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# Double consciousness :a comparative approach to interpreting the experiences of Black female pupils in a predominantly Black well-resourced and historically White school in South Africa?

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UNIVERSITY OF THE
WITWATERSRAND,
JOHANNESBURG

# ***Double consciousness: a comparative approach to interpreting the experiences of Black female pupils in a predominantly Black well-resourced and historically White school in South Africa?***

*Dissertation submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree:*

*Master of Arts,*

*Department of Political Studies*

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# Declaration

I declare that this is my own unaided work. It is being submitted for the requirements of the Degree, of Master of Arts in Political Studies, at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted for any degree or examination at any other university.

I have used the Harvard convention for citation and referencing. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this project from the work, or works, of other people has been acknowledged through citation and reference.

_____ _____

Signature Date

# Acknowledgements

It has taken me longer than expected nor hoped to pen down this piece of scholarly work and bring it to fruition. There is no denying that this has been one of my most challenging, yet rewarding papers to write. Its personal relevance to my own life and to the lives of the twenty young black womxn who participated in this research, can be found in the forthcoming pages. It is a testament of the significance of why we write: so that we may see ourselves and make sense of our existence.

I would like to begin by giving thanks to both the Society, Work and Politics (SWOP) institute and the Oppenheimer Memorial Trust (OMT), particularly to Professor Eddie Webster, Karin Pampallis and Clare Digby. I took a risk by coming to WITS without full funding, thank you for believing in me. My gratitude further goes out to the Andrew Mellon Foundation, particularly, Prof. Shireen Hassim and the work you do under the Governing intimacies project: thank you for seeing my light and promise. I would like to extend my gratitude to the Oprah Winfrey Leadership Academy Foundation (OWLAF) for supporting and investing in me. I am forever indebted to you Mum O, for your continuous love, support and generosity. I hope that this work stands as a testament yet again that it was all worth it. To my mother, Annie Apie Ntaka, I thank you for your patience, love and belief in me as I pursued my dreams, and for making my dreams yours too. To my friends, thank you for supporting my breath, nourishing my soul and anchoring me. In the various ways that you have all done this, I love you all for it.

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*“Remember love is what brought you here and if you trusted love this far, don't panic now. Trust it all away”*

— *James Baldwin,* *If Beale Street Could Talk* (1974)

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# Abbreviations

| | |
|---|---|
| ANC | African National Congress |
| DEC | Department of Education and Culture |
| DET | Department of Education and Training |
| DNE | Department of National Education |
| DPME | Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation |
| NP | National Party |
| OWLAF | Oprah Winfrey Leadership Academy Foundation |
| OWLAG | Oprah Winfrey Leadership Academy for Girls |
| PBHS | Pretoria Boys High School |
| PHSG | Pretoria High School for Girls |
| SAHRC | South African Human Rights Commission |
| SGB | School Governing Body |

# Introduction

In the months leading to the write-up of my dissertation I came across a series of public opinion pieces, twitter posts and newspaper articles written by black parents, former pupils and journalists, putting into perspective the effects of continued racism in schools, on black children. One such article was written by a former pupil of Pretoria High School for Girls (PHSG), Malaika Eyoh, in the Daily Vox newspaper on 4th February 2017. In this article titled, *"Our schools undervalue Blackness and focus more on containing us than nourishing us"*, Eyoh poignantly states that the year 2016 undoubtedly marked a turning point at her alma mater. She remarks that while historically white (former Model C) schools are expected to stand as an emblem of unity – as one of South Africa's successful integration stories in the new dispensation – the opposite holds to be true (Eyoh, 2017).

The protests at Pretoria High School for Girls (PHSG) came after a series of uprisings in the broader landscape of student movements and protest action within the higher education space. Student movements such as #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall not only fought for free decolonised education but also influenced previous views held on the ideal of non-racialism and the "Rainbow nation" in South Africa: there was an evident shift from "colour blindness" being the currency of the day since 1994, to a more critical and on-the-ground conversation on how racism persists today. More importantly, because of the womxn[1] and non-binary activists within the #FeesMustFall and #RhodesMustFall movements, new conversations emerged on the importance of expanding the debate on racism to consider other forms of oppression in term of gender, class, sexuality, able-bodiedness and mental health (Ndelu et al., 2017: 2). It is important to draw connections between the protests that have taken place in higher education to those that have emerged at schools such as Pretoria Girls, so as to engage at a deeper level on what it means to go through South Africa's educations system from pre-School till university as a black girl and then womxn. It allows us to engage more meaningfully on the

[1] The term womxn has been used in this thesis as an intersectional and inclusive approach in recognition of the multiple identities black womxn hold simultaneously in terms of sexuality, class, gender and ability (Ndelu et al.,2017) – diverging from the historical norm of assuming that all those interviewed would only be heterosexual black womxn.

experiences of black womxn and how these may differ within the spectrum of blackness[2] depending on the realities they face. Within this broader context, the protest at Pretoria Girls is a contribution to key questions around how decolonisation can be imagined in South Africa's educational space and what the experiences of these young black girls can teach us.

Similar outcries to those of black leaners and alumni at Pretoria Girls have also been expressed by black parents, voicing their disappointment and frustration with former Model C and private schools. This has lead them to reconsider the traditional route and opt for new private low-fee schools such as Nova Pioneer and Future Nation schools – whose ethos and educational philosophy is seen to be centred on affirming African identity, Pan-Africanism and producing future African leaders and entrepreneurs, who are innovative about making a significant difference in the continent (Nova Pioneer, 2015; Future Nation Schools, 2016). Thus, both schools have adopted an education model that seeks to be inclusive in terms of teaching subjects such as African studies; developing leadership and project based skills from a very early age; and cultivating a culture that embraces diversity and experiential learning (Nova Pioneer, 2015; Future Nation Schools, 2016).

The low-fee private schooling sector has thus been expanding at quite a fast rate – offering more 'affordable' rates than those of traditional private and even Model C schools. The fee structure for schools such as Nova Pioneer, Future Nation Schools and SPARK Schools, amongst others, have been seen as a bridging gap for learners from low-to-middle-income families (Nhlapo, 2017). While these schools have stylised themselves as being low-cost and affordable, the Centre for Enterprise Development (CED) has branded them as mid-fee given their for-profit nature. The fee structure for schools such as Nova Pioneer, Future Nation Schools and SPARK Schools, amongst others, ranges between R21 000 – R35 000 per year (Nhlapo, 2017). While these schools have been seen as a bridging gap from both a cost and institutional culture perspective, the reality remains that not all black parents from within the low-income bracket could afford to take their daughters to these schools – let alone being able to decide which schools are best for their child's development.

From the onset, black parents within the low-income bracket are not privy to this information – barred by their socio-economic reality – thus township schools become the only option

[2] Drawing from Maldonado-Torres (2016), referring to blackness as a socially constructed phenomenon that speaks to the daily reality of what it means to live, navigate and walk through the world as a black person. Blackness also has a historical meaning in which it was condemned and seeing as mean less than/inferior in relation to whiteness.

available. This is not to say that all township schools are inadequate but to realize that the continued legacy of apartheid and its creation of a two-tiered education system – characterised by the "haves" and "have nots" – is still looming in the shadows of our twenty-five years of democracy. Considering this, the Oprah Winfrey Leadership Academy for Girls (OWLAG), in its design, has in many ways bridged this socio-economic gap: The school was built with the idea of providing an education for girls who would have otherwise not been able to attend private/ historically white schools given the cost implications – making tuition free.

Established in 2007 by billionaire media mogul and philanthropist, Oprah Winfrey, the Academy came into existence from a conversation between herself and late former President Nelson Mandela to build a school that created, "a safe space to educate, to nurture, to empower and, of course, to inspire the next generation of women leaders for South Africa and for the world" (Winfrey, 2018). Born from the recognition that black womxn and girls continue to experience marginalization on multiple levels in post-apartheid South Africa, the school was designed with this in mind so as to change the narrative. Unlike most schools in South Africa, the Academy has the advantage of not bearing the unfortunate burden of being married to South Africa's history and the slow pace of change that is a feature of historically white (Model C) schools. One could deduce on this basis that the experiences of black womxn who have gone through the Academy, would perhaps then differ immensely as a result of the intended outcomes for why the school was built. Privately funded and an independent school itself, the Academy lacks nothing in resources and facilities – standing as an equivalent to historically white (Model C) schools in this regard. The Academy sits in the middle of the country's two-tiered education system. While it could be argued that the Academy should be located in the tier characterised by the 'haves", its intention to educate girls from disadvantaged backgrounds nullifies that. Schools within the tier of the "haves" are often accessible to those who are able to pay fees, while the Academy is a not-for-profit educational institution.

Through a comparative analysis, this dissertation is interested in examining how the educational experiences and perspectives of the black womxn who are alumni of the Oprah Winfrey Leadership Academy for Girls (OWLAG) and Pretoria High School for Girls (PHSG), may differ or contain similarities. The intent of this is to examine how both school settings have come to influence the identities of these black womxn and the respective backgrounds they come from. Thus, the primary mode of research was based on structured interviews with alumni from these two secondary schools.

For a long time the markers for progress in determining what makes a "good" school, have often been associated with with how well it has adapted to South Africa's new dawn in 1994; its ability to possess an array of resources and good facilities; having a sufficient supply of skilled educators and a well-taught curriculum – often correlating with the design and context of historically white (former Model C) and independent schools in South Africa. An approach of this kind, while useful for assessing infrastructure and capacity, mentions nothing about the opinions of the learner – in this case black womxn – and what they think of their educational environment. Viewing black womxn as active participants in their educational development and having the agency to critically reflect on their journeys, allows for us to deeply examine the kind of approaches that should be taken going forward in providing a wholesome educational experience for young black girls. This dissertation will therefore further probe into whether DuBois' notion of "*Double Consciousness"* (1903) can be a useful theoretical framework in articulating these experiences.

A contribution of this kind is important for two primary reasons: instead of assuming or homogenizing the "black girl" education experience, it allows for further analysis and appreciation for the nuances that may arise, as we pay attention to the intersection of race, class and gender. The unique experiences of these young black womxn gives expression to a holistic perspective of the challenges they have faced as they reflect on their educational journeys. Secondly, putting these two school contexts and experiences in conversation with one another, contributes to the larger debate on decolonisation and transformation in relation to South Africa's challenge in providing quality education. It compels us to critically engage on how education is currently done in order to go beyond looking at just the already-existing markers of what makes a school "excellent" – but to look more in-depth as to whether the culture, environment and ideals of schools allow for black girls to see themselves within these contexts.

# Chapter I: Historic context and conceptual framework

In the following section I will begin by briefly providing an overview of Pre-apartheid education and its intent in relation to black South Africans. Thereafter, I will then discuss the ending of missionary education; the implementation of Bantu education' and its effect on the lives of black South Africans – particularly black womxn and girls in this context. Subsequent to this I will discuss the racial desegregation of historically white (Model C) schools; their struggle for transformation and why it is important to bring together the educational experiences of alumni from PHSG with those of OWLAG. I will then conclude by exploring DuBois' notion of "double consciousness" and how it can potentially be adapted to suit the South African context and realities of black womxn.

## *From missionary to Bantu Education in South Africa*

One of the first schools to be established for black people in South Africa was opened in 1799 near what was later known as King Williams Town. The first public school for White people had already been in existence as of 1633, more than a century earlier. Missionary groups continued to establish more schools for Africans on the fringes of settler communities, making missionary schooling a common form of education for Africans up until 1948 (Molteno, 1984). Earlier missionary schools positioned themselves as seeking to teach literacy as well as social and religious values. However, it is worth noting that the entire enterprise and history of mission schools is a rather contested subject within South Africa's educational discourse particularly because they have always, "…in Africa stood at an ambiguous, and conflicted crossroads. It was partisan to the colonial project, yet educated students ended up being against it" (Freedman, 2013).

As such it is crucial to recognise the role and impact of missionaries in South Africa, as part of the British empire's broader vision of expansion, conquest and colonialism. Writings from British socio-educational research, reveal that during the colonial era a sustained focus was placed on the role of education in aiding with gender socialisation. Education played an integral part in advancing the gendering of roles as part of the British empire's vision: in British society male public schools endorsed 'athleticism' as a means to define what masculinity, having a character of "manliness", success, aggression and ruthlessness meant (Gaitskell, 1988), whereas girls' education emphasised the importance of femininity and domesticity so

as to define what it meant to be a womxn. Gendered socialization was not something that was exclusive to the metropole, in fact it applied to colonial South Africa as well: it came as no surprise that then Natal Prime Minister in 1895, Sir John Robinson, stated that schools were expected to ensure that the educational development of black girls groomed them in accordance to the Eurocentric standards of what a white European womxn ought to be. (Gaitskell, 1988). Although black female pupils often outnumbered black males in South Africa at the time, primarily in their pre-teenage years, this had no bearing on the expectations held that womxn should be domesticated and that her place was in the household as wives and caregivers.

Given that gender socialization was accompanied by racism and classism, black girls were frequently subjected towards a life of working as domestic servants within white settler communities (Gaitskell, 2008). Many young black girls and womxn were thus limited and subjected to manual labour in fields that were often associated with being "soft" professions such as domestic work as well as the unpaid labour of being housewife and mothers within marriage (Gaitskell, 2008).

It is quite evident that colonial education formed an integral part of the process of conquest and dispossession. As Kallaway (1984) mentions colonialism sought multiple measures of domination. Beyond military, political and economic subjugation, cultural and ideological domination also meant that missionary schools would be major agents of this process. In the two chapters of her compelling book, *Maids and madams: a study in the politics of exploitation* (1980), Jacklyn Cock draws linkages between the employment of black womxn in the domestic services sector in colonial South Africa and the education patterns in the Eastern Cape till 1880 (Cock, 1980: 9). She does this by chronicling the establishment of several missionary education schools in the same region that sought to develop domestic skills such as learning how to cook, sew and do laundry work to young African girls working in industrial departments based in Lovedale, Blythswood, Healdtown and St Mathew's (Cock, 1980: 9). Cock therefore concludes that the primary intent of mission education for black girls was 'vocational, domestic and subservient' work because they were deemed as part of the subordinate classes (Cock, 1980: 32) – a telling revelation that black girls faced discrimination from a race, class and gender lens.

