Wrestling with standpoint theory… some thoughts on standpoint and African feminism

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abstract

This essay attempts to probe the theory of standpoint feminism, and the charge of epistemic privilege associated with the theory. Standpoint theory itself can be seen to have emerged in the context of feminist critical theory attempting to explain the relationship between the production of knowledge and practices of power (Harding, 2004: 1).

The essay attempts to probe the efficacy of a standpoint epistemic within the framework of the various asymmetries embedded in the lived experiences of women in African contexts. The essay works through the notion of 'entanglement' (Nuttall, 2009) which refers to the meshed and particular historical connections of an individual or group. It explores, through ethnographic insights, whether standpoint epistemology is able to offer a theoretical understanding of Black African women who are likewise 'entangled' within a particular archive of local socio-cultural and economic specificities.

Introduction

Feminist movements had as their imperative the redress of the political, economic and social asymmetries experienced by women. Within the literature a wave model has been popularly used to describe both the chronology as well as the exigencies of the earlier movement from those of the latter. Feminist theory can be seen as having emerged from feminist movements, as the questioning and examination of the materiality of women's lives came to be mirrored in the scrutiny at the level of discourse; feminist scholarship worked to unveil how these experiences, and even (the construction and understanding of) 'woman' herself, come to be discursively articulated. While earlier first and second wave feminist critiques were concerned with the under-representation of women and women's experiences within the social sciences (and increasingly even the natural sciences), later strains of more reflexive and situated feminisms were suitably self-conscious and cognisant of the homogenising and hegemonic

effect of the theories of Western feminist scholars when confronted with the realities of women in non-Western contexts.

This essay is positioned from a theoretical rather than an activist stance, and while some writers in the academy might still feel a lingering sense of guilt at 'doing' theory rather than practice, it is felt that while theory and practice are distinct, they are to be seen as one feeding into the other. A good case in point is standpoint feminism or standpoint epistemology, which is critical social theory maintained as having as its starting-point the lived experience of real women and their lived contexts. But of course all women are real women, in real-life contexts. More important then is the exigency of knowing which of the very many real women out there we are referring to within the overarching umbrella term of 'woman'. Feminists have quite rightly scrutinised and indeed criticised the tendency of dominant groups to unthinkingly universalise their own values and practices (Lawson, 1999: 25), and feminists from within the dominant groups have also not escaped this scrutiny and criticism.

The piece does not claim to be definitive and is, rather, poised to offer some thoughts to the discussions around standpoint theory. It does this by drawing on two ethnographies that sought to provide some insights around the specificity of Black African women's experiences. Given the positioned framework of this piece, it is not possible to go into any great detail with the rich data collected in the ethnographies mentioned, which are published elsewhere (see Naidu, 2009a; Naidu, 2009b; Naidu, 2010). However, I attempt to selectively draw little narrative 'clips' that hopefully will act as lenses framing what I attempt to say. I am typically sceptical of overly ambitious agendas that are, more often than not, guilty of proffering essentialist or universalist answers. Of greater significance rather is the possibility of tangible insights that may be extracted from ethnographic research, which could in turn resonate with the work of other researchers. This is what is attempted here.

Anthropology, which is the disciplinary perspective within which I am situated and from where I write, privileges the rich 'face-to-face encounters' or thick ethnographies. While life is full of (very) naturally occurring (multiple) face-to-face encounters, ethnography is the conscious methodological seeking out and documenting of such encounters as part of a disciplinary methodological praxis where we further refract these culturally relevant frames of reference through particular theoretical lenses. By drawing on ethnographic material collected as part of a larger study, the piece probes what standpoint theory and the notion of epistemic privilege may offer to a discussion of African feminism. The ethnographies in turn looked at:

• a group of African women cleaners working at a University;
• a group of African women working as Zulu dancers.

