



# THE PERSPECTIVE ONLINE

Student journal on the deepening of transformation, decolonisation, and Africanisation in higher education

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**COVID-19 IN HIGHER EDUCATION**



*The Perspective Online* journal is published bi-annually at Nelson Mandela University by the Chair for Critical Studies in Higher Education Transformation (CriSHET), the Office of the Dean of Students, and the Department of Student Governance and Development.

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## **The idea behind this journal**

*The Perspective Online* journal came from a collective observation that student activism needs to also be driven by thoughtful and productive contributions to advance academic, pedagogical and knowledge renewal within the university.

The journal has been positioned as a strategic resource for students to develop a culture of disciplined writing in order to bring to the fore a particular social consciousness amongst university students underpinned by robust engagement, radical contestation of ideas and critical scholarship.

As a result, *CriSHET*, in partnership with the office of the Dean of Students, and the Department of Student Governance and Development introduced this journal which will be published bi-annually and feature articles, columns, and creative work by students on the deepening of transformation, decolonisation, and the Africanisation of higher education.

The journal will be made available online in all communication and media platforms, with a limited number of hard copies. It will also be available through the library platforms of the university. Writers who also intend to develop their columns into research studies and/or journal articles are encouraged to utilise this platform.

Lastly, undergraduate and postgraduate students across all Faculties are encouraged to write as individuals and/or as groups. A quarter of the journal space will be set aside for the contributions of staff and community members.

Contributions must be thoughtful, considered and analytical. They must meet the general criteria of conversational-academic writing.

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# The Perspective Online

Student journal on the deepening of transformation, decolonisation, and the Africanisation of higher education

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**Semester 1 and 2, 2020**

**Special Edition**

**Vol. 2, No. 1-2**

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## **Editorial Notes: Covid-19 in Higher Education<sup>1</sup>**

For this edition, we invited articles, columns, and creative works that are based on a social justice orientation that can contribute to the transformation, decolonisation, and Africanisation of Higher Education and the broader society - within a domestic context that is engulfed by globalising technological possibilities and pandemics such as Covid-19.

The pandemic has significantly affected the higher education sector across the globe. For the South African context, the higher education sector is confronted with the pandemic within a post-Fees-Must-Fall genre where the country's high levels of inequality were emphasised and a nationwide call for a free decolonised education was made. This included a demand for a university model that is freed from labour outsourcing, and gendered-racialised patterns of dehumanisation.

Undoubtedly, the pandemic has accelerated our higher education shortcomings. The 'lockdown' regulations implemented by government to try manage the health crisis pushed mainly underprivileged students into numerous forms of exclusions. The student activists who are authors in this edition have identified, analysed and criticised these 'pandemic-induced' inequalities and they have proposed a number of decolonial, innovative and transformative interventions to restore the purpose of an African public university of our times.

Firstly, the edition begins with a critique of the online spaces we have come to utilise for our public engagements. **Nobubele Phuza, Qhama Noveve, Anne Munene and Anele Mngadi** question the hypervisibility of whiteness that comes at the expense of erasing black women academics in international webinars. This erasure is also underscored by **Lauren Yew-Siong** and **Yaseen Ally** who argue that the preventative health care strategies tabled against Covid-19 misrecognise indigenous interventions. On a social front, **Vuyolwethu Ngcofe** and **Yonelisa Mabotyi** reveal that the implemented 'lockdown' regulations generated the ugliest tendencies of our society where women, children and queer bodies were at the receiving end of domestic violence and numerous forms of patriarchisation.

Secondly, the edition then moves to the classroom dynamics encountered by underprivileged students during the pandemic. Particularly, **Chumisa Mqina** and **Lubisi Thoriso** highlight the displacement of poor black students in the technological-migration regime that the pandemic required. This, they argue, shows the extent to which South African universities were not modelled for black experiences to begin with. On the other hand, **Kutu Ramolobe** sees an opportunity out of the crisis by tabling innovative and transformative strategies that universities should

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<sup>1</sup> **Reference:** Mzileni, P. (2020). Editorial Notes: Covid-19 in Higher Education. *The Perspective Online*. 2(1-2). pp.1-2.

consider as pathways to equally accessible higher education through equitable online teaching and learning practices.

Thirdly, the writers have also stretched their social responsibilities by touching on community issues. **Kurisani Mdhuli** raises concerns about food insecurity in urban townships. These are largely black communities that have been undergoing high levels of poverty and unemployment in post-apartheid South Africa. The pandemic has emphasised the extent of dehumanisation in these communities and this has potential, as **Noxolo Kali** argues, to be a generational crisis unless the entire sociology of the post-apartheid order gets to be economically reorganised. **Zvikomborero Hweju** proposes that the science and technological experiments that we are currently developing against the pandemic could be a possible beginning if they can be equally exported to our communities.

I have no doubt that the articles featured here are all based on a social justice orientation that will contribute to the transformation, decolonisation, and Africanisation of higher education and our society beyond the Covid-19 pandemic.

I invite you to enjoy this reading.

Pedro Mzileni

**Editor-in-Chief**

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9 April 2021

## **PART ONE**

### **Black Erasure, Patriarchisation, and White Domination**

# **(In)visibility of Race Online: Reflections on the Erasure of Race in International Networks during Covid-19<sup>2</sup>**

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## **Abstract**

The Covid-19 pandemic has greatly affected the world, and severely reordered our interactions and engagement with others. Social distancing as a major response in curbing the spread of the virus has inevitably shifted us, to more online-digital learning and work environments. The use of virtual software and platforms is now central to our professional work, businesses, academic pursuits, social-life and collaborations. Our educational paradigm is largely hosted online and academic rigor to sustain higher education (Combining of intellect, and educational activities for growth) (QS, 2018) is highly desired. This has been met with peculiar emerging challenges; the article will interrogate the use of these virtual and digital technologies and their reproduction of exclusions. The central argument in this paper is that the architecture and experience of some online academic platforms facilitates the erasure of certain voices and accentuates a clumsiness of gender and racial tensions. This paper relies on the collective reflection of black academic women in an international global network hosted virtually. The paper discusses complexities of structure that has a reserved space for what is 'normal', how it affects black bodies, the justification of being critical and the debate of tokenism in hypervisibility of whiteness. This work calls for reflexivity to support transformative discourse and agency.

**Keywords:** *Tokenism; Hypervisibility; Erasure; Black Women; Higher Education*

## **Introduction**

Virtual knowledge exchange, participation and learning has had a distinctive rise in the wake of the 'new normal' compelled by Covid-19. While there are several challenges associated with the radical shift from the traditional face-face interactions to digital experience, this paper situates itself in the gap of poor representation and visibility of black bodies in the digital space. Tokenism and performative presence is discussed in this work, as part of critically challenging false solidarities with black

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<sup>2</sup> **Reference:** Phuza, N., Mngadi, A., Noveve, Q., & Munene, A. (2020). (In)visibility of Race Online: Reflections on the Erasure of Race in International Networks during Covid-19. *The Perspective Online*. 2(1-2). pp.4-10.

lives, or the use of their presence in higher education and other sectors to feign inclusion and diversity. The research methodology for this paper is virtual/ digital ethnographic qualitative approach. This method studies the internet phenomenon with the intent to research fundamental questions, respond to complex constructions, and contribute to debate (Figaredo, et al., 2007). The authors were part of this ethnographic research and the paper is a critical response of their experience of invisibility in a virtual global academic network.

## **Online Intersectionality**

Virtual platforms have become essential prostheses to support diverse real-time interactions, in light of Covid-19 regulations. Connectivity, reliability, visibility and security (Sumo Logic, 2020) have become key factors shaping our internet experience as we work and study remotely. Technical challenges in the form of internet connectivity, availability of connecting devices, data pricing and access, routing protocols among other digital concerns (Ahmed , 2019) have become areas that expose digital gaps and inequalities (Jansen, 2020). While solutions to these problems are not immediate and needing multiple responses and investment, their presence limits inclusion and presence in the digital space (Williams, 2019). Video conferencing as a tool that amplifies corporate culture is accompanied with administrative authority that seemingly disciplines the virtual space. For instance, who is/are the host(s)? What is the duration of engagement? Whose audio and video presence is muted? What emoji's has and forms of chat are available for response or reaction? Who gets to control the waiting room, or initiate leave meeting? How do all these affect the potential of self- expression, self-definition and self-representation?

Complete immersion in the internet world is almost compulsory; it dictates how humanity and communities define themselves (Williams, 2019). This article ,being a reflection of the authors' erasure of blackness in a virtual global academic network, confirms the complexity of online identity, and visibility that is linked to hegemonic structures of race, white supremacy, extractive capitalism, power, patriarchal systems that control and minimise black peoples agency and life (Noble, 2016). The structure of the internet has "whiteness as its default identity, ... and representation of humanity" (Brock Jr, 2020, pp. 5, 7). Brock (2020) argues that black digital identity is not associated with the internet, and cut off from information communication practice and expertise. Online control and exclusion models the 'culture industry' (Fagan, 2008) where mechanical and formulaic patterns dominate human life, knowledge engagement and production. Critical reflection and action remains vital, to narrow the disregard, isolation and alienation of certain categories of researchers, students and academia in the infrastructure of the internet.

Studies of virtual communities often analyse the social relations formed in these mediated spaces and the psychological well-being resulting from participation in such spaces. Many studies address the formation of a subculture identity or a marginalised

group (Zhang, 2006) but not so much on the dynamics and experiences of certain group identities. Black women digital experiences and representation is affected by multiple intricacies - language, interpretation, translation, control and censorship (Sobande, 2020) that directly affects their visibility and participation in academic networks. This comes as no surprise as there is a whole body of work that documents the global marginalisation of black women in the academy especially theorisations coming from black feminist thought and post-colonial feminist movements.

The intersectionality of race, class and gender are important here as they offer an impetus on the patterns of exclusions within global networks. These are often very difficult and complex to explain and dissect as they overlap between structure and agency. Puwar (2004) noted that according to the work of Foucault and sociologist Pierre *Bourdieu*, through historical sedimentation, there are certain “normal” occupants of spaces and anyone who does not possess the gendered and racial profile of this so-called reserved space, will be ostracised. The pervasiveness of whiteness in the academy and the fact that it is denied or deemed unsayable is the reason why anti-racism ideologies have not worked. Many claims of diversity and inclusion are only a way of doing affirmative action. Ahmed (2005) speaks of the fact that inclusion is a way of, placing black faces in the right places, or conveniently placed for universities and networks to seem internationalised only to attract students or other researchers in the market for their own benefit.

According to Ahmed (2005) transformative discourses are non-performatives and the proof lies in the lack of real actions to address the underrepresentation, the carceral punitive spaces, the erasure of race and gender which forms part of the resistance which is experienced by black women. The qualitative experience of black women can be seen through the defending of their experiences, having to find special ways and walk on eggshells when it comes to addressing and speaking of oppressive practices. This places a psychological burden and feelings of unworthiness even in present times, where you have to put a fight for a place on the table. The relationship between neoliberalism and higher education remains alienating. The latter is no longer a site of public good, civic education and a place where democratic culture are instilled and scribed onto institutional scripts (Fraser, 1997). Instead, studying and researching oppressed people has become a way of gaining relevance, research grants and funding without reforming the system and undertaking a process of reflexivity.

The feelings of infantilisation are always so present where, it would seem like black women academics are more junior than they are, have no valuable views and opinions as the space is saturated with whiteness. The environments are not welcoming, they infuse an imposter syndrome. The fact that there is a dominance of white males, confirms the legitimisation of masculine knowledge. The following sections will focus on two aspects of the black woman experience on a virtual network, which will possibly provide clarity, highlight the reflections already mentioned, and accentuate the detail of being a black body virtually.

## Invisibility of Black Bodies

In this section we discuss (in)visibility creating a fictitious solidarity within the mentioned international research network and how it facilitated clumsy gender and racial tensions. International research communities consist of individuals from around the world who, while belonging to different local, national and/or continental groups, have certain common intellectual principles that unify their work and aspirations. The network in question was a collective of global individuals that do social research through the notion of *critique*. The criterion of being experts was justified arguably through their academic positions as either tenured senior academics, postdoctoral and postgraduate individuals. Our understanding is that scholars working on the World Network project (pseudonym) want to ultimately remain credible to the community, which makes intellectual contributions through the lens of *critique*. Therefore, these scholars are in the scholarship of critical race studies, critical linguistic studies, critical phenomenology etc but also developing conceptual analyses that is “aimed at seeking emancipatory alternatives and facilitating productive critical praxes” (Cross and Keet, 2020).

Cross and Keet call the *critical* to also be self-critical in a way that invites moderation and other possibilities. Proven here is that being *critical* is a complex task built through rigorous reflexivity and openness to that which you may not know. This includes the experiences of others even when they are communicated through protest, rage or emotion within movements that you do not believe in. Although cursorily stated here, the works of Patricia Hill Collins (2002) and Michele Foucault (1997) posit *critique* in this way distancing it from mere judgement or nuance.

