



# Democratising Participatory Research

*Pathways to Social Justice from the South*

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## 6. The South African DCR Project: Undergraduates as Researchers

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Senzeni na?

Kwenzeka kanjani ukuthi kube nomehluko omukhulu kangaka phakathi kwabantu bemibala eyahlukahlukeneyo? Ithi ngiphinde. Kwenzeka kanjani ukuthi umbala (OWODWA) kube yinto eyenza ukuthi mangidlula ngasemotweni yomuntu anyuse amafasitela akhe, abe nemoto engaziyo ukuthi kuyoba iphupho ngize ngiqede ukukhokhela isikweleti sokufunda, ngisize futhi nasekhaya.

Angiboni ukuthi kumina nalaba abafana nami ukuba nezingcindezi ngenxa yokungazi ukuthi ikhona imali yokuqeda esikoleni yinto enjengokuphefumula, kodwa kaze abelungu bayacabanga ngazo lezinkinga ngesinye isikhathi, akufani. Akufani.

Angiqondi ukuthi losizi luyophela nini. Kwanzima ukuphila bengaboni iziphambano esizithwele, bengaboni ukuqina okudingakalayo ukuze sikwazi ukuqhubeka nsuku zonke. Bengaboni ukuthi ukuba mnyama akuyinto yesikhumba sami kuphela kodwa futhi yinto yempilo yami yonke. Akekho umuntu othanda ukuphila elokishini, othanda ukuphila ngamagranti, othanda ukungazi ukuthi ukudla okulandelayo kuzophumaphi, ongazi ukuthi ingane yakhe mhla iyobamba itoho emayini iyobuya neziphi izifo ngenxa yokufuna ukubeka ukudla etafuleni.

Akekho umuntu othanda ukusebenza umlungwini impilo yakhe yonke kodwa uma eseneminyaka engamashumi ayisikhombisa angabi nesenti lokuveza akwenzile.

Angiqondi ukuthi njengelizwe siqhubeka kanjani nsuku zonke senze sengathi lezinkinga ziyonyamalala noma singenzi lutho ukuzishintsha. Angiqondi ukuthi abelungu ababuboni kanjani lobuhlungu esiphila nabo abangasoze babubone. Angiqondi ukuthi kutheni bamangala uma sitoyitoya sengathi sifuna okuningi kakhulu. Sifuna impilo ephilekayo, qha!

Let's never let the fire burn out, as long as the burden remains.

*Narratives on Social Injustices: Undergraduate Voices, 2018*

### 6.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the DCR process undertaken by twelve undergraduate students at the University of the Free State in 2017. Various sources of data are displayed here, such as the second and third phases of interviews, reports on participant observation and my individual journal. The text not only provides a comprehensive account of the activities carried out by the group, but also highlights the collaborative decision-making during the process, together with the platform for the ecology of knowledges and expansion of their valued capabilities. First of all, a total of nine official workshops took place between March and October 2017.

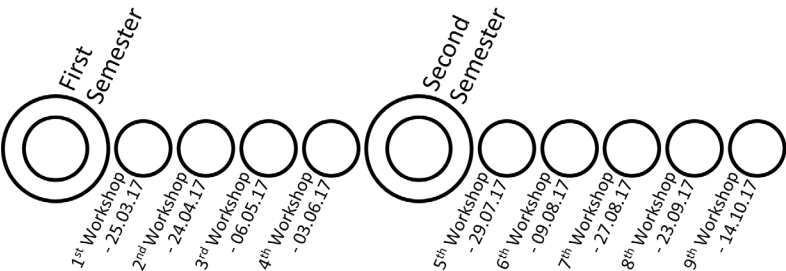


Figure 6: Workshop schedule (image by the author, 2021).

The team usually met once a month although at times it was more than once, as in the sixth and seventh workshops or during our informal meetings, which are displayed in the last section of the chapter. Except for the first workshop and part of the second, which were designed by the facilitator, all the meetings closed by collaboratively discussing the agenda for the following day. This meant that the members were actively involved in the creation and implementation of the process from the very beginning of the project.

The working periods were variable although most took place from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. The group usually had breakfast together, normally at 8 a.m., and a break for lunch at around 12:30 p.m., together with small breaks in between. These periods were mostly used for informal conversations amongst the members of the group. Some days were especially significant, and the group stayed talking until late after the

workshops had concluded, and some days we even went home together. The form of compensation was discussed and agreed by the group during the first workshop. Moreover, due to the nature of the project and the need to access online information, members who did not have a personal laptop were lent one for the duration of the project. In total, seven of the twelve members enjoyed the use of a laptop during the project.

Furthermore, despite the official workshops, the team had numerous contacts outside of the project, who were sometimes related to the project and at other times were not. Firstly, members frequently met to attend seminars, university meetings or art exhibitions, which were related to the project. For instance, we attended the Africa Day Memorial Lecture (2017) given by Paul Tiyambe Zeleza at the Centre for African Studies at the university, along with multiple meetings convened by the Student Representative Council (SRC) to update information on the de-registration issue on campus, by which some of the group members were affected. The team also participated in general assemblies convened by the university to provide information on the Shimla Park incident. Similarly, some members attended an art exhibition on campus related to LGBTQI rights. This was of interest as LGBTQI inequalities were raised at an early stage in the project as constituting an important form of inequality on campus. Further, the group even met for more informal meetings, such as watching a movie together or having casual contact just to catch up or help one another with personal matters. These spaces were relevant in that they provided a sense of belonging and family environment, as per their Ubuntu capability.

On the other hand, the combination of different knowledge systems, together with their continuous interactions, allowed the project not only to provide the members with epistemic access to scientific knowledge—as their insurgent epistemic capability valued—but also allowed the epistemic foundation of the project to be ‘imperfectly’ diversified. The project brought in other valued and relevant knowledge systems, as subsequent sections will highlight. The process of an ecology of knowledges (De Sousa Santos 2014) is not perfect when it is down-to-earth. It is a continuum where spaces for other knowledge systems are opened and debated, but also refuted through collective discussions and decision-making. Therefore, it is a process that requires flexibility for the diverse tempos among different individuals and space for

collective decision-making in order to adjust the research in line with the group aims and paths of inquiry. Respecting these collective and organic learning processes and focusing on their valued capabilities and their group aims and aspirations, while simultaneously promoting a diverse epistemological base, sets us on the right path to articulate epistemological plurality. Consequently, the following sections will describe and explore each workshop, highlighting the different activities of the day and the decisions taken by the group, and focusing on their central capabilities and experiences as a result of being involved in the project.

## 6.2 'It Feels More Personal than Being Just a Participant...' (First Workshop)

The first workshop was the only one where I, as a facilitator, was fully in charge of the structure, planning, and implementation. The meeting consisted of establishing a first contact between the members. Despite the fact that the students were acquainted with me, and I with them, due to the individual and informal meetings conducted beforehand to identify their valued capabilities, the team had not yet had the chance to get to know each other properly. For this reason, the first activity of the day was for the members to prepare a brief presentation, a maximum of fifteen minutes each, to introduce themselves. They could talk, sing, show a piece of art, or give a conventional PowerPoint presentation. It was up to them to think about how to introduce themselves to the group. Two formats were most frequently used: oral presentations and PowerPoint presentations. Some of them talked about their friends, their families, their hobbies and/or their cultures. For instance, the in-depth explanation of her family name and family tree that one member gave were particularly significant. During the final interview, this member expressed how important this moment had been for her, and the significance of having the space to talk about herself and her family in her own way as this is not commonly done or promoted on campus.