Despite some valuable recent accounts of African womxn's lives, Gaitskell (1988), explains that there is virtually no existence of black womxn's autobiographies on any historical depth and their own perspective on how missionary education impacted them. The minimal accounts

on this presents a limited understanding of how, from a historical perspective, this can further inform the challenges South Africa and black womxn face today. Additionally, it presents black womxn as absent from the history books and passive participants of education. Much has been written, on a national and policy level, on the ills of missionary and Bantu education – what is missing however are the perspectives and ideas of black womxn within this framing.

For over one hundred and fifty years, Christian missionaries heavily influenced the education of black people – and black womxn in this context – in South Africa (Van der Walt, 1992: 221). The Nationalist-led government of 1948 however, brought about significant change with the implementation of the 1953 Bantu Education Act – making the practice of mission education almost virtually impossible due to financial and political constraints. Missionaries at the time were portrayed in a negative light by Afrikaner scholars and their pursuit in educating black people. This was seen as a threat to Afrikaner heritage and ideals of superiority – justified by "scientific" findings that black people were inferior. This is evident in the 1939 writings of Nationalist scholar, M.L. Fick who published a monograph titled "The educability of the South African Native" where he argues to have made use of "available objective data" that shows that black people who were educated by Christian missionaries had an innate inferior intelligence compared to white people (Fick, 1939: 1-2). To note, the foreword of M.L. Fick's monograph was written by Werner Eiselen, the then primary Chief Inspector of Native Education who later was appointed as Chairman of the National Party's inquiry into Bantu Education (Lewis, 2007: 189).

The principal ideology and aspirations of the National Party (NP) government was to increase racial segregation through separate development. This was done through official policies that altered the social, political and economic landscape of South Africa (Johnstone, 1970: 125). Therefore, Eiselen not only argued and established as part of his findings the "intellectual superiority" of White people, but further advocated for a different education system for Black people. A similar conclusion was also drawn by Nationalist scholar J.A. Jansen Van Rensburg, in the study "The learning ability of the South African Native", arguing in favour of "science" to validate the perception that Black people were only fit to carry out manual labour (Louw-Potgieter & Foster, 1991: 63).

In the same vein to that of the British empire, education was undoubtedly the backbone of apartheid policy – such that the pedagogy used was designed to indoctrinate Black Africans into seeing themselves as sub-standard. Education was thus an instrument of oppression and

subjugation for the Apartheid government. Renowned Brazilian scholar, Paulo Freire, writes in "Pedagogy of the Oppressed" (1970), that education can be used to further certain agendas through teaching. Freire further states that a careful analysis on the teacher-student relationship, gives rise to indoctrination through what he terms "narration", where the teacher takes on the role of the narrator while the student becomes the patient (listening object). Therefore, the role of the student is to record, memorize and repeat what the teacher has presented while the role of the teacher is to instruct (Freire, 1970: 21).

Parallels can thus be drawn between Freire's work and the role of teachers during the Apartheid era, where they were expected to teach and narrate a curriculum that was in line with the ideologies of the government. This is of course not to say that all educators were complicit, but to highlight how education formed part of the broader hegemonic ideals of Afrikaner nationalism and the expectations of teachers to roll out this content. Thus, from the onset, black students were taught into believing that they were destined for manual labour post-secondary schooling and to see themselves as inferior.

In January of 1949, a commission on Native education under the Chairmanship of Dr. W.W.M. Eiselen was established (Christie & Collins, 1982: 59). The main terms of reference for this commission were directed towards formulating separate principles and objectives for black South Africans as an independent race. Consequent to this commission, a report was produced in 1951 that concluded that the education of black people should be geared towards establishing a segregated socio-economic developmental policy. This report also stated that the main function of the school as an institution, be placed on transmitting and cultivating "black cultural heritage" (Christie & Collins, 1982: 59) – which as mentioned teachers were expected to ensure this happened. The "cultivation" of black cultural heritage was a scapegoat tactic of the Apartheid government, seeking to justify their implementation of separate development as a means to give more "independence" to black people in governing themselves.

Considering this report, the Bantu education Act of 1953 gave H.F. Verwoerd, then Minister of Native affairs, extensive autonomy in initiating process of executing the recommendations that came from the Eiselen Commission. Black education therefore became a centrally planned and financed policy that regulated government expenditure on the black child to a fixed annual amount. It also ensured that the responsibility of black education would now be transferred from missionary bodies, who were running the majority of black schools at the time, and into the hands of the Native Affairs department (Christie & Collins, 1982: 59).

While the idea of separate development in the education sector was purported by the NP government to allow for cultural minorities in the Bantustans to have their own "independence" and nationality, the reality is that "separate" did not mean equity. Conditions in black schools were inadequate in every aspect; schools in the township and rural homelands were characterized by high pupil-teacher ratios and were subjected to a curriculum that was designed and constantly determined by the government (Johnstone, 1975: 125). This curriculum sought to ensure that the idea of "black cultural heritage" was aligned with preparing black people to transition into the cheap and exploitative manual labour system of the South African economy and simultaneously, condition them into accepting the reality of being in an "inferior" position.

Molteno (1984) therefore contends that the aims of Bantu education went far beyond just hindering black people from gaining entry into medium-level (semiskilled) professions such as teaching. Ultimately, it intended to subvert and divert the economic, social and political aspirations of Black South Africans (Molteno, 1984: 94). In accordance with the ideology of separate development, the National Party in the early 1940s made educational provisions which ensured that there were separate education systems for all four officially recognized racial groupings. By 1984 these provisions had created a bureaucratic monster of epidemic proportions, namely: The Department of National Education (DNE). The DNE's purview entailed (a) jurisdiction over all education irrespective of race, (b) standardized policy in all educational departments, and (c) national policies and standards for certification and remuneration (Martineau, 1997: 385). The DNE centrally planned the education of the all black people, through all six Bantustan departments of education (Urch, 1992). In line with this there were nineteen structures that were integrated into the country's education system. Of the nineteen, this included three separate executive departments of education and culture, divided on the basis of race, under the Tricameral Parliament's legislative bodies. These were the House of Assembly, owing responsibility for the Department of Education and Culture (DEC) for White people; the House of Representatives that was primarily responsible for the DEC of Coloured people; and the House of Delegates which was responsible for the DEC of Indian people. After this, followed the Department of Education and Training (DET) which trained all black people outside the Bantustans, yet ironically had no official representation in Parliament (Martineau, 1997: 386).

This inevitably meant that extreme inequity existed in terms of educational funding that ran along racial lines. On average the government allocated R1211 on the educational development of each white learner while allocating only R146 per black child by 1982 (Boddy-Evans, 2017).

Funding was a large determinant of both the quantity and quality of learning materials, facilities, and teachers. Disproportionate funding, because of the government's racial categories, meant that huge disparities existed in the different learning environments. The average teacher-pupil ratio in white schools was 1:18 and 1:39 in black schools (Garson, 2004). Racial discrimination within the education sector evidently served two important purposes for the Apartheid government: the first was to entrench black people in a position of inferiority and to, secondly, privilege white people by equipping them with the best of facilities and resources so as to "justify" their superior complex in the then fabric of South African society.

As Carrim (1998) explains, the apartheid system gravely affected the provision of education in South Africa. It ensured that schooling took place in segregated environments such that at every level of schooling, race was a determining factor. This meant that educational budget provisions, the composition of staff and pupils in schools, the prescribed curriculum and the values each school subscribed to, were embedded in the racial categories that the South African government had created. Therefore, when we speak about addressing discrimination and racist policies within South African education this would require a conversation on how institutional culture is formed; what it has consisted of in past years as well as undoing discriminatory norms and practices – not just at a legal level – but at a mental, physical and structural level as well (Carrim, 1998: 301).

Between 1960 and 1985, the number of black females in primary and secondary schools had increased extensively. In contrast to other African countries, enrolment patterns for primary schooling in South Africa had reached a level of parity to that for boys. Despite increased records of enrolment during this 15-year period, the number of girls who had completed secondary education only further dwindled (Martineau, 1997: 385). The gendering of roles and setting of limitations is not something that disappeared under the Apartheid regime: it is important to view history as continuous so as to discern that which has remained and that which has changed. The truth of the matter is that the majority of black womxn were historically positioned to remain at the bottom of the barrel – positioned for a life of servitude where their educational training geared them to underpaying jobs.

The lives and educational accounts of black womxn from black womxn, thus presents for an interesting analysis: being both womxn and black as well as forming part of the working class, who were historically denied access to power and resources, speaks to the multiple levels at which black womxn face oppression (Cock, 1985: 409). Connecting these accounts with the

accounts of black womxn today, post-1994, allows to reflect on how far black womxn have come and to be honest on the continued forms of oppression that manifest today still. It is for this reason that Cock (1985), further mentions that the difference in living conditions between black and white womxn in South Africa has often stood as a point of contention rather than solidarity – or any oversimplified version of feminism and "sisterhood" (Cock, 1985: 410).

South Africa's liberation struggle against the Apartheid regime played an integral role in fighting against the socio-political conditions that black people had been subjected to as well as challenging separationist policies such as that of Bantu education. Within the liberation struggle also exists the plight of womxn evident in the March of 1956 fighting for the right to vote; womxn who risked their lives fighting in uMkhonto We Sizwe; being a part of anti-Apartheid grassroots movements such as the Black Consciousness movement; and even the Soweto Uprising of 1976. Throughout these events womxn have always been there, present and fighting for black liberation, and ultimately their freedom too.

Traditional white values and the monopoly that white people had on what was considered to be truth in South Africa was challenged (Biko, 1978: 28). The idea was to develop a new political consciousness where notions of objecthood[3], inferiority and mental slavery were rejected. The student of movement of 1976 forms part of the struggle for freedom and education as protested against the government's policy of introducing Afrikaans as the official medium of instruction in schools nationwide. The uprising filtered into other parts of the country and stood in direct opposition to the ideals of Bantu education. Challenging the duality of Apartheid South Africa in terms of the discrepancy that existed between the value of white life and black life, lit the path for democracy.

While it is evident that there is no scientific basis to prove that white people were intellectually superior to black people, it served the government's agenda to argue otherwise so as to endorse an education system that would suit what was deemed to be the "mental capacity" of black South Africans (Lewis, 2007: 189). Access to economic power, resources and employment for black people were – in addition to multiple directly related policies – heavily constrained by discriminatory educational policies (Johnstone, 1970: 125). The liberation struggle against the

[3] Using Fanon's (1986) literature, Black skin, White masks, Object *hood speaks to the state of one's existence being in a fixed position as it is determined outside of the self. In this case I refer to the nationalist government which, through Apartheid policy and ideology, sought to seal the fate of black people never allowing for true self-determination.*

Apartheid regime was therefore a major factor in the decision leading up to repealing the Bantu education Act in 1979 and the desegregation of schools after 1990 in South Africa (Wren, 1991).



The desegregation of schools is one of the cornerstones of the post-1994 education dispensation in South Africa. The decision and announcement to desegregate schools was made in 1990. As the country made its way towards its first democratic elections, the schooling system was expected that it would now be standardized across the board in terms of teachers, resources and the curriculum – irrespective of where a school was situated and its racial demographics. Learners from Indian, coloured and black population groups now had the option of attending schools with better facilities and resources, which were often associated with historically white schools (Soudien, 2012: 89). As Wolhuter (1999) explains, these learners often came from cultural, and to a great extent socio-economic and educational backgrounds that were different to those of the white learners from these schools. This factor in and of itself may have been sufficient to also impact the education and development of these learners given the new situation they found themselves – even in light of the fact that historically white schools were expected, by law, to adequately any challenges that would have surfaced in the integration process (Wolhuter, 1999: 366).

In 1994 the government ensured that one of its priorities would be to undergo legislative reform by enacting policies such as the 1996 South African Schools Act and Curriculum 2005 which were founded on the principle of equality (Soudien, 2012: 158). Additionally, an in-depth policy framework was established, founded on the ideals of inclusion, equity and redress. A central tenet of this policy framework was decentralizing the administrative and legislative mechanisms previously used by the Apartheid government to control the kind of pedagogy. that was taught in schools. Decentralization therefore meant that schools across the board would have increased autonomy in determining their school governing bodies; reforming admission policy and criteria, in line with the new constitutional framework; and conciliating the national curriculum in relation to inclusion (Sayed & Soudien, 2004: 116). It also meant that black parents were now in a position to send their children to schools that they were once denied entry from.

While these were important strides to make, practical questions and interrogating how the challenges of dealing with integration and teaching children from different racial, economic and social backgrounds were not given the much-needed attention they deserved. This of course created a loophole which allowed for cultural practices, norms and rules embedded in these historically white schools in the apartheid era to go unchallenged and filtered into the schooling system post-1994 (Soudien, 2012: 158). The assumption made that the usage of legislation would address the wrongs of the past and lead to an educational system that was now "equitable" and accessible for all is both short-lived and short-sighted.

It therefore becomes important to understand that when the state declared that all schools would be open for all races in South Africa and used the law to enforce this agenda, it did so without looking at their location, composition of personnel, teaching methods – all of which can and have carried the apartheid legacy – as a reference point (Soudien, 2012: 159). This is indicative of the fact that while the law has the power to legally enforce desegregation across all South African schools – it is limited when it comes to overseeing everyday human interaction within classrooms as well as recognizing and addressing what behavioural norms and patterns embedded in colonial and Apartheid South Africa, persist today.

Although the intent to decentralize and allow for more independence within schools was evident, the reality presented had unintended consequences: these legislative and administrative mechanisms were not adequate determinants for measuring how far historically white schools had come in terms of integration from a teacher-student and student-student relations perspective. One of the pitfalls of national legislation when it comes to redress is that although it regulates how people should act, unless there are follow-up measures in place, there is no surety in showing that the law translates to changed behaviours and norms. To simply base our idea of progress on legislation alone ultimately nullifies the significance of creating scholarship that examines the experiences of black learners – and in particular black girls in this case – in historically white schools.

To further substantiate this point, Carrim (1998) mentions that when the President of South Africa, F.W. De Klerk, announced the opening of "white" schools to other races, the then Minister of "white" education Piet Clase (1984 – 1989) made sure that certain process from the Apartheid era would not be completely discarded. To begin with white schools were given three models to choose in the process of desegregating. Model A allowed for white state schools to shut down as state schools and reopen themselves as private schools. Model B gave

state schools the option of remaining as they were, while Model C allowed these schools to become both semi-private and semi-state schools, whereby teachers' salaries would remain paid for by the state (Carrim, 1998; 308).

