Chapter 4

Converging Worlds: Exploring Gendered and Pluriversal Possibilities in South African Universities

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Abstract

In this chapter, we critically analyse the current state of Psychology within the South African higher education system, shedding light on the enduring impact of colonial and apartheid-era agendas on the contemporary practice of Psychology. We advocate for a paradigm shift from an exclusive focus on the individual towards a recognition of the systemic influence of apartheid and colonialism on mental well-being. This necessitates formulating a decolonised and Africanised version of Psychology that integrates historical and contextual factors. As scholars and activists, our perspectives as intergenerational Black women in Psychology bring a unique and invaluable dimension to the discourse, emphasising the imperative of transforming the discipline to be more inclusive and relevant within the South African context. We challenge the persisting colonial power dynamics perpetuating inequalities and underscore the significance of acknowledging diverse voices and challenging research hierarchies. Furthermore, we advocate for the potential of community-based engagement research methods in addressing the marginalisation of Black women. By advocating for transparent, inclusive, and participatory research approaches, we aim to contribute to the ongoing critical discourse. Ultimately, we argue for the crucial need to reassess and transform the discipline of Psychology in South Africa, taking into account the historical and contemporary adversities faced by marginalised

communities, particularly Black women. Additionally, we critically examine the inadequacies of numerical accessibility in higher education in capturing the daily struggles of navigating the intersections of gender and race, highlighting the persistent exclusion of women in public and private spaces despite their statistical representation.

Introduction

Mapping our academic identities: Situating ourselves within higher education and the discipline of Psychology

In this chapter, we aim to shed light on our individual journeys in higher education and Psychology, while also drawing clear connections between community convergence, Afrocentricity, and decoloniality as potent mechanisms for deconstructing the traditional image of the university and challenging the dehumanising aspects of Psychology. Afrocentricity refers to centring African and African diasporic perspectives in analysing and interpreting social, cultural, and historical phenomena. Decoloniality involves challenging and dismantling the enduring impacts of colonialism on knowledge systems, including those in the field of Psychology (Maldonado-Torres 2007). Furthermore, we will emphasise the African philosophy of *ubuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* (I am because we are), which underscores the interconnectedness of individuals within a community. This concept posits that the self is inseparable from the collective, highlighting the need for a collective and inclusive approach to community engagement. By exploring these themes, we seek to present an argument advocating for a more inclusive and community-oriented approach to higher education and Psychology. This approach would involve centring diverse perspectives and actively involving communities in the teaching and learning process, thus challenging enduring colonial power dynamics within these fields (hooks 1996).

Our chapter is founded on the principle that collective activities and gatherings are integral to traditional African societies, with an emphasis on consensus-building. In addition

to Maqutu's (2018) study, Hlongwane et al. (2018) conducted research in various African communities, reaffirming the central role of older women in facilitating communal dialogues and activities. Furthermore, Smith's (2017) anthropological work highlighted the prevalence of *Imbizo* and *Legotla* as integral components of traditional African societies, shedding further light on the vital role of older women in these communal gatherings. This accumulation of scholarly evidence staunchly supports the argument that older women are crucial in orchestrating and facilitating important community exchanges in various African traditional settings. Thus, we deem community-based methods an effective alternative for contesting hierarchies in research, increasing multivocality, and developing more transparent participatory research (Maqutu 2018).

The concept of multiple perspectives is a fundamental aspect of many African cultures, a testament to the diversity and richness of African psychology. It recognises that people's meaning-making and understanding of the world are not just influenced by their individual experiences but also by the collective culture and history they are a part of. Asante (2020) argues that African identity is not defined by race, gender, or background but by a shared connection to Africa and its people. This shared connection can be understood as a common bond beyond individual attributes, rooted in a sense of belonging to the African continent and its diverse cultures.

