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# Rethinking the Logics of the Sex/Gender Anatomical Schema

**Nqambaza, Palesa Rose**

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# Rethinking the Logics of the Sex/Gender Anatomical Schema

Palesa Nqambaza

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Johannesburg, 2023.

Supervisor:

Dr Siphiwe Dube

# Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own unaided work, and where other people's work has been used, sources are acknowledged and referenced in-text and in the bibliography.

It is submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. I declare that this thesis has not been and will not be, submitted in whole or in part to another University for the award of any other degree or examination.

Signature



---

Palesa Nqambaza

March, 2023

# Acknowledgements

I would firstly like thank my Lord and saviour Jesus Christ for getting me through yet another degree. It has been such a long daunting journey that I thought would never end, but through his goodness, mercy, and unfailing love, I am here. To my ancestors, those that have come before me, imparting knowledge, archiving for future generations, I am eternally grateful and feel honoured that at a time when there are calls to decolonise the academy in what is today known as South Africa, I can turn to your wisdom and sheer genius in my attempts to excavate indigenous knowledge. While we still have a long way to go, the prospects are exciting, and I am blessed to be part of this moment.

I am eternally grateful to my parents, my late father Johannes Nqambaza, and my gorgeous mother Jeannet Nqambaza, the best parents one could ask for. Thank you so much for raising me to believe that I could achieve anything I put my mind to. Under your tutelage, I grew up confident, fearless, and daring. Your love and support are unwavering; words cannot express the gratitude I feel for all you have done for me. My soulmates. I love and appreciate you always. This one is for you. It is a product of your hard work, endless support and bottomless love. To my siblings, Themba Nqambaza, Lesego Masethi, Lerato Masethi and Tshirelletso Mogapi, you all add a beautiful spark to my life, when the PhD journey got dull and boring, you all provided the distraction and comic relief I needed. Life is colourful with all of you in it.

To my partner Patamedi Lebea, my day one. Thank you for believing in me and always pushing me towards my dream even when it wasn't easy. The final lap was particularly the most difficult and you were there to make sure that I kept moving forward, even when it meant crawling at times. Your investment in my wellbeing and success does not go unnoticed. I appreciate your consistency throughout the years, we finally made it. I love you always.

To my academic community, my friends, what would I be without all of you? To Dr Refiloe Lepere, what a gift you have been to my journey. The memories we made together throughout this PhD journey are priceless. Thank you for making it all bearable. To Dr Eddie Ombagi, you have been a consistent bash throughout this journey. Your love for life was unbelievably contagious and dares me to keep living, thank you. May your beautiful soul rest in peace. To

my good Professor friend, Dr Sakiru Adebayo, your brilliance, discipline, and dedication to scholarship leaves me in awe of you. You are such an inspiration, and I am proud to call you friend, thank you for all the support you have given me throughout this journey. To my other brilliant friends, Dr Hlengiwe Ndlovu and the rest of the THInK gang, you have all been an incredible support to me, thank you. To my funder and mentor Professor Eric Worby, thank you for allowing me into such a beautiful space as THInK where I was allowed to experiment with my crazy ideas unrestricted. You believed in my project when I had very little reason to. Thank you for your support and for making this PhD journey the blast that it has been. I made so many memories with the THInK family, I hope it doesn't end here. To my Nihss skeem, Dr Lerato Mokoena, Manosa Nthunya and many others that I cannot mention, you have been such an invaluable part of my journey, thank you. To Siyabonga Mviko, I am so grateful for your brilliance and intellectual rigour. Thank you for being a sounding board, a linguist and so many other things when I needed you. Most importantly, thank you for being an amazing friend. In many ways your help made this project possible. To Gcobisa Linyana, thank you for being the isiXhosa expert in my life when I was unsure. Your help has been invaluable.

To the ladies of the JIAS writing collective, enkosi bo love. The sisterhood has been a place full of so much love, caring, nurturing and growth. Dr Keo Mbebe deserves special mention for curating a space where we have all benefitted so much, not forgetting the online Jitsu platforms you curated when meeting in person was no longer an option. You are such a pillar of strength, yet so gentle at the same time. I appreciate you. To my sister Lebogang Ramalepe, thank you for being there when the wheels of the bus were falling off one by one – you came in, no questions asked and helped put me back together again. I am blessed to have people like you in my corner, thank you.

To my first supervisor Prof Antje Schuhmann, thank you for providing me the space and freedom to experiment with ideas at the early stages of this doctoral project. You allowed me space to own this project as my own and to trust my voice. I also got more than I asked for from you, and that was a sisterhood. I appreciate your love and support throughout this journey, you are appreciated. To my second supervisor, Dr Siphiwe Dube, you stepped in during what seemed like the last minute, when so much was not making sense with this project, and you turned it all around. You have been a true-life hero and I am forever indebted to you for bringing this to completion. I also appreciate all the letters of recommendation that you have

written for me, you have been an amazing good luck charm, a gift that keeps on giving. Thank you so much for everything. We did it.

To my funders, THInK, Nihss and SSRC, thank you for all the monetary support as well as the mentoring opportunities that you have provided throughout this journey. I am also thankful for all the writing retreats and conferences that you organised, that allowed me space to gather my thoughts and test them among peers who were on similar journeys. Your efforts did not go unnoticed.

To the rest of my family, ba kwa Nqambaza le ba kwa Mogapi, and all the other amazing people that have been part of my journey, in one way or another, rooting for me, praying for me, believing in me, this one is also for you. May the slay never rest. To more achievements. Cheers.

This research was made possible through the generous funding of:
Transforming the Humanities through Interdisciplinary Knowledge (THInK) Fellowship funded by the Andrew Mellon Foundation
&
The Social Science Research Council (SSRC)
&
The financial assistance of the National Institute for the Humanities and Social Sciences (NIHSS), in collaboration with the South African Humanities Deans Association (SAHUDA) towards this research is hereby acknowledged. Opinions expressed and conclusions arrived at are those of the author and are not necessarily to be attributed to the NIHSS and SAHUDA

# Abstract

This dissertation is an appraisal of the dominant gender discourse(s) in selected South African anthropological, gender and feminist texts. It challenges the uncritical adoption of colonial sex/gender frameworks when making sense of indigenous ways and modes of being and proposes an Afrocentric alternative that goes beyond bio-logical frameworks. This study is two pronged. Firstly, it problematises the uncritical application of Western feminist theories that have tended to impose European realities on the African context. Secondly, it mines the indigenous archive for Afrocentric ideas that contribute to creating a uniquely African theory of subject formation that considers aspects important to the African world-sense such as seniority, kinship status and ancestral links.

