The 'Business' of hair: the meaning of hair for Southern African Black women

by

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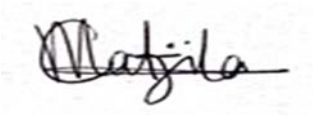
Dedication

For every little black girl, past, present and future.

Declaration

I, Chéri Rozánne Matjila, declare that the product of this dissertation is my own work and that all quotes, references and citations have been duly credited. I herewith submit this dissertation as a prerequisite for the degree of Master's of Social Sciences with specialisation in Anthropology at the Department of Anthropology, University of the Free State, Republic of South Africa. I further declare that I have not previously submitted this dissertation for a qualification at another institution of higher education.



Signature

30 November 2020

Date

Acknowledgements

Philippians 4:13: I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. This verse in times of doubt, has always reminded me of what I am capable of accomplishing. It has been a trying time for the world at large, but I found that turning towards Something greater than ourselves, is where we can see the light at the end of the tunnel. My cup runneth over.

To my supervisor, Dr Christian A. Williams, I would like to say that it has been my greatest pleasure to have been under your supervision. At a time when I thought that this would not be possible, you and your lovely wife, Tarminder, opened up your home to me. I am grateful that you took the time to assist and guide me as I put my thoughts onto paper. Our daily meetings in which we unpacked my vision for this thesis, pushed me beyond what I thought I could handle, and it is that that I take forward with me. To Dr Jonatan Kurzwelly, I say thank you for helping develop a feminist perspective which I was not aware I possessed. It was under your co-supervision, along with Dr Williams', that I was able to see multiple perspectives and acknowledge my own biases.

This journey would not have been possible without the love, support and encouragement of my mother and father. Their unyielding faith in me thus far has given me the strength and the will not to give up. To my brothers Rashaad and Fareed, thank you for the endless support and love, and a special thanks to my older sister Mariska. You have always been my example and competition throughout our academic journey; see you at the finish line.

Being so far from home, I have come to appreciate the daily support that my friends have shown me. To Keshia Murison (Kiki), thank you for listening to me cry over the phone and for driving me to my supervisor's house. Your unwavering support and constant calls, and messages made this journey less lonely.

Last, but not least, I acknowledge the women who participated in this research study. I have learnt that my experience with hair is not the same for everyone, but it still holds a great deal of importance in their lives

Abstract

Hair carries different meanings all over the world and reflects our interconnected globe, as well as our regional and local histories. For many years, black people in Southern Africa have had to assimilate to dominant Eurocentric beauty standards with respect to hair. This, particularly for black women, was and continues to be a locus of social, physical and emotional oppression. Major events in history such as the Transatlantic Slave Trade, racial segregation, and apartheid have played an important role in influencing the complex relationship that black women have with their hair, in and beyond the region. As a result of this turbulent history, the Natural Hair Movement strives to fight against stereotypes about black women's hair, including the related issues of racism and discrimination. However, the paths towards embracing natural hair are diverse and encapsulate a complexity which escapes singular and simplistic interpretations.

This study explores the nuanced and diverse meanings, and practices that surround hair for black women in contemporary Namibia and South Africa. The hair journey of black women is intricate and often escapes representations that reduce hair to debates surrounding opposing labels of 'natural' or 'un-natural'. Seven women participated in this ethnographic research and shared their perspectives on hair in general, and "natural hair" in particular. These women reside in Windhoek, Namibia and in Bloemfontein, South Africa. The results revealed that the relationship that black women have with natural hair is often strongly related to processes of identity formation. In some cases, these processes were shaped by women's efforts at daily hair maintenance and socio-economic concerns. In others, they reflected black women's deeper spiritual and metaphysical connection with natural hair. Furthermore, it is evident from the results that affinity towards natural hair can also be an important form of social activism. Therefore, regardless of whether or not black women view their hair choices politically, wearing natural hair is a stand against Eurocentric beauty standards, thus altering the relationship that black women have with hair. In essence, this thesis illustrates the importance of hair for black women in Southern Africa and the multiplicity of meanings that are attached to it. In addition, it also stresses the need to liberate and decolonise the mindset of black communities regarding hair, and to

wean young black girls from the Eurocentric subliminal messages of hair care companies.

KEYWORDS: Hair, Natural Hair Movement, black women, identity formation, spirituality, freedom, beauty, pain, discrimination, and racism.

Table of Contents

List of Appendices

List of Abbreviations

ABC	American Broadcasting Company
ANC	African National Congress
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
CBD	Central Business District
SWAPO	South West Africa People's Organisation
USA	United States of America

My Afro is a sacred halo

I refuse to simply lay low

Wearing my crown with dignity

Despite the frowns of bigotry

©Worthy Poetry, 2018

CHAPTER 1

Introduction: Untangling a Sense of Self

As a little girl, I wished upon a shooting star for long, straight hair; similar to actors in a film who got what they asked for. Much like the strong coils of my hair intertwined with one another, my hair was entangled with both pain and pleasure. On the one hand, I was ashamed of my hair and I was cautious not to let it get wet after it was straightened. It was a cumbersome battle to decide which hairstyle to get, because swimming season was coming, and loose, afro-textured hair did not pair well with water. I remember white and coloured girls looking at my hair, and asking me why it always shrank. I was not able to answer them, as I had no credible explanation, and so, I simply shrugged it off. The shame that I felt, was unwittingly thrust upon me by my mother, who is of coloured descent. She had long, relaxed hair and often commented that my hair was difficult, thick, and *'kroes'* (coarse). I would frequently hear my mother tell me how tiring it was for her to do my hair, even though she only did it every three to four weeks.

It must be noted that the sheer physical pain of doing my hair was unbearable. Hair straighteners, rollers digging their teeth into my scalp, and the painful installation of braids would sometimes bring me to moments of exasperation. In those moments, all I wanted was for the ground to swallow me whole, because I could not bear the pain anymore. Imagine your hair being pulled in different directions with no relief for a good hour, until the rollers could be removed; after which we continued with the next phase of what is commonly known amongst women as 'hair day'. I would be seated on the floor between my mother's legs for a further two hours, where she would begin plaiting my hair into individual medium-sized, three-stranded braids.

Despite all of this, I looked forward to the moment when the curlers would be taken out and the look on my mother's face when she was sufficiently pleased with the outcome. If my mother was not pleased with it, she would put the curlers back into our hair, until all was perfect. Now, to note, my sister and I are complete opposites in this regard. I am the more feminine female who enjoys 'hair day', whereas my sister does not and prefers to exchange her heels for sneakers, and a skateboard. Doing her hair and being in touch with her more feminine side are elements in her life that do not bother her. My mother often gave us a short break from the torture and gave me the

comb, because she knew how much I enjoyed admiring my hair, and its length. Tired and tender headed, I went to the mirror and began applying oils, and styled my hair. I delighted in the knowledge of how easily, and smoothly the comb went through my hair, regardless of the throbbing pain at the centre of my head that was caused by the pressure of the curlers. The joy and pleasure that I felt whilst doing this, surpassed the pains that are typically associated with this particular hair grooming ritual. 'Hair day' and all that comes with it, became an event in my life that I grew to accept and enjoy, because it allowed me to play, and to work with my hair after the labour; as short-lived as those moments were.

As I became older, I struggled in vain to find pleasure in my hair. Seated in front of the mirror on the carpet floor with hair products on full display, I 'tortured' myself with a hair straightening iron that left tiny patches of burnt flesh on my forehead, and ears. The aroma of burnt hair, mixed with that of sweet, pungent hair products, left the room filled with smoke. I was not satisfied until my hair was straight and a thin toothed comb went through it seamlessly. After that, I spent a few more hours styling it, but that was short-lived, because it had to be braided for school. In due course, I came to acknowledge that my hair could not be loose for too long, because it was either prone to breakage, 'scared' of water, or a mission to 'manage'. During my childhood, my mother was adamant that my sister and I would only be allowed to relax our hair through chemically altering its texture when we turned 18 years old. That never happened, because we became so accustomed to our hair that the topic seldom came up after that.

On account of these struggles, caring for my hair became tangled up in the formation of my identity. Styling it and monitoring its monthly growth became so important to me, because it was a part of my life that I believed needed to be kept under my control; and to some extent, it was. As a pre-teen with body image issues, I focused all my efforts on the health and growth of my hair, which would shift the attention of others away from my body, to my hair. When my hair was not plaited or braided, friends and family admired my ability to create a different hairstyle for various occasions. Hence, in light of everything that I needed to mentally and emotionally process as a child, I embraced the battle of managing my hair, in order to control my image; and the outcome gave me immense pleasure.

At the height of such an epiphany, I realised that my hair, and my sense of spirituality, became inextricably connected to one another. Evidence of this connection can be seen in my attitude towards hair salons. For most of my life, I regarded visiting a hair salon as a personal treat and I relinquished the care of my hair to only one person. The reason for this attitude, was due to the fact that my sister and I grew up hearing that only one person, other than our mother, should be allowed to take care of our hair. If not, our hair growth would either be stunted, slowly break off, or a series of misfortune would follow us. As a result of such wives' tales, I still strongly believe in in my hair being handled by one person. Although some people may view it as superstitious behaviour, there were instances where I was right in my beliefs. There were times when I was pressured to permit others to tend to my hair, and the end results failed my expectations, and thus my hair struggled to grow. More evidence to support my 'superstition', was from the testimonies of friends. Some spoke of how they derived strength from their hair and how potent the cutting of one's hair can be, if left in the wrong hands. Furthermore, they stated that hair that has been locked, for example dreadlocks, strengthens one's connection to the spiritual realm. In essence, these stories revealed to me how complicated others' relationships with hair was as well.

As my adolescent years passed by and I entered into my young adult life, seated in an Anthropology lecture at the University of the Free State, a strange feeling stirred within me that was hard to place. It was a first-year lecture in 2015, and although, in hindsight, I cannot recall the topic for that session, the complexities of my relationship with my hair were still oblivious to me. A debate ensued around human hair extensions and the vital force, mana, and intentions that are attached to them, and it made me question my own relationship with hair. The students went quiet as the male lecturer asked a black female student why she wore extensions. I sat there shocked, because I knew that it was inappropriate for anyone, let alone a man, to question the reasons why black women wear weaves, extensions, or wigs. When the lecture ended, I found myself on a path to discover the meaning behind this love-hate relationship that I have with my hair, and to understand the experiences of other black women as well.

According to Francis Nyamnjoh (2015: 12), the pursuit of completeness is tenacious and pays no heed to the fact that full autonomy is an illusion. I often returned

to this perspective whenever I reflected on hair extensions, and other hair practices that I performed in years passed. Uncomfortably aware that these practices were a response to an incompleteness created by societal expectations regarding beauty standards, I decided that weaves were not for me. This decision was highly influenced by the discussion that was held in that Anthropology lecture that illuminated how complacent I was in my visionary search for completeness and that, going forward, I should fully embrace my natural hair. As delighted as I was with my decision, my new found epiphany prompted further questions within myself. For example, what exactly does natural hair mean to me? Furthermore, do other black women share the same perspectives and meanings that I do? As I was processing these details of the discussion, I remembered a documentary that was presented by Chris Rock called *Good Hair* (2009). Inspired by a question that his young daughter asked him, Chris felt compelled to understand why hair was so important in black culture. The documentary investigated the origins of human hair extensions in the illustriously profitable hair extension industry, including hair that was donated to cancer patients. Some of these origins included hair that was offered up to various deities in Hindu culture, and hair that was even stolen.

From this stepping stone, more documentaries on hair extensions started appearing on social media platforms such as YouTube, and the conversation around hair in general, especially natural hair, began gaining momentum. On a personal note, *Good Hair* allowed me to feel a part of a larger discussion. A conversation where celebrities and ordinary black women who wore extensions spoke their truth, and what hair, and human hair extensions did for them. In addition, the documentary exposed how the international hair industry capitalised off of our incompleteness, and the social pressures that shape how many black women in different geographical locations, under various circumstances, experience their hair. I was not alone in my struggles. At the same time, other black women's experiences with their hair and relationships to natural hair were not entirely the same as mine.

In 2016, the Natural Hair Movement was reborn in South Africa. Drawing from memories of the Black Consciousness Movement of the 1960s and '70s, the movement saw black men and women move against a racially oppressive system that sought to denigrate, discriminate, and alienate people of colour (Erasmus, 2000: 71; cf. Hadfield, 2017). This 2016 movement further encouraged and deepened my desire

to accept, and display my natural hair, including various braiding hairstyles, in a society where black females were indoctrinated to believe that hair extensions and other white standards of beauty were the only options available to them. While simultaneously reflecting on my own experiences, and listening to the experiences of others with afro-textured hair, I can conclude that more should be done to illustrate what natural hair means to young black women today, along with the complexities and challenges of donning natural hair.

Therefore, in light of the discussions thus far, the exploration of the subject of this thesis will highlight the stories that some young black women have told me about their hair. To reiterate, I am interested in, and inspired by, the Natural Hair Movement, however, I am also searching for the meaning that young black women attach to hair; which go beyond 'black consciousness' or the aims of the movement as a whole. Moreover, the various themes that will be brought forth in this thesis probe deeper into this social phenomena, therefore highlighting how hair relates to pain, spirituality, and identity formation.

1.1. The Social Significance of Hair Among Black Women in South Africa and Namibia

Around the globe, within different cultures and across history, hair has been socially significant. For example, in cultures foreign to Africa, women's hair has symbolised many events in their societies. Whether these events occurred within familial traditions, or formed part of the larger community's beliefs and values, the subject of other women and their lived experiences illustrates that they too shared a bond with the intricacies of hair. Such intricacies may include the belief that hair was an expression of beauty, a symbolic representation of marriage, that it possessed magical meanings, and it was an indicator of both wealth, and status. For example, such beliefs are still common in Japanese and South Korean societies (Choi, 2006: 70). Delaney (1994: 160) states that hair in Turkey is especially meaningful and symbolic. Hair in Turkish communities is charged with emotional symbolism that largely depends on age, gender, religious opinions, political fidelity, and class (Delaney, 1994: 160). In the Pacific islands, during early 1830's Samoa, the '*tut-agita'* was a coiffure strictly meant for young female virgins (Mageo, 1996: 139).

Almost all societies have believed that the head was the centre of communication, identity, control over the body, and intense preoccupation, and elaboration (Mercer, 1987: 34; Pergament, 1999: 44; White and White, 1995: 49). The significance of hair for identity was on dramatic display during the Holocaust. As Deborah Pergament notes (1999: 48), the Nazis used hair mutilation to dehumanise and control Orthodox Jews in concentration camps. The cultures and events that are mentioned in this paragraph are, but a few examples of the social significance that hair has held for people around the world at different moments in time.

Narrowing the focus of this discussion to the African context, hair has had symbolic social value for Africans over many centuries (Johnson and Bankhead, 2014: 87; Molebatsi, 2009: 23; Powe, 2009). Such symbols of social value can be witnessed in historical records from the early 15th century, which indicate that various West African societies used hair to convey messages. For example, girls not of marrying age in the Wolof culture of Senegal, would have their hair partially shaved to ward off courting advances from men. In addition, for the Mende of Sierra Leone, hair that was unkempt, ‘messy’ or ‘neglected’ implied insanity, or that a woman was immoral (Byrd and Tharps, 2014: 2; Patton, 2006: 27). The tonsuring of hair was considered to be a means with which to control individuals, and it was also the source from which individuals gained their power, and could be used for divine purposes, or human sacrifice (Bellinger, 2007: 66; Leach, 1958: 149). Since the head is the densest part where human hair can be found and rests, it is perceived by many to be a medium that can be used to connect one to supreme beings, ward off bad intentions, and even bring good fortune.

An example of such spiritual beliefs that are attached to hair in Africa, can be seen within the Yoruba tribe of Nigeria. The devotees of certain deities in Yoruba culture were expected to keep their hair in a specific braided style, as the worth and value of their hair was heightened due to its spiritual attributes. There is a common belief throughout Africa, and among the Yoruba, concerning the intertwined spectrum of ideations that surrounds the limitless growth of an individual’s hair, however, these notions may be inconsistently interpreted (Warner-Lewis, 1993: 117). Babies who were born with matted or knotted hair were revered and considered as gifts from gods called Elena, or Ezenwa by the Igbo of the south eastern part of Nigeria, Dada by the Yoruba from the western part of Nigeria, and by the Hausa of the north (Agwuele,

2019: n.p.). These children are said to bring about good fortune and in honour of their special time on earth, feasts are a common occurrence. In an attempt to balance the scales, shaving rituals are held by the river to integrate them into society before puberty. The hair is not discarded, but kept as a mixture of medicinal ingredients in a clay pot containing river water. Believed to have healing properties, the medicinal brew is taken when a person falls ill (Agwuele, 2019: n.p.). The highest point with which to communicate with the spiritual realm is head hair, as spirits and gods were said to relay messages to the soul through it. With just a single strand of hair, harm could be cast on another individual through the use of incantations. According to Byrd and Tharps (2014: 5), in Wolof tradition, women would call on the spirits and the genies in men's hair in order to summon powers that could hypnotise men, and make them fall in love with them. Furthermore, the medicine men of Cameroon adorned their containers and vessels with human hair as a means to protect and add potency to their healing potions.

With regards to men wearing dreadlocks, such people were either avoided, labelled dangerous, or mad. They were perceived as dangerous and volatile, comparable to mentally ill individuals whose unruly and unkempt hair symbolised a dissonance with society. To wear dreadlocks was considered to be an insult towards society's norms and systems of order (Agwuele, 2019: np). Nevertheless, Rastafarians have defied these social conventions by wearing dreadlocks as part of their inner spiritual pilgrimage. That is, it is an expression of their soul and mind when embarking on their life's journey. This, in light of their belief, is justified in the Bible according to the book of Leviticus 21: 5, which states that men are not supposed to be bald-headed (Mokoena, 2016:121; Warner-Lewis, 1993: 117). In certain sects of the Rastafarian religion, their interlocked ideologies are revived as a result of well nurtured matted hair. This type of hair stands as a bold testament of apartness, whilst simultaneously emphasising the enigmatic strength that an individual exhibits due to the dedication that they have towards their spiritual 'life-mission' (Warner-Lewis, 1993: 117).

All of the above examples suggest the importance of hair in Africa and elsewhere over many years. For Africans and people of African descent, hair has taken on a heighted significance because of how systems of slavery, colonialism, and apartheid have attached meaning to it. These systems of oppression created a racial hierarchy wherein Africans and the diasporic population were treated as inferior to

Europeans, and those of European descent. Hair was a key marker of racial difference as it distinguished those at the top and bottom of this hierarchy (Mercer, 1987: 39).

In order to explain hair's significance in African culture, one must consider, for example, scholarship on the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade and hair. As soon as African slaves disembarked slave ships, their hair was removed, and they were sold into slavery. This was the first of many steps that were taken by slave traders that would forever alter their relationship with hair. A therapist of mental health and PhD, Joy DeGruy developed the Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome theory and posited that prior to the subjugation or oppression of any human being by another, they must first be relabelled as subhuman (DeGruy, 2005: n.p.). Achille Mbembe (2017: 2) writes that the 'despoliation' of the Atlantic slave trade transformed African men and women into human-commodities, human-objects, and human-money. William Ellis (2015: 121) argues that the relabelling of Africans confined or imprisoned them, and this is concurred by what Mbembe (2017: 2) suggests was a "dungeon of appearance". As a result, they became the 'property' of those who despised them, depriving them of their own language and names (Mbembe, 2017: 2).

A study that was conducted by Joy DeGruy on the transgenerational trauma that is suffered by Africans, revealed that this condition exists due to centuries of African slaves and their lineage's multigenerational oppression at the hands of slave traders, and slave owners (DeGruy, 2005: np). Various forms of slavery were founded on the belief that black people were genetically inferior to their white counterparts, and this produced institutionalised racism which perpetuated the legacy of this type of trauma (DeGruy, 2005:np). Once the ideal feminine features which included light skin and straight, long hair were established, slave owners then sought to use this information to further demoralise African slaves by pathologising their darker skin pigmentation and tightly coiled hair (Bryd and Tharps, 2014). Officially relegated to the bottom of the evolutionary racial ladder, the brainwashing of slaves in this regard was firmly rooted. Black women started to believe that their 'woolly' textured hair and darker skin-tone deemed them not only inferior, but ugly as well. It is argued that this form of brainwashing was a deliberate and an easy attempt to control slaves (Bryd and Tharps, 2014: 18). Once the racist rhetoric of slave owners was internalised by black women, as it was somewhat inevitable, it was not long before that pathology was

passed on to their daughters, sons, and future generations (Bryd and Tharps, 2014: 18).

Beyond the context of slavery, hair-based racial hierarchies have impacted powerfully on many aspects in the lives of African people and their descendants. The existence of colonialism in Africa, created a racial hierarchy which continues to shape the experience of many black people and their hair today. In South Africa, colonialism has a long history which dates back to the arrival of the Dutch East India Company in 1652. Between 1682 and 1902, South Africa was under siege as conflict broke out between Africans who fought one another for territory, while fighting off white people whose aim was to take control of their land through annexation (O'Malley 2005: n.p.). Racial discrimination was not a characteristic unique to the Union administration, however, rather a general practice found among colonial powers. O'Malley (2005: n.p.) states that prior to the end of World War II, the order of the world was governed by racist assumptions that reinforced colonialistic ideals and promoted segregation. This order of life prevailed in Europe, the Caribbean, sections of Asia and in both North, and South America; including throughout Africa as well (O'Malley, 2005: n.p.). Remaining within the context of this study, the aforementioned assumptions often constituted preconceived notions about the inferiority and superiority of people as measured by their hair.

In South Africa, hair for black people became a locus of oppression under the apartheid rule. For example, the 'pencil test' was a means by which to racially classify who belonged to which race in borderline cases. A pencil would be inserted into an individual's hair and the determining factor that was used by the government in order to classify one as either White, Coloured or Black, was whether the pencil fell out or not (Powe, 2009: n.p.). This action that was taken by the apartheid government separated many family members from one another, and a good example of this can be seen in the movie *Skin* (2008). The tragic autobiographical cinematic depiction was based on the life of Sandra Laing, who was born at the peak of the apartheid regime to white parents, and was registered as white at birth. As a young girl, Laing's body became the emblematic tale on which apartheid law was inscribed, due to the scrutiny she received for being a 'darker' skinned white girl during that era. The 'pencil test' was then eventually administered on Laing and she was later reclassified as Coloured (Dargis, 2009: n.p.; see also Stone, 2007).

Experiences such as those that were described and discussed in the preceding three paragraphs, have had a major impact on how black people, especially women, perceived themselves physically. The events in the past impacted the current relationship black women have with their skin colour and particularly with their hair, across all of these contexts. The subsequent effect of racial segregation or apartheid is more insidious than the act of segregation itself, as it resembles a tumour which unfortunately spread generationally. With this in mind, it brings one to the reality of Eurocentric beauty standards and how they have been globally prioritised. As a result, the industries that cater to these standards continue to thrive, images across media platforms solidify them, policies reward them, and the enactment of personal and interpersonal behavioural regimens mimic them (Jackson-Lowman, 2013: 171).

Viewed as unattractive, African hair was defined in disapproving terms, such that, irrespective of the changes that occurred in society, words such as matted, peppercorn, wooly, '*kroes*' and coarse, continue to be used today to describe afro-textured hair. In the past, light skinned slaves who had curlier, easy to 'manage', and manipulated, loose textured hair were favoured, and worked in the 'master' house. These chosen few would also receive preferential treatment as opposed to the darker skinned slaves (Hunter, 2002:176, 2007: 240; Patton, 2006: 28; White, 2005: 297). Essentially, a hair typing, or grading system was created by hairstylist to Hollywood celebrities Andre Walker in the 1990's, and it was accepted by cosmologists, and consumers. Walker has been Oprah Winfrey's hairstylist for over 20 years and was behind the famous Halle Berry Pixie cut. In addition to this, he also created The Golden System, a natural hair care line (Aghadjanian, 2020). Unfortunately, this grading system only served to continue the alienation of afro-textured hair as it currently ranges from 1A (silky straight hair) to 4C (afro-textured hair); which is less desirable, because it is 'hard to manage' (Kymberlee, Adesola, and Prajjwhal, 2018: 30).

Nevertheless, as scholars such as Zimitri Erasmus, Francis Nyamnjoh and Divine Fuh have argued, black women's experiences of their hair today is not solely about colonial power. Consider, for example, Zimitri Erasmus's article "*Oe! My Hare Gaan Huis Toe": Hair-styling as Black Cultural Practice*, wherein she argues that there are different ways and means that women of African descent express their blackness through hair. Erasmus is very attentive to the ways in which Eurocentric beauty standards stigmatised black women, including in her own experience as a Coloured

woman growing up under apartheid. However, she is critical of the idea that any work that is done on black hair is due to an imitation of whiteness, as if it were the only standard by which all women are judged (Erasmus, 1997: 14). Moreover, she counters the essentialist idea that straightening hair for black women is a reactionary, colonial response to Eurocentric beauty ideals, arguing instead that there are many ways to be African.

According to Erasmus (1997: 12), working or not working on our hair does not determine how progressive or reactionary black/African women are. Instead, there are many factors that influence what black women do with their hair. For example, she states that 'texturing' and the process of washing hair reflects class difference. She adds to this by stating that middle-class black women should not appear in public with curlers in their hair like working class women do. "We do not have the freedom to appear in public with an uncovered stocking on our head. We should keep our '*kroesies*' in the closet" (Erasmus, 1997: 12). I can relate to this point personally, as '*kroesies*' was a word my siblings and I often heard from our mother, who wanted us to look respectable and educated, as she believed that they always had to be brushed when stepping out in public. Briefly returning to the topic of hair and swimming, Erasmus's (1997: 12) incident with regards to it also resonated deeply with me, and may possibly resonate with other black women as well. In retrospect, the issue was not about wanting to be white, but rather it was about the stares that I received from friends whenever my hair shrank, or 'went home'. This in turn, never made me feel comfortable wearing my natural hair out in public, as I was not encouraged to feel that way. In essence, while black women's conceptions of beauty have been deeply marked by the principle beliefs and racial hierarchies of colonialism, there are numerous ways in which they respond to these colonial hierarchies as they negotiate the many relationships, and social ranking systems that shape their everyday lives.

In other articles, Erasmus (2000: 2) touches on important themes in black women's relationship with hair as well. For example, in her article called *Hair Politics*, she discusses the pain, beauty, and work done on hair. Although black women's hair is entangled with painful contradictions that were shaped by colonialism, it is also a space for black expression. For instance, a particular hairstyle of note, was dyeing one's hair blonde as a black/African woman, however, despite this form of black expression, the predominant perception was that this individual was having a racial

crisis. Erasmus (1997: 15) on the other hand, sees it as an opportunity to 'diss' whiteness, break binaries, and for black women to mark such moments in life as a new dispensation of hair liberation. Colonial encounters and the cultural appropriation of signs from early contact with the 'master' culture in the First World, birthed "hair-straightening as a cultural practice [in a] a cauldron of diaspora experiences" (ibid, 2000: 6). Understood as a 'critical bricolage', hairstyling by black individuals is seen as a form of experimenting with a wide range of technological advances for hair, such as gels, chemical straighteners and dyes. When hair is styled, it is more about the feeling, that is, being proud and confident. To summarise, hair is a celebration and an enthusiastic pursuit which brings together the present with the past, black and white, resulting in new amalgamations of cultural expressions (ibid, 2000:6).

Francis Nyamnjoh and Divine Fuh make a similar series of points from somewhat different angles. Like Erasmus, these authors highlight how racial oppression influenced the way that African women's bodies were stigmatised during colonialism and the legacy of this stigmatisation; furthermore, that black women were reduced to primitive savages, and the 'scum of humanity'. They were treated as if they were in need of a saviour to transform them and to start procedures that would help them resemble the beauty, and humanity that was epitomised by European civilised society (Nyamnjoh and Fuh, 2014: 55). In addition to these sentiments, African women are autonomous beings and make imaginative, and creative choices. How then do individuals interact with social factors, such as geographies, gender, race, generations, classes, religions, cultures and acculturation, that define what passes as beautiful? As Nyamnjoh and Fuh conclude, for black women, like all other people, personal and social identities are progressively worked on constantly, and are influx (ibid, 2014: 56).

Whilst analysing the work of creating personal and social identities, Nyamnjoh discusses the idea of incompleteness. As previously noted, for Nyamnjoh (2015: 12), people's pursuit of completeness is often tenacious, paying no heed to the fact that full autonomy is an illusion. By contrast, Nyamnjoh (2015: 13) is advocating for the recognition of our 'incompleteness' and joining with others who are also incomplete through "mingling and comingling" and welcoming "'strangers beyond mere tolerance" (Nyamnjoh, 2015: 13). He suggests that hair can be a platform where black/African people have the right to be open-minded and adventurous about their path for

completeness. This is not so much as a quest for it, but rather, it is about searching for enhancement via the vast wealth of encounters that individuals have with those who are incomplete (ibid, 2015: 13). Thus, the possibilities of this space are endless. Instead of viewing afro-textured hair as inadequate, many black/African women have invested in transforming their hair and thus were able to enhance themselves. From this standpoint, our state of becoming and being is forever in flux and requires that we borrow enhancements, that is, hair extensions, weaves, braids and wigs, that render the individual beautiful (ibid, 2015: 5).

From the discussions thus far, it can be surmised that, however one views it, colonial racism has shaped the experiences of most African women and the diaspora with regards to their hair. Nevertheless, their unique individual responses to this legacy is shaped by unique, personal forms of experiences. Thus, with this knowledge, this thesis highlights this complexity, that is, the complexity of meaning and practice around hair in South Africa, and Namibia today. The use of personal narratives, through working closely with some black women, will assist in understanding their hair practices and experiences. My intervention in this regard will draw from the scholarly work of Zimitri Erasmus, Francis Nyamnjoh and Divine Fuh that was discussed in this section, with the aim of illuminating and expanding their insight into black women's hair through ethnographic exploration.

The ethnographic data that will be collected in this study will look into the nuanced and complex practices, and the creative work that is done on hair as an expression of identity for a few young black South African, and Namibian women. While this study will engage with colonial legacies, the premise of its ethnographic exploration will not reduce black women's current experiences to colonial racist binaries. Indeed, these experiences are about far more than just a dualistic white versus black idea of hair. They are about how beliefs of good and bad luck, and being in touch with certain elements around us, are experienced through our hair. Moreover, these experiences are about the relationships with our family, the different ways in which to express a gendered identity, how pain is linked to pleasure, and they are about saving money and cutting costs; and lastly, these experiences are about the expression of an ethnic identity. With such details in mind, there is a possibility that the research participants in this study may be searching for a certain level of 'completeness' through weaves, braidings, wigs, the dyeing, and the straightening of

hair. Regardless of such scrutiny, the aforementioned hair care practices may enhance individuality, generate confidence, and may even contribute to a person's prospects of becoming and being (Nyamnjoh, 2015: 4).

With all that has been highlighted and discussed in this section, I now turn the focus of this thesis, the topic of natural hair. For my research participants and I, this term is encased with symbolism, and is also linked to a colonial past, and a racially oppressive present. At the same time, the idea of natural hair and the cultural practices surrounding it are complex, and furthermore, experienced differently by different individuals. Therefore, this thesis focuses on these unique, individual experiences.

1.2. Racially Charged Hair Movements

Many social movements that transpired through the past 60 years have left their imprint on the global society, and none more so than the Natural Hair Movement that occurred in the last five years. It reflected black history and the deep-rooted forms of oppressive, and intimidating control, and violence that was adopted in communities who were marginalised for generations (Nyamnjoh, 2015: 2). Given the rise in black women's inclination to go natural and the attention that natural hair received in the past, and today (globally), we should consider what this movement entails exactly.

According to an article that was published by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) in 2017, the movement embraces all types of black hair free of chemical straighteners, wigs, or hair extensions (Kasprzak, 2017:np). As one of their interviewees indicated, the 'movement' resulted in the explosive inflation of hair businesses small and large, the sudden expansion of natural hair care gurus, fashion and accessories, and hair care social media videos birthed from the genius minds of black women (Kasprzak, 2017:np). In addition, the article suggests that the movement gained strength among black women who were interested in their heritage, identity, and a re-awakening of who they might be. Therefore, it is indeed, a movement. As one person views it, the majority of social movements are political by nature and the Natural Hair Movement is no exception (Kasprzak, 2017:np).

Many people date the Natural Hair Movement back to the Black Power movement in 1960 that occurred in the United States of America (USA) and its sister movement, Black Consciousness in South Africa in the mid-1960s, which was pioneered by Steve Biko (Erasmus, 2000: 71). Thus, the Natural Hair movement can

be traced back to the mid-1960s during a time of civil unrest when black men and women were fighting for equal rights. At that time, the afro symbolised a resistance that was used to build a black identity that was positive and that redefined 'blackness' in conversations about apartheid (Erasmus, 2000: 72). Erasmus (2000: 4) and Kelly (1997: 340,349) mention that in the USA during the mid-1960s, the Black Power movement was a rebellion against the racist Westernised standards of beauty, by demonstrating that black is beautiful. In this context, the afro became a powerful and symbolic statement in black people's style politics, and out of every other hair style, it politicised black hair (Erasmus, 2000: 4). As a whole, the afro was a sign of cultural resistance to the oppression of white racism and was also referred to as 'the natural'. Similarly, in South Africa, the concepts of '*kroes'*, natural hair was equated with black consciousness and blackness (Erasmus, 2000: 4).

Staying in the same vein, there have been many black women throughout the decades who have promoted black is beautiful and who have worn their hair 'as God intended', *au natural,* or in braids, bantu knots, and dreadlocks. For example, in the 1960s, Angela Davis was an activist connected to the Black Panther Party and wore her hair *au natural*, encouraging other women to follow suit. In 1971, Melba Tolliver was fired from the American Broadcasting Company (ABC) for wearing her afro at President Richard Nixon's daughter's wedding, and in the 90's, *Essence Magazine* brought up the topic of a new trend, weaves, and why dreadlocks were viewed as unacceptable. To further the argument in this discussion, one points to the 2005 documentary *My Nappy Roots: A Journey Through Black Hair-itage* which focused on the deeper meaning behind the term 'nappy' hair (Kenneth, 2011:np); and also to Chris Rock's documentary '*Good Hair*' (2009), which centered on the importance of natural hair for African-American women. Additionally, the natural hair movement gained momentum when notable female celebrities of colour, and who have varying hair textures, advocated for and wore their hair natural. These celebrities included Lupita Nyong'o, Erykah Badu, Solange Knowles, Viola Davis, Janelle Monae, and Tracee Ellis-Ross, amongst others. Throughout the decades the natural hair movement has had moments where it peaked and brought attention to the politics of hair, yet as time passed, it waned. However, in spite of this, the issue of hair in the lives of African men and women, including the diaspora, has remained important.

Returning to the South African context, the natural hair movement took on a new and heightened significance following an event that took place at Pretoria Girls High School in 2016. On the 29 August 2016, a protest broke out, because black schoolgirls' hair was against the school's policy concerning the dress code (Mokoena, 2017: 122; Alubafi, Ramphalile and Rankoana, 2018: 152). At a school that was previously white, the school's dress code policy did not speak specifically about African textured hair, but about female learners' hair in general. Pretoria Girls High School was founded in 1902 and opened up to a racially diverse group of girls only in 1991, yet by 2016, the policies had still not been updated to take into consideration black girls' hair texture. Black girls were made aware of their 'otherness', as the subject matter of hair brought forth allegations of derogatory 'racist' statements made by teachers towards black students at the school. Told to tame their hair, because it did not comply with the school's policy, black girls, led by then 13-years-old Zulaikha Patel, led a march in protest.

As a result of these events, Zulaikha has become a symbol of resistance to policies that do not recognise black girls' hair. The incident at Pretoria Girls High School unearthed the ideological corpse of apartheid's shallow grave that laid within the minds of many people of colour, and it continues to haunt many South Africans today. Elsewhere in the country, the protest at Pretoria Girls High School sparked similar protests, for example in the Eastern Cape, where a student from Lawson Brown High School marched against cultural discrimination and racism; while in Bloemfontein, children were accompanied by their parents to address the issues they had with the hair regulations at St. Michael's School for Girls (Vilakazi, 2016: n.p.).

Through the idiom of natural hair, Zulaikha and other women of African descent, are confronting a very violent and salient issue regarding the politics of race, and the social life of hair. Shirley Tate (2017: 105) states that for a child to hear that their hair is in 'violation' of school rules, such words translate to their 'being'. Their hair, which is a representation of their racial identity, is debased by school rules and taunts. In terms of the psyche of the human mind, how is anyone, let alone a child, supposed to overcome the vehemence of contempt? As Tate stresses, an attempt to silence the stylisation of naturally, textured black hair and the surfacing identity politics, only empowers neo-liberal hegemony, heteropatriarchy and racial supremacy.

In light of what has been discussed, despite the attention that was drawn to the Natural Hair Movement in and beyond South Africa over the past few years, little or no scholarship has highlighted what natural hair has come to mean in the lives of individuals. This is not to say, of course, that no authors have engaged with the topic of natural hair. Indeed, natural hair is a central theme in the previously discussed work by Erasmus, Nyamnjoh, and Fuh; and to reiterate their points, hair is a facet in an individual's life that is constantly being worked on and therefore it can never entirely be natural, or 'purely innocent'. Rather, it is creatively imbued with multiple identities, and open to various interpretations, ergo "permanent works in progress" (Erasmus, 2000; Nyamnjoh, 2014: 57). As Nyamnjoh and Fuh (2014: 55) posit, Africans aim to utilise their capacity to imagine the impossible, and to invent new projects in the social sphere through their hair; including hair that is seen as natural.

Despite the importance of their theoretical work on hair, Nyamnjoh, Fuh and Erasmus have written about black women's experiences of natural hair ethnographically to a limited degree. For example, in one particular article by Nyamnjoh and Fuh (2014: 55), the authors focused on debates that took place on public media platforms in the USA and in South Africa. These debates surrounded the issue of black women's hair and how several female students at the University of Cape Town responded to these debates. The discussion focused on four anonymised students from different racial and national backgrounds, with whom the authors shared a draft of their article. The authors' discussion of Hair Four, an Indian Mauritian student pursuing her MPhil in African Studies, is ethnographically rich. Not only was she very interested in the theme of Nyamnjoh and Fuh's research, but also had been speaking with other students on the topic, citing a conversation that she had had with a group of black South African women of 25 years or younger. What she surmised from their responses was that their "perceived disinclination to valorise their own hair as black women [was] more than merely a question of aesthetics" (ibid, 2014: 62). Instead, there are many more dimensions such as gender, personal choice, collective ideology, and political activism (ibid, 2014: 64). Through the discussion of Hair Four, the authors open up many topics that one could explore through research with young black women, however, these interviews only begin to scratch the surface of these subjects.

Similarly, Erasmus's auto-ethnographical account delves into her experiences with hair across her lifetime, highlighting the pain that she experienced styling her hair

as a child and the multiple interpretations, and perceptions of her hair by others. By recounting and describing a detailed account of her 'hair day', Erasmus gives the reader a glimpse into her life and her struggle with natural hair vis-à-vis identity, gender, family, and society. In addition, Erasmus's (1997: 15) article brings together the opinions of other prominent writers on the reconstruction of racialised ideations of beautiful hair; thereby producing opportunities for many potential ethnographic research questions. However, her focus is not on studying others' relationships with their hair ethnographically, because it is centered more on her own experience with hair.

Henceforth, considering the above discussion, this thesis will explore natural hair ethnographically in order to determine the importance of hair for black/African women. It will take into account how people have engaged with their hair, including their uniquely different personal, spiritual, and political journeys to a re-awakened, and a reimagined self with or without the influence of the Natural Hair movement. I mention this, because I deduced from both Erasmus, Nyamnjoh and Fuh's articles that they did not focus their research on interviewing individuals about the significance of hair in their lives. Therefore, although my ethnographic data may overlap with certain themes that are presented in their articles, the data will also uncover a deeper lived experience of black women that is related to hair in Windhoek, Namibia, and in Bloemfontein, South Africa.

1.3. Methods

In this section, the methodology that was used in order to help realise the objectives of this study, will be highlighted and discussed. Such details are important to mention, as they illustrate the reasons behind certain motivations in terms of data collection and analysis. With regards to the data, it was collected using a variety of ethnographic methods, which included participant observation methods and one-on-one interviews with the participants. Both ethnographic methods were used at the first and second field site. The first field site for this study was downtown, in an area near Hoffman Square in Bloemfontein, South Africa. There, I approached a local hair salon owner and asked her permission to work in the salon at no cost. I chose the downtown area, because I believed that it would enrich my ethnography and it would enable me to observe a steady stream of black women with various hairstyles visiting the salon.

Months before my fieldwork, an acquaintance who later became a research participant, eagerly invited me to After 8 Hair Salon after she heard about my research topic. During the first couple of visits to the salon, I observed the daily interactions and had conversations with some of the stylists. Weeks later, feeling more confident and less of an interloper, I asked the owner if I could assist a stylist and this amiable interaction proved to work in my favour. I soon motioned to assist the other stylists and they were astonished that I was only assisting for research purposes and not for money. One of the challenges that I experienced, was with regards to my first conversation with the owner and the stylists I interacted with. They were not sure as to why I was there initially, however, as time progressed and I started asking questions about hair, and its meaning to black women, they slowly came to understand that I was not studying to become a hairstylist. With the first hurdle over, I was finally able to enjoy the participant observation aspect of my research study, as I was well versed in styling hair.

Shifting focus to the second field site of this study, it was located at a local market called Soweto Market in Windhoek, Namibia. The market forms part of the wider township of Katutura and is a place where the locals, and tourists can go in order to experience the local culture, view the arts and crafts, sample Namibian cuisine, and have their hair braided. I had also planned to conduct research at another hair salon that is owned by my hair stylist of 22 years. It is situated in the Central Business District (CBD), however, after two interviews with the stylists who work at the salon, I was directed to Soweto Market. This decision was based on the circumstances at the salon. Since there was a lack of female clients as a result of the weather (it was Winter), it was agreed by both the stylists and myself that I would have better opportunities at Soweto Market. The owner of the stall in Soweto Market saw me walk around and called me towards her. I recognised our encounter as an opportunity to introduce myself, and to explain to her why I was there. After explaining the purpose of the research study and its objectives, I was granted permission to conduct interviews with her clients. My encounter with her was amiable and effortless, and this was a moment that I did not expect would happen during my first visit to the market.

The primary reason behind the chosen field site locations was due to the fact that they created better opportunities to approach black women for discussion about

their hair. Geographically speaking, both locations were easily accessible as my family home is in Windhoek and I have been a student at the University of the Free State in Bloemfontein for the past 12 years. I conducted parts of this study in Bloemfontein over a period of three months, because it is my permanent home of residence. The other part of the study was conducted in Windhoek over a one-month period, when I went home to visit my family. Thus, due to the convenience of these locations, access to my participants was less of a challenge.

It was decided that it would be more valuable for this study's objectives if a multi-sited ethnography of hair was conducted at more than one location. Falzon (2016: 1) and Marcus (1995: 99) state that a multi-sited ethnography is the study of certain phenomena in society that cannot be adequately studied if all the focus was centered at one location, because the object of the study is a social marvel that needs to be explored holistically. Thus, the essence of multi-sited ethnography is to follow connections, people, relationships, and associations across space since they are considerably incessant, but spatially non-contiguous (Falzon, 2016: 2; Marcus, 1995: 102). With regards to this study, the interest laid in how people understood and experienced 'natural' hair across Bloemfontein and Windhoek. With the legacy of apartheid still lingering, one may hypothesise that the many points which pertain to the social significance of hair for black women, would apply to women in both locations. Significantly, although the Natural Hair movement is well known in South Africa, it was discovered that the black women who were interviewed in Windhoek had little to no knowledge of it. As a result, their experiments with 'natural' hair was reinforced in a substantially different context, which will be discussed below.

In conjunction with conducting participant observation ethnography at these field sites, women were also identified for possible one-on-one interviews. Deciding on the criteria for participant involvement in this study was based on its interest in 'natural' hair and the relationships that I developed, or had previously developed with the women that participated in this study. Some participants were interviewed at the University of the Free State and one during a home visit and others on site. My constant presence and assistance at the field sites helped to foster a relationship with the stylists, and clients that were interviewed. By offering up my own experiences with hair, a conversation-like atmosphere was established which put both myself and the

participants at ease with the process. On some occasions, the dialogue became intimate and one of the participants and I revisited memories, thoughts, and ideas about our hair. In essence, by its very nature, ethnography allows for the chance to create new locations for the production of knowledge; and it is at such sites that I sought to yield valuable knowledge through the one-on-one interviews (Williams, 2009: 23).

Regarding the maintenance of the ethical standards of research etiquette, the participants in this study were made aware of their ethical rights before the interviews commenced. The purpose of this study was explained in detail to each participant individually, and verbal or written consent was obtained before, and after each interview, for methodological and ethical reasons (Marshall, 2003: 275). The research participants were notified that their identities would remain anonymous and that they were in no manner pressurised to accept otherwise. In addition, they were also informed that any sensitive material concerning their personal details would not be disclosed in the study. The participants were reminded that they were under no obligation to respond to the questions and had the right to terminate their participation at any point in time, should they feel uncomfortable, emotional or stressed. Remaining mindful of the intimate and delicate nature of this study's topic, the relationship between myself and the participants was of a personal nature. I mention this, because these personal relationships, and my own complex love-hate relationship with hair, made me more conscious of the participants' concerns regarding the revelations of their experiences of hair, than I might otherwise have been. I was cautious not to behave too intrusively with my line of questioning, as allowing the conversations to constructively lead the interviews was beneficial for the wealth of the data.

Much has been written about the strengths of participant observation for the purposes of understanding how people make sense of their lived experiences. Bronislaw Malinowski (1848) pioneered participant observation during his fieldwork in the Trobriand Islands in 1922, and this feat in the realms of research exists, because of Malinowski's desire to diarise the islanders' daily experiences of social life (Atkinson and Hammersley, 1998; Cole, 2005). Consequently, participant observation has become a standard research method that is widely used by anthropologists and other social scientists, in order to foster rapport and to interact with the research participants

daily for a certain period of time. Howard S. Becker and Blanche Geer (1957: 30) believe that research participants are more likely to open up if the researcher engages in the daily experiences, or activities of the research participants. Therefore, having been motivated by such reasons, I decided to play an active role with my participants, and this choice helped to strengthen my rapport. Accordingly, this allowed me a certain level of access to the stylists' clients. As Conrad Kottak (2015: 41) suggests, establishing a good working relationship with research participants in order to develop a sound rapport, enables us to learn the reasons behind specific events and practices. I attempted to develop such a relationship and limited my level of detachment, and impartiality, for such approaches were not considered to be conducive to my research.

It is important to note that the results of participant observation research reflect the particular traits of the researcher, such as his or her various weaknesses and strengths. One of the biggest challenges that I experienced during my research in South Africa involved language. Perceived as a black female researcher by my participants, they expected me to be able to speak their language. Not being able to communicate in a language they assumed I could speak, made explaining the purpose of my research difficult. Had I possessed the knowledge of the local languages, particularly Sesotho, I would have understood the conversations that took place in the hair salon, and my participants may have felt more comfortable expressing themselves in their own tongue. If I had been able to communicate with my participants in their mother tongue, this would most probably have given me a better understanding of their lives and experiences. By contrast, language was not an issue for me in Namibia, because I was born and raised in Windhoek. Therefore, due to my upbringing, I knew that I would be greeted in English, irrespective of the language that others spoke. There were occasions where, whenever the stylist asked her clients about their hair or spoke to her fellow colleagues, she reverted back to her mother tongue to enquire if the client was pleased with the style, thickness of the braids, or if she was pulling her hair too tightly. Nonetheless, I was able to speak comfortably with my participants in English and was able to initiate discussions easily with the aid of my 'gatekeeper', the owner of the stall.

My 'native' identity, which is automatically based on my skin colour and hair texture, also afforded me a certain level of entrance into the salon space in both

Bloemfontein and Windhoek. It was vital for me to point out my skill level to the owner of the salon (in Bloemfontein) and to the one at the Soweto Market stall (in Windhoek) in order to gain entry. I did this to reassure the owners and my potential participants that I would not be a hindrance to their business, nor unprofessional when I engaged with their clients. From what I have observed in the past, whenever a client gets their hair braided and it has been established that it would take more than three hours to complete, stylists usually help one another if they do not have their own clients to tend to. At both field sites, I was able to assist the stylists with their clients' hair, and this allowed me not only to interact with the stylist, but also with their clients simultaneously. The clients and the stylists appreciated the gesture as my contribution cut their time in half, even on days when the salon and the market were quiet. For example, to keep the momentum going during a slow day at the salon in Bloemfontein, I offered to help a Ghanaian hairstylist with a braided weave she was creating for a client. Eight hours later, while twisting synthetic hair onto a rope, two of the stylists shared their packet of chips with me and I was offered a banana. I knew then that I was slowly being welcomed into their space. In short, my personal experience aided in my ability to question the participants in a manner that was not impertinent, because our mutual understanding surrounding the difficulties that are experienced daily with afro-textured hair.

Nyamnjoh (2012: 65) states that assumptions, prejudices, and preconceptions concerning the details of reality is an illusion that all individuals fall prey to. Considering the aforementioned statement, I discovered this for myself whilst conducting my fieldwork. It was during and after my fieldwork, that I realised that I had preconceived ideas of what I would find in the field; specifically with regards to the information that I gathered from my participants concerning the topic of ‘natural’ hair. It was, therefore, crucial that I became aware of instances where I was projecting my own views, and opinions about hair onto my participants. Generally speaking, I allowed the memories that were linked to said views and opinions to divest the momentum of the interviews, and upon this realisation, I would steer them back into the direction of the topic at hand. After recovering from relapses of preconceived biases, I encouraged the participants to speak about black women with different hairstyles and the perceived, and actual difficulties that accompany the afro-textured hairstyle. It was clear from the details revealed in the interviews that the women had similar experiences with hair,

that resonated with my own. Consequently, from such revelations, the themes that were presented in the beginning of this chapter were evident in some, if not all, my participants' narratives. With that being said, I am reminded of each woman's narrative and how they differed in one way or another from my own; and therefore, it is these unique and personal experiences that I sought to collect, and that this thesis explores.

1.4. Summary of Chapters and Arguments

This ethnographic study will unpack the complex practices and meanings that surround hair in South Africa and Namibia today, by exploring and understanding the hair practices, and experiences of a few black women. Furthermore, it will highlight the many ways in which these women express their identity through natural hair. As I have already suggested, black women's hair journeys should be seen beyond the binary of natural or 'un-natural' hair. In the same breath, I maintain that embracing natural hair is an important form of social activism, irrespective of whether or not different black Southern African women see their hair choices in those terms. These main arguments will be illuminated and discussed further in the subsequent chapters of this study.

Concerning chapter two, the practicalities and economic facets of hair maintenance, and identity construction will be discussed through the case of Wanda[1]. This chapter will discuss why Wanda chooses to express herself as she does with her hair. While enjoying the benefits of weaves, natural hair also allows her to celebrate her inheritance and express her whole beauty, which she is proud of. Wanda's expression of self can also be attributed to certain practical issues in her life. Some of these issues involve the financial repercussions that come with purchasing and maintaining weaves, including the use of chemical straighteners that steered her towards embracing her natural hair. It will be highlighted in chapter two how Wanda's unwillingness to tolerate pain was another contributing factor for why she has chosen natural hair as an avenue to express herself. Her narrative will also reveal that there are different perspectives and priorities that arise when dealing with issues that are associated with hair maintenance, tolerance and affordability. Taking into regard the ethnographic accounts of Wanda's experience with her hair, further enriches and

[1] It must be noted that the names of the participants in this study are pseudonyms, so as to protect their identity.

expands the knowledge of Southern African women's experiences of natural hair. Her accounts demonstrate that the relationship black women have with hair shapes an identity that is not only influx and contextual, but also often constrained by socio-economical accessibility.

Chapter three explores other avenues through which one can understand the complex meanings and practices surrounding black women's hair. In this chapter, I discuss Rethabile, one of my participants, whose identity is entangled in a variety of beliefs that entail the human body, freedom, femininity, and, above all, contact with the spiritual realms. Chapter three will point out that Rethabile is exceptionally self-aware of how her identity is linked to natural hair, and it will highlight how Rethabile's expressions of identity are contextual and influx. Rethabile's narrative is a different lens through which we will be able to understand the lived experiences of black women, and the meaning that natural hair has in the formation of an identity, especially as identity links to spirituality.

Chapter four will illustrate from a critical feminist perspective how hair is moulded by beauty standards that lead woman to self-torture, regardless of whether they themselves are aware of it, or see it that way. This chapter will draw from previous scholarly literature to further solidify one of the arguments in this study, that is, how the female body has become a sight of political struggle, and also what the significance of hair in such struggles for black women means. The varying, yet similar interpretations from all the research participants about the pain and discomfort that accompanies styling hair will highlight the depths and lengths to which black women go to achieve a hairstyle. As the last chapter with an ethnographic premise, it aims to address a form of experience that seemingly spreads across the different hair journeys of each research participant. Thus, their journeys resonate with this study's view that wearing natural hair is a form of activism.

Lastly, with regards to chapter five, a conclusion on the importance of this research topic in the current political, social and academic spheres in Southern Africa, will be discussed. Furthermore, the significance of each of the chapter's findings, the overall importance of the inclusion of the participants' personal narratives, and recommendations for potential future research studies will be also be highlighted, and discussed.

CHAPTER 2

Hair and Identity Formation: Wanda's Natural Hair

Natural hair can have different meanings to African women in various contexts. As discussed in my opening chapter, many scholars across the world have studied how people use the medium of hair to construct their identities, including how different people living in different contexts understand the meaning and value of hair differently. (e.g. Erasmus, 1997; Manning, 2010; Mercer, 1987; Nyamnjoh, 2014; Tate, 2007). As Erasmus (1997: 16) maintains:

> All hair is always worked on, constantly processed by cultural practices. There is no such thing as innocent, pure, natural black hair. These practices invest hair, biologically dead, with social meaning and value. Hair is gendered, racialised and sexualised. This makes it politicised. Hair is socially constructed, imbued with meanings and with multiple identities.

Wanda, like so many other black/African women, lives in a society that was shaped by an apartheid past, in which racialised beauty standards are currently being questioned. Regardless of this, she has a perspective on what natural hair means and what the benefits are of going natural that is unique to her circumstances. This chapter explores how Wanda constructed meaning and her own identity around her natural hair. In addition, her perspective concerning natural hair and its daily maintenance will be explored. Aligning with the above quote by Erasmus (1997:16), this ethnographic research study revealed that the issue with afro-textured hair is not easy to categorise in simple terms (where 'natural hair' is politically 'woke', and non-natural is naïve), but rather exposes the complexities and meanings that surpass politics. The main argument here is that, like so many other black women, Wanda constructed her identity through her hair. This construction of identity is contextual and influx. That is to say, it is not static as is presumed by much of the popular discourse on natural hair. This relationship with identity reflects Wanda's personal choices as well as her constrained socio-economic possibilities.

2.1. Meeting Wanda

It is the 5th July 2019 in Windhoek and the midmorning taxi ride down Abraham Mashego street to Soweto Market started to become routine. It was as if I was on autopilot, holding my breath and praying I would find someone to talk to. I say this, because it is not every day that the women at Soweto Market receive a client that needs braids or weaves put in. In what I can only describe as muffled sounds in the background, I took the back entrance into the market to avoid the usual "*Meme*, do you want to do your hair" from every unoccupied stall owner. I reached Me Tolonga's stall, only to find her busy removing a client's extensions. I later found out that this client had come two weeks prior in hopes of finding Me Tolonga there, but to no avail. She was not particularly satisfied with the closure of the extensions done by someone else and so decided that Me Tolonga should re-do them.

Wanda, who is a self-employed businesswoman, lives with her mother and five years old daughter in Windhoek, but often returns to her hometown, Okakarara, a small town that is located in a former Herero ethnic homeland in Namibia's Otjozondjupa region. She currently wears sewn in weaves so as not to deal with her daily hair ritual. At the time of our meeting, Wanda had just returned from a funeral and said that she chose to wear a weave due to the fact that it accentuates the traditional head piece (a hat that is shaped in the form of a cow's horns) worn by Herero women along with the '*Ohorokova*,' a traditional Herero dress.

When asked about the hair care regime her mother used on her during her childhood, Wanda spoke about being plaited (three-stranded braid known as "essence") as a child and the pain that was involved. She was not able to recollect at what age her mother started relaxing her hair, only that she did and used to braid it, as well as occasionally using a hair dryer to straighten it out. These experiences, in turn, drew Wanda to natural hair. As she explained:

> She plait us and then we go back to the hostel same routine and then when I came back in grade 7 I just decided this thing is so painful, let me just cut the whole hair. [My mother was] …okay with it, because I decided I have a painful hair, so we have to cut my hair. I don't want hairs anymore and then she

> cut when I went to grade 8, so my hairs are growing fast neh, so I just cut for three months and then it grows back.

Following this dramatic change in how she wore her hair, Wanda developed a new hair care routine that she was satisfied with. In the process, she found that natural hair made her happy:

> … I just started loving my hair…sometimes people will tell you "Do this and then do that". So I just decided no, I won't follow what they are saying. I want my hair to be natural so I will just do the hair mayonnaise *thingytjie* and it, 'cause it makes the hair soft. And you just keep your hair natural.

As these two quotes suggest, Wanda began to love her hair after it became natural. She now associates being natural with release from painful hair care routines such as tight braiding, weaving, and chemical, and thermal straightening of hair. As she further clarified, being "natural" did not mean no hair care, but rather different degrees and kinds of hair care; such as home hair care remedies that include the use of avocado and mayonnaise hair masks; in reference to the so-called "the hair mayonnaise *thingytjie*[2]," to which Wanda refers to in the above quote.

As my interview with Wanda continued, she slowly started to open up more and relaxed. She shared more of her positive associations with natural hair which helped me to better understand how she has worked with, and navigated the issues surrounding natural hair. It was important to know how she understood what natural hair is. As she opined,

> …natural hair is something beautiful cause it shows your whole beauty and everything. And it's…you just natural, it's kind of something you inherited from your parents, so you are proud to have it like that. Cause nowadays I see everybody's like…ah…I go natural.

What is evident from the above quote is that Wanda believes that natural hair allows a full or fuller expression of who she is, that is, her identity, than "unnatural hair" does. It is clear from the rest of Wanda's testimony that she is not implying that she is "whole" or "complete" in the way that Nymanjoh critiques, because she keeps on

[2] English and Africans slang for an object or thing.

experimenting with and adding to her hair in many ways. Moreover, she is not saying that she lives a correctly “pure” life, because she wears natural hair and others are “impure” (an ideological view). Rather, she simply states that “natural hair” (however she understands that term) expresses her “whole beauty.” Wanda’s belief is further strengthened when she mentions her inheritance from her parents, which offers us insight into how she understands the meaning behind “whole beauty.” We often hear black women speak of their transition to natural hair in conjunction to resisting Eurocentric beauty standards through wearing “pure” natural hair. On the other hand, Wanda is stating how natural hair makes her feel. Wanda deviates from, and has chosen not to succumb to social norms around the aesthetic appeal of natural hair, and black women’s overall appeal. This is made possible by natural hair’s slow growing popularity in Namibia as an alternative hairstyle. With it gaining favour in discourse and socially, black women such as Wanda, are able to reformulate an identity that is always influx, self-contradictory and contextual. Not only has its popularity boosted the confidence of others, but for Wanda in particular, natural hair makes her feel extremely proud even when she wears a weave.

As the interview continued, I asked Wanda what piqued her interest in natural hair. She stated that it was her flatmate who suggested that they go natural. This point confused me, because of what she said in the previous narration about her childhood. Is it possible that Wanda mixed up her childhood natural hair experiences with those from her adulthood? Regardless of this, Wanda mentioned that she had been natural for three years and keeps her hair short. She and her friend decided on the natural look, because it was cheaper and less time consuming than relaxing one’s hair every four to six weeks. She further stated that it was also a good decision, because when one is unable to “afford the expensive relaxers you end up using the cheap ones which then break your hair.” Not only was the expense of relaxers financially debilitating, but it was also detrimental to the health of her hair, ergo her opting for cheaper solutions. Thus, this is one of the leading reasons why many black women revert to natural hair. It became clear that Wanda’s transition to natural hair did not stem from an ideological standpoint of ‘wokeness’. In actuality, it was a practical choice, which, in turn, shaped her personal identity.

Although Wanda transitioned to natural hair, she still wears weaves or does the occasional braiding coiffure (hairstyle). There is one style, however, that she would

never try again called the fish tale braid. For this style, hair stylists usually start off braiding the hair with synthetic fibres beginning at the hairline. This particular style thus became the main cause of receding hairlines and traction alopecia[3]. Since a receding hairline is a cause for concern for Wanda, she chooses to alternate her choice of hair styles. Wanda's alternating hair choices also reflect other concerns about the health of her hair. As she explained,

> …I like changing my hair because with people, the experts, they say the hair should also absorb vitamin E. Apparently, the sun should penetrate through your hair that's why I keep taking it off (referring to the weave wears).

Wanda's ability to alternate between weaves and her natural hair speaks to how non-chalant she is about consistency and "purity" in reference to how she wears her hair. While her choice to be natural is in many regards linked to her identity, her focus is not to be perceived as a 'naturalista' who is 'woke' and involved in the politics enveloping hair. Instead, what her narrative points out is that apart from taking care of the health of her hair, Wanda is also preoccupied with what is in fashion and how alternating her hairstyles can enhance her beauty. At the same time, Wanda's enthusiasm for style and her zeal for her natural hair were often intertwined. Those who are natural often see their hair as standing for their separation from the societal expectation that black women's hair must be straight in order to be presentable, acceptable, and professional. Viewed from that perspective, if one alternates between natural hair, and weaves, wigs, and the occasional straightening of the hair (thermal), it appears that one is running away or being indecisive. By contrast, Wanda was not indecisive and celebrated her choices by utilising a variety of hairstyles to express an identity influx.

After the discussion surrounding her childhood experiences and how they influenced her adult hair experiences, the interview shifted to the topic of hair growth; a topic of interest for many black women who like natural hair. Wanda was excited to highlight that although she cuts her hair annually, she looks forward to how fast and long it grows, regardless of it being cut short every year. To note, as excited as Wanda

[3] While conducting this study, I observed that many women who have this issue do not seem deterred and continue with this damaging hairstyle. Moreover, some cover it up with weaves or wigs, while others, perhaps, choose to keep their hair short

is to apply homemade hair care remedies to her natural hair and watch how it grows, she is even more excited to cut it all off again. According to her, by cutting her hair ever so often, she is able to monitor its growth and check how best to treat it. In this discussion of growing and cutting her hair, Wanda further demonstrated her enthusiasm for natural hair, and the significance of natural hair care practices in her life.

Not long after the discussion on hair growth began to subside, the matter of natural hair, attraction and school policy emerged. I asked Wanda if there were any school policies on hair in Okakarara. She and Me Tolonga stated that there is a school in the town where girls have to shave their hair and keep it that way until matric. Typically, school policies in Namibia and South Africa frown upon schoolgirls wearing long weaves, altering their hair colour, and wearing long braids to school; shaving girls' heads is a more extreme version of such policies. The school in Okakarara, according to Wanda and Me Tolonga, is of the opinion that requiring girls to shave their heads equals discipline. The school's rationale seems to be that part of disciplining girls, comes from not attracting men with their hair. This policy may leave some girls feeling stripped of their ability to express their identity through choosing a hairstyle (Asheeke, 2015: n.p.). Wanda's comments did not reveal much with regards to how she felt about the school's policies. Although in South Africa, school policies around hair seem to be increasingly politicised following the 2016 Pretoria Girls High School incident, Wanda did not mention that incident or criticise the school policy at Okakarara. Her comments suggest that her interest in natural hair is not an explicit political stance, but it is rather linked to how it makes her feel.

It is apparent from some of Wanda's comments on natural hair, that she is not positioning herself in relationship to the norms that are associated with her country, and ethnicity. For example, Wanda had this to say about Namibian and Herero women's relationship to hair:

> …you see when it comes to Brazilian hair everyone wants it. It's the Namibian way, everybody wants to have it. It makes you look good; it makes you look pretty, but with me, I think my natural hair, when it is short, I love it. 'Cause I can make styles which I want with my hair and I don't use relaxer. I just use a gel, it very

> nice for my hair cause when it comes to…uh…to us…us Hereros, some of the people they don't care about hair. It's just hair which is on your head.

From my own observations and that of Wanda's, it seems that Brazilian hair has become the norm in Namibian society for numerous black women, both young and old, residing in remote villages and in Windhoek. Being a prominent and fixed feature in Namibia, the wave of Brazilian hair enthusiasts will not subside in the near future, as young black girls look forward to the moment when they can express themselves by wearing Brazilian hair. This expression also includes any other artificial hair product from Asian countries such as China, or India. Wanda, by contrast, often seeks to express herself through her natural hair and does not buy into "the Namibian way." By pushing against the idea that a black Namibian woman must either embrace foreign weaves or not care about hair, Wanda sets herself apart from the rest. Equally important is Wanda's belief that her natural hair contributes sufficiently to her self-confidence as a Brazilian weave would: "I think my natural hair, when it is short, I love it, 'cause I can make styles which I want with my hair." By emphasising her ability to manipulate her short natural hair according to her preferences, she demonstrates the multiple styling options associated with natural hair, instead of the stereotypical misconception that its styling is limited and time consuming.

As for ethnicity, Wanda remarked earlier that she chooses to wear a weave to accentuate the traditional head piece that goes with the *Ohorokova*. She believes that the head piece is better suited with a weave and because it is "traditional" to cover up your own hair when attending a funeral. When discussing the matter of weaves versus natural hair, she states that some Hereros "don't care about hair." In both these examples, the ethnic identity "Herero" is referred to when making decisions about her hair. However, she is not bound to meeting one set of stereotypes about being "Herero" with her hair. Rather, "Herero" is a flexible reference point for her as she makes choices about how she'd like to wear her hair. Regarding her decision on how to wear her hair, Wanda chooses when ethnic identity suits her in a particular situation, and how that identity should be expressed. Therefore, her choice supports the supposition that identity, understood to be influx and flexible, is constructed through hair.

In light of what has been discussed thus far, it is important to emphasise that while Wanda has found beauty in her natural hair, she still appreciates synthetic hair. It is possible to wear natural hair and to believe in an ideal such as it, without it being burdened with political, or rebellious undertones. As discussed previously, Wanda's choices were influenced by several overlapping circumstances, which included the cost of hair products such as relaxers and her ability to accept herself. Other circumstances also included her hair being in its natural form, while still enjoying the ability to stylistically experiment with it. Very often we assume that going 'natural' is riddled with rebellion and influenced by political discourse around hair. Additionally, this assumption also includes the standards of beauty that are strictly imposed and ingrained in the psyche of black women. Although this may be true for some women, for Wanda, it is actually about making a decision that best suits her current style, and that is mindful of her financial status. In the world that we live in today, there are so many bloggers and hair influencers who claim to be experts in the natural hair department. These self-proclaimed experts have caused a divide between those who are natural and those who choose to alternate hairstyles. What many fail to understand are the reasons behind going natural and how black women choose to express themselves through hair, for it goes beyond just a political statement, or opposing European standards of beauty.

This point is again clearly evident in the manner in which Wanda engages with her child's "natural hair" in the context of her family. From what I could gather, Wanda's daughter spends most of her time in Windhoek and when they travel to Okakarara to visit the family home, she is not satisfied with having a random aunty do her hair. When asked whether or not her daughter's hair was natural, Wanda stated,

> It's natural, she has very soft hair even if you pull her, she starts getting pimples. Even when she is with her father, her father is like "Don't pull my kid. I will just send the kid back so you can do whatever you are doing."

During the discussion, Wanda explained that she started braiding her daughter's hair when she was four years old. She attributes the growth of her daughter's hair to the continued use of braided hairstyles. Her daughter, from what she says, has a mind of her own and if she is not happy with her hairstyle, then she strongly voices her

dissatisfaction. According to Wanda, her daughter would tell her that her father takes her to salons and that she prefers to go there instead of an aunt's house. To note, Wanda gave no indication that her child's remark to having her hair done at an aunt's house bothered her.

I concluded our interview by asking Wanda what she understood by 'good' and 'bad' hair. Her response to this was that "good hair, it's easy to maintain. When it comes to bad hair you always have to spend a lot of time on your hair." In essence, if you have to spend time and money on your hair, then it is considered to be bad, and 'good' hair is carefree, and easy. Contextually speaking, the response to this question would be different for many black women depending on where they are at in their hair journey. For Wanda, as a child and in her adult years, managing her hair was a dreadful process which she chose to put a stop to. As a result of this decision, she began to embrace her natural hair and among the benefits are easy maintenance, and affordability. In her opinion, these benefits do not come at the expense of beauty and self-expression; although, with that being said, she is not rigid about expressing herself through natural hair. These observations further support my argument that Wanda's construction of identity through her natural hair is influx and contextual.

2.2. The Path of Self-discovery

Nyamnjoh and Fuh (2014: 61) argue that apart from the politically charged scholarship on natural hair, inadequate attention has been placed on the nuanced complexities of black women's relationship with their hair. Wanda's narrative provided a glimpse into the complexities of one person and her unique hair journey. As anthropologists of identity have argued, identity is influx, multifaceted, not static, and is continuously being moulded through expression, perception and reformation, notwithstanding self-contradiction (Kurzwelly, Rapport and Spiegel, 2020: 75). Wanda's hair journey clearly exhibits these qualities. As Nyamnjoh (2015: 6), postulates individuals are incomplete and constantly straddling a myriad of identities, which are in the process of accreting form, whether materially or socio-culturally (see also Kurzwelly et. al., 2020: 75). Hence, Wanda's relationship and opinions around hair have changed, and continue to do so. In some situations, it was more important for her hair to be flexible and cheap in maintenance, whereas in other situations, it was about

looking professional or attractive. Therefore, different perspectives and priorities come to the foreground at different times.

In my narrative of my meeting with Wanda, I pointed to several key events in her hair journey. These included the first time she cut off her hair, because she refused to endure any more pain caused by doing her hair, and a decision with her flatmate to fully embrace her natural hair due to financial constraints. It should be noted that these two accounts of events seem to contradict one another. Wanda's varying accounts as to why she embraced natural hair offers further evidence into the complexities connected to the initial reasons behind accepting natural hair. Expecting Wanda or all black women to have one exact moment or reason behind transitioning to natural hair is not plausible. For instance, a devote Christian would experience a moment in time that defined and strengthened their belief in God. Same could be said for women who are invested in a firm "naturalista" identity and political view justifying that identity. In Wanda's case, she has had many such instances where the back, and forth travel between weaves, and natural hair, further shaped her identity and strengthened the meaning of natural hair in her life.

Francis Nyamnjoh (2015: 6) postulates that we live in a "world of flux", whereby structure is a transient exhibition of change which, in actuality, is constantly flowing. In this world, human beings are in need of constant enhancements, potency and activation via relationships with other incomplete individuals (ibid, 2015: 6). Similarly, Wanda is seeking to enhance herself through her hair. This is a journey that is leading her not to seek out 'completeness' through pursuing Eurocentric beauty standards, but to express herself through her hair in a variety of ways, whilst in conversation with others. Thus, natural hair is an important medium for this expression. Moreover, Wanda's ability to switch between natural and synthetic hairstyles speaks to the flexible way that she enhances, or activates a part of herself that is incomplete.

Drawing from their research participants, Nyamnjoh and Fuh (2014: 60) state that wearing synthetic hair should have no bearing on one's racial identity or "authentic" blackness. They noted that hairstyling and wearing synthetic hair is a choice, and depending on the person or the circumstances, it helps to boost a person's esteem. Mercer (1987: 34) suggests that hairstyling is just another famous form of art that articulates a range of "aesthetic 'solutions'" to a variety of 'issues', that were created

by the ideologies of racism and race. That is, hairstyling is a unique reply to the experiences of dispossession and oppression. Wanda's relationship to natural hair seems to align with these points. She uses weaves to enhance her appearance, as well as to express who she is as an individual in relation to others; and not as someone who is either trying to, or not, to be 'authentically' black. With that being said, no one person has the monopoly on what constitutes completeness and whether, or not the enhancements used go against a sense of 'wokeness'.

With regards to Wanda's experience or journey with hair, it is a very personal one. From previous conversations with other women in Windhoek, the politics surrounding hair and the discourse around natural versus 'unnatural' hair, has not garnered as much attention in Namibia as it has in South Africa. This may be a contributing reason as to why Wanda was not aware of the Natural Hair Movement. Being natural for Wanda is not just about wearing natural hair per se, but preferably about a personal sense of beauty, a personal response to economic circumstances and maintenance needs, and a personal way of understanding her national, and ethnic identity. Personal choice was a vital part in her decision to switch to natural hair, and it is clear from the discussions in the interview that she also allows her daughter the freedom to make her own personal choices. With choice comes flexibility in styling options, whether natural or 'un-natural'. Wanda sees the choice between natural and 'un-natural' hair as an experimental phase through which a person can find acceptance of the self, and other individuals' choices to express themselves.

In the same breath, personal budgets remain a constraint in the choices that many black women make for their hair. Wanda's interest in natural hair and choices for hair care reflect her limited financial means. Such constraints are less evident in the subsequent chapters of this study, as having the option to buy expensive weaves, wigs and the best chemical relaxer, allows my other research participants to express themselves with fewer limitations.

Of course, financial constraint need not have led Wanda to natural hair. One could argue that black women have multiple options open to them even when financially restricted. The different paths that black women could take, given their financial situations and the reasons behind their choices, would be to purchase cheaper relaxers and to utilise other dangerous styling techniques. The pedalling of

relaxers used to be costly and advertisements promoted a product that proffered manageability, and the illusion of acceptability, and enhanced beauty (Johnson and Bankhead, 2014: 93). However, what companies do not advertise is the damage and emotional harm that is caused by the prolonged, and misguided use of their products. In addition to the emotional injuries and damage to black women's hair, is the amount of money that they spend on products (Olasado, 2009: 204). Referring back to Wanda, she could no longer afford chemical relaxers and the amount that one needs in order to sustain the care on one's hair before it falls out. Consequently, it is for this particular reason that many women resort to buying cheaper relaxers that only cause further damage.

In light of the above discussion, there is evidence to suggest that the common occurrence of hair loss among males and females leaves devastating, psychosomatic consequences in its wake (Nnoruka, 2005: 13). The etiology varies, as hair loss can range from bald spots to extremely diffused patterns of hair loss (ibid, 2005: 13). Due to black women's severe hair care practices, varying forms of alopecia inevitably occur, for instance, in situations where styling techniques such as weaving, hair braiding, and chemical or thermal straightening take place. These practices place African women in danger of experiencing different injurious forms of alopecia (Ibid, 2005: 13). As a result, black women globally have opted to go natural, and as Moloto (2018: n.p.) stipulates, this transition is culturally based and its psychological benefits are just as important to black women, as are the commercial benefits for stores, and manufacturers that cater to them. Wanda seems to have found a healthier path with her home remedies despite her limited budget. She often resorts to home remedies such as a sand mixture for the maintenance of her natural hair, which she believes works better than store-bought products. Accordingly, this practice brings Wanda closer to understanding her hair and what works for her, despite the limited budget for her hair products that other 'naturalistas' use. Additionally, more often than not, our choices are dictated by circumstances, and in Wanda's case, her limited financial resources were a leading factor as to why she has natural hair.

In essence, Wanda's narrative about her relationship with natural hair surpasses beyond a political agenda. The narrative touches on national identity, ethnic identity, looking professional, and being attractive. Ultimately, taking into account all of these considerations, time and money pose a practical obstacle which limits one's

options, and can therefore become one of the key deciding factors between being “natural”, or not. By delving into her hair experiences, it can be concluded that it is important to pay attention to the complex and nuanced relationships that individual black women have with hair. Their identities, which are often shaped by and expressed through this relationship, are in constant flux. Furthermore, these identities are contextual and constrained by the economic, and social possibilities a person has access to.

CHAPTER 3

'Hairituality[4]': Rethabile's Natural Hair and Beliefs

Hair means so much more than just 100,000 strands on the human scalp. As discussed in the preceding two chapters, hair plays a part in the formation of identity and a sense of being, and becoming for my research participants. It is also associated with spirituality and has a rich symbolic significance. Some of the elements that are linked with the aforementioned includes communicating with deities, ancestors, or spirits using our hair. In fact, scholarly literature suggests that many people have an intensely spiritual relationship with their hair. As stated in chapter one, nearly all communities believed that an individual's head is the core of communication and identity, and that it controls the human body, as well as being the epicentre of intense preoccupation, and elaboration (Mercer, 1987: 34; Pergament, 1999: 44; White and White, 1995: 49). To reiterate the thoughts of Deborah Pergament (1999: 48) in chapter one, during the Nazi reign, the hair of Orthodox Jews who were kept in concentration camps was cut off in order to dehumanise, degrade and control them. In addition to this, Bellinger (2007: 66) highlighted that the act of tonsuring hair was one of many ways in which individuals were subdued, and furthermore, according to Leach (1958: 149), it is a source from which people derived their supernatural power for use in divine intentions and when sacrificing humans. In essence, because it rests on the highest point of the body, hair is a medium that is used to connect one to supreme beings, protect one from those with evil motives, and also to attract divine blessings.

In this chapter, the focus on spirituality contrasts significantly with that of the previous chapter's, wherein I centered on the practicalities of how one individual, Wanda, constructed her identity through natural hair. The discussions in chapter two revolved largely around the upkeep of one's hair, the money and the time spent on it, as well as the ability to be perceived as attractive, and professional through one's hair. However, in this chapter, the focus will shift to another completely different subject, that will illustrate how, for some women, hair has a spiritual dimension linked to it; a

[4] the everyday rituals and/or practices that take place when dealing with hair. A deeper connection to hair as more than just a symbol or head-covering for different individuals in various locations or contexts. Used as a therapeutical device, hair can be used to connect or retreat inwards to realign, recentre the individual's concept of self or connection to a higher purpose or divinity.

topic that Wanda did not share or mention. The plurality of meanings and practices of hair for different people in an array of situations, will be documented through tracing the hair journey of another research participant, Rethabile; thereby contributing to the goal of this thesis. Although the practicalities are also imperative for Rethabile, there are other meanings and practices associated with natural hair that diverge from those that were described by Wanda.

Therefore, with the above in mind, I argue that for Rethabile and several other research participants that will be mentioned in this chapter, natural hair acted as a conduit that is used to connect with spirits or other metaphysical forces. They connect with the divine and the spiritual realm using hair as a medium, or an antenna, and in Rethabile's case, at least, she has found that her connection to the other side is clearer when she returns her hair to its natural state.

3.1. Rethabile's Mourning and Finding her "Antennae"

In 2019, Rethabile and I travelled to a small town in the Free State, called Philippolis as mentors to the University of the Free State's (UFS) third-year Anthropology students. The midmorning air on our second day was perfumed with an aroma unfamiliar to that of the city girl's life. The smell of sheep dung and the fragrance of wildflowers, as well as indigenous plants mingled with the country air as I tried to adjust my senses. It was during this time that I took the opportunity to chat with my fellow mentor about her hair journey.

As Rethabile began to tell me her story, she took me back to a time when she was a little girl, aged between seven and 10 years old, and living with her aunt. Her aunt during that time was the main caretaker of her hair and she recalled how she was taunted, or berated for the fact that she had a big head with too much hair; a situation that I had also often found myself in while my mother tended to my hair as a child. After a brief laugh about it, she mentioned that it was a daunting situation for her. She explained to me that her aunt, and others, gave her the impression that her hair was difficult to work with and abnormal. After living with her aunt, Rethabile moved in with her mother, who is of Swazi descent. It was there that she had her hair relaxed for the first time and was advised that it must be kept that way. According to her mother, for women in the Swazi culture, hair is considered their crown and it is what makes them beautiful. Furthermore, they are only allowed to cut their hair when their husband dies.

Therefore, Rethabile, who is a self-proclaimed tomboy, developed a self-image that was heavily reliant on how her hair was maintained. During her teenage years, she moved in with her father who gave her autonomy over her hair, allowing her to cut it, and have it chemically straightened.

The turning points in Rethabile's story, especially with respect to her understanding of natural hair and its link to spirituality, seem to have corresponded with two deaths that took place in her family. When her grandmother died in 2005, Rethabile explained that men and women shave their heads in observance of Pedi cultural traditions. If your head was already braided (this included children) during the mourning period, you were not allowed to undo it, because someone in the family died. She further elaborated, as an illustration of this traditional practice, how a small section at the nape of her head was shaved to adhere to cultural mourning practices. Later, she shaved her head again to mourn the death of her father who passed away in 2018. She referred to these mourning periods in Zulu as "*Inzila*," or "the dark cloud", a period of darkness that hangs over the family of the deceased until members of that family perform rituals that appease the deceased's soul.

During the *"Inzila"* for her father, Rethabile began to reflect more on the relationship between her natural hair and her spirituality. She referred to this period in her life as her "Mourning rite of passage," and presented it in this way:

> I don't know what it is, but it's as if the bigger…the bigger your natural hair grows…right… the more your antennae's [grow]…It's as if it's your connection to the spiritual side [becomes stronger]…Hair is beautiful, and I appreciate hair. So much so, 'cause I see my hair, but it's as if there is power man. You know when Solomon [Samson] talks about power, I see that there is power in…natural hair.

It is not surprising that during the period of mourning, on two separate occasions Rethabile started to reflect on her spirituality. The tonsuring of hair is used by bereaved family members to appeal to the ancestors and symbolises respect for the dead. By honouring tradition, Rethabile also saw the "Beauty in cutting [her] hair". As a self-proclaimed tomboy, she had kept her natural hair short and shaved on both sides of her head after her father's funeral. Throughout her narrative, Rethabile refers to her

natural hair as “antennae”, an image for the spiritual connection found in it. While referring to strength, Rethabile drew my attention to the Biblical figure, Samson (whom she mistakenly called Solomon) to further illuminate her point. Samson’s connection to the divine powers came through his hair from which he drew his strength. The comment suggests that Rethabile’s imagination of the link between hair and spirituality is drawn from both the Bible and some kind of cultural initiation to thinking about the Bible. Her belief that a person draws his or her strength, or power from their hair and her metaphorical reference to natural hair as “antennae”, may stem from her belief in African spirituality and being a Catholic. What is clear is that, for Rethabile, the tonsuring of hair during mourning is not only a sign of respect to the dead and to the ancestors, but it also allows for “rebirth, rethinking, regeneration”. In brief, it is within this act of tonsuring that Rethabile found the strength and power in hair.

In the past, the assumption by some men and women was that a female with a shaved head was unattractive, and was not considered beautiful. Being required to cut her hair on various occasions for mourning purposes, Rethabile saw herself past the physical beauty of having hair and focused on the spiritual connection, by embracing her “antennae’s” ability to bring her closer to the spiritual realm. Although Wanda’s natural hair does not seem to have led her to reflect on her spirituality, it does draw her inwards to a place where she sees beauty, and safety in cutting her hair annually. Thus, for both women, hair allows them to rethink their choices and to reconnect with themselves.

While narrating her experience of the “*Inzila”,* Rethabile often returned to the topic of dreadlocks. It is apparent, that for her, dreadlocks are symbolic of a fierce spiritual connection. To get her point about dreadlocks across, Rethabile explained that she noticed a young man who was, in her opinion, battling with himself and this was evident from the way that he dressed (he seldom wore shoes), and from the condition of his dreadlocks. This, I surmise, was how Rethabile knew that his ancestors were ‘calling’ him and that he was yet to heed the call. Drawing from her personal story, Rethabile began to narrate her version of the young man’s situation. She informed me that the young man came from a wealthy background and that his father was a priest. According to her, “He’s got everything, he’s not poor. He just doesn’t know who he is.” She then made reference to herself and her “stubborn” natural hair which she got from her biological mother’s side of the family. By constantly

being told that her hair was uncooperative and hard to maintain, her family members were disturbing the ancestors on her mother's side of the family from whom she had inherited her hair. As she put it, "The more you try to kill one side of the family [maternal side], it's the more you making them [the ancestors] upset. They are forced to rise, because you are ignoring them." This is what Rethabile believed was happening to the young man. She explained,

> …sometimes Chéri, they literally…they [the ancestors] will literally make you walk on your feet. He is finding himself; he is finding his voice in his own particular way and I think that's why hair will always be the first indicator, because you realise once it starts… *ke* dreadlocks…then you like yeah.

In her opinion, the young man did not yet know who he was. It seems that, perhaps he was finally surrendering to the ancestors and allowing them to guide him to who is meant to be. Earlier in this chapter, Rethabile had referred to her hair as "antennae" and that wearing her natural hair in dreadlocks would bring her closer to, or be the final step to reaching the spiritual realm. Hence, her supposition that the young man's dreadlocks were the first indicators of the ancestors attempting to speak to him. She further inclined that the man's hair could reflect his 'calling' and that, perhaps, he is destined to become a *sangoma*.

Rethabile's comments in this passage probe deeper into the widespread associations between dreadlocks and spiritual power. According to Hair Shaman (2009), 'dreads' denote a certain "fear of the Lord", an outward symbol used to portray an estrangement from contemporary worldly materials and other evils. This, in turn, brings them closer to the covenant of God and when a child enters the world with matted hair, they are considered to be spiritually protected and wise. The Yoruba of Nigeria believe that one should only cut their hair once they are safely anchored to the physical world and the spiritual realm no longer has a hold over them (Warner-Lewis, 2002: 117). Rethabile saw this young man's outward appearance as a sign that the ancestors were trying to connect with him and that his dreadlocks, and bare feet were indicative of that fact. Accurately described as an extension of the sensory nervous system, hair is characterised as exteriorised nerves. Simply put, they are 'antennae' or feelers that are highly developed, and which are capable of transmitting copious

amounts of relevant information to the neocortex, limbic system, and the brain (Ancient code, 2017: n.p.).

Rethabile's understanding of her hair as antennae seems to draw from these wider associations with dreadlocks and from her relationship with her sister who is a practicing *sangoma*, and wears dreadlocks. It is from her close connection to her sister and her sister's ability to commune with the ancestors, that Rethabile's understanding of dreadlocks may stem from a 'sixth' sense, or 'antennae,' as she often says with regards to her hair.

3.2. Styled by the 'Gifted': The Divine Touch

The notion that hair is like antennae is, but one of the themes that are related to "hairituality", a theme that Rethabile and my other research participants had shed some light on during the interviews. Another recurring theme was the "the divine touch". I have heard many refer to the hands of some stylists or members in their family as gifted. Some may view it simply as a talent or a skill, while others refer to it as a blessing, or a gift from God. However it is viewed by individuals, several of my research participants noted that the ability to help other women's hair grow or break may depend on the intent of those caring for it. As Rethabile elaborated, permitting different people to touch her hair gave her headaches. In addition to this, she had also noticed that objects around the home would break if numerous people touched it. Rethabile's sister, who tends to her hair on the occasions that she returns home, offered her an explanation. She said that objects broke around the family home, because she allowed strangers with bad intentions to style her hair. Rethabile's sister's ability to warn her of any bad omens or misfortune, is attributed to her gift of foresight; a gift which is often given to traditional healers (cf. Podelecka, 2016: 148).

Such beliefs are not unheard of in the black community. Like so many others, I too believe in the divine touch, a gift that is given by the divine in order to braid hair and to help it grow. Many of my research participants also discussed this touch. For example, Mabel, from Windhoek, also believes in the gift that is given to some to care for people's hair. She stated that,

> …it's a spiritual thing, because they say if you have a good heart, goodness comes out of you. If you have a bad heart,

> badness comes out of you. So people with hands that help their hair grow it's, because their hearts are good, they actually love doing hair and they want to see people's hair grow. They wanna know that they nurtured the way it is so that when the client comes back months later and their hair has grown a substantial length.

Subsequently, Charlotte, also from Windhoek, had a similar perspective and drawing from it, explained why many black people choose to remain with one hairstylist. She had this to say,

> To be honest, all of them. My family is black people so…everybody will say that like even a hairdresser will say that … Ah who plaited your hair? [in high-pitched voice] … your hair is breaking. It's just something in them, I don't know it's just something. Many of them told me that there are certain people's hands that doesn't let your hair grow. I've experienced it and I've seen so. It's true, so when that happened I started keeping…when I was in a certain area\city and if I would see this person is the actual person that does the hair nice I keep up with her, 'til I meet somebody else in another city…hair is something that needs attention.

As Mabel and Charlotte emphasised, individuals' intentions, whether good or bad, flow from them and is transferred through a person's hands as they deal with hair. As one is not always certain of another person's intentions, all of my research participants therefore believe that by remaining with one hairstylist, one can avoid unfortunate incidences such as objects breaking, headaches, hair falling out or not growing. As Charlotte maintains, when she relocates to a different city she observes and decides that, "This person is the actual person that does the hair nice, I keep up with her, 'til I meet somebody else in another city…hair is something that needs attention". This attention that is given to the maintenance of hair speaks to how profound, nuanced, and crucial her connection to hair actually is, and that she takes care in her decision as to whom can touch her hair. As some scholars have highlighted, touch is more complicated than a simple gesture since it serves to connect persons and transfer

energy between physical, and spiritual entities (Coleman, 2002:129, cf. Nordin, 2009; cf. Saber, 2018: 376). With that being said, for my research participants, the matter of touch has indeed other worldly consequences, if not applied right. For them, hands undeniably connect, curse, and heal as divine energy is transferred to different individuals through working with hair.

In addition to Rethabile's wariness of who touches her hair, she also believes that one should not let their hair lie around after getting a haircut or trim, because people with evil intentions may use them to harm her. Many people believe that hair, when cut, also carries potency. That is, the life force of the person it comes from is still found in the strands of the hair. The cuttings of hair are therefore surrogates of the individual and could be used as either benign, or malignant amulets to ward off evil intent or to curse them (Miller, 2001: 185). It is for such reasons that Rethabile is fearful of being cursed through her hair. Under the assumption that salons burn the hair after it has been shaved off or trimmed, she jokingly remarked that she would "Ask for my hair back". We laughed at her declaration, knowing fully that that would not be possible. As one ponders on what has been said about touch and its supernatural link to hair, perhaps Rethabile's fear of someone using her hair against her is a reality she believes could one day come true.

When it comes to the matter of gender, there are also a number of speculations concerning "the divine touch" that Rethabile spoke about in our interview. During the interview, she began to count, or perhaps take stock of how many male stylists she had over the years, and continues to have. During her childhood, whenever she went to the hair salon, she only had male hairstylists, because her family thought that they would be better at addressing 'stubborn' hair. According to her, only particular individuals could deal with her hair the way her mother requested it to be done. Throughout her life so far, she has had four male hairstylists, which she attributes to a "Particular belief that, because men do not menstruate, men do not fall pregnant," that they are better hairdressers. She spoke of how females enter a period in which they are "…hot." Rethabile does not wish to refer to this period as unclean, because that was not how she viewed it. Instead, she believed that we entered a period of "liminality" which others would then call impure, or polluted. One moved into this liminal space, because during the monthly occurrence of one's menstruation, a woman's body excises a part of itself instead of generating new life.

With confusion heavily written across my face as I did not understand her, Rethabile equated her interpretation of the menstrual cycle and its significance to hair care, to how women were treated during Biblical times. In chapter 15 of the Book of Leviticus, verses 19-33, it states that women in their cycle are not granted permission to enter the church or to tend to daily household chores. As part of a quintessential 'rite of passage' for females entering womanhood, menstruation prepares the body for reproductive functioning (Ismail, Pedro and Andipatin, 2016: 394). Ismail et. al. (2016: 394) elaborate by stating, "Simultaneously, menstruation is viewed through a reverent and fearful eye, and shrouded in the language of concealment, and ambivalence." Since female stylists do not go around declaring their time of the month, Rethabile prefers to have a male stylist whenever possible. In short, Rethabile believed that during a woman's menstrual cycle her hair is vulnerable. She, therefore, is cautious about having female stylists out of concern for what kind of energy they might release at that time, and the resultant effects on her hair if she does.

3.3. The Power and Essence of Hair

In the course of our interview, Rethabile reminded me of a previous conversation that we had regarding Samson, the Biblical character who drew his strength from his hair. It is written in the Bible that an angel of the Lord appeared to the barren wife of Monoah and declared that she would conceive a boy child. No blade was to pass over the head of her son for he was a Nazarite, born to free the people of Israel from the Philistines; and the Spirit of God moved with Samson as he defeated 30 men in Ashkelon. Soon it came to pass that Samson fell in love with a woman named Delilah. The Philistine lords became knowledgeable of this and they each offered her 1100 silver pieces to entice Samson into revealing the source of his strength. After multiple failed attempts by Delilah, Samson finally disclosed the source of his strength. As he slept on her knees, Delilah called on a man to cut the seven locks of hair from his head which caused Samson's strength to leave him (Judges 16: 19; Nyamnjoh and Fuh, 2014: 53). During his time as prisoner of the Philistines, Samson's eyes were gouged out and as time passed, his hair grew back. Still rejoicing in the capture of Samson, the Philistine lords called upon him to be their entertainment. Placed between two pillars, a blind Samson called upon the Lord one last time. With immense faith Samson asked for his strength back in order to avenge the eyes that were taken from him by the Philistines. Using the strength that God had granted back

to Samson, he destroyed the two main pillars that held the roof of the palace in place, and in doing so killed not only himself, but all the Philistines that were present.

The story of Samson and Delilah is not absurd for Rethabile and many of my research participants. They believe that the presence or absence of hair is also used to either increase, or decrease power in certain situations (see also Weitz 2001: 683). The power I speak of is in reference to how a certain coiffure, for example, equates to a level of competency, or femininity in professional and social spheres. The constraints that are placed on women have led them to use certain strategies such as hair and its appearance to gain power. Consequently, this power is evident in our modern society and it is used to enhance not only a woman's confidence, but her beauty as well. Moreover, it can be used to make a political statement as hair symbolises a person's soul, that is, a type of 'energy' or a vital force from which they can draw their power (cf. Leach, 1958: 160).

Remaining with power, life forces and hair, it is possible that Rethabile's inability to wear someone else's hair stems from the fact that she views it as a person's source of strength, and they are capable of retaining that potency or 'energy'. Hair, she said, is an intimate part of life. She explained that she would not purchase someone else's dreadlocks, because that individual bonded with the hair, and it grew out of his or her head. A person's essence, vital force, strength, or 'energy' is attached to their hair, and it is insensible for someone else to walk around with that trapped aura. For Rethabile, hair carries within its shaft the 'energy' of the person from whom it came from, and with it good, or bad energy. Thus, when a woman wears weaves or lace front wigs, her self-esteem and bravado may change. The same, she thinks, also applies to recipients of organ donation, who have reported experiencing strange cravings and changed behaviours that emerged after a successful recovery from an operation (cf. Dossey, 2008: 14; Buttigieg and Duffy, 2017: 181).

Continuing in the same vein, I had heard a similar story whilst having an informal conversation with a black female in her late 20's. Impatient to grow her dreadlocks, Buhle attached her mother's dreadlocks to her hair and as time passed, she noticed that she a lot of misfortune had followed her. Not understanding why certain events were happening, she later spoke to her mother about it. From that conversation, Buhle learned that her mother had cut her dreadlocks after experiencing

bad luck herself, and therefore decided to cut her hair. She came to believe that everything her mother experienced would be removed if she cut her hair and started over again. Therefore, with regards to Buhle's mother's case, it is apparent that a person's vital force and its connection to their hair, may unknowingly harbour 'bad luck'. This unpleasant aura was trapped in the dreadlocks and thus was transferred to her daughter. Andreas Nordin (2009: 203) and Nyamnjoh and Fuh (2014: 53) speak of substance transfer, which is the anthropomorphic and animistic facets of gift exchange. If Buhle's mother was so willing to give her daughter the dreadlocks, why then did Buhle receive the 'bad' energy which was done away with? Furthermore, if removing them dispelled her mother's bad luck, what prompted the transference of such misfortune? Whatever the answers may be, Buhle removed the dreads and noticed a change in her luck as time passed. In essence, regarding all that was discussed in this section, it is evident that Rethabile is fearful of wearing weaves, wigs or dreadlocks, because she is unsure of the type of energy that will be transferred through them. Although one may have good intentions when purchasing a weave, wig or dreadlocks, the intent of the person installing them combined with that of the energy from the weave or wig, is not known nor is the extent of its power.

3.4. Natural Hair, Self-Image and Freedom

For Rethabile and the other research participants, their perceptions of hair and spirituality were often closely connected to their own efforts to accept their self-perceptions in a world that is governed by Eurocentric beauty standards. Although Rethabile embraces natural hair now, she explained that she has not always seen her hair this way,

> [I]…had beauty issues…because I felt I'm bigger neh, body wise, darker…at least now I need something to work for me, because I was taught black is bad, we go through a lot of [expletive] all the time. I found myself competing with other girls wanting to be other people even.

Before the death of her father there was a period in Rethabile's life where she alternated her hairstyle multiple times. From bob cuts to Mohawks, to chemically straightening her hair, she found her hair daunting. Admitting that she could not maintain relaxed hair, she tried weaves and braids, but they too left her feeling

disheartened. At that time, Rethabile referred to herself as bigger in terms of body size. Simultaneously, she had to take into consideration what her mother said about cutting her hair. “So automatically there’s cultural connotations”, with the added pressure of taking care of her hair, “I don’t know if I’m speaking broadly for black people, African people neh. It’s as if from the word go [birth] you get told that your hair is your crown.” Her mother’s criticisms of cutting hair and a broader African perspective that hair is a woman’s ‘crown’, created an expectation to which she could not conform.

In her graduate years, Rethabile felt bigger and darker than other girls, and felt that she needed something “to work for [her]”. She had used her hair as a shield and as a means through which to compete with other women, and the different hairstyles she tried were in an effort to calm the anxieties about the size of her body. She soon came to realise that “I am darker in complexion, I am short, I am like this.” The older she became and redefined God in her own image, the more Rethabile was able to find herself, “I realised God made me the way I am… and I’m perfect.” Thus, Rethabile’s need to compete with other women through her hair stemmed from internalised oppression, or self-hate. Black women internalise such messages daily, whether they are aware of it or not, and this subject will be further discussed in chapter four.

As time went by, Rethabile’s relationship with her hair changed. She went through a self-actualisation period where God was redefined in her image. As she stated, the reason behind this was, because according to her, God does not make mistakes. In turn, she came to the realisation that she is perfect as she is. Before this realisation she had been following women, she termed as ‘pretty girl’ or ‘slay queens’ on social media. One such ‘slay queen’ was South African celebrity Bonang, whom in her opinion, is shallow and not happy. Rethabile compared her to Thandiswa Mazwai, the lead singer from one of South Africa’s most famous bands, Bongo Maffin. According to her, Thandiswa is living her truth, and as a result of this epiphany, she had to decide to either follow ‘slay queens’ or to be “…[her] African self…” She explained that:

> The African self for me means that firstly, God looks like me. Or I look like God – my skin colour, this one (at that exact moment my gaze fell upon the skin of her forearm as she poked its surface, as if urging me to take a good look) looks like God and

> then acknowledge the fact that I have ancestors. So, for me, African means the me, my hair, the land, and my divinity. I'm not chasing that particular divinity anymore, but I have it within me.

By pointing out that "God looks like me" and "I'm not chasing that particular divinity anymore," Rethabile rejected the worldview that God is white. The pursuit to reach a benchmark of white beauty which is unattainable for many, particularly black women, is a mirage of 'completeness'. For her, in embracing her natural hair, she believes that she is coming closer to a divinity that looks like her and that she is becoming 'complete'. When she does not feel this connection or feels "battered by the world", she has means of attempting to regain it. She made reference to the "*Umsamo*", which is Zulu for shrine in her home and it is at this shrine where she performs her daily rituals. As she said, "by the time I leave [the *Umsamo*] I feel centred." She recognises her ancestors in her life and by retreating to her home, and performing her rituals before her shrine, she is able to find peace again. No longer of the opinion that God is only white, embracing her natural hair has allowed her a level of awareness to redefine who she is. The result, she says, is that "I find myself; I see myself."

Furthermore, she seemed to find a sense of freedom in grounding her self-image in the idea that "God looks like me." She believes that black women, in general, chose a version of beauty growing up, but we did not do it consciously, because that is what we were taught to believe. In turn, if a black woman wants the hair associated with this beauty, she needs to be prepared to spend quite a lot of money on good quality hair. However, with that being said, not everyone is financially able to do so. Therefore, seeing God in one's natural hair, frees one from this cycle. As Rethabile highlighted,

> It's because we are running away. We are running towards Eurocentric version of beauty, right? And that's why we get stuck in all this wigs, braids, that we have to sit 50 years… [an exaggeration, trying to emphasise the hours one has to sit down in one position just to have their hair braided. Which is then accompanied by buttocks that have gone numb, because one has been sitting too long on a hard chair or floor] …just to

> put them on, because according to me, we are running towards longer hair. It's as if we are not appreciative of our hair.

In believing that God looks like her and that she is enough, she has come to appreciate what hair can do for her. No longer running towards a level of 'completeness' that is offered by Eurocentric versions of beauty, Rethabile has broken this cycle. In embracing natural hair, Rethabile has not only foregone the expensive weaves and chemical straighteners, but she has also deepened her connection to the spiritual realm. Not only has her hair become the medium through which to communicate with her ancestors and God, but it has allowed her to see herself. That is to say, she is more than just her skin colour, and body image, in a world where a positive self-perception of one's body image is a rarity, and where racial discourse still seeps deep in contemporary South Africa.

In conclusion, Rethabile feels a sense of freedom in her natural hair. A freedom from the burden that was placed upon her person by society to look a certain way and how to style her hair, including the financial freedom from the expenses that accompanied weaves. Additionally, her freedom seems to be rooted in how she has come to see the divine in her hair and how she is able to connect with the divine, and the spiritual realm through it. By not being bound to social standards of beauty and allowing her natural hair to guide her to self-acceptance, and spirituality, she found a freedom that permits her to cope with life's experiences. This freedom also grants her the ability to draw on the unseen strength, or power from her hair. Moreover, in addition to this separation from a bondage of falsehood, her hair symbolises her personal style, a liberty to express who she is and what she believes in. Earlier in the chapter, Rethabile equated her hair to "antennae" and that the bigger (longer) her hair grew, the stronger her connection becomes to the divine and a higher sense of self, and freedom.

CHAPTER 4

With Beauty Comes Pain

Throughout the last two chapters, this thesis has taken up different elements of identity construction that is expressed through natural hair. Firstly, Wanda's narrative introduced the socio-economic aspects and practicalities of hair maintenance, while, secondly, Rethabile's personal narrative revealed how hair is entangled in a variety of beliefs that entail femininity, the human body, freedom and contact with the spiritual realm. As this is the last chapter with an ethnographic purpose, a number of critical feminist perspectives regarding how hair is moulded by ruling Western and Eurocentric beauty standards, which have led many black women to undergo self-torture, will be discussed. For the purposes of this chapter, I will be probing into the vast complexities and encumbered nuances of different forms of violence that has been exerted on black female bodies. This chapter brings together powerful narratives of painful hair practices that were recounted by a few women from Windhoek and Bloemfontein.

Perhaps we, that is, myself and perhaps others, are nursing deep wounds that guided me to this specific theme. These wounds are both physical and emotional, as when we were young children, we used to hear words such as "*kroes kop*" (curly head), "*skirdraat*", "*Matjila's"*[5] and even "*kaffer hare*" used to describe our hair. These descriptive terms were used when my mother washed, curled and styled our hair. This led to a love-hate relationship with my hair and as a young girl, I would sit in front of a mirror ironing it out and disregarded the self-inflicted burn marks that were produced on my scalp, forehead and ears. In addition to this, pimples developed after having my hair pulled so tightly, it hurt to laugh, let alone smile. To note, the pain, like so many other women would agree, was an indication that one's hairstyle was satisfactory, regardless of the discomfort that would ensue at night once it was time to sleep.

Suffering for beauty is a common experience that I share with many black women and a topic that came to the fore amongst my participants. Take for example, Adelina, who is an aspiring model and completing a postgraduate degree at the University of the Free State. I met Adelina at a photoshoot for a campaign called '*Don't Touch My Hair*' for the campus student newsletter. With her flamboyant hairstyle

[5]Referred to as the unruly stubborn bits of hair found at the nape of the head or front and sides of the head.

wrapped up in vibrant colours, she remarked that she does not appreciate being told what to do with her hair and when to do it, unless it is in connection with her modelling career. In like manner of those who do not want to ruin their hairstyle, Adelina mentioned that she too used to sleep on her arms "I sleep like this (crosses arms and places head on them), I don't want to mess up my hair". I commented on some of my memories and attempts at sleeping with freshly braided hair as a child, as compared to my adulthood and we both laughed at the similarities. Adelina concluded by saying, "So you want to look beautiful so then just sit down girl. She (her mother) said that beauty goes along with pain baby. If you want beauty, then there is pain."

There are numerous other stories that are similar to the ones that I have listened to during informal conversations with friends, and acquaintances, while reminiscing and sharing traumatic 'horror stories' of our ordeals with hair. As a young girl and perhaps it is still evident today, the behaviour of sleeping on one's arms in order to keep a hairstyle in perfect condition, is mostly done to showcase to others the product of long hours of grueling work the following day. Due to the expectations and stereotypes that surrounds the female body, and beauty, women have been deceived into believing that beauty is associated with pain. This belief is a consequence of the unrealistic expectations that were set forth by male dominance and the tyranny of fashion over the female body (Banks, 2000: 23). For black African women and the diasporic community, the colour of their skin and the texture of their hair has been a source of great physical, and emotional pain. Returning to Wanda's case, she gave no indication that she suffered emotional turmoil, however, she was rather vocal about the physical pain that she endured while getting her hair done; whether it was weaved or chemically straightened. On the other hand, Rethabile vocalised that her pain was not only physical, but it was emotionally affixed to her sense of self. Remarking on how the practicalities of hair maintenance left her disheartened, Rethabile embarked on a hair journey that strengthened her connection to the spiritual realm. With that being said, the women in this chapter all narrate a time in their lives where unbearable hair practices became burdensome in one way, or another. Therefore, in order to liberate themselves from this vicious cycle, some black women in present-day South Africa and Namibia have opted to wear their natural hair as a way to escape such uncomfortable experiences.

4.1. Eurocentric Beauty Standards and Black Women's Pain

The dominant beauty standards that many have so blindly followed for centuries were created in accordance with the European/Western perspective of what beauty is, and should look like. As Saltzberg and Chrisler (1995: 307) state, the overbearing expectation of the female body to constantly change, is a repercussion of the ever changing and overruling standards of beauty. The hegemonic ideologies that were established under patriarchal rule over the female form is evident throughout history, where women were sub-consciously coerced into conforming to the pressures of male dominance and influence over their physical appearance, irrespective of their race. An example of this patriarchal officiousness can be traced back to China's dynasty era. Chinese women were subjected to the painful binding of their feet, because smaller feet were considered to be more feminine (Ko, 1997: 8; Foo, 2010: 4). The binding of feet occurred during the Song Dynasty (920-1279) and it was a widespread practice in society. This practice of binding young women's feet was akin to societal expectations of women in the Han Dynasty (Bossen, Xurui, Brown and Gates, 2011: 348). Similar to the expectations that encompassed the practice of foot binding, women bore the daily torture of corsets and other repressive beauty image fashions that were deemed fit for the female physique by hegemonic beauty standards (Saltzberg and Chrisler 1997: 307; Patton, 2006: 25).

Although the above discussion highlights major issues in patriarchy's order of femininity, *Reshaping the female body: the dilemma of cosmetic* by Kathy Davis (1995) introduces a different perspective. Davis (2003: 74) opines that on the surface it is assumed that women alter their bodies or body parts for the sake of complying with the relevant, and modern ideals of ladylike appearances, or women are being manipulated according to set ideologies. She concluded that the choice to have cosmetic surgery should rather be seen as an "intervention in identity - that is, a person's sense of her embodied self – [rather] as a beauty practice" (Davis, 2003: 74). With regards to the corset which was viewed by many as a tool that afflicted women, it was embraced as an essential part in not only constructing femininity, but it assisted in the construction of a subjectivity and an identity that was class-based (Summers, 2001: 9). Seen as the holy grail by middle-class and fashion-conscious women, corsetry offered them the ability to craft their bodies into class-appropriate curves (ibid, 2001: 9; Jeffreys, 2000: 420). Considering the discussion thus far, I concur with Kathy

Davis' supposition that any alteration, whether it be permanent or temporary, made to the female form is an intervention in identity. To realign the physical form with the mental imaging is to bring peace to an individual's soul, that is, their identity. In chapter four, Rethabile remarked that the wearing of weaves was an indication that black women were not appreciative of their own hair, and were running towards Eurocentric beauty ideals in order to feel a sense of unattainable completeness. However, the same cannot be said for Wanda, as she embraces the possibilities and the layers that are added to her identity by alternating between weaves, and her natural hair.

For Leigh Summers (2001: 195), women were willfully complicit in the sado-ritual of foot binding, clitoridectomy and puerile corseting. Considering that women did this to themselves, any and all moral responsibility, or blame for such practices was denied by men (ibid, 2001: 195). Mothers soon became the scapegoats as men abnegated responsibility for perpetuating such practices. In advertisements that contained corsetry or ritual practices, for example, clitoridectomy or foot binding, the chief advocate for such rituals were the mothers of young girls. These mothers were regarded to be influential instruments in the administration of such practices in the lives of young girls (ibid, 2001, 195). Women in all countries, according to Summers (2001: 195), understood all too well that the cruelty of such traditions was, and still is, necessary if young girls were to be accepted as satisfactory brides. In patriarchal societies such as 19th century China and Victorian Britain, a realistic future for women was marriage. Thus, mothers who faced such unnerving and sad realities had few options that were available to them, and hence, for survival purposes, mutilating their daughters was the only alternative (ibid, 2001: 195).

In *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a world of strangers* by Kwame Anthony Appiah (2006: 75), he observed that there was a shift in a centuries old practice in China between 1910 and 1920. Foot binding was eradicated within a generation and what was once considered to be beautiful, had become unsightly (Appiah, 2006: 75). The reason behind the vast decline in the practice can be attributed to a campaign that brought to light knowledge that nowhere else in the world was the practice adhered to. Previously, the binding of feet was used to attract a husband, however, Natural Foot Society members pledged that no woman with feet that were bound, would marry their sons. Furthermore, it became evident that being coerced to experience the anguish of unbinding, left women's 'ornamented' feet disfigured (ibid, 2006: 76).

Although the abhorrent realities of foot binding cannot be entirely equated to the issue of hair, the fundamental problem of experiencing pain in order to attain beauty, remains the crux for both. Black women have become complicit in the harsh use of chemical and mechanical straightening mechanisms not only on their hair, but on that of their young daughters too. Initially seen as a way to gain social standing, attract a husband, or to be considered as beautiful, ideas such as the bleaching of skin, and chemically straightening hair have, in contemporary society, become ingrained in the psyche of black women. This unwarranted indoctrination is thus passed on through hair practices, generationally. Unlike foot binding in China, these ideas have not been eradicated. Nevertheless, the Natural Hair Movement has and continues to challenge the discrimination of black women's hair. Moreover, one of the objectives of this movement involves ensuring that the ideals from the 1960's are passed on amongst black women; and this target group also includes some of the research participants that are presented in this thesis.

4.2. Power, Pain and Sexuality/Gender

In addition to all that has been discussed thus far in this section, Samuelson (2007: 134) highlights that the female form is enshrouded in mystery and meaning, and therefore is an ideologically contested battleground. In the camps of the African National Congress (ANC) political party, women were subjected to sexual abuse and were unwilling to testify. Samuelson (2007: 133) states that this double bind can be artlessly described to be a matter between gender and race. In other words, there was an internal squabble within a woman regarding her fealty to racial liberation, and remaining silent in the face of adversity. Allegations of sexual abuse were also reported to have occurred within the camps of the South West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO) political party. War was seen as an area that is reserved for men, and unfortunately, women who joined the armed forces were treated as subordinates and experienced 'gendered punishment' (Akawa, 2014: 13). They were sexually assaulted, tortured and raped by the enemy, and by the male soldiers in their camp. The bodies of women were used to exact humiliation and to send a message that their men were not courageous enough to protect them. Moreover, this deplorable treatment of women was also initiated to degrade a country's cultural honour, and national pride (ibid, 2014: 13). Amina Mama in *The Gender Politics of the Namibian Liberation Struggle* by Martha Akawa (2014: 13), explained that the conversations

which surround the pervasive perceptions of colonialism's history of disgraced men, and African nationalism, as well as the importance of recovering men's mangled manhood, was proffered as an explanation as to why and how women suffered as victims of violence, because of their gender. This violence, she notes, was particularly prevalent in camps for refugees.

In Simone de Beauvoir's (2010: 84) opinion, the female form is "solicited by two kinds of alienations; it is very clear that to play at being a man will be a recipe for failure; but to play at being a woman is also a trap: being a woman would mean being an object, the Other; and at the heart of this abdication, the Other remains a subject." Defined as a phenomenon, the human body encapsulates multiple choices and options, and it is also regarded as being highly unstable, and extremely malleable (Shilling, 1993: 74). Erving Goffman's (1949) work examines the influence and maintenance of social roles, relations, and encounters as an integral part of body management. He posits that the body acts as a mediator between a person's social and personal identity, and manages to construct specific versions of an individual's self in diverse ways (ibid, 1993: 74). Ergo, the body as a biological entity vanishes and instead becomes a product that has been socially built, and has the capacity to be imbued with alternating manifestations of power, and an array thereof (Shilling, 1993: 74).

The aforementioned power is the ability to force and influence one's will on another without considering the 'others' will, thereby changing their wants or desires (Weitz, 2001: 668). It also involves surrendering ourselves to the power that we have over other people, theirs over us, and our participation in acts and emotions that we sense, on one or another level, is not 'nice' (McKenna, 1984: 3). Giving in to the desire to reach a specific beauty ideal has had long-lasting and devastating effects on the female body. Self-deprivation, self-torture, and self-mutilation are the different ways in which women tend to deal with, and strive for hegemonic beauty ideals (Gimlin, 1996: 505). The 'Other' in colonial times and today, is not defined according to who they were, but were judged from a perspective of how different they were in relation to their oppressor. There is no disputing the existence of oppression and domination, but what needs to be examined is what characteristics exist within an oppressor that motivates him, or her to oppress others (Jandt, Dolores and Tanno, 2001: 122)? Prompted by fear of the oppressor's blindness, ignorance, and need for significance is the 'Other's'

way of holding on to, or making sense of the world in which they exist (ibid, 2001: 122). Therefore, in that light, the domineering power that the 'Other' inevitably yields to, further solidifies the oppressor's influence over them. Conclusively, there is no need for physical action against the 'Other', because this power is well-known, deeply rooted, real, feared, and is usually never challenged (Weitz, 2001: 668).

It is clear from the discussions thus far, that the human body being a site for power struggles should come as no surprise. The evolution of 'disciplinary practices' created 'docile bodies' (such as factory workers, regimented soldiers, and obedient students) through which individuals acted on and internalised the beliefs that were the primary source of their inferiority (Weitz, 2001: 668). As a result, the body became a vessel that was used to not only demonstrate resistance, but also as the loci for contentions of power, as the choices of individuals concerning the body became saturated with political idioms (ibid, 2001: 668). The emergence of the Natural Hair Movement in the 1960s, 1970s, and again in the early 2000s, has witnessed countless women with afro-textured hair forego the relaxers, straighteners and weaves. This moment of liberation allowed them to proudly wear, with confidence, their natural hair as an act of defiance, and self-acceptance. However, this was not the case during the era of slavery and segregation in America, as well as in South Africa and Namibia where the subjugation of black people under colonial rule, and at the height of apartheid was prominent illustration of the oppressor's power (Oyedemi, 2016: 538). During these times, African hair was seen as inferior and the emergence of the hegemonic notion of what good hair looks like, rendered African textured hair invisible (ibid, 2016: 318).

As a reminder of the discussion in chapter one and its relation to power, African slaves that were forcibly brought to the 'New World' reluctantly assimilated under pressure to their slave owners' rule. In the 1700s, racial segregation was evident not only between white and black people, but slaves were also made to feel alienated amongst themselves. Africans of a much lighter complexion were treated as house slaves and those with a darker pigmentation worked in the cotton fields. The division of labour was based on the institutionalisation of 'pigmentocracy', where racial hierarchy determined an individual's socio-economic position; and later hair was also factored into the equation (Mercer, 1987: 36). During the time of slavery, female house slaves were vulnerable to their masters' advancements and were raped. The resultant

effects of these rapes produced children of mixed race. The progeny generations later benefitted, at no fault of their own, and were treated differently due to their easier-to-manage tresses, and lighter complexion. Since slaves were not always fortunate to have sufficient amounts of time to tend to their hair, they resorted to covering it with leftover cloth material to wrap around it, and looking presentable spared them the plantation owners' anger (Patton, 2006: 28; Thompson, 2009: 833; Oyedemi, 2016: 539).

Willie Marrow chronicled the history of African slaves and their matted, and tangled hair in *400 years without a Comb.* Marrow argues that hair and the colour of a person's skin is irrevocably intertwined, thus making it difficult to divide the two factors when studying the elements that moulded the lives of black people (Thompson, 2009: 833). The socio-cultural importance of hair as a natural and basic symbol of what people aspire to be, should not be taken lightly. It soon became a tool through which slaves sought acceptance by imitating the hairstyles worn by slave owners. After the abolishment of slavery in 1865, black women were coerced into straightening their hair and lightening their skin in order to benefit socially through advertisements (Thompson, 2009: 834; Patton, 2006: 28). A need to integrate into white culture was catered to by Madam CJ Walker and other black entrepreneurs who recognised, and benefitted from selling, and marketing products to women of colour. On account of her skin colour, the success of her hair straightening tool and softener sanctioned the act of straightening, which changed the way black women saw their hair. This practice moved it away from the obligations that white people had imposed on black people, and became a cooperative indicator of progress (Thompson, 2009: 834). Although Walker encouraged high self-esteem among the black female community, the alterations that were made to black women's hair became a practice that was highly contested in the 1960s' and '70s by social movements such as "Black is Beautiful" (Byrd and Tharps, 2014; Bankhead, 2014: 93). Individuals such as Malcolm X and Marcus Garvey saw the straightening of hair as a sign of shame towards black beauty and its uniqueness, as well as an attempt to emulate the standards of white beauty (Patton, 2006: 29).

As black women endeavoured to either emulate whiteness or to practice a different expression of blackness, the practice of obtaining 'good' hair is embroiled in all states of violence. Be it direct, physical, symbolic, cultural or structural (Oyedemi,

2016: 538). This violence is also self-inflicted and perpetuated generationally, and furthermore, internalised to such an extent that it forms part of the daily lived experiences of African black women, and the global diaspora vis-à-vis hair.

Taking into account the discussions that encompassed topics such as hair, power, identity and the body, my experience in the field showcased the above practice to which so many black women are numb. Towards the end of my fieldwork in Windhoek, I decided to have my hair braided. After three of the seven hours in which it took to braid my hair, I was feeling the familiar pull and neck stiffening sensation that I often experienced in my childhood. However, the pain was now tolerable and anticipated. I sat on a white plastic chair with my head bent, and my backside slightly numb within the first two hours of what became a long day. Facing the entrance of the stall, I took note of two young girls, possibly between the ages of six and nine. They were excited to have their hair done and I was eager to see the reward for their excitement. An hour passed and I heard the faint whimpering of a little girl. Since half my head was completed, I looked up to observe this girl sitting next to her sister on a hard, plastic chair. It seemed to have engulfed her small frame as she slowly tried to avoid the pain of each cornrow that was being braided. Her cries did not seem to deter her young braider, or her sister sitting next to her, nor did they gather the attention of a sympathetic ear. No one was coming to her rescue as the young girl's cries became ever louder, such that they echoed throughout the market. Moments passed and her cries soon became whimpers.

This situation reminded me of a similar incident at a hair salon in Bloemfontein. I was seated at the entrance of the salon merely as a spectator that day. Lindiwe, a young girl aged either four or five years old, was seated on chair cushions in order to level her with the stylist. Her head was bent over her knees as she sat to get her hair braided, which could not have been longer than three centimetres. I shuddered as I watched what transpired before me, because the process of braiding hair that short is excruciating. Additionally, this experience may be perceived as borderline torment on a child so young, who cannot voice her anguish. Torment being used to describe such an experience, can be attested to by many black women. When one's hair is pulled in different directions to create a specific style and it is completed, it feels as if one's eyelids were pulled backward. Your head feels heavy, because of the looming

headaches that will be experienced for a few days as you struggle to find a suitable position that will allow you to sleep peacefully. Moreover, as a result of the irritable pain and multiple pimples that are bound to form, some women place a cold compress on heated areas for temporary relief.

Continuing with Lindiwe's case, there came a point where her cries stopped as she jumped from her seat and ran around her stylist. Dressed in an off-pink ballerina tutu, she gave no heed to her grandmother who attempted to calm her down, and seated again. After coaxing her, Lindiwe was seated once again in the chair which she possibly associated with pain. The one braid which the stylist managed to attach, with difficulty, to what little hair Lindiwe had at the back of her head, was half braided when she wriggled herself out of the chair. After running around laughing and avoiding the outstretched hands of the stylist, including the attempts of her grandmother to capture her for an hour, it was time to leave as her grandmother's hair was done, and styled. Unperturbed by an incomplete head of synthetic fiber, Lindiwe skipped past me smiling as if in slow motion. It was in that moment that I could imagine this young girl rejoicing as if to say, "I won that round." However, one cannot help, but wonder how long her obstinate behaviour will prevail.

4.3. Feminism and Black Women Empowerment

During the second wave of feminism, black women's unique experiences with their bodies and sustained resistance to it are what fueled the Black Feminist movement in the 1960s and '70s. Despite a political climate that asked women to choose between fighting patriarchy (first wave Feminist Movement) and racism (Civil Rights Movement), black female activists chose a political label that Benita Roth (2003: 43) points out was not encouraged by male activists in their communities. Furthermore, this discouragement was also supported by a number of black female activists. Roth asserts that the second wave of feminism was reshaped by black feminist thinkers that stretched the thoughts of feminism over the limits of their crusade. She further argues that the feminist convictions of black women in the 1960's and 70's, was possibly more profound than that of their white counterparts (Roth, 2003: 46).

According to Roth (2003: 50), organisations and groups that were formed by black feminists, adapted a feminism that subsumed analytical oppressions of class, race/ethnicity, sexuality and gender. The analysis of oppressions from an intersectional standpoint was posited by black feminists, and this also included the importance of defying different forms of control simultaneously (Collins, 1990; Rosette and Dumas, 2007; Robinson, 2011). These diverse manifestations of oppression and coercion are administered not only by structural institutions, but by cultural institutions as well, such as our family, friends, and ourselves. Based on the different identities that black females possess (race and gender), discrimination that collides based on several different factors at the same time, needs to be addressed (Perry, 2017: 20). Patricia Hill Collins (2000: 204, 248) and Kahleeka Perry (2017: 20) assented on the importance of Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw's 1989 addition of intersectionality into the Black Feminist perspective. Intersectionality as a concept described and addressed the vast forms of discrimination black bodies face from numerous directions. Additionally, it also sheds some light on the failure of white feminists to acknowledge the gravity of being a resident in a state that is overly repressive. Intersectionality broaches a self-created, countercultural viewpoint whereby black women's lived experiences are united, validated and visible with regards to their survival of multiple forms of persecution (Perry, 2017: 14-15).

Shauntae Brown White (2005: 297) points out that the different shapes in which oppression manifests itself, is rooted in the political parallels that are found between hair and skin colour as products of white supremacy, and cultural hegemony. These factors emanated from racial segregation, or slavery in the USA, and apartheid pigmentocracy in South Africa, and Namibia. It must be noted that I am not deliberately excluding black men and their experiences with hair. The reason for such a decision is mounted on the observation that social hair hierarchy has had more of an inimical effect on black women. White's (2005: 297) argument regarding this was that men of colour (African American or African) are not held by the same yardstick of physical allure and beauty as women are (Collins, 2000: 46).

Earlier in this chapter, I mentioned that hair texture hierarchy, which either divides, alienates or brings black women together, has in the last few years contributed immensely to how black women, or women with afro-textured hair view themselves.

Furthermore, how they treat or take care of their hair. In the subsequent section, I will explore and discuss how experiences of pain brought some of my research participants together in pursuit of natural hair.

4.4. Pain, Beauty and Turning to Natural Hair

To be black and express one's self by wearing one's natural hair creates conflict. To emphasise on this point, it is an undeniable fact that the style in which black African women and the diaspora choose to wear their hair, is seen as an act of rebellion against colonial dogmatic conditioning. Nevertheless, as I have explored throughout this thesis via the work of Francis Nyamnjoh, Divine Fuh, and Zimitri Erasmus, Africans' perspective of becoming and being vis-à-vis hair should be acknowledged as a way to negotiate, navigate and reconcile conflicting identities that were imposed by colonial structures. Therefore, in light of the observations that were made thus far in this chapter, it is evident that people respond to this colonial legacy differently.

The legacy that was left behind by colonialism has repeatedly required black individuals to question their identity. Is my decision in how I choose to wear my hair related to how African, or close to my roots I am? Moreover, how 'woke' or decolonised am I? Robinson (2011: 360) and Dosekun (2016: 65) posit that for one to understand the worldviews of women, it is vital that we attempt to comprehend why hair is of such great significance to them. The lived experiences of black women reflect a culture dominated by white standards of beauty, which have been regarded as more attractive than their dejected African ancestry. Robinson (2011: 360) and Mercer (1989: 35) state that the beauty standards that were emboldened by racial inclinations and fused with the complexities of colour, made hair length and texture a crucial element in the identity of a black woman. Henceforth, only one caliber of beauty is honoured. These higher echelons of beauty exclude and declare afro-textured hair, thus compelling black women to join the ranks of Eurocentric beauty standards, which in actuality, does not work for them (Robinson, 2011: 360; Mercer, 1989: 35).

Mercer (1987), Erasmus (1997, 2000), Powe (2009), Byrd and Tharps (2014), and Ndichu and Upadhyaya (2019) among others, assert that social mobility for black women is directly attached to the texture and appearance of their hair. Years after slavery and systemic racial segregation, black women relied heavily on relaxers and

hot combs, or straighteners for employment. The hegemonic ideology that was followed by generations before us, states that straight hair is the ideal and the subconscious rejection of non-conforming coiffures, that lies beneath the black women's consciousness. Socio-historically, this ideology has been transported and sustained globally via fashionable culture and other routes that immortalise the pristine ideals of long, straight hair that flows. This perpetuated idol worship of white beauty portrayed an unattractive picture of afro-textured hair amongst black women (Ndichu and Upadhyaya, 2019: 53; Erasmus, 2000). It has been further argued by Byrd and Tharps (cited in Oyedemi, 2016: 539) that, regardless of the emancipation of the ideal coiffure, for professional and social advancements to take place for black women, and the diaspora, the belief that straight hair will aid in this regard continues to be the norm. This acceptance of the 'social norm' is one of the many contributing factors as to why black women believe that straight hair will also gain them favour with the opposite sex, when measured against the yardstick of beauty. Therefore, with that being said, one poses the question of whether or not it is inconceivable to believe that black women straighten their hair for reasons other than those that have been industriously circulated in society? For black women, one such reason is that straightened hair is more manageable.

In general, black women willingly and subconsciously endure, and administer painful hair care regiments not because they choose to, but rather it is expected that with beauty, some pain will follow. If black women choose to publicly wear their natural hair, then they are, in some sense, activists protesting against some form of white supremacist dogma set out to silence the black body, and mind. In essence, black women may be practicing their right to choose a hairstyle irrespective of their political commitments and views. Hence, with the aforementioned arguments in mind, the subsequent discussions will illustrate how my research participants offered several different examples of how black women in South Africa, and Namibia practice this right.

I discussed the subject of natural hair with Kensani, a stylist from a hair salon called After 8. As she explained, she was chasing an image of beauty for her daughter, "Because of beauty, I was trying to make her some other way, but after I'm doing those things, they [her daughter's hair] would start falling, making something that didn't even…bad even more than before." During the interview, she acknowledged that the

pain of seeing her daughter's hair fall out, made her realise that she caused her daughter pain in her pursuit to make her beautiful according to societal beauty norms. Following this incident, she therefore made the conscious decision to stop relaxing her daughter's hair and allowed it to grow naturally. Her daughter currently has a full head of hair (afro) since October 2018, which she only braids during special occasions. For Kensani herself, her transition to natural hair took place 10 years ago. In our interview, she brought up the subject of her receding hairline and was not in the least self-conscious about it. She conceded to the fact that the incessant tension causing hairstyles were to blame. The decision to return to her natural hair was for herself, because she understood the recurring and problematic relationship that exists between beauty, and pain; a relationship that she is trying to sever for her daughter.

For Charlotte, a 27-year-old woman from Namibia who works in the hospitality industry, being indecisive in her childhood led her to opt for taking care of her hair herself. Braids, ponytails, and wearing her natural hair was what occupied a young Charlotte during her formative years. However, her mother had one rule,

> …no highlights or dyes. Keep it clean; constantly use certain products, especially shampoos. She is not into relaxers; my mother is also a natural woman. Those old women, they like keeping their kids natural. The environment that we even grow up in, naturally as a woman you just want to take care of your hair on your own. Us that time, we were a little bit stubborn, but we also want to look like white women…so we need to relax our hair.

I found Charlotte's comment of "we also want to look like white ladies" interesting. During my empirical research, I had read that one should not assume that black women straighten their hair or install weaves to look whiter (Erasmus, 1997: 14). However, Charlotte held that viewpoint and was prepared to embrace it even if it involved physical pain.

> I think you know being a child that time, you know, you see white people in their own different ways and there are just certain things that influence you like their hair. You know, they are so soft, long. You know. And you find even coloureds that

> also have…has nicer hair and you find black people that are naturally having nice hair. So when you look at their natural, nice hair you just want to keep up with them…but I think that was just an influence. It was just how you saw or how you see things in others. 'Till a point I tried the natural way, now it has a big influence. I feel that it's my path now, at the moment.

It appears that in her efforts to "look like white ladies," Charlotte was battling with the seed of self-hate, social acceptability, and authenticity. She was willing to go through painful experiences in pursuit of that aim, because at the time, that was what was being propagated. Nevertheless, she eventually became conscious of what she was doing to herself and realised that it was a reflection of how she was "see[ing] things in others." Adams states that times have changed, and black women do not style their hair in an effort to imitate whiteness. Instead, currently, white people have their hair styled like black people's hair, in order to look like them, because they consider it to be more fashionable. In essence, Adams opines that the self (either white or black) adapts, adopts and appropriates the appearances of others (cited in Dash, 2006: 34). Many women with afro-textured hair who have gone 'the natural way', appear to have gone through a similar set of experiences as they seek a way forward for their hair. With that being said, it is possible that not every black woman feels inspired to let go of relaxers, straighteners, weaves, or wigs, and embrace what the Natural Hair movement stands for. However, that in itself can be interpreted and judged differently, as the importance of such a movement resonates differently for every afro-textured haired woman in various stages of her life. Nonetheless, Charlotte's turn from "seeing things in others" to finding her own personal "path" through natural hair, is a recurring theme in my research.

Consider the case of Nomsa, a student furthering her studies in South Africa. She, like many other individuals, was aware of the incident at Pretoria Girls High School. She mentioned that she keeps herself briefed on the movement, and other similar cases about hair discrimination. She went on to state that she knew that there were women who are speaking out and "…emphasising that listen here, its' time to get out our natural hair…stop with the weave, stop with the relaxer. You know it's time to be proudly African and stop with all the Western and European thought about what it should be to…you know. What it means to have long hair and what does hair really

mean and all of that." She believes that many women (African American and black African women) have had enough, especially the current generation. According to Nomsa,

> …the older generation would have just been like, well you know, that's life. That's the way it is, just go on. We make the best of it and we go on. This new generation that's coming up is a generation that decides we not going to take things lying down anymore. We not gonna be like our elders and who say it's okay, let's leave it like that. We want things to change and in order for them to change we going to make them change. So, this thing now all of a sudden people are about natural hair and afro's, and appreciating it, you know putting it in glory and emphasising it. The need to be purely African and appreciate the humbleness of where we come from. In terms of our hair you know, our roots, in terms of how we took care of our hair. How proud we are, or we were once upon a time and as African women of our natural hair before the you know, before this really…some people would call it oppressive, uhm so I would go with that word. Before this really oppressive ideology of what it means to have long hair and uhm, it has to be that way otherwise you not considered to be a beautiful woman. If your hair is short, if it's coarse, it's not really appropriate or yeah. Some people would call it inappropriate to have coarse hair in publicit, goes to show that uhm, this generation it is basically putting into spotlight, uhm, because it not very ladylike. It's too wild, you gotta, you know, tie it up and everything like that. So this generation is trying to I think, trying to emphasise that listen here it's time we stood up for our elders, be their voice in terms of what it means to appreciate our African hair, because they come from a time where it was always the white person's view imposed on them and they couldn't say anything about it. They just have to take it lying down. This whole movement and this emphasis on hair, especially black hair, especially amongst

> black Americans its quite a, it's like a peak in human evolution or human society.

It is clear from the above quote that Nomsa believes the Natural Hair Movement to be a turn away from autocratic beauty standards that are used to denigrate black women. Unlike Charlotte, Nomsa did not grow up wanting to be white or to feed into the propaganda of whiteness, as she was more concerned with the taxing, and painful side of getting her hair done. The movement has, perhaps, given Nomsa a new outlook or permission to not be enamoured with hair, and that, no matter the texture of one's hair, we are all equal and should be treated as such.

Hypothetically speaking, there is a possibility that the reason why some people had an issue with the coarseness and the aesthetics of black natural hair, was a result of it not being consistently visible in society. Some black women and maybe the odd, coloured girl who doesn't fit into the "*gladde hare*" category, is learning how to take care of their hair through trial and error. There is also the likelihood that a struggle with not only the tightly, coiled textured hair, but with where we fit into what society refers to as race and identity, exists. Nomsa remarked earlier that she is of black and coloured decent, and explained that her hair is manageable because her hair texture is not that coarse. To reiterate, she believes that many people have had enough of Western and European ideologies. We have assimilated to their mannerisms and etiquettes, and put our African traditions, such as the way we dress, what we eat and how we do our hair into a box; only to be taken out annually on Heritage Day. Furthermore, Nomsa is also of the opinion that there is not enough black representation in magazines. She commented on the fact that black women are still racially segregated in terms of the distribution of items that are depicted in magazines, as a certain number of those items concern only white women.

Like myself, Nomsa also noticed the rise in more ethnic hair products on the shelves of different stores, and how numerous companies are profiting off of the natural hair movement. Her opinion on the matter of balancing the scales with regards to race, is that big companies are "…trying to avoid a racial investigation with human rights activists and aren't in the mood to square off with protesters, and lobbyers, and policymakers. You know trying to make new policies in place, they trying to avoid it. Just give the people what they want so they can shut up." From this conversation with

Nomsa, I observed that she does not want African women to be blatantly deceived or to be pacified, and thus forget the reason why the movement exists. In brief, Nomsa's analysis of the current situation within society regarding black women, is an illustration of how a subject on skin tone can be swiftly placed in hibernation by a debate on natural hair.

The Natural Hair Movement and many like it, are important to Nomsa because it is imperative for children, especially young black children, to know the importance of being "proud of the hair that you have. It is important, because with it comes confidence, you know. When you wear an outfit, apart from the outfit looking good, the next best thing you check in the mirror is your hair." She also believes in what her pastor says about God: that He is a God whom likes variety. Therefore, regardless of how long, short, straight, or tightly coiled it is, a woman should be proud of it; and this is a sentiment that is also shared by Wanda. In reference to the topic of men's opinion on a woman's beauty, Nomsa believes that hair tends to attract men, and to some extent, their opinion does play a role in a woman's grooming habits.

The debates over the natural hair movement lead to a particular question which many have answered and weighed their opinions on regarding the problem: can white women be part of the natural hair movement? Nomsa does not think that it would be a good idea for them to do so. Yes, indeed, they can support the movement, however, it would be difficult to equate the two races' struggles with hair. I can acknowledge that all women have different, if not similar issues, or obstacles with their hair. However, other than that of black people, no other race has had to deal with hair discrimination in the workplace, schools, and even possibly within their own homes. Despite such sentiments, the coloured community, however, would be accepted because they too have experienced similar issues of racial discrimination.

During apartheid, skin colour, along with hair texture, was a racial marker (Mercer, 1987: 35). That is to say, it was body-politics based on the social-racial ordering of the world that was built solely on skin pigmentation. This social classification was used to legitimise and establish dominance between the colonised, and the coloniser (Ramantswana, 2016: 181). Nomsa's relationship with hair and her knowledge of the black struggle in South Africa has placed her within a collective inter-generational, and anti-colonial struggle which in some way bred a sense of pride within

her regarding ‘natural hair’. As a reminder of her earlier comment, she concedes that taking pride in one’s appearance, specifically with regards to one’s hair, attracts the opposite sex (White, 2005: 305). She further admits that there is some validity to it, however, she does not embrace it. Although she does not agree with it, she does recognise its existence and would use it to attract a man. As she stated, “…if you look good, I feel like a man will respect you more.” In her opinion, if the opposite sex shows a woman respect due to her appearance and her ability to take care of herself, then conclusively, this grooming technique does have its advantages. In essence, hair for Nomsa, is more than just a woman’s crown that is worn as an ornament and adorned to attract a prospective husband (Robinson-Moore, 2008: 77).

Acutely aware of her surroundings and how the world is changing, Nomsa has seen many black women establishing themselves and challenging supremacist ideological beliefs about beauty. She is well informed of the racial history of South Africa which segregated individuals based not only on skin pigmentation, but hair as well (White and White, 2005: 295). Being of black and coloured decent, Nomsa has had issues with the coarseness of her hair, but was never allowed to chemically alter the structure of it, due in large part as a result of her mother. White and White’s (1995: 69) interview with a former slave in their work *Slave Hair and African Culture in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth centuries*, mentioned that disentangling children’s hair was a painful process (Erasmus, 1997: 13; Mercer, 1987, 37). Therefore, many women of colour must contend with the emotional ambiguity affiliated with hair, pain, and pleasure versus pride, and shame (Mercer, 1987: 37).

Despite the cumbersome battles that some black women face with their hair, Nomsa is grateful for her mixed-race lineage, because it has made her hair more “manageable.” Notwithstanding, her hair was often a source of pain during her childhood and teenage years. She highlighted a moment in time when her mother would roll in her hair and the pain that she felt after her mother removed the medium-sized, orange and green rollers, from her head. This particular pain was excruciating and accompanied by headaches. She further elaborated that not an hour would pass by and she was immediately expected to have her hair plaited to prevent tangled bed hair the following morning, “…it really was painful. It did feel like I wanted to pee in my pants”. Nomsa did not care much for her hair, because her mother would take care of it for her. She commented that it was only when she went to university that she had to

start caring for it. For her, the "…responsibility of doing my own hair and what it means to take care of it, and basically loving it," was tricky. This daunting challenge may perhaps be a consequence of how her mother tended to her hair. She linked the factor of trauma to her hating 'hair' day as a little girl, and currently in her adult life. "The blow out was the worst for me, 'cause I was afraid of the heat coming from the blow dryer. It stung a lot when it came too close to my scalp. "This isn't about you," she would say." Unbeknownst to some, this type of self-abuse is passed on, and this includes the mentality that straight hair is the best hair. Consequently, for young girls, it is difficult to put such perspectives into words, because they do not want to come across as accusatory towards their parents, particularly their mothers.

Be that as it may, Nomsa eventually found her way away from these and other painful experiences by turning to natural hair. In so doing, her experience intersects with Kensani, Charlotte and other research participants whose agonising pursuit of Eurocentric beauty standards pushed them to consider other alternatives. In brief, it is clear that these research participants' daunting experiences with hair and the change in what is considered beautiful today, has led them to accept natural hair. Nevertheless, there are still many women who are willing to withstand the pain of hairstyling practices that were introduced to them at a young age.

CHAPTER 5

Conclusion

In contemporary Southern Africa and globally, one cannot feign ignorance when with regards to perpetuating colonial stereotypes about hair. For years there has been a distinction between what was regarded as ‘good’ hair and ‘bad’ hair. Straight, silky smooth European hair was ‘good’ and ‘*kroes’*, nappy, tightly coiled, dry hair was ‘bad’. This understanding was also the leading contributor to the chemical and mechanical straightening of hair that has led to violence against the self, emotionally and physically. This issue currently remains contentious, especially in South Africa.

On the 8th September 2020, many South Africans took to social media to express their opinions on the prejudiced and abhorrent disregard for black women’s hair, by a hair care company called TreSemmé. The advertisement in which this message was portrayed, was released by Clicks, a beauty, health and pharmacy retail store that stocks their hair products (Grobler, 2020; Nhlapo, 2020). The advertisement depicted white hair as ‘normal’, flat, and fine compared to black hair that was dry, damaged, frizzy, and dull. This portrayal of black women’s hair was seen as racist and it lacked sensitivity to the detrimental effects that it could have on them. Following the forced closure of Clicks stores nationwide due to Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) protests to rectify the matter, TreSemmé hair products were removed from the shelves and were replaced by locally sourced hair products with immediate effect (Nhlapo, 2020).

Although some hailed the protests of the EFF as necessary in order to make the grievances of black women known to Clicks, the reality of the situation is that the problem was surreptitiously ignored (see also Nhlapo, 2020). Those responsible were suspended and subjected to a disciplinary hearing, and proactive strategies were implemented to bolster inclusivity, and diversity. Nhlapo (2020) remarks that companies constantly remind black women of their inadequacy, yet proclaim #BlackLivesMatter to retain the support of the public. She further elaborates that those who are in support of #BlackLivesMatter, do not diligently investigate what factors render black lives obsolete and inferior, and what measures can be put in place to fix the problem. In 2018, a similar incident was reported when H&M, a clothing retail store, was forced to remove the “Monkey t-shirt” that was worn by a black boy (model) from

its clothing racks, because of its derogatory wording “The coolest monkey in the jungle”.

In essence, it is evident that black people in Southern Africa, and globally continually need to defend their blackness against institutions that catergorise their mistakes as either a lack in diversity training, unintentional, casual, or passive racism. The damage caused by such incidents renders the progress made by black women obsolete, and creates situations where protests lead to aggressive retaliations. Fighting against years of oppression that marked whiteness and its ideals around beauty as the benchmark, black African women and the diasporic community have created their own standards of beauty that is all encompassing. Regardless of the lengths that were taken, they celebrate their unique beauty and are intolerant of those that “unintentionally” try to tell them otherwise.

Naturally, recurrent events such as those illustrated above, and others, should have been adequately addressed. They raise many questions in the search to comprehend how it is possible that issues which surround black women’s natural hair, are still a problem in the 21st century. It has become noticeably clear that understanding the importance of hair for black women should inform public debate in South Africa, and Namibia. Therefore, research on black women’s experiences of their hair is significant in this context.

Inspired by the Natural Hair movement, this thesis attempted to understand and give importance to how different individuals construct what natural hair means to them. Each chapter endeavoured to capture different women’s narratives and topics which previous literature explored ethnographically to a limited extent. My search for understanding what natural hair means to young black women today, touched on, but also went beyond the Natural Hair movement and ‘black consciousness’. The various themes that emerged in this thesis delved deeper into the phenomenon, and highlighted how hair relates to identity formation, spirituality, and pain in individuals’ lives.

To fully understand the topic of this thesis, one needs to explore the different attitudes and meanings that are attached to hair in the lives of different black women. Overall, I have argued that black women’s hair journeys move beyond the binary natural versus ‘un-natural’ hair. The diversity of voices is important so that we do not

reduce natural hair to singular issues, or to singular representations. Each of these women's narratives challenged societal beauty standards not only through embracing natural hair, but also through expressing what natural hair is, and why it is vital to them in varying ways. Accepting what different hairstyles can do for black women leads to an array of possibilities and diversified versions of who they are, and can be. At the same time, I maintain that welcoming natural hair is an important form of social activism, irrespective of whether or not different black Southern African women see their choices in those terms.

By listening to such personal narratives, we may better comprehend that, with regards to natural hair, no one experience can be applied to all. Black women within their own communities and families are attempting to understand, learn and accept varying textures of natural hair, and its unique beauty. In addition to personally embracing natural hair for themselves, some black women are striving to break the cycle of damaging hair practices and messages that inaccurately depict who they are as this inappropriate portrayal leads to internalised oppression and self-hate. I have come to appreciate these different standpoints and I comprehend that Afrocentric versus Eurocentric, or reactionary versus 'woke', does not capture the nuanced experiences of black women and their relationship with hair.

Presently, as in the past, black women have divergent ideas about what good hair is. Nonetheless, the Natural Hair movement should point us towards common qualities of black women's experiences with hair, and these qualities may unite us. Regardless of the hairstyles within the black community, hair and its variety of textures has challenged the rhetoric around what is acceptable. For centuries, the history of black hair and its associated characteristics, stereotypes, behaviours and attitudes within, and out of the community keep black people, particularly black women, divided and far from the actual goal. Misconceptions about different black hairstyles divides black women, but can also unite them. This, I think, is what the Natural Hair movement stands for. Irrespective of the hairstyle, whether it be natural versus 'un-natural', dreadlocks, weaves, or braids, the battle is the same. The sooner this message is understood, the less challenging it will be to break the cycle that forced black women to shrink themselves, and to arrive at places of work or school feeling like incomplete versions of themselves.

Each of the narratives in this thesis have but scraped the surface in understanding how hair has contributed to identity formation, and challenged beauty standards. Wanda's narrative revealed how socio-economic constraints, among other problems, leads to the construction of an identity that is contextual and influx. It exposed the complexities and meanings surrounding natural hair and its alternatives, which went beyond the mere politics of hair to address attractiveness and professionalism. Her particular narrative revealed, and provides, a unique lens through which to understand the reasons behind hairstyles. Examining Wanda's "whole beauty" and her biological, and cultural inheritance adds to public, and scholarly discourse around natural hair, and its salience in the lives of black women.

For the other research participants in this thesis, a positive connection with natural hair has also led to deeper spiritual connection. Accounts of head hair being the highest point on the body through which energy flows in and out, was discussed in connection with the Rastafarian religion. As a reminder, Rastafarians draw their strength from their hair, and Native Americans believe that their long hair gives them the ability to sense danger. The use of hair in tonsuring, mourning and initiation rituals has been documented over the years. However, what has not been recognised or explored sufficiently was how these diverse understandings of hair and spirituality relate to the construction of identity, or of identities influx. This thesis recorded black women's connection to the spiritual realm through hair, as well as the beliefs about the metaphysical forces that surround hair and its maintenance. As Rethabile's narrative revealed, this connection to the spiritual realm reflects individuals' efforts to define who they are and to develop a sense of freedom.

The critical feminist perspective that was discussed in chapter four, solidifies the argument made in this thesis. Drawing from previous literature, we are able to understand how the female body became a site of political struggle, and how the impact of hair in such struggles for black women affected them. The different voices and their experiences differ in salience over time, and context around the natural hair versus weaves debate. Events such as the Natural Hair Movement of 2016 and the Clicks 'mishap' of 2020, among others, are reminders of the stereotypical issues, social acceptability, race, and the cultural implications that contribute to the narratives encompassing natural hair, or any stylistic cultural practices. The discomfort and pain that was experienced by all of my research participants when their styling their hair,

highlights the lengths and depths that black women go to for the desired hairstyle. I reiterate once again that although hairstyling choices for some may be just that, the affinity towards natural hair symbolises a rebellion against Eurocentric beauty standards. In essence, changing black women's relationship to hair is, perhaps, best addressed by individuals disseminating subliminal messages that redefine beauty, and make our understanding of it more diverse.

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Appendix 1

UNIVERSITY OF THE FREE STATE
UNIVERSITEIT VAN DIE VRYSTAAT
YUNIVESITHI YA FREISTATA
UFS UV

GENERAL/HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (GHREC)

29-Mar-2019

Dear Miss Matjila, Chéri CR

Application Approved

Research Project Title:

The Business of Hair: The meaning of hair for South African women.

Ethical Clearance number:

UFS-HSD2018/1274

We are pleased to inform you that your application for ethical clearance has been approved. Your ethical clearance is valid for twelve (12) months from the date of issue. We request that any changes that may take place during the course of your study/research project be submitted to the ethics office to ensure ethical transparency. furthermore, you are requested to submit the final report of your study/research project to the ethics office. Should you require more time to complete this research, please apply for an extension. Thank you for submitting your proposal for ethical clearance; we wish you the best of luck and success with your research.

Yours sincerely

Dr. Petrus Nel

Chairperson: General/Human Research Ethics Committee

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Appendix 2

UNIVERSITY OF THE FREE STATE
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UFS UV

Project Title

The Business of Hair: The meaning of hair for South African women

Researcher Name

Chéri Matjila

Department of Anthropology

University of the Free State
cherezel23@gmail.com

Supervisors Names

Dr Christian Williams (williamsCA@ufs.ac.za)
Dr Jonatan Kurzwelly (jonatan.kurzwell@gmail.com)
Secretary of the Ethics Committee:
Charné Vercueil; (+27) 51 401 7083; vercueilcc@ufs.ac.za

I am a Masters student in the Department of Anthropology from the University of the Free State. The purpose of this research is to understand what meaning women attach to their hair, especially women perceived as 'Black'. It is with this study that I wish to address or understand the everyday politics, experiences and practices of women invested in maintaining and cultivating hair that is understood as 'natural', in contexts where chemical interventions (relaxers) and extensions or wigs using synthetic, and human hair predominate. It is then through this study that a better understanding of black women's feelings towards their hair in times where social media and society expect certain hairstyle for various reasons can be made sense of. The research will be conducted over a period of 3 months at salons located in (Bloemfontein, South Africa and Windhoek, Namibia), through a collection of in-depth (audio-recorded) interviews, photographs and participant observation data will be collected and analysed.

Consent

The purpose of this form is to ensure that you are willing to permit the use of photographs and audio-recorded interviews during the project and to let you understand what it entails. Signing this form does not commit you to anything you do not wish to do and you are free to withdraw at any moment. Material gathered during this research will be coded and kept confidentially by the researcher. It will be securely stored on a password protected computer and a password protected Internet server.

Please answer each statement concerning the use of the research data.

This research involves taking photographic images and audio-recordings. Photographs and audio-recorded data can be a valuable resource for future studies, publications, therefore we ask you for your additional consent for the use of the material gathered and the material you produced for this purpose.

I agree for my photographs, audio-recorded material to be used in Chéri Matjila's thesis.	☐ Yes	☐ No
I agree for my photographs, tape recorded material to be published as part of this research (including articles and books).	☐ Yes	☐ No
I agree for my photographs, tape and video recorded material to be used in future studies.	☐ Yes	☐ No

I agree that should the researcher need further information, that I may be contacted.	☐ Yes	☐ No

Participation in this research is completely voluntary and your consent is required before any gathered material can be used. If you decide at a later date that the data or a part of it should be destroyed we will honour your request in writing.

I have been informed about the study and have had any questions answered to my satisfaction.

Please fill in and return this page. Keep the letter above for future reference

---

Study: *The Business of Hair: The meaning of hair for Southern African Women*

Researcher: *Chéri Matjila*

Name and Surname: _____

Age: _____

Contact number: _____

- I hereby give free and informed consent to participate in the abovementioned research study.
- I understand what the study is about, why I am participating and what the risks and benefits are.
- I give the researcher permission to make use of the data gathered from my participation, subject to the stipulations he/she has indicated in the above letter.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

205 Nelson Mandela Drive/Rylaan, Park West/Parkwes, Bloemfontein 9301, South Africa/Suid-Afrika
P.O. Box/Posbus 339, Bloemfontein 9300, South Africa/Suid-Afrika, T: +27(0)51 401 9111,
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Appendix 3

MA Final Submission - CR. Matjila

ORIGINALITY REPORT

4%	4%	1%	2%
SIMILARITY INDEX	INTERNET SOURCES	PUBLICATIONS	STUDENT PAPERS

PRIMARY SOURCES

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