All three of these models allowed for the enrolment of black students where "black" referred to people who had been historically classified Indian, Coloured or African. All three models had the same conditions in terms of allowing for certain practices, norms and rules to remain untouched (Carrim, 1998: 308). This included:

1. All schools in the three aforementioned models were had to maintain a 51% demographic of the student population being white;
2. The philosophy, values and cultures of these schools were not expected to change;
3. The state/school was not obliged to find itself in a position where it had to provide financial assistance to "black" incoming students;
4. The state paid for any costs of relocation whereby white parents or students refused to remain a part of the school as it began to enrol black students;
5. Lastly, both the school and/or state had no obligation to facilitate any programmes that would help black students to adapt quicker and easier.

What the above conditions illustrate is that the Clase announcement of 1990 meant the "opening" of white schools and the form in which integration took place, would be carried out in a manner that intended to preserve white standards, white privilege and security while simultaneously expecting black students to conform and to 'fit in' (Carrim, 1998: 308). The unfortunate reality of this is that for black students, their experiences were completely ignored from both a racial and financial standpoint.

Echoing similar sentiments, a study spearheaded by the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC) in 1999 also revealed that the situation in schools however, was far from making progress to end racial discrimination and prejudice within former white schools. Complaints received included: racial discrimination in disciplinary measures, racial violence as well as cultural prejudice. Schools continued to be characterized by racial separation and discrimination. Efforts at racial integration had not achieved the desired outcomes of the government as part of its decentralization strategy.

The SAHRC stated that a large part of this was owed to the fact that – apart from legislative and administrative mechanisms – no other strategies had been put in place to address the

systemic reality of racism within schools in so far as institutional culture and daily interaction; its historical relevance and effect; as well as challenging the unlearning of ingrained prejudices that could lead to the othering of black children (SAHRC, 1999: 3). While at a legal level desegregation was implemented, this report is indicative of the gruesome reality that the law itself was constrained in its ability to ensure that its constitutional jurisdiction of dismantling unequal race relations also translated within the classroom between learners and educators.

Educators were further seen to exhibit little to no commitment in the construction of an environment that was free of racism in which one of the outcomes of such was the superficial tolerance of black learners rather than affirming their presence as a right. In this aspect, historically white schools were not breeding grounds for continued racism, but sites of struggle and assimilation as black parents fought for access and the equal treatment of their children (SAHRC, 1999: 3). Furthermore, these historically white schools had become places where racial hierarchies that were constructed in the Apartheid era were now being reproduced years later.

Early news reports in the media as well as published research by Erasmus and Ferreira (2002), looking at the integration of black children into historically white schools, revealed that that learners at such schools did experience challenges. Erasmus and Ferreira (2002: 28), state that there has also been a denial of background differences and the conflicting potential of these differences, as well as the neglect of instituting effective accommodation strategies which could negatively affect the education and development of these learners.

Similar echoes to those detailed in the 1999 SAHRC report are have found expression in the recent upsurge of protests in 2016 at Pretoria High School for Girls; Sans Souci Girls High in Cape Town and Lawson Brown High in Port Elizabeth. Renowned author and journalist Sisonke Msimang substantiates that historically white schools remain a breeding ground for racism because the fact remains: these schools continue to reflect an infrastructural and ideological design that remains suited for the betterment of the white child. Msimang (2013), makes reference to the findings of another report by the SAHRC in 2013, which revealed that Leonard Mackay, who was a teacher at a Free State school, was found guilty of racism and hate speech. Mackay referred to the black students he was teaching as monkeys and kaffirs; and was found displaying the old South African flag in the classroom; and had dehumanising images of black people being compared to apes (Msimang, 2013).

While some may argue that these acts were extreme and confined to being acted out by a single person, this does not take away from the fact subsequent accounts – similar in nature – have happened in other historically white schools. A growing body of scholarship has documented how, as spaces, historically white schools not only reproduce the racial hierarchies that they were expected to dismantle post-Apartheid – but that they reinforce racial boundaries through subtle and at times what is deemed as "race-neutral" practices. These practices, disguised as "race-neutral", have only averted the need to talk about race within historically white schools (Teeger, 2015: 1).

A reasonable starting point would be to discuss the idea of "integration" in historically white schools and how this affects the experiences of black students. Soudien (2012), states that it is only when we interrogate the conceptualization of integration within South Africa's educational sphere, will we begin to understand how social difference has been developed and its impact. Thus, integration in historically white schools has mainly been understood within a legal framework and in relation to race: meaning that black children could now attend schools that had previously been designated to white children only. This however did not mean that "legal integration" equated to "social integration" or that all norms, ethos, policies and rules were inclusive. Furthermore, integration in the legal sense fails to account for subtle and overt forms of racism that continue to exist and thrive because they are somewhat "invisible". In this aspect, integration has been a one-sided phenomenon and has only redrawn the lines of privilege and racial hierarchies (Soudien, 2012).

Additionally, integration, has largely been analysed from a racial lens however the intimate relationship between race, class and gender within the schooling system needs to be further interrogated. Steve Biko, an organic intellectual whose writings reflected the times in which black people lived in, argued that the main problem within South Africa and the analysis given by liberals was their conclusion that apartheid could only be countered by the formation of non-racial groups. As such the answer to racism would be non-racialism. White liberals identified the thesis to be apartheid, and its antithesis was non-racialism which would thus lead to integration as the synthesis (Biko, 1978: 5). It sounds easy to assume that the apartheid and non-racialism would eventually cancel each other out and lead to integration, this however assumes that equality can be achieved through race neutrality. Non-racialism takes on a form of race-neutrality, which advertently assumes equal footing when the reality is that hundreds of years of racial and class – as well as gender –oppression cannot simply be undone by laws only. The integration that White liberals saw befitting ignored and did not address the already-

existing class differences and inequality because of race. For Biko, this idea of "integration" in all spheres of South African society, as proposed by white liberals, was impractical because it further ignored the privileges that apartheid afforded them and how those should be rectified.

The thesis for Biko was the fact that a strong white racism could only be countered by a strong solidarity amongst black people which was the antithesis (Biko, 1978: 5). This approach not only directly challenged the issue of racial inequality but also saw the humanity of black people as thinking and breathing beings, whose identity did not require approval from whiteness. It spoke to the idea of recognition – placing at the centre black people who affirmed their own existence and the expectation that rest of society should know of this. Therefore, the antithesis of liberals (non-racialism) was in many ways an alteration of the truth which had a close-proximity to the thesis, being Apartheid (Biko, 1978: 5). Although fighting racism is important and must never end, we cannot continue to sideline other global systems of oppression that complement and aid racial oppression, in order to also flesh out and be allies to the varying identities that exist within blackness and experience oppression differently.

Thus, cultivating an education system that goes beyond policy and determining "quality" education on the basis of how much resources a school has – but one that also delivers justice – is important. "Quality" education that does not speak to the daily realities of marginalized identities in South Africa, that does not help them make sense of and locate their own identities in these institutional spaces, is detrimental and limiting. Additionally, race having have been the prime determinant of oppression under apartheid and its usage post-apartheid to address inequality, has undoubtedly created new forms of exclusion that cannot be ignored (Sayed & Soudien, 2004: 116). There is indeed an argument to be made about the historical relevance of race in South Africa, however its usage as an over-arching reference point in redress challenges has overshadowed the equal importance of looking at gender and class. An approach of this kind, narrows our own comprehension of how marginalization may continue to manifest post-1994 when looking at the double jeopardy – and even triple jeopardy with the inclusion of class – that black womxn experience.

## *Conceptual and Methodological approaches*

The focus of my research will be to explore to what extent Du Bois' notion of Double Consciousness can be applied within the South African context, so as to help us understand better the educational experiences of black womxn in Contemporary South Africa. Reflecting on the times in which he lived in, Du Bois sought to give expression to the lived-experiences

of "black folk" in US-America under the Jim Crow laws of the South, and the constant threat and actualization of racial violence in the early 1900s (Bruce Jr., 1992: 299). The term "double consciousness" spoke to the conflicting reality that "black folk" in America found themselves in: this was the struggle to reconcile their negro identity with that of being American, within a socio-political context that made this almost impossible. The struggle to reconcile these two identities, constructed as mutually exclusive to each other, was due to the inherent structural racism that sought to keep out every black American from the mainstream white American society. Du Bois' concept describes the feeling and internal conflict of not being able to bridge one's American identity with their blackness because of never being seen as enough, or as being "American enough" (Bruce Jr., 1992: 301).

Du Bois' reference to the individual feeling of experiencing one's identity being split into several parts, not only spoke to the direct struggle of not being allowed to have a unified identity, but also to the struggle of being human in a country that valorised whiteness. He maintained that since the arrival of black people in America, they were in a constant state of repression and devaluation. This made it difficult to forge any sense of belonging and for black people to cement their identity within the context of segregated America – bearing in mind that the idea of "Americanness" was associated with being white and Christian. Double consciousness forced black people to not only view themselves from their own unique perspective, but to also view themselves as they were constructed by the outside world, the dominant white society in US-America (Du Bois, 1903: 351).

In many ways, Du Bois' was both an organic and public intellectual, having studied at Harvard and through his writings, reflected on the times in which he lived in. At the time in which he wrote "The Souls of Black Folk" (1903), he further points out that this was in a context whereby by white people had no obligation to understand the black condition because it had no bearing on their survival. In contrast, black folk in America continuously had to grapple with the painful reality of being both within and without, as they strived for acceptance but were never enough for the white world. Similar sentiments to those of Du Bois are shared by Frantz Fanon in "Wretched of the Earth" (1963). Fanon's writings emerge much later than those of Du Bois as he writes on blackness and oppression in the context of the colonial era. Fanon's writings delve into the settler colony where he writes that that being black in the colonial meant operating within a state of perpetual agony and pain because to survive, one had no choice but to negate their blackness and live through the image of the colonizer often termed as the "white gaze" (Fanon, 1963: 5). Du Bois and Fanon's writing point to the fact that black people in America

and in other parts of the world, were in many aspects compelled to understand the customs and behaviours of white people in order to initially survive, while white folk in reverse had no such intentions to understand the mores and behaviours of black people. In the same vein, it can be argued that integration in historically white schools in South Africa have never been held accountable or expected for that matter, to understand the different socio-economic and political contexts that black learners come from. Instead the model of integration post-1994 has been one in which black girls and their parents have had to assimilate into an existing culture, set of traditions, values and norms – while these schools have shown no real intent – other than tolerance – to change.

If we are to use Du Bois' lens on Double consciousness, speaking to the impact of race on black identity, the assumption would perhaps be that it is most applicable to the context of historically white schools. However further analysis should also be put into looking at the experiences of black girls who are alumni of the Oprah Winfrey Leadership Academy for Girls (OWLAG) and whether sentiments of double consciousness may emerge or not, together with a historically white school. This is an important consideration to make, given that these would be black womxn who are recruited from predominantly working-class backgrounds – different to what is mirrored in the schooling environment they are accepted in. This research will thus contribute significantly to knowledge around black identity and its intersection with gender and class; it will discuss the idea of "integration" within South African schools – and more importantly – how certain norms and standards have contributed to an institutional culture that remains exclusive within these schools. Additionally, as previously mentioned, this research will seek to elicit the nuances in how we interpret blackness and allow for further interrogation on what it means to journey through South Africa's educational system as a black womxn post-Apartheid.

My research performed qualitative semi-structured, biographical interviews with black womxn who are alumni of these two schools over the years. I conducted 20 interviews with 10 alumni from each school. The interviews sought to elicit attitudes on race, class and gender in the two schools by speaking to these alumni and their experiences. My data is part of an interpretive analysis for the topic at hand in which I used primary and secondary sources as well. Additional data was provided through the analysis of primary sources in the respective environments such as journal articles, policies and governance documents pertaining to the topic at hand. For the

purposes of privacy and eliciting as much information from participants, all interviews were conducted on a one-on-one basis.

Initial participants were identified through recommendations given by the Youth Programs manager at the South African Institute of International Affairs (SAIIA), Desirée Kosciulek. Given the nature of programs for young people the Institute works on and Model United Nations debating with High Schools, Desirée knew of potential interviewees from both schools that I could approach. Other potential participants, were identified by me as I had known them personally and enquired whether they would be interested in partaking in my research. The recruitment method used thereafter to source interviewees was through the snowball sampling technique where the existing study participants provided referrals for other people to consider for the interview process.

The snowball sampling consisted of two steps during this interview process:

- Identifying potential participants in the population. Often, only one or two possible participants were found initially;
- Asked those two participants to recruit other people (and then asked those people to recruit). Participants were made aware that they do not have to provide any other names.

Source: (UCLA OHRP, 2012)

Feminist theory was used as part of the research and writing process so as to go beyond the standard masculine methodological methods that expect detachment from the subject being discussed at hand. This research therefore took seriously the humanness of the individuals that took part in my project. Secondly, I positioned myself as a subject within a context whose knowledge production and experience is also recognized – with the intent of not claiming objectivity in the sense of universality – but acknowledging the significance of my contribution in the process of producing knowledge as being a central tenet of feminist methodological approaches. This will give understanding to my own experiences as an alumnus of the Oprah Winfrey Leadership Academy for Girls (OWLAG), as well as the experiences of the black womxn who have attended both above-mentioned schools. As Lather (2007) explains, moving away from research and writing methods that separate the self from the writing process and inserting one's own expression and discussion of subjective experience is for the purposes of challenging the dominant and exclusionary research methods of the post-modern era and interrogating what we mean by gender, identity and culture (Weedon, 2004).

In order to do that, as a researcher, one has to be aware of the manner in which a specific tradition has claimed to be universal when it is not; white Eurocentric and Western thought, theories and practices, have has sought to establish themselves as the dominant, consequently hegemonic, white feminism has historically ignored the experiences of black womxn and this is still reflected in many current political practices. Amos and Parmer (2001), make example of the black feminist movement in the United Kingdom in the last decade (1991 – 2001), so as to centre black womxn's oppression and exploitation. Their concern in doing this is to illustrate how white, mainstream feminist theory, irrespective of whether originates from socialist or radical leanings, does not speak to the lived experiences of black womxn. In instances where it has tried to do so, it has often been founded on racist practices and perspective (Amos & Parmer, 2001: 17). Thus, in stating that contemporary feminist theory is unable to speak to black womxn's experience, we must also acknowledge this is not merely about their absence but of the active attempts at making their existence invisible.