I make use of critical discourse analysis to analyse the dominant discourse(s) and knowledge on sex and gender within the context of what is today known as South Africa. I do this employing the Azanian philosophical tradition as the theoretical framework that informs the perspective from which I read and make sense of these discourses, using a mixture of textual analysis, linguistics, archival work, and historical method.

Based on my reading of dominant gender discourses against textual, linguistic and historical evidence, I make the following arguments. Firstly, I problematise the blanket usage of the conceptual category of 'woman' to refer to colonised subjectivities. I demonstrate that Black womxn have been discursively constructed as existing outside the bounds of the conceptual category 'woman' who is the key subject of feminist theorising. Secondly, I demonstrate that the logics of the sex/gender anatomical schema, that organises men and women in a hierarchy, cannot account for indigenous modes of social organising. I maintain that African subjectivities are fluid, complex and contingent, depending on aspects such as one's seniority, kinship status and ancestral links. Likewise, I invoke the institution of ubungoma as an additional site to demonstrate the inadequacy of the sex/gender anatomical framework in making sense of sangoma subjectivities. I also problematise the tendency to use LGBTQ languaging as an alternative in making sense of the institution of ubungoma. I maintain that while noble, this alternative framing is also implicated in underscoring the existence of a coherent sex/gender regime within which the institution of ubungoma is then assumed to be 'queer'. I maintain that there is a pressing need to mine indigenous linguistic archives for alternative ways of wording indigenous subjectivities in ways that are not distortive, nor mimic Eurocentric versions.

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# Chapter 1: Introduction

## 1.1 Introduction

Historically, evidence suggests that the social sciences and other disciplines have been weaponised and have played a crucial role in establishing, legitimising, and maintaining colonial conquest. In contemporary South Africa we witness the same disciplines being instrumentalised to erase the fact of colonial conquest from historical memory by failing to centre it in knowledge production (see Webster, 2021: 120). South African social sciences (including gender studies) are full of scholarly accounts that analyse the various ways in which race and gender intersect to fashion the experiences, identities, and subjectivities of some of the most marginalised people in society. That is, while acknowledging coloniality, these accounts do not centre it in their analysis. What results is the production of knowledge that masks coloniality's persistence by treating conceptual categories such as race and gender outside of the context that creates and necessitates them.

In taking account of this persistence of coloniality even in supposedly progressive discourses, this dissertation makes a critical appraisal of the dominant gender discourse(s) in South African gender and feminist literature. In particular, and drawing from the observation that the late 1900s saw increasing numbers of South African gender scholars write about the position of Black womxn in South Africa, the dissertation makes a link between the findings of this early scholarship and the contemporary experiences of students in the Fallist movement of 2015. [1] One of the main aims of the earliest wave of South African feminist and gender writings referenced above was to capture the history of the status and contributions of Black womxn in the Black nationalist movement (see Wells, 1982; Govender, 1987; Ginwala, 1990; Walker, 1991). In that vein, feminist scholars sought to "correct" the one-sided patriarchal narrative about the role and contributions of Black womxn in the struggle against colonial and apartheid oppression.

Similar observations resurfaced during the 2015 students' uprisings under the #RhodesMustFall (#RMF) banner which called for decolonised and Africanised university curricula and the overall transformation of the university. Shortly after, the #FeesMustFall movement followed and echoed similar demands to the #RMF movement. In the Fallist

[1] According to Black feminist scholar Kunz (2019), womxn "is an intersectional concept that seeks to include transgender womxn, womxn of colour, and womxn of Third World countries".

movement, some feminists bemoaned what they argued was the patriarchal nature of the student movement because the contributions of wom[x]n and gender non-conforming people had been overlooked. The mantra "[t]his revolution will be intersectional, or it will be bullshit" (Kunene, 2018) was adopted to demand that wom[x]n and gender non-conforming people be recognised as equal participants in the struggle for decolonisation.

However (and this is the lynchpin of the dissertation's argument), what is striking about the debates on the 'woman's question' in these Black nationalist and decolonial movements is that the frameworks and language used to make a case for the place of gender in the struggle to decolonise South Africa were themselves very Eurocentric and colonial. That is, my point of contention is that, despite their progressive calls for inclusion, these movement perpetuate the kind(s) of discourse(s) that insist on dislodging and therefore masking the fact of colonial conquest from primary analysis. The language and grammar of 'Black' and 'woman' is uprooted from its colonial origins and context and treated as neutral analytical categories that index subjectivities. Therefore, they become and uphold discourses of erasure because they erase the very fact of colonial conquest and coloniality.

I am not the first scholar to demonstrate the colonial foundations of the conceptual category 'woman'. In fact, in the context of Africa, Oyeronke Oyěwùmí's (1997) work was groundbreaking in this regard. In addition, there is the decoloniality movement originating from Latin American scholars who too have grappled with the question of the 'coloniality of being' (Torres, 2007) and the 'coloniality of gender' (Lugones, 2016). Oyěwùmí situates the process of genderisation as a consequence of colonization and coloniality. Similarly, Lugones demonstrates how genderization is a consequence of coloniality, and how it too has been weaponised in the dehumanisation of Black and indigenous people, by rendering them agnostic to the sex/gender anatomical schema. The work of Torres (2007) and Lugones (2016) takes issue with the usage of conceptual categories such as 'Black' and 'woman' as if they are mere identity markers that are not implicated in the workings of colonial conquest and coloniality.
In building on the arguments of these aforementioned scholars, I argue that the dominant language and grammar of sex/gender used to make sense of the Fallist movement is based on a Eurocentric discourse that can only read instances such as the performance of Chapungu (detailed below) through a lens of resistance and not as an indigenous alternative mode of being and existence that pre-dates colonialism. This thrusts Chapungu into the realm of exceptionalism and even idealism when, in fact, the Afrocentric corpus suggests that what Chapungu represents is not an exception in the pre-colonial African imagination. I maintain that the persistence of coloniality and conquest conceals Afrocentric alternative ways and

modes of being. Moreover, I argue that it is only through centralising conquest in the analyses of social phenomena that social scientists can begin to unmask the multiple ways that coloniality and conquest affects, shapes, and distorts various phenomena. To that end, the dissertation demonstrates how the work of scholars such as Oyěwùmí (1997; 2000; 2016a; 2016b) and Ifi Amadiume (1987; 1997) help us re-imagine alternative Afrocentric subject formations that do not rely on gender and the body to find coherence.

