Chapter 3

The South Africa Academy, Intersectionality and Attempts to Erase Black Women

Grace Khunou

Abstract

The position of Black women tends to remain the same due to continuing discrimination and a growing pushback of the feminist wins of the early 1990s. This is particularly true when you think about the differential experiences of Black women. In this chapter the focus is on how an intersectional analysis can assist us to understand the experiences of Black women from the perspective of African foreign women in the South African academy. The argument of the chapter is that even though intersectionality emerges in the West, when used critically, it is able to help us make a contribution in theorising African experiences, especially when the intention is to humanise those experiences.

Introduction

The hiring and promoting of Black women have been problematised using multiple exclusive arguments in South African universities for many years. 30 years into democracy and attempts to transform the South African higher education sector, Black women remain the minority in the professoriate, as heads of research centres, and as leaders in multiple sectors of the higher education system. Multiple stereotypical arguments have been put forward over the years to maintain this untameable status quo, including that Black women do not have PhDs, they do not have the experience, they are outsiders, and or they do not want full-tenured positions as they prioritise motherhood over the

rigours of academic life (Canham 2014; Johnson & Thomas 2012; Mabokela & Magubane 2004).

These arguments to keep Black women out and junior are becoming more absurd as the numbers of PhD holders for this cohort and their numbers in the academy are growing. Tau (2022) shows that women remain the highest holders of master's degrees and PhDs. The persistence of these exclusionary tendencies is not based on fact and thus bears testament to Badat's (2004: 2) argument that "the inherited higher education system was designed, in the main, to reproduce, through teaching and research, white and male privilege and Black and female subordination in all spheres of society". It is disheartening that we are not seeing concrete shifts with regard to how we position Black women in this system.

Hence, I argue in this chapter that these continuing exclusionary efforts are meant to erase not only the intellectual contributions of Black women from these spaces but their voice, leadership, and desires for full humanised lives. The chapter argues that the erasure of Black women's contribution to multiple sites of society is a form of continued violence on their bodies and psyches. This violence perpetuates the exclusionary status quo and steals from younger generations the pride and lessons useful for building awe-inspiring futures. To illustrate how this violence is perpetuated, this chapter will provide a detailed discussion of different theories on erasure, its intentions, and conceptions of violence to illustrate how structural and systematic violence sustains itself through cultural practices that erase bodies deemed insignificant. Later, the chapter provides examples of how intersectionality as a Black feminist theory and methodology is useful in helping us think about how Black women's lives and contributions are positioned in the South African higher education sector.

The Visible Erasure Of Black Women From History

The erasure of Black women's, contributions from South Africa's history is glaring. What is clear from literature though is that the general erasure of women is a global phenomenon. Shrivastava

(2017) writes about how it manifests in Indian society and argues that this erasure continues even after the development of a disciplinary field titled 'the history of women'. The idea of signifying the contributions of women in history has been engaged by women writers and feminists as early as the 1970s, including in psychology, literature, politics, and sociology, among others.

Out of these calls and attempts to restore women to history, there remain important gaps. Shrivastava (2017) shows that what remains less invisible is the history of ordinary women of colour. This erasure is not only real with regard to women's role in everyday life – it is also true in societal institutions like the academy. In the book *Excavating women: A history of women in European archaeology*, Diaz-Adreu and Sorensen (1998) argue that the discipline of archaeology has been particularly good at selecting and forgetting, and thus marginalising, women's contribution. This is also true in the broader intellectual project. Women's contribution to the making of the disciplines has been relegated to the margins. Hill Collins (1986) writes about the marginal position of Black women in the academy and how being in touch with this marginality produces distinctive standpoints. Mabokela and Magubane (2004) write about how this marginality manifests in the South African academy by focusing on how racism and sexism try to mute Black women academics. This tendency to just tolerate the presence of Black women in the academy to just tick the employment equity box requirements conspires to continue the substantive exclusion of Black women as worthy contributors to the academic project.