A central aspect of our discussion is the concept of 'self-storying' (Goodson 2014), a powerful tool that allows us to share our unique experiences and perspectives. These personal narratives are about our individual journeys in Psychology and our collective pursuit of decolonising and Africanising Psychology as a discipline. To achieve a decolonised and Africanised Psychology in Africa, we propose a shift in focus. Instead of an individual-focused approach, we advocate for examining historical and contextual factors and communal methods that shape people's experiences and worldviews. This shift enables us to challenge and deconstruct colonial power dynamics to create equitable societies. Furthermore, positionality is a critical consideration in our discussion as it relates to where we come from and how

we position ourselves within psychology. We offer an embodied encounter of how Psychology can be reimagined and moved towards a more Afro-centred approach, emphasising multiple views to understand heterogeneous realities.

The Personal Context

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Reflecting on my upbringing, I cannot ignore the profound influence of my roots in Tsakane, Brakpan, and rural Mpumalanga. Despite my family's relocation to Gauteng to pursue better opportunities and education, our connection to Mpumalanga remained deeply ingrained. Our move was motivated by the sluggish economic development in Mpumalanga, a region still endeavouring to bridge the gap with the rest of the country. The persistent issues of income inequality and poverty further emphasised the challenges faced by the community. Thus, my parents instilled in me the value of education, which ignited my academic journey at the University of Johannesburg (UJ) and later at the University of South Africa (UNISA), where I pursued my undergraduate and postgraduate studies in Psychology. In our family, it was customary for the eldest son to contribute to the education of younger siblings, fostering a culture of shared responsibility and support.

Despite financial constraints, I completed high school in 2004 with unwavering support from my mother and eldest brother. Pursuing higher education presented its own financial hurdles, but my determination led me to pursue a PhD in Psychology. UNISA was a practical decision, given its affordability and proximity to home, combined with invaluable financial assistance from the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS). This allowed me to continue my community volunteer work, which is integral to my personal and academic journey. The challenges I faced as a young black African woman in both South Africa and Mpumalanga are mirrored in the broader sociopolitical landscape of the country. Hence, institutions of learning and

teachers must make an effort to understand the historical factors and the enduring impact of colonial and apartheid policies on the experiences of Black communities. This contextual understanding and experience have shaped my journey and solidified my commitment to addressing the challenges African students and communities encounter in their daily lives.

In considering my academic journey, I cannot help but acknowledge the profound impact of Black women and historical figures who, like myself, sought to pursue careers aimed at healing, growth, and education within their communities. Women such as Winnie Mandela, Lillian Ngoyi, and Nokukhanya Luthuli serve as inspiring examples of individuals who placed their community's well-being at the centre of their career paths. Their ability to inspire mass mobilisation and unite people, especially women facing daily struggles, resonated deeply with me. This connection solidified my belief that I belonged in the Human Sciences faculty.

After several visits from professionals representing different universities, I was convinced that my path lay in Psychology. I realised that there was a lack of Black psychologists in my predominantly Black community, and accessing professional training in Psychology meant enrolling in a traditionally 'white' university. Consequently, my enrolment at UJ in 2005 coincided with a significant transformation within South African higher education institutions. The theme of transformation in higher education has been a subject of extensive discourse, with the definition and interpretation of this term evolving. While initially focused on achieving parity among faculty and students regarding race, gender, class, and disability, the concept of transformation has expanded to encompass a broader spectrum of higher education aspects. This includes institutional culture, pedagogy, curricula, research methodologies, community involvement, and the development of graduates who can contribute positively to society (Luvalo 2019; Jowi et al. 2013).

However, the lack of a clear definition of transformation and the contested interpretations of this term have had adverse effects on students, particularly those who identify as Black.

The course materials often failed to connect with their cultural background and instead pathologised their ways of being. Furthermore, the Westernised approach to teaching Psychology in African Psychology departments neglected to address the experiences of individuals with differing viewpoints, further alienating Black students. Reflecting on my journey, I grappled with the pressure to assimilate into a new culture presented before us as Black students. It felt like a constant struggle as I navigated the unfamiliar territory of tertiary education while grappling with the dual identity I was expected to assume. It was clear that the lack of clarity in defining transformation, combined with the Westernised approach to teaching, had a detrimental impact on Black students.