Consequently, the aims of this dissertation can be described as follows: first, to challenge the heavy reliance of dominant African feminist discourses on Eurocentric frameworks that fail to account for the indigenous African experiences. Second, to explore African knowledge reserves by applying an Afrocentric lens to make sense of indigenous modes of social organisation. In further setting-up how the dissertation achieves these aims, this introductory chapter contains the background of study, research problem, aims and objectives, methodology, a section on the justification of study, the limitations of study, and a detailed chapter outline.

## 1.2 Background

The year 2015 saw the inauguration of one of the most potent student uprisings in contemporary South African history. The movement started as the #RMF movement and spread to other institutions of higher learning under the banner of the Fees Must Fall movement. The #RMF movement sought to primality protest the persistent coloniality that characterised the University of Cape Town that found expression in (among other things) the presence of the statue of Cecil John Rhodes on campus. Moreover, the students called for "the decolonization of higher education, the insourcing of university support staff, and a fee-free education to ensure access for the poor, who are mainly constituted by the Black majority of South Africa" (Nqambaza, 2021:19).

On the 9th of April 2015, Sethembile Msezane, a young Black female Master's student at the time, in protest, stood as Chapungu on a plinth as the monumental statue of Rhodes was being taken down from where it had stood majestic for decades at the University of Cape Town, one of Africa's handful of prestigious universities. Msezane is a visual artist and performer whose work explores "issues around spirituality, commemoration and African knowledge systems" (Msezane, n.d). Her performance of the rise of Chapungu as Rhodes symbolically fell during the #RMF movement, is iconic and became synonymous with the #RMF movement.

Chapungu represents one of the sacred bird sculptures carved out of soapstone that were erected around the walls of Great Zimbabwe. This ancient civilisation housed the Shona people between the 11th and 14th centuries. These birds, the Bateleur African Eagles, were believed to

be messengers of the ancestors of the Shona (Ebrahim, 2016). Thus, their cultural, spiritual and symbolic value and role cannot be overstated. However, the same fate that befell other colonised African nations could not escape these sacred sculptures; that of colonial theft and plunder. In 1889, Willi Posselt, a European hunter, held the indigenous peoples of Zimbabwe at gunpoint. He forcefully looted the most intact of the sacred soapstone sculptures of the Great Zimbabwean civilisation. The sculpture was too heavy for a single person to carry, so he broke the top half of the statue from the plinth on which it stood. Later, he sold the sacred sculpture to Rhodes, who kept it in his Cape Town home, in his bedroom, where it still stands to date. According to Ebrahim (2016), Rhodes became so obsessed with this bird sculpture that he even replicated its image on the wooden staircase of his home. It is also said that Rhodes would make all the significant decisions of his life in its presence. The bird became his personal totem. This would not be the last time that Rhodes appropriated sacred symbols of the Zimbabwean people for his personal aggrandisement. He demanded that he be buried in the Matopos Hills upon his death, a sacred place of worship for the Ndebele of Zimbabwe. Ultimately, in both scenarios, we see Rhodes positioning himself in the realm of the sacred, a god of sorts for the Zimbabwean people, by displacing their Gods.

After agitation from the #RMF movement to have the statue of Rhodes removed from the University of Cape Town grounds, the university senate decided that the statue would be removed on the 9th of April, 2015. Msezane decided that as Rhodes symbolically fell, Chapungu would rise in place of him. Her rise would mark the demise of Rhodes, a figure that had appropriated her (Chapungu's) image and sacred prowess for his own ends. Indeed, as Pauwels (2019) maintains, it was as if, on this day, Chapungu had been set free. This is especially true because, later, Msezane performed the same living sculpture on the heritage site of the ruins of Great Zimbabwe to symbolise Chapungu finally returning home. This later performance is particularly significant because over the years, all other seven Zimbabwe Bird sculptures that were looted in colonial plunder have since been returned, all except the one that is housed in Rhodes's residence. Thus, this symbolic return home of Chapungu was not without meaning.

According to Pauwels (2019:10), "Chapungu constitutes an attempt to create icons or counter-images, by re-appropriating and honouring Zimbabwe Bird sculptures as a precious cultural feat of a pre-colonial African civilisation". What is intriguing about Chapungu is that she returns to revolutionary public discourse as embodied by a young, Black, African female to dislodge a powerful white male colonial figure responsible for her dislocation in history and memory and the distortion of her significance and power. She returns to her rightful place as

sacred, powerful, and independent of the meanings that coloniality had imposed on her. That Chapungu is embodied as vividly female and Black in this context is not insignificant. Her place as sacred calls into question Western-imposed systems of the anatomical sex/gender schema that renders females inferior, and the physiognomic schema that renders Black people inferior (see Wynter, 1990; Mbembe, 2001, 2017; Fanon, 2008).

According to Msezane, "having been confronted with monuments erected to celebrate British colonialism and Afrikaner nationalism … I revisit contested sites of memory in my performances and choose African wom[x]n as re-imagined protagonists … for this reason, performance has been key in my practice to re-locating the presence of the Black female body … collectively these works narrate resistance" (Msezane, 2018: 3-5). I maintain that Msezane's choice to embody Chapungu, a sacred symbol, in an African female body is not unheard of in the African world-sense. I present an Afrocentric alternative to thinking about subject formation where the female is not necessarily a debased marginalised 'other' by virtue of their female anatomy. In accordance to this alternative perspective, I further maintain that in certain African understandings of the sacred, the body collapses and ceases to be central in subject formation and the allocation of status and/or (dis)privilege. Works of other African scholars such as Amadiume (1987; 1997), Mangena (1991), Oyěwùmí (1997; 2000; 2016b) and Nzegwu (1998) also attest to regimes in Africa where females are not inherently marginalised and oppressed purely based on their anatomy. This is an argument which will be elaborated upon in later sections of this dissertation. However, I highlight it here because it already provides an explanatory Afrocentric framework for analysing Chapungu.