Following the presentations, the group discussed what our lunch would be during the workshops. We all debated various options, and a decision was made by consensus. For every workshop, a different member would be in charge of this task, and therefore responsible for

asking for the preferences of the group and taking the lunch order for the day.

The second activity of the day was to discuss justice and injustice. The activity started with a brainstorming session. One of the members volunteered to write on the flipchart for the group, featuring words such as 'circumstances', 'moral', 'government (positive/negative role)', 'power', 'ignorance', 'hierarchy', 'centralism/localism' and 'competition', which would form the core of our debates. The group discussed these points enthusiastically, relating the words to their experiences and the experiences of others they knew. After a while, one of the members proposed watching a video together about social justice (from TED Talks online) that was relevant to the debate the group was having. Thus, the group watched the video together and this helped to increase the number of ideas and concepts related to the debate about justice. Therefore, more words were added to our list, such as 'knowledge', 'conscience', 'proactive/action' and 'social classification (positive or negative)'.

After debating for a long time, I proposed a practical activity to better understand our different perspectives on justice. The group was divided into four small teams composed of two to three people each. All the teams were given the same issue and they needed to look for the most just solution and present it to the group as a whole at the end. The activity helped the group to continue thinking about justice and injustice, providing the larger group with different solutions based on diverse criteria of justice. Therefore, the whole group concluded the activity by understanding that justice can be assessed differently according to diverse criteria, such as values. However, it is important to investigate the circumstances surrounding that situation as a way to have a better-informed perspective. One of the students commented on this activity in the second interview:

'I got to understand social injustice. I never really understood it. It was just a word which I never really understood. But the first workshop... it just, it just helped me. What social injustice is... The little things that we don't think they... they are social injustices. That social injustice begins at home, academically here in varsity... It just helped me. It's just... It made me understand it even more. It, it gave me like a very broad understanding of what it really is.' (Bokamoso, second interview, May 2017)

This activity was designed according to the literature and the DCR principle of starting a research process with a common concern about injustices (De Sousa Santos 2010). Despite identifying which injustices were important for us as a group, it was necessary to grasp what justice meant for us in a certain way, and what we would use as an evaluative space to assess unjust situations (Sen 2009). This not only helped the group to expand their own understanding of justice, but also to find the common values that they had.

The following activity of the day was to agree on which injustices we were interested in, and which injustices the group wanted to investigate together. Writing on the flipchart, the members mentioned various issues, mostly related to their lives, such as racism, social privilege, social class, power asymmetry, gender inequality and sexual orientation discrimination. As the group was composed of twelve members, it could be divided into smaller working groups. Thus, the members agreed on three topics to be researched by three small groups: racism, gender inequality, and social inequality/power imbalance. The university would be our context to research these issues.

In this exploration of the specific concerns of the group, the valued insurgent capabilities were at the forefront of the process. One member expressed what this space to enhance their self-development capability meant for her:

'It feels amazing because at first you sort of think that... agggh... it is just some volunteering stuff... it's nothing, but becoming part of the project. It's... it feels more like, it feels more personal than just being a participant. [...] Personal in the sense of... that, for example, talking about certain topics, such as race, issues that we actually experience on a day-to-day basis, that we live... so... that's why I say it feels personal, it's like things we experience sometimes and issues that need to be tackled. And having the platform to do so, it's... it's just amazing.' (Minenhle, second interview, May 2017)

To finish the day, the last activity aimed to explore what the research meant for the members, and which options the groups had for exploring their topics. Therefore, as in the previous activity, the session began with a member writing on the flipchart and brainstorming possible research avenues. Ideas such as actively answering questions, collection of data by different means, searching for information, objectivity vs subjectivity,



reading, surveying, theory and practice, science, mythology, evidence, and quantitative or qualitative research, were all discussed among the group.

The group continued talking about different methodologies, and the various ways to understand reality and knowledge. Although these were unfamiliar concepts for the group, they proved to be not only helpful for the development of the project, but also for their studies in general, enhancing their identified epistemic capability. This session provided access to the university epistemic system—which is denied and/or reduced, due to their colonial conversion factors—whilst also prompting discussions about which aspects of this epistemic system were adequate for them and the project.

One of the members expressed how this workshop was significant for her in that it enhanced her vocabulary, but also her awareness of the university epistemic system, and how knowledge is generated within its walls, which is not typical for undergraduate students in this context:

‘Specifically... The first one it was... enhancing my vocabulary, I was like... I am used to natural science and biochemistry terms... so in terms of humanities... like... those definitions, it was something actually new for me. [...] It introduced us to the different terms: methodology, epistemology and ontology, so yeah... those two were really insightful.’  
(Iminathi, second interview, May 2017)

The team closed the workshop by agreeing on the date of the next meeting and individually exploring the ideas that we had been debating that day. At this point, the group had clear research themes that involved injustices that affected their lives, and had started thinking about how to implement the research in a more open way or guided by a more conventional strategy.

### 6.3 ‘There Is the World... Run Wild...’ (Second Workshop)

The second workshop was intended to have two major functions: to progressively transfer the responsibilities of the project to the members, and to continue the process of ecologies of knowledge, by providing a diversification of internal knowledges.

In order to transfer the ownership of the project to the members of the group, two activities took place at this second workshop. First, as the project initially had a website page for the members to upload videos and information of interest, the group started the day with a website training session. Henceforth, they could not only create a new website for the project or update the current page, but also gain skills and use them for their own purposes, as part of their epistemic capability. In that training session, basic skills about how to create and design a website were taught. At the end of the activity, all of the participants had a basic website and had managed to work with the editing program for a while. However, no decisions about the project website were made at this point, as the group intended to make a collaborative website page at the end of the project to share its outcomes and create a platform for the larger community (see Workshop Nine).

Secondly, one of the strategies for transferring ownership was to start designing the following workshops as a whole group. What did the group want to do next? When? How? And who would be responsible for each activity? This helped to create a culture of communal decision-making, which was present until the end of the project, although not without challenges. One of the members said:

'I was telling Rethabile that [the facilitator] gives us so much rooming space... like... there is the world, run wild... yeah... so I was telling her, [the facilitator] gives us so much... how can I put it? Free... freedom in terms of getting there. She doesn't tell us no, you have to do this and think about this alone... So you actually get to expand your thinking... like... okay... So, I don't have to think in a little box.' (Iminathi, second interview, May 2017)

Nevertheless, she continues by saying how difficult this was for her when she was used to being given the exact work to be done and told how to do it and when, owing to her authoritarian educational experience:

'Mmm... I feel like, because we are so used to being given... like...this is the work...you're gonna write about it. That is what we are used to.' (Iminathi, second interview, May 2017)

This was definitely not the only comment on this subject; the transfer of responsibilities was not easy at all. Members mentioned several times that it was confusing to have the freedom to decide because they

had spent more than twelve years in an authoritarian, post-colonial educational system that told them how, when and what to think. However, the project challenged these colonial conversion factors, and decision-making functionings were ultimately achieved, as the above quote highlights and other members' reflections indicate. Hence this progressive process, in which the co-researchers took more and more responsibility for the project, also impacted other important capabilities for them, such as self-development and human recognition.

In this workshop, the group agreed that they wanted to meet with individuals who might know about the topics they were interested in. Two groups were proposed: more students from the university, who could offer radical perspectives on the different issues under research; and scholars, who could give an academic perspective. A table was designed by the group with the individuals they wanted to invite, and the name of the group-member responsible for informing the person in question and ensuring that they would come to our next meeting. Initially, the third workshop was designed with three activities: first, jointly planning the next workshop; second, the scholars' meeting; and third, the students' meeting. However, the scholars' meeting was postponed until the fourth meeting, due to the fact that those individuals who had been invited to attend were unavailable on that day. The plan was to prepare relevant questions to be asked at each of the meetings relating to our three different themes, and to appoint a member of the group to be responsible for coordinating and facilitating the collective dialogue together, with another member to take notes of the discussion, despite the session being audiotaped.

Members of various social movements were invited to our second workshop to talk to us about the issues of concern to the group on campus. This idea arose because one of the members of the group was actively involved with several of these movements, and helped to select the student organisations, structure the dialogue, and facilitate the discussion for that day. Thus, the second part of the workshop was planned and scheduled with this member, who was in charge of contacting the pertinent organisations and arranging a meeting to explain the project to them and how they could help to enhance our knowledge about the issues the group was investigating. Three organisations were

invited to this workshop for an open dialogue: ‘Embrace a Sister’<sup>1</sup> (a feminist student organisation on campus), to talk to us about gender inequalities and racism, ‘Unsilenced UFS’<sup>2</sup> and the Transformation Office of the Student Representative Council of the university, to debate inequalities and power struggles at the university.

For all the groups invited, the debate started with a brief explanation of the organisation, who they were and what they did, followed by questions from the members and an open debate about the ideas on the table. All of the debates were rich and extensive, covering a wide range of challenges, so our conversation was audiotaped and used as part of our data sets at later points of our research. What was obvious at this point was that there was racism on campus, as well as many gender inequalities affecting the student population in negative ways. Examples of this included the discussion about racist events that took place on campus during a student protests in 2015 and 2016, or the high incidence of sexual harassment and rape cases. In addition, controversial policies such as the ‘No Student Hungry’ (NSH)<sup>3</sup> campaign, or the language policy, both of which affect the most vulnerable students, were discussed (Dick et al. 2019; Sinwell 2019; Van der Merwe 2016).

Undoubtedly, this workshop was one of the most significant for the members. During the interviews, they referred to the second and third workshops as the most significant ones in the whole project. Iminathi mentioned the language policy and the fact that different conversations on that day changed the way she thought about these issues, enhancing her epistemic capability:

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- 1 Embrace a Sister is a feminist student organisation founded at the University of the Free State in May 2012. Its aim is to focus on all issues pertaining to black woman and other minority groups. They challenge the set status quo that they are subjected to daily through oppression. Their activities are diverse, from the promotion of gender dialogues on campus, to protesting against rape culture and providing support to victims, among others.
  - 2 Unsilenced UFS was born as a student organisation claiming justice after the Shimla Park incident at the UFS in February 2016 (see link for more information [https://www.ufs.ac.za/docs/default-source/all-documents/ufs-shimla-park-report\\_27-february-2017.pdf](https://www.ufs.ac.za/docs/default-source/all-documents/ufs-shimla-park-report_27-february-2017.pdf)). The organisation focuses on the unequal and constrained situation of black students on campus, performing artistic protests to highlight their demands (see the link for more information <http://www.thejournalist.org.za/art/unsilencing-ufs>).
  - 3 For more information about this programme see <https://www.ufs.ac.za/giving/unlisted-pages/lead-projects/the-no-student-hungry-programme>.

'Remember when the SRC were here... and they started to touch... based on what is happening on campus, in terms of the language policy<sup>4</sup> [...] I remember they spoke about a lot of things, we spoke to Embrace a Sister... and... it literally... it changes you, because you have different perspectives like... even if I talk to somebody maybe before we met with the SRC and what not, and then we talked about the same issues after. I think, my opinion would be so, so, so different because now you hear different perspectives... so you understand... So, okay, this is how this person thinks. [...] It was very enlightening to hear other peoples' thoughts about certain topics as well... yeah. [...] It was actually an eye-opener for me, really an eye-opener... if I can put it that way.' (Iminathi, second interview, May 2017)

Another member, Siyabonga, uses similar words to refer to those conversations: 'Just hearing what they have to say... from a leadership point of view... it was... it was... enlightening...' (Siyabonga, second interview, May 2017). Or Khayone, for instance, who highlighted his learning on gender issues, 'I learned a lot of kinds of things, like that day when... it was those other people from Embrace a Sister... like we were having a debate about... the issues that women are facing and that those issues are not being addressed then.' (Khayone, second interview, May 2017).

Rethabile talked about how much she learned, enhancing her epistemic capability during these conversations because she was not aware of some of the issues that were discussed:

'The Embrace... and the SRC Transformation Office showed me a lot of things that I never thought about. Like... there... she... she... in a sense, like she opened my mind because there are a lot of things that you as a person, as a student, you are being ignorant to.' (Rethabile, second interview, May 2017)

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4 The UFS was initially a bilingual institution with two main languages of instruction: English and Afrikaans. Programmes were offered in both languages. However, some questioned the equality of conditions for students when attending different classes presented in different languages, claiming that white students attending Afrikaans classes benefitted (see the link for more information about the language policy <https://www.ufs.ac.za/docs/default-source/policy-institutional-documents/language-policy.pdf?sfvrsn=0>). This is not an isolated case, as this claim has been voiced in other traditionally Afrikaans universities in the country. Especially relevant is the case of Stellenbosch University and the viral video "Luister" (see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sF3rTBQTQk4>).

Amahle equally highlights this workshop as the most relevant for her, due to the really rich and open dialogue. For her, the group discussed things that she was not fully aware of. She mentioned in the interview how this conversation had an impact on her, her way of being, her human dignity and self-development capability:

'That... it kind of changes my perspective at it... mmm... the last talk that we had... I think... yeah... it was like different people there... it was actually after that... that I left my hair in an Afro<sup>5</sup>... and [her friend]... was like "Oh no... it's actually really nice!" And I was like what?... Like how?... and then for once, it was just fine with my other black friends... "That looks nice"... I remember like those things... that's like... you are valid as well, even if like... It makes you feel that way and... that was the first time in my entire life that I ever just walked around with my Afro... it was so weird... but I also like it... I understand that it doesn't have to feel that way... that I must feel a little bit uncomfortable... but I was happy... that was a big, big thing.' (Amahle, second interview, May 2017)

This workshop was relevant for many of the members, not only because of the diverse perspectives presented and the knowledge emerging from the dialogues, expressed above as their epistemic capability. The workshop was equally a safe and open space to talk about sensitive issues enhancing their self-development capability, as expressed by Amahle. This was especially visible in this workshop and in the following one, in which racism and other delicate issues were discussed with other collectives. The members stated that spaces where they could feel safe and comfortable to participate are scarce on campus, especially owing to racial structures that impede them from doing so. Sometimes they even referred to classrooms as challenging spaces in which to participate openly, not even mentioning discussing sensitive subject matter with their peers. However, this epistemic injustice does not act in isolation. As this chapter will highlight, for many of the members, especially the female members, these colonial conversion factors intersect with their racial, gender and socio-economic identities, jeopardising their epistemic freedoms. Combined, they greatly inhibited their active participation,

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5 Afro refers to when a black person wears her or his hair in its own natural state. This is a political feminist symbol which highlights the oppression of black women through hairstyles, due to the prevalence of white standards of beauty. It is a colonial conversion factor that affects their freedoms. See link for more information <https://www.newstatesman.com/media/2014/01/politics-black-hair>.

especially in the early stages of the project. Nevertheless, the transition observed from the beginning of the project to the end was remarkable for some of these members (see Chapter Seven). It is important to mention that even though these students participated more or less in their classrooms, the knowledge provided by the workshop greatly differed from that gleaned in the classroom. In the workshops their informational basis (Sen 1999) was being expanded, since they were now accessing new epistemic systems, different from the university ones, whilst being able to unpack the university epistemic system too (Grosfoguel, Hernandez & Rosen Velazquez 2016).

#### 6.4 ‘The Solutions Need to Come From Us’ (Third Workshop)

As the collaboratively pre-designed first part of the workshop (the scholars’ meeting) had been delayed until the fourth workshop, the group used the first part of the morning to talk about the research project and next steps to take. The group talked for hours about what kind of research they wanted to undertake, how, and in which phases. Questions were asked about what academic research looked like, enhancing knowledge from previous conversations and ideas explained at the first workshop. The topics of research, paradigms, and diverse methodologies were among the wide compendium of ideas debated that morning.

Finally, the group agreed to work in three small groups according to their own interests, based on the initial divisions of gender inequalities, racism, and social/power inequalities on campus. For a few weeks, each group worked on a document that summarised what they had so far, and how to continue with their research plan. Hence, the three teams were to meet at the next workshop (the fourth) in order to have the opportunity to get feedback and advice on their research document from the other groups.

The second part of the day was dedicated to a dialogue with different students about the topics of interest to the group. This time they were not student organisations, but individual students. Five students from different faculties and levels joined the meeting. All of them had been invited to the workshop by the members of the group because of their

different perspectives and opinions about the issues under research. One member of the DCR group, as usual, directed the conversation and acted as facilitator for the day, explaining to the guests what the group was interested in, opening the space for a joint debate, and leading the group conversation. In addition, all the members took notes and the conversation was audiotaped, as in our previous discussions.

The dialogue focused mainly on racism and inequalities, although there was a residual discussion on gender. Racism at university occupied most of the discussion. The various guests presented their own perspectives and experiences regarding racist issues and discussed them with the members of the group. Ideas such as white privilege, colour culture, black tribalism, university-specific racist issues (such as the Shimla Park incident),<sup>6</sup> gender-cultural traditions, oral history, oral knowledge, and inequality (in general), were debated, generating new insights into the research topics, with rich data from different perspectives.

This collective meeting and the previous one were those most frequently cited by the members as being significant moments in the whole project. For instance, Siyabonga said the collective meeting was important thanks to the different points of view we heard that day. He explained how this conversation was an eye-opener for him, enhancing his epistemic capability. Another member, Khayone, said this meeting was the most relevant one for him, due to the conversations we had about different cultures, gender, and politics in general. He said, 'I learned a lot from them' (Khayone, second interview, May 2017).

Furthermore, Karabo said this workshop had been important because she started applying the things she had learned in previous meetings, referring to the first part of the day and the discussion about research and next steps. Additionally, Kungawo talked about how powerful it had been to hear, for the first time, a white person recognise their own white privilege. This highlights the epistemologies of ignorance that this collective is used to enduring in the higher-education context (Steyn 2012). Kungawo said, 'It's very new to me to hear like a white person confesses white privilege and white... and all of these other things... It's... it was absolutely weird it was like... it just blew me away'

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6 For more information see [https://www.ufs.ac.za/docs/default-source/all-documents/ufs-shimla-park-report\\_27-february-2017.pdf](https://www.ufs.ac.za/docs/default-source/all-documents/ufs-shimla-park-report_27-february-2017.pdf).



(Kungawo, second interview, May 2017). Here Kungawo is reflecting on his own personally felt epistemic injustices as a black male in South Africa. He is reflecting on how colonial conversion factors affect his epistemic freedoms, and when the oppressor group often does not recognise their own system of oppression. In the literature this is referred to as epistemic exploitation (Berenstein 2016) or epistemic marginalisation (Goetze 2018). The oppressed groups subjected to these colonial conversion factors constantly have to explain their epistemic marginalisation, despite white communities having the available knowledge to understand it. For Kungawo this was the first time he did not have to explain his own marginalisation as a black student to a white member of the university community.

He added that it was also important due to the fact that they were able to bring diverse individuals together to talk in one place:

‘It was important for me because first of all... I’ve never seen that in my life, all those kinds of people in one area, like I always told you that... you know... since I got here, to this university... I encountered racism and I know that I’ve been always told about it... but when I got here and I saw that was actually real... and... we spend too much time through this activism thing, we spend so much time trying to... to spend time to speak up about it, I told you that I’m from Unsilenced UFS and stuff... umm... and generally people, student leaders on campus and student activists try so much, so many times to put together people of these different kinds of thought to come together and talk about a solution... so the fact that we were... able to do it, it was amazing... and that’s why we are even planning to continue the conversation to a larger audience, to other students. [...] Umm... for me that felt like a milestone... we were able to do that... and you know... then after the conversation, the people saying that... it was so useful... you know that we were doing something great... you know... I’m still meeting people around campus who ask me... are you still debating that stuff? People wanted to become, to join us and to do research stuff... it was amazing... because they think that... you know such a platform needs to... be created and... the solutions need to come from us because... you can say that the university... has... has... or it’s institutionally racist... umm... but it is at the end of the day us because we are the ones, we have to deal with it on a daily basis, we are the subjects... you know of racism... on the daily basis, but... we... the students, both blacks and whites, we are part of the solution. [...] If... we as students... we just become independent and do our own stuff, and I almost swore then, but if we do our own things... you know be... outside management,

outside of the institution management, we can go somewhere. [...] For me it was like a milestone, it was really important, especially because racism is important to all of us... and a lot of us had been subjected to it, so to hear white people speak like that... and actually confess that racism it's, it's, there is racism here... yeah, that was... yeah... that was, yeah.' (Kungawo, third interview, October 2017)

For Kungawo, this workshop and the research process as a whole challenged many conversion factors on campus, bringing together different groups to discuss sensitive issues. This impacted not only his epistemic capability but his own self-development and human recognition, giving him the platform to talk in more equal terms with those groups which had historically oppressed his communities.