By the mentioned standards, remaining credible to this kind of group (i.e. that of *critique* and *critical* praxis) is not unattainable but certainly requires constant confrontation with the self, triggered by those you are in contact with. The authors have mentioned that in a discussion that was a reflection of #BlackLivesMatter movement and the space of race in critical university studies. A white woman proposed that the academic group should focus on places where race does not matter. Her reasoning was academic rigor and the need to nuance the conversation around race to include other forms of oppression that drive movements elsewhere. We believe that it is her lack of familiarity with Black pain, Black rage and Black reality that advocates for the exclusion of global anti-racist movements as an expert opinion and position. Much has been written about this type of ‘white work’ (Christie van der Westhuizen, Tre Johnson) but it is insufficient to satisfy *critique*. Rather it borders on nuancing or politics of the more. In physical or face-to-face interactions, the presence of Black bodies in the room is often sufficient deterrent for this kind of racial clumsiness. Without raising their voice, Black bodies make whiteness or Shirley Anne Tate’s whiteness (2018) question itself, clarify and adjust appropriately so that it receives recognition. This is not in the self-certain way that the *critical* asserts itself.

Blackness and accompanying Black thought is not the marker of pure knowledge but in a discussion on #BlackLivesMatter and anti-racism, it is possible to position Black bodies as those operating out of what they feel and know rather than what they have read and understood (Simmonds, 2017) (Idahosa , 2019).

## **Hypervisibility of Whiteness**

In this section, the authors share and discuss their experience of invisibility. Through no fault of our own, we felt our presence and visibility controlled by the inability to have our videos on due to connectivity issues. The authors were the only black women in this academic community and their limited online presence burdened their minority status that was already muted, invisible and erased given the dynamics of what controls online presence. This experience of underrepresentation and token minority lead us to engage with the concept of tokenism. We explain this concept as the “symbolic effort” to include members of minority groups in order to give an appearance of inclusivity and equality to avoid responsibility of discrimination (Paludi, 2012; Bernal, et al., 2003).

The idea of “symbolic effort” in the above definition highlights the meaninglessness minimum effort to administer cohesive diversity. In the book *Why we can't wait (1964)*, Martin Luther argues that tokenism constitutes the bare minimum in accepting of black people into mainstream society. This is informed by the thinking that adding black bodies into spaces that are dominantly white and potentially racist, absolves racism, but on the contrary, this does not resolve issues of racism and neither do these spaces become less racist. What this does is adding black bodies into hypothetically violent situations, the authors found themselves resisting voicelessness in invisibility, their bodies taking the pressure of emotional labor within the group as means of being included.

Psychologists believe that token members are treated differently from other members of the organisation. The token can be perceived as ‘less than’ or handicapped and is often believed to be intellectually inferior. This odd arrangement can also be manipulated to provide this two perceived advantageous that we list. One that the token minority becomes a representative of their communities and thus are seen experts. Two, the space is glorified and personalised the minority should be grateful that they are cultured enough to fit in these spaces fields (Bernal, et al., 2003). The impact of such conditions can be evidenced in the poor mental health of black bodies and their overall creativity, involvement and quality contributions is adversely affected. In our experience, the idea of being a token took away meaningful engagement and participation in the network because it led to heightened levels of consciousness and always checking if we were politically correct. The latter to refer to a situation where you are very anxious of constantly being unrepresented, but not wanting to reproduce the same inequality and micro aggressions that you experience. We felt our black bodies, made us props to sustain this intellectual community as being

non-racist and allies of diversity. This of course created a sense of false comradeship and solidarity in the group.

Rosabeth M. Kanter (cited in Mickey & Wingfield, 2019) suggests that this could affect the tokenised person in three ways. First, it may lead to performance pressure because the tokens are subjected to intensified visibility and scrutiny. In the context of this paper, we will refer to this as “performative presence” as our experiences exposed the absence of highest engagement in this working arrangement. The impact of the subtle racist comment made in our presence, forced us to consult and consolidate with each other as black women. To verify the comment was indeed racist, to police ourselves off the stereotype of angry black women and to make a collective decision done in a ‘professional manner’ as regards this issue. Kanter (2019) also studies the emotional tax, which is the downplaying of the racist comment and allow the meeting to continue as if it was nothing while you seek and recruit ally-ship from the other black bodies present. This accurately highlights how uncomfortable and repressive we felt of this academic space as black women. Kanter also observed two other outcomes where the token is socially isolated and a more long-term impact of the token assimilating to mainstream culture and eventually losing of their own identity.

## Conclusion

Having reflected on our experiences of being black women in virtual online global network that was dominantly white. We would suggest that in order to improve the experiences of black women in these spaces, network organisers ought to consider having introductory social consciousness and awareness sessions that educate on racial politics, identity politics and gender. We acknowledge that these are not conversations that are easy to have but are important conversation that need to take place in order for different people of diverse origins to be able to work together from a point of understanding and essentially a better perspective.

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# “Getting a seat at the table” during the Covid-19 Pandemic: Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Healthcare Decision-Making<sup>3</sup>

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## Abstract

In this paper, we comment on the positioning of indigenous knowledge systems during the Covid-19 pandemic as reported in South African news. In South Africa, there exists cultural and ethnic diversity and healthcare systems need to be cognisant of these systems of belief and their role in healthcare decision-making. The study is motivated by a news report, entitled, “We spoke to a traditional healer about Covid-19”, which was published on 27 March 2020 by City Press and News24 (Langa, 2020), which highlighted the exclusion felt by the Traditional Healers Practitioners Sector (THP), specifically regarding indigenous knowledge systems and practices, and the lack of consultation or specific inclusion of their knowledge and expertise into the healthcare decision-making. The current study was motivated by this perceived exclusion and aimed to comment on how the Covid-19 treatment is being positioned in a country where indigenous knowledge systems are often drawn upon in times of crisis. We argue, that in South Africa, where diverse belief systems abound, the inclusion of the Traditional Healthcare Sector more formally into the overall healthcare, may result in a more pluralist and relevant provision of health services.

**Keywords:** culture, indigenous knowledge systems, biomedicine, Covid-19, Coronavirus, plurality, traditional healers

## Introduction

The Coronavirus of 2019 (Covid-19) was first reported as a global pandemic on the 31 December 2019 (National Institute for Communicable Disease, 2020). The spread of the virus at present, has affected the world, with increasing daily death rates. While there has been tremendous effort toward a cure, a vaccine is currently available, and being dispensed to populations across the globe. The coronavirus has foregrounded the need for more adequate, immediate responses to population health threats, with

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<sup>3</sup> **Reference:** Yew-Siong, L., & Ally, Y. (2020). “Getting a seat at the table” during the Covid-19 Pandemic: Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Healthcare Decision-Making. *The Perspective Online*. 2(1-2). pp.11-20.

hospital services and healthcare workers foregrounding this. The failure with the current medical systems, is the lack of inclusion of culturally informed strategies that could potentially be drawn upon, especially in contexts such as South Africa, where belief systems varying from the biomedical perspective, is known to inform health decision-making.

We argue, in this paper, that these culturally informed strategies derived from Indigenous Knowledge Systems, may provide nuanced, cost-effective insights, and approaches to assist in coping with the fight against Covid-19. While we note this, we also state that indigenous knowledge systems are not being positioned in this paper as having ‘the cure’ to the virus or any health-related issue. Instead, we suggest that countries rich in histories of indigenous knowledge should in fact, be drawing on these understandings to assist in alleviating some of the experienced symptoms associated with the virus. This is further necessitated by the fact that natural herbs such as turmeric – known to have healing properties, along with ginger and other natural substances have been suggested to boost immunity (Mahomoodally, 2013). With the South African medical systems overburdened and underresourced, consideration should be given to natural herbs and remedies utilised by traditional healers for somatic symptoms, like respiratory problems, bodily pains – then perhaps these can be utilised alongside biomedical treatment for the virus.

## **Literature Review**

The Traditional Health Practitioner’s Sector (THP) released a statement expressing concerns regarding traditional healers not “getting a seat at the table”, when discussing means to combat the virus (Langa, 2020). Furthermore, the THC stated that “it is regrettable that our sector has not been engaged and even given clarity on protocols affecting their practice and rights of patients in accessing services that include but not are not limited to operating of our herbal shops and pharmacies” (Langa, 2020). In contexts where there are diverse belief systems, it becomes important to acknowledge and understand the different healing beliefs and practices that exists. This is vital, given the influential role it may have in health and wellness of the population at large. While traditional and indigenous methods have been acknowledged (in part) throughout history (Mahomoodally, 2013), it seems that the integration of these knowledge systems has not been regarded or explored adequately and sufficiently in relation to its effectiveness in the treatment of symptoms associated with illnesses, like the coronavirus.

Researchers have noted that cultural beliefs are a central component in understanding the way in which humans’ function, and therefore, understanding and integrating cultural beliefs into treatment options, may result in a more applicable, relevant, and transformed psychology, that ‘makes sense’ (Anderson, 2015; Beyers, 2017). A key element that is apparent in the definition of culture, is that it comes to represent an acceptable way of living prescribed for a group of people. Members of a particular

culture are thus believed to think, feel and behave in an approved or uniformed manner. This approved manner is collectively adhered to and shapes individuals of the culture, making them unique from others. It is this very act, that creates the conditions for the expression of and experience of physical and psychological symptoms, as being ascribed to other forces or factors. While many tend to associate culture with the supernatural, superstition and magical thinking, cultural practices are also linked to natural forces and elements and the use of plants and herbs have been documented as having efficacy in the treatment of a variety of ailments (Ozioma & Chinwe, 2019). Cultural beliefs thus, creates the condition for various mechanisms to be implemented, through which life and living is viewed.

For example, Subadhi (2014) explained that cultural beliefs and practices informs individual's understanding of mental illness and the treatment thereof while; mental health practitioners, for instance, have prescribed ways outlined in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual for the Diagnosis of Mental Illnesses – 5 of dealing with disorders in psychotherapy. In the South African context, cultural beliefs regarding psychological symptoms may be associated with “*ukuthwasa*”, “*amafufunyana*” for example and usually, the ways prescribed for the treatment of such experiences differs from westernised approaches and do not involve African traditional beliefs and practices. Similarly, research suggests that the natural herbs and plants, used by various healers across the world, have been helpful to patients experiencing various medical conditions.

In light of this, one should question the feasibility, utility, and the cost-effectiveness of the efficacy of such treatments for respiratory problems for a virus like Covid-19? If natural immune system aid can be provided through natural substances that the traditional healing sector is familiar with, is utilised, will this not provide benefit to a healthcare system that cannot cope with the influx of patients requiring medical assistance. Again, we iterate, that we are not suggesting this as a cure, but rather as a collaborative health care plan. However, such a healthcare system is complicated by the contradicting worldview between African cultural belief systems, which includes more traditional or religious-cultural methods of treatment, and more Westernised methods of treatment- such as biomedicine and allopathic practices (Irmak, 2012; Scrutton, 2015). This presents a unique challenge to the South African healthcare system. The influence of traditional systems of healing and healthcare becomes even more important to focus on, given that over 80% of Southern Africa's population first consults with traditional healing methods, before consulting a biomedical practitioner (Audet, Ngobeni, Graves & Wagner, 2017). Despite this acknowledgement, the exclusion of traditional systems of healing in the healthcare of South Africans, has been significantly slanted towards a biomedical focus. Therefore, this study explored news reporting around the Covid-19 pandemic in South Africa during the lockdown, with the aim to uncover the role associated to the traditional healthcare system.

One of the barriers that may be faced is the negative perception that exists regarding the traditional healing sector - a sector that has struggled for legitimacy in a system which seems to favor biomedical advancement. In South Africa, as academic disciplines engage with the idea of transformed and decolonial practices, the Health Sciences must begin to engage more actively with alternate knowledge paradigms in order to provide a more comprehensive treatment.

## **The Need for Multidisciplinary Teams**

Globally, multidisciplinary teams are often used to treat multiple medical ailments, diseases and disorders (White, Ray & Hamilton, 1997; Reed & Lyne, 2000). Multidisciplinary teams are defined as a group of persons who work together, with the purpose of fulfilling a set task, which is seen as central to that specific team (Pastor et al., 1980). In the past, it has been proven that multidisciplinary teams have the potential to enhance the clinical work of practitioners, and this is no different to the South African context (Pastor et al., 1980). Fonn, Egesan, Cole, Griffiths, Manderson, Karibu, Ezeh, Thorogood & Izugbara (2016) states that healthcare systems require multidisciplinary teams/ approaches in order to effectively build or respond upon other ways of generating knowledge, and to develop an appreciation for theoretical research methods.

## **A Western Scientific Approach**

The Health Sciences have an extensive history in countries such as Europe, the United States (Berry, 2013), and therefore, could potentially have close ties to cultures and traditions of those places. Resultantly, those close cultural and traditional ties, are embedded into what we often refer to as the Western scientific approach. This form of Westernised/ biomedical approach has spread to many parts of the world and have even found its roots in South Africa (Makhubela, 2016). However, it is evident that the Western scientific approach cannot be applied as a global means, as it is limited to its own concepts, origins, traditions and empirical research (Berry, 2013; Johnston, 2016). However, due to the dominance of the biomedical system, other healthcare frameworks have been sidelined. It could be suggested that the biomedical or Westernised approach should not be afforded such dominance and to consider how indigenous knowledge systems, approaches and epistemologies that are relevant and beneficial to the provision of a more holistic treatment plan.

By viewing the Health Sciences as value free and objective only, it leads one to acknowledge a healthcare system that views individuals as being independent from social and cultural influences (Mkhize, 2006). This contradicts the very existence of Western scientific approaches, as it could be argued to be a social construction that is based on the cultures and traditions of individuals from the global North, rather than centralising traditions of the global South (Berry, 2013).

Health science in South Africa should provide a platform for phenomenological experiences and understandings that are unique to each South African individual and should be acknowledged accordingly. This train of thought is not only applicable to the theory of health sciences, but should also be considered in practice, especially with regards to the inclusion of culture and indigenous knowledge in this global pandemic, more specifically within collectivistic societies, such as the communities located within South Africa (Ma & Njeru, 2016).

## **Indigenous Knowledge in South Africa**

Biomedical advancements were implanted in the global North and has significantly influenced health sciences with regards to aspects such as theory and research, practice and education (Eagle, 2005; Ngcobo & Edwards, 2008). Consequently, health science within South Africa has been substantially influenced by Western training models, and this leads to question the relevance of this Westernised scientific psychological knowledge approach, especially with regards to diverse communities within South Africa (Eagle, 2005; Berry, 2013; Johnston, 2016).

It is known that South Africa is linguistically, ethnically and culturally diverse, as it embraces many cultures, customs, religions and has 11 official languages (Berg, 2012; Johnston, 2016). This is indicative that in South Africa, different forms of health science approaches are needed, one that is based on comprehensive lived experiences, values, beliefs and philosophical traditions and indigenous methods that influence the health and behaviour of an individual (Zikalala, 2017; Adelowo, 2015; Makhubela, 2016). As such, there is a need for multidisciplinary teams in healthcare systems and the inclusion of alternative expert sources such as traditional healers, spiritual leaders/healers, faith healers, chiropractors and herbalists (Clayton, 2017; Lund 2008; Sorsdahl, Stein, Grimsrud, Seedat, Flisher, Williams & Myer, 2009).

As a result of this, it can be deduced, if healthcare issues cannot be fully comprehended and understood due to its lacking cultural inclusion, ways of treating or alleviating other issues that come along as a result of this virus is not being fully comprehended and understood as well.

## **Discussion**

Literature suggests that Acts and policies that have been implemented in South Africa previously, such as the Mental Health Care Act, Act No 17 of 2002 (MHCA), National Development Plan (NDP), National Health Insurance (NHI) and National Strategic Plan on HIV/AIDS and TB, is /was to promote the human rights of people with disabilities, within South Africa (Clayton, 2017; Van Rensburg, 2007). However, these are impacted in terms of implementation, due to limited resources, accessibility to healthcare facilities and medicines (Van Rensburg, 2007).

There is a clear indication that there is a need for multidisciplinary teams or approaches in South Africa (Irmak, 2012), in order to provide treatment methods and measure that could potentially be instilled. Thus, leading to a more comprehensive and a more conducive method of diverse approaches to this pandemic and its countless effects.

Karanci (2014) expresses a need for multidisciplinary teams, but explicitly denies the expertise of healers, thus indirectly rejecting the inclusion of traditional treatment modalities, and a method which could lead to the potential holistic healing of individuals as a result of cultural and indigenous inclusion. It is important to note that an expert is not someone with a just a degree of some sort, but instead, an expert is constantly exposed to and deals with their science.

Despite Karanci's (2014) rejection of traditional healers, it is evident that traditional healers are considered as an acceptable, as well as an accessible form of health practitioners. In South Africa, it is not uncommon for individuals to seek traditional and allopathic treatment (science-based/ modern medicine), which could be an illustration of potential medical pluralism (Audet, Ngobeni, Graves & Wagner, 2017; Fonn, Egesah, Cole, Griffiths, Manderson, Karibu, Ezeh, Thorogood & Izugbara, 2016).

A South African based study, with HIV/AIDS positive individuals, was conducted in 2017 and reported that traditional healers could only treat such patients after the patient had received an official diagnosis from a hospital and that; the traditional healers are also commonly known for making referrals to allopathic care providers (Audet, Ngobeni, Graves & Wagner, 2017). The study reported that traditional healers had success in treating HIV/AIDS patients (which is responsible for 5.1% of deaths in South Africa), as 14% of infected adult patients, with CD4 count <350 cells/mm<sup>3</sup>, reported being successfully cured, and 30% of individuals with CD4 count >350 cells/mm<sup>3</sup>, reported being successfully treated (Audet, Ngobeni, Graves & Wagner, 2017). This study suggests that medical plurality may have resulted in the desired outcomes (Audet, Ngobeni, Graves & Wagner, 2017). Even though it has not been explored to great lengths, if this is possible with HIV/AIDS, it should be acknowledged that it could potentially increase the success rates of healing or the invention of new and diverse approaches to this Covid-19 pandemic.

This provides some context and evidence, that with regards to healthcare systems within South Africa, expansion in terms of natural and supernatural coexistent explanations, multidisciplinary methods and medical plurality of diagnosing and treating sickness, illness, diseases and disorders, could potentially be beneficial.

Whilst reviewing the literature, it is evident that the South African medical system is dominated by Western epistemologies. Healthcare can achieve increased success with regards to healing if multiple disciplines network and collaborate more formally – to

share knowledge on a topic from multiple perspectives. An approach is lacking, one which could diagnose and treat sickness, illness, disease and disorders by means and perspectives from coexisting explanations and understandings, one which includes the Western approaches, as well as indigenous and cultural components. The literature proves that this approach can bring success and is evident when it comes to healthcare systems in general (Audet, Ngobeni, Graves & Wagner, 2017).

Healthcare is currently finding itself to be challenged in a country such as South Africa, as the Western model was developed to cater to the cultural beliefs and traditions specific to certain places such as the United States, Europe etc. (Berry, 2013). However, it is often questioned with regards to the South African context, as South Africa is so diverse in terms of its races, ethnicities and consists of its own cultural beliefs and traditions that may impact individuals and their overall health, in ways that may differ from those individuals for which the Western model was developed. This is often overlooked, as literature on understandings and explanations of cultural traditions and beliefs are often left unpublished; or is often dependent on American research which may not always be relatable or relevant to the South African context (Johnston, 2016; Eagle, 2005).

The in-depth analysis of the literature speaks to a need for a more integrated health care framework, one that includes culture (Irmak, 2012; Igreja, 2018). This refers to a more culturally accepting health science or healthcare system or means of diagnosis and treatment within Westernised approaches to this pandemic. However, this does not mean that the healthcare and health science systems and approaches, and its advances throughout the years should be dispelled, but rather that it should be re-evaluated and transformed to support the inclusion of indigenous knowledge within the theory and practice of the measures and discoveries being developed by various practitioners whilst in the midst of a pandemic. Whilst this is commonly suggested, one could question the fact that it is often stated in theory, but there is a lack of practical steps put into place, as seen by traditional healer, Nombulelo Doreen Ndiko and the leader of the National Sector, Solly Nduka (Langa, 2020).

## **Conclusion**

This paper argued that healthcare systems need to consider more inclusive practices to ensure that different systems of belief are included in South African healthcare services. In this paper we argued that indigenous knowledge systems may present with opportunities to provide alongside the medical fraternity, treatments that can be utilised for symptoms associated with a variety of illnesses, such as Covid-19. However, the lack of agency presented to the Traditional Healthcare Sector in South Africa is alarming considering the diverse belief systems that exist. It is suggested that if more engagement and collaboration can be formalised, in education, training and practice, plurality of treatment modalities, rather than a reliance on one healthcare system, will be created.

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# Being a Support Person in the time of Gender-Based Violence and Covid-19<sup>4</sup>

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## Abstract

This opinion piece is intended to outline the daily considerations of support staff- working mainly in the area of GBV in the sector of Higher Education. This analysis requires careful exploration of what experiencing violence based on one's gender or sexuality means for students and how they engage the academic imperative. The specific challenges brought by Covid-19 to the nature of the work done by GBV support persons within the university space are of particular interest in this investigation.

**Keywords:** *Gender-based violence; LBGTQI+; University Transformation; Covid-19.*

## Introduction

The struggle against Gender-Based Violence (GBV) has always been a visible epidemic in the higher education sector. In 2016 the issue of GBV on university campuses was brought to the fore by students from various universities, including Rhodes and Nelson Mandela University who staged protests to confront this violence.

After the brutal killing of 19-year-old University of Cape Town (UCT) student, Uyinene Mrwetyana at a post office we continued to mourn the deaths of women who had been killed. Perhaps as South Africans, we had thought the death of Uyinene was enough to return a sense of humanity to all. However, the senseless killing of women and girls in South Africa has continued to rage rampantly- even after Uyinene's 'widely accepted' martyrdom. Just recently we came across the senseless murder of Asithandile Kwasa Zozo, a 19-year-old Witwatersrand University (Wits) student from Dutywa who was allegedly fatally stabbed by her ex-boyfriend for refusing to stay in the relationship. We are left questioning how many more students should lose their lives for GBV to end?

GBV is perpetuated in and around university campuses, where the safety of students remains a key challenge (Orth, van Wyk, Andipatin,2020: 191). More often than not,

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women students find themselves overwhelmed by fear when staying alone late in designated study areas such as the library or taking an Uber back to their residences after a night out. In a study of the experience of women residence students Gordon and Collins (2013) detail how women in the university space plan their lives around avoiding violence and preserving their safety. In a study relating to feelings of safety in universities, Shefer et. al (2018) reports on the unease with which women students carry out their daily activities in the university space, due to not feeling safe.

Imperfect as it may be, the University space is a mediated space-which makes use of well-entrenched awareness programs, anti-GBV policies, and counselling support groups to do the work of dismantling cultures of violence and prejudice. These programs, which were once reliant on face-to-face human interaction, have had to move onto virtual platforms which has complicated the work of GBV support persons greatly.

This paper is a culmination of consultations with support persons working in the area of GBV. It will explore the issues of safety and freedom of our students, how the nature of the work that support staff does has been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, give a brief commentary on LGBTI+ lives during COVID-19 and then table concluding remarks which will include immediate proposals and future recommendations.

## **Safety and Freedom**

When the threat of Covid-19 became imminent, the University decided to take precautionary measures by closing the University before the official lockdown was announced by the President. This resulted in learning and teaching being placed on hold and the closure of all residences.

For many students, access to universities meant moving away from their abusers at home or in their communities. The initial level-5 Covid-19 lockdown regulations meant that physical access to visiting friends and support groups- normally available in the University- was no longer available. During the first week of 'hard lockdown', the impact of restricting the physical movement of our citizens raised concerns about the safety of women, with more than 2 000 GBV complaints having been registered from 27 March 2020 until 31 March 2020 (South African Police Services, 2020).

During the 2020 lockdown, when students were sent home, there was a recorded increase in the number of students reporting cases involving third party offenders ( or offenders who are not affiliated with the university in any way) (Nelson Mandela University, 2020). This increase in third-party offenders on student cases was recorded alongside an expected decrease of student-on-student cases (Nelson Mandela University, 2020). Typically student-on-student cases usually occur most frequently given the social activities that students partake in within the precinct of a residential university (Nelson Mandela University, 2020).

Increasingly support staff have found their role being that of intervening in cases that have occurred within the homes and communities of students, as students increasingly turn to the university to provide support, such as counselling services.

A study conducted by the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (2016) details how violence has become a norm in many South African communities and homes. Violence is often experienced at the hands of guardians, parents, or family members. The Soul City Institute (2015) reports that power dynamics in the home exposes students who are dependent on parents or guardians to violence. Moreover, because GBV is not always understood as a valid form of violence in the communities students belong to, incidents are under-reported and perpetrators often go unpunished.

The University space itself is not without its own threats to safety; the primary difference is our ability to provide support, should a GBV incident occur and to also proactively conduct anti-GBV awareness campaigns aimed at enhancing the understanding of what constitutes GBV and also to change the mindsets of the University community. Examples of such interventions include Nelson Mandela University's MEMEZA anti-GBV campaign which aims to combat violence in the university space through discussion (Nelson Mandela University, 2020). Another example is the Singamadoda Campaign which seeks to promote positive masculinity (Nelson Mandela University, 2020). These initiatives have since had to move onto virtual platforms to continue.

GBV support persons have had to adapt to a new and virtual way of conducting engagement. Support and advocacy work have been moved to online platforms such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams, WhatsApp, Emails, Facebook, and phone calls. A colleague in one of the consultations that have culminated into this paper noted, with frustration, how GBV support staff have always functioned with the tacit assumption that face-to-face interaction would always be possible. As such, the role of the support person has become more complex, with the drastic changes to their work-life giving rise to stress and anxiety, as once noted by Magogodi (2017).

## **Changes brought by COVID-19**

Resoundingly, colleagues agree that it has been difficult to offer support during the Covid-19 lockdown. Most times connectivity during online sessions is unstable when the video camera is activated during a session. Without being able to visually observe the client, it is difficult for support persons to read the body language and non-verbal cues during sessions. This makes it hard for the support person to have confidence in the quality of their interventions. Some students find expressing themselves fully via these online platforms difficult, while others feel more at ease not being visible to the support person.

Most students do not have access to private spaces in their homes for them to access the online support in a manner fitting for the confidential content they need to share. In face-to-face sessions, the support person can guarantee privacy which makes it more comfortable to share. As such, the online process impedes the client's comfort thus slowing down the process of getting help.

Occupational health employees who interface with employees are deemed essential personnel. Occupational health employees detail that even though they have been working from the office since the start of the lockdown, their operations have changed. The work has been affected because other employees that they work with, as well as clients, are working from home. In a study conducted to build a framework for online counselling, Chipise, Wassenar and Wilkinson's (2018) identified several hurdles to the online counselling process, such as not being able to adequately form a connection with the client, the increased risk of interruption of clients by third parties and difficulty in finding a common language. Be that as it may, students are reaching out for support whether it be concerning GBV incidents or the anxiety created by the uncertainty that the impact the lockdown will have on their studies.

We have observed an increase in the number of male students requesting support during Covid-19 lockdown, relative to pre-lockdown times. This trend shows that mental health challenges are impacting both male and female students. This trend discredits two myths. Firstly, that males ignore or deny their feelings and, secondly, that seeking psychosocial support is regarded as a feminine weakness. This trend is contrary to the findings reported by Charteris-Black and Seale (2009: 84) where they report that "Men conceal their emotions and avoid revealing themselves as vulnerable in their quest to maintain a self-presentation of themselves as masculine."

## **Lesbian Gays Bisexual Transgender Intersex (LGBTI) Persons during Lockdown**

When students leave their homes for University, the expectation is that they will be able to experience freedom and comfort in their own identity. However, living in a community of students has meant the University space itself is not immune to homophobic attacks.

Pre-Covid-19 LGBTI anti-violence campaigns and LGBTI conversations promoting equality, inclusivity, and dignity were conducted on an ongoing basis. These interventions were aimed at forming an LGBTI community within the University and creating an inclusive residence environment (Nelson Mandela University, 2020). Munyuki and Vincent (2017) found that LGBTI students' experience of residence culture was varied, with some finding the space to be comforting, free, and secure, while others experienced alienation, discomfort, and a sense of not belonging.

During the Covid-19 lockdown period, the residence system has become a cocoon for those LGBTI students who remained behind, unable to go elsewhere to avoid homophobia from their residence mates. Students who normally spent their day going to lectures and campus events, no longer benefit from these differential spaces available to them. Despite ongoing awareness programs having moved to virtual platforms, the effectiveness of these online interventions is difficult to gauge. Other students who have left for home are unable to participate in LGBTI conversations because of data constraints and connectivity challenges. The inability to connect exacerbates the feeling of loneliness that lockdown has brought to everyone which was particularly pronounced in the case of LGBTI persons who often live in home environments where they must hide their sexuality. In a study on Queer youth in South Africa, Nell and Shapiro (2011) indicate that many LGBTI persons experience emotional isolation, rejection, and eviction from their homes.

## **Concluding Remarks**

The University has not been exempt from the trend of the rising number of GBV cases during the lockdown. However, this rise has manifested itself in rising numbers of cases between members of the university community and third-party offenders. As such, the role of GBV support staff must be tailored and expanded. This is necessary to assist GBV support persons to deal adequately with the need to provide support for students to engage the academic imperative from their homes- in the absence of the cocoon that the University at times provides from the issues of the home.

While this paper has noted the various challenges of the use of virtual platforms for advocacy and support including the absence of a guarantee of privacy in the homes of clients and an inability to read non-verbal cues- the virtual landscape has also provided many opportunities- including the increased presence of males in GBV discussions.

Resoundingly, consultations with support staff show that their greatest fear is the inability to fully support their clients- in the ways that face-to-face consultations allow. This fear was exacerbated by their unfamiliarity with the full extent of the challenges our students continue to grapple with, thus making it difficult to plan appropriate interventions. To cope with these challenges it is necessary for the support given to staff to take a more proactive approach- towards supporting GBV support staff through these changes in their role.

Post Covid-19 will necessitate the continuation of both virtual and physical interaction with students. This must be done to maintain the benefits of virtual interaction, while face-to-face sessions will decrease the stress and anxiety experienced by support staff during virtual sessions. For clients preferring online counselling sessions, the online sessions will remain an option they can elect to utilise. In these changing times, we must endeavour at all times to maintain a high service quality while remaining flexible

and relevant in the provision of support to ensure that we empower our students and staff as they process the trauma of their personal GBV experiences and eventually achieve what they were intended to accomplish in their lives.

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# The 'New Normal': Staying at Home is Less than Ideal for Numerous Students: A Queer Take<sup>5</sup>

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## Abstract

This paper predominantly investigates the impact that Covid-19 has on higher education, focusing specifically on social vulnerabilities, queer experiences, African feminism(s), and gendered inequalities. Analysis of a significant number of online articles is utilised as methodology including semi-formal interviews with a few students. The results show the following: (1) going online will lead to a perpetuation of learning inequalities; (2) most universities might fail to facilitate online teaching with immediate effect due to infrastructural constraints; (3) vulnerable communities and university peripheral groups are mostly affected and excluded; and (4) the family home environment for most students (e.g., queer students, women at risk and young girls) is hazardous and not conducive for a fulfilling experience of social interaction and learning. Although these can be difficult challenges of our times, it is also an opportunity for universities to practice flexibility and social justice to demonstrate that students are treated with humanity. A pedagogy of compassion and support should be explored to mitigate these challenges in the immediate future.

**Keywords:** Covid-19, South African Universities, Higher Education, Vulnerable Communities, Students, Women, Queer Students

## Introduction

While some South African citizens are just experiencing a few inconveniences due to lockdown restrictions. For some, particularly university students, their lives have been disturbed. Fear and uncertainty continue to ripple through South African universities. This makes it difficult to tell with precision of what remains to be done to secure a successful completion of the academic year. For various students, this pandemic did not only result in an inconvenience where they miss out on-campus activities or experiences but it led to possible dropouts indefinitely.

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The higher education minister, Blade Nzimande announced on the *Covid-19 protocols* (2020) on SABC News, on 9 June 2020 that, “beyond the coronavirus pandemic, the education sector must embrace technology as a method of learning and teaching”.

While online teaching may seem a sensible option under the prevailing circumstances, it is most unlikely to accommodate all the students, particularly the underprivileged groups. Even for students who might be privileged, learning online may be a difficult exercise as well. Given that computers and internet facilities at home are either limited or in higher demand from all household members who need to communicate and search for opportunities.

Below is a discussion on a few themes that are of great concern with regards to the outbreak of Covid-19 in the higher education spectrum. Firstly, I will discuss the social vulnerabilities that have been exposed by this pandemic at large. This is followed by a discussion on queer experiences before and during this time of the pandemic. The third theme will focus on African feminism and its views concerning the pandemic, and what it means for women and young girls. The last theme involves a brief discussion on gendered inequalities that existed before the pandemic, which are now exacerbated.

## **Methodology**

Amidst the outbreak of the pandemic, as noted earlier, most countries, including South Africa went on lockdown. Furthermore, doing research had to be limited by the restrictions that came with Covid-19. This meant that I could mostly rely on media coverage. I initiated my research by going through a variety of online articles that were circulating concerning the pandemic. I also drew my research from personal experiences.

Human contact is still not advised for safety purposes, meaning that interviews are mostly done virtually. I was able to speak with a few female postgraduate students over the phone. The interviewees wished to remain anonymous. They reside in Zwede, Gqeberha. One of them is currently studying towards her master's degree at Nelson Mandela University. I decided to speak to her because she falls under the university peripheral group and I wanted an insight into her experiences on studying at home during the pandemic.

After the data collection process, I had a mountain of data that had to be analysed from these different sources I have stipulated. I divided the online articles according to the themes I am focusing on – which are young queer women's experiences under the pandemic in universities.

The live news interviews were quite a few, four to be exact, and they were already based on a specific theme. I have used these for context, regarding the state of the country

and its universities during the outbreak. Lastly, the use of a one-on-one snowball interviewing method for this paper brings an insight directly from a student who faces issues discussed in the paper. The convergence of these two pieces of data helped triangulate the data altogether to anchor its validity.

## **Social Vulnerabilities**

A member of the SAUS (South African Union of Students), Bongani Mahlangu, on a *live zoom interview* on SABC news (2020) 04 May, expressed his disappointment to what the Minister had announced. He claims that the minister disregarded the internal discussions between them as an organisation and the Minister, which stressed that no individual institution or student should be left behind.

He continues stating that going online will lead to a perpetuation of inequality. He urges that the regulators should come up with certain conditions that will ensure that inequality within the sector does not grow. He further mentions that the primary conversation should be inequality, not online learning. He also states that they should devise an inclusive pedagogy.

Most universities might fail to facilitate online teaching with immediate effect due to resource and infrastructural constraints (Mahlangu 2020). Numerous students do not have access to laptops and the internet at their homes. Also, what will happen to those students whose courses cannot be taught online? Falling into this category are students who have to conduct laboratory experiments, practical and art performances. And how will the universities assure the quality of online teaching in concurrence with the value-for-money notion? These are some of the modalities that universities will have to consider attentively in moving the direction of online teaching.

With regards to students' assessment and evaluation methods under the online arrangement, Bongani Mahlangu urges higher institutions to reconfigure the curriculum during the migration to online teaching. At this point, most universities are still vague about how they will facilitate first semester examinations. Continuous assessments are also likely to carry on alongside online teaching, something that will also be difficult to endure for most students.

The complicated scenario for most universities right now is finding out methods of administering the outstanding tasks, assignment projects and other continuous assessments (Mahlangu 2020). The member of the SAUS suggests a shift from summative assessments to formative assessments.

What the speaker illustrates above is that without in contact teaching and learning, not residing in residents, and the environment being conducive at home - several students will struggle to study from where they originate from. This is due to subjective distractions (e.g., crowded with rowdy incumbents) and technological deficiencies.

Other students are in social constructs that do not allow adequate academic participation altogether.

Peripheral groups, such as international students, final-year students, postgraduate students, students with mental disabilities and special needs are expected to perform at a certain level to articulate and move to honours or masters. Some students, apart from those funded by the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) are funded by private entities that require them to obtain high grades to sustain their scholarships. Failure to meet these requirements poses a threat to them losing their funding schemes.

The impact is even worse for cash-paying students. Some are likely to graduate late due to the postponements. This poses a serious risk to their career prospects. The other challenge relates to the stranded international students who cannot move back to their home countries at this critical time due to lockdown restrictions on international travel.

It has also become a great challenge for administrators to ensure food, accommodation and safety service for students. All these challenges ought to serve as a wake-up call to all university authorities - where tough interventions need to be taken, and be taken urgently. At this time, every university ought to be looking into devising a crisis response plan that is framed on equitable assistance to ensure that students and their qualifications are not prematurely compromised.

On 16 August 2020 I conducted a virtual interview with one of my participants and she stated the following:

*I am stuck in the location in an environment that is not study friendly. The uncertainties brought by this pandemic are making it hard to stay motivated and do my work. People in our homes are losing jobs and their lives. It is traumatic and that does not allow any room for positivity. Chasing a degree amidst all of this is by far the worst experience. You lose yourself and the motivation to do anything which also impacts our mental health. Another challenge is finding work as if it was not hard pre-pandemic it is more difficult now especially for young women*

In South Africa, vulnerable communities are highly burdened. As Covid-19 magnifies these existing issues, bear in mind, home for most students is unsafe and inconducive. Some households are not pleasant and the university is supposedly an escape from many aspects including discrimination, poverty and abuse. The passage above supports this argument. Both interviews address the social vulnerabilities exposed by this pandemic. They address inequality, social vulnerabilities and the gendered patterns of disengagement from the teaching and learning programme of the university as a result of Covid-19 regulations.

## Queer Experiences

In a country where there are already limited accounts that celebrate queer bodies and the way they embody and occupy urban space, circumstances have worsened for this group. During the pandemic, especially as the poor and working-class face greater risks, the LGBTQIA+ community is at the intersection of multiple vulnerable disadvantages, with those who are immunocompromised, living with HIV/AIDS, unemployed, those who are homeless, refugees and others who are forced to live with homophobic family members undergoing the most trouble. Even within non-governmental organisations, funding very rarely prioritises these kinds of social problems for this community.

For queer students, this means more time with their homophobic parents, relatives and community. They are separated from their peers, who are also their support system. Given that the majority of them come out to their peers than their parents for socio-emotional support, they now find themselves spending more time with their disconnected families and are feeling more isolated. This can trigger anxiety and ultimately impact their mental health.

With campuses closed many had to leave residences and are now stuck in abusive spaces. Whether they are out or not, being in a lockdown period with a family that is not accepting or oblivious to the person you are is immensely terrifying for many. They cannot be themselves entirely, having to change the way they speak or dress. They can no longer seek safety at school, work or with friends. There is no easy way to preserve them.

The LGBTQI+ community was already at the margins before the regulations of the pandemic were initiated. As with any socio-economic phenomenon, it is always the marginalised populations who are hit the hardest. Now they are mostly at risk considering the use of Covid-19 to stifle queer rights. This community is most likely to lose their social services and livelihoods and face possible displacement.

The housing issue is a huge problem that queer individuals face. This is not a new conversation. The effects of Covid-19 add a different element to the frustrating experiences of queer people currently. The pandemic has worsened homelessness. Having a safe place to call home and having access to love ones that understand their identities is not always the case.

While NGOs attempt to bridge the gap between the needs of the community and the actual service government provides, this is a systemic issue. Worse still, even the services that the government does provide often result in incredibly traumatic experiences for queer individuals who can access them. The majority of healthcare

providers they have access to are not necessarily part of the community. They lack context, understanding and empathy.

Accessing general healthcare often comes with trauma and discrimination against the community. Trans-identifying individuals cannot access specialists they need as easily now. Those without updated ID documents, affirming gender markers find this even more difficult. Many are dead-named, misgendered and ill-treated, this becomes a problem when such a large part of the population cannot access healthcare because they are aware of the trauma involved in doing so from state institutions.

## **African Feminism**

From an African feminist viewpoint, it is essential for a proactive response with care to the challenges faced by young women amid this pandemic. The officials that make key decisions regarding women's lives are mostly men. And I suppose it does not occur to them how these decisions impact women's lives in South Africa daily. So, it is up to us as South African women to fight against these institutionalised inequalities.

President Cyril Ramaphosa's *Covid-19 State Address* SABC News, dated 17 June 2020, announced that Gender-Based Violence (GBV) and Covid-19 are parallel pandemics in South Africa. When people are confined indoors with large families with no privacy and high-stress levels, substance abuse is likely to occur as a coping mechanism. This ultimately leads to violent outbreaks.

Women who are at risk find it difficult to escape a dangerous situation due to movement restrictions. As distancing measures are put in place, and people are encouraged to stay at home, the risk of intimate partner violence is likely to increase. Women who are already in abusive relationships and their children will be further exposed to this social crisis. As families spend more time in close contact with additional stress and potential economic or job losses, women may have less contact with other family members and friends who may provide support and protection from violence.

## **Gendered Inequalities**

Women remain at the mercy of capitalist exploitation and patriarchal injustices. With an upsurge in unpaid care work, child care and domestic violence, especially in developing countries. With women's employment mostly at the bottom of the supply chain and informal sectors characterised by precariousness and lower wages, the effects of the pandemic are evidently not gender-neutral.

Therefore, a more gender-mainstreaming of social responses and interventions by various actors should be explored. Eventually, the gendered division of labour places the burden of unpaid care work solely on women. Whilst women in the informal sector

face challenges related to child care and a potential collapse of businesses due to closure of some markets, the women in the formal sector also have to deal with job losses and pay cuts.

Staying home for young girls means more time with their toxic mothers, abusive partners, parents and relatives. More time doing house chores, resulting in less time for school work. The gender digital divide in the Southern African region ordinarily discourages gender equality and entrenches the discrimination of marginalised and at-risk groups. Within the context of a global pandemic, the pervasiveness of existing inequalities and structures of discrimination are magnified. Perhaps the time has come for a feminist access to the internet.

## **Concluding Remarks**

In these unprecedented times, no one holds the right answers. The structure of these institutions themselves was hit hard. The sectors of the economy that are most vulnerable are being disrupted the most. Which have not had much disruption in a hundred years, and that is health care and higher education.

Part of the reasons why higher education is being disrupted derives from it being built on systems that are not adaptable or humanising. This pandemic has exposed the key vulnerabilities of higher education institutions. These include the wastage that universities incur from keeping bloated administrations and infrastructure that is generally underutilised, such as very high operating leverage, lots of fixed assets, unoccupied buildings, parking spaces, administratively tedious services, and traditional dining halls. These services and spaces should be re-evaluated in light of the pandemic's technological demands for purposes of minimising their costs and optimising their usage in order for the new returns to be redirected towards gender services in higher education.

Since going online, South African universities specifically have had to quickly build resilient systems. This still poses a lot of challenges for the institutions and the students respectively. This is the perfect opportunity for universities to practice flexibility and demonstrate their forever-sung chorus of “students’ interest remains our key priority”. Among urgent interventions that need to be considered are to provide the students in need, as far as they can, with the requisite support for them to participate in the projected online teaching optimally.

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**PART TWO**  
**Teaching and Learning Inequalities**

# Development and Implementation of Effective Online Teaching and Learning by Public Universities during Covid-19: Challenges and Opportunities<sup>6</sup>

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## Abstract

During the Covid-19 period most South African public universities developed comprehensive strategies for online teaching and learning systems. Despite the benefits of online learning, there are challenges that need to be addressed to increase and enhance the effectiveness of online teaching and learning. This review discussed current opportunities and challenges that hinder the effective adoption and development of online teaching and learning by higher education institutions. This paper exposes a number of reasons for the limited achievements of remote online teaching and learning, which related to e-learning infrastructural development, inequalities, support and funding. Finally, the paper recommends that the government must fulfil its commitment to support students, especially rural students, by providing services such as electricity needed for online teaching and learning – including resources such as laptops and adequate data for online learning. In addition, the university should promote understanding and training in the use of ICT's among staff and students.

**Keywords:** *Online teaching and learning; government; public universities*

## Introduction

Stringent regulations such as national lockdowns and social distancing programs have been adopted by governments' worldwide in an effort to prevent the spread of Covid-19 (Ali, 2020). The outbreak of Covid-19 was unexpected and has led many universities to choose to minimise the spread of Covid-19 by opting for online learning (Lei, 2020; Ali, 2020). As of March 13, 61 countries - in Africa, Asia, Europe, the Middle East, North America and South America had implemented possible 'lockdowns', and most universities have imposed localised closures (UNESCO, 2020). On 5 March 2020, South African government announced the first confirmed case of Covid-19, and a month or so later (5 April 2020), the number of confirmed cases increased to 1585.

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<sup>6</sup> **Reference:** Ramolobe, K, S. (2020). Development and Implementation of Effective Online Teaching and Learning by Public Universities during Covid-19: Challenges and Opportunities. *The Perspective Online*. 2(1-2). pp.37-45.

The number of confirmed cases in South Africa increased to 3953 as of 23 April 2020, with 75 associated deaths (Mahaye, 2020). This resulted in the immediate closure of education of all public universities in South Africa to avoid the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic, and most of these institutions have developed comprehensive strategies for online teaching and learning systems. The Covid-19 pandemic made a rapid change from face-to-face learning to remote teaching and learning. The Covid-19 pandemic has changed the way in which universities operates, and the leadership responsibilities and obligations across faculties and departments (Gigliotti, 2020).

The purpose of this paper is to assess the development and implementation of effective online teaching and learning by public universities during Covid-19. The introduction of online learning presented higher institutions in South Africa with different challenges. For instance, students from rural areas do not have access to internet connection and certain students are living in environments that are entirely unfavourable to learning, such as overcrowded homes with inadequate or unacceptable facilities. Studies in different environments (such as Mahaye, 2020; Gigliotti, 2020; Ali, 2020) provide evidence of the impact of the Covid-19 on education but leave the gap to assess the development and implementation of effective online teaching and learning by public institution during covid-19. This study, therefore, seeks to extend research on the impact of Covid-19 on higher institutions in South Africa. The article begins with the discussion on the development and implementation of online learning and teaching during covid-19. This include the strategies initiated by different nations to combat this virus. Furthermore, the article will look at the effect of Covid-19 on public institutions, and the public institutions approach on online learning and teaching during Covid-19. Lastly, the article will discuss the challenges of online teaching and learning.

## **Development and Implementation of Online Learning and Teaching during Covid-19**

Covid-19 began to spread exponentially worldwide, causing over 3000 deaths in its first month of spreading on the global North (Huang, Liu, Tlili, Yang, & Wang, 2020). Subsequently, many nations began initiating related strategies to combat this virus. As of March 12, 2020, 46 countries on five different continents declared closures of schools and universities to contain the spread of Covid-19 (Huang et al, 2020). This led to government and tertiary institutions around the world to introduce new policies to continue teaching practices during Covid-19 (Ali, 2020). However, there was confusion and disagreement about what to teach and how to teach (Zhang, Wangg, & Wang, 2020). Huang, Liu, Tlili, Yang, and Wang (2020) suggest that governments and education providers need to further encourage the creation of educational knowledge, consider equipping teachers and students with structured home-based teaching and learning facilities, undertaking online teacher training and promoting academic research on online education , in particular education, to assist students with online education. While the long-term effect of the pandemic on universities is

uncertain, the short-term impact is significant, including the cancellation of face-to-face classes and university activities, dramatic changes to remote emergency teaching and restrictions on travel for students and staff (Concerned Academic Staff, 2020).

Despite the benefits of online learning, there are issues that need to be tackled to increase and boost the quality of online teaching and learning. Bao (2020) conducted a report in China on Covid-19 and online higher education teaching. Bao (2020) argued in her study that shifting all the current courses online in a matter of days is a huge, and disruptive move. As online courses require, an extensive lesson plan design, teaching materials such as audio and video content, as well as technology support teams. However, most faculty members are facing the challenges of missing online teaching expertise, early training, or help from educational technology teams (Bao, 2020). Academic staff have raised concerns about the consequences of remote teaching and how the higher education sector has not taken full account of the situation of the disadvantaged (Concerned Academic Staff, 2020). A research on Teaching Teachers-E-Learning in Further Education for Lecturers in Higher Education was conducted by Edinger, Reimer, and van der Viles (2013). In their research, Edinger et al (2013) have described some of the teaching difficulties that lecturers would face when introducing online teaching in higher education. First, lecturers and students would have difficulty understanding how a particular new tool works. Secondly, the lecturers would need to figure out how educationally they can incorporate the associated teaching and learning content. The final challenge could be that the related tools, such as learning management systems, would require lecturers and students to be competent.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, large-scale, national attempts to use technology in support of remote learning, distance education and online learning are emerging and developing rapidly. Literature addresses such shortcomings, such as the vulnerability of the online teaching infrastructure, the inexperience of teachers, the knowledge deficit, and the dynamic home climate (Murgatrod, 2020). Wikramanayake, (2005); Khan et al., (2012) provides the following advantages of developing and implementing online learning:

- i. Provides teachers with access to vast tools
- ii. Provides learners with access to unlimited learning opportunities that can improve the capacity and confidence of learners
- iii. Teachers and learners can carry out learning wherever they are without the typical need to come together.
- iv. It enhances collaborative engagement between teachers and learners, which enhances the confidence and success of learners.
- v. Immediate evaluation feedback of assessment is reported to students
- vi. Teachers act as facilitators while learners are permitted to participatively build their own information (Wikramanayake, 2005; Khan et al., 2012).

Despite these advantages, though, the present situation demands action in such a manner that student education is by no means compromised. For instance, during Covid-19 lockdown, China launched a Suspending Classes Without Stopping Learning policy to see that learning was not affected at any time (Zhang et al., 2020). This is one of the measures put in place by China to see that during the nationwide lockdown and school closures, student learning was least affected.

## **The Effect of Covid-19 on Public Institutions**

The South African government has imposed stringent lockdowns across South Africa to flatten the curve. Fowler, Hill, Levin, and Obradovich (2020) report that in order to curb the spread of Covid-19, lockdown is successful, but it has a huge economic impact. Lockdown includes the closing of businesses and the suspension of jobs (except those deemed critical services) and the closing of schools (Mahaye, 2020). Educational institutions in South Africa were temporarily closed in March 2020 to track the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic (Mahaye, 2020). Despite the temporary closure of higher institutions in South Africa, Dr Blade Nzimande, Minister of Higher Education and Training, has announced that it would be possible to allow up to 66 percent of students to return to university campuses under Level-2 of the lockdown. This has been achieved in terms of the comprehensive Covid-19 management plans in effect across the institutions of learning in South Africa (South Africa Department of Higher Education and Training, 2020). This was motivated by the number of Covid-19 recoveries in South Africa.

The recovery rate was 591 208 in August 2020, which corresponds to a recovery rate of 89.3 percent

<b>Province</b>	<b>Total Deaths</b>	<b>Total Recoveries</b>	<b>Active Cases</b>
Eastern Cape	3079	84108	1018
Free State	838	29093	14360
Gauteng	4039	193429	20017
KwaZulu-Natal	2532	108063	7238
Limpopo	362	13756	603
Mpumalanga	496	25156	873
North West	341	24101	3745
Northern Cape	184	11541	3438
Western Cape	4121	101961	3444
National	15992	591208	54736

**Source: Department of Health., 2020**

## **Public Institutions approach of Online Learning and Teaching during Covid-19**

Institutions have been introducing return initiatives for their own students in accordance with their teaching and learning and campus preparation plans, and up to 33 percent of students have returned to campus under Level 3. Depending on their background and preparation, and in line with their own comprehensive institutional plans and strategies, each institution has taken a different approach to the risk-adjusted, phased-in return (Department of Higher Education and Training South Africa, 2020).

The total number of positive Covid-19 cases reported by higher institutions in South Africa as from 6 August 2020.

	<b>Staff</b>	<b>Students</b>	<b>Total</b>
Institutions	975	577	1552

**Source:** Department of Higher Education and Training South Africa, 2020

Although problems remain in the system, all universities have made substantial progress in their teaching and learning strategies and campus protection strategies, including the introduction of various remote learning methods, the delivery of devices and data to students, the delivery of learning materials directly to students in other ways, training staff, frequent contact with staff and students, and adhering to protocols that keep staff and students safe on campuses and in residences (Department of Higher Education and Training South Africa, 2020). For example, the University of Nelson Mandela has adopted the teaching and teaching approach below.



Source: Nelson Mandela University (2020)

The above approaches of Nelson Mandela University was informed by:

- “The fact that we were planning and continue to plan in a vacuum, as there are many unknowns. This has necessitated the generation of different scenarios with a view to remaining agile and being prepared to go back to the drawing board to revise our plans in this unprecedented, uncertain, fluid time.
- Our unwavering commitment to provide all our students with learning and teaching opportunities and support to complete the 2020 academic year despite the trying times that the country faces – #NoStudentLeftBehind.
- The differing contexts, circumstances and needs of our students, and especially the challenges students might experience to learn remotely.
- The core values of our university. In particular, as we traverse these uncharted waters, we committed to excellence, social justice and equality, and integrity, as the core values that underpinned our planning process” (Nelson Mandela University, 2020).

## **Challenges of Online Teaching and Learning**

In an effort to curb the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic, most governments worldwide have temporarily closed educational institutions. Hundreds of millions of students are affected by these countrywide closures (UNESCO, 2020). Although the reported cases of Covid-19 and associated deaths in African countries have been low compared to other continents, due to the economic and technological backwardness of most African countries (UNESCO, 2020), it is expected that the education of an African child will be the most affected after the Covid-19 period. A research conducted by Hedding, Greve, Breetzke, Nel, and van Vuuren, (2020) found that many higher education institutions had to scramble to put study material for students online because of Covid-19. Out of necessity, contact universities have had to develop innovative and flexible ways to offer both theory and practical components to students, and find alternative forms of formative (and most likely summative) assessment. Academic staff, however, usually have little, if any, expertise or education in pedagogy or online learning delivery. Academics with teaching duties would also have to upskill and rapidly become acquainted with online learning platforms and everything they include, including increased administration (Hedding et al, 2020).

In Botswana, Moakofhi, Leteane, Phiri, Pholele, & Sebalatlheng (2017) carried out a research at the University of Agriculture and Natural Resources of Botswana on the challenges of implementing e-learning. Moakofhi et al., (2017) has identified the following challenges on online learning and teaching: weak infrastructure (constant power outages, inadequate computer labs, and weak Internet services), inadequate IT support, lack of e-learning policies, and lack of support for university management. Furthermore, Islam, Beer, and Slack (2015) classify the challenges associated with a university's implementation of online learning into five categories: pedagogical e-learning, styles and culture of learning, professional preparation, and difficulties in time management.

Online learning presents higher learning institutions in South Africa with different challenges. For instance, many students from lower socio-economic backgrounds have no internet connection or cannot afford connectivity due to the lack of network coverage, even though universities have made data accessible. There is also a recognition that certain students are living in environments that are entirely unfavorable to learning, such as overcrowded homes with inadequate or unacceptable facilities (USAf, 2020). Hedding et al (2020) wrote that they do nothing to support students living in rural areas where electricity supply is erratic and network coverage is low despite all these remedial efforts.

## **Conclusion and Recommendations**

A review of literature was conducted to identify the challenges and opportunities related to development and implementation of online learning and teaching by public

institutions. The paper confirms the impact of Covid-19 on the academic year of public institutions in South Africa. Public institutions have shifted most of the existing courses online in a matter of days because of Covid-19. Furthermore, the paper has delineated some of the most challenges and obstacles relates to the implementation of the online learning and teaching. Amongst the challenges highlighted by the study was the challenge that lecturers and students will experience challenges of learning how a specific new tool works. Some significant avenues for future studies have been established by the paper. This will involve carrying out an empirical analysis to investigate the effects of Covid-19 on public institutions' learning and teaching. The paper also recommends that ICT and e-learning infrastructure should be expanded to promote students' and staff members' access to e-learning environments; staff members should be regularly trained in e-learning skills; and, finally, the government must fulfill its commitment to supporting students, especially rural students, by providing services such as electricity.

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# Digitisation of Teaching and Learning Systems during Covid-19: Evaluating the Presiding Impacts of Web-Based Learning on Underprivileged Students<sup>7</sup>

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## Abstract

(Savan, 2020) Western modelling of local knowledge management systems only widens the already prevailing social, cultural, political, economic, and epistemic gaps in a society. Due to COVID-19, most of the universities in South Africa have been shut down. Either the educational institutions are lacking basic amenities like laptops, desktops, and internet connections, or if they are equipped with these facilities, an issue of poor internet connection exists, or the tutors are unaware of its usage. So, before we celebrate this rapid process of digitisation as a phenomenon of global inclusivity to salvage the academic year, it is important for us to address these questions: - Who are its beneficiaries, is it inclusive or under the mask of inclusivity, is it only preserving the colonial hierarchies of knowledge management in the present era?

**Keywords:** *Digitisation, inclusive higher education, Covid-19, transformation, equity*

## Introduction

South Africa's education system is complex, with historical inequalities dating back to apartheid. Most of the country's students come from disadvantaged backgrounds and as the Covid-19 crisis has revealed, there's a huge digital divide at play. This article will address decolonisation in the curriculum, balancing the interest between "equality and equity" regarding access to learning resources during this pandemic, an issue that needs to be objectively assessed to give effect to the constitutional right to education as contained in section 29. This paper will evaluate two topics, namely, equality and the virtual classroom. The last paragraph being the concluding remarks.

## Equality

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<sup>7</sup> **Reference:** Mqina, C., & Thoriso, L. (2020). Digitisation of Teaching and Learning Systems during Covid-19: Evaluating the Presiding Impacts of Web-Based Learning on Underprivileged Students. *The Perspective Online*. 2(1-2). pp.46-49.

The impact of apartheid on South African education is clear to see. Surprisingly, after more than 20 years into democracy, the restoration of change is moderate. A fortunate few receive a world-class education and for the majority, basic education remains a bid rather than reality. The usage of the terms equality and equity has led to a great loss in their interpretation. The meaning of the two terms differs, even though they are mostly applied simultaneously. Section 9 of the Constitution suggests equivalency in the eyes of the law, which means treating everyone equally and the provision of access to the same opportunities. On the other hand, equity promotes fairness and equal representation by race, class, gender etc in those same opportunities thus amplifying the previously mentioned social, cultural, political, economic, and epistemic gaps in a society.

In the wake of the Covid-19-propelled public health crisis, schools particularly higher institutions, are turning to online learning. Technology presents a huge opportunity to engage students to continue with their studies. However, online education poses a great challenge regarding the administrative aspects of learning together with the unique challenges students are faced with.

It should be noted here that missing from all the narratives of online education is the question of equity and equality, the cornerstone of the Constitution of South Africa (1996). The aim of the two words regarding education, is the provision of equal education opportunities to all citizens irrespective of caste, class, gender and religion etc. Section 29 of the Constitution provides for equal access to educational institutions maintained by the state, without discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, and language. Similarly, the South African School Act 108 of 1996, mandates to provide equitable quality education to everyone.

However, all the efforts of the government to facilitate education processes during the pandemic draws attention to the fact that the milieu of public/government education system, and low fee private school or affordable private schools, are out of the purview of government initiatives of online education. Less consideration has been given regarding disadvantaged communities in the sense that the stark realities of social inequalities and resources have been bulldozed to oblivion.

Moreover, the pandemic has put the spotlight on the ever-increasing structural imbalances in school education in terms of rural-urban, rich, and poor and gender divide. Some schools are struggling with resources and the necessary skills learners and educators need for online learning. Some of the insights emerging from this scenario are the gaps in addressing the needs of students as well as teachers belonging to the marginalised sections of society. Inclusivity is the hallmark of the National Curriculum Framework as well as the draft National Education Policy but even so, when it comes to the needs posed by the repercussions of the pandemic, the marginalised sections of society are being neglected.

The shift from a traditional to a virtual classroom has only proven that though we are free from the colonial rule, the injustices of the past have not fully been remedied. Class and social standing still determine who suffers specific disadvantages, and equality in this sense, merely suggests empathy and tolerance for a specific group and palliates prejudice and discrimination towards that specific group.

## **The Virtual Classroom**

The virtual classroom has widened the inequalities and disadvantages faced in higher education. Virtual means something that is in effect and not in form. The traditional classroom addresses the needs of the students in relation to social interaction and psychological security. If you do not understand or know the answer to something, that can simply be rectified by raising your hand and voicing your concerns. The virtual classroom, however, is the opposite. Originally created to engage students in activities, to provide direct interaction between the students and the lecturers and the provision of instant feedback, this does not seem to be the case. In some cases, a lecturer may respond instantly but due to network problems, the message is delayed on the receiving hand. This has created a huge controversy regarding who stands to benefit from this. Only those with access to a proper connection and conducive environments can complete their work. This alternative medium has brought to the fore some stark persistent realities of South African society characterised by social inequalities in terms of availability of resources, essential to access these online classes/platforms. These digital initiatives are perpetuating the hegemony of elite schools over the education system, resulting in the digital divide between rural and urban and rich and poor.

Even though technology currently proves to be the best option for learning, poverty, migration, home environments and other related factors continue to plague learning. The education system is destined to face an array of issues post Covid-19. These range from a new burden on government schools due to influx of students from low fee private schools, as many of them will no longer be able to afford to pay for education due to financial constraints. All these hardships are going to affect students immensely.

## **Concluding remarks**

The South African social setting already overshadows the section 9 right to equality due to the extreme gap in our living circumstances, the different opportunities presented to us. No right is absolute, but education should be a tool to bridge that gap. Instead of a solution that discriminates against students who come from areas where the virtual classroom is less effective, a solution based on inclusivity and equity should be incorporated. No one wants to feel as though someone is doing them a favour by providing them the opportunity to get an education.

Given the above, the government should come forward with a policy perspective on post Covid-19 response to education. This should entail a plan to address the specific academic needs and psycho-social needs of children once they return to school as well as strategies to mitigate Covid-19 induced issues relating to the management of schools, addressing emerging learning gaps among children, and training of teachers to use principles of blended learning flipped classroom. Such plans that clarify where to use low as well as high tech educational solutions which will also prepare the government to combat any post Covid-19 crisis such as conflict, natural disaster, or pollution.

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## **PART THREE**

### **Community Innovations, Science and Social Resilience**

# The Severity and Complexity of the Negative Impacts of Covid-19 on the Economy, Food Security, and Household Sustainability in the Townships of South Africa<sup>8</sup>

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## Abstract

The paper concentrates on the severity and complexity of the negative impacts of Covid-19 on the economy, food security, and household sustainability in the townships in South Africa. I argue that since South Africa is one of the countries with the highest levels of economic and social inequality in the world, the impacts of Covid-19 are much more severe and complex in the townships than in urban areas in many ways and for various reasons - including among other things, the high rate of illiteracy, unemployment, lack of proper sanitation, infrastructure and health care facilities in the townships. Covid-19 is obliterating the township economies that long existed in the margins of the macroeconomy prior to its outbreak. Food insecurity is one of the most pressing issues in many South African townships and with the outbreak of Covid-19 it has been unnecessarily exacerbated. Household sustainability had always been hindered by various factors in the township including the dangerous nature of townships itself, poverty, crime, unemployment, and lack of housing. The arrival of Covid-19 was a final staggering blow. The measures that are taken or to be taken by the South African government to minimise the damage caused by Covid-19 on the economy, food security and household sustainability in the townships ought to be deliberately different from those of the urban areas. Since the realities of these two areas are different, they thus experienced the pandemic differently.

**Keywords:** *Pandemic, Township-economy, Food insecurity, Household unsustainability, Township.*

*“The Pandemic is exposing the violence of Social Inequality in Societies”*

*~Thomas Piketty.*

## Introduction

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<sup>8</sup> **Reference:** Mdhuli, K. (2020). The Severity and Complexity of the Negative Impacts of Covid-19 on the Economy, Food Security, and Household Sustainability in the Township of South Africa. *The Perspective Online*. 2(1-2). pp.51-58.

The unprecedented outbreak of coronavirus disease of 2019 (Covid-19), an infectious respiratory disease that was first identified in December 2019 in Wuhuan, Hubei province in China caused devastating political and socio-economic impacts on many if not all societies in the world. Covid-19 was declared a global pandemic by the World Health Organisation (WHO) in March 2020 following the halt of international trade and many other economic activities by the majority of states (Yue Zu and Di Jiang, 2020). One of the most notable results of Covid-19 is the exposure of socio-economic inequality in societies in a convenient fashion, therefore, propelling governments to respond to the most neglected question of socio-economic inequality in societies (Piketty, 2020).

The paper discusses the severity and complexity of the impacts of Covid-19 on the economy, food security, and household sustainability in the townships of South Africa. The focus is on level-4 and level-5 lockdown which is the period whereby the South African government decided to halt all economic activities except for the few that were regarded as essential goods and services - such as the production and distribution of food, medication and Covid-19 personal protection equipment. The purpose of lockdown was to minimise or slow down the spread of the virus. The lockdown levels started from level-5 to level-1 – level-5 and level-4 were characterised by strict Covid-19 regulations, whilst level-3, level-2 and level-1 saw the relaxation of Covid-19 regulations.

The paper is divided into three main sections, the economy, food security, and household sustainability. Under the section economy, the paper discusses the effects of Covid-19 on the township economies. The term township economy refers to the microeconomic and related activities taking place within areas broadly defined as townships. Townships tend to be dominated by relatively low-income households, which defines the buying power and to a large extent the skills profile of people living in townships. These factors have a primary influence on the business opportunities within the townships and the nature of job opportunities that are available in the townships (Nemasetoni and Rogerson, 2005). Covid-19 for township employees meant that majority of them had to lose their jobs since they do not have job security as compared to their cities and suburbs counterparts who in most instances are professionals or meaningful entrepreneurs with financial security.

Under the section food security, the paper discusses the effects of Covid-19 on food security in the townships and several existential socio-economic conditions that exacerbated food insecurity especially during hard lockdown level-4 and level-5. Such conditions include among other things, rising unemployment rates, landlessness, lack of knowledge and desire for commercial and subsistence farming, hostile weather conditions (drought) in some parts of the country, corruption and lack of initiatives by the government to encourage farming.

Under the section household unsustainability, the paper highlights the nexus between the hard lockdown level-4 and level-5 and the prevailing widespread household unsustainability in the townships. By discussing how the township conditions inspire barbarities and maleficence that can be seen as indicators of household unsustainability. Such barbarities and maleficence include rape, gender-based violence, divorce and so on and they are engendered by lack of housing, poor family planning, unemployment, alcohol and drug abuse, economic marginalisation and lack of access to education amongst other things (Roche, 2002).

These conditions are aggravated by the lockdown regulations that were necessitated by the outbreak of Covid-19. The conclusion summarises the effects of Covid-19 on the general wellbeing of the township communities in South Africa.

## **Understanding the Township**

In legal terms, the concept of township refers to a formally promulgated urban area. However, in a historical sense, the term township refers to areas developed by the former apartheid legislation typically for black South Africans (Pernegger and Godehart, 2007). The fundamental objectives of a township were to perpetuate racial division and create large pools of cheap labour for the broader colonial settler apartheid economy (Stubbs, 2005). However, despite the different policy intentions of this programme more recently the term has been used to describe areas developed by the democratic government through the housing subsidy programmes. Township economy refers to the microeconomic and related activities taking place within areas broadly defined as townships and the township economies constitute the margins of the broader South African economy (Nemasetoni and Rogerson, 2005). Townships can be broadly defined and described in terms of their geographic location, socioeconomic profiles, their origins and growth trajectories (Mahajan, 2014). Townships can be geographically grouped as follows: located in large metropolitan and secondary cities that are typically multi-nodal - for an example, Soweto, located in the city of Johannesburg, Mamelodi in the city of Tshwane and Mdantsane near East London. There are also townships located in smaller industrial towns such as Hammanskraal outside city of Tshwane and Botshabelo outside Mangaung (Mahajan, 2014).

The establishment of townships have occurred through two distinct ways: a formal process, where the government decides to establish a residential area and provide basic residential services and infrastructure such as roads, schools, electricity, and water and so on. These areas are divided into the old formal Apartheid-era housing developments and the newer formal Reconstruction Development Programme (RDP) developments (Co-operative Governance & Traditional Affairs, 2009). Some developed through an informal process where a community initiates a settlement or typology of housing through their need to gain access to housing where housing is scarce. This is usually done without the consent of the government. Furthermore, an

entire settlement may be informal, situated on land not owned by the residents and/or not formally promulgated as a residential area with the required infrastructure. As a result, the settlement is automatically regarded as informal in that it is an illegal occupation, and the structures built on the land may not have the required development rights and may not be built to the legislated building standards (Co-operative Governance & Traditional Affairs, 2009).

## **Economy**

The term township economy refers to the microeconomic and related activities taking place within areas broadly defined as townships. However, these areas differ significantly in terms of their histories, location characteristics, current dynamics, constraints and future potential among other things (Nemasetoni and Rogerson, 2005). Notwithstanding these differences, township areas often have the following common characteristics. Most township economies still currently serve the dual purpose of providing cheap labour to established big cities and other economic hubs, and of absorbing growing numbers of surplus labour (Nemasetoni and Rogerson, 2005). They are often relatively poorly located and spatially disadvantaged in terms of facilitating economic activities and accessing other economic nodes and job opportunities. They generally have a disproportionate concentration of lower-income households and lower skills levels. As a result, many township residents either offer their labour services to outside areas, often incurring high travel cost in the process or engage in a range of small-scale economic activities within the township itself (Co-operative Governance & Traditional Affairs, 2009). It is this background that helps us to understand the vulnerability of the township economies and its population to political and socio-economic crises such as Covid-19.

Townships tend to be dominated by relatively low-income households, which define the buying power and to a large extent the skills profile of people living in the townships. These factors have a primary influence on the business opportunities and the nature of job opportunities that are available in the townships (Nemasetoni and Rogerson, 2005). Covid-19 for township employees meant that majority of them had to lose their jobs since they do not have job security as compared to their cities and suburbs counterparts. Whom in most instances are professionals or well-established entrepreneurs with a decent income, benefits, and financial security. Cities based employees and entrepreneurs did not necessarily lose their jobs during level four and five lockdown instead they worked from home.

Township businesses on the other side became the most vulnerable targets of the financial meltdown caused by COVID-19 as opposed to the cities and suburbs based businesses (Stiglitz, 2020). This is due to several structural issues such as lack of financial security (insurance) for township businesses, lack of formality and recognition by the government which led to the implementation of a Covid-19 economic stimulus system that neglects the dynamics of township economies.

Furthermore, the economic system of the country (capitalism) allowed big and well-established economic entities to operate during the lockdown and generate even more profits from the pandemic (Stiglitz, 2020). For instance, big supermarkets and pharmaceutical companies such as checkers, pick n pay, clicks and so on were allowed to operate in the name of “essential goods and services providers”. Whilst township spaza shops and the traditional medicine industry in the township remained closed. The criminalisation of the use of Umhlonyana (traditional medicine for flu) against Covid-19 by the South African government provides a shining example of such. Despite the availability of these companies in many townships, their contribution to the township economy is nothing more than the exploitation of cheap labour.

## **Food Insecurity**

Food insecurity is one of the most contested concepts in social sciences, this is due to the difficulties associated with its measurements. Hence, in recent years it has been regarded as a flexible concept (Labadarios and Davids, 2009). However, a comprehensive and advanced definition of food insecurity would be one that includes political, social, economic, and ecological dimensions that would help to understand the circumstances that determine whether people have adequate access to food that they desire (Battersby, 2011). For the purpose of this discussion, food insecurity is simply defined as a material condition of being without consistent or reliable access to a sufficient quantity of basic nutritious food due to economic destitution or other social, political or ecological related circumstances. South Africa is a middle-income country that ranks amongst the most unequal countries in the world, the country is characterised by large income inequalities and absolute poverty (Battersby, 2011). Since the occurrence of drought in the African continent, food insecurity has always been a topic of interest in the continent. In South Africa since the collapse of the apartheid regime, there has been a considerable decline in poverty and food insecurity. This is because the political transition brought new opportunities to the previously oppressed African majority in terms of equal job opportunities, equal education, and self-recognition. As compared to the previously privileged white settler minority, hence, that contributed to the decline of food insecurity (Battersby, 2011).

However, there is still much to be done in South Africa to alleviate poverty and reduce food insecurity as the pandemic has conveniently exposed the high levels of poverty and food insecurity in the country. Mostly recorded in the townships, rural areas and informal settlements. In an interview, French economist Thomas Piketty argued that “the pandemic (Covid-19) is exposing the violence of social inequalities, the violence expresses itself in various ways including poverty, hunger, inadequate access to health care services, unemployment, and corruption” (Piketty, 2020). These conditions are most prevalent in the townships than in cities and suburbs where individual families do panic grocery shoppings and further perpetuate food insecurity in the country. All these factors are playing a critical role in aggravating food insecurity in the country. Although some of these factors are not products of Covid-19 but are exacerbated by it.

Unemployment is the all-time biggest direct contributor to food insecurity in South Africa in that it denies individuals financial security which is key to the procurement of food through purchase. Subsistence farming is not an option for the majority of township dwellers since the majority of them do not have enough space even for small-scale farming. It is not only land for farming that they lack, but also land for residential purposes. Political corruption has also played a significant role in helping the pandemic brutalise and humiliate the poor population of the country as politicians have been successful and perhaps excellent in denying poor people access to food parcels.

## **Household Unsustainability**

While it is true that most societies in the world struggle to maintain household sustainability, it is also true that South Africa is one of the countries with raising household unsustainability in the world, and this is due to structural issues that remain unresolved in the country (Mahajan, 2014). The most obvious factors contributing to household unsustainability in the townships include the dangerous nature of the townships itself, lack of housing, poor family planning, raising unemployment, alcohol and drug abuse, economic marginalisation and lack of access to education among other things (Cooperative Governance & Traditional Affairs, 2020). These conditions are most prevalent in the townships than in the urban areas. Although Covid-19 did not invent these social problems, however, with the help of the lockdown regulations, it has managed to energise and modify these challenges to make them even more brutal and severe (Cooperative Governance & Traditional Affairs, 2020). Issues such as Gender-Based Violence (GBV) and child abuse, divorce, substance abuse, and rape among other things which are the indicators or rather results of household unsustainability skyrocketed during lockdown level four and five (Cooperative Governance & Traditional Affairs, 2020). There is an irrefutable nexus between the lockdown which was necessitated by Covid-19 and the upsurge of the above-mentioned barbarities and malfeasance. The pandemic did not invent new social challenges for South African township families apart from the extraordinary health challenges and the lockdown regulations that made their livelihoods miserable. Instead, it has reinvigorated and modified the same old social challenges facing the township population. Stephen Bantu Biko a fallen anti-apartheid activist reminds us that the conditions of the townships are not an accident nor natural, they are a social construction that was orchestrated by the former apartheid regime. Apartheid was a project to enslave and annihilate the black nation. The township set up is unnatural, it is a decivilisation and bastardisation of the black nation project. It is a set up for black people to fail, hate each other and even kill each other. It is a miracle to survive a day in the township (Stubbs, 2005). COVID-19 is building on the old structural challenges designed deliberately by the apartheid government in the townships.

## **Conclusion**

The paper discussed the impacts of Covid-19 on the economy, food security and household sustainability in the townships of South Africa. The concept of the township is contextualised to reflect the historical meaning, origins, and functions of the township within the broader South Africa. As well as to reflect the position of the township economy within the broader South African economy. Townships are usually located in the outskirts of the cities, they are dominated by low-income households and their fundamental objective was to perpetuate racial division and create cheap labour. The job and business opportunities available to the townships are inferior compared to those from the cities and suburbs. Township economies are severely affected by the pandemic due to structural issues such as a large number of unskilled population, lack of formality and financial security for township businesses which enabled them to benefit adequately from the Covid-19 stimulus system. South Africa is a middle-income country that ranks amongst the most unequal countries in the world, the country is characterised by large income inequalities and absolute poverty. Food insecurity has always been a challenge in South Africa. Some if not all the factors contributing to food insecurity are worsened by the Covid-19 regulations that exacerbated challenges such as unemployment, lack of subsistence farming and local business in the townships. Household unsustainability has always been a challenge in South Africa, over the years it has expressed itself through various barbarities and maleficence such as rape, gender-based violence, divorce, murder and so on. All these malicious acts have been aggravated by Covid-19 regulations.

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# Embracing Sensor Technology in Mitigating Covid-19 Impact in Higher Education Institutions<sup>9</sup>

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## Abstract

Covid-19 is a fast-changing pandemic that has provoked widespread global concerns. Among the major casualties of the pandemic is the higher education sector. This has been evidenced by the closure of most higher education institutions at the onset of Covid-19. Now that most of these institutions have either reopened or are preparing to reopen, proper precautions and mitigation game plans must be administered to avert potentially catastrophic consequences. This study is a presentation on the application of sensor technology to minimise human contact with potentially contaminated surfaces and objects. Examples of these potentially contaminated surfaces in higher education institutions include, but not limited to, water taps, door handles, bank notes and coins, human to human contact, light switches, and public telephones. This study anticipates a significant and positive influence on the trajectory of epidemics using sensor technology in higher education institutions.

**Keywords:** *Covid-19, sensor technology, higher education, mitigating.*

## Introduction

The British Columbia Centre for Disease Control (2020) attested that, 80% of diseases are transmitted through human contact with potentially contaminated surfaces and objects. Taking that into account, transmission levels are anticipated to be unrestrained in high population density areas such as higher education institutions. It is, therefore, necessary to identify all potential Covid-19 transmission surfaces and put in place measures that reduce human contact with these surfaces in higher education institutions.

By virtue of water being an indispensable resource for human existence, manually controlled water taps are among the most touched facilities and hence making them potential sources of covid-19 transmission. Efforts to reduce human contact with water taps have seen the emergence of auto-taps. According to a study conducted by

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<sup>9</sup> **Reference:** Hweju, Z. (2020). Embracing Sensor Technology in Mitigating Covid-19 Impact in Higher Education Institutions. *The Perspective Online*. 2(1-2). pp.59-63.

Mäkinen et. al. (2013), touchless auto-taps significantly reduce the spread of such diseases in comparison to manually controlled taps. Auto-taps have an integrated active infrared sensor for hand motion detection. Detection of hand motion triggers the opening of the solenoid valve, and subsequent flowing of water out through the spout.

Conversely, the absence of hand motion triggers the closing of the solenoid valve and subsequent cutting of water flowing from the spout. Given the current crisis, it is agitating to note that the greater proportion of water taps in higher education institution in South Africa are manually controlled. There is, therefore, no better time than the present Covid-19 ravaged time, to adopt the use of auto-taps for the successful mitigation of communicable diseases.

### **Touching Objects and Disease Transfer**

According to Vriesekoop et.al. (2016), credit cards and bank notes are on the long list of objects that are frequently touched and have high probability of carrying disease causing organisms. Since the expulsion of respiratory droplets from an infected can contaminate surfaces such as notes, coins and bank cards, there is high potential of disease transfer when a card or cash holder coughs and hands over the card or cash to someone across the counter. It is in response to the highlighted issues that the world has witnessed the emergence of contactless payment methods such as facial recognition-based payment method. With this facial recognition purchasing technology, there is no exchange of cards or money, for all that one needs to be able to purchase is their face. To capture facial features, there is no need of contacting the camera. Additionally, the uniqueness of the human face coupled with immunity to manipulation, qualify it as an appropriate substitute for the payment cards method. Despite there being some success stories on the implementation of the technology elsewhere (Ong 2017), higher education institutions in South Africa still use conventional Covid-19 transmission friendly payment methods such as bank notes, credit cards and students' identification documents. Since the low uptake of the technology is partly due to perceived privacy issues by consumers, there is need to put up acceptable national administrative frameworks that protect consumers (Statt 2020).

### **Installation of Smart Sensor-Based Technologies**

According to Perdue et. al (2003), buildings have a central role to play in mitigating the spreading of diseases. While buildings can also aid the spreading of diseases, the introduction of innovative structural designs, smart building codes and use of sensor technology can aid in the fight against diseases. Consideration must be given to the installation of smart sensor-based technologies like touchless entryways. Due to the frequent use of door handles in institutions of higher education, the surfaces are anticipated to be infested with disease causing organisms (Rheinbaben et. al. 2000).

Despite the regular cleaning of the door handles in higher education institutions, they quickly get dirty due to high human traffic. Given the prevailing Covid-19 pandemic, it is fundamental to minimise hand contact with potential infection transmission objects, and touchless activated doors are the solution of choice. The Covid-19 pandemic has reminded us to revisit building codes with the intention to achieve compliance with infection control regulations.

The conventional Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) methods for Covid-19 is not appropriate for early disease discernment. Additionally, the high costs associated with conducting such tests do not accommodate the entire population. The current pandemic may be an opportunity to utilise the advances in sensor technology for early Covid-19 detection in higher education institutions. Technology that can notify responsible personnel within higher education institutions of possible Covid-19 infection, long before the symptoms are evident is welcome. Such technology may be in the form of wearable sensors. Researchers have proved the success of wearable sensor technology in diseases (Seshadri et. al. 2020). Apart from preservation of higher and tertiary education personnel's health, use of the technology could benefit frontline health staff. According to a research conducted by Luo et. al., as many as 70% of frontline health personnel are infected by Covid-19 during service delivery (Luo et. al. 2020). Privacy concerns by consumers must be addressed before the technology can be fully adopted. Regulations that ensure that collected patient data must be used only as intended are needed.

Among multiple measures that higher education institutions must take to ensure that students and staff feel safe in a co-located learning environment is the maintenance of social distance. According to a study conducted by Ferguson et. al., social distance plays a crucial part in mitigating Covid-19 spread (Ferguson et. al. 2005). But due to excitement, it is easy for people to let down their guard and forget to social distance. Equally impractical is the assignment of dedicated staff to monitor social distancing adherence in offices, lecture rooms, halls of residency and higher education institution grounds. In such context, technologies are vital in automatically reminding, motivating, and enforcing students to social distance. To alleviate social distance adherence monitoring challenges, diverse sensor-based solutions have emerged. For instance, wearable sensor technology has been successfully implemented to measure inter-people distance and alert them in the event of failure to observe social distance.

## **Conclusion**

The feasibility of using sensor technology in mitigating Covid-19 impact in higher education institutions has been evaluated in this study. Sensor technologies that minimise human contact with potentially contaminated surfaces and objects have been highlighted. The study has revealed that sensor technologies have been deployed to tackle the spread of diseases in diverse arena. It is evident that many countries, especially in the first world, have shifted from manual to smart technology-based

disease prevention ways. This study suggests the introduction of building codes and design innovation for all future structures to comply with infection control measures, with greater input from disease specialists in construction projects that often see the design stage as a chance for cost cutting. Based upon evidence gathered from research, the technology is beneficial to higher education systems for the successful fight against Covid-19. It has also been discovered that the main hindrance to the total adoption of sensor technologies is to do with privacy concerns by consumers. It is recommended that proper regulatory frameworks must be put in place for the protection of consumers, including higher education institutions personnel.

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# Dehumanisation of the Black Body and Mapping Generational Poverty – COVID-19<sup>10</sup>

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## Abstract

This paper will draw attention to how the dehumanisation of the black body was a prominent feature of the media coverage during the Covid-19 pandemic in South Africa. *Dehumanisation* as a concept is utilised in this study for the purpose of bringing a clear understanding on how the acts of media outlets portrayed the lives of black people. Millions of black people in South Africa were affected by the Covid-19 pandemic and needed urgent government intervention. This was mainly because black people make up the majority of the poor population in South Africa and those who are fortunate enough to have jobs could not work, as a result of lockdown regulations. This resulted in people going hungry and unable to fend for themselves. This was seen through media coverage, as elderly black people were either recorded queuing in long lines for SASSA grants or running alongside the youth to receive food parcels from the government or NGOs. This brought forward the question of mapping generational poverty in the black communities which will be covered in this paper. As a result of inequality and the distribution of wealth in South Africa, black people find themselves depending on government grants and assistance from birth until they pass on.

**Keywords:** *black body, generational poverty, food parcels, Covid-19, dehumanisation.*

## Introduction: The Dehumanising Coverage of Black Communities by the Media

In the year 2020, we witnessed as the world struggled to take control of the Covid-19 pandemic. The pandemic spread across the world with a very diverse level of fatalities in different regions and countries. The first case of Covid-19 in South Africa was announced on the 5<sup>th</sup> of March 2020 and by the 15<sup>th</sup> of March the cases had risen to 61. This resulted in President Cyril Ramaphosa declaring a national state of disaster. The President also announced a number of measures which would be undertaken to curb the spread of this deadly virus.

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<sup>10</sup> **Reference:** Kali, N (2020). Dehumanisation of the Black Body and Mapping Generational Poverty – Covid-19. *The Perspective Online*. 2(1-2). pp.64-68.

Several government structures were quickly put in place to help manage and respond to the pandemic. The President, together with the National Command Council declared a 21-day national lockdown which commenced on the 26<sup>th</sup> of March to find the most effective ways to minimise the impact of the virus on the society. The movement of the people was restricted and they were also encouraged to practice social distancing. In addition, people were urged to sanitise and wash their hands on a regular basis. The pandemic had several implications, and this included social, economic, health, environmental and technological disadvantages and inequalities (Sekyere, Bohler-Muller, N. & Hongoro. 2020).

The media played a significant role in broadcasting the impact of the virus in different communities. What became evident was that across these broadcasts, black South African communities were portrayed, as people who do not care about their safety and that of others (Mzileni, 2020). Black people were also portrayed in ways that were dehumanising. In one broadcasted incident, an elderly woman was seen fainting after having spent hours queuing to receive her pension grant which is administered by the South African Social Security Agency (SASSA). The broadcaster streamed live as bystanders rushed to help the woman who was declared deceased shortly after. One can imagine the trauma of being recorded in such a state. It can, therefore, be argued that her black body was denied dignity even during the last moments of her life.

In a separate incident, community members from a rural village were shown running towards a truck to receive food parcels. These food parcels were being provided by a Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO), with pictures and videos being taken during the “handout”. Many of those receiving these food parcels looked away, while others looked down and a few simply smiled. This makes one wonder what the purpose of this was - was it to assist those in need or to dehumanise and degrade the poor?

Unfortunately, these practices of indignity have been normalised in South African media coverage generally. Society has witnessed this through images and videos of black people sick in hospital beds, dead bodies of black people and black people dying of the HIV virus, just to mention a few. The media finds a way to present a distorted image of black communities (Jan, 2017). During the 21-day national lockdown, the country continued to witness this as media coverage broadcasted.

## **The Impact that Generational Poverty has on Children**

The South African Constitution, in section 27 (1) states that everyone has the right to have access to social security, including, if they are unable to support themselves and their dependents, appropriate social assistance “. Furthermore, it is stated in the United Nations Convention of the Rights of Children that every child has the right to a standard of living adequate for his or her development and the state is obligated, should the need arise to provide material assistance (Hall, 2019). The reality under

lockdown exposed that this was not the case. Many people who were already living in poverty needed urgent government assistance when they could not make a livelihood for themselves. However, government assistance during the lockdown period came in the form of food parcels and financial aid in the form of grants.

On the other hand, what became evident while the impacts of Covid-19 were at play was the generational poverty that affects many black people's communities in South Africa. Inequality today can be understood as a legacy of apartheid. Apartheid as a system stripped the black community of its resources and livelihoods, which left many of them people depending on welfare support to survive. Children in rural and predominantly black societies start receiving child support grant a month after they are born. The social grant systems in South Africa was introduced as a safety net for poverty alleviation (Leibbrandt, Woolard, Finn & Argent , 2010).

The grant is meant to provide financial assistance to the parent/s or guardian of the child who is likely to be unemployed (Hall, 2019). Furthermore, public schools play a role in the nutrition element of a child's life by providing a meal on a daily basis to children from disadvantaged homes during schooling hours (Kota, 2015). In the post-schooling phase such as higher education, students from disadvantaged homes receive government funding as well as food parcels to ensure they are fed. The application process to receive this aid is often lengthy and time consuming. Students sometimes que for hours to receive assistance for funding or food parcels.

Lastly, pensioners also receive a grant from the government until they pass on. This became evident during the 21-day lockdown, where so many of our people, because of inequality and food insecurity, could not provide for themselves and had to depend on government intervention or NGOs for food. It has been approximated that about 50% of households in South Africa are living below the poverty line and are unable to afford basic healthy nutrition (Vermeulen , Muller & Schonfeldt, 2020).

This was a devastating reality for both the young and the old. Young women and mothers were seen in long SASSA queues to receive child support grants while young men were sleeping outside the Post Office, hoping to receive the R350 relief grant promised to the unemployed by government. The post office was identified as the institution which would administer the distribution of these grants. The Post Office would often run out of money and this would result in young people sleeping outside of this state facility to ensure that when its doors open, they are first in line to receive assistance. Also, this was done out of desperation and hunger as many people had no other form of income. The cycle of generational poverty in South Africa is one that is almost impossible to address as a result of it being deeply rooted in the country's levels of inequality. Hoelscher (2004) states that a person who was raised in a poor family has more chances of experiencing poverty in different stages of their lifetime into adulthood.

Furthermore, school closures which were a result of the pandemic exacerbated previously existing inequalities, and the children who were already most at risk of being excluded from a quality education have been most affected (Human Rights Watch, 2020). Children living in disadvantaged and rural areas are less likely to have the necessary resources to adopt and implement measures which were essential for the continuation of teaching and learning during school closures, and this includes access to the internet. Some of these children are the ones who go to public schools because their parents are unable to take them to private or middle-class schools where education and resources are conducive. The parents and guardians who have very little to no formal education experienced great difficulty in providing support to their children with home learning during the national lockdown. While those who attend private and middle-class schools are often provided with devices and learning material which makes it possible and easier for them to keep up to date with their school tasks. These devices also make it possible for teachers to have constant interactions with the learners (Human Rights Watch, 2020) as digital literacy levels were identified as indispensable elements in children's right to quality education.

## Concluding Remarks

It is important to note that there are devastating implications that are a result of this racial divide with relations to poverty and deprivation by population group. Covid-19 played a role in amplifying some of these implications. Unfortunately, these are everyday realities for many black people living in poverty. A more comprehensive approach to transform the existing patterns of the economy and a radical welfare programme are some of the social interventions that government should consider to alleviate this crisis from occurring in future.

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To you, the readers, thank you for engaging this copy and distributing it to your peers.

Lastly, I wish to announce that this is my final issue of this journal as an editor-in-chief. I have joined the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at Nelson Mandela University as fulltime Lecturer. It has been a pleasure to lead this publication for the past two years and I truly appreciate the confidence given to me by *CriSHET* to lead this project. I wish the next editorial team all the best on this exciting intellectual work.

Pedro Mzileni  
**Editor-in-Chief**  
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