### 1.2.1 *Gender, #RMF and Black Nationalist Struggles*

As should be obvious from the above, Rhodes represents everything colonial, especially in the context of South Africa. He stands for land dispossession, mineral exploitation, the proletarianisation of Africans and exploitation of their labour, racialisation and patriarchisation. If historically South Africans have been indexed as Black, uncivilised, and not fully human, it is because of figures such as Rhodes. To date, his legacy remains intact, and this is precisely why the #RMF movement emerged. South Africa remains racially polarised and unequal, with Black people being disproportionately represented among the poorest of the poor and among the landless. In other words, the indigenous peoples of South Africa remain Black, a category that houses those thrust into the zone of non-being (Fanon, 2008). Consequently, it is no surprise that in South Africa, public symbols such as statues have for the longest time been those of colonial and apartheid figures such as Jan van Riebeek, Paul Kruger,

Louis Botha, and Rhodes to name a few. Evidently, the colonial order that props up these figures to the status of godhood is also patriarchal at heart; hence we also witness the over-representation of white men and no white women.

Therefore, that Msezane was able to stand so tall, embodying a sacred and majestic symbol in the imagination of the indigenous peoples of South Africa, is not consistent with the dominant narratives on the place of womxn and gender non-conforming people in the #RMF movement and the broader South Africa. The dominant narrative paints a rather grim picture of the status of and place of Black womxn in South Africa, and rightly so. For instance, wom[x]n disproportionately make up the majority of unemployed people in South Africa. Statistics South Africa (Stats SA, 2020) reported in 2020 that 43.4% of wom[x]n were unemployed. This is compared to 36.5% of men. Of the 43.4% of unemployed wom[x]n, Black womxn make up the majority, with white women only accounting for 8.1% of the unemployment rate. Stats SA (2020) also reported that in 2020, one in five wom[x]n in relationships had experienced physical violence at the hands of their partner. Moreover, the South African Police Services (SAPS) reports that between April 2021 and May 2022, 12 702 sexual offences were reported (South African Police Service, 2022). However, these numbers only offer a glimpse of the situation on the ground because a significant number of sexual offences in South Africa go unreported (see Gqola, 2015).

The above statistics give an incomplete picture of what wom[x]n in South Africa, especially Black womxn, experience daily. Gqola also reminds us that Black lesbian, bisexual and trans womxn are among the most violated and brutalised people because of the prevalence of homophobia and transphobia in South Africa (see Gqola, 2007; 2015; 2017). It is for this reason, therefore, that this study foregrounds the university space as its point of entry, because this space is a microcosm of the broader South African society. All the challenges that Black heterosexual, lesbian, bisexual, and trans womxn face in broader society are also experienced in the context of the university space.

Therefore, in lamenting and protesting the marginal position that Black womxn and gender non-conforming people had been relegated to in the #RMF movement, especially since it mirrored not only historical patterns but also contemporary societal attitudes, the feminist activists took on the mantra "[t]his revolution will be intersectional, or it will be bullshit" (Kunene, 2018:1). Their main point of contention was that while rallying for the decolonisation of the university and the fall of institutional racism at the University of Cape Town (and South Africa more broadly), the questions of patriarchal oppression of wom[x]n and gender non-conforming people were put on the back burner of the demands of the movement and left

unaddressed. For instance, student activists had initially decided that the #RMF movement would draw its ideological pillars from the Azanian tradition, composed of Black Consciousness and Pan Africanism (see Mangcu, 2017). Black radical feminism was only included later, after contestation from the feminists present in the movement. This is an example of the hurdle jumping with which the gender activists and feminists had to engage during the #RMF movement to secure adequate representation. Nevertheless, they were unrelenting; this new generation of feminists and gender activists had taken a page from the history books and were not going to be caught repeating the same mistakes as their predecessors in the Black nationalist movement.

The #RMF was not the first time in South African history where we witnessed a clash between Black nationalist and feminist demands. Scholars such as Yates, Gqola and Ramphele (1998), Gqola (2001), Gasa (2007) and Ramphele (2021) document how the Black nationalist movement in South Africa not only put womxn's (feminist) demands on the back burner in favour of Black nationalist demands. They also lament how their (womxn's) contributions were also erased from the writings of history. Thus, the aforementioned scholars have made great strides at remedying this erasure by writing (Black) womxn back into history. However, and importantly so, their works became very foundational in shaping gender discourse in the South African social sciences and how the question of gender would be thought of and written about. The #RMF feminist activists drew on the language and grammar of this earlier scholarship to voice their discontent with power imbalances within the #RMF movement from the discursive field that their predecessors contributed to. The main point of contention was clear: when demands for racial liberation are put forward, demands for wom[x]n's liberation should not be forgotten. The struggle must be intersectional.

The main assumptions within this intersectional formulation of struggle are that, firstly, questions of racialisation and gender are thought of as commensurate and thus as variables that can be addressed simultaneously. However, I put forward the argument that if we take seriously the premise that South Africa, to date, remains a colonial entity, then we must consider how racialisation; the process of the blackening and the dehumanisation of Africans, renders them delinquent to the sex/gender anatomical schema that Western discourse has reserved for those who are considered full human beings, i.e., white people. The second assumption inherent to the intersectionality paradigm is the uncritical adoption of European categories such as 'woman' as universal and thus taken for granted. It depends on the presence and existence of an identitarian regime that finds coherence in the body, a regime that Oyěwùmí (1997) calls somatocentric and bio-logical. While these above assumptions are neither far-fetched nor

erroneous in and of themselves, they point to the uncritical adoption of a schema that only makes sense through a colonial mind-set. It is this mind-set of coloniality that the dissertation seeks to challenge by decentering it as the framework through which to understand the struggles and resistances of Black womxn in particular.

### 1.3 Research Problem

In the section above, I use the figure of Chapungu as performed by Msezane to draw attention to two competing discourses. The first one, which is based on an Afrocentric premise that Chapungu is uncontroversial and even normative, articulates that the fact that Msezane is young, female and African does not render her unsuitable to perform (and become) that which is sacred and prominent. That is, her anatomy as 'female' does not disqualify her from embodying a sacred symbol such as Chapungu. As I demonstrate in Chapter 5, where the sacred is concerned in the indigenous world-sense of Abantu, one's biological body seizes to matter and their subjectivity becomes complicated in ways that frustrate the binary logic of the sex/gender anatomical schema.[2] The second discourse reads Chapungu mainly through the eyes of resistance as deviant and provocative. In it, Chapungu sits at the nexus of racialisation and genderisation. She embodies and performs an intersectional resistance to multiple systems of oppression. However, it is a discourse that fails to adequately account for the fact of colonial conquest and the multiple ways in which coloniality persists today.