Erasure and Black women academics in South Africa

In the introduction of her essay, "Placing African women's history and locating gender", Hunt (1989) asserts that "African women whether as subjects or objects (and to a lesser extent as authors) of history, are no longer invisible in African historiography. Despite continuing lapses in awareness, invisibility is no longer the problem". She then goes on to point out that a few historical anthologies, monographs, and dissertations have been written on African women thus making the case that African women

are no longer invisible. I make a case in this paper that visibility is a complex phenomenon. For Black women in South Africa, the question of visibility is not just about being seen. It is about how the historical lens portrays these women, what is omitted in the processes of making their contributions visible and which woman's contribution remain marginalised, and how all these contribute to the lapse in awareness of women's historical contributions.

Although there have been attempts to acknowledge women's contribution to societal development, these have been inconsistent and have focused on a few "exceptional" women, suggesting that only a few women are capable, thus denying the fact that all women are able (Shrivastava 2017). The problem with centring so-called exceptional women, Lerner (1975) writes, illustrates the limited analytical lens of traditional history, which "fails to tell us much about activities in which most women engaged, nor does it tell us about the significance of women's activities to society as a whole" (Lerner 1975: 5). An important limitation of traditional history is that it overlooked how race and class impacted which roles and which women's activities were deemed historically important. For example, recent critical Black studies, like Magoqwana's (2021) and Magoqwana and Adesina's (2020) elucidations on maternal legacies, are reclaiming motherhood and care work as significant for thinking about Black lives in ways that are particularly different from how these roles were conceived in patriarchal Western thought.

The erasure of Black women from history is also visible in how we phrase the question of what their contribution has been. Lerner (1975) argues that conceptualising women's "contribution history" is problematic when it is judged by standards appropriate to men. When thinking about Black women, we therefore need to be cognisant of their position, and thus centre the contributions that position called for.

Erasure as violence

The abstractness of the concept 'violence' has been made clear by the trouble social theorists get into when defining it. This

has been shown by the many forms its conceptualisation takes. Riches (1986), in *The phenomenon of violence*, defines the concept from the premise that everyday uses of the term are problematic and useful at the same time. He argues that they are problematic because in everyday usage, the term is used in relation to the cultural context, therefore bringing forth a lack of universality which makes it difficult to 'appreciate violence cross-culturally'. In dealing with these problematic everyday uses, Riches goes on to give two accounts of understanding violence through the Anglo-Saxon mind. He argues that "violence strongly connotes behaviour that is in some sense illegitimate or unacceptable" (Riches 1986: 1). This, he says, is in the eyes of the observer and the violated, and shows that for the performer of violence, it is seldom seen as such. He further says that the term or concept of violence is for the witness and the victim, which makes the appreciation of violence cross-culturally possible, hence the usefulness of the everyday use of the term 'violence' in understanding its meaning.

Degenaar's (1990) conceptions add intentionality to our understanding of violence. He defines "violence as the movement of carrying extreme force against X in such a way that it is damaging and destructive or physically injurious to X". This contribution brings the notion of violation into our understanding of violence. 'Violation' is defined as a situation when the moral right of X is violated. He then moves on to say that violence on its own does not entail the violation of a moral right. His project here implies that not all uses of extreme force signify violence, but that disrespect of others worth is a deeper type of violation. Through Degenaar's (1990) discussion of structural violence, it is obvious how violence is perpetrated via the structure of political, economic, and family relationships. Ho (2007) also argues that structural violence constrains agency and thus curtails the attainment of fundamental human rights – like contributing to your society and being remembered in ways that inspire those who come after you to be fully human.

Structural violence is not the result of an accident but the result of unequal distribution of power which then constrains agency. Ho (2007) further argues that "the distribution of power through structures, whether it is called exploitation or violence,

enhances the agency of some but at the expense of constraining the agency of others". I therefore argue that the erasure of historical contributions of Black women in the South is violent and contributes to socio-economic and political inequality.

Intersectionality: The Promotion and Hiring of 'Foreign' Black Women

This chapter focuses on the problematisation of the foreignness of Black African academics. I want to use this to illustrate the differential experiences of Blackness and see how intersectionality is an important tool in helping us understand the nuances of the Black experience.

