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What a time to be birthing!': exploring childbearing experiences of black middle-class mothers in Johannesburg, South Africa

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ABSTRACT

This ethnography is based on over a year of fieldwork with Black middle-class mothers in Johannesburg, South Africa (2017-2018). Employing ethnographic methodological techniques - including participant observation, interviews and digital ethnography, this thesis explores mothering experiences of Black middle-class mothers. Middle class black mothers are a unique group in South African Anthropology, one that is under-researched and whose stories of motherhood remain largely under explored. Using the South African 2015/2016 Fees Must Fall/Rhodes Must Fall student protests as well as the American Black Lives Matter movement as a backdrop, I explore the ways in which motherhood is shaped by the context it happens in, particularly in terms of race and politics of representation. I argue that political events, particularly the student protests and Black lives matter movements set in motion a space where the mothers who were my interlocutors formed a political and social consciousness that saw them seeking ways to affirm and instil a Black pride in their children. Thus, in this thesis, I show how themes of race, Blackness, Black pride and representation fold into the everyday practice of mothering for Black middle-class mothers in Johannesburg, South Africa.