Even before I begin to 'poke' at the theoretical notion of standpoint feminism, there is a self-consciousness with the question of 'who' is raising such issues. After all, I am Indian female, and located, in terms of disciplinary identity anyway, within anthropology. However, as Amina Mama (2007: 152) points out, feminist intellectual work has spawned intense ferment across all the conventional disciplinary landscapes. What gives me pause though is not concern about insular boundaries on who is authorised to write what, and from what knowledge-producing disciplines, but that I, like many others, Indian and White (and some African), am guilty of having been 'breast-fed' and raised on the canonised thoughts and texts of mainly White feminist writers, and so quite possibly guilty of giving ourselves certain "theoretical luxuries" (Harding: 2004) that women outside of these situated contexts cannot.

Thus the thoughts on 'African feminism' are proffered with suitable awareness about the possible shortcomings of my positionality and my (somewhat skewed) early intellectual pedigree. I am also aware, given all my protesting, that it may appear decidedly odd that I draw somewhat heavily on the aforementioned White (and Western) feminists. However, it is in the works of White feminists Sandra Harding, Nancy Hartsock et al. that we get a profound sense of the sub-textualities as well as controversialities, and the contested and multiple positions that are embraced within standpoint theory.

the Black African woman and the Black African body is likewise deeply entangled within a colonial and post-colonial history

The discussion that I draw from is also enriched with the intellectual works of Black feminists such as Patrica Hill Collins, Uma Narayan and Chela Sandoval, all of whom have also been vocal with their thoughts about the tensions in standpoint theory. But of course these Black women are not African women. My aim here is to see how the particular lived contexts and social realities of the groups of African women that I worked with can be brought into dialogue with certain hermeneutical strands of standpoint theory as they appear in the works of the feminists mentioned.

Black feminism and African feminism, and entanglement

I am mindful that the term 'Black', while a powerful signifier in many contexts, is also highly elastic and, as Rassool notes, is a powerful hegemonic construct that shapes the way the world views the non-White or non-Western other. "Black is conceived of as 'an amorphous, racially' and culturally homogenous outgroup" (Rassool, 1997: 185). Rasool quite rightly continues that the Black experience points instead to a complex tapestry of historical experiences and socio-political realities, and that Black people (and of course Black women) do not form a hermetically sealed category.

The concept of entanglement (Nuttall, 2009) as it is used in the social sciences is defined as gesturing towards a set of social relationships that may be complicated and ensnaring (2009: 1), implying a meshed background and historical connections. 'Entanglement' is an appropriate conceptual lens that allows us to clearly 'see' Weekes' (1997: 111) claim, where she says that Black women come to construct definitions of themselves which reveal that they are intimately situated in the way that they experience their particular social positions, and their (racial) identities. African women's experiences are intricately entangled within particular webs of socio-political realities that transcend the generic label of Black.

Within the literature Black feminism is most especially associated with the experiences of Black African American women (and Black British women). It was Patricia Collins (2000) who pointed out that Black feminist thought is conjoined to the specificity of American multiculturalism. Thus Black feminism articulates within a complex pattern of localised intersecting oppressions and social practices, which although appearing on one level seemingly universal, is entangled with the particular trajectory of American political history.

Again reading through the scrutiny of the notion of 'entanglement', we see that the Black African woman and the Black African body is likewise deeply entangled within a colonial and post-colonial history, which in this instance is read within a 'register' (Nuttall, 2009) of South African socio-political archive and specific issues of subjugation, objectification and oppression. The context of post-colonialism is thus multivalent and polyvocal and characterised by uneven processes, playing itself out in sometimes very particularistic ways, in different spatial and geopolitical locations.

Johannesburg fruit trader on Noord Street in the city centre.

Much has been captured in sociological and political science scholarship as well as post-colonial literature about the social engineering wrought by apartheid South Africa, and what Homi Bhaba (1994: 7) refers to as the 'past-present'. This piece works through the lens offered by particular ethnographic insights. The first ethnographic study with 56 African participants looked at how the uniforms of these African female cleaners act as much more than an abstract object framed by the practical exegetics of work, as something that they just wore at work. The stories that the women shared showed that their uniform was acting as a sort of material exercise of disciplinary inscription, and emerged as a mode by which the cleaners are homogenously objectified and plastically turned into visibly working 'subjects' (Foucault, 1982).

The work with a large sample group of female cleaners across three campuses of the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) showed that while at work, aspects of the women's personality were entangled with being in the uniform. Their narratives shared that the single-layered garment worked to discipline the body and strip down the complex multi-layers of their personality and attempted to naturalise their status as cleaners. The women's narratives revealed their attempts to destabilise this conscription, if only outside the spatial and organisational domain of the work space. In focus groups and in one-on-one interviews they spoke about how they experienced themselves while wearing their uniform within the spatial organisation of work, and how they experienced themselves in their own self-selected items of

clothing. The women spoke about why it was important for them to remove the uniform and its associative meanings of cleaning and change into their own clothing at the end of the work day, so that they might shed the image of cleaner, if only "while going home".

In the case of the women working as cleaners, their sense of 'self' as 'women' can be seen as being entangled with their socio-economic location as cleaning women, as well being clearly visible to all, as cleaners. Because of this hyper-visibility created by their uniform, they shared narratives of having to be one kind of woman at work and another (experienced as prettier and as being more themselves) outside of work. It is of course the socio-political trajectory of 'past-present' (Bhaba, 1994) in contemporary South African society that perpetuates the reality that the largest number of workers employed as cleaners are drawn from the communities of Black African women in the country.

The (African) female body and (kinds of) 'work'

Hazel Carby (1997), in her essay 'White Woman Listen!', talks about being outraged at not only the absence of Black women in various contexts, but also by how Black women have been made visible. She pleads for contexts that allow for specificity, while allowing cross-cultural reference points (1997: 51), imploring that Black feminists be allowed to begin with "different herstories". However, Black bodies are valued only insofar as they kinetically hold the potential to create products or become labour that can be transformed into capital through a complex matrix of marketing and sales (Peoples, 2008: 22-23). According to Connell (1994: 11), the earlier feminists (Rosaldo and Lamphere, Rayna Reiter et al.) saw the division of labour as central to the subordination of women. There has also always been poor value and prestige associated particularly with cleaning work. One can perhaps trace this back to the

beginnings of 'cleaning' as being part of women's work at home and of course the association with nonproductive and unpaid labour. On the hierarchy of domestic tasks, cleaning is positioned at the bottom of the rung (Messing, 1998: 178/179).

Writing in *Agenda* more than a decade ago, Grant (1997: 62) drew attention to the then operating ideological framework for domestic labour within the country, claiming that South African society had historically attached a low premium to both the categories of women's work and to that of Black labour in general. Domestic work especially was perceived as particularly undervalued because it had traditionally been treated as women's unpaid duty in marriage, which extended outside of marriage when many 'unskilled' women entered the workforce and were obliged to take on cleaning work in private homes and organisational institutions, schools, universities, factories, and indeed the nooks and crannies of many economic institutions, without whom these bodies could not function. Grant goes on to say that many Black women found themselves in the position where they were obliged to perform underpaid, undervalued (women's) work, and returned home to do exactly that – women's work again as wives and partners, sometimes also undervalued, and in this context also unpaid (see Naidu, 2009a). To me there exists a clear continuity between the domains of private and public in the context of (Black African) women's cleaning work. Indeed, Lan (2003: 188) brokers a theoretical convergence of the two domains by viewing unpaid household labour and paid domestic work as structural continuities across the public and private spheres.

The uniform as an artifact and symbol of obligatory organisational dress is not limited to categories of only female cleaning staff, or only African women. However, there were particular "techniques of the body" (Messing, 1998: 177) associated with the uniform of the African female cleaning staff, which operating like Foucault's

panoptic, clearly signal their status and their place in the pecking order within the organisational work space of the university. Formal dress (unlike that of the staff at an outlet like a McDonald's) is associated either directly or indirectly with the category of 'professional', even if they might well not be from a professional affiliation, such as the uniform worn by bank workers, etc., alluding perhaps merely (Rafaeli and Pratt, 1993: 38) to a particular organisation. However, there is not much that is unique about the dress of the cleaners. Their uniform-dress is very similar in design to the uniform of other cleaners in other companies and indeed, as pointed out by the narratives of the women, is a source of immediate association with the kinds of cleaning work that they perform. The women spoke about "how ugly" the uniform was and "how ugly and old" it made them "feel". Women especially seemed to resent having to wear the headscarf, which was part of the uniform ensemble.

Peoples (2008: 37) states that particular relations of power appear to be masked in the hyper-visibility of Black American women. The same can be said in the case of the Black African women in my ethnography. The women are rendered bizarrely invisible through a process of hyper-visibility. We see the cleaner as she is clearly to be seen in her uniform, but she is, to all intents and purposes, also invisible as she looks like and is meant to do the work of any other and every other cleaner. As the women shared: "the people see us, but maybe they don't see us".

The second ethnography was with a sample of 16 women working in a cultural tourist 'Zulu' village as well as with large (120) purposively sampled and multiple groups of isi-Zulu-speaking non-performers. In the case of the women working as cultural dancers, there is another kind of hyper-visibility operating that is a guise of invisibility. We see the 'Zulu' dancer but the woman is relatively invisible alongside the image she is packaged as projecting, that of the animated maiden on the ubiquitous postcard.

The ethnographic vignettes were orally shared, and the time that was allowed to me in the numerous hours watching them in their 'cultural' performances for tourists helped cohere a sense of the women and their experiences. The African female performers here revealed that they did not harbour any great measure of dislike for their "job", and it was seen as legitimate work. It was clear though that they were able to 'switch on' facial expressions and bodily demeanour that sold them as thoroughly enjoying themselves in front of the tourists, who sought out this encounter with what they perceived as 'the African Zulu', and the 'culturally indigenous'. This, the performers confided, they managed to accomplish no matter how tired or bored they might have been, and was very much an expectation of their job. This did not mean that they despised the performance and act of dancing for tourists, but that the very sense of enjoyment they portrayed was very much performed.

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It is claimed that inhabitants in the so-called Third World countries, spatially organised in the South, are usually more exposed to the tourist gaze. In many instances the locals are said to conform to and "mirror what the tourists want", and in so doing they enact the "Western imaginary" (Maoz, 2006). The fact that the female performers that I spoke to are at some level compelled to adopt a smiling disposition for the tourists reveals an ongoing display and consumption of so-called 'culture' and, more importantly, the 'cultural bodies' of the African women in tourism (see Naidu, 2009b). Again, while the so-called First World has a seemingly never-ending queue of consumers of culture and bodies deemed exotic and available from the (sic) Third World, in the South African context it is only women from the constructed and marketed

'ethnic' stocks of African and Zulu, Pedi, etc., that are positioned in cultural tourism, for the gaze of the Western (masculine, although not necessarily only male) consumption.

The women I spoke with said that they were aware that they "were looked at", and sometimes it was "awkward". The pleasure of looking, according to Freud, derives from the sexual drive, and voyeurism is linked with dominant-submissive behaviours seen to operate between host and tourist. The gaze is situated somewhere between the eye and what is seen, "since the gaze is pre-existent to the eye" (Johnson, 1996: 9). Looking involves not simply the act of seeing, but also translating and interpreting (Coorlawala, 1996: 19), and these are powers and

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prerogatives that lie with the tourist-consumers. Cohen points out that the reality is that the local people in tourism activities can be seen as engaging in participating in staging 'identity' as a resource in exchange for money, which "replaces one type of oppression with another, called poverty" (Cohen (1996), cited in Ballengee-Morris, 2002: 238). Labour, in the instances of the women working as cleaners and the women working as cultural dancers, is thus very much a material, bodily practice where bodies are (discretionarily and coercively) organised, deployed and consumed.