The work being done to bring to light the complexities faced by black womxn is culminating in a body of scholarship, born from the writings of black feminists: black womxn are not only part of history, but are writing history too in the process. This is done with the recognition that it is only through writing that we can make sense of, "…our place in the Black movement; the boundaries of our sisterhood with white feminists. These are important areas for us as Black women for our experience is the shared experience of Black people but it is also the shared experience of women within different class contexts" (Amos & Parmar, 2001: 18). As such, Amos & Parmar (2001), further suggest that as, black feminists, their political responses and writings will always be shaped by this duality of identity and nuances. It is important to recognise this as it gives rise to a new body of scholarship, that has not always been considered mainstream, so that we may no longer overlook gender and its relationship with the reality of being black and class differences within that spectrum of blackness.

While conducting this research I will further took into consideration past critiques of how black womxn have been either ignored or made merely to be subjects of research. While one aspect of dominant research methods has been to deny the experiences of black womxn, making them invisible or without importance, another has been the usage of anthropological research methodology. More often than not, black womxn have been featured in cross cultural studies under the disguise of "feminist" and "progressive anthropology" when in actual fact this is mainstreaming and rendering them as "subjects" and "exotic" for the purposes of comparison (Amos & Parmar, 2001: 19).

Adopting research methodology and frameworks framed around dominant standards becomes a futile exercise in the face of challenging perceptions, redundancy and chauvinism. One such assumption has been the idea that pre-capitalist economies and countries branded as "Third world" are to blame for the continued oppression of black womxn (Amos & Parmar, 2001: 20). It further becomes implied that only when womxn in the "Third World" – referring to South Africa in this context – enter capitalist societies will they fully experience liberation. Not only is this assumption false, it further tries to romanticise imperialism and suggest that it cultivates capitalist relations (freedom) – thus making an argument for why this is a remedy for "underdeveloped countries" (Amos & Parmar, 2001: 20). Similarly, this would be to assume that the educational experiences of black womxn in the "Third World" are owed to the lack of/absence of capitalism – which is equated to the achievement of Freedom. Not only is this assumption false, but it further assumes that black womxn in in the developed world do not share similar experiences. As such, feminist theories seeking to debilitate the agency of black and Third World womxn requires that it be continually challenged, exposed for its embedded racism and rejected.

In the context of this research it thus becomes important to not judge the experiences of womxn on the basis of dominant standards that have historically fuelled stereotypes, redundancy and chauvinism. Rather, it is imperative that we understand the varying experiences of womxn and to embrace the difference that exists in them. A number of feminist scholars have often written on the concept of "difference" and how it has often been used to "other" people who are seen as not being part of mainstream discourse (Maynard, 2001: 125). Thus, in order to understand the depths of how difference is used to not only shape stereotypes, but to also negate people's identities, it becomes imperative that we see it as a language. It is a language that is able to take form and to shape power relations – which have historically been unequal. The concept of "difference" has a longstanding history in relation to Western Feminism. Recently, "difference" has been used with particular reference between womxn themselves. There have been two conceptions of difference in this regard: the first is one which takes a strong focus and embrace on the diversity of womxn and their experiences, while the other speaks to difference in the context of postmodernist thinking (Maynard, 2001: 125). This thesis seeks to use difference in the context of the former: by looking at the varying educational experiences of black womxn at Pretoria Girls' High (PHSG) and the Oprah Winfrey Leadership Academy for Girls (OWLAG), these should inform us and add to difference as discourse positively, rather than subtract from it. It is only from this perspective that we may be better able to see

how black girls view the world, interact with and make sense of it in multiple ways. By paying particular attention to how black girls' experiences highlight the ways in which race and gender are integral to how they are positioned socially and economically (Maynard, 2001: 125), as scholars we better positioned to challenge existing paradigms and antagonisms towards what is not regarded as the norm in terms of black womxn and education in post-apartheid South Africa.

Thus, by taking strongly the concept of difference, by probing and re-authoring, in writing, this speaks to the reclamation of one's experience which forms the basis of this dissertation and removing the disconnect present between the self and academic writing (Wolfe, 1991). It is therefore important to locate meaning through self-narrating and re-authoring which allows for the creation of alternative spaces associated with identity – in this context black womxn – given that the identity of marginalized peoples has tended to be framed outside of the self by dominant misogynous and cultural narratives that have perpetuated "othering".

### *Research ethics and challenges/risks:*

Bearing in mind the research ethics and procedure of this research, all participants were given both an information sheet and consent form. Before each interview I ensured that I explained further the intentions of my research and what it would be used for; asked for the interviewees permission in recording the interview; reminded the interviewees they could opt out of answering any question they were uncomfortable with and that at any point of the interview they had the option to discontinue the process. The consent form made sure to mention that all work pertaining to the progress and write-up of this dissertation would only be viewed by myself and my supervisor. As a researcher, I was also cognisant of my own personal affiliation with the Oprah Winfrey Leadership Academy, as an alumnus, and the need to ensure the integrity of my work in the write-up of this research. It thus became important for me to not only constantly reflect on my own findings, but to ensure that both contexts and the experiences of these womxn are adequately represented. Additionally, considering the writings of Global south decolonial thinkers such as Asher and Spivak, who have written extensively on "otherness" and "making the subaltern speak", I was sure to ground my approach in this stream of thought so as to centre the lives of black womxn by researching their perspectives on their educational experiences in terms secondary schooling.

An interesting thing happened, which I will highlight below, during the process of interviewing my participants. One of my very first interviewees had initially said that she had no objections to her name being mentioned in the write-up of my dissertation. However, post-interview she requested anonymity. She further suggested that going forward I might want to consider asking participants, regarding anonymity, at the beginning of the interview and also at the end as they may have changed their minds. I thought this to be an important technique to use as I too realized that while the participants may want to continue with the entire interview process, they may or may not want anonymity depending on the type of questions asked – and that their responses could change irrespective of what they had said initially. In contrast, some of my other interviewees requested anonymity from the onset. Thus, to ensure the integrity of my research and privacy of my participants, those who requested anonymity were given pseudo names. This can be seen with an asterisk* for those whom I have anonymised. Those participants who did not request anonymity did so partly because they were comfortable with being mentioned as they saw their contribution as part of ending the silence they have endured as a result of their alma maters. Notwithstanding these challenges, I believe that this research remains highly important and offers valuable insight on the positionality of black womxn, their struggles and contributes further to conversations on decolonisation and transformation within the educational sphere.

### *Research Questions:*

- Main Question:

    - Is Du Bois' notion of double consciousness, as a theoretical framework, useful in explaining the educational experiences of black womxn who have previously attended PHSG and OWLAG?

- Secondary questions:

    - How can double consciousness be broadened in order for it to contextualize the intersecting importance of race, class and gender in contemporary South Africa?
    - What are the nuances and similarities in how the discourse on race, class and gender are articulated in these two school contexts, and in the experiences of the black womxn interviewed?

- How do the socio-economic backgrounds of these womxn inform/influence their educational experiences?
- To what extent do the educational experiences of black womxn inform the broader debate on decoloniality and transformation in South Africa's education system?

# Chapter II:
# In conversation: Pretoria High School for Girls and the Oprah Winfrey Leadership academy

## *Race, class and gender: putting into conversation PHSG and OWLAG*

The history of PHSG is a much longer one in comparison to that of OWLAG – which has only been in existence for twelve years – and is in many ways carefully interwoven with South Africa's colonial and apartheid history. Established in 1902, PHSG was started by Lord Milner as part of his agenda to, "…anglicise the Transvaal under British Occupation" (PHSG, 2017). At the time Pretoria had been under British control to which there was no secondary school for English-speaking pupils in the Transvaal. The only school that was in the area at the time was the Staats Model school, which had been built in 1893 to train teachers in what was then known as, the Zuid Afrikaansche Republik (ZAR). Once Pretoria fell under British rule, the Staats Model School was refurbished and renamed Pretoria High School and became one of the very first "Milner" schools in the Traansvaal. Initially the school housed both boys and girls and was later renamed Pretoria Boys High School (PBHS) when the first 106 girls left to begin their education on Visagie street at PHSG. During apartheid PHSG was a designated "white" school and like any other school, abided by the then government's separation policy by race (PHSG, 2017).

PHSG is however regarded as one of the first schools to have voted – within an overwhelmingly majority – in favour of opening their doors of education to girls from the other racial categories in the Northern Transvaal. The first black pupils were admitted in 1991, with the daughter of Malawian diplomat, SP Kachipande being the first to gain acceptance (PHSG, 2017). At the time, the school had been under the leadership of Ms. Ann Van Zyl, who later also headed St Stithians Girls College and the Oprah Winfrey Leadership Academy for Girls, in Johannesburg. From an academic standpoint, PHSG has always been regarded as reputable and as being one of the Gauteng Department of Education's (GDE) leading schools. From its inception, the school has now grown significantly, from 106 to more than1500 learners with a teaching staff of almost 90.

In contrast, the Oprah Winfrey Leadership Academy officially opened its doors on the 1st of January 2007. The Academy was founded, as a promise to then President Mr. Nelson Mandela,

by Oprah Winfrey, seeking to offer an education to young South African girls who came from economically disadvantaged backgrounds yet exemplified strong leadership and academic talent. The two founding classes of the Academy were 290 girls in Grades 7 and 8 (OWLAG, 2017).

With a unique environment and peaceful location South of Johannesburg, Henley-On-Klip, the campus is comprised of twenty-one-state-of-the-art classrooms as well as laboratories – and offered art, science, computer and design technology that was the best of its kind. All the classrooms had SMART Board™ technology. Additional cultural features included a library holding approximately 10 000 books; a state-of-the-art 600 seater theatre with a practice rooms and an Amphitheatre. Sporting facilities included fields, a gym and a wellness centre with nurses, doctors, college counsellors and psychologists (OWLAG, 2017). The student-teacher ratio was 18:1 with a school population that is predominantly black.

When comparing the two-school contexts what also seems to stand out are the class differences between these two groups of black womxn interviewed in this dissertation. Part of the requirements for those who were selected to attend OWLAG, in addition to their leadership potential and academic excellence, was that they had to come from households earning R6000 or less per month. In contrast, those from Pretoria High School for Girls, a former model C school, those I interviewed came from households, that were able to afford to pay their school fees. This condition remains intact at the Academy. Fees at PHSG run within the range of R36000 – R40000 per annum (PHSG, 2019).

Increasingly, this group of womxn from PHSG would be associated with coming from families that represent the emerging/existent "black middle class" in South Africa's post-1994 political dispensation. The term "middle class" has also been acknowledged, by some, of its shortcomings in not being descriptive enough in what it means other than the vague understanding of it referring to people whose gross income sits between the two bands of low-income and upper-class earners (Korhonen, 2018). South Africa's middle class has historically been dominated by white South Africans as per the findings of a recent report done by the Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation, in collaboration with Stats SA and the World Bank (Sicetsha, 2018). While this report shows that more black people are gaining access to the middle class, the make-up of South Africa's class by race shows that 28% of white people form part of the Middle class in comparison to the 95% of Black South Africans identified as "Chronic poor" (Sicetsha, 2018).

These two groups of black womxn, considering the socio-economic context, do come from different class backgrounds. This was evident in some of the questions I asked around their parent's occupations; whether they had any siblings or family members that went to university before them; where they lived and grew up. With the black womxn from PHSG, what was evident was that there had been a shift in movement: prior to attending PHSG they had either been born or lived with their parent's or grandparent's outside the province. They only moved at a later stage when their parents had found better employment or to be closer to school. They represented in many ways, a group of black families that did transition – to a certain extent – economically as South Africa moved into democracy. All of those interviewed from PHSG (all ten alumni) had parents who had went to university and received a degree.

In contrast, the alumni of OWLAG predominantly came from households where they were the first-generation graduates or there was only one person before them who had went to university. Out of the ten interviewed, only three mentioned that their parents had a university degree while the remaining had been the first in their families to go to university. These were black womxn alumni whose parents were low-income earners, some with single parents, and in many ways, were struggling. Given their socio-economic backgrounds and schooling context – a historically white and predominantly black well-resourced school – makes it even more compelling to see how these two groups of black womxn recall their educational experiences and the nuances that can be drawn from putting their contexts into conversation with one another. It also shows us that we cannot divorce the personal in terms of the family contexts of where these womxn come from, from their education and how this has also impacted their development.

Spelman (2001) writes, that it is often difficult to analyse the intersection between race, class and gender in a way that does not undervalue their effects on one another. As such it becomes important to make sense of how the links between them are conceived. In doing so this allows us to analyse the various elements that make up our identity and the various forms of oppression that exist (Spelman, 2001: 74). Often the negation of gender and sexism comes at the hands of being compared to racism and which form of oppression should take precedence. In many instances, the need to compare race and sexism (towards a certain gender) often presupposes the non-existence of black womxn as if neither apply to them – when in actual fact this is a bitter irony since black womxn are the victims of both forms of oppression. The presence of

class differences adds a third dimension in terms of the discrimination/disadvantages that black womxn may face as well as the differences that may exist between them.

The class divide existing in the same racial demographic of people is at times overlooked or has not been analysed in-depth. This is because hierarchies of oppression dictate that we look at class difference from a racial lens in terms of being black in relation to what it means to be white. This means in a country such as South Africa – where race and class are so intertwined – the assumption would be that class differences predominantly run along the racial lines. This is not to say that this is a wrong perspective to hold. Current statistics do indicate that South Africa is a largely unequal society (in terms of its Gini-coefficient), with the majority of black South Africans still bearing the brunt of poverty, with nearly half of them falling in the lower-bound poverty line as indicated by statistics South Africa (Chutel, 2017). The statistics do however further reveal that, black womxn and children remain the most vulnerable to poverty – further indicative of why class differences even amongst black womxn is an important consideration. Class differences themselves are also an indication of access, opportunities and the spaces in which one can get into. As such the concept of double consciousness may need to be reimagined, in order to consider the multiple identities that black womxn hold and how they intersect with their blackness.

The Academy is a predominantly black environment that has a semblance of "middle-classness" with regards to its educational environment in terms of infrastructure, ideology and institutional culture. This semblance of "middle-classness" operates in a context (South Africa), where it is often synonymous to the political and socio-economic condition that a white minority are accustomed to in comparison to the country's black majority. By taking girls from the same economic grouping – whose parents had to earn R6000 or less – this in a sense standardised and limited class difference amongst the girls at the Academy. This is of course not to say that the class question is only prevalent in historically white (former Model c) schools or that black the black womxn who have attended these schools have not experienced class difference – but that we must be cognisant of the nuances present in what economic difference may mean in both these environments. These nuances are equally important as they shape discourse on black subjectivity, class and gender differently. Wolpe (1988), thus reminds us that neither race nor class, alone, can explain the way social formation has transpired in South Africa and how privilege, power and position have been redistributed. It is thus integral that one looks at the intersection of race and class as well as the role played by politics and culture

(Soudien, 2012: 90). I would further argue that the exclusion of gender from this analysis would also mean the ignorance of how social formation and hierarchies affect black womxn.