This experience underscored the urgent need for a more inclusive and culturally sensitive approach to the discipline of Psychology and higher education. Sadly, Carolissen et al. (2015) exposes how the discipline of Psychology is a common choice among historically disadvantaged undergraduate students both locally and abroad. However, this is the same population whose Psychology continues to mirror the colonial wounds inflicted by colonialism followed by apartheid. Naidoo's (2000) argument is further supported by the works of decolonial scholars and theorists, such as Mignolo (2007) and Grosfoguel (2007), who also critique the passive nature of disciplines and courses that predominantly teach Western theory without effectively engaging with non-Western socio-historical contexts. These scholars advocate for a more inclusive and meaningful approach to education that considers diverse perspectives and experiences.

In light of the challenges I faced in higher education and my struggles at PhD level in my studies in 2016, I actively sought a supervisor who could empathise with the experiences of Black individuals. At this point, I crossed paths with Professor Puleng Segalo, and that encounter marked a significant awakening for me. I was deeply inspired by her approach to interacting with students and her encouragement to embrace and take pride in my African heritage. She also emphasised honouring our elders and acknowledging them as custodians of African knowledge. Furthermore, she instilled in me the belief that Western

knowledge is not the sole epitome of wisdom but rather that various perspectives and realities can enrich it.

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Reflecting on my experience as a student in a historically white university in the late 1990s, I was confronted with glaring colonial symbols inside and outside the classroom. The colonial buildings and privileging of Western theorists contributed to a heightened sense of alienation and unbelonging. Despite the resounding messages and politicians' voices that "doors were open" to Black students, I felt like an outsider and a body out of place in a space where I did not belong. This was because I was entering an institution that, for decades, was meant for whites only, the University of Pretoria (UP). Doors were open, but we found inside that we entered an unwelcoming reception where we would even be told explicitly that the status quo would not change just because the law says so and that teaching would continue in Afrikaans. For some modules, English classes were only offered in the evenings, even though many students relied on public transport, which was unsafe at night. Having to navigate such hostility daily was exhausting both physically and mentally.

Language was also used to widen the divide between Black and white students under the guise of accommodating white students. The institution continued to provide classes in Afrikaans and only added English to accommodate those who were now entering the system. Afrikaans was used as a dividing marker and served as capital for those who could understand and speak it. I remember one of the lecturers who refused to teach in English, reminding us that this was an Afrikaans university and the new policy was meaningless to him. How do you challenge that as a first-year student coming from a township and not skilled in the art of arguing or challenging? You draw from your communal spirit! I was lucky to have done Afrikaans at school and understood it well enough to assist my fellow students struggling with the coursework. Language can be a powerful weapon of inclusion or exclusion (Segalo 2022) and has been used in both the colonial conquest and the apartheid regime (Simango & Segalo 2020) to serve as a marker of who belongs and who does not belong.

Even in spaces that were supposed to be transformed, such as universities that moved from excluding Black people to accommodating them, coloniality continues to persist. The coloniality showed itself in how I felt alienated from the curriculum that did not recognise my culture and my history. This was evident in the prescribed textbooks that solely relied on theories from the West, with all theorists being white men. Yes, I could now go to this formerly whites-only university. However, the transformation was superficial as I had to leave my history, knowledge systems, and what I was taught in my community at the door of the lecture hall as I was to be transformed into 'an educated' psychologist with tools to go back to the same community that raised me, with diagnostic tools developed elsewhere. The alienation was also because I did not see myself in those who stood in front of the lecture hall to teach me. I was made to sit and listen to how problematically my communities were pathologised and seen as a problem (Du Bois 1903; Manganyi 1984). It was in how Euro-western theories of development, social learning, and psychometrics were applied to (mis)diagnose challenges happening in most Black communities. The misunderstanding and misrepresentation of how people view and respond to the world led to imported theories used to make meaning of Black realities (Simango & Segalo 2020).

These experiences were all about identity, belonging, and finding a place in a space that was never meant for someone who looks like me. Now, as a psychologist and lecturer in Psychology, I have shifted from the other side of the class to the one facing it. I have seen faces of relief, knowing they have found someone who understands them. In his research, which "examines how teaching and learning in the racialised context of a predominantly White institution affects the pedagogical interaction between Black faculty and Black students in the classroom", Tuitt (2012: 186) argues that the students have hope and expectation that Black faculty will understand and connect with them better. This is because people's historical and social histories contribute to how they come into the world and, by extension, into the lecture hall.