Standpoint theory and African feminism: Epistemic privilege?

Early feminist standpoint theory (1970s/1980s) held that all knowledge is located and situated and that the experiences of women and their standpoint is to be valued in that it proffers a vantage point that reveals the truth of social reality. However, the work of many feminists critical of this particular formulation have offered up (situated) studies showing that there are many differences among women and that there exist multiple standpoints, implying that the women in turn must necessarily inhabit multiple (and truthful) realities.

Standpoint theory is thus not without many controversialities, which both White (Sandra Harding; Nancy Hartsock), as well as Black (Patricia Hill Collins; Chela Sandoval; bell hooks) and non-Western (Uma Narayan; Vandana Shiva) feminists address. Standpoint theory has also been most trenchantly criticised by feminists no less, for what appears as its epistemic of privilege, the "inversion thesis" (Wylie, 2004: 339) that the marginalised and oppressed woman has privileged access and insight by virtue of her being the victim of various kinds of systemic violence/s. Black women or Black African women then, according to the contours of this reasoning, would be tapped into privileged access just by being Black and African women, who are (collectively) marginalised and oppressed.

Thus in the study with the cleaning women, tipped off by peer feedback on the preliminary field notes, I was on the constant look-out for this expression of privilege manifesting in acts of resistances that the women may have marshalled against what they claimed the uniform did to them and their sense of "feeling young" and "feeling pretty" and "feeling like ladies", all words used by the women themselves (sometimes translated to me, sometimes spoken directly to me in English). Prodded on by feminist literature on epistemic privilege and peer reviewer comments (of early drafts of the studies), I looked for grand narratives of resistance that I could write about, that would show that the women were certainly not acquiescent victims of an inscriptive garment, and that they had stories of resisting their drab uniform, dressing it up with accessories or delinquently adding a brazen spot of colour, and so on. With the women working in the cultural village I looked for stories of verbal resistances where they might have objected to the repetitive enactment of Zulu vignettes, or signalled more

subtly their discontent about periodically (in some instances, four times a day) putting on beads and skirts, evocative of 'Zulu' in the tourist imaginary. In both ethnographic contexts I did not find what I (thought I) was looking for.

Calling attention to any kind of epistemic privilege also embraces a dark side. It's what Uma Narayan refers to as the dangerous double vision, where the oppressed groups' privileged access is assumed as translating to some kind of political resource that they can automatically muster in the contexts of their oppression. Harding (2004) reminds us, however, that epistemic privilege is not automatic. This of course makes sense at a very fundamental level. The women employed as cleaners and the women working as performers in tourism are certainly not automatically privileged by where they are located socially, or by the particular kinds of work that they do. It would certainly be ludicrous to suggest that they are.

The socio-economic scripts that are drafted in the texts of a post-apartheid society have indeed made it possible for (certain categories of) Black African women to legitimately audition for, and rightfully earn, the roles of high-flying corporate executive, complete with all incumbent business perks. Where once she was locked into accessing only particular kinds of lowly paid work as cleaner and being the object of tourism consumption as dancer, she is now able to travel for business and pleasure, and even act as the tourist in other countries, and in this way stake her place as economic and cultural consumer.

However, also deeply embedded and entangled with the present are the socio-political scripts that naturalise the role of domestic 'cleaner' as being predominantly Black African women. Just as deeply embedded and entangled with the colonial past and spectacle of the 'exotic', are also reified contemporary images of the 'native'. We are no longer crudely satisfying our obsession in observing the spectacle of the other, a la Sara Baartman style, in a museum. We have instead
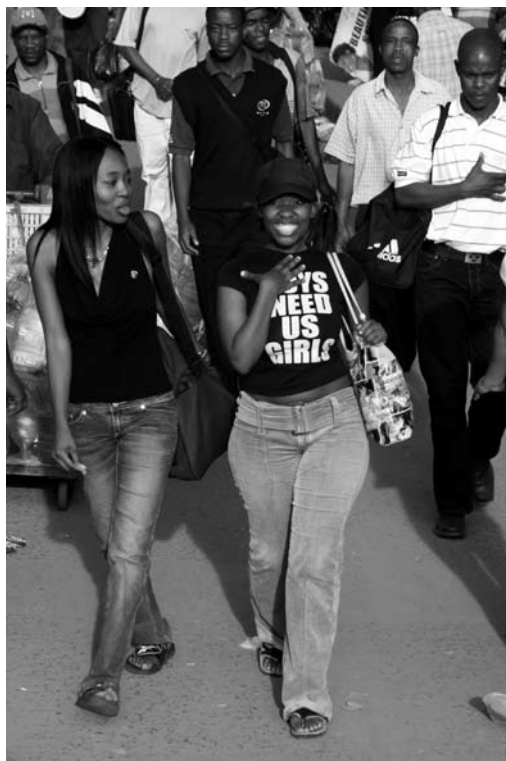
Women on their way home after a day's work in Johannesburg.

built 'authentic' small-scale Disney-type cultural villages for the voyeuristic thrill of experiencing (the performance) of African people.

Realistically speaking, turning the experiences and potential 'values' in the oppression of African women into epistemic and political resources would demand that these oppressed groups need to be granted access to locations and structures (Narayan, 2004), institutional or otherwise, that give the women the tools to understand the systemic processes in which they are entangled. But this is the catch – the system itself does not allow for this and we are back to the reality of Black African women with little or no literacy skills having to take up work as shoddily paid cleaners, and Black African Zulu 'ethnic' women posing for the tourist gaze.

Certainly on some level the behaviour of the women reveals an epistemic privilege in showing that the women understood the patterns of power relations that they are embedded in, as African women and employed in the kinds of work that they found themselves doing. However, within epistemic privilege is the hidden (imperial and Western) transcript of epistemic violence. Gayatri Spivak speaks of epistemic violence as the projection of a White European epistemology onto the rest of the world (especially the so-called Third World) in assuming that African women necessarily recognise and articulate their resistances in similar ways as Western women. Moreover, the "moment of critical insight" comes through only in political struggle, Harding (2004: 9) tells us, as it is "blocked" and its "understandings obscured by the dominant, hegemonous ideologies and the practices that they make appear normal and even natural".

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While on one level I did not find the kind of grand large-scale oppositions that I was blinkered into looking for, I did find narratives of other kinds of resistances. I was reminded that 'power' is but a series of strategic relations (Foucault, 1980), and is in no single particular place but 'everywhere', and if not in one space offers in another the possibility of resistance. The women's experiences revealed in ways that may have otherwise been deemed small by the likes of researchers (like me), or certain feminist intellectuals (like some of my reviewers), that they did resist the contexts of embedded power in their work environment.

In the case of the cleaners, this was in the simple, yet profound fact that all 56 women interviewed were adamantly clear that they would never consider wearing the uniform either to work or from work, even though it might have been simply easier and more convenient. Unlike almost all other categories of workers, the women arrived at work to, only minutes later, change out of their "prettier dresses" and remove accessories of make-up or jewellery and put on the cleaner's uniform. Observing them over several months as they shed their uniforms and dressed again in their self-selected clothing at the end of the work day showed clearly that this was an attempt to destabilise the work and uniform-induced body-hexis, if only outside the organisational space of the university. It was much more complex than simply not wanting to soil their clothing. Outside of work they refused to be associated with or be seen as cleaners. They knew that they worked as cleaners, but what they were saying to me, as indeed to all others, was that they were not (just) cleaners.

In the context of the 'Zulu' dancers, the women indicated that they did not wish to create "problems" for their employer, or themselves, by complaining about playing at being Zulu or "exposing" themselves for the tourists. Yet the women were creative in the way that they positioned themselves in the dance. While not immediately noticeable, the women pointed out to me that it was the men, dressed as warriors, who ventured more physically proximate to the tourists as they sat seated in the 'village' amphitheatre. The women told me that they felt more protected from the tourists this way, more especially for their younger dancers who were, more often than not, bare-chested. It was their way of occupying a safer psychological space as they posted themselves in front of the tourist gaze.

Power is not innately hierarchical, so there is no single site of revolt (Barker, 1998: 28), and it made sense that there was no one particular point of highly dramatic resistance on the part of the cleaners and dancers, but ongoing and daily 'little' resistances. The women thus emerge as nodes in a web of relations as they simultaneously exercise some form of control and power over the physical

body and self, even as they experience the effects of power over them. These instances of resistances may well appear insignificant or compromised, yet they need to be appreciated within the context of the precarious socio-economic lives of African women who did not wish to jeopardise their jobs.

The material examples of resistances and the psychological significance also played out differently between these two groups of African women. While the 'Zulu' women dancers erected 'fences' attempting to distance and 'protect' themselves from the invasive tourist gaze, the cleaning women saw how they could forcefully throw off (on some level) the cleaner-woman habitus, if only outside of work. This was when they spoke of reclaiming a social self beyond that of the visible-invisible cleaner, who out of the uniform was no longer under the 'surveillance' of the employer.

Situated and context-relevant feminist theory recognises that not only would there be multiple standpoints, but multiple African feminist standpoints, as the acts of resistances on the part of African women play out in a myriad ways, perhaps in ways not even discernable to Western feminists raised in contexts of large vociferous lobbying and 'bra-burning' type protests. Of course the difficulty here is how to see the women as epistemic agents with an epistemic advantage, without the additional violence of essentialist, automatic privilege. One 'sideways' way of approaching the argument is to perhaps take up the merits of the discussion of Collins, Narayan et al., and their suggestion that standpoint feminism offers the way of developing multiple feminists-of-colour standpoints. Hirschman (2004: 320) points out that "feminists of colour are particularly critical of the way that standpoint's universalist potential has been unwittingly promoted by White feminists" and the "use of the term feminist standpoint as opposed to Black feminist standpoint or White feminist standpoint" (or African feminist standpoint, one adds!). The discussion is indeed

nuanced and complex, and it is not the intention here to reframe these arguments.

My point is that ethnographic studies such as the ones referred to in this essay bring to the discussion of multiple standpoints the voices of the African women and their experiences that serve to illustrate the multiple African standpoints, and give us real examples of differential resistance. If we are to erect notions of the homogenous African woman in the same manner as the homogenous Black woman, we would indeed be trading one (wide) referential term for another (more specific) referential term, African. There is no singular understanding of African woman, just as there is no one Black woman collective. While I would not argue for any kind of 'oppositional consciousness' as developed in the works of Patricia Hills Collins and Chela Sandoval, my ethnographic insights

Power is not innately hierarchical, so there is no single site of revolt

bear out Patricia Collins' thesis that standpoint theory does refer to group-based experiences that serve to explicate knowledge/power frameworks. Of course the individuals in the two ethnographic groups have individual voices, but standpoint theory looks at the specific group and specific examples of power relations that work upon those particular groups of women. In my ethnographic examples the power relations were enacted via devices such as the cleaners' panoptic, immediately visible uniform and the immediately apprehended visual of 'ethnicity' in the 'Zulu' women.

While this is an ongoing dialogue for feminist theorising, one vital way of enriching the dialogue is to call for more situated ethnographic contexts of study, that can then be located and read theoretically, allowing multiple African standpoints to be heard and theoretical understandings developed. Clearly though, standpoint theory - as both a "political and social epistemological"

(Wylie, 2004) – still invites much wrestling and debate in terms of what it can offer to the agenda of African feminism.

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