The taken for grantedness of the history and impact of colonial conquest as well as cultural and epistemic imperialism has seen the category of 'Black' as no longer having profound discursive implications for how we think about subject formation. Today, it is treated as merely a matter of pigmentation, when historically it was weaponised to deny certain groups access to the category of 'human'. Likewise, gender categories tend to be taken as presupposed in mainstream feminist theorisation. They are treated as universally occurring phenomena that coexist with (and are not necessarily seen as contingent on) racial markers such as 'Black'. This academic enterprise has also meant that indigenous categories of kinship relation, such as 'umfazi' and 'umama', have been translated into and used synonymously with the colonial

[2] By 'Abantu' I am referring to the indigenous peoples of Southern Africa who during the Apartheid regime were classified as the 'Bantu'. These groups of people include amaMpondo, amaXhosa, amaZulu, amaSwati, Batswana, Basotho, BaPedi, VhaVenda, VaTsonga and many other indigenous groups.

category of 'woman'. [3] I seek to challenge and complexify this generalised genderisation of the indigenous colonised peoples of South Africa.

## 1.4 Research Aims, Objectives and Questions of Study

To that end, the overarching aim of this dissertation is to challenge the uncritical adoption of European frameworks in studying and theorising indigenous sex/gender systems. Secondly, the dissertation aims to explore the knowledge reserves that can be unearthed by applying an Afrocentric lens to making sense of indigenous modes of social organising.

In pursuit of the said aims, the first objective of the dissertation is to interrogate the basis on which anthropological and feminist discourses have constructed sex and gender as universally occurring phenomena, albeit with varying expressions across various cultural contexts. The second objective is to mine various Abantu discursive sites to excavate knowledge on indigenous modes of social organisation.

The research question that this study aims to answer is: how, if at all, does applying an Afrocentric lens to the study of indigenous sex/gender systems help us think about African subject formation unfettered by Eurocentric logics?

## 1.5 Significance of this Research

This research contributes to Afrocentric knowledge that seeks to disrupt the unequal global distribution of epistemic labour, where the Western academy does the work of philosophising and theorising and Africa is used as a space where those theories are tested and applied. This research achieves two aspects that disrupt the global knowledge distribution of labour. Firstly, it challenges the uncritical application of Western feminist theories that have tended to impose European realities on the African context. Secondly, it mines the indigenous archive for Afrocentric philosophies and ideas that could contribute to creating a uniquely African theory of subject formation that considers aspects important to the African world-sense such as seniority, kinship status, and the sacred ancestral cult.

## 1.6 Key Concepts

This section is dedicated to clarifying some of the key terms used throughout this study. Primarily, my study is guided by the work of Oyěwùmí. Therefore, most of the key concepts I use in this dissertation are drawn from her work.

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[3] For the purposes of this dissertation, I will not be italicizing indigenous words from Abantu languages (of South Africa) because I want to emphasize that they are as central to my thinking and theorizing as English is. Therefore, I do not wish to adopt gestures that potentially dislodge the centrality of Abantu languages in this project.

### *1.6.1 Woman, womxn or wom[x]n*

According to Kunz (2019:2), the term 'womxn' "stems from the orthographic "woman", which is rooted in the patriarchal power structure that still systematically excludes womxn. 'womxn' is an intersectional concept that seeks to include transgender womxn, womxn of color, womxn of Third World countries, and every personal identity of womxn. It (sic) an antithesis to the daily micro-aggressions that subtly, but systematically work to undermine the value of womxn and enforce their secondary social status". Kunz, like other intersectional feminist scholars uses the alternative 'womxn' primarily as a means of inclusion for those that have been marginalised by oppressive power structures from the identity 'woman', as indicated in the quote above, these include trans people, people of colour and Black people. However, while Kunz uses 'womxn' as a tool of inclusion, I borrow it to demonstrate how it comes to be that Black womxn, by virtue of their Blackness are excluded from the category of 'woman', and why the categories 'Black' and 'woman' cannot be reconciled. The third chapter of this dissertation expands further on this argument.

In this dissertation, I use 'woman' and 'women' to exclusively refer to white cisgendered heterosexual women. I use 'womxn' to refer to Black womxn and other womxn that have been typically marginalised from the mainstream category of 'woman'. Wom[x]n is used in instances where I or any other quoted author refer to groups of wom[x]n that are constituted by a mixture of white women alongside other marginalised groups of wom[x]n.

### 1.6.2 *World-Sense versus Worldview*

At the beginning of her most influential work, *The Invention of Women* (1997), Oyěwùmí boldly states that "this book is not about the so-called woman question". This statement becomes a moment of rupture in many studies of gender, which tend to be preoccupied with the 'woman question'. For the Oyo Yorùbá, according to Oyěwùmí, the 'woman question' is an import from the West, which many Nigerian and other African scholars have preoccupied themselves with uncritically. [4] For Oyěwùmí, the Yorùbá do not do gender. The question of gender that many Western scholars, and in the contemporary, some African scholars have preoccupied themselves with, is inapplicable for the Yorùbá. Therefore, as part of demonstrating the limitations of the Western epistemological framework in dealing with different modalities of being, Oyěwùmí coins the idea of a "world-sense" to contrast it with the

[4] While I am not interested in discussing the Nigerian and other African scholars that Oyěwùmí engages with in her book, for reference to the multiple scholars she is in conversation with, see the *Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses.*

Western notion of a "worldview". In the Western world, the body is central to social organisation because "difference and hierarchy […] are biologically determined" (Oyěwùmí, 1997:1). Thus, according to this worldview, social hierarchy is predicated on the body and is perceived primarily through sight. Therefore, one could say that, indeed, in the West, seeing is believing.

Oyěwùmí's project takes issue with the idea that all social orders, universally, are premised on the primacy of the body and the ordering of bodies "in terms of sex, skin colour, and cranium size" (Oyěwùmí, 1997:2). She maintains that in other societies, and most definitely among the Yorùbá, society is organised in terms of different criteria that are not necessarily or primarily perceived through sight. Thus, for other cultures, world-sense "is a more inclusive way of describing the conception of the world by different cultural groups […] 'world-sense' […] [describes] the Yorùbá or other cultures that may privilege senses other than the visual or even a combination of senses" (Oyěwùmí, 1997:3).