This moves beyond just seeing someone who looks like them teaching psychology – it is also about how I teach psychology.

Together with other colleagues, we revised and reimagined how psychology can be centred on people's experiences, acknowledging and considering their history and theorising from the body and their contexts (see Canham et al. 2021; Terre Blanche et al. 2021). This has also meant contributing to the existing body of knowledge by conducting research with communities and rethinking psychology by consciously centring African experiences, thereby enabling students to bring themselves into the learning spaces. According to Mkhize (2021), it is imperative to consider African societies' cultural heritage and traditional beliefs when teaching and practising psychology.

The 2015 #FeesMustFall/decolonise the curriculum movement helped to make visible the struggles that I and others have been fighting for years. It forced institutions to rethink their transformation agendas, and the journey towards true inclusivity and diversity continues.

Towards a Socially Responsive and Relevant Psychology

This section aligns with the preceding background of how we have come into psychology. The literature we reviewed on African Psychology has endowed us with the thinking that higher education institutions in South Africa continue to define and construct transformation and its meanings for themselves, the students, and the communities it serves. It, therefore, becomes critical that academics, researchers, and educators reflect on the meanings of an engaged, porous university. Thus, it is necessary that we start by acknowledging the many truths and varied ways of knowledge production, the diverse identities, racial groups, and realities of Africans. This parallels our critique of a discipline whose preoccupation lies solely with the individual and overlooks the importance of assessing the social elements and structural issues contributing to how people navigate the world. Arguing from an African Psychology approach, we contented that Western Psychology in Africa is a conduit of colonialism that perpetuates an oppressive socio-economic and political system (Dawes 2001). We agree with Bulhan's (1985) enduring critique of the discipline

of Psychology in South Africa that, in its approach, it continues to masquerade as a servant of the apartheid era and its governors. Similarly, guided by decolonial and African Psychology principles, we capture our and students' critique of Western Psychology in Africa below.

1. Western Psychology has and continues to privilege the experiences of graduate students in the United States of America, positioning them as a representation of all humanity (Nwoye 2021).
2. In most parts of South Africa and Africa, the promotion and provision of mental health care services continue to be inaccessible and inappropriate for the needs of Black (African) communities (Naidoo 2000).
3. Psychology continues to neglect to address the sociopolitical concerns of the survivors of colonialism and apartheid.
4. Psychology isolates and distances Black psychologists and students alike economically, socially, and politically from the same communities they come from (Mkhize 2021).
5. Psychology in Africa has failed to embrace *pluriversality* in knowledges and realities in their approach to inquiry, thus further alienating the Black communities it purports to serve and further misrepresenting our (Africans') multiple realities and experiences (Nwoye 2021). Currently, the discipline of Psychology and the universities in which it is taught on the African continent are an extension of the Eurocentric paradigm.

Considering the above, our chapter has incorporated specific theoretical frameworks proposed by Lazarus and Seedat (1995) in their work on community Psychology in South Africa, which we believe are pertinent to our endeavour. These scholars argue that for psychologists to remain relevant in South Africa's broader healthcare portfolio, they must assume the roles of community mobilisation and networking (Lazarus & Seedat 2011). Our objective is to promote reflection on the strategies and objectives of effectively engaging African communities in Psychology and communal healing, as suggested by these scholars. Moreover, Preece (2000) has provided insights into the characteristics of a socially responsive university in present-day South Africa.

The author highlights the pivotal role played by South African universities in challenging the injustices of the apartheid regime and the ruling party, the National Party, concerning unequal housing, education, and healthcare services. In keeping with Preece's (2000) assertion, we propose a theoretical framework that draws on African Psychology principles and the principles embedded in a convergence and dialogue method with previously disadvantaged communities and those trapped in the periphery. Our argument for pursuing this theoretical window of opportunity is premised on finding a curriculum approach that privileges the community as much as the students, academic staff, and researchers (Preece 2000).

