





The Need for a Deeper Theorisation on Race and Gender Equity in South African STEM

Drawing on Fraser's Participatory Parity, Decolonial, and Decolonial Feminist Insights

Zaira Solomons 

*Centre for Global Learning
Coventry University 
Coventry, United Kingdom*

*Department of Sociology
University of Johannesburg 
Johannesburg, South Africa*

Introduction

In this chapter, I bring together key theories and concepts pertaining to social justice and inequality in South African higher education to critically analyse the experiences of access and inclusion for Black female students throughout the entire Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) trajectory; i.e., schooling, higher education, further studies, and employment. This chapter therefore finds itself situated at a juncture between critical theory and a decolonial paradigm, drawing on both strands of thought, specifically Nancy Fraser's (1997a; 1997b; 1998; 2007a; 2008; 2010) participatory parity framework and aspects of the coloniality of power, knowledge, and gender. In doing so, I seek to advance both the theoretical and empirical terrains of these fields. I particularly aim to



unpack issues surrounding Black women's entry into contested, male-dominated, white spaces, such as university STEM courses in developing contexts. I argue that the lived experiences of Black women from the Majority World or Global South are particularly significant, including how they are uniquely positioned based on race, gender, geospatial location, and class background in white Eurocentric institutional spaces that primarily cater to the needs and experiences of the dominant white male (Liccardo, 2018; Liccardo et al., 2015; Liccardo & Bradbury, 2017). The terms "Majority World" and "Global South" are used interchangeably throughout this chapter to imply the geographic locations situated outside of the developed world¹ (De Sousa Santos, 2012)

To demonstrate how a dual perspective can give voice to Black South African women's experiences in accessing and participating in masculine hegemonic study and workplace confines, I first draw on decolonial thought and related insights by aligning it with Fraser's (1998; 2007a; 2007b; 2008; 2010) participatory parity framework, which incorporates three interrelated dimensions: distribution (economic), recognition (cultural), and representation (political). I utilise Quijano's (2000; 2007) conception of the coloniality of power, as well as Mignolo's (2007; 2011a) colonial matrix, to illustrate how the structures of coloniality/modernity and capitalism create unequal opportunities for accessing higher education based on the interconnection of race and class dynamics. More importantly, I aim to demonstrate how these structures

1 I use this term to highlight how the Euro-American framework has exploited and benefitted politically and economically from non-dominant bodies and spaces, in the interest of developing and advancing its respective territories through processes of slavery and colonisation both inside and outside the colony, i.e., Africans, Native Americans, and Aborigines (see Quijano, 2000). This plundering of natural resources and human labour from the South to the North created an uneven terrain, as the latter "developed" itself at the expense, misery, and suffering of the former (see Quijano, 2000). Yet, ironically, the developed North currently views its philanthropic endeavours as noble and righteous, while seeking to exclude its underdeveloped counterparts based on race and non-Western democratic values and ideals (see De Sousa Santos, 2012).

financially exclude low socio-economic township and rural aspiring female STEM scholars. As I have observed elsewhere, impoverished contexts still provide debilitating circumstances, particularly for township and rural women's access to university STEM higher education, due to the fusion of geospatiality and cultural patriarchy, which is undergirded by a meritocratic education system that works to perpetuate their exclusion (Solomons, 2024). This aligns with Fraser's (2008) identification of the distribution or economic element of social justice that must be addressed for all students to participate on an equal footing.

Secondly, I draw on key international decolonial and critical thinkers, such as Mignolo (2011a), Quijano (2007), Lugones (2007; 2008), and Mendoza (2016), as well as scholars from within the South African context, such as Mbembe (2015; 2016) and Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013; 2015). Additionally, I employ De Sousa Santos' (2018) notion of cognitive justice and Fricker's (2003; 2008) concept of epistemic injustice, which I link to Fraser's cultural domain of social justice. This refers to the types of situated knowledge held by Black women in higher education that have historically been, and may continue to be, deemed invalid by Eurocentric male-dominated institutions – along with how women make sense of these experiences. This approach also interrogates questions such as who are considered legitimate knowledge producers, whose linguistic identities can be relied upon and why, and how knowledge intersects with language (race, class, and gender) in matters of legitimacy. This combined theoretical lens facilitates a deeper understanding of the racialised, classed, and gendered realities that Black women both bring with them into South African higher education and that further inform their experiences and meaning-making through access and participation.

Thirdly, I integrate Lugones' (2003) conception of "World-Travelling" and pilgrimages and Anzaldúa's (2012) borderlands with Fraser's third domain of representation, as a means to give Black women in STEM a voice and a sense of belonging in further STEM studies and masculinised employment contexts. In other words, Lugones' World-Travelling and

related concepts are drawn upon to show how women in male-dominated workspaces remain invisible and excluded, while often being compelled to navigate in-between spaces. Hence, this research draws on insights from critical and decolonial theory. Notably, Fraser's participatory parity framework assists in understanding the overarching mechanisms that enable or restrain equal participation in, through, and out of STEM higher education from an institutional perspective, whereas decolonial and decolonial feminist thinking allows for insight into Black women's lived realities from an onto-epistemic angle in a Majority World context. This aligns well with Mignolo's (2011a, p. 17) assertion that daily structural issues are not particularly endemic but are "being articulated through the colonial imperial difference".

In the first part of this chapter, I draw on decolonial theories, referencing Fraser's distribution element, and demonstrate how these interrelated concepts can be applied to Black women's lived experiences in preparing for STEM higher education. The second part addresses issues of knowledge politics and draws on concepts of cognitive justice and epistemic injustice in relation to Fraser's recognition dimension. This focuses on the dialectical tension between valid and invalid knowledge in Western educational enclaves, including who has a claim to knowledge and what those claims depend on in the higher education context. The third part incorporates Black decolonial feminist political thought, in conjunction with the representational dimension of Fraser's social justice model. This enables the inclusion and representation of women as knowledge producers and not mere consumers in affording minorities² with voice and agency in matters of equity in further STEM studies and employment contexts. I discuss each theory

2 This term suggests how non-dominant identities have been dehumanised by dominant hegemonic influences, such as conservative Western feminism, which overlooks Black, Brown, queer, and trans bodies for not fitting the standards of being white, bourgeois, and feminine (see Lugones, 2007). In this way, minority identities and non-dominant ones are still vilified and regarded as unequal and inferior (Vergès, 2021).

in turn and draw links and inferences between each but first provide a rationale for using both as analytical lenses.

A Rationale for Critical Theory and Decolonial Thought

Since I seek to merge two distinct schools of thought, decoloniality and social justice, both of which converge on untangling salient aspects of inequality, it is important to outline their differences. I provided a recent example of how this can be achieved (see Solomons, 2025), since the former investigates the origins of social (in)justice, while the latter highlights the repercussions that result from such inequality (Adam, 2020). Pertaining to the former, Runyan (2018) contends that ignoring colonialism implicates us in ongoing violence that continues to affect already deprived groups and individuals. It therefore becomes essential to foreground the role of (de)colonisation in our analytical interpretation and conceptualisation of rising inequality and oppression (Mignolo, 2011a; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013, 2016; Shepherd, 2018). Another matter of contention arises from the omission of how the coloniality of gender continues to shape the lived experiences of women and non-hetero bodies in the developing world. As Chávez (2019, p. 190) points out, by overlooking the historical arrangements relating to gender, we leave its colonial dimension intact and “undisturbed”, which allows it to persist into contemporary challenges, such as gender-based violence (GBV) and femicide.