### 1.6.3 *Bio-Logic/Somatocentric*

Linked to her critique of the West's obsession with worldview, Oyěwùmí speaks of two concepts linked to ideas of the body; the bio-logic and the somatocentric. She refers to the bio-logic as the kind of logic that stems from biological determinism (Oyěwùmí, 1997:X). Suppose we understand the epistemological foundations of Western knowledge as relying on what is seen. She maintains, "the reason the body has so much presence in the West is that the world is primarily perceived by sight. The differentiation of human bodies in terms of sex, skin colour, cranium size is a testament to the powers attributed to 'seeing'. The gaze is an invitation to differentiate."(Oyěwùmí, 1997:2).

In that case, one understands how and why the body would play a central part in such a knowledge regime. For instance, to demonstrate the centrality of the body reasoning in Western thought, Oyěwùmí quotes Dorothy Smith, who makes the observation that "a man's body gives credibility to his utterance, whereas a woman's body takes it away from hers" (quoted in Oyěwùmí, 1997:X). Thus, the divinely ordained hierarchy that places men above women, what Sylvia Wynter (1990) refers to as the sex/gender anatomical schema, relies on the body to find coherence and authority. Oyěwùmí uses the concept of somatocentricity as synonymous with the bio-logic because both refer to the centrality of body reasoning in the Western episteme.

### 1.6.4 *Anatomical Model of Sexual Differentiation*

Wynter makes reference to two schemas of Western origin that have been historically used to categorise and order human beings. The first is the anatomical model of sexual differentiation,

and the second is the physiognomic schema of race. Before the European expansion into the "New World," Wynter maintains that Europeans were primarily organised following the anatomical model of sexual differentiation (what I refer to from hereon as the sex/gender anatomical schema). Males were differentiated from females purely based on their reproductive organs. This ordering was perceived as divinely ordained by the Christian God, who put man above woman (Wynter, 1990). Wynter (1990) also highlights how the physiognomic schema of race and the sex/gender anatomical schema have historically been mutually reinforcing in keeping indigenous and Black people outside of the category of 'human'. This will be explored further in the literature review.

### *1.6.5 Subjectivity*

For the purpose of this dissertation, I use the concept of subjectivity when referring to indigenous ways of being and becoming, which also reflects a concern with specific power relations between subjects. That is, notions such as uma, umalume, ubawokazi, among others, are not simply given or inhabited in the way in which identity discourse assumes, but are a reflection of a complex process of negotiation. While I understand that identity and subjectivity are not mutually exclusive, I opt to use the concept of subjectivity to drive home the relationality and contingency that informs and shapes the subjectivities in question. Moreover, as Judith Butler (1990) has argued, identity is based on subjection. That is, as she puts, "It is not enough to inquire into how women might become more fully represented in language and politics. Feminist critique ought also to understand how the category of 'women' … is produced and restrained by the very structures of power through which emancipation is sought" (Butler, 1990: 2).

Drawing from this line of argument, I extend Butler's observation to the general discourse of colonial gendering of African subjectivities and argue that if we are to better understand how gender is a colonial construct, we need to understand how the category of 'woman' is created and constrained through the colonial register. In that sense, subjectivity, at least as constructed by thinkers such as Keguro Macharia (2019), is regarded as produced within a particular context, contingent and active (whether it is the act of becoming a subject or performing the subjectivity). That is, subjectivities such as uma, umalume ubawokazi mentioned above, when put under scrutiny are not mere labels attached to individuals but also imply attendant roles and responsibilities attached to them (that is, power relations). They speak to an active becoming (see McGushin, 2014), in that umalume, for example, in a given context, has to exercise their agency in the act of becoming umalume and fulfilling the role of umalume.

### 1.6.6 *Indigenous Peoples and Natives*

Robert Sobukwe, the father of Azanism in the context of South Africa, maintains that the Africans "constitute the indigenous groups and form the majority of the population [in South Africa], they are the most ruthlessly exploited and are subjected to humiliation, degradation and insult" (Sobukwe, 1959).[5] By indigenous, Sobukwe does not distinguish between the so-called Khoi, San and Abantu groups. He only recognises the indigenous people as "African" and does not fragment beyond that point. 'Coloured', or so-called mixed-race people, are also considered African and indigenous to the land. For this project, the term 'indigenous peoples' will be used in a similar vein (Sobukwe, 1959). [6]

At times, I will refer to the indigenous peoples as those native to the land. I am aware of the historical burden that the term 'native' carries, as indicated by post-colonial scholar Mahmood Mamdani. According to Mamdani,

> Through a theory of history and a theory of law, [Henry Maine] distinguished West from the non-West and a universal civilisation from local custom. In the process, he distinguished the settler from the native, providing elements of a theory of nativism: if the settler was modern, the native was not; if history defined the settler, geography defined the native; if legislation and sanction defined the modern political society, habitual observance defined that of the native. If continuous progress was the mark of settler civilisation, native custom was best thought of as part of nature, fixed and unchanging, the native was the creation of theorist of an empire-in-crisis. (Mamdani, 2012: 6)

Mamdani's problematization of the term native is already witnessed in his earlier works, where he argues for the need for the post-colonial African state to discard the dichotomisation of citizens according to native and non-native (or settler) because of the disastrous effects such fragmentation brought about in contexts such as Rwanda and Uganda. I will borrow the term 'native' to achieve clarity in identifying people who are of African origin. Mamdani distinguishes between native as a settler libel against the native, and then as native self-assertion (Mamdani, 2001). I will be using the term according to the latter, since it speaks to indigenous people asserting their legitimate claim to the land and thus rejecting colonial conquest and coloniality.

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[5] South Africa is a colonial invention that came into being with the Act of Union of 1910 (see Dladla, 2018; 2020; Modiri, 2021). Therefore, I only use "South Africa" in the dissertation to achieve clarity and uniformity. I am aware that there is no such thing as a pre-colonial South Africa since "South Africa" is itself a colonial invention. The Azanian School of thought continues to problematize the question of "South Africa" to date.

[6] I am aware of the debates that have dominated the South African public discourse around questions of the authenticity of the indigeneity of Abantu groups to South Africa. While this moment presents an interesting opportunity for deeper research and discussion into this topic, it is not in the scope of this project to cover these aspects of the debate.

## 1.7 Chapter Outline

The first chapter contains the introduction, background, the aim of the study, the chapter outline and summary. The second chapter covers the methodological approach that informs this study. I also make a case for why I chose not to use conventional feminist methodologies in undertaking this study.