In a *Mail and Guardian* article by Hugo Canham (2022), "Afrophobia: The violence of the letter R", he writes: "only in the South African context, the foreigner is always African". Canham writes about how one's accent can make one a victim of negative labels of being an African. He writes that "to be Shona is to be Zimbabwean. To be Zimbabwean is to be the harbinger of failure and trespasser. Job thief. Foreigner neighbour and resource grabber". They, Zimbabweans, Somalians, Nigerians, and Mozambicans, evoke the 'African as foreigner' because they don't easily blend in like those from Lesotho and Eswatini (Canham 2022). Their different language, dress, and mannerisms induce the idea that difference is dangerous. In this context, the term 'African' fails to conjure the fact that the term was claimed to represent "the assertion and affirmation by Africans of their humanity, and as human beings, both makers of history and contributors to the history of human emancipation" (Manji 2019: 50). Instead, it evokes the negative which represents the African as

> a synonym for the non-human or lesser human being that justified enslavement, slavery, colonialism and exploitation, and how the meaning of the word evolved subsequently to consider the African as 'uncivilised' under colonialism, and then 'underdeveloped' in the post-independence period.

This view of the African contributes to why, when thinking about foreign in the South African context, it never implies others from Europe, Asia, and the like but only those from the continent.

When thinking about Black African women in the academy – what does it mean to reimagine the use of intersectionality in the South African higher education context? Intersectionality allows us to hold constant multiple intersecting issues of oppression. For the purpose of this chapter, I will focus on two conceptual frameworks emanating from intersectionality. The first is that which theorists on intersectionality have already provided detailed discussions on (Crenshaw 1989; Hill Collins 2000; Meer & Muller 2017; May 2015); which maintains that intersectionality allows for the interrogation of conventional frames and thus it challenges and dislodges 'traditional' explanations (May 2015). This is particularly significant when thinking about Black women. I also like that intersectionality would have us do a more heuristic analysis (Crenshaw 2011: 232). That is, "draw attention to dynamics that are constitutive but generally overlooked or silenced". For example, in Khunou et al. (2019), Black academics' experiences of the South African academy are re-centred as significant knowledge from trustworthy knowers. *Black academic voices: The South African experience* (Khunou et al. 2019) attempts to do away with the traditional injustice of viewing experiences recounted by Blacks, and Black women in particular, as 'suspicious'.

To draw attention to those traditionally overlooked and/or silenced intersectionality provides an analytical method that cuts across scales and thus provide a lens to challenge false binaries and illustrate important connections between systems of oppression (May 2015). This is made possible by the matrix orientation central in intersectionality. Hill Collins (2000) says that this matrix of domination is the organisation of power in a society, where a specific matrix has a particular arrangement of intersecting systems of oppression, and these systems come together in a historically and socially specific way. Furthermore, Hill Collins (2000) suggests that this matrix of domination is made up of four domains of power, namely structural, disciplinary, hegemonic, and interpersonal. How these matrices

of domination work is fundamental in thinking about why intersectionality is a relevant analytical tool. An important take away from intersectionality, which this chapter intends to centre, is the notion that there are "few pure victims or oppressors" (Hill Collins 2000: 287) and thus, no single-issue struggles because there are no single-issue lives (Lorde 1984: 183). This idea is an important one to remember as it challenges the simple theories that have the potential to trap Black women in unsalable rigid conceptions. Having said that, I suggest that it is important to be context-specific in our endeavours to understand how the matrices of domination are experienced in different contexts. This is more so for South Africa given that most knowledge consumed in the country is created by the West with Western contexts and epistemologies in mind.

The second conceptual framework that is of interest in making a case for the significance of intersectionality in South Africa is that it teaches us to ask incremental and continuous interrogative questions (May 2015), thus leaving limited space for self-fulfilling and limiting analytical approaches. An example of self-limiting thinking is that which assumes that Black women's experiences are homogenous. Nash (2008: 6), who offers an illuminating critique of intersectionality, points out that one of the limitations of intersectionality is a lack of intersectional investigation. She argues that "intersectional projects often replicate precisely the approaches that intersectional theorist's critique".