While race – and class to a certain extent – forms an important basis for South Africa's reform policies it would be remiss of us to not look at the impact of South Africa's education system in relation to black womxn. As Maynard (2001) writes, many societies have often acted, and continued to act as if race is a fixed objective category – with reference to one's skin colour, country of birth, citizenship and language. In this regard, term "black" was initially employed as a political category to mark the common experience of a group of people who had historically been subjected to racism and marginalization, and the ever-present disparity between white folk and those who face oppression at their hands from both the system and individual (Maynard, 2001: 123). Thus, historically speaking, the "black experience" became the basis for forging unity and resistance in the face oppression.

It is however important to recognize that the "black experience", is not as homogenous as it has been made out to be. To argue otherwise would be to ignore the varying realities and identities that exist and how oppression may manifest differently. The large difficulty in establishing a connection between race, class and gender, has largely been because these concepts have – and continuously– been polarized in research and writing (Maynard, 2001: 123). Although white feminist work has often been criticized for its silence and disregard on debates pertaining to "race", the fact that analyses on "race" have had a tendency to negate gender is also more often than not, ignored. Although a vast body of literature on "race" exists, little of it, with a few notable exceptions such as the writings of Bell Hooks and Audre Lorde, have been gendered. I would also argue further that few notable exceptions in terms of literature on race have been gendered and addressed class simultaneously.

### *Navigation, negotiation and negation in a historically white school*

The popular "Rainbow Nation" metaphor has often been used as a symbolic gesture, marking the aspirations of the state and international community for South Africa to move forward. It stood as an emblem of unity seeking to be of example, internationally, that a nation could heal from its past and that as a people from all walks of life, South Africans could live together in harmony (Henderson, 2016). While these aspirations are admirable, one cannot shy away from the reality that South Africa remains a deeply divided society, thus uniting a society grappling with the remnants of its past remains a formidable challenge.

The movement to radically transform education in South Africa is not an easy task considering the fact that opposition to change remains entrenched. This opposition finds expression within the structures of school governing bodies, as well as in the attitudes of teachers who vehemently deny that they have racist attitudes. The upsurge of protest action that occurred at Pretoria High School for Girls (PHSG) was not something of a peculiar nature. While of course the primary reason given for the protest was tied to the discrimination of black hair – also bearing in mind the historical politicization of black hair – this is an incidence that cannot be viewed as an isolated matter. Upon hearing about this matter, Gauteng MEC for Education, Panyaza Lesufi launched an independent investigation whereby a law firm was appointed to probe into these allegations. On the 2nd of December 2016 – just over three months since the incident – Lesufi announced that the findings did indeed reveal numerous accounts of racial abuse, bullying and victimisation (Henderson, 2016). Some of the findings of the report included the following:

- Black girls being made to provide ethnic/settlement origins and information during apartheid, because of their race, while no expectation was held of white girls to do this;
- That the school was guilty of being unresponsive to the complaints of black girls regarding racial abuse by educators and white learners;
- A number of incidences further confirmed that learners or parents who had notified the school of racist undertones had received no responses or updates;
- Black girls were constantly referred to a specific black educator to deal with their hair, expecting them to straighten it and avoid certain African hairstyles such as the Afro;
- That the current composition of the SGB had not been reflective of the racial demographics of PHSG.

The sentiments expressed in this report were further confirmed by some of the black womxn I interviewed – older girls – who they themselves had attended PHSG in their earlier years. This confirmation further proved that there has been a history of insensitivity when it came to the well-being of black womxn in this school. In August and September of 2018, I interviewed ten black womxn who had been alumni of Pretoria Girls. An interesting thread that I noticed amongst my interviewees, were the words they chose to describe their educational experiences at PHSG. These key words included, “whiteness”, “Eurocentric”, “race-neutrality” amongst others. There were also expressions where my interviewees mentioned that Pretoria Girls placed immense pressure on them to assimilate and “integrate” into the status quo – which often entailed Eurocentric ideals of what it

meant to be a "lady". One of my first interviewees Lehlohonolo Moche, class of 2012, mentioned the following:

*"Now that I look back I realize that we weren't ourselves, we were performing whiteness right. We were trying to assimilate to whiteness. We were just trying to, you know, aspire to white values all the time...you tell your parents but your parents also feel like they don't have the authority or power to go talk about subtle things like comments about your hair, comments about, 'this not being a taxi rank' when people [black girls] are shouting or talking loudly"* (Moche, 2018).

What quickly pointed out during this interview, as the conversation continued, was that a culture of silence had been created in the school: black girls spoke amongst themselves, yet never felt safe to voice their concerns about the subtleties of racist comments made by teachers. Furthermore, they felt safer in certain contexts or places to voice their opinions. In this case, these safe spaces existed amongst themselves as black girls in the schools and with their parents. The unfortunate reality of this however, is that the institutional environment together with the teachers, was not a space where they could be open and honest about their experiences – rather it was limiting to their identity as black girls at the time. Additionally, although from a financial perspective their parents paid the same fees as white parents did, there was never a feeling of belonging or ownership in relation to the governing of the school.

Although these were black parents who were in a financial position to send their daughters to Pretoria Girls, they could not attend parent or SGB meetings because they were working during the time these meetings took place. One of my interviewees pointed out that usually a white learner had at least one parent present either because one of their parents did not work or were able to take time off from work. She mentions that the story for black parents is different they have to work twice as hard to send her and her siblings to good schools (Thando*[4], 2018).

This is in further recognition that the parents of these girls have often been branded as part of the emerging/existent "black middle-class", who are in many senses, part of the last generation to have experienced the realities of apartheid. Commentary on racism at schools like Girls high has left many blaming black parents for sending their children to historically white schools when in actual fact this would not be a reality due to the apartheid government's creation of a two-tiered education system and the continued presence of it today (wa Azania, 2015).

[4] All names with an asterisk is with reference to those whom I interviewed who requested anonymity. The names used here are pseudo names.

*"Memoirs of a Born Free: Reflections on the Rainbow Nation"* (2014) author, Malaika wa Azania, writes:

*"They argue that we must send Black kids to Black schools and leave White kids in the safety of their ivory towers of White supremacy. Quite frankly, this is a problematic argument that wants to paint victims as the ones at fault and in the process, exonerate the real culprits…the two-tier education system constructed by the apartheid regime, where the education of a White child received five times the funding of that of a Black child, has left a lasting legacy which is characterised by the quality of infrastructure in these former model C schools versus schools in Black communities."* (Wa Azania, 2015).

Wa Azania points out that the issue at hand is not as clear-cut as some make it out to be: the two-tiered apartheid education system compelled many black parents to want to send their children to better schools which are evidently historically white model c schools. Had this not been the case, and education was standardized across the board in terms of resources, perhaps then we would be having a different conversation.

When asked to describe their schooling environment in terms of ethos, culture and tradition, there was a feeling of dissonance and assimilation that my interviewees experienced. Asked to recall their initial feelings with regards to attending PHSG my interviewees pointed out that they remember how, "white" the school was. This description pointed to two things: the first being the evident physical presence of a majority white student body in comparison to the number of black girls. The less obvious one, however, were the implicit undertones of hegemony and tradition that catered to and favoured white learners, and how that impacted the educational experience of these black womxn (Moche, 2018; Kale, 2018 & Sinazo, 2018).

One of my interviewees who was a prefect during her time at Girls High spoke candidly about the conflicting experience of being part of the Representative Council of Learners (RCL) as a black girl and needing to enforce rules or witnessing how the senior leadership of the school did very little to understand those who were black girls. Speaking on the hair policy one of my interviewees, Morategi Kale, mentioned the following:

*"…I was on the side of enforcing the rules and from being in discussions with the principal and the deputy principal on the hair policy, they really didn't make as much of an effort to accommodate girls who did have their hair natural. They spoke about it like it was an*

*inconvenience, saying they can't have it [black hair] like that because when other girls are sitting behind them [black girls] they can't see"* (Kale, 2018).

The same interviewee further goes on to say:

*"The only black people were myself and this other girl who was the head of one of the hostels and for some reason they would always ask her opinion on the hair of black girls. For a long time, I couldn't understand it or didn't have the words to articulate it why. Her proximity to whiteness was a lot closer than I was: all her friends were white and teachers saw her as someone who understands white people better and so everything on blackness they would ask her and pretty much no one else"* (Kale, 2018).

The above sentiments not only speak to the "proximity to whiteness" but also speak to how difference is seen as being inherently bad. In this context, it becomes clear that an expectation was levied on black girls: being a part of this school meant that one had to constantly negotiate between being a black girl and what was expected with regards to the what it meant to be a "Girls high" girl. To be a "Girls high" learner meant that the behaviours and mannerisms of black girls had to mirror those of white girls – if this was not the case one was seen as being an outcast or unruly. Thus, this "proximity to whiteness" was about the closeness of one's identity to white standards in order to be deemed acceptable and worthy of having a "valid" opinion. This is particularly highlighted above given that Kale (2018), mentions that a part of her peer being seen as the "go to" person for all matters related to black girls was because she was much more aligned to what was then acceptable (white) standards and expectations. This included having white friends and the white teacher's ability to relate to her.

The danger in this is that it creates stereotypes that are dangerous and demeaning. As such to be a black girl automatically meant to be stereotyped as loud while to be a white girl meant you were polite and soft spoken; to be a black girl meant being associated with never being punctual for school while white girls are always punctual; to be a black girl meant you are always unruly because your hair does not look like white hair, while the neatness of white girls' hair goes unquestioned (Kale, 2018; Moche, 2018).

The danger in this is that these stereotypes often create an incomplete narrative – "the danger of a single story" (2009) as feminist and acclaimed author, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie would say. Single-sided stories not only negate the dignity of people, but make further inference that some are more human and equal than others because of the emphasis placed on difference

(Adichie, 2009). The reasons for this intolerance of difference has often pointed to the fact that the teachers at Girls High are first and foremost, predominantly white and secondly, coming from an older generation – that was part of the apartheid era. This is rather telling and is also substantiated by the findings of the 2016 report that stipulated – as part of the recommendations – that within three months diversity training would need to be implemented and a culture survey to be put in place (Henderson, 2016).

The above accounts stand as proof that although protest action broke out in August of 2016, the educational experiences of the black womxn I interviewed, are not as far removed or far-fetched from the reasons that lead to protests. These incidences prove that although South Africa's political dispensation has changed – legislatively – much still needs to be done in terms of changing the internal politics of historically white schools. The increased admission of black girls does not necessarily mean that a school is transformed when it comes to its institutional culture and ethos.

The problem here has been that the idea of difference – seeing another person in opposition to the other – has been used in an antagonistic manner. In line with this one of my interviewees mentioned that, "*…they wanted to make them white people – 'white girls Girls high girls'"* (Moche, 2018), to describe how teachers at the school sought to and expected black girls to assimilate into a culture embedded in Eurocentric values, norms and understandings.

In addition to the hair policy, this assimilation found expression in the subtle micro-aggressions made. Some examples given regarding the subtle micro-aggressions made were linked to one being prohibited to speak any other language other than English – unless it was break time – yet there were instances of teachers who directly spoke in Afrikaans and interacted with other white students in this manner during class and expressions such as, *"Then why did you come to Girls High if you were going to be late?"* (Kale, 2018; Lihle*, 2018) in response to those who were delayed because of public transport. In this regard one of my interviewees described the environment and school as, "anti-poor" because of the aforementioned remarks made to those girls coming to school late – without the consideration that some black girls used public transport to get to school from surrounding townships in Pretoria such as Soshanguve and Mamelodi, that were North and North-east of Pretoria respectively (Moche, 2018). As such it becomes important to note, as mentioned earlier on, that race does not function alone. Instead it functions in conjunction with other world systems to create unequal power relations. This includes capitalist, patriarchal and sexist ideas as well. It has been show, as have the above

instances, that these ideals significantly affect black girl's and womxn's experiences of and treatment in the educational space. Maynard (2001), makes reference to how race has profound effects in terms of the environments and circumstances that womxn live around the world – this however is only part of the problem.

When race interacts with gender and class the idea of "difference" takes on three dimensions, as does double consciousness. This means that the identity of black womxn and girls in terms of how they navigate, negotiate and negate their identity is intricately linked to the spaces which antagonize racial, gender and class differences. As such in order for double consciousness to be a useful theoretical framework or that it be reimagined, it becomes important for it to be given a multi-dimensional lens that takes into account intersecting identities. This comes with the understanding of realizing that black girls who attend schools like Pretoria Girls' high are expected to conform to a certain standard that intersects with race, class and gender (Osmond, 2016). This standard is one of whiteness – functioning in conjunction with other global structures – that dictates the rules of the game and in this instance, one that dictates how black girls ought to exist and behave while never questioning the identity of white girls. As such this standard expects black girls to be "ladies" which inherently means one must aspire and act as a white Eurocentric girl would. It is a standard that in this idea of being a "lady", even enforces certain patriarchal ideas such as the civvies day policy at Pretoria Girls of the "Three Bs" which were, "no boobs, bums and bare shoulders" at PHSG (Moche, 2018; Lihle, 2018*). Part of the reasons given here for the "Three Bs" was to ensure that all girls at the school do not "distract" the male teachers which is inherently patriarchal as it places the burden of men behaving decently on girls – thus seeking to police their bodies. Additionally, it exempts the school and its male teachers from introspecting on their own faults and how their policies can prove to be detrimental.

Gramsci's writings on hegemony thus provide us with further tools of analysis to further understand how power relations are formed. Gramsci developed the theory of hegemony in the Prison Writings. "Hegemony" to Gramsci, spoke directly to the dominant "cultural, moral and ideological" oppression of a marginal group over a majority . As such Hegemonic culture rationalises its own values and norms as being logical and unquestionable – maintaining the status quo (Gramsci, 1929). Using this train of thought we are able to see how this applies in the educational space of historically white schools: the institutional culture of historically white, Model c schools, remains embedded with colonial and apartheid ideals that still dictate

how they should be governed and how black girls ought to behave in this environment. These rules and expectations go unquestioned, making them universal standard.

The admission of black girls to schools such as PHSG is still perceived as a "favour" in terms of "accommodating" them. It is for this reason that terms such as "accommodate", "include" and "integration" remain inherently problematic. As one of my interviewees mentions:

*"It has been like twenty plus years now since democracy so I don't think we should still be 'accommodating' black people. The environment should already be accepting of them…I don't think a black person should walk into a certain situation and feel like they need to be accommodated…when someone, because they are of a certain race, didn't go through the same. Everyone else was allowed to be who they wanted to be in that space but we had to have a mediator of some sort to say what we were doing right and what we needed to be punished for"* (Amahle*, 2018).

These terms not only come with an insinuation of doing one a "favour", but are inherently rooted in the idea that one must conform to an already-existing culture that does not seek to ensure that the environment is reflective of its demographic in terms of race, class, culture, gender and religion amongst other things. An institutional culture rooted in Christianity and Eurocentric ideals will without a doubt exclude and marginalize people. These womxn interviewed here in many ways did not have the words to articulate what happened to them when they were school girls, but mention that it has been upon reflection, post-schooling that they are better able to understand and attach meaning to their experiences. Attending Pretoria Girls was an ultimately conflicting experience as they had to navigate and balance being a black girl and being expected to aspire to what it means to be a white girl.

### *Navigation, negotiation and negation in a predominantly black well-resourced school*

The Oprah Winfrey Leadership Academy for Girls (OWLAG) has a different story and history in relation to South Africa's political landscape. To begin, and as mentioned previously, it is a predominantly black well-resourced school – falling outside of the two-tier education system that apartheid created to divide and conquer. In many ways, it mirrors a model that bridges the gap between the resources historically white schools can offer yet not many black children can access, and the lack of resources that township schools have yet possess students with so much potential.

Established in 2007, the academy directly recruited girls coming from family backgrounds that earned an income of less than R6000 per month, yet despite their economic circumstances, possessed immense academic and leadership potential. Through the Oprah Winfrey Leadership Academy Foundation (OWLAF), the founder, Ms. Oprah Winfrey funds the Academy and further supports its graduates financially as they enter university (OWLA, 2019). Describing in her own words the vision and intent of the school, Ms. Winfrey, mentions the following in an interview she did on the first graduating class of the academy:

*"I wanted to help girls who were like me, girls who really wanted it. They could see the possibility for themselves – if only. You take that girl, you put her in school, you give her an opportunity to walk through the door of higher education and we have what has happened here with these OWLAG girls…so for me I've taken that to heart and, you know, trying to create options and access. As you know it is your access to information, and your access and ability to get yourself into the right spots to even be interviewed. It's your access that makes all the difference and your ability to do that comes from being exposed to the best that education can offer you so that's what we've tried to do here"* (Winfrey, 2018).

Considering South Africa's history, regarding its differentiation of educational resources on the basis of race, it comes as no surprise that the demographic of the school is predominantly black. This is not to say that there were/are no white teachers and learners, but that in contrast to PHSG, racial demographics were the reverse. The founding class in 2008 consisted of 150 girls, two being white, eight being coloured and one student being Indian. The remaining number of girls (146) were black. Additionally, it is quite rare to find an independent black well-resourced school in South Africa where its learners receive 100% free tuition and further university support.

Thus, in the write-up of this dissertation the predominantly black environment that was the Academy reminded me of a book written by South African journalist, Ferial Haffajee, titled, *"What if there were no whites in South Africa?"* (2015). In her first book, (2015), Ferial Haffajee recounts her own experience of working at the Financial Mail in 1999 and the problem of black invisibility in a predominantly white workplace. In the Preface, Haffajee argues that the response to the title of her book or her findings rather, will not necessarily be of service to white racists who say, "down the tubes" or to an angry generation of black South Africans who would respond by saying "good riddance".

Hafajee's book title and writings evidently reveal the frustrations of today's black South African generation. In the educational context, using Hafajee's book as an analogy, begs the

question of whether white people are the problem and whether the outcome would be different in a predominantly black well-resourced environment. Furthermore, it asks us to interrogate how different or how similar the educational experiences of black girls would be in the physical absence of whiteness or whether whiteness is able to pervade any space irrespective of demographic composition. For scholars such as Fanon (1986), whiteness is ever moving: it defines what is universal, pure and just. It prescribes what it means to be civilized, modern and human. It is intangible yet ever present in one's life and has – for all intents and purposes – been used to justify white supremacy (Fanon, 1986:134).

In South Africa whiteness points, directly to the evaded and deeply entrenched assumptions as to who has the authority to speak; what and who is good; and who it is that is entitled to benefit in contemporary South Africa. What Haffajee (2015) soon realizes is that there is indeed a generational shift that exists between her own experiences of freedom and its appreciation and those of the "born free" generation who have become rightly impatient with the slow pace of change. This dismay and dissatisfaction with the Rainbow nation ideal, reconciliation and social cohesion narrative finds expression within the 2015 #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall movements (Haffajee, 2015: 166) – and even in the outbreak of Protests at Pretoria High School for Girls in 2016.

As an alumnus of the Academy myself, using Hafajee's question as a premise, I was interested in looking at how the experiences of these black womxn alumni would compare to those of the womxn who attended Pretoria High School for Girls (PHSG). This in recognition of the fact that difference amongst black womxn can be used as a useful tool for us to understand the varying ways in which they navigate and see the world. Similar to PHSG I conducted ten interviews with alumni from OWLAG between August and September of 2018 in Johannesburg. What remains both a memorable and common thread amongst my interviewees from the Academy, is their recollection of the emotions that had engulfed them when they were informed of their acceptance. They put into perspective what it felt like to see the school for the first time and then, to move back and forth between school and home. Unlike other schools boarding was compulsory for those accepted such that one would be at school for three months and at home for the holidays for one month, per term.

While extensive literature exists on historically white schools, they lack the perspective of black girls. Similarly, there is a missing perspective of girls who come from backgrounds such as those of OWLAG and what it means to be taken out of one environment and adjusting to a

new one. Refilwe Digoamaje, one of my interviewees, was interviewed by the Citizen in October of 2017. Refilwe grew up in Mafikeng with both her parents. Her mother worked as a cleaner and her father was migrant worker in the mines. In her Matric year of 2012 her father was one of the miners on the restive platinum belt of mines. He and thousands of other miners were in shock of the strike that lost 34 lives namely the "*Marikana Massacre".* Today, Refilwe, a 24-year-old womxn from Mafikeng, owns shares in the Radisson Blu hotel development, having completed her second degree and is simultaneously bringing about a better quality of life for her community and family (Hlatshaneni, 2017). Speaking on her experience of being an "Oprah Girl" she says:

*"I believed boarding schools were where smart students went. My parents could not afford to take me to one, so this was finally my opportunity to go where I felt I could fit in… One of the hardest parts was the feeling that I was living two different realities. You had the academy where everything was basically perfect, [except for] the pressure of being an 'Oprah Girl'. It was overwhelming at times. You'd think about what's going on at home and begin to lose track of what you're supposed to be focused on"* (2017).

Refilwe's experience is but an extension of the feelings and emotions of other womxn who went to the Academy in their earlier years. What many perhaps fail to recognize is that the Academy is a school of excellence and with excellence comes high expectations. These are expectations that all these womxn – coming from across South Africa – had to fulfil. The bar was now raised academically in comparison to what their former schools could offer them but there was never truly really escaping the hardships of home. These are womxn whose successes were not just their own – but their families – because of what it symbolized: a chance to break the cycle of poverty and make a substantial difference in their communities.

All of the womxn interviewed were womxn who came from all over the country, from Rustenburg; to the rural area of Bulwa in KZN; to the townships of Soweto and Mdantsane in the Gauteng and the Eastern Cape province respectively. Speaking to Samukelisiwe Nkosi, part of the founding class of the academy, she mentions the conflicting experiences of both joy and misunderstanding around her acceptance. While some of her family members and teachers were happy others remarked with envy, given the nature of this opportunity, *"…that they didn't understand why it was me and not them"* (Nkosi, 2018).

Samukelisiwe and her brother were raised by a single mother in Soweto who worked as a primary school teacher. Putting into words her family environment and the dynamics of it she further goes on to say the following:

*"My father did the 'black man thing' and left and then he came back I think, when I was about seven or eight but he would just come in say, six months to a year and then he would also like disappear periodically. I now have found out that it was him being pushed away and also him leaving. So, I used to think he just left me but I think now that I have like a fuller picture of what was happening he was also pushed away, like my mom would move out and not tell him where we were staying and stuff like that…"* (Nkosi, 2018).

As I continued to conduct interviews there was a trend that I began to pick up amongst most of those I interviewed: with the exception of two interviewees, the others came from single parent households with fluid family structures. While the traditional capitalist model of family structures dictates a "nuclear" setting with both the mother and father present, fulfilling specific gendered roles (Van Driel, 2015), this was not the case in this context. My interviewees were raised by single mothers who fulfilled the role of being the breadwinner as well. My other interviewee, raised by her mother who worked as a domestic worker moved between the township of Mdantsane in the Eastern Cape to Morningside, Johannesburg, during her upbringing. Speaking on her circumstances growing up she makes mention of the reality of being poor but simultaneously not having been acutely aware of it, because it was normalized:

*"…we were poor [laughs], it didn't feel like we were poor because I didn't know we were poor. I was young, I was just eating whatever we were eating. But now I think of it and sometimes between my sister and, I we would have five rands to spend at school and that was funny to us. It was okay to us but now looking back we were like wow it was really tough and hard, and I think my mom also tried a lot to hide that from us that we were poor and struggling sometimes"* (Olwethu*, 2018).

In light of their upbringing, the academy was symbolic of an escape but also of an abundance of opportunities they would not have received elsewhere. With this opportunity came doubt, pressure and anxiety:

*"I just remember not believing how I could have been chosen to be here because it didn't align to my story or what I had envisioned my life would be. I imagined I would go to Fourways high then I would, I don't know graduate from Fourways high and that was it. At twelve years old that is as far as I was imagining"* (Olwethu*, 2018).

The Academy, Ms. Winfrey in particular, had handpicked young black girls from their previous schools – the cream of the crop – as such attending the academy further presented its own challenges. These challenges included moving between home and school, as well as the

academic challenge of adjusting to a new environment and being in a room with other young black girls, who were just as capable and smart. In many ways, the Academy presented the womxn I interviewed with an escape from the reality that was home and simultaneously an opportunity.

One of my interviewees, Bongeka Zuma grew up in rural KZN in a village called Bulwa. She describes her home environment as traditional and mentions that gendered roles are a norm in her family. Her experience of home is born out of a setting where her father has assumed the traditional role of being the head of the household while her mother took care of the household and her siblings. She also mentions the restrictive conditions in which she grew up in where her father was an alcoholic and grew to be abusive to her mother growing up. She says:

*"Most of the time I knew him as a drunk person, like I knew him as an intoxicated person. So, I didn't really like know him angaphuzanga (not drunk). He was also really abusive to my mother. I grew up…it was a space of fear most of the time. I think Zulu people overlap fear and respect, and they are not the same things…he was abusive to my mother and us. I just grew up in a very violent environment"* (Zuma, 2018).

Bearing this in mind she further makes reference that she grew up in an environment where there were expectations levied upon her because she was a girl. Thus, the girls were always treated differently to the boys. This included partaking in domestic chores, wearing only skirts and growing up with the idea that "you were not enough as a womxn" if you were unable to carry out these duties. She further mentions that womxn in society are raised to be quiet, obedient and subservient. This however was in contrast to what the Academy taught her (Zuma, 2018).

At the Academy, she was taught that she had the agency to act; the autonomy to think for herself; and most importantly to question. Bongeka, like many other womxn who went to the Academy is a first-generation graduate in her family – yet the contradicting roles of what it means to be a womxn, that these two environments have presented is what has been of conflicting to her. In the interview, I further asked her how her father grapples with the realisation that she was excelling academically – growing up to be a free thinker and receiving opportunities which were historically reserved for men – although he believed in gendered roles. She mentions his initial scepticism regarding her acceptance to the academy was quelled by her teachers:

*"When I got into the Oprah school, a lot of my teachers had to calm him down. My teachers were worried my father wouldn't allow me to go because he wouldn't want me to be raised by someone else – outside of him – not really out of love but more so out of being able to control me and the way that I am brought up. They had to come to my home bazomtshela bona (to tell him) about the school and emphasise ukuthi (that) it's an all-girls school with predominantly womxn teachers"* (Zuma, 2018).

She does mention that over the years her father and family have come to be more accepting and understanding of her achievements and doing things which were perhaps more expected from her brothers. Bongeka's experience, which she details, was about how she would manage these two worlds not from just a socio-economic perspective but from the two differing perceptions held of what a womxn was. In many ways, it shows the intersection of class and gender, as well as the expectations that womxn and young girls should behave in a certain manner.

As an alumnus of the Academy myself, I too can see the significance that a school of this kind has had on my life. My mother, being a domestic worker herself with no formal education training, would have never been able to send me to a "good" school let alone university. I have been provided with a world class education that has led me to institutions such as the University of Cape Town, the University of Witwatersrand, and the University of Oxford – changing the trajectory of my life and that of my family forever.

However, the struggle of reconciling my identity, between who I was at school and who I was at home, was a constant juggling act that I had to balance over the years. I recall going home for the holidays for the first time in 2007, after being away from home for three months at a time. This was a few months after the Academy had officially opened. My mom, family and friends could not understand what was going on with me: I had changed and I was struggling to adapt back into who I was before I had left. This change came from the exposure I had gained of a world where I had access to things I never had before – thus going home made me experience a dissonance that I initially grappled with. This struggle of being home came with my inability to why I was born poor – why I could not have what I had at school.

It was the frustration of not knowing how to deal with the reality of not having my own space, my own bathroom, and having food similar to what was served at Academy – suddenly OWLAG became my reference point for how everything was different at home. At the time, I struggled to articulate my emotions, how to deal with the change and where these feelings of

conflict were rooted in. It is only when I was older that I began to understand that the root of my conflict came from having to balance growing up a home that didn't have much and a school that had everything at my disposal – and the constant negotiation of my identity as I moved between these two worlds. It was a feeling of having and not having access to resources – being somehow privileged yet being poor at the same time. Out of this experience and from the conversations that arose in university during student protests, I begin to think about Du Bois' idea of double consciousness as a possible avenue that could explain the feelings I had about never feeling whole. I saw Du Bois' concept as a cannon from which I could draw from and use as part of my own body of scholarship in the process of trying to make sense of my own reality.

Reflecting on this, Du Bois' notion of double consciousness does not completely account for the two sets of double identities Bongeka has to hold simultaneously. Looking at the womxn I interviewed from the Academy, I draw a similar conclusion to that of PHSG in relation to double consciousness. In its initial form, double consciousness provides us with a framework with which we can understand the duality that comes from our consciousness when walking between the "white" and "black" world. However, this duality of consciousness is further broken down when we consider that these womxn not only navigate white and black – with the economic associations that come with it – but also have to manage and grapple with who one should be at home and at school. It is being both within and without as well.

The challenging part of this experience is undoubtedly figuring out how or whether it is possible to reconcile these identities, which doesn't seem at all possible. Instead these womxn have had to learn how to navigate, negotiate and at times negate certain parts of who they are depending on where they are and whom they are with. Seeking to reconcile or "unify" these multiple identities assumes that something must be broken and that it requires fixing to be whole again. Again, this would be based on the very standards and norms that were used to historically oppress people – that we would now seek to mend. Audre Lorde says, *"The Master's tools will never dismantle the master's house"* (2001). Within the multiple consciousness's that we possess not only should we endeavour to understand that these experiences form part of our reality, but that we should *"…reach down into that deep place of knowledge inside herself and touch that terror and loathing of any difference that lives there. See whose face it wears. Then the personal can begin to illuminate all our choices"* (Lorde, 2001: 92).

From hearing the stories of other black womxn from these two contexts, affirmed to me that the educational experiences of black womxn are not homogenous: they are complex, vast and nuanced – and that they deserve to be told. Here were two schools that mirrored the same middle-classness in terms of facilities, and here were two groups of womxn that formed part of these schools, whose identities were being influenced, taking form and changing at different points. It was out of this that the idea came to write this thesis: to look at how these two groups of black womxn – from contrasting socio-economic backgrounds – have navigated, negotiated and perhaps negated parts of their identities throughout their academic journeys. These two contexts are informative, but further speak to black subjectivity and the multiplicity of realities that exist within it. In the following pages below I will share some reflections on my findings in relation to these womxn's experiences.

# Chapter III: Reconciling and reflecting:

## *Connecting Du Bois, difference and intersectionality*

Throughout his life, W.E.B Du Bois has often been cited, together with Frederick Douglas, as having been an advocate for black womxn. Du Bois, amongst one of the few men of his generation, gave recognition to the importance of womxn and their contribution to family income. This is indicative in *"The Damnation of Women"* where Du Bois mentions that the liberation of womxn was next to the colour line (Warren, 1960: 81). Historian, Joy James, has previously stated that Du Bois' understanding of the struggles that womxn faced were closely related to understanding that the idea of freedom went beyond the color line: but that it included gender and sexuality. While this may stand true, it is not to say that Du Bois himself was not guilty of prioritising race over gender and sexuality in terms of what is to be attained first (Warren, 1960: 81). This prioritising is best evident in the language Du Bois uses in his article of 1898, "The Study of the Negro Problems," where he describes a number intellectuals, those who are the authority and investigators of Negro problems, as male (Griffin, 2000: 28).

Even within the *"Damnation of Women",* as Griffin states, although Du Bois speaks about the liberation of womxn being next to the colour line his description of womxn is that of mothers, workers and activists – but never as intellectuals (Griffin, 2000: 28).

Similarly, in his book, *"The Souls of Black Folk"* (1903), Du Bois writes:

"*After the Egyptian and Indian, the Greek and Roman, the Teuton and Mongolian, the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world, —a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity".*

When Du Bois wrote these words, he sought not only to display the fractured identity of an African-American, but to further illustrate the hierarchal nature of society and how it had it placed at the bottom the Negro. While this experience is valid, considering the time in which he wrote, it is not wrong to say that this hierarchy of society is incomplete. With the consideration of race and gender it would be correct to say that the Negro is not homogenous,

and secondly that the experiences of being a black man will differ to those of black womxn. If the Negro man is a sort of "seventh son" as Du Bois mentions, then it must be said that the Negro womxn would be the eighth child – illustrating the hierarchical nature of society when we include gender as part of the mainstream conversation. Even within his conversations on Double consciousness and race-relations in America at the time, Du Bois writes from the perspective of black males rather than critically discussing both the experiences of both black men and womxn – and how these are nuanced.

While some would see it as incorrect to insinuate that black men are more privileged in comparison to black womxn, how the world is and continuous to be ordered compels us to do so. From a historical point of view blackness and being "black" were of course political terms that had been used to denote the common oppression of a group of people, however differential experience does not allow for us to ignore the varying levels of marginalized identities even within this spectrum of blackness when we consider race, class and gender together.

Du Bois' theory of double consciousness is a useful framework in the South African context but only to a certain extent. In the context of the educational experiences of PHSG and OWLAG, Du Bois' theory is integral in our understanding of the different spaces black womxn navigate, negotiate and negate. The educational experiences of those who are alumni of PHSG reveals how in their schooling years there was a sense of needing to navigate and balance being a black girl – in an environment designed largely for the development of the white girl. As such black girl identity is not only juxtaposed to that of the version of the "Eurocentric white lady", but is further fixed and discriminated against through a "white" gaze. As such expectations are levied for black girls to not only assimilate but walk between a black and white world.

In contrast, the black womxn of OWLAG spoke more commonly of their experiences of travelling between home and school for the holidays: it was of leaving one environment that looked completely different to the next and needing to adjust one's expectations. Home represented a reality that was less privileged than the Academy. This reality was one that was difficult for many – especially the first time one went home – because of the readjustment one had to make in terms of their physical surroundings. Navigating home and school also required the necessary mental adjustment to come to terms with the difference in reality in relation to the self. Here we had black womxn needing to learn to navigate walking between two worlds that differed immensely from a socio-economic lens.

Thus, putting these two contexts into conversation with another allows for the understanding of difference, how it exists in these contexts and use it as a learning tool to comprehend how black womxn experience and see the world because of their educational experiences. Therefore, while Du Bois' theory of double consciousness has been useful in this perspective – however it is evident that it is not able to stand alone. Instead double consciousness requires that it be reimagined to the extent that it takes into account intersectionality, the further exploration of difference and recognition. Twenty years ago, Kimberle' Crenshaw, renowned author, feminist and leading scholar coined the well-known term "intersectionality" in a paper she wrote seeking to explain the oppression of African-American womxn. Crenshaw's work has impacted the manner in which we view race politics and identity formation in today's society. In a recent interview with Columbia Law School, Crenshaw (2017) articulated that intersectionality should be seen as lens in which we can see how different forms of power collide, interconnect and intersect with each other. As she says, "it's not simply that there's a race problem here, a gender problem here and a class or LGBTQ problem there" (Crenshaw, 2017). Using this approach is what Crenshaw argues as a framework that tends to erase the experiences of people who are subjected to all of these things put together.

What Du Bois' theory has done is that it has helped us to understand what it means to navigate and grapple with being in between "white" and the "black" world – and what how it feels to be both "within" and "without". Once we put PHSG and OWLAG as mirror reflections of each other, it is clear that further theoretical analysis by using intersectionality and the politics of difference is required so as to understand holistically how these womxn not only see the world, but how their experiences broaden what it means to be both black and womxn.

For some scholars, they view double consciousness and intersectionality as complementary frameworks rather than being adversaries of one another, while others deem double consciousness as incomplete in comparison to intersectionality. Dickens, who published a study on *"Double Consciousness: The Negotiation of the intersectionality of identities among academically successful black women"* (2014), mentions that although Du Bois wrote on the "splitting in two" of African-American identity as a result of racism it can still be applied when researching and writing on the experiences of black womxn. Dickens (2014), states that the pressure to assimilate as a result of having double consciousness has an impact on black womxn and their comprehension of their own race, class and gender identities – all of which they have to navigate in the processes of assimilation. In her study Dickens (2014) explores how, within

the Euro-centric culture, black womxn themselves have to manage how they navigate both "White world" and "Black world" and they the effects of walking in between these two worlds. Thus, in this perspective, double consciousness and intersectionality together can speak to how people with intersecting identities navigate two worlds at a time, depending on where they are and whom they are with.

In order to comprehend the South African context and how these womxn's experiences, it also requires that we broaden our own tools of analysis. As Soudien (2012), mentions the racial discourse of apartheid has in many ways been sustained and carried itself into the new South Africa – with even the new reform agenda remaining firmly entrenched with in this veil. This is evident within the policies of affirmative action, immigration and social renewal (Soudien, 2012: 91). This alone however does not explain the further disparities that exist in when we factor class and gender – together with race. Considering this, the concept of "difference" offers with it immense potential for us to learn and understand the nuances that exist. As of recent, difference was used as a means to highlight the existing differences amongst womxn as well rather than between two genders or race in terms of "black" and "white" (Maynard, 2001: 125).

There are two connotations of difference which exist: the first one focuses on the diversity of experience, while the other looks at difference from a postmodernist lens. Scholars, sympathetic to the cause of postmodernist thinking, have often spoken in opposition to the notion of difference based on the former. Maynard (2001), writes that scholars such as Barret critique this on the basis that it is rooted in a relativistic view of knowledge, and therefore what is considered "truth". However, this view to a certain extent is reductionist in its approach. If we are to agree that knowledge itself is political and has a history of being written from the lens of the "victor", then we can further agree why it is important for those who have been side-lined to not only contribute to the cannon – which can only be done from the way in which they view and have experienced the world. In line with this, black writers have often emphasized the importance of understanding that difference is crucial and that experience does not necessarily equate to truth (Maynard, 2001: 126) – nonetheless it ought to be brought to the fore. Although these two connotations differ and may be rooted in differing philosophies, their consequences for the study of both race and gender are quite similar.

Firstly, both these ideas of difference share an emphasis on heterogeneity and are sceptical of any analysis that seeks to make sweeping generalizations that develop grandiose theoretical frameworks on this basis. Both these perspectives challenge the unquestioned polarity that

exists of black versus white and the heterosexist male versus female. The "diversity of experience" approach in particular allows for the consideration of hierarchies that exist between men and between womxn respectively (Maynard, 2001: 127). Both of these formulations of difference, in varying ways, subverts the unity and meanings of terms such as "race", "black" and "woman". Placing an emphasis on difference creates the possibility for multiple identities to be seen and for emancipation (Maynard, 2001: 128).

Reflecting on the educational experiences of the black womxn I interviewed further shows the nuances in which they have grappled with their identities and the different circumstances they come from. The former (PHSG) represents a grouping of black womxn raised within the context of the "black middle class" family who have been able to afford to send them to historically white schools yet have still experienced discrimination at the hands of teachers. What this tells us is that affordability in terms of being able to enter certain spaces – such as historically white schools as a black child – does not necessarily equate to equal and just treatment. It further tells us, that we are not in a position to gauge how well a school functions on the basis of pass rates alone nor can we measure the progress of democracy in relation to the number of democratic elections that South Africa has held. The ultimate test of the Rainbow nation metaphor lies in the values of a nonracist, non-sexist and non-classist society and must be realized in the lives of all children. When a group of black girls rose against the hair policies of Pretoria High School for Girls in August 2016, countless testimonies thereafter came into the fold from graduates and pupils speaking out against discrimination in the former model C schools. As the anecdotes increased, numerous schools were scrutinised and put under the spotlight for how well they had/had not transformed in relation to their institutional culture, policies, educators and codes of conduct. This alone proves that our preconceived markers for progress need to be re-evaluated in within our education system. Other schools such as Westville Girls' High School in Durban and Rustenburg Girls' High School in Cape Town, also come under fire for racial undertones in their policies, racial utterances and for the lack of transformation in teaching staff demographics (Evan, 2018). The aforementioned issues within Girls' schools points us to a bigger issue at hand: the institutional othering of black girls within historically white schools and is largely indicative of the pitfalls of national legislation in creating meaningful engagement around these issues.

The alumni of OWLAG face a contrasting struggle one that is much more linked to being a black womxn in the context of their socio-economic identity. Their educational trajectory in terms of moving from township schools and/or environments which were challenging and into

a school that catered for their every need has put them on the path of walking between two contexts. They are walking down a narrow path in which on the one hand their home context mirrors socio-economic disadvantage yet on the other side is them attending a world class school – it is a both a balancing of being seen as privileged and not being privileged.

What these two contexts reveal to the reader is that both these groups of womxn have experienced challenges and conflicts in their identities. At different points, they have had to navigate being privileged and not being privileged; and being black but not black enough; and even assimilating – as black girls whether it be to a different reality or culture. This reveals that attending a historically white school and being "privileged" enough to do so does not mean the absence of oppression, nor does the absence of whiteness in a predominantly black school, mean the absence of challenges. Ultimately what this should teach the reader is the importance of realizing of the difference experiences of black womxn and how oppression can and still manifests at different levels and contexts. In many ways Spivak's essay *"Can the subaltern Speak?"* (1988), echoes the importance of reflecting the background of womxn's struggles and oppression in other parts of the world that have often been excluded in the international framework. Western feminism has often excluded these differences where as Spivak's writings challenge the basic assumptions of feminism. All womxn are not the same and even among womxn with regard to class, colour and creed (Spivak, 1988: 243). Spivak's fundamental arguments are not in opposition to feminism but rather strengthen these fundamental principles of feminism in which freedom is a central tenet of it.

Fundamentally, it becomes important that recognition is given to the stories of black womxn in their entirety. More often than not history has been narrated in such a manner that the needs and stories of black womxn have been pushed to the side-lines. The subject at hand has always been in relation to "what the man wants" and more so, "what the black man wants" – all the while postponing the gender question. Postponing the gender question – much like those who speak of race neutrality – would be to assume that disparity does not exist in this regard (McClintock, 1997: 94).

As renowned author and feminist Audre Lorde mentions, far too often have womxn been taught to ignore their differences amongst each other. This has been fuelled by the perception that "difference" not only creates separation and suspicion, but that no positive change can come

from it. The idea that "community" and "individuality" are antagonists of one another has made it seem as though there is no middle ground (Lorde, 2001: 90).

Lorde agrees that it is through the idea of community and a common cause that political liberation has been achieved, community should not equate to the negation of one's own identity and the purposeful ignorance that differences do exist. For those who have been forced to stand on the touchlines – because they fall out of the realm of acceptability politics in society – have known that to make meaning of their existence is to learn to survive and to affirm that their difference matters too. There has to be a recognition that womxn, poor womxn and womxn of colour are different and that the daily manifestations of racism, sexism and class are not experienced the same. The failure of white feminist theory and academic feminists to embrace nuances as a strength, is undoubtedly resistance of a patriarchal kind that must be challenged (Lorde, 2001: 91).

### *The struggle for affirmation and recognition*

The struggle for recognition of difference emerged in the seventies and eighties and was charged with the clarion call for the emancipation of marginalized voices in terms of sexuality, gender, ethnicity and race relations (Fraser, 2000: 107). It spoke of the assertion of these marginalized voices to challenge dominant power relations that perpetuate narratives embedded in masculinity, misogyny and capitalism to bring about a more inclusive and nuanced understanding to matters related to the redistribution of power and wealth. Claims for recognition of social difference have been a driving factor in the uprisings of social conflicts across the globe in terms of campaigns around national sovereignty and autonomy, conflicts around multi-culturalism and grassroots movements that have advocated for international human rights (Fraser, 2000: 107).

The claim for recognition of social difference has formed an integral part of intersectional feminist theory and social movements that have advocated in favour of marginalized identities. Applying this idea of recognition into the South African schooling system challenges us to advocate for a different social order in the sphere of education today – one that does not prioritize only racial identity as a main descriptor. Considering this as a society we need to, "move towards a more self-conscious and theoretical position that is mindful and aware of the

shifting relationship between cultural and racial difference, social authority and political discrimination" (Soudien, 2012: 91), in order to engage with dominant narratives that persist.

An approach of this kind would of course require a society that is self-aware of how language, theory and articulation has worked in favour of the dominant narrative on race in South Africa. This presents the possibility of transcending the ways in which stereotypes have been developed as a mechanism to construct difference (Soudien, 2012: 92). The quest for recognition of difference as a positive has often not been taken seriously and has often meant the inadequate address of social justice issues – especially when a society's mainstream culture, values and norms go unquestioned yet are the basis for inequality (Baum, 2004: 1073).

Similar to the American context, South African laws had institutionalized the idea of race such that one's skin colour formed the basis upon which they would be judged – where superior would be separated from inferior. Moolman and Olga (2016), further explain that in addition to skin colour, ethnicity, language culture and religion can also be used to reinforce ideas of difference amongst groups and as such they speak of the multiple forms of racism that come out of this. Moolman and Olga (2016) are not wrong for speaking on there being multiple forms of racism that can exist. If we think about white superiority and its enforcement, this cannot be isolated from other norms that went hand-in-hand with it. Thus, to be white meant that this was complemented by Christianity as being the dominant religion that one followed, in accordance with Eurocentric values and traditions. When Steve Biko speaks of "universal truths" in his book *"I write what I like"* (1978), he speaks of how whiteness undisputedly became the standard of whiteness together with religion (Christianity) and Eurocentric values and traditions. People who fell outside this realm of "universal truths" were not only discriminated against, but were also perceived as subpar. Thus, how we perceive ourselves and are received by the world is directly affected by these markers of skin colour, ethnicity, religion and so forth (Moolman & Olga, 2016) – the same markers that affect the educational development of black womxn. The aforementioned markers are often indicative of the intersecting identities people have and have unfortunately also been used to perpetuate the many forms racism comes in.

Bearing this in mind makes us comprehend that racism does not function alone, but with global structures of power, that converge with the, "capitalist/ patriarchal/ Western-centric/ modern/ colonial world system" in order to perpetuate classist, gender biased and sexist standards along a structured racial hierarchy (Moolman & Olga, 2016). Multiple levels of oppression thus exist

that intersect with race, class, gender and sexuality. If anything, gender, class and even sexual oppression will be experienced differently depending on whose body is being racialized.

Therefore, if we analyse the South African context, economic inequalities have been divided into those who have wealth, resources and opportunities and those who are without. This however has been produced along fault lines, because of South Africa's racialized history of separate development, that take on a racial character (Moolman & Olga, 2016). As such those living in affluent suburbs relish material wealth and further have the tools to accumulate more of it whether it by property, income or land etc. The "have nots" continue to face systematic racism, live in townships, informal settlements and segregated communities while earning low wages, with some struggling to find well-paying employment and endure levels of violence (Moolman & Olga, 2016). The contrast between those living in affluent suburbs and those living in townships shows up in access to health care; whose children get to attend well-resourced schools; housing facilities and even social protection. From an education standpoint, we further see the manifestations of these differences through the yearly matric results and pass rates, the use of public transport; violence and lack of protection; service delivery protests and who has access to tertiary education (Moolman & Olga, 2016).

Political changes in government since 1994 have of course weakened these fault lines, however their remnants are without double a feature of South Africa's democratic dispensation today. Bearing this in mind, this is further compounded with the fact that society is further divided in accordance with social differences such as gender or sexuality which add another layer of inequality – in an already racially and economically divided country. Statistically, the 2017 Millennium Development Goals report indicated that black womxn have the least access to economic opportunities in terms of well-paying jobs and securing positions of leadership (Moolman & Olga, 2016). As evident gender and economic inequalities are shaped by each other and further enforced within this racial hierarchy. We therefore cannot address race alone in the hopes that it will solve all other inequalities. As mentioned race is complemented by other global structures that allow it to thrive. The world in which we live in has prioritized and cemented ideas of white, masculine, and heterosexual privilege thus forming a dominant worldview that is able to dictate whose voice is heard and which socio-economic problems are paid attention to (Moolman & Olga, 2016).

While some may argue that overt racism, classism and sexism are evidently oppressive and thus easier to combat because the problem has been identified, what is often ignored is the

continued covert forms of oppression that continue to permeate people's lives. It speaks to the invisible forms of oppression and power relations that are often ignored or deemed "imaginary", that influence our decisions. These invisible power relations which we see play out in the lives of the womxn interviewed here, influence how the world views them; dictates whose lives and bodies matter the most; and even what knowledge and competence looks like (Moolman & Olga, 2016). It is undoubtedly evident that racism does not function alone and neither can it be addressed exclusively from other forms of oppression.

In the South African context, considering the marriage between race and class, the gender question has tended to be excluded from the equation. Utterances such as, "we will deal with gender later" and, "The problem we face in South Africa is a race problem" are not far from the tongues of many people today. In a recent article titled, "The long road SA's women face" written by Boitumelo Molusi and Dudu Msomi in 2018, they point out in a similar vein Fanon and Du Bois' "white gaze", that womxn's daily lives are impacted by how men perceive them. This perception is often a connotation of being weak, defenceless, sub-standard and in need of being saved. As such this often exposes womxn to unequal treatment, abuse, sexual harassment and discrimination, as documented by a social experiment conducted by Soul City Institute in 2017 (Molusi & Msomi, 2018). This is a preconception that applies to womxn and even young girls – which impacts their lives going forward.

The manner in which social differences are intertwined with each other makes it necessary for the social matrix of power and domination to be tackled with this in mind if economic, political and gender equality is to be achieved. This awareness undoubtedly has to be rooted in the interconnectedness and different ways in which racial hierarchies are constructed and are even misconstrued (Moolman & Olga, 2016). In the same breath, it requires sympathy and the ability to recognize the covert and intersectional forms of oppression that find expression today. The politics of recognition and difference requires more of us in not only understanding the educational experiences of womxn and the broader challenges they face, but that we directly challenge these from both our positions of privilege and marginalisation – throughout society.

# Conclusion

Simone de Beauvoir once wrote: “It is in the knowledge of the genuine conditions of our lives that we must draw our strength to live and our reason for acting” (1949). Racism, gender and economic inequality, and homophobia are all undoubtedly the real conditions of all our lives at this point and time (Lorde, 2001: 92). It is in these circumstances, at this particular point and time, that we must muster up the courage to act; to be relentless and unwavering in the pursuit of telling the stories of those who have historically been marginalized – so that they too one day reflect a truer version of history.

Twenty-five years later, South Africa remains a country that continues to grapple with the race question. While there is no denying that the legacy of apartheid has played a horribly memorable role in keeping alive racial inequality – running along economic lines – the gender question to a large degree remains untouched – even more so the intersection of all three of these concepts. Reform policies in the sphere of education have thus sought to implement redress policies on the basis of race. Using race as the primacy has undoubtedly in return created new forms of exclusion. Race alone fails to consider identities that intersect with it – instead it homogenizes and categorizes social issues into accordance with challenges faced by a black majority without the consideration of the plethora of realities that exist within the spectrum of blackness. There is no denying the historical relevance of “black” as a political term that sought to unify the struggles of an oppressed group of people, however the presence of it must not mean the absence of recognition of other forms of oppression and identities.

The intentions of this dissertation were to articulate the educational experiences of black womxn particularly in post-apartheid South Africa, from their own lens. The motivation for this sprung from the realization that the although there has been extensive literature on the educational and structural effects of Apartheid’s Bantu education policy, minimal texts exist that speak to the educational experiences of black womxn and their intersecting identities. Through a comparative analysis of Pretoria High School for Girls (PHSG) and the Oprah Winfrey Leadership Academy for Girls (OWLAG), this research project sought to investigate whether W.E.B Du Bois’ notion of double consciousness is a useful theoretical concept in providing context and conceptualizing the educational experiences of the twenty black womxn interviewed; the various spaces they have had to navigate and how they negotiate their identities at varying points.

These two groups of black womxn interviewed invariably came from two different socio-economic contexts: those coming from PHSG come from what has been termed "black middle-class" backgrounds whose families have been able to pay for their fees. In contrast those from OWLAG emerge from an economically disadvantaged background who would have not been able to attend a school of similar standards and features, had the academy not been established.

While Du Bois' theory of double consciousness proves to be useful in explaining the spaces these womxn navigate in terms of home and school; as well as walking between the "black" and "white" world, it cannot function alone. Double consciousness fails to explain the effects of these two worlds "black" and "white" and moving between home and school, from the lens of what it means to be both black and womxn – while considering class as well. Thus, using double consciousness together with intersectionality, which takes into account the intertwining of identities in terms of race, class proved beneficial in explaining the complexities of being a black girl and womxn – as one navigates the world.

Drawing on intersectionality it was evident that the experiences of the black womxn from Pretoria spoke to the conflicting experience of being a black girl but being expected to assimilate not only into whiteness, but to mimic a white girl. In the conversation surrounding transformation and decolonization it is evident that historically white all girl's schools remain a breeding ground for not just racism, but also for modelling black girls in accordance with a "Eurocentric" ideal of what it means to be a "lady". This includes patriarchal norms and rules that have been normalized as well as the unrealistic expectation that black hair must be straight, thin and soft as white hair. These findings point us to the realization that just because historically white schools possess within in them the best of facilities; have a high matric pass rate; and admit black students does not mean they are not racist. Additionally, it shows that these markers for "excellence" are failing black students: they do not reflect the fact that the institutional culture and environment of these schools remain for the development of the white child although black parents equally pay for their children to attend these schools.

In contrast, the experiences of those who have attended OWLAG are different. These experiences, spoke to the lives of black womxn who are of a different class denomination – taken out of their home circumstances and put into a new school that would give them a world class education. These womxn spoke of their adjustment in the school environment in relation to home: it revealed the challenges of being a black girl from an economically disadvantaged background and moving into a new environment contrasting that which they were familiar

with. This contrast revealed itself in the facilities the school had which these womxn grew up not having. This included having their own beds to sleep in; eating three meals a day; clean water and sanitation; as well as the facilities to match those that existed within historically white (model c) and private schools. However, attending the Academy came with its own challenges: here were a group of womxn who were both privileged and not privileged simultaneously. They walk between two worlds and identities: they have had to balance the identity they hold while at school and adjusting it every time they went home.

The differences in the lives of these two groups of womxn reveals that both have experienced struggle and a need to develop tools to survive within their various contexts. By employing difference – not as an antagonist – but as a means to learn what it means to be both black and womxn we are better able to reveal the nuances that exist within blackness and amongst black womxn. This teaches us to recognize difference – experiential difference at that – as a way of life that can inform and teach society. It teaches us that that varying experiences of black womxn matter in the new dispensation that is South Africa and more importantly that educational reform requires that we take this into account. South Africa's education system remains marred by the remnants of Apartheid more so that these have been ignored in the pursuit of racially desegregating schools.

From this dissertation, we learn that legalized desegregation has not necessarily translated into changed norms and behaviours from institutions themselves. As such the clarion call for quality education means nothing if it does not speak to the experiences of black womxn across the board – taking into consideration race, class and gender. Ultimately, we should endeavour to ensure that, irrespective of where a black girl is educated, she should never have to feel as though her identity is question or that it is fixed by the perceptions of others. We should endeavour to ensure that every black girl receives an education that is holistic – one in which they can see themselves in. What this dissertation has ultimately reveals is that not one framework is able to explain the lived realities of black womxn and their educational journeys – but that if we are true to the commitment changing the education sphere we must be interdisciplinary and approach this from multiple theoretical angles.

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## *Fieldwork Interviews*

- Joyce Bongongo (Pretoria High School for Girls alumni) 20 September 2018 University of the Witwatersrand.
- Lehlohonolo Moche (Pretoria High School for Girls alumni) 30 September 2018 Johannesburg.
- Morategi Kale (Pretoria High School for Girls alumni) 30 September 2018 Johannesburg.
- Sinazo Masina (Pretoria High School for Girls alumni) 31 September 2018 University of the Witwatersrand.
- Avukile Zoya (Oprah Winfrey Leadership Academy for Girls) 1 October 2018 University of Pretoria.
- Samukelisiwe Nkosi (Oprah Winfrey Leadership Academy for Girls) 1 October 2018 Pretoria.
- Aqhaba Dlomo (Pretoria High School for Girls alumni) 3 October 2018 University of the Witwatersrand.
- Itumeleng Mokoena (Pretoria High School for Girls alumni) 5 October 2018 University of the Witwatersrand.
- Boitumelo Motaung (Pretoria High School for Girls alumni) 6 October 2018 Unversity of the Witwatersrand.
- Bongeka Zuma (Oprah Winfrey Leadership Academy for Girls) 15 December 2018 Johannesburg.
- Refilwe Digoamaje (Oprah Winfrey Leadership Academy for Girls) 15 December 2018 Sandton.
- Mbali Meyers (Oprah Winfrey Leadership Academy for Girls) 20 December 2018 Sandon.
- Eight participants chose to remain anonymous