The third chapter is a two-part literature review that also serves as a discursive minefield that I explore to unearth the multiple ways that the category of 'woman' has been written about. The first part of the review focuses on the context of Western writings on the subject and category of 'woman'. It demonstrates how historically, Black people were thought of and constructed as existing outside of the sex/gender anatomical schema. The second part of the literature review looks at writings covering the Black nationalist struggle against colonial apartheid to map how discourses of gender played out side by side with discourses of race. In it, I explore and demonstrate how, although gender thinking was in many ways integral to the language and framework of politics and political participation in the South African Black nationalist struggle, it was not necessarily a preferred mode of identification among the indigenous womxn of South Africa, with them at times opting for motherist alternatives of identification.

In the fourth chapter, I introduce an important intervention in the sex/gender logic through a focus on what I have termed the kinshiparchy. Kinshiparchy refers to a system in which the kinship group that gains its legitimacy and authority through the sacred ancestral cult is the primary site where the allocation of status and/or (dis)privilege to individuals is determined. Moreover, in this chapter, using the works of Oyěwùmí and Amadiume, I demonstrate how the somatocentric regime of the body plays a very minimal role in the workings of this alternative system of social organising. It also engages the (non)sex-gender systems of the Abantu, being in conversation primarily with the work of anthropologist Monica Hunter. In it, I demonstrate that Abantu systems of social organisation should be understood as informed by a kinship-based system and not necessarily a gendered lens. I use linguistic evidence to show how interpretations of various social phenomena that prioritise a sex-gender interpretation tend to distort various indigenous phenomena. Ultimately, I make a case for why scholars who study indigenous modes of social organisation must adopt a lens that prioritises the kinship group as a unit of analysis.

The fifth chapter is dedicated to discussing how the indigenous sacred institution of ubungoma further complicates the logic of sex-gender thinking. Primarily, I use the biography of Zandile Nkunzi Nkabinde to explore the divergences and convergences of the sex-gender

framework with the sacred institution of ubungoma. I also discuss how the institution of ubungoma has come to be interpreted by scholars using the language of sex and gender and how this discourse has resulted in the distortion and limitation of what the institution of ubungoma is. The final chapter is dedicated to the concluding remarks and summary of the dissertation.

# Chapter 2: Research Design

## 2.1 Introduction

This chapter is dedicated to the research design that guides this study. I make use of critical discourse analysis to analyse the knowledge on sex and gender within the South African context. I do this employing the Azanian philosophical tradition as the theoretical framework that informs the perspective from which I read and make sense of these key discourses on sex/gender in South Africa. In terms of methods of analysis, I use a mixture of textual analysis, linguistics, archival work and historical method.

### *2.1.1 Critical Discourse Analysis*

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is a method that is used to examine power relations in a text, and how they are established and reinforced through language. Overall, it is concerned with the "empirical study of the relations between discourse and social and cultural developments in different social domains" (Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002:60). Meaning that, it is primarily concerned with social relations that are constituted by multiple layers which can only be made sense of by analysing the different sets of layers, which may entail relations between people, objects, social structures etc. When approaching a text, a CDA practitioner will ask themselves various questions which include questions regarding what the angle and perspective of the speaker in a said text is and how it shapes how they see society and the questions under scrutiny, what concepts and issues are made important in the text, which questions are minimised and/or neglected, and who is the intended audience, among others.

Although there are various strands of CDA, I use it in accordance with the synthesis provided by Jørgensen and Phillips (2002) and adapt it to the theoretical demands of the Azanian philosophical tradition which stresses that colonial conquest and its attendant cultural and epistemic imperialism be centred in knowledge production. I use this method to examine how dominant discourses on sex and gender in South Africa present, conceal and distort knowledges on indigenous sex/gender systems and/or modes of being. I situate the failure to address the persistent and unabated universalisation of Eurocentric sex/gender logics to the detriment of Afrocentric alternatives in the failure to read and interpret sex/gender systems from a decolonial perspective. In other words, the persistence of the dominance of Eurocentricity in the field of sex/gender studies in South Africa signals the reluctance and/or failure to centre the fact of colonial conquest and its attendant cultural and epistemic imperialism in knowledge production and theorisation.

According to Jørgensen and Phillips (2002) there are five key elements that are shared by all CDA approaches. Firstly, they maintain that "discursive practices, through which texts are produced (created) and consumed (received and interpreted) are viewed as an important form of social practice which contributes to the constitution of the social world including social identities and social relations" (Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002:61). Thus, social and cultural reproduction takes place through discursive practice. Text in this sense, does not exclusively refer to spoken and written words but can also be visual. The second attribute that all CDA approaches share in common is that they view discourse as both "constitutive and constituted" (Fairclough, 2013:3) by the social world (Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002:61). It is both shaped by social practice and it, in turn shapes social practice and the social world. Thirdly, when using CDA, "language use should be empirically analysed within its social context" (Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002:62). Language is taken as a site that is constituted by and reflects social practice (Watterson, 2019:37). Moreover, in CDA, "it is claimed that discursive practices contribute to the creation and reproduction of unequal power relations between social groups […] these effects are understood as ideological effects" (Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002:63). Thus, discourse is perceived as central to maintaining unequal power relations to the benefit of some groups. Lastly, CDA is always in aid of a political project that aims to empower oppressed social groups by unearthing the role of discursive practices in the maintenance of unequal power relations to push for social change. It "does not understand itself as politically neutral (as objectivist social science does) but as a critical approach which is committed to social change" (Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002:64).

As noted already, in this dissertation I approach CDA by using a mixture of textual analysis, linguistics, archival work and historical method to grapple with and contextualise the dominant discourse(s) on sex-gender systems in the context of South Africa. In particular, I demonstrate how the discourse on sex and gender is being (re)produced by the prevailing colonial, cultural and epistemic imperialism that the Azanian philosophical tradition problematises. Jørgensen and Phillips (2002:66) maintain that "text analysis alone is not sufficient for discourse analysis, as it does not shed light on the links between text and societal and cultural processes and structures". In other words, textual analysis that is not supplemented by an approach that reads societal and cultural processes and structures could fail to account for the power relations and political dimensions that shape discursive practice.