Moreover, Fraser’s (2008) social justice paradigm omits the processes of coloniality and their implications in her theorisation of inequality and social justice. De Sousa Santos (2012, p. 48) further argues that this omission “takes on a derivative character which allows it to engage in debate, but not to discuss the terms of the debate, let alone explain why it opts for one kind of a debate and not another”. Adam (2020) highlights the limitations of both coloniality and the concept of participatory parity in addressing the social justice phenomenon and suggests that the adoption of both can serve as a novel framework in our theorisation of inequality. I thus

adopted this bifocal approach to ascertain how both historical and current underlying structural mechanisms impact the ability of underserved student communities to fully access and participate in higher education, and what implications may arise from this. Decolonial and participatory parity theories have been widely used, both individually and in conjunction with other frameworks across sociology, social work, education, and psychology. However, from my understanding, very little work has been done to bring these two frameworks together to develop new ways of theorising social justice and gender equity in higher education settings, particularly in the Global South. Given that both phenomena remain pernicious and problematic, especially in Majority World contexts that exhibit remnants of historical ills against the majority of society, it is imperative that we explore new ways of articulating our conceptualisation of both (in)equity and social (in)justice (Mutekwe, 2014). For example, as Lister (2007) observes, Fraser's participatory approach has primarily been geared towards addressing inequality in developed contexts, omitting salient features relating to poverty and injustices in the Majority World. Therefore, we need additional lenses that address coloniality, geospatially, and rurality that affect the developing world and its people (Masinire, 2020; Mignolo, 2011a, 2011b; Omodan, 2022; Timmis et al., 2022).

Coloniality/Modernity Nexus and the Coloniality of Gender

I unpack what various decolonial scholars refer to as the coloniality/modernity entanglement, which is responsible for the interrelated systems of oppression faced by non-Western subjects due to colonialism. Coloniality is distinct from colonialism in that it is an extension and an ongoing process of colonisation (Baker, 2012). Maldonado-Torres (2007, p. 43) argues that it “refers to long-standing patterns of power that emerged as a result of colonialism, but that define culture, labour, intersubjective relations, and knowledge production well beyond the strict limits of colonial administrations”. For Mignolo (2011a, p. 17), the process of ongoing coloniality

operates within a “colonial matrix, [that consists] of interconnected heterogeneous historic-structural nodes crossed by colonial and imperial differences and by the underlying logic that secures those connections”. Consequently, it has been nearly impossible to eradicate the remnants of coloniality altogether. As De Sousa Santos (2018, p. 109) argues, the post-colonial process has merely been altered in its “form”, but not in its substance. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2015, p. 488) describes it as “an invisible power structure, an epochal condition, and an epistemological design, which lies at the centre of the present Euro-North American-centric modern world”. Other decolonial scholars refer to this phenomenon as the coloniality of power (Quijano, 2000; Mignolo, 2011a), as it sustains the ongoing “wicked problems” (Hopwood, 2019, p. 266) that particularly affect disadvantaged communities. This is what Carter (2012) refers to as “stubborn roots” in her work paralleling educational inequalities in both the United States of America and South Africa – two distinctly similar unequal contexts.

To contextualise inequality from both historical and colonial processes, it is necessary to carefully examine the coloniality/modernity nexus to understand the underpinning mechanisms involved in issues of oppression and social (in) justice (Quijano, 2000, 2007; Mignolo, 2007, 2011a). Critical decolonial scholars, particularly those from the modernity-coloniality schools of thought, largely agree that coloniality and Western modernity are one and the same phenomenon (Icaza, 2017; Mignolo, 2007). Both remain rooted in Eurocentric agendas (Mignolo, 2013), are deeply intertwined, and work in tandem to achieve similar goals in structuring the entire global landscape (Escobar, 1995; Quijano, 2000, 2007; Mignolo, 2011a). To illustrate this, Mignolo (2007, p. 450) asserts that the sinister “rhetoric that naturalizes ‘modernity’ as a universal global process and point of arrival hides its darker side, the constant reproduction of ‘coloniality’”. This is evident in the case of racial identity and the exploitation of labour, which give rise to processes of capitalism and the constant need for the accumulation of wealth (Quijano, 2000). Moreover, for coloniality to be successful, it is heavily reliant on the

establishment of boundaries and the creation of binaries, such as North–South, Black–White, and Male–Female (Amin, 2009; Ndlovu–Gatsheni, 2013), as a means of subjugation and enslavement in crafting a utopian West (Quijano, 2000; 2007). This provides a lens through which the entire world could be viewed (Quijano, 2000; De Sousa Santos, 2018; Tlostanova, 2010) and a “mirror in which Europe, as an identity and culture, could recognise itself as modern” (Aman, 2016, p. 101). According to Mignolo (2011a; 2013), this standard can be regarded as Western modernity. This standard not only pertains to how the terms are set out, but also to the content of relations between coloniser and colonised, and North and South (Mignolo, 2011a). It suggests that Western modernity is unable to provide solutions for the problems it has created (Escobar, 2004). Hence, for Aman (2016, p. 101), there lies a sinister motive behind reasonings from the West such as “‘salvation’, ‘development’ and ‘progress’, or, to put it differently, coloniality”.

The hierarchisation and categorisation of various identity markers are also essential in our analysis of the hegemony of wealth accumulation (Quijano, 2000; 2007) and the processes of the coloniality of gender (Lugones, 2007; 2008; 2010). In the case of the former, the hegemony of wealth accumulation can be seen as a structure that emerged with the colonisation and expansion of the imperial world by exploiting Black labour and physical power in the colonies for the benefit of the empire (Grosfoguel, 2011, 2020; Quijano, 2007). Quijano (2000) notes that the processes of Western modernity are prevalent throughout the globe, where the standard is set for cheap labour, leading businesses to offshore operations to save costs, while it remains morally acceptable to desire something from someone for next to nothing in return (capitalism). Therefore, as De Sousa Santos (2018, p. 109) states, “capitalism cannot exert its domination except in articulation with colonialism”.

De Sousa Santos (2018) takes this a step further by locating the ways in which gender as a construct has been shaped and influenced by the structures of colonisation (see also Lugones, 2007; Tlostanova, 2010; Mendoza, 2016), articulating heteronormativity among both colonised men and women, as

well as further complementing the hierarchical colonial system (Lugones, 2008; 2010). Here, enslaved and colonised women were unable to stake any claims in economic matters and were particularly vulnerable to sexual abuse and exploitation by both colonisers and colonised men (Mendoza, 2016; Vergès, 2021). Moreover, in this classification, gender was further inscribed into neat categories of those who possess a gender and those who are non-gendered (Lugones, 2003; 2007). Similarly, Fraser (2007a) draws a parallel by untangling the nexus between work and gender, as we will see later in her framing. She argues that women are most at risk of exploitation, with class and race as defining categories in the intensity of that risk. Her argument stems from the concept of the “labour of love” or unpaid work that Black women often endure; not only caring for their own offspring but also for those of their white masters.

Subaltern women (Spivak, 2010), particularly from disadvantaged backgrounds, are not afforded the opportunity to economically participate on par with their male counterparts due to gender-organising principles established through the processes of colonisation, which invalidate and dehumanise Black femininity in general. This often manifests in various impoverished contexts in South Africa, where the girl child is frequently burdened by household duties while contending with patriarchal expectations, which affects her schoolwork and impedes her ability to secure funding and a place in STEM higher education, due to its competitive nature (Solomons, 2024). This is why decolonial feminist theorists conclude that subaltern women are often regarded as “genderless”, not only because their situatedness and social experiences (ontologies) are invalidated by colonial systems of oppression (Bhambra, 2020; Hlabangane, 2018; Segalo, 2015; Segalo & Fine, 2020), but also because their humanity is called into question (Lugones, 2007, 2008; Segalo & Fine, 2020). Various scholars have highlighted the human/non-human binary that lies at the heart of the colonial system in its inscription of race, class, and gender (Lugones, 2008; Wynter & McKittrick, 2015).

Higher education institutions continue to subscribe to the colonial order in their subjugation of anyone who does not fit

into the mould of the dominant group (De Sousa Santos, 2020b), particularly in white masculine spaces (Liccardo & Bradbury, 2017). The liberal individual, neoliberal system (Luckett & Naicker, 2016), and the “plastic university” (Keet, 2014; 2018) as remnants of coloniality (Bell, 2018) should be critically interrogated, where markets, profits, and merits determine who is included and who is not (Liccardo, 2018; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013, 2016), while remaining reflexive (Ndlovu, 2017), self-aware (Hlabangane, 2018; see also Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2016), historical, and political (Keet, 2018). Keet (2018, p. 20) argues that,

the ‘origin’ of the university, from which it has detached itself, is plastic: flexible, with an inscribed transformative ability rooted in the ‘nature’ of the knowledge and the disciplines with which it works. The university’s essence is transformability. As our ways of disciplining the university have concealed this essence, the decolonial turn, with its circulations, in my reading, is a call to excavate the plasticity of the university ... a kind of unburdening of epistemic freedom as a key notion in any definition on the decolonisation of knowledge.

Hence, the “delinking” from the shackles of colonialism and its properties that Mignolo (2007; 2011b) advocates for remains pivotal in assessing the inequalities created by a Western view of education. He adds that, in counteracting the dominant Western/Eurocentric ways of being and becoming in institutions, subaltern knowledge can be centred to allow the subaltern subject to evade the Western gaze to which it is constantly subjected. In this regard, Davies (2016, p. 42) suggests that knowledge is “multi-dimensional” in essence – operating in different ways and manners, emerging in relation to varying experiences, and “does not necessarily imply the need to be explicit”. Knowledge is both epistemic and political and is always situated from a gendered (Haraway, 1988), as well as from a colonial “other” perspective (De Sousa Santos, 2012; see also Escobar, 2004; 2007), created through prisms of identity and experience and informed by our intersectional bodies, ethnicity, age, disability, and habitus.

Cognitive Justice and Epistemic Injustice

Visvanathan (2005; 2006) introduced and developed the concept of cognitive justice and De Sousa Santos (2007a; 2007b; 2008; 2009; 2018) later furthered its relevance in the context of the ongoing struggle for decolonisation and knowledge parity. Cognitive justice calls for a transformation in how diverse knowledges can be viewed as legitimate (Boni & Velasco, 2020; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015; De Sousa Santos, 2018) and equal, to the extent that “subaltern” or non-dominant knowledges are not merely tolerated or even dismissed, but are substantively recognised (Visvanathan, 2005; 2021). Visvanathan (2006) argues that such a possibility will only occur through cooperative principles, whereby we should strive at all costs to disrupt dominant forms of knowledge imperialism. By seeking to disentangle the various entities embedded in both dominant and non-dominant forms of knowledge, we can recalibrate what Oyedemi (2020) sees as a polycentric decolonial framework. Oyedemi (2020) avers that polycentricism calls for all voices and knowledge to be made visible in order to advance the efforts of a decolonised university.

Moreover, such frameworks include Afrocentric epistemologies, such as conceptions of “Ubuntu”³ (Letseka, 2012; Ramose, 2020). For Letseka (2012, p. 48) Ubuntu “translates as humanness, personhood and morality”. In other words, it emphasises that “the flourishing of one human being is not separate from the flourishing of all other”, which makes it particularly “transformative” (Cornell & Van Marle, 2015, p. 5). Chilisa (2020, p. 25) notes that as Africans, “Ubuntu offers an example of how the researcher’s ethical and moral obligation” undergirded by his/her obligation towards his fellow men are often interlocked with subjective reality and epistemic

3 This refers to an African way of being in the world with others, as well as with oneself (Chilisa, 2020), and has key tenets rooted in communalism, forgiveness, sharing, and reciprocity. It remains epistemic and can be regarded as a buffer against the social, political, and economic oppression that result from individualism, neoliberalism, and capitalism, all of which have called into question the humanity of those on the fringes of society (see Letseka, 2012).

awareness. "This also underscores the interconnectedness in the I/we relationship, where 'hierarchy' is discouraged" (Chilisa, 2020, p.25).

Yet, there remains tension between various factions regarding the applicability of Ubuntu as a moral philosophy of care in addressing contemporary challenges related to structural and gendered inequalities (Chisale, 2018; Letseka, 2012). Kubow and Min (2016), for example, concluded that African female teachers felt more aligned with Westernised ideals of individual sovereignty in schooling than with the ideological constructions of communalism and Africanism. However, upon closer examination of Western modernity and the meaning of being liberal, Letseka (2016) problematises these arguments as shortsighted and superficial. He further argues that "mainly due to the unintended consequences of [past] colonialism and imperialism, liberalism has mutated into new forms such that there is no single view that can be said to define what it means to be a liberal" (Letseka, 2012, p. 2; see also Fricker, 2013). Nevertheless, various scholars have commented on the value of alternative epistemologies, such as Ubuntu, as an antidote to a plethora of historically based injustices and the ongoing entrenchment of neo-colonial and neoliberal ideals in African societies (Gouws & Van Zyl, 2015; Higgs, 2016; Nicolaidis, 2015; Ramose, 2020). This transformative potential further involves an ethics of care, which can be aligned with more liberal principles to help rectify past injustices, illuminating not only its philosophical orientation but also exposing its ideological and political ideals (Gouws & Van Zyl, 2015).

The concept of different knowledge systems, such as Ubuntu, should be regarded as dynamic, co-existing with other epistemologies and ways of being, rather than being viewed in isolation (Visvanathan, 2021). De Sousa Santos (2007a; 2018) coined this idea as the "ecologies of knowledge", wherein if one particular system fails to adequately address an issue, an alternative framework can be relied upon (Escobar, 2020; Ramose, 2020; De Sousa Santos, 2007a, 2008, 2018, 2020b). For example, if Western medicine cannot provide a solution to a problem, we may turn to traditional

medicine or even a combination of the two. Escobar (2020, p. 43) and De Sousa Santos (2018) refer to multiple ways of knowing within the cosmos of knowledges as the “pluriverse”. Moreover, drawing on a plurality of perspectives will bring us a step closer to achieving true transformation in the context of the decolonisation agenda (Bhambra, 2020; De Sousa Santos, 2018, 2020a).

To achieve knowledge equity, Leibowitz (2017a) advocates for a relational understanding of various epistemological practices that exist among groups, depending on the amount of power and influence being wielded. This raises the question of how those from lower socio-economic backgrounds generate knowledge and what such knowledge means for them compared to their upper-class counterparts. Furthermore, who has access to dominant knowledge that contributes to the global structure and power dynamics at play, and at whose expense? (Leibowitz, 2017b).

De Sousa Santos (2007a; 2012; 2018; 2020a; 2020b) urges us to critically examine the influence of coloniality on the subversion of other forms of knowledge, suggesting that it is imperative to understand “the intimate connection between the epistemic project and the imperial political project that construct the other as a non-human being, devoid of either knowledge or aesthetic sentiment” (De Sousa Santos, 2020a, p. 119). He argues that an “abyssal line” is constructed, whereby Western colonial knowledge, culture, and understanding on one side are viewed as human and valid, while on the other side, non-human epistemologies exist that should be disregarded and rejected (De Sousa Santos, 2007a, 2020b; Bhambra, 2020; see also Escobar, 1995; Tlostanova, 2010). This abyssal line creates a divide between so-called “true knowledge” (scientific and Western understanding) and “false knowledge” (that espoused by marginalised communities daily, which become erased in the process of knowledge subversion and silencing) (Bhambra, 2020; Leibowitz, 2017a, 2017b; Waghid & Hibbert, 2018). Imperial “sociability is thus the mode of operation of modern domination between unequal human beings, i.e., between

fully fledged human beings and sub-human beings” (De Sousa Santos, 2020a, p. 119).

Similarly, Fanon (1986) categorises the experiences of individuals into the zones of being and non-being. Those who do not fit a Western understanding and outlook on life are relegated to the zone of non-being, which raises questions about their humanity. Conversely, those who neatly fit this mould occupy the zone of being and are deemed fully human. This further implies that the ultimate goal is to attain the zone of being, where experiences and sentiments are humanised, even if it means denying core aspects of one’s own identity in emulating another; for example, Black bodies adopting whiteness, Eurocentrism, and Westernisation as means to validate their humanity (Gordon, 2005).

Others implicate the establishment of Western institutional values in “enclosing knowledge, limiting access to knowledge, exerting a form of control over knowledge and providing the means for a small elite to acquire this knowledge for the purposes of leadership of a spiritual, governance or cultural nature” (Hall & Tandon, 2017, p. 8), through the enlightenment agenda that has spread across the globe (Mignolo, 2011b; Small, 2012), initially by “Christian theology [standards, and later by] secular Reason” (Mignolo, 2011a, p. 16) through a conduit of Western philosophers and thinkers that shape our understanding of the world (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2021). Nevertheless, Western knowledge also poses its own limitations, despite the elaborate universalism it has created. As Leibowitz (2017a, p. 101) states:

The hegemony of Western knowledge is problematic in five respects: it is embedded in relations of violence and imposition; it is embedded in relations of social inequality; it is interwoven with dynamics of alienation; it lacks a foil to counter its own excesses and show up its weaknesses; and it is inadequate on its own to solve questions that require attention.

Fricker (2003; 2008) introduced the concept of epistemic injustice, encouraging a re-evaluation of whose knowledge is

considered valid in the interests of epistemic and knowledge diversity. Epistemic injustice reveals how non-dominant ways of knowing have been decentred due to Western biases and prejudices (Fricker, 2008). Fricker (2013, p. 1320) argues that this refers to an individual being treated unfairly as a “knower”, or rather what she terms an “epistemic subject”, due to an “unjust deficit or credibility” afforded to them. Fraser (2001; 2007a) views the invalidation of non-dominant forms of knowledge as an injustice of misrecognition, which arises from the interplay of both class and culture. Dominant groups, regardless of race, enter institutions while sustaining and reinforcing the prevailing status quo, often at the expense of their lower socio-economic counterparts. This phenomenon is commonly referred to as an institutional habitus, as articulated by Bourdieu (1984; 1987) and further explored by Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992), as well as more recent research by Carter (2003; 2012). Moreover, Fricker (2013) categorises epistemic injustice into two types: testimonial injustice and hermeneutical injustice.

Testimonial injustice undermines the credibility of the knowledge bearer based on external characteristics, which renders their word or understanding marginal or inferior, thus preventing them from reliably conveying facts and truths (Fricker, 2008). Fricker (2013, p. 1319) notes that this typically occurs “when a speaker receives a deficit of credibility owing to the operation of prejudice”. This suggests that a subaltern individual is regarded as less equal, and their words are likely to be seen as misrepresentations simply because of who they are and what they represent, including factors such as race, gender, class, and sexual orientation.

Hermeneutical injustice refers to “when a subject who is already hermeneutically marginalized (that is, they belong to a group which does not have access to equal participation in the generation of social meanings) is thereby put at an unfair disadvantage when it comes to making sense of a significant area of their social experience” (Fricker, 2013, p. 1319). Here, the idea is that when a marginalised person (e.g., non-white, non-hegemonic) is surrounded by a dominant group (e.g., white, hegemonic), their ability to make sense of or construct

meaning around their own unique social experiences is inhibited due to the domination effect (Fricker, 2008; 2013). Fricker (2013, p. 1319) points out that varying degrees of hermeneutical injustice, including its severity and seriousness, often occur in instances where the status quo and norms of a group usually determine which members wield power and who are subjected to such power, which in turn can inadvertently produce and reinforce the dominant hegemony. She also suggests that there remains a “hermeneutical gap” in which the victim of such injustice is not in a position to make sense of their injuries, or they may be able to comprehend the injustice and relay such experiences to others but may struggle to articulate it to institutions of authority. Moreover, for Fricker (2013), both forms of epistemic injustice are often responsible for the discrimination and ultimate prevention of equal participation by actors who are bearers of their unique epistemic reasoning. Fricker (2013) further coins the term “distributive epistemic injustice”, which refers to the lack of education or information for all, relating to injuries pertaining to equity and social (in) justice in society.

World-Travelling, Pilgrimages, and Borderlands

According to decolonial feminist insights, variations among women were constructed and established with the advent of the colonial era (Grosfoguel, 2011), marked by the onset of the coloniality of power (Quijano, 2000), whereby racialised and enslaved women were regarded as unequal to their dominant white bourgeois counterparts (Davis, 2019). This inequality arises from the privileges afforded to a certain group of women through the “logics of purity”, which determine the classed and racialised reproduction of white middle-class men (Spelman, 2019). It is evident in the violence instituted against non-dominant women and non-cisgender individuals at the hands of their dominant counterparts, as well as in how the latter are primarily deemed more privileged than Black men in the hierarchical structure of society (Hill Collins & Bilge, 2020). Lugones (1987) thus proposes the phenomenon of World-Travelling for two important reasons: firstly, it allows dominant

bodies to truly experience “other” worlds, and secondly, it ensures that female bodies are marked as playful in the various worlds they occupy across interstices of difference, whether we identify as white/Anglo feminist or view ourselves as Black, Brown, hybrid, decolonial, mestiza, Dalit, queer, or trans (Velez, 2019; Vergès, 2021). She reiterates that this will enable all those who identify as women, including men of colour, to share in one another’s struggles in forging a path towards acceptance and tolerance across boundaries of difference, as well as to establish a platform for deeper coalitional work in fighting oppression, which I will return to later.

In her theorisation, Lugones (1987; 2003) conceptualises a “world” as something real, actual, and occupied by “flesh and blood”. It may be a community or even a small stratum of the broader society, but it should embody the lived realities of “crossing lines of gender, race, and class difference, as well as ability, where those lines mark social hierarchy” (Price, 2019, p. 220). Hence, the act of World-Travelling comprises workplaces previously dominated by white and Black upper- to middle-class men and examines how non-dominant outlier groups experience such “worlds” (Lugones, 2003). Moreover, being situated on the fringes of dominant worlds further generates an epistemic shift for the world-traveller (Ortega, 2006; 2016), since Anzaldúa (2012) demonstrates how the new mestiza reduces the scope for taking up space in both dominant and non-dominant “worlds”. This multitude of identities possessed by the mestiza coalesces to produce oppressive encounters and instances of dehumanisation in both dominant and non-dominant worlds, leaving her to traverse the borderlands. Anzaldúa (2012, p. 102). states:

As a mestiza I have no country, my homeland cast me out; yet all countries are mine because I am every woman’s sister or potential lover. (As a lesbian I have no race, my own people disclaim me; but I am all races because there is a queer of me in all races).

In the above, Anzaldúa (2012) draws our attention to how the coloniality of gender, in all its guises, is unable to accommodate

her multiplicities selves. The mestiza thus remains a world-traveller or one who constantly occupies in-between worlds (Ortega, 2016). Moreover, these travelling selves create an opening and awareness for “identities [to be understood] as real and multiple, but impermanent and socially constructed, in the self and others”, as Zaytoun (2019, p. 60) notes. Therefore, occupying such “in-betweenness” (Ortega, 2016, p. 198), which non-dominant bodies are subjected to, further exposes their vulnerability to the violence meted out by heteronormative masculinity and their “arrogant perceptions”, belonging to both races and backgrounds, in traditionally male-dominated work contexts (Lugones, 2003). Since the traveller is compelled to occupy spaces that were not historically intended to accommodate her, she is thus further confronted with feelings ranging “from rage to despair and from insecurity to inflexibility” (Ortega, 2001, p. 4). This is why Lugones (2003) sees Black women occupying worlds that present implications for their onto-epistemic being and belonging, either being playful or unplayful, as a consequence. In other words, due to the tension arising from their positionalities, women of colour are compelled to forge different personas while travelling back and forth between worlds, as well as dwelling in such spaces simultaneously (Lugones, 1987). As Anzaldúa (2012, pp. 101-102) attests, these outliers take on a “subject-object duality” in “developing a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity”. For example, they must succumb to the values, norms, practices, and ideological constructions that reproduce their status as a non-dominant “other”. In addition, as Keating (2019, pp. 241-242) maintains, it further ensures a nuanced complexity associated with liminality by underscoring “the heterogeneity of people’s positioning in relationship to power, and underscores the interlocking, intersecting, and intermeshing of multiple forms of oppression in people’s lives” while travelling to “other” worlds. The layered embodiments of the non-dominant selves thus enable them to become the subject of oppression at times, as well as the *raison d’être* for such oppression at other times.

Furthermore, it remains pivotal in building solidarity, as well as opening ourselves up to “worlds” occupied by another’s onto-epistemological understanding of what it is to become the “other” in a multitude of worlds, as Lugones (2003) insists. This comprises establishing deeper levels of coalition building in “amplifying” and illuminating the oppressive and subjugated realities of racialised women (Keating, 2019, p. 242). This is particularly important for heterosexual men of colour in establishing coalitions of partnership with women of colour and “other” non-hetero/cisgendered bodies in “delinking from the logics of colonial domination”, as Chávez (2019) points out, given that it is through such entrenchment associated with the colonial imbrication of gender that non-dominant men and women are prevented from creating deeper understandings in mitigating and fighting all forms of oppression (Keating, 2019, p. 248). In doing so, it establishes a platform for Black men, but also white women, to open themselves up to unique perspectives from “worlds” uninhabited by both, since engaging in such alliances “is part of knowing them and knowing them is part of loving them”, as Lugones (2003, p. 93) eloquently summarises. Furthermore, for the former, it aids in mitigating against GBV against already oppressed female bodies, whereby the fusion of race and patriarchy still bears a colonial nature and character, while for the latter, it should transcend purposes of voyeurism or “academic” research and should bear the promises of genuine self-discovery and a longing to see through the eyes of the “other” and not merely being motivated by curiosity (Price, 2019, p. 233).

The next section discusses Fraser’s participatory parity framework.

Participatory Parity

Fraser (2007a; 2007b; 2008) developed her participatory parity model as a comprehensive approach to enable social justice among individuals and groups, as well as to illustrate how people can fully participate in society as equals. She articulates her framework through three areas: distribution, recognition, and representation. Her model provides key insights into the

reasons why certain individuals are granted access and full participation while others are excluded from society, along with the implications for equitable participation (Hölscher & Bozalek, 2020). Although her model is relevant to society as a whole, various scholars have applied her work within the South African educational context (see Bozalek & Carolissen, 2012; Clowes et al., 2017; Garraway, 2017; Dykes, 2018; Khan, 2019) and beyond (Cazden, 2012; Keddie, 2012; Vincent et al., 2021), and with many others calling for it to be used more widely in educational contexts that are starkly unequal (Hlengwa et al., 2018; Hölscher & Bozalek, 2020; Leibowitz & Bozalek, 2016; Sobuwa & McKenna, 2019).

The South African context is just one example of egregious inequality. Luckett and Naicker (2016) argue that due to the vast inequalities [in places like South Africa], it is important to recognise the constrained agency of universities as institutions of civil society – they are not able to completely compensate for society, nor can they fully interpret the social reproduction of inequalities – nor will their internal public spheres ever be perfectly just and democratic.

Fraser's (2008) model provides us with a platform to understand the inherent inequalities that restrict, impede, or even enable certain individuals in their participation as full members in higher education. She developed her theoretical model on social justice by initially accounting for economic (distribution) and cultural (recognition) dimensions (Fraser, 1997a; 1997b; 1998). It was only much later that she decided to introduce the political dimension (representation) to provide a more robust framework for guiding our understanding of social justice (Fraser, 2007b; Zurn, 2003). The participatory parity model is particularly useful for understanding the plight of underrepresented groups' access and participation in dominant institutional contexts, including race, class, and gender in STEM.

Fraser's (2007b; 2008; 2010) participatory parity model centres on three dimensions: access to resources (distribution), consideration of diversity and acknowledgement of various

worldviews and outlooks (recognition), and inclusion in decision making that affects the individual (representation). This trivalent aspect “either mitigates against or contributes to social justice” (Leibowitz & Bozalek, 2016, p. 112). Moreover, Fraser (1998) views these three dimensions as distinct yet interdependent, although not reducible to one another. She maintains that there can be no distribution or recognition without representation (Fraser, 2007b). This suggests that one cannot be substituted for the other, and each analytical account must be considered for social justice to be fully realised (Fraser, 2008).

Distribution

Fraser (1998) posits that for equitable participation in society, economic resources must be distributed both equally and fairly. This assertion highlights the significant disparities between the Global North and its less affluent counterparts, with intersectional identities playing a pivotal role in this divide (Fraser, 1995; 2010). In educational contexts, students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds are often inadequately prepared to engage as full agents in learning and teaching processes alongside their more privileged peers, primarily due to a lack of necessary economic or material resources. This situation results in a maldistribution of resources (Bozalek & Carolissen, 2012; Leibowitz & Bozalek, 2016). Consequently, to address maldistribution, the distributive element aims to ascertain whether individuals have unobstructed access to financial resources that will enable their full participation (Fraser, 2007a). In pursuing this goal, it seeks to identify structures and processes that hinder an individual’s ability to acquire economic resources, such as “exploitative work or lack of access to income generating work and disparities in work, leisure time and responsibilities” (Bozalek & Hochfeld, 2016, p. 201). All these factors are considered in the effort to ensure the redistribution of material and economic resources to create a level playing field (Fraser, 1998).

The stark reminder of neoliberalism, disguised as equity in promoting a level playing field in education, is nothing short

of a myth (Fraser et al., 2004). In fact, neoliberal ideologies concerning service delivery, such as education, have become individualised issues rather than being recognised as a moral public good (Hölscher & Bozalek, 2020). This perspective assumes an identical starting point for all individuals, irrespective of the historical and structural factors that contribute to the marginalisation and exclusion of certain groups (Cross, 2009; Bozalek & Boughey, 2012; Badat & Sayed, 2014; see also Fraser, 1995). This is particularly relevant to the South African context, where the legacies of both colonialism and apartheid have resulted in a largely fragmented society, not only along the lines of race but also significantly influenced by social class issues. Specifically, educational financing during apartheid was egregiously inequitable due to the segregated nature of white versus non-white educational spaces (Badat & Sayed, 2014). This suggests that Black educational institutions in the new democratic dispensation have been less able to catch up and remain on par with their former white counterparts, owing to generations of underfunding and a lack of skills and knowledge to manage their own financial affairs (Bozalek & Boughey, 2012).

Moreover, during the current dispensation, universities find themselves at a disjuncture between social transformation and redress on one side and their own economic interests on the other, which leaves many disadvantaged groups in precarious situations when accessing institutions (Botsis et al., 2013; Cross, 2009). This often impacts whether students from resource-deprived contexts possess the necessary resources to support their learning needs, particularly during unprecedented periods such as the COVID-19 pandemic, as the demand for technological learning and teaching exacerbates and intensifies these realities (Czerniewicz et al., 2020; Le Grange, 2020; Mpungose, 2020). Additionally, due to the significant disparity in educational opportunities available to various groups, Cross (2009) asserts that this further entrenches a hierarchised society – one that promotes and values a distinctive group and class structure that perpetuates power differentials (Botsis et al., 2013; Matsehela, 2018). Consequently, Fraser's (1998;

2007a) insights resonate with how the experiences of socio-economically challenged students regarding access to resources and equitable participation in higher education can be adversely affected. In other words, the distribution element necessitates a narrowing of the gap between the “haves” and the “have nots” to eliminate issues of class status and to ensure that all individuals can enjoy the benefits of a democracy and participate equally (Fraser & Bedford, 2008). Furthermore, a particularly contentious issue for South Africa is that social class continues to exhibit a racial dimension (Naidoo, 2004; Ngoasheng & Gachago, 2017; Van Zyl, 2016). These issues are elaborated upon in the following paragraphs.

To contextualise the aforementioned, the 2015/2016 student uprisings, specifically the #FeesMustFall and subsequent #RhodesMustFall movements, emerged as critical encounters in revealing racialised and classed incongruences in South African higher education, as well as on an international scale. The former movement advocated for free education in response to the inflated costs of university education, which restrict access to higher education. Matsehela (2018) asserts that institutions are disconnected from the lived realities of impoverished students, rendering them incapable of providing adequate support, which in turn leads to student unrest. For instance, students from disadvantaged backgrounds are often required to travel long distances to initiate the application process, whether for attending interviews or submitting portfolios in support of their university applications (Khan, 2019; Matsehela, 2018). Furthermore, the scarcity of technological resources presents significant challenges for marginalised students attempting to submit online university funding and residence applications. In numerous instances, indigent students find themselves isolated in their efforts to make ends meet in residential settings (Khan, 2019; Le Grange, 2020; Matsehela, 2018), frequently being compelled to accept exploitative casual employment (Leibowitz & Bozalek, 2016) or seeking temporary accommodation prior to securing university residences (Khan, 2019; Walker, 2018), often while taking responsibility for younger siblings and elderly parents at home (Khan, 2019; Pather & Chetty, 2015).

Some students are burdened with the role of being de facto parents for their younger siblings due to the death of a parent or other circumstances, which limits their ability to engage in activities that could enrich their academic pursuits during their free time (Lareau, 2011, 2015; Pather & Chetty, 2015). Moreover, Van Zyl (2016) contends that students from lower socio-economic backgrounds are disproportionately affected by attrition as they navigate their university journey. Van Zyl (2016, p. 3) posits that “many talented students in South Africa find themselves constrained by finances and, as a result, unable to translate their potential into actual performance”. Such factors became evident in the student protests of 2021, during which students demanded unrestricted access to university for all those facing financial difficulties, particularly as the COVID-19 pandemic further highlighted these inequalities. At the onset of the 2021 academic year, students threatened to shut down all public universities in South Africa should their demands remain unaddressed. Higher education institutions subsequently engaged in mediation with student leaders and Student Representative Councils to develop a pathway forward in financially supporting resource-deprived students.

In addition, the issue of gender, when considered in conjunction with race and class, assumes a distinct yet subjective dimension (Chilisa, 2020; Davis, 2019; Mama, 1995; Tlostanova, 2010). Fraser (1998) argues that the situation may be particularly dire for women from low socio-economic status (SES) backgrounds, as they are expected to undertake additional responsibilities such as caregiving and household duties, without any form of economic redistribution. Fraser (1998, p. 2) states:

From the distributive perspective, gender is a basic organizing principle of the economic structure of society. On the one hand, it structures the fundamental division between paid ‘productive’ labor and unpaid ‘reproductive’ and domestic labor, assigning women primary responsibility for the latter. On the other hand, gender also structures the division within paid labor

between higher-paid, male dominated, manufacturing and professional occupations and lower-paid, female dominated 'pink collar' and domestic service occupations. The result is an economic structure that generates gender-specific forms of distributive injustice.

Extending Fraser's gender lens to low SES female students specifically, as Helman and Ratele (2016) point out, these individuals are more likely to be expected to engage in domestic and caregiving responsibilities at home, in comparison to their male counterparts, which impacts their academic progress and the opportunity to participate in extracurricular activities and socialisation benefits. Shefer et al. (2012) also identify that female students from low SES backgrounds are often particularly vulnerable to sexual exploitation in exchange for pocket money and low-value gifts. Consequently, the overburdening of duties without financial compensation produces a ripple effect, which culminates in broader psycho-social issues, such as a lack of motivation to concentrate on academic studies (Bozalek & Leibowitz, 2012; Clowes et al., 2017). The plight of marginalised women in higher education, especially within male-dominated Western contexts, necessitates an analytical approach that considers both the dimensions of distribution and recognition (Fraser, 2007a; Fraser & Bedford, 2008). The oppression of Black women in the Majority World is often characterised by a duality – one aspect concerns economic maldistribution, while the other pertains to cultural misrecognition, particularly regarding societal expectations that normalise men as breadwinners (Czerniewicz et al., 2020; Fraser, 1998; Khan, 2019).

A further example of how the effects of maldistribution intermingle with misrecognition in the context of gender can be observed in the 2015/2016 student unrest (Davids, 2016; Xaba, 2017). Findings affirm that, while female students of colour were actively advocating alongside their male counterparts for the right to a free education and for curriculum reforms, they were simultaneously subjected to sexual abuse, where their feminine attributes were perceived as inferior, thus misrecognised and sexually exploitable (Khan, 2017; Xaba, 2017).

Recognition

Recognition pertains to the manner in which differences in physical appearance or visible characteristics, such as cultural affinities in institutional contexts, are addressed in ways that either hinder or promote participatory parity for all (Fraser, 1997b; 2000; 2001). This is contingent upon the respective identity markers an individual possesses, such as race, class, and sexual orientation/identity, among others, which take on various forms in the valuation (recognition) or devaluation (misrecognition) of such characteristics. In other words, recognition, within Fraser's framework, considers how different sets of epistemologies and even ontologies are perceived and regarded by institutions in critically examining institutional responses to such perceived differences. In this regard, Fraser (2008, p. 405) notes that "people can be prevented from interacting on terms of parity by institutionalized hierarchies of cultural value that deny them the requisite standing; in that case they suffer from status inequality or misrecognition". Common examples of recognition within institutional contexts involve whether student linguistic identities are valued and promoted, or otherwise (Clowes et al., 2017), and how prevailing structures influence the dominant cultural landscape, which often reflects the perspectives of a small minority. Recognising linguistic identity exclusions could, in turn, underscore the relevance of promoting the practice of multilingualism within the South African higher education context and how such an initiative could positively contribute to enhancing student identity formation, yielding improved academic outcomes, and thereby reducing the achievement gap between different groups and ethnicities (Carter, 2012). The broader structural frameworks and normative institutional policies therefore remain predominantly focused on the hetero-cisgendered white, Christian male and his needs and experiences (Leibowitz & Bozalek, 2016). Indeed, it is through such patriarchal structural frameworks that heteronormativity and masculinity as social constructs are perpetuated in universities (Ngabaza et al., 2018; Shefer, 2016; Shefer et al., 2012).

Fraser (2000; 2001) makes a clear distinction regarding identity politics and how identity theorists frame the issue of recognition. She provides her account of the conceptualisation of recognition by arguing that identity politics remain more concerned with group dynamics and how such collective entities are perceived, including the psychological effects experienced by members and the group as a whole (Fraser, 2000). This traditional framework, on the one hand, often depends heavily on “a single, drastically simplified group identity, which denies the complexity of people’s lives, the multiplicity of their identifications and the cross-pulls of their various affiliations” (Fraser, 2001, p. 24). However, Fraser’s (2000; 2007a) model of recognition is, on the other hand, more centred around what she refers to as status subordination, as opposed to identity. She argues that scrutinising the impact that institutional cultural patterns have on an individual’s marked characteristics would either promote or impede equal participation. She suggests that the act of misrecognition is not simply to be thought ill of, looked down upon or devalued in others’ attitudes, beliefs or representations. It is rather to be denied the status of a full partner in social interaction, as a consequence of institutionalised patterns of cultural value that constitute one as comparatively unworthy of respect or esteem (Fraser, 2000, pp. 113–114).

To be misrecognised therefore pertains more to the dynamics involved in social interactions shaped by overarching patterns that are responsible for excluding and occluding identities perceived to “misfit”, rather than the psychological impact of such identities by institutions (Fraser, 1997b; Fraser et al., 2004). Misrecognition also operates distinctly from maldistribution, as it requires its own analytical lens and should not be reduced, although it may be analysed in relation to it (Fraser, 1997b; Fraser et al., 2004). Fraser (1998; 2007a) maintains that there is often an intersection, an overlapping, and even an influencing of the analytical dimensions, although each stands in its own right and should not be substituted for the other, thereby refraining from reducing one at the expense of the other. She strongly cautions against this and even

critiques feminist interpretations by asserting that “it is no longer clear that feminist struggles for recognition are serving to deepen and enrich struggles for egalitarian redistribution” (Fraser, 2007a, p. 24).

Moreover, aspects of misrecognition can be observed in the South African educational context from a gendered perspective. For instance, Black impoverished women in male-dominated academic fields often experience a disjuncture or feel conflicted by the Western, heteropatriarchal cultural landscape they perceive they must conform to, which can conflict with their own lower SES African backgrounds and the prior knowledge they carry with them (Liccardo, 2018; Liccardo & Bradbury, 2017). This highlights the concept of misrecognition, as suggested by Fraser et al. (2004) and later by Fraser (2007a; 2016), which is predicated on an individual’s position in societal hierarchies, wherein societal constructions and institutional values are often oriented towards exclusion rather than inclusion of non-hegemonic identities. Consequently, the pervasive Western hegemonic influence in institutions, characterised by competitiveness, metrics, and informed by its neoliberal counterpart, poses a disservice to indigenous low SES students, as they are unable to connect with or relate to such frameworks. This form of exclusion is compounded by a lack of consideration given to mitigating these obstacles, which results in already marginalised groups becoming further disenfranchised (Bozalek & Boughey, 2012; Morrow, 2007).

The various forms of exclusion are particularly problematic against the backdrop of a stratified South African schooling system, which has its roots in both the colonial and apartheid eras. Numerous studies have emphasised that students from impoverished township schools encounter issues of epistemological exclusion when entering higher education, in contrast to their more privileged counterparts who were educated in the former Model C and private schooling systems (see Morrow, 2009; Bozalek & Boughey, 2012, 2020). Liccardo et al. (2015) demonstrated how a group of Black female students engaged in STEM higher education at a South African university experienced imposter syndrome, which is attributable to

several factors associated with the prevailing white masculine hegemony, the colonial settler legacies, and the Eurocentric course content to which they were subjected.

Correspondingly, the current dominant institutional framework runs counter to the principles of communalism, sharing, and reciprocity, which are based on the underpinning of Ubuntu as a moral compass and a value system embedded in the African understanding of existence (Higgs, 2010; Letseka, 2012; Venter, 2004). An alternative non-dominant framework therefore has the potential to address the misrecognition of women (culture) and its associated effects of maldistribution (economics) in developing contexts in rethinking Western values (liberalism) and shifting our focus towards alternative perspectives (Ubuntu).

Another key concern that differentiates the status subordination model from conforming theories on recognition and identity is its avoidance of “essentialising” a specific identity marker over others or other significant factors. Such a narrow focus may lead to further issues of inequality and social justice (Keddie, 2012, p. 264). For instance, concentrating solely on dominant experiences, such as Black and white groupings, risks misrecognising “other” in-between groups, simply because they do not fit into such binary classifications. Moreover, an emphasis on specific identities in marginalised groups can silence those embodied identities that have suffered most from oppression within these confines, such as same-sex, trans identities, and disabled bodies. This is why Fraser (2000) perceives misrecognition as a moral contention rather than an ethical one, in contrast to the way mainstream recognition theorists, such as Honneth (1995), conceptualise it. By approaching misrecognition radically, Fraser (2000, p. 109) argues that “struggles for recognition can aid the distribution of power and wealth and can promote interaction and cooperation across gulfs of difference”. However, scholars such as Honneth (1995), Lister (2007), and, more recently, Hochfeld (2022) have also problematised and cautioned against Fraser’s notions for not considering the psychological impact on already marginalised groups that arises from being misrecognised.

Representation

Representation pertains to how and where individuals are situated politically and whether they possess leverage in decision-making processes that concern them. This dimension of social justice addresses voice and political agency, which are intended to mitigate the effects of injustices. When this agency is removed or when an individual is denied this right, it can therefore be regarded as an instance of misrepresentation (Fraser, 2007b; 2010). Fraser (2008, p. 403) suggests that “through the lens of democratisation struggles, justice includes a political dimension, rooted in the political constitutions of society, whose associated injustice is misrepresentation or political voice”. In higher education or even in the workplace, this pertains to whether students and workers are able to participate in student and work unions, vote for and elect representatives, as well as engage in political rallies on campus or in workspaces without facing persecution or victimisation (Bozalek & Boughey, 2012; 2020).

With that said, she highlights the importance of distancing ourselves from a post-Westphalian perspective, which primarily accounts for the nation-state while neglecting the significance of the global (Fraser, 2007b; 2008). Fraser (2007a, p. 23) asserts that “the Keynesian Westphalian frame is now considered by many to be a major vehicle of injustice, as it partitions political space in ways that block many who are poor and despised from challenging the forces that oppress them”. The central argument presented here is that transnational policies established by global entities are largely responsible for the reproduction of inequality, which further exacerbates the oppression and marginalisation experienced in nation-states by those already on the periphery of society (Clowes et al., 2017). Moreover, such global entities are self-insulating against scrutiny and critique, and as a result of their power and influence, they are able to operate outside the parameters of democracy (Bozalek & Boughey, 2012; 2020). An illustrative example of this is the issue of the internationalisation of higher education and its differential impact on advancing neoliberal agendas, particularly for institutions in the Global South, which

must contend with the additional burdens of colonialism and, in the case of South Africa, segregation. This poignant reminder should serve as a message to the global academic community that the construction and introduction of metric league tables and rankings of institutions are not developmental, particularly for underserved communities in the system. This is due to the fact that not all participants have access to the same level of playing field from the outset, given the historical, socio-cultural, economic, and political structural frameworks in which they are situated (Bozalek & Boughey, 2020; Fraser, 2007a, 2007b; Mathebula, 2018). Consequently, student groups on the periphery, such as women of colour, are not afforded a voice in the ongoing ranking system, which hierarchises universities, distinguishes elite institutions from non-elite ones, and further determines the value of a qualification conferred by an institution. This qualification is subsequently utilised as a form of cultural capital to leverage further opportunities, depending on which side of the divide one occupies (Bourdieu, 1984, 2008; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990).

Moreover, within this dimension, Fraser (2007a; 2008) introduces a deeper level of political representation, which she terms “boundary-setting”. For Fraser, boundary-setting serves as a means of examining how the misframing of less privileged groups and individuals within institutional contexts results in differential participation in political matters. Central to this discussion is the question of who should be considered a legitimate student or worker in terms of access to and participation in higher education or work environments, and who should not (Fraser, 2007a; 2007b; 2008). This often occurs when institutions and workplaces establish a uniform starting point for all individuals, without consideration of the socio-cultural, economic, and historical contexts that may afford certain individuals more advantages than others. Consequently, this approach can inadvertently lead to the exclusion of non-dominant groups (Carter, 2012; Fraser, 2007a). It is crucial to recognise that the issue extends beyond the “what”, in terms of resources (distribution) and culture (recognition), that informs social justice claims, to also encompass the “who”,

regarding the individual (political) and what they represent, which deserves greater scrutiny (Fraser, 2007a). An illustrative example of individuals (political) who are often misframed and not perceived as “real” or legitimate students and workers, from the perspective of higher education institutions and organisations, includes those from lower socio-economic backgrounds, non-dominant women, and individuals who do not conform to the dominant characteristics of being white, heteronormative, able-bodied, and Christian (Bozalek & Boughey, 2012).

Conclusion

This chapter demonstrated how two conceptual paradigms can be positioned alongside each other from both a social and institutional perspective, as well as from an epistemic one, to provide a nuanced understanding of issues of equity and social justice concerning the entirety of Black South African women’s journeys in STEM. This is particularly evident in the South African context, where neoliberal policies dictate that all entrants into the university system are perceived as equal, predominantly white, upper-middle-class men (Bozalek & Boughey, 2020). In this regard, I illustrated how various strands and facets of both critical theory and decolonial thought can be employed at different stages of the STEM journey to impart deeper meaning and voice concerning the inclusion-exclusion nexus of Black and female South African scientists and those aspiring to enter the field.

I initially provided a rationale for employing both philosophical strands to complement the strengths and weaknesses of each, as well as to offer insight into how both can be integrated into higher education research, addressing issues of gender in STEM, inclusion, and participation. Furthermore, I engaged with various decolonial and decolonial feminist concepts, such as the colonial/modernity nexus, to understand how the “historico-structural nodes” (Mignolo, 2011a, p. 17) of capitalism and neoliberalism continue to be implicated in the subjugation of subaltern women through ongoing neo-colonial processes that shape the current status quo regarding Black

women's access to the STEM field. I also critically assessed the concepts of cognitive justice and epistemic injustice to ascertain how non-dominant forms of knowledge are invalidated, which consequentially affects equitable access in elite and masculine contexts, such as STEM higher education. Additionally, I presented decolonial feminist thinking to illustrate how dominant paradigms create exclusionary experiences for those who do not conform to the standards established by both white and Black men in STEM workplaces. In this regard, Maria Lugones' insights provide valuable understanding of how the dehumanisation of Black women is perpetuated through "world-travelling" events in both dominant and non-dominant worlds.

Secondly, I incorporated Fraser's participatory parity mechanisms by drawing on her three dimensions of distribution (economic), recognition (cultural), and representation (political) to complement the aforementioned insights into how access and participation are either impeded or enabled in STEM through the entire STEM journey.

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