In Nwoye's (2021) rendering, not only has colonialism led to the dispossession of land, but it has also succeeded in erasing interdisciplinary knowledge traditions that constitute African Psychology. Parallel to the community dialogues we facilitated and the principles of African Psychology, we demonstrate the inclusive nature of African Psychology in epistemologies and transdisciplinary methods. We further undertook this method with the idea that pursuing knowledge and other realities is infinite (Nwoye 2021). This is because human-centred Psychology requires the recognition of diverse identities and holds space for entering a dialogue with individuals who embody varied histories, philosophies, ontologies, and knowledges (Nabudere 2006). It is, thus, through such dialogical encounters that knowledge emerges.

This is consistent with the commonly cited maxim, *ubuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* (I am because we are), the community enriches the individual. A person's self-worth can be located in one's community and is regarded as essential to being human (Karenga 2022). As such, we shift our attention to the collective construction of beings and the prospect of co-constructing knowledge through dialogue. In this regard, Ramose (1999) elaborated that a dialogue constitutes a mutuality of beings. The meanings and purpose of a dialogue embodied in an African setting are perfectly captured in isiZulu as *ingxoxo, indaba*, and *ubu-dlelwano* (loosely translated as discussion, communion, unity, or closeness). Similarly, De Sousa Santos (2019) illustrates the value embedded in dialogues, referring to its methods as

an encounter between different knowledge ecologies, wherein all are equally superior. Given these insights, we, thus, elected to privilege community dialogues in the context of Psychology as dialogues seek to connect experiences from where they are constructed. Following Sefa Dei's (2005) reprove, Psychology's failure to utilise African languages has led to the *invisibilisation* and silencing of the rich ideas embedded in these languages. For example, Nabudere (2006) offers that African proverbs are a rich source of psychological knowledge. Central to the discourse of meaningfully engaging our communities through dialogue, the foundation of African Psychology lies in listening deeply to African people's experiences through their voices.

Thus, the project of undoing colonial traumas begins (Ratele et al. 2018). As evidenced in our trajectories in higher education institutions in South Africa and those of many other Black academics and students, while it is critical to change demographics, this does not entail transformation or how students and staff experience navigating the university and the discipline of Psychology (Ratele et al. 2018). Among other ideas on how to decolonise and centre the Psychology curriculum in Africa, scholars suggest that we must investigate the research projects we are involved in and who our funders are. This will determine whose interests we serve. We further need to reflect on where our work is published and by whom, access or a lack thereof to therapy, and how it is conducted (Ratele et al. 2018).

Moving from Theory to Praxis: African Women's Convergence (Movements) and the Intersections of Community Psychology and Pluriversalism in Higher Education

This section explores the theory of convergence in the context of African women's histories of converging for a common purpose, albeit under oppressive patriarchal and, at times, dangerous circumstances. These initiatives inspire us to explore and understand African women's leadership techniques and strategies and how these may be useful as the university forges towards converging with the communities around it.

Moreover, scholars have revealed how women utilised their titles as mothers to converge publicly to resist oppressive patriarchal structures that impinged on their quotidian lives and, subsequently, their livelihoods (Gasa 2007; Magoqwana n.d.; Ngcobozi 2017; Zwane 2000). Similarly, throughout history, African women have always organised and collectively 'talked back' at unjust laws of oppressive states, namely, colonialism and apartheid. Evidence shows that women's convergence and struggle for justice against unjust apartheid laws, namely the pass laws, began as early as 1898 (Wells 1993). These discourses were centred on issues that affected women as mothers, leaders of organisations, and everyday lives as ordinary South Africans living in townships (Goldblatt & Meintjies 1998; Zwane 2000).

Ginwala (1990) eloquently points out that women's resistance emanated from issues that disrupted their daily lives and the financial maintenance of their families. The preceding challenges progressed to women's discourses and gatherings in church. In this chapter, we explore the gatherings of the Methodist Church women. Historically, Black women would join *Umanyano* in the church but could only meet on Thursdays when Black domestic workers were off duty from the white households. They would meet to pray, develop one another, and collaborate on ways to respond to social issues in their communities. In this way, women's *manyano* organisations were agents of transformation in Black and poor communities. *Umanyano* has been appropriated by women of the Methodist Church of South Africa since the 1870s to describe women's organisation in the Methodist Church. *Manyano* is a Xhosa name initially given to African women's prayer unions in South Africa, originating in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa. It is derived from the verb *ukumanya*, meaning 'to join' or 'unite', 'unity' or *kopano* in Setswana or Sesotho (Madise 2008). According to Preston (2007: 42), the word '*manyano*' signifies "purity of speech, the holiness of life, conduct and temperament, and service to the glory of God for the extension of his Kingdom".

In keeping with women's leadership in their communities and converging to address injustices in their roles as mothers, Magoqwana's (n.d.) concept of *inimba* becomes pertinent here. She describes *inimba* as an attribute of African women's leadership.

Building on this, she challenges the view of motherhood as an exclusive title to those categorised as female. She contends that *inimba* may be a useful leadership tool that all members of society can utilise and learn from in leadership in communities (Magoqwana n.d.). She continues that as much as the principle of *inimba* is "life-giving, life-sustaining, and life-preserving" (p.2), it also serves as a tool to deconstruct the prevailing patriarchal disparities that continue to exist in our country (Magoqwana n.d.).

Magoqwana's provocation coincides well with the tenets of the philosophy of *ubuntu* that may be traced back to African leadership and traditional societies' convergence and solidarity (Hofstede 1983). Thus, most traditional African community duties were performed collectively. Furthermore, *ubuntu* is marked by relatedness, collectivism, communalism, and spiritualism (Maqutu 2018). In addition, Mbigi (1997) affirms that *ubuntu* is not an exclusive principle to African people. It can also be located in the lives of marginalised communities who converge together for a common purpose on issues that continue to decentre their experiences (Mbigi 1997). Traditional African societies assembled to facilitate collective educational and social events such as *Imbizo's* and ritual ceremonies (initiation schools) for young men and women to educate the younger generation on traditional African customs and norms (Maqutu 2018). What seems to emerge from the aforementioned African structures is that convergence, collective education, and *ubuntu* are a way of life for African communities.

We underscore the interconnectedness between the philosophy of *ubuntu*, diverse truths, and the lessons that universities can glean from the solidarity of African women. We urge Psychology to focus on the social and ethical dimensions of human existence within African cultures. In these cultures, the community enriches human beings and is enriched by them. Embracing the principles of *ubuntu*, which include Truth, Justice, Caring, and Reciprocity, is essential to being human in these contexts (Karenga 2022). We posit that by embracing the social and ethical principles of being human from an Afro-centric perspective, Psychology can better cater to the needs of individuals and communities in these settings.

Tapping into the Principles of *Inimba* and *Oomama Bomthandazo*: Towards Nurturing University-Community Partnerships

We argue that it is pivotal for the same department of Psychology that was instrumental in shaping the development of apartheid to play a critical role in responding to the current mental health needs of communities in our country. This has not occurred. In Townson's (2018) reprove, institutions of higher learning in South Africa have distanced themselves from the communities around them due to their failure to respond to their needs. In line with the objectives of this chapter, Matthews et al. (2018) affirm that the relationship between the university and the community is nurtured through the community's participation in the university's projects and where the community's strengths are utilised. In this way, universities are not seen as detached agents of knowledge but as co-actors partnering with communities towards their economic and social growth (Groulx et al. 2021).

This engagement enables community needs, resources, and strengths to be advanced and utilised (Miller 2020). As Sachs and Clark (2017) emphasised, engaging with the community allows academics to understand its challenges better and assist community members in utilising their skills and capabilities to improve their community. Furthermore, we argue that universities can nurture meaningful partnerships with communities by tapping into the principles of *inimba* and *ooMama Bomthandazo*. This approach shifts the university's role from being a detached source of knowledge to a collaborative partner in communities' economic and social growth (Groulx et al. 2021).

Universities must adopt a more integrated approach to community engagement by actively involving local community members in research and teaching activities. This inclusive approach fosters a reciprocal exchange of knowledge and facilitates co-creating innovative solutions that are more relevant and beneficial to the community (Gumede 2020). By establishing genuine collaborative partnerships with local stakeholders, universities can address community-specific challenges and harness local talents and resources, promoting sustainable

development and positive social change. This strategic alignment with community priorities accentuates the university's role as a proactive contributor to broader societal well-being, fostering a sense of shared responsibility and collective empowerment.