In terms of linguistics, I borrow my method from sociolinguist Pamela Maseko, who studies the isiXhosa language to find links between language and socio-cultural practices. I use lexico-semantic techniques and sociolinguistics to unearth how critical concepts in the

sex/gender discourse(s) have been used and what their usage reveals about the world-sense of a people and how they make sense of different subjectivities. Semantics refers to a linguistic study of meaning (see Kroeger, 2018; Maseko, 2018). Kroeger (2018:4) maintains that "semantics is concerned with the inherent meaning of words and sentences as linguistic expressions, in and of themselves". It is a technique that allows one space to scrutinise a lexical item to get down to its core meaning. Sociolinguistics refers to the study of the relationship between language and society. By scrutinising the language and grammar used to make sense of different subjectivities such as 'woman', 'Black womxn' and 'mother' for instance, I demonstrate that there are underlying assumptions and knowledges that are informed by the episteme of the speaker.

I use language as an evidential field because I move from the same premise as Ngugi wa Thiong'o, who argues that language carries culture. Thus from language, one can get a sense of how a people make sense of various phenomena (wa Thiong'o, 1987:14). Like Maseko (2018), I am interested in the meanings that are embedded in lexical units of the indigenous languages of Abantu of South Africa. My primary focus is on the Nguni languages. However, in some instances, I use Sesotho languages to show the similarities and continuities between the various cultures of Abantu of South Africa. I then make links between the lexical units, their meanings, and the attendant socio-cultural practices. For Maseko (2018:40), "language constructs the world and […] in turn constructs power around a certain society's knowledge". Her position is similar to that of wa Thiong'o, who maintains that "language [is] not a mere string of words. It [has] a suggestive power well beyond the immediate and lexical meaning" (wa Thiong'o, 1987:11). Thus, by mining language, what wa Thiong'o refers to as "the collective memory bank of a people's experience in history", one is able to get an idea of the world-sense of a people (wa Thiong'o, 1987:15).

## 2.2 On the Azanian Tradition: Centralising Conquest

### *2.2.1 Background on the Azanian Philosophical Tradition*

The Azanian philosophical tradition refers to an intellectual movement that finds its roots in the resistance of the indigenous peoples of South Africa against colonisation and coloniality (Dladla, 2021). For the proponents of the Azanian philosophical tradition, the fact of the persistent colonial conquest of Azania (what is otherwise known as South Africa), and the attendant racism, cultural and epistemic imperialism is what predominantly informs and shapes knowledge production in the South African academy and it is this political and epistemic injustice that the Azanian philosophical tradition seeks to problematise. The name 'Azania' is

a "key term in the lexicon of the Africanist-black radical tradition because it reflects the view of 'South Africa' as an artefact of colonial sovereignty that came into being in 1910 through the racial contract between the two European conquering powers that had subjugated the indigenous African population and other groups and racialised them as 'Blacks' in the process of inventing the political category of whiteness" (Modiri, 2021:43)

Joel Modiri (2021:45) further argues that in unmasking the persistence of coloniality in Azania, the Azanian philosophical tradition is marked by a five-fold itinerary. This itinerary includes:

1) The continuation and elaboration of the struggle for liberation at the analytical, intellectual, and conceptual level;
2) The critique and negation of Western civilisation – which is to say the dismantling of (settler-)coloniality, white supremacy, and racial capitalism (and the social, sexual, cultural-symbolic, intellectual, and political systems they engender and reproduce);
3) Resolute analytic focus and consciousness about the ongoing constitutive material and symbolic force of race and racialisation;
4) A long view of the historical memory of colonisation, apartheid, their enduring structural violence, and their persisting afterlives in the post-1994 period; and
5) The restoration and reaffirmation of the political and cultural integrity of African, indigenous, and Black experiences and consciousness.

Consequently, and in line with the Azanian perspective above, the premise of this dissertation is that colonial conquest and coloniality continue to shape various aspects of how South African society is thought of and portrayed. As such, I am of the view that centralising the fact of conquest and its attendant cultural and epistemic imperialism in studying phenomena reveals aspects that coloniality attempts to conceal. For a thorough account of the history of Azanism, one should consult the work of Diaz (2009). Here I use it according to scholars of the Azanian Philosophical tradition, such as Ndumiso Dladla (2018, 2020, 2021) and Modiri (2021). They mainly draw from its usage within the Pan Africanist Congress of Azania (PAC) and the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM).

### *2.2.2 History of the Azanian Movement*

Here, I give a brief overview of the history of the Azanian movement that animates the intellectual project of the Azanian philosophical tradition. The PAC is a South African political

party formed in 1959, at the height of the apartheid regime, as a result of a breakaway faction from the African National Congress (ANC) by those whom Dladla describes as being aligned with an "Africanist tendency" (Dladla, 2018: 417). The PAC broke away from the ANC after the Congress Alliance, constituted by the ANC, the South African People's Congress, the South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU), and the South African Congress of Democrats, adopted the Freedom Charter in 1955. In the Freedom Charter, a declaration was made that "South Africa belongs to all who live in it, Black and white" (Congress of the People, 1955). For the Africanists, this declaration meant that "the ANC had surrendered its will to freedom by accommodating the prevailing and unethical colonial reality" (Dladla, 2021:2).

The Africanists understood that South Africa came into being in 1909 through the South African Act of 1909 of the British parliament, uniting two European powers that had colonised the indigenous people of South Africa. Furthermore, its constitution saw the violent dispossession of indigenous peoples of their land and their mineral resources (see Magubane, 1996). In other words, the "constitutional origins of South Africa reveal that it has its basis on the loss of title to territory and sovereignty over it by the indigenous peoples conquered in the unjust wars of colonisation" (Dladla, 2018: 417). Therefore, the Congress Alliance's declaration that "South Africa belongs to all who live in it, Black and white" (The Freedom Charter, 1995) was interpreted as ahistorical, accommodationist and legitimising colonial conquest by choosing to overlook the crime of conquest that was yet to be resolved.

On the question of race, what distinguishes the Africanists from the Congress tradition in South African political activism and theorisation of history is the explicit framing of race as a "socio-ontological" (Dladla, 2020:93) category that hinges on the fact of conquest as its life-line. The Azanian conception of race goes against the dominant liberal analytical tendency in contemporary South Africa, which treats 'race' ahistorically and "is obsessed with the analysis of concepts and the construction of abstract definitions, void of the historical experience which has given rise to them" (Dladla, 2020: 78). That is to say, one cannot write about 'race' without adding to their analysis the history regarding how race has been weaponised to dehumanise and subjugate Black people. Furthermore, one would also have to acknowledge that the inauguration of racialisation served to prop up and maