants, these assumptions left SADC students having their transnational identities misrecognised. They were alienated from the protest discourse because their moral understandings of race and class did not match those promoted by South African protesters. However, I also showed how their use of

moral grandstanding and virtue signalling (see Tosi & Warmke 2016; Wallace et al. 2020) got SADC students involved in identity politics on Rhodes University campus, which created new forms of exclusion within the student community.

Chapter 6 challenged perceptions of international students as a stereotypically marginalised group and suggested that SADC students may even comprise future elites in southern Africa (see McLellan 2009: 289). Whilst portraying SADC students as a group that is often perceived as having a certain level of privilege in comparison to South African students, this was again contrasted with their experience of considerable social and emotional precarity. I discussed the way in which SADC students have managed to carve a social space where they feel 'at home' at Rhodes through peer leadership roles. However, as this takes place within the institutional structures of Rhodes, SADC students' participation in such activities as tutoring is unlikely to alleviate their sense of non-belonging in the wider society. Moreover, I illustrated that these 'future leaders' face pressures to 'give back' to their home communities according to the support they have received (see Dominguez-Whitehead 2017), which adds to their sense of precarity.

7.2. Contribution

This thesis set out to explore the ways in which SADC students in South African higher education experience, interpret, and practice social class as migrants. I have explored these research questions through the key themes emerging from my data: identity, aspiration and belonging. The case of SADC students at Rhodes University has offered a fresh perspective on the research fields of migration, higher education, and social class by linking them together. I have argued that in the South/southern African contexts of race and class, SADC students' transnational identities are a source of both privilege and precarity. Their understandings of identity, aspiration and belonging are inflected by the context of inequality in South African higher education and wider society, in which one person's advantage is easily seen as someone else's disadvantage (and *vice versa*). By analysing both the structures and the practices that reproduce classed peer relations in

higher education, this thesis helps to understand the ways in which the intersection of subjective and material aspects reproduces social class.

Identity emerged as one of the key themes in this thesis through the way in which debates on persistent inequality and the need for transformation at South African universities emphasise personal and collective experiences of social injustice. For some South African students, the transformation imperative has become an avenue for discovering and expressing their intersectional identities. However, SADC students do not generally share this sense of empowerment, but rather experience ambivalence due to the specific intersection of their race, class, and national identities.

The role of international students within the transformation debates in South African higher education remains delicate. South African higher education prioritises local students and considers internationalisation contradictory to transformation, restricting SADC students' sense of belonging (Majee 2020: 142). SADC students have not been seen as agents of transformation, nor have they benefitted from it. In the wider society, non-South African Black people are not included in affirmative action policies and can only be hired for a job if a suitable South African candidate – from any racial group – is not available (Mdladlana, cited in News24 2010). In other words, SADC students are studying in a country where they are not necessarily welcome to stay after graduation.

I chose to look at the different aspects of student life at Rhodes University through the lens of social class. However, the five substantive chapters of this thesis have demonstrated that SADC students are a diverse group whose experiences are best understood in relation to their intersecting identities. Race and class in southern Africa are intertwined in ways that make possible the narratives of Black people's upward class mobility as 'becoming White',[205] which I often heard on the Rhodes University campus.

[205] The idiom 'becoming White' does not seem to be widely used in this way elsewhere, but its incorporation of race and privilege is similar to the way in which Jewish people have been labelled as White to emphasise their assumed class advantage and thus to undermine their experience of racial oppression (see Brodkin 2002).

This implies that increasing diversity (for example through such initiatives as affirmative action) may lack transformational power if they reproduce class divisions (see Booi et al. 2017). As the Observer columnist Kenan Malik (2023) writes, 'diversity policies […] do not necessarily challenge inequality, but simply make it "fairer"'. As we have seen, at Rhodes, individual students may break barriers to become 'leaders', but the structures remain unequal, obscuring classism behind a veil of meritocracy. It is therefore paramount that questions of class are taken seriously in research regarding higher education transformation (see Higham 2012; Kistner 2011).

Emerging from a larger framework of African middle-classness, aspiration was a key theme that helped to explain young SADC citizens' contradictory experience in South Africa's higher education. Whilst aspiration was a driving force behind their transnational education pathways, it also exposed SADC students' financial, social, and emotional precarity. Adding to their uncertain future prospects, migrating for educational purposes had heightened the expectations of success, thus creating a temporal dislocation in which intergenerational aspirations were directing them to a promising yet unknown future whilst reducing the present moment to an academic and social obstacle course.

The way in which SADC students have managed to occupy a little 'corner' of Rhodes University in which they can feel 'at home' through peer leadership roles perhaps merely suggests that these positions have not (yet) been widely scrutinised through a transformation lens (but see Booi et al. 2017). Furthermore, this 'corner' of institutional privilege is, as I have shown in this thesis, in stark contrast to their experience of social and emotional precarity. SADC students' sense of precarity stems both from their 'foreignness' as well as their (largely) middle-class identities, both of which are constructed by SADC students themselves as well as 'in the eyes of others' (see Vincent 2005: 114) – including South African peers but also policy makers, as their exclusion from affirmative action programmes testifies.

Belonging was a key theme that emerged in this thesis through two distinct frames of reference. My data suggested that feeling 'at home' at the university was important to the students. Using Bourdieusian analysis of social class in university settings, I demonstrated how attaining this kind of sense of belonging was often subject to conforming to the institutional structures and practices that also reproduce inequality. Furthermore, SADC students' sense of belonging in the wider South African society was impeded by their experiences of Otherness as regional migrants.

In the South African society, 'foreignness' typifies an undesirable kind of Otherness and within the university transformation debates, middle-classness represents convention and conservatism. Being ascribed these unwanted identities aggravates SADC students' sense of loss of agency, as navigating them or refusing them altogether (see Englund 2004: 12) becomes a frustrating 'game' of code-switching. SADC students in South Africa therefore mainly keep their heads down and focus on building their future careers. Whilst their transience could be used as an excuse to exclude them from longer-term transformation debates in South African higher education, my research has shown that including transnational perspectives benefits transformation pursuits by adding to the understanding of how privilege and precarity at university are produced, maintained, and experienced.

7.3. Future prospectives

As I write this, the SADC students who participated in my research have moved on in their lives and most have now left Makhanda. While I have lost contact with many, I know that some are doing internships or volunteering in their home countries while looking for something more permanent. Others are still in South Africa engaged in further studies. The only one I met during my last fieldtrip was Zimbabwean Sherry who was doing a master's degree at Rhodes and working at a bakery café. Zambian Samuel is a research officer in a South Africa-based non-profit organisation dealing with international relations. Teboho is still multi-tasking: finishing his master's at another

South African university, working in climate advocacy consulting, running a green energy enterprise as well as being actively involved in international climate diplomacy. He is currently based in South Africa. He has parted ways with Daniela who is currently working as a candidate attorney in commercial law in Eswatini and is aiming to be an admitted attorney of the country's High Court. Zimbabweans Mudiwa, Ndabezinhle and Theodore are all pursuing academic careers in South Africa. Sadly, Zimbabwean Russell passed away in a tragic incident on campus soon after my second fieldtrip and never got to start his master's programme (nor become President of Zimbabwe).

New students from all over southern Africa and beyond are arriving at Rhodes University with their suitcases. They may become tutors and teaching assistants, or they may struggle with writing assignments. Whatever they do, these new students are likely to experience their time at Rhodes as a 'vital conjuncture' (Johnson-Hanks 2002: 871) as they live through important life moments whilst making steps towards their future and following guidance from the past. As I have shown in this thesis, university is a time for students to engage in individual and group identity-building while also seeking to contribute to their families' intergenerational class-making projects. Throughout the chapters, I have aimed to gauge how these unstable processes exist alongside and in relation to such categories as 'social class' and 'migrant'.

This thesis has emphasised that identities are fragmented and dynamic – something that need to be constructed by individuals and families. Being a (migrant) student is a transient identity and I have also shown how other identities such as those regarding race and class can be understood and experienced as unstable and context-specific. For example, SADC students at Rhodes University do not easily fit with South African narratives of 'Black' identity and may therefore have their class identities misrecognised. However, I have also characterised students according to such identifications as race, class, and nationality. Indeed, my research question asked how SADC students 'experience, interpret, and practice social class as migrants'. This way, I have referred to some identifications as more 'stable' categories.

While this use of 'stable' identifications may seem to contradict my focus on identity processes, Vignoles et al. (2011: 10-11) explain that identities may in fact only appear to be stable because of our continuous efforts to maintain them. Moreover, identities often have variability across contexts even if they are relatively stable *within* contexts (ibid.: 11, my emphasis). In this way, migration can heighten the need for 'fluid and flexible' identities (Seo 2019: 190) and continuous identity renegotiation (Rye 2019: 37). As moving between identity categories over time also requires relatively permeable group boundaries, mobility in terms of class may be easier than in the case of other identifications such as 'race' (Spears 2011: 207). However, in the environment of hardening identity boundaries at Rhodes, maintaining the race and class identities that SADC students had back home was difficult, and this mismatch became a major source of their sense of social and emotional precarity.

The events and experiences explored in this thesis are of course non-replicable. Rhodes University and Makhanda are changing, and new students will not carry with them the memory of the 2015-2016 fallist protests. Yet, this thesis can help us to understand some of the ways in which privilege and precarity is reproduced in South African higher education settings, despite policies and rhetoric of transformation. My research can help us to understand the persistence and deepening of inequality within South Africa, as well as offering new opportunities for comparison with countries in which race, class, and national identity have different historical trajectories and present-day configurations. Therefore, Rhodes University would serve as a good basis for further investigations regarding privilege and precarity, but future avenues of research may also lie elsewhere.

Going forward, research on the intersections of social class, migration, and higher education would benefit from more focus on the ways in which Otherness and privilege coalesce in different settings. The key themes of this thesis were identity, aspiration, and belonging, which I maintain are central for the understanding of experiences related

to privilege and precarity. Rollock et al. (2015) have investigated the educational choices and trajectories of racially minoritised Black middle classes in the UK from an intergenerational perspective that goes deeper than the more common focus on middle-class consumption patterns. While their research appropriately points out ways in which the experience of race shapes the identities, aspirations, and ideas of belonging connected to middle-classness, it could be further augmented by a complementary view on how perceived privilege in turn shapes ideas of being minoritised. To what extent do privileged racialised people 'become White' as the South African idiom suggests?

In the context of higher education, research has highlighted the ways in which minority identity in the UK may be accentuated in contrast to normative Whiteness (Osbourne et al. 2021), whilst Black students in South Africa may feel alienated from their racial identity during upward social mobility (Singh & Bhana 2015). These discussions could be taken further by investigating the ways in which these experiences are not only produced by differing positions in terms of relatively 'stable' race and class identities in a higher education setting but constructed through continuous (re)negotiations of intersecting ideas of privilege and precarity, as suggested in Scandone's (2020) research on female Bangladeshi heritage students experiencing racialisation in UK higher education.

In this thesis, I have emphasised the way in which migration accentuates the experiences of identity misrecognition and how this amplifies one's sense of non-belonging. Benson (2015; 2019) has explored the ways in which privileged migration or 'lifestyle migration' (see Benson & O'Reilly 2009) are intrinsically connected to racialised logics both in the country of origin and in the destination, as the Whiteness of lifestyle migrants tends to racialise local populations and perpetuate colonial patterns. Further research would benefit from a reverse position of investigating non-White people participating in lifestyle migration in the same manner with Mikoshiba's (2022) work that focuses on the ways in which racially minoritised privileged migrants with internationally mobile upbringings (typically due to their parents' expatriate lifestyles) experience their claims

to belonging as mediated along the intersections of race, class, and other identifications. Moving forward, examining the experiences of those young Africans from the SADC region who move to study in the Global North instead of South Africa would add to this important emerging area of research.

This thesis has made an intervention in the scholarly debates on identity, aspiration, and belonging by discussing the social class experiences of student migrants at South African universities. Analysis of SADC students' transnational identities as a source of both privilege and precarity in the South/southern African contexts of race and class has offered insight into the ways in which structures and practices in higher education reproduce classed peer relations, therefore contributing to the ongoing discussions on post-apartheid transformation. Issues around privilege and precarity across southern Africa are conceptualised and experienced in ways that emphasise the importance of cross-border connections in the production and consolidation of the region's middle classes. South African universities are at the heart of this region-wide class-making project.

8. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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APPENDIX 1. INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS' SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC DETAILS

Name	Nationality	Gender	Age	Race	Degree level	Self-identified class	Accomm	Religion	School
Harrison	Zim	M	21	B	UG	Middle	C	Christian	Mission
Fadzai	Zim	F	Unknown	B	PG	Working	O	Unknown	Private
Busisiwe	Esw	F	19	B	UG	Middle	C	Christian	Private
Brenda	Zim	F	21	B	UG	Middle	C	Christian	Private
Sherry	Zim	F	23	B	UG	Middle	O	Unknown	Private
Gregory	Zim	M	Unknown	B	UG	Middle	C	Unknown	Private
Tarusikirwa	Zim	M	Unknown	B	UG	Middle	O	Unknown	Private
Daniela	Esw	F	20	BR	UG	Upper	O	Unknown	Private (SA)
Scott	Zim	M	24	W	PG	Middle	O	Unknown	Private
Trevor	Zim	M	24	B	UG	Middle	O	Unknown	Private
Sylvie	Les	F	Unknown	B	UG	Working	C	Christian	Unknown
Ndabezinhle	Zim	M	Unknown	B	PG	Working	O	Christian	Unknown
Itumeleng	Bot	F	Unknown	B	UG	Upper middle	O	Unknown	Private (SA)
Theodore	Zim	M	Unknown	B	PG	Working	O	Unknown	State
Teboho	Les	M	24	B	PG	Upper	C	Unknown	Private
Ayanda	Esw	F	Unknown	B	UG	Middle	O	Unknown	Private (SA)
Melissa	Zim	F	Unknown	B	UG	Middle	O	Unknown	Private
Natsai	Zim	F	Unknown	B	PG	Upper middle	O	Unknown	Private
Russell	Zim	M	Unknown	B	H	Middle	O	Christian	Private

Amy	Zim	F	Unknown	W	PG	Middle	O	Unknown	Private
Kufara	Zim	F	23	B	UG	Middle	O	Christian	Unknown
Samuel	Zam	M	Unknown	B	UG	Middle	O	Christian	Private
Mudiwa	Zim	F	Unknown	B	PG	Upper middle	O	Christian	State/ Private
Hilda	Nam	F	Unknown	B	UG	Working	O	Christian	Unknown
Simbarashe	Zim	M	Unknown	B	H	Upper middle	C	Unknown	Unknown

Zim= Zimbabwe
Esw= Eswatini
Les= Lesotho
Bot= Botswana
Zam= Zambia
Nam= Namibia

M= Male
F= Female
B= Black
BR= Biracial
W= White
UG= Undergraduate

H= Honours level (Fourth year)
PG= Postgraduate (MA or PhD)
C= Campus
O= Oppidan