Thus, a community-centred approach to university engagement transforms the historical role of universities as the sole beacons of knowledge. It lays the foundation for a more inclusive, equitable, and mutually beneficial relationship between academia and society and the mutual exchange of knowledge and learning. This transformative collaborative model enriches the educational experience and significantly contributes to communities' holistic development and resilience, positioning higher education institutions as integral partners in advancing societal progress and fostering meaningful social impact. This strategic alignment with community priorities accentuates the university's role as a proactive contributor to broader societal well-being, fostering a sense of shared responsibility and collective empowerment.

Adopting a strategy that focuses on nurturing university-community partnerships in South Africa has the potential to benefit African students significantly. By actively involving local community members in research and teaching activities, universities can establish a more inclusive and culturally relevant learning environment for African students (Johnson 2020). This approach allows students to engage in practical and contextually relevant projects addressing community-specific challenges and experiences. It also fosters a sense of belonging and integration into these institutions, hoping that students will not have to encounter the challenges I, Puleng, and other #FeesMustFall movement activists and students experienced from the year 2015 leading up to the year 2017.

Emanating from South Africa, the #FeesMustFall movement was driven by students' passionate advocacy for free, decolonised education, aimed at addressing the financial challenges experienced by many students and striving to rectify the inequalities within the education system (Mathebula & Calitz 2018). The movement provided a platform for students to voice

their concerns regarding financial burdens that hindered access to education and confronting authorities in government and higher institutions of learning and exclusionary institutional cultures (Ndlovu 2017).

While the media and other stakeholders labelled the movement as disrupting pursuits, these experiences underscore the students' desperation, determination, and resilience in their pursuit of a just and equitable education system. We hope no student will have to resort to these measures again if the curriculum and institutions we study and work in are transformed, decolonised, and inclusive of its students and the communities they come from. Moreover, by embracing the principles of *inimba* and *ooMama Bomthandazo*, universities can cultivate a sense of shared responsibility and collective empowerment among African students. This collaborative model enriches the educational experience by promoting a deeper understanding of community needs, resources, and strengths. African students are offered the opportunity to contribute to their communities' economic and social growth, instilling a sense of pride and ownership in their academic pursuits. Furthermore, this approach can facilitate African students' access to local talents and resources, promoting sustainable development and positive social change. By nurturing meaningful partnerships with communities, universities can create opportunities for African students to develop essential skills and capabilities while contributing to their communities' holistic development and resilience. By embracing nurturing university-community partnerships, African students can benefit from a more inclusive, equitable, and culturally enriching educational experience that equips them to be proactive contributors to societal progress, nurturing feelings of belonging and contributing to progressive institutional cultures.

Conclusion

The potential for transformation in higher education is immense. By reconceptualising the notion of transformation, we can confront gender disparities and the specific experiences of Black women within African contexts. This chapter underscores this potential for change. We propose that universities can play a

pivotal role in this transformation by striving to become socially relevant, anchoring their significance within local communities and their everyday experiences (Johnson 2020).

An extensive analysis of the literature and community engagement initiatives within South Africa's higher education system shows that partnerships between universities and communities often result in power imbalances. Despite the noble intentions of these collaborations, they frequently perpetuate existing disparities. To address this critical issue, psychologists, educators, and researchers must implement Afrikan psychology principles and proactive strategies to effect positive change within the communities they serve. Drawing upon the works of prominent scholars such as Magoqwana and Adesina (2020), who assert the necessity of examining the representation of women in the curriculum and broader knowledge production, it is clear that systemic changes are urgently needed.

By acknowledging and valuing these communities' experiential knowledge and lived experiences, we can lay the foundation for meaningful and sustainable progress. By integrating these insights into our educational practices, we can foster an environment conducive to positive change and inclusive growth. We conclude that psychologists, educators, and researchers must critically engage with African Psychology principles and actively implement strategies that empower communities and address power imbalances. We need to work collectively and collaboratively towards a more equitable, inclusive, and empowering space for academic staff and students who constantly feel alienated. We reiterate the importance of drawing from the philosophy of *ubuntu* as it offers new perspectives on interpreting convergence, socially engaged universities, transformation in higher education, and leadership in African contexts.

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