Furthermore, Lethabo referred to this moment as being important, not only because it was an eye-opener for many of them and enhanced their epistemic freedoms, but also because it helped to solidify the group identity and enhanced their human recognition capability. He said:

'In one moment it gave us like a group identity, I guess, and the fact that the people we brought in were very... umm... well-spoken in terms of, the things that we wanted to talk about, you know, M-A, and the coloured lady, umm... yeah... I think specifically, the people we brought in... they really brought a whole new eye-opening dynamic to it all.' (Lethabo, third interview, October 2017)

Nevertheless, as Kungawo finally remarked, although it was important to listen to the students that came to talk to us, to listen to other members of the group was also part of the process of bringing different knowledges and influencing our epistemic freedoms. In his own words,

'Like I said again like... hearing like what people have experienced, yeah it's really, it's really interesting to me I don't know how to put it. Now it leaves me like... enlightened me to things like things I have never heard of before. And I know that the other guy, [referring to Khayone]. It's amazing when he talks like how he speaks of like South African history like that like for me... I need to shut up and listen to him speak because he knows a lot about African history. And then you get Lethabo who speaks about his Afrikaner experience and then you get someone like Rethabile.' (Kungawo, second interview, May 2017)

Clearly, the second and third workshop affected the group in various ways, enhancing several of their insurgent capabilities, and challenging

their epistemic marginalisation, but also making them epistemic contributors. Firstly, due to the fact that they were discussing issues that were relevant to them personally, but which they did not have available platforms to discuss, the workshop was especially helpful for discussing racism happening at the university. Thus, the workshop enhanced and achieved different functionings of their epistemic capability. Secondly, because of the information provided there, and the different perspectives revealed during the dialogue, this being a safe space where they could openly participate, the workshops influenced their self-development as well as their human recognition capability. This was, in fact, a space of plural learning, where different perspectives were displayed and scrutinised by the members in an open and safe platform. They became more than just recipients of their university curricula.

### 6.5 'If We Make it...Too... Formal. I Feel it Will Lose Its Safeness' (Fourth Workshop)

The fourth workshop was designed by the group in two main parts. The first part was dedicated to discussion with scholars of the topics we were researching, and the second part explored the work done so far by the small groups over the past few weeks, and was used to create a document with their general research plan.

Surprisingly, after a really enthusiastic and active conversation with both of the scholars<sup>7</sup> who visited us that day and talked to us about the issues under research, none of the members referred to them during the interview as being relevant or significant during the project. Furthermore, the second part of the workshop seemed to be difficult and overly technical for them, as it was based on exploring the different phases of their research plan.

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7 Two scholars working on campus visited us that day as guests. Both of them specialised in inequalities and racism. The first of these was Dr Marthinus Conradie from the Department of English, who has several publications related to critical race theory and social inequalities using discourse analysis. The second was Dr Luis Escobedo, who is a postdoctoral fellow at the Institute for Reconciliation and Social Justice and whose research focuses on whiteness and systemic racism. Unfortunately, the group was not able to find a third scholar specialised in gender studies at this stage of the project.

An interesting reflection was made by one of the students about this central phase, where much scientific knowledge was used, through conversations with scholars and some explanations about the use of scientific research:

'It's a debating context... you... know... but at the end of the day, I don't want us to lose that element of being like an informal settlement because if we go too formal it's gonna end up being back to that, it is not a space anymore... because now people are trying to really ... ummm... impress their ideas... and instead of us talking about it and developing new thought, changing or not changing, or just being exposed to new thoughts... if we make it... too... formal. I feel like it will lose its safeness.'  
(Siyabonga, second interview, May 2017)

The member was here referring to how an informal safe space, where everyone has the chance to express themselves in their own way, was somehow being transformed into a hostile space. This hostile space, which emerged with scientific concepts and ideas about research and complicated conversations about theory, made the members feel uncomfortable and, at times, lost. For them, it was like a return to their normal university settings. Lesedi said, during the second interview:

'Let me tell you something. [Laughs] Well while I was like... umm... there were a few words there. There were like D-whatever... I cannot even pronounce them right I was like... 'Oh my God these terms are so big, I am so lost,' so I am like, 'Oh God, okay! Calm down Lesedi, you got this.' (Lesedi, second interview, May 2017)

Their distance from these ideas and terms was emphasised by their unfamiliarity and hostility, which were not bad in and of themselves, but somehow served as a reflection of the group-members' epistemic marginalisation from the university epistemic system. The DCR process was a space for learning, and this learning combined their knowledges with other knowledge systems that were expressed in different ways, such as scientific theories. This combination created an ecology of knowledges in the process of learning and exploring. Therefore, it was important to investigate new ideas and concepts in order to allow the team to expand its informational basis as a dialogic space, e.g. a space in which to decide which direction the following steps of our project should take (Appadurai 2006; Rowell, Riel & Polush 2017; Sen 1999). Members decided that this kind of scientific knowledge production was

important to them. After all, they were all students at the university and this institution used such frameworks to produce knowledge and, in many ways, to marginalise them. Hence they decided to explore these kinds of knowledge production to the extent that they could manage, to enhance their epistemic capability. Some evidence of this learning and the benefits of being exposed to this university knowledge will be shown in the following sections. Nevertheless, this was not ultimately how the members wanted to lead the project. This is why, in our fifth and sixth workshops, we looked for alternative approaches that could better reflect the research aspirations of the group.

During the fourth workshop, one of the members mentioned being confused about how to reference and access reliable scientific information. Other members were also interested in learning more about it, as they had not yet have been taught any research courses, or if they had, they had not gained much from them. As such, part of the workshop was spent talking about scientific sources of information and academic reference systems. Again, this was important, because despite the decision to take a less conventional approach in our research project, students were willing to learn more about the scientific epistemic system. This epistemic system is central in their lives, even if they are only the recipients of epistemic materials. Navigating and exploring further was a shared aspiration and valued capability, thus we dedicated time during this day to exploring these aspects.

Members mentioned during the interviews how beneficial this exploration of the academic knowledge system was for them, not only for the project, but beyond it. For instance, Siyabonga mentioned how this had helped him to look for reliable scientific information, which is framed not as the only source of information, but as a reliable space in which to look for information within this particular knowledge system. Similarly, other students stated how this helped them in their academic work. Minenhle said:

‘The academic search engine as well, it makes things so much easier for me actually... because normally... I... I... normally took my information for my assignments... from... mmm... not so... umm... how do they say? I took it... from maybe blogs... I didn’t know that I should not take information from blogs... and that doesn’t mean that whatever they mean... is the right information... or... taking them from websites... or Wikipedia actually... so... and also... it is easier for me... in terms of the

referencing, bibliography-wise... it really helped me... it made things so much easier for me... yeah.' (Minenhle, third interview, October 2017)

Lesedi corroborated this view:

'It helped us a lot, it helped with this academic search engine, you can use it for your academic work and it's something that nobody would be... you know... you are not taught in class, your lecture or your facilitator... who knows? They don't come to you and tell you "Hi, with this academic search engine if you need help with that and that and that." I did... I did more than four assignments with this academic search engine and I did very well with them so... it helped me that way... in my academic work and when I see that... I did perform well and it's something that it didn't take so much time to learn, and I didn't have to pay for it, because you have to pay for everything these days.' (Lesedi, third interview, October 2017)

The group talked very positively about these sources of information and the specific skills they had gained on that day. It is clear that accessing the academic epistemic system forms part of their aspirations and offers them a way to enhance their insurgent capabilities. Access is the only way to overcome the many colonial factors that jeopardise their freedoms, and those of their loved ones, in accessing higher education. Indeed, their epistemic marginalisation is central to the challenges they experience on campus and, more often than not, they face a unilateral epistemic relation with the university as a post-colonial and hostile institution. They are there to learn the coloniser codes but not to contribute their own knowledges and African conceptions of good (Mbembe 2015). They are situated on the wrong side of the epistemic line, as Ndlovu-Gatsheni explores (2018), and thus their insurgent epistemic capability needs to claim freedoms of epistemic access to the academic epistemic system. However, this is insufficient, and a redrawing of the epistemic lines is required in order for them to contribute their own epistemic material to this exclusive epistemic system (Fricker 2015). It is clear, thus, that colonial conversion factors are essential for an international reader to understand the oppression that these students experience on a daily basis. Hence, when I refer here to 'epistemic freedoms', this means fair access to Western epistemic materials, but also access to and respect of other epistemic systems, as both givers and receivers, as we will see in the following sections.

## 6.6 ‘I Didn’t Really Feel, Like, Valid to Contribute...’ (Fifth Workshop)

The interviews I conducted during the project and at the end of it provided an individual and collective perspective in the midst of the process. They were not only substantial in identifying difficulties and challenges for the group, but also in making these issues available to the group in order for them to be debated. These tensions, such as the issue of punctuality or power imbalances in the group, were mostly debated between the fourth and the fifth workshops.

During the second interview, I asked the members individually what they would change about the project. One of the participants mentioned punctuality and how that affected participation in the group. He said:

‘Because sometimes people come late, and when they come late... they just sit... they don’t even have an idea of what is really going on. [...] We have to be time conscious, when... when we say 9:30, make sure that we are here at 9:30, 9:45 at the latest, and then we start with everything.’  
(Khayone, second interview, May 2017)

Naturally, as this member observed, some of these delays were registered in my personal journal and the participant observation reports. One of the journal entries debated whether it was pertinent to initiate a debate with the whole group when it was only one member who was identifying this as a limitation. Nevertheless, the participant observation showed that this was in reality also a problem of active participation; thus, we dedicated some time to talk about it on this day.

The debate was started by Rethabile, who told us that we did not have a good excuse to be late and that it was not a question of meeting an hour later, but of being conscious of our responsibility to be on time. She also proposed that members always arrive an hour early in order to be able to start on time. For instance, she proposed that we should allocate responsibilities among the members, such as arranging the chairs and tables in the room, preparing breakfast, or setting up the laptop and projector. On the other hand, Lesedi proposed creating a punishment system; latecomers would not get the voucher for that workshop. This idea was not really supported by the rest of the group, so it was agreed that everyone would be on time for the next workshop and that the last

person to arrive, together with her or his respective group, would be responsible for setting up the room the next day.

Secondly, equal participation was mentioned by the same member who highlighted the problem of punctuality, and who claimed that not everyone was contributing or participating equally. He highlighted that something which had to change during the workshops was ‘contributions... it’s contribution... everyone has to contribute’ (Khayone, second interview, May 2017).

This response was quite surprising, as one of the questions everyone was asked at the second interview was if they were aware of power imbalances, or if they were provided with an adequate space to participate actively. Members attested that the research project helped them to be more secure in their opinions and to express their opinions in public more easily, thus enhancing their human recognition capability. However, the researcher journal and participant observation notes also recorded some observations that some members were more talkative than others, or dominated certain spaces during the meetings. In this case, the interviews helped us to investigate this matter from an individual perspective, highlighting that colonial conversion factors featured in these divisions of active participation. For instance, some examples are provided below:

‘Because in a sense... that... you’re still scared, that if I say this it might be wrong. Or, because in your mind it’s always... I don’t know, we have this mentality that “your answer is always wrong.” So and then you know when you meet new people you’re scared to share a lot of things.’ (Rethabile, second interview, May 2017)

‘For me, I am always that person who sits at the back. I just sit and listen to people talk. And then I agree. I am like... okay, okay.’ (Bokamoso, second interview, May 2017)

‘I wasn’t so vocal. I know... I know that I am... ummm... I’m opinionated but most of the time, I keep it to myself... I felt... felt... something about certain issues... I just keep it to myself or I just tell a close friend.’ (Minenhle, third interview, October 2017)

‘I think... you remember... I was quiet at the beginning and I didn’t really feel, like, valid to contribute and stuff.’ (Amahle, third interview, October 2017)



In addition, Iminathi said that she did not like to talk and that she told her group that she preferred to do other kinds of work to contribute to the group, such as reading the material. She said 'I don't like approaching people, I tend to be like, I am angry when I am not, so I am like okay... I prefer to be reading' (Iminathi, second interview, May 2017).

Interestingly, this viewpoint was mentioned by six of the seven black female members of the group, which clarifies that there are sub-dimensions within colonial conversation factors, such as gender, race and class, among others, as sustained by post-colonial scholars (Lugones, 2003). A good example of this interaction is shown in the following quote by one of the (black female) members, who said:

'Yeah. Yeah, I do actually because I don't know, a friend of mine always says I suffer from insecurity, I don't really trust myself in terms of talking about your... sharing my thoughts... about maybe social injustices or maybe LBGTQI community, which is true because most of the time, when you come to varsity, when you come from a state school and you come to varsity, you feel like... no... uhh... Neliswa is smarter than me, and that [another person] is smarter than me, so I don't want to say anything because what if I say something stupid, something that might be stupid.' (Minenhle, second interview, May 2017)

This is a clear example of how epistemic injustices work due to colonial conversation factors in which different Western categorisations are at play, with intersecting forms of oppression, such as being a black woman in South Africa, where patriarchal, racial and class norms are part of the student experience on campus. These experiences vary widely from what a Global North student would experience, even if they might be subjected to oppressive norms and epistemic injustices in other ways. In a context such as South Africa, we are talking about colonial conversation factors because these students attend classes in a language that many do not know in their own country, their lecturers maintain the social norms of a dominant culture to which they do not belong (such as Western principles of professionalism, whereas looking directly into the eyes when talking might be seen as a sign of disrespect for many African communities). They are foreigners in their own educational system. As Berenstain (2016, 580) explores, this is an epistemic 'gaslighting'. She asserts that 'gaslighting functions to undermine a person's confidence in their grasp on reality leading to an overall sense of self-doubt and a lack

of trust in one's perception. Gaslighting, thus, involves raising doubts about a person's ability to accurately perceive and understand events, and can thus harm them in their capacity as a knower'. This prevents them from participating and sharing their epistemic materials, thus affecting two of the major capabilities, epistemic and human recognition. Nevertheless, as Chapter Seven will highlight, some of these colonial conversion factors were challenged by the project, especially by female group-members, who noticed an expansion of capabilities and actual functionings in participation and voice. Moreover, these issues were debated by the group and addressed at different levels in an effort to compensate for the different positions that different members had, and the way in which that affected the functionings of participation.

The fifth workshop was held right after the winter holidays, in July. This was a special opportunity to collect knowledge and perceptions from the participants' own families, friends, and communities and to share them with the rest of the group. Thus, the group dedicated the second part of the day to sharing their knowledge of gender inequalities, racism, and power inequalities with the group through an open debate. Members collaborated in a broad discussion of the validity—or not—of this knowledge, and of how different values guide the assessment of these ideas. Equally, the ideas discussed previously in other sessions were raised and scrutinised by the group through audiotapes and notes taken of our conversations.

The group concluded the workshop by distributing the responsibilities and tasks for each group to bring to the following workshop. Each group was responsible for conducting a brief academic literature review, using skills from our previous workshop, about their topics.

## 6.7 'I've Learned More about Research than in those Past Two Years' (Sixth Workshop)

The members of each small group prepared a document which contained a brief literature review. The three documents from each group were printed and given to each of the members to read before the presentation. They had fifteen minutes to read the document before the group presented it to the plenary, and after every presentation there was a critical pause to debate the various points of the research, to propose changes or improvements, and also to resolve doubts.

This practical activity was beneficial for the participants' understandings of what scientific research is, how it is shared, and also of how the social issues they were exploring are framed by scholars. Some of the students mentioned these activities during the interviews:

'I feel that because they did not teach us in how to do research probably we end up not being able to take up the right information. It ends up... with this research process... it's teaching me to work through information and... yeah... it's quite beneficial for me. Because in my course they don't teach us unless you do your Honours, but when you do your honours... but it is not really guaranteed that you are going to do your honours because you need like a specific average, to qualify to do your honours, so it's quite difficult. Now you must wait for honours to do research and what not... but yeah... I think it is so beneficial to me.' (Iminathi, third interview, May 2017)

Amahle stated that, although she knew about research, she had learned more from the project than from her actual research module at her faculty:

'We did like a research module... first and second year... like... we do a project but I think in the past months, I feel like I've learned more about research than in those past two years... that... we used marks... and I did the test on it... and all those things.' (Amahle, second interview, May 2017)

As mentioned above, undergraduate students tend to be passive receivers of the academic epistemic system, and this is even more evident when talking about collectives that have been historically excluded from universities for generations and that still experience other types of epistemic marginalisation (Badat 2008). Information is given to them during their lectures but nothing is said about how this epistemic system builds its knowledge, or how knowledge comes to be knowledge in their classroom. Although this DCR project considered knowledge in a broad manner, it was important for these students to show, as their identified epistemic capability highlights, that access alone was not sufficient. They were claiming to be part of and contributors to this academic epistemic system, alongside other epistemic systems in which they actively participate.

On the other hand, to bring about an ecology of knowledges (De Sousa Santos 2014) is also to understand the different rhythms and learning processes that diverse individuals undertake, as well as their epistemic

choices. In this regard, the project provided epistemic access to academic knowledge 'imperfectly'. Moreover, it equally provided space to explore and investigate other knowledge systems in the same context, in order to scrutinise them and decide on their epistemic paths. The members confronted the issues of how to propose a 'conventional' research project, how to look for academic and non-academic information, and how to implement a research project (in a broad sense) according to their personal interests, and thus this was sufficient to articulate an ecology of knowledges. Further, as Kemmis, McTaggart and Nixon assess, '[t]he criterion of success is not whether participants have followed the steps faithfully, but whether they have a strong and authentic sense of development and evolution in their practices, their understanding of their practices, and the situations in which they practice' (2013, 19). In a DCR process, it will be said that this 'strong and authentic sense of development' is assessed by the expansion of freedoms (capabilities) that these individuals have reason to value. Moreover, the process provides an adequate platform for their expansion and achievement (functionings). Hence, participatory research should not be assessed according to whether it follows particular stages, but rather with an expansion of valued freedoms and the articulation of an ecology of knowledges.

Hence, the group discussed whether to continue collecting data and analysing it in a conventional scientific way or whether to use an alternative way. The alternative path discussed was based on their own lived experiences and knowledge gained through the process, but also the knowledge collected during our discussions. Thus, together, the group analysed the viability of such an option, with two main considerations forming the core of this discussion. Firstly, the second semester is usually a really dense and short period of the year, which, in many ways, considerably reduces the free time available for students. In this case, it reduced the availability of the team members. On the other hand, two members of the gender group dropped out at this stage of the project, due to academic-related issues. Their leaving necessitated a redistribution of the members of that group into the other two groups—racism and power inequalities—which affected the original distribution of the team. Therefore, although a final decision was not taken on this day, we agreed to continue thinking about alternative possibilities and to discuss them at our upcoming workshop. And a final agenda point for

the day was the discussion of a project t-shirt, which a few members had proposed in the previous workshop. One member brought a photo with a possible design for the t-shirt. This consisted of the logo of the project on the front and a slogan, the name of the relevant person and the words 'Researcher in action' on the back. The whole group was enthusiastic about the design. Some members then took on the responsibility of obtaining price quotes for the t-shirts, in order to have them as soon as possible. The group ended the day with an agreed plan to think about possible ideas to contribute to the next workshop.

### 6.8 'Now. Think Again. Are We Equal?' (Seventh Workshop)

The first part of the day was dedicated to brainstorming the ideas we had thought of for our research project, as we had finally decided not to adopt a conventional research approach. The group began with a discussion about how to continue with our research project, taking into consideration the time needed and our interest and preferences. Ideas such as using participatory video and participatory writing were the main proposals. Hence, we agreed that we would use participatory video, producing two final videos for the two principal themes: (1) racism and (2) power inequality on campus. Furthermore, we agreed that our written stories as part of the collaborative book would capture a more personal experiential knowledge level, with reflections on our experiences of injustices via the three themes (racism, gender inequality and power inequality). The final agreement was to create a new project website, where these resources would be shared and distributed. Hence, responsibilities were allocated and a schedule was designed to accomplish the deadlines and task before the end of the academic year. For example, these tasks included the creation and design of the website, and all members also had to work on a collaborative online document for their contributions to the book—according to the three main sections agreed upon. Finally, the group would partly use the second half of the workshop to start the participatory video process.

The group continued the workshop by exploring how to use the online program and how to work collaboratively on an online document until our next workshop. This program was proposed as a means of

easily working together on our book. Further, a major benefit was that the program was available for free via an internet connection. Hence, a document was created and all of the members were added as editors. We displayed the program on the big screen and I provided a brief explanation about its use and main features.

To conclude, the group dedicated the last part of the workshop to the participatory video process, debating their themes and main ideas in their videos, and designing storyboards. They designed (in groups) one storyline on racism on campus named 'Thinking forward, moving backwards', and another on inequalities and power imbalances named 'Are we equal?'. The first video would interview different students and staff members around campus, discussing their perspectives about racism on campus. The aim of the video would be to highlight that even if some actions have been carried by the university (e.g. changing names of buildings), there are many micro-racisms underlying the relationships between actors in this institution. The idea, as proposed by the group, was to bring these micro challenges to the forefront but also to end with a message of hope, using Nelson Mandela's quote, 'It's always impossible until it is done'.

The second video focused on power inequalities in a more intersectional manner. The team planned to interview students and staff members on campus. Besides an emphasis on students' financial constraints, the outsourcing of cleaners and other service providers, they wanted to emphasise the Shimla Park incident as a central event of the video. They wanted to conclude the video with a rhetoric question to the audience: 'Now. Think again. Are we equal?'

The workshop ended with arrangements for the agenda of our next meeting and the responsibilities for each member until then, and the decision that the eighth workshop would mainly be used to continue with our participatory video process.

## 6.9 'There Is No Place for Us, as Black Students...' (Eighth Workshop)

The storyboards were ready after some final feedback and reflections and the two groups only needed some basic training on how to produce video-clips, taking into consideration lighting, framing, and sound

following their storyboards. This basic training was provided, together with an explanation on the basic use of the video camera and voice recorder. The groups had some time available before recording began, so they practiced in the room. Once roles had been allocated among the members, with consensus on who would take care of the video camera and who the recorder would be, the members were ready. They then went out to produce their videos.

The two teams returned in the late afternoon to edit the video-clips and audio pieces collected. Thus, as everyone had the video software, a brief training session, using some of the audio and visual material taken by the members, was provided. Basics skills, such as clipping footage, the introduction of layouts and text, or adding audio to a video, were provided. Thus, the groups used the rest of the afternoon to edit the videos according to their storyboards, and received continuous feedback and assistance throughout the production, even if this was not completed on that day.

During this workshop the videos started to take form and their arguments were constructed, through the inclusion of different positionalities from diverse collectives and their experiences on campus. Both videos ended up delivering a really powerful message about racism on campus. Throughout different interviews the team showed how racism is openly accepted on campus, how patriarchal norms define standards, and how homophobic prejudices about the LGBTQI+ community persist. In this regard, a statement given by one black student interviewed for this video was very significant. He said: 'It saw us, that there is no place for us, as black students at the University of the Free State, and that we still need to fight towards justice'. The videos presented many challenges that the university students were familiar with through their own daily experiences, although few platforms are provided to discuss them. The group felt that the videos and the collaborative book were tools to enhance their voices and make them properly heard by powerful actors. They as students are part of the solution too.

The editing of the videos took a long time, which is why the group worked until late during this workshop and decided to meet informally on another day to conclude their editing after the group feedback. They decided to set aside the last workshop to focus on the written pieces for the collaborative book and the website. Thus, the team met the following week, during a public holiday, to continue the editing of both videos,

working on them for the entire day, and agreed to finalise the editing process by the next workshop.

### 6.10 '[I] Could Never Have Been Prepared for the Mental Adventure that Was About to Begin' (Ninth Workshop)

This day was mostly used to continue working on the book and to review the website together. The team worked on the book from morning to evening, using our online software on our laptops and reviewing the website together in deciding what to include or exclude. Siyabonga, one of the members in charge of the website, said during the interview that it had been a great experience to take on that responsibility,

'I learned how to make a website, which is quite great... I mean... the time might come when I need a website myself, and then it's really gonna help me.' (Siyabonga, third interview, October 2017)

However, this viewpoint was not restricted to him, and other members of the group also valued the opportunity to learn how to set up and design a website for free through the program. Lesedi said:

'We learned how to open up a website... it's great because when you think of a website you think... oh... I have to pay for that... like every month... or something and I just want to stay away from those things until you have your own job or what not, like... it's okay... it's not like that... you can just... learn and here is how... it was amazing.' (Lesedi, third interview, October 2017)

As Lesedi said, this program is freely available to use and not only allowed the members to create a project website, but also gave them the skills to be able to create their own websites, or to create websites for professional purposes in the future, at no additional cost. This is of relevance in a context such as South Africa, as these kinds of skills are scarce, and so this provided them with extra resources for facing the uncertain future. Although this may be seen as a mere skill transfer of access to and knowledge about the Internet, softwares, and computer literacy, technology helps humans to communicate, participate and exercise fundamental freedoms, like those that these students have



reason to value. These skills are instrumental for the articulation of freedoms such as epistemic, human recognition and self-development, and facilitate an active and more equal participation in these virtual and interactive spaces.

The written stories were not finalised in this workshop, but it was agreed that they would continue working on them over the coming months. Even if this was officially our last workshop, we wanted to host a public event on campus in 2018 in order to engage with other students about the issues explored. Hence, before the end of the day we agreed that the written pieces would be structured in four main parts: in the first students would write about the DCR project, reflecting on their experiences as co-researchers in this participatory research. The second part would focus on racism and the third, would focus on gender inequalities. And the fourth and final part would focus on social inequalities and power imbalances. Furthermore, we decided to write the stories in a variety of different languages, from English to Sesotho, isi-Zulu, Afrikaans, and isi-Xhosa. The idea was that, although the major part of the text was in English (as our workshops had been), other local languages were given space in the compilation of the book, reflecting the linguistic diversity of the team. Moreover, once finished, the agreement was to upload the book and videos to the website, so that people could obtain free copies of the collaborative book and watch our videos.

Despite this being the last workshop of the project, the team knew that this was not the end. The project had perhaps concluded, but the group intended to continue working together informally, at least for the following year (2018). These ideas included holding a book launch at the university the following year, or continuing as a group of activists, and providing platforms at the university for different groups to discuss these issues together, or using social networks to promote awareness. The team continues to have informal meetings today even if not with all the members, as some have already left the university community.

I would like to conclude this last section with an excerpt of the collaborative book written by one of the members, which contains her personal reflection on her involvement in the DCR project:

'I am a twenty-one-year-old student at the UFS. I grew up in Durban in a family of five and felt like most of my worldview was shaped by my experiences earlier on in primary school, having had a very diverse group of friends and never being able to put my finger on the face of inequality and not being able to question it because no one else seemed to explain it in a way I could understand. I started debating in Grade Six but always had a very keen interest in politics and understanding the world and why it is the way it is. I really was that annoying kid who asked my parents bizarre questions like "why must I have a job? What if I want a job that doesn't pay? Does that mean I'm not making a valuable contribution to society enough to be able to afford to live?"

So, long story short, I ended up in Bloemfontein with the same questions unanswered. I think I have always surrounded myself more with people who ask the same questions rather than those who look like me or come from the same place. The participatory project happened, literally out of the blue. A friend of mine had seen posters about it and was very interested and could not shut up about it. So, I joined in the second week and could never have been prepared for the mental adventure that was about to begin. I feel incredibly lucky to have somehow found myself surrounded by such diverse, peculiar but very special people once a month at workshops discussing all of the questions that have plagued my mind for years. We had interesting discussions about everything but as you would expect from a group of individuals whose brains could not stop thinking even if they were rewired to do so, the topics ended up predominantly revolving around race, power and gender inequalities and the huge influence of these on our lives.

This project has given me tools to look at life from different perspectives and has enriched my knowledge of other people's experiences in a way that no other could. With the main objective of the project having been to explore social justice (the lack thereof) and to give us as undergraduates an opportunity to develop our ability to contribute to knowledge production unconventionally, I've learnt a great deal about research and the academic world and have also been able to see its flaws. The greatest question that this project has forced me to explore is value and how our place in life is hugely predetermined by the value boxes that different societal perceptions place us in.' (*Narratives on Social Injustices: Undergraduate Voices*, 2018)

Certainly, a project such as this DCR is a multidimensional project. It does not aim to advance knowledge for the sake of knowledge; but rather as a way to expand our limited frontiers of knowing, both personally and professionally. Working with undergraduate students in South Africa opened a door to other ways of seeing and experiencing

the world, and the beauty of it is that our worlds connected with one another and bridged our differences, even if this was done imperfectly.

## 6.11 Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter has provided a review of the activities undertaken by the group during each of the workshops that composed this DCR project. The combination of diverse epistemological bases made the promotion of an ecology of knowledges possible (De Sousa Santos 2014), bringing different sources into a common space for collective investigation and scrutiny. In this investigative space, research was considered as a capacity through which individuals can expand their own knowledge horizons about a matter that is important to them (Appadurai 2006). This is how this research process has mixed knowledges coming from different sources and adapting the approach according to the participants' aims, capacities and frames of reference (Chilisa 2012).

Furthermore, the ten sections have revealed how decisions were taken throughout the process, as well as the importance of the members' valued capabilities, situating them as the directors and owners of the project. This process has not been easy, and a variety of challenges have been highlighted. In addition, the chapter has shown how the members have benefited from the project in terms of their identified capabilities, and how significant some of the activities have been for the group due to the colonial conversion factors jeopardising their fundamental freedoms. However, this analysis is incomplete, and thus the next chapter aims to focus on two co-researchers' valuable capabilities and their expansion through the project, in order to better understand individual experiences of taking part in this project after a collective perspective.

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