At a decolonial feminist workshop I attended in Brazil, the critique launched against intersectionality was the fact that it is a theory borne of the West and thus its ability to move across national borders is similar to American culture and its dollar. Nash (2008: 12) suggests that one of the fundamental limitations of intersectionality has been its "tendency to ignore the intimate connections between privilege and oppression". She argues that this tendency to ignore how subjects might be both victimised by patriarchy and privileged by race (also ignores how subjects might take pleasure in some of the trappings of patriarchal power) in patriarchal social, cultural, historical, and political moments.

My interest in using intersectionality to understand the experiences of Black women in the academy is because, like Nash (2008), I see the opportunities that intersectionality can provide in our effort to conceptualise Black womanhood from the vantage point of difference. Nash (2008) captures this idea thus: "conceptualizing black womanhood as its own contested, messy terrain requires that intersectionality theory abandon its commitment to sameness, what Rinaldo Walcott has termed (in an admittedly different context, a critique of black studies tendency to elide differences among blacks) … a regime that trades on the myth of homogeneity" (Walcott 2005: 93). Thinking from homogeneity we all know provides some comfort, i.e., when the enemy is clearly out there then we can focus our energies on it – for example apartheid. Unfortunately, post-1994 we had to grapple with our heterogeneity as Blacks. My work on the Black middle class shows how these differences manifest (difference informed by educational level, occupational level and residential location among others). In this chapter, I use the work of Batisai (2019) to argue for the usefulness of intersectionality in the South African academy. In her chapter in *Black academic voices: The South African experience*, Batisai shares that

> The self-reflective exercise unpacks my race, gender, nationality, class and socioeconomic identities in ways that illuminate how transformation contours can be mapped through intersecting subjective positionalities.

This chapter by Batisai problematises the notion of homogeneity of experience and thus provides us with an improved intersectional analysis, which according to Nash (2008) is because it "considers the differences between Black women producing a potentially uncomfortable disunity that allows for a richer and more robust conception of identity" (Nash 2008: 12). To do this, I want to speak to how bringing back difference is useful in thinking about the nuances of Black women's experiences in the South African academy.

Theorising from the South and intersectionality

The blind use of theories from the West has created challenges for fully understanding African contexts and how the intersecting identities of Black women impact their everyday life experiences. This has been so especially in contexts where these theories are appropriated without a critical engagement with the circumstances around the development of those particular theories. For example, even though I have found Marxist theory attractive in my formative years as a daughter of a unionist and a student of labour in South Africa, I find it challenging how 'dogmatic Marxism' (Satgar 2019) refuses to see the importance of intersectionality of class, race, gender, and disability, among others. Even though Marxism is a theory developed in the North, its use in the South African context by some illustrates the importance of intersectionality. For example, Satgar (2019: 2) makes a case for the contributions of Marxism to the fight against racism during apartheid. Satgar's theorisation is a good example of how to engage with theories emanating from the North – that is, "class analysis should be linked to race and gender" and other forms of oppression.

The idea that Africa should be a blind consumer of theories developed in the West and that the West should lead in theorising is not only held by those in the West – it is perpetuated by those in Africa and other so-called peripheral countries (Mallavarapu 2005). This notion remains one of the biggest challenges for decolonisation and for providing relevant concepts to understand and humanise experiences from African contexts. Tamale (2011: 30) argues that "repositioning both the geographical and conceptual locations of what is African will avoid the slippery terrain of the essence of who and what is African". In making a case for theorising sexualities in Africa, Tamale (2011) further makes a case for interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary research. This, I believe, is not only a must for sexuality studies but for most studies in Africa to "deepen our understanding of Black experiences". Many African scholars come at research and theorising in Africa from an understanding that research, and not untested assumptions, is central to humanising the African

experience (Amaduime 1987; Magoqwana et al. 2020; Oyěwùmí 1997, 2016).

To make a case for the significance of intersectionality as a useful theory in South Africa, this chapter engages with similar questions articulated by feminist researchers on how we should use intersectionality in disciplines outside of law. Can we use it in other institutions without limitations and what would be those limitations? I think intersectionality can be argued to be a grand Northern theory only in contexts where its uses are not critical and aimed at making it work for the contexts in which it is being used. For example, Purkayasha (2012: 61) cautions that "we need to encapsulate marginalization structures that are salient in other locales and the ways in which these hierarchies play out in transnational spaces". Other important debates on intersectionality have been on understanding its appropriations outside of theorisations of Black women's experiences of oppression. Are these debates useful? My personal experiences with intersectionality in the South African context are that it has been empowering in providing tools to deepen already existing Black feminist/womanist thinking on Black women's experiences.

Bringing Back Difference: The Complex Experiences of Black Women with Privilege and Oppression

The racial and gendered inequalities experienced in the academy have been debated and written about in many geographical contexts. What remains interesting is that Black women throughout the world share important experiences of exclusion and marginalisation. This is not only true with regard to exclusions of Black women as knowledge producers but with regard to Black women in different parts of the academic structures. In South Africa, research on the experiences of Black women is only gaining ground now, and many of these studies echo the argument by Rabe and Rugunanan (2012: 2): that "the imbalances of race and gender do not seem to have disappeared, instead they re-appear in new ways that seem to perpetuate the racial and gender inequalities of the past". I want to add here that with the democracy and seeming opening-up of our borders

to those in the continent, we see historically hidden sites of difference for Blacks.

In the introduction chapter of the book *Black academic voices: The South African experience* (Khunou et al. 2019), it is clearly articulated how Black women grapple with intersecting matrices of power in their experiences in the academy. Furthermore, Khunou et al. (2019) accurately indicate that Black women are not mere consumers of knowledge but active knowers and knowledge producers. From this starting point, this chapter engages with how these historically excluded knowers experience the academy as an uninviting space. I want to argue that Black women can see and decipher power dynamics in ways that other players in their context refuse to acknowledge. Magubane (2009), in her piece "Ethnography's showcases as sites of knowledge production and indigenous resistance", shows how the idea of Blacks as lacking the capacity to see or recognise racist and sexist reality is an act to objectify them and continue racism and the exclusion that comes with it. This notion of the inability to recognise racism, Afrophobia, and sexism is also quite visible in the South African academy.

The first example I want to speak to is reflected on in Batisai's chapter in *Black academic voices: The South African experience*. The title of the chapter is "Black and foreign: Negotiating being different in the South African academy". In this chapter, Batisai captures succinctly how, as a Back woman, she is othered because of her 'foreignness'. She writes from a feminist standpoint and argues that her writing standpoint is informed by

> Gqola (2002: 11), who asserts that a feminist standpoint is when we do not write back to white feminists, to colonialism, to patriarchy, to apartheid…but the intention is to refashion the world in exciting ways where the difference within is not a threat but a source of energy.

She further shares that

> When 'stitched' together, the intersecting subjective identities alluded to above do not merely constitute my

> biography, but they are profound lenses for exploring multiple systems of exclusion in the academy, and through which transformation could be imagined, understood, and eventually realised.

Her chapter captures her experiences at the University of Cape Town (UCT). She shares the following experiences which marked her entry into the South African academy:

> When I graduated with my PhD in 2013 at UCT, exactly a year before South Africa celebrated 20 years of democracy, we were only two Black African graduates – from Zimbabwe and Ghana. Reflecting on these statistics, I asked myself: 'What happened to my Black South African counterparts?' and it immediately dawned on me that my experience as an 'other' in the academy should shape the long journey of transforming higher education institutions in South Africa.

One of the reasons I wanted to use Batisai's experiences to support the argument of this chapter is the fact that she was forced to decline participation at a book launch discussion of *Black academic voices: The South African experience* (2019). She had initially agreed to participate, and as colleagues working in the same department at the time, we had multiple corridor discussion about the upcoming launch with excitement. At the time of the launch (2019), South Africa was experiencing a number of xenophobic attacks, especially in the Gauteng Province. It was really difficult times with heightened violence that then moved to other parts of the country. Newspaper articles at the time carried the following titles:

- **Xenophobia in South Africa: What happened to Ubuntu?** (*Daily Maverick*, Susan Tolman, 30-08-2019) – "have been watching the violence and looting of foreign owned-businesses over the past few weeks across South Africa, first in Johannesburg and now escalating in Pretoria, with despair. The authorities seem to be standing by and watching the attacks against migrants and foreign nationals, and their businesses, who dare to try and make a living or work for a better life in our backyard".

- **Xenophobia: South Africa's 10 worst attacks ever** (*Punch Newspapers*, Oluwakemi Abimbola, 11-09-2019) – "Nigerians and other foreign nationals in South Africa have been the targets of xenophobic attacks in recent weeks. It started when a taxi driver was killed by an alleged drug dealer in Pretoria. The death of the taxi driver led to a protest, which escalated into the killing of foreigners, looting, and burning of businesses owned by foreigners in August".
- **Xenophobia has reared its ugly head again in the Rainbow Nation. African nations have had enough** (*CNN*, David McKenzie, 02-09-2019) – "this week at least 10 people were killed, and hundreds arrested in a spasm of xenophobic violence and looting in Johannesburg, Pretoria and elsewhere in the country. Much of the violence and crime targeted foreign African migrants from countries such as Nigeria, Ethiopia, Zambia, and Kenya. Of course, there is a difference between feeling separated from the continent and its people and violence against African migrants".

The headlines are multiple and some of the pictures that accompany them illustrate the types of violence experienced at the time. To communicate her decline to participate in the book launch, Batisai sent me an email indicating that even though she wanted to attend, she felt unsafe to do so given the violence experienced by 'foreigners' at the time.

Fellow contributors and I were able to attend the launch as we did not experience the same fears or trepidations. Even though we were keenly aware of the violence, our nationality allowed us a privilege that Batisai did not have. Her middle-classness as a Black woman did not take away the fact that she is not of South African nationality. That fact makes her experiences as a Black academic in South Africa different in ways that limit how she moves – her foreignness thus trumps her class, gender, and racial identities. In her chapter, she reflects thus on why she invokes the Black foreign concept to frame her experiences of the South African academy:

> I argue that the experiences of black foreign academics are noteworthy. Wondering, one might ask why the category

> 'black and foreign,' and its realities matters in South Africa's higher education transformation narrative. The category matters because when the definition of black in higher education transformation discourses is restricted to Black South African academics, it misses the struggles and testimonies of black foreign academics. Writing from experience and observation, I strongly believe that stories of how black foreign academics navigate the higher education landscape in South Africa are an inroad into insightful discussions about transformation at large.

As a scholar interested in understanding how difference is experienced and how inequality manifests as a result of erroneous readings of such differences, Batisai's evocation of the Black and foreign frame made me uncomfortable at first. But I reflected on how it can help us understand that the Black experience is never homogenous and how that is significant for grounded theorising, transformative questions, and policy engagements. The differential experiences of Black women migrants and nationals is a case in point. Most of the recent research on migration illustrates that Africans who migrate within the African continent find themselves in a precarious position as compared to nationals (Hungwe 2013). In these contexts, their 'foreign', othered status confers unequal access to taken-for-granted resources and opportunities and in more cases than not, they experience institutional bias (Hungwe 2013).

To be defined as 'foreign African' reduces one to being incompetent and unwelcome. South Africa has seen a number of knowledge workers from outside the continent for generations. According to Sehoole et al. (2019), in 2000, these numbers included 95 from Asia, 19 from Australia and Oceania, 409 from Europe, 81 from North America, and 18 from South America. In 2010, these numbers included 87 from Asia, 19 from Australia, 369 from Europe, 75 from North America, and 11 from South America. However, in public discourse, when we hear conversations about foreigners in the academy it is usually about African foreigners. Sehoole et al. (2019) suggest that reasons for these differential experiences is because some groups tend to want to preserve their

own nationality. Furthermore, Sehoole et al. (2019: 4) suggest that "African, Asian, and Latin American academics and students in the US face discrimination that far surpasses the challenges faced by academics and students from western nations, including Europeans, Canadians and Australians".

I want to suggest that the same is true in the South African context: Western foreign academics have better experiences compared to those from the African continent. This is because, as articulated by Oyedemi (2018: 400), "[c]oloniality is totalizing". This totalising aspect of coloniality is undertaken through the coloniality of power, which Oyedemi (2018: 400) defines thus:

> Coloniality of power presents a model of power on three core axes. One is the creation of an ideology derived from a 'natural' difference between the colonizer–oppressor and the colonized–oppressed based on the body and codified in the idea of race. The other is an exceptionalism of a culture that encapsulates the ways of being and knowing codified in Eurocentrism. The third is the establishment of a structure of economic power through the control of labour, resources, and products because of capital and global market system of capitalism.

This conception of the coloniality of power shows us how the othering of academics from the continent, as illustrated in Batisai's experience, is one of the ways coloniality continues in the South African academy. The coloniality of power codified in the idea of race facilitates the continuity of epistemic violence which, according to Heleta (2016: 3), "marginalises Africa and is often full of patronising views and stereotypes about the continent".

Intersectionality: A Tool to Inspire Social Justice Action in Africa

Finally, I want to suggest that even though intersectionality complicates sameness and difference with regard to oppression, it remains an important tool for centring the inter-connectedness in Black women's struggles and continues to be an important tool for justice action in our world. This becomes more so when thinking

about the struggles of Black women from a decolonial perspective. The move away from the single-axis analysis that Crenshaw (1989) and many feminist writers warns against (Lorde 1981) is useful in facilitating the discontinuity of coloniality. Coloniality is the glue that interlinks the oppressions experienced by Black women and in the knowledge creation space. In our attempts to understand the experiences of Black women in the South African academy, Kiguwa suggests that it is important to "avoid the trap of homogenizing Black women's experiences in ways that do not account for intersectional nuances" (Kiguwa 2021: 213). At some point in the chapter, Batisai makes the following assertion:

> My controversial positionality opens a can of worms that allows those interested in questions of belonging and the politics of exclusion to engage in progressive conversations about transforming South Africa's higher education landscape.

She is making an important assertion here. If we are going to do work with lasting impacts on the lives of our institutions and our people, we have to ask the uncomfortable questions and recognise where we could open ourselves up for learning. I have claimed in this chapter that intersectionality provides multiple possibilities for us to do so. According to Meer and Muller (2017), looking at issues such as the one presented by Batisai in the above quote from an intersectional lens "can reveal the multiple identities that define people, exposing the different types of discrimination and disadvantages that occur as a result of the combination of these identities". This is important as it illustrates that being Black and foreign as Batisai suggests makes her experiences and challenges very different, thus allowing us a lens into the importance of critical engagement with the nuanced Black experience.

Meer and Muller (2017) also allude to the importance of intersectionality in building collaborative organising across social movements. I find their elucidations important as the silos in social movements illustrate the capitalist colonial logic with a basis in the profit motive. Their suggestion for collaboration via intersectionality as a methodology and action orientation is worth considering for why intersectionality can work in African contexts.

Tilling the Ground for the Excavation of Her-Stories

The fallist movements was led by South African students in 2015. This movement called for the removal of the Rhodes statue from UCT, for university fees to fall, and for a shift away from contracting support staff. Although these movements were university based and primarily focused on student-related issues, the movements shook South African society as it also called for the decolonisation of society. The fallist movements made visible the continuing inequalities in broader society, including in the workplace, in university curriculums, and, most importantly for this paper, the movement revealed the problems in gender politics.

At a particularly important moment in the fallist movement, there was a rupture in the unity among the leaders. This rupture led to a new hashtag – #PatriarchyMustFall. The young women leaders refused to be erased from the narrative of that moment and the making of her-story. The actions by the young women leaders revealed the "pervasive positivist attitudes of hyper-masculine privilege within society" (Ndlovu 2017) and made visible how women's contribution to development gets erased. The #PatriarchyMustFall movement was argued by other, especially male, fallist leaders to be detrimental to the main movement against increasing university fees. This type of thinking was similarly evoked in the struggle against apartheid where women were called to curb their intention to confront patriarchy in the interest of fighting racism (Ramphela 1989). This illustrated how women's issues have been historically marginalised.

Past struggles against apartheid became single-issue politics with women's issues argued to be less significant. Single-issue movements are violent as they tend to erase and marginalise the experiences and contributions of those grappling with the oppressive tendencies of patriarchy and capitalism. Although that seemed like a good strategy at the time, it buried the experiences of women and delayed their emancipation. Thus, the call for patriarchy to fall during the fallist movement in 2015/2016 is a call emanating from that unresolved past in gender relations.

What this call did for me was to awaken the truth about the invisible place of the majority of Black women in South Africa's history. Since 1994, we have had several firsts. The first professor in the humanities at the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) was Pumla Dineo Qgola in 2016. Pumla is not the only one. There are a number of these first in all sectors of society: Mamokgethi Phakeng and Puleng LenkaBula. I was also the first South African Black African woman full professor in the humanities at the University of Johannesburg (UJ) and the first South African Black African woman vice-dean research. The recording of the contributions of these Black women firsts matters. My contention is that in focusing on celebrating these achievements we should not lose sight of the conditions that have created these firsts and, in more cases than not, ends with them. According to Materre (2018), the conditions these women engage in are filled with uncertainty and toxic, unchanging institutional cultures. My discomfort with the many Black women firsts we see post-1994 is the underlying, unspoken assumption that it is difficult to find numerous capable Black women, that the few who are contributing are an exception to the norm. This idea of exceptionality is at the heart of the violence of erasure, because it allows for the contributions and experiences of 'ordinary' Black women to be rendered useless and thus easily marginalised.

The discomfort I have felt on these issues of firsts and exceptionalism informed my entry into these questions of erasure and its violence against Black women. A few questions came to mind and continue to drive the transformation work I engage in: Where were the Black women before 1994? What were their contributions? Why do we not know about them? What are the effects of this lack of information on the consciousness of young women? What have been the mechanisms for their erasure from history? And what are the reasons for their erasure? Although this chapter addresses some of them, these remain important questions for advocacy work and remembering work that I engage in.

Conclusion

The work of theorising Black women's experiences of the academy should appreciate the history of knowledge production and the position of Black women as silent and gaze-less. To centre Black women as active knowers and knowledge producers of their autobiographical experiences of the academy has been invaluable in unmasking the link between 'surveillance and knowledge'. In this chapter, Black women's ability to speak back, deliberate silence, and their return of the look are significant in the fight against racism and sexism in the academy as an institution and in the knowledge-making space.

On another note, this chapter has also made a case for how intersectionality presents an opportunity for those of us attempting to theorise the experiences of Black women in the academy. Intersectionality reveals and allows us to hold constant the multiple identities and intersecting systems of oppression and matrix of domination in our attempt to understand the lived complex experiences of those from and in Africa. This chapter has presented arguments to illustrate the view that intersectionality remains an important theoretical lens to understand gender identities as experienced in the African context.

It is important to excavate the stories of women to restore them as important historical players. This excavation should be in multiple forms. Shrivastava (2017) argues that it should include discovering and preserving women's records and, most importantly, it should involve broadening "the conceptual and narrative frameworks of mainstream historical traditions". I argue that this excavation should centre the contribution of all women – in South Africa, the stories of women who might be considered elite include Winnie Mandela, Mariam Tladi, Lilian Ngoyi, and Charlotte Maxeke. However, when one goes deeper into the narratives of their lives, it is obvious that they were ordinary people who did extraordinary things. However, the challenge of focusing on women whose names we all remember limits the project of signifying all women. Therefore, I argue that it is violent to think of ordinary women's contributions as insignificant as

their untold stories take away from us the opportunity to see what we are capable of.

Erasure of the contribution of all women makes invisible everyday structures of violence and sustains the status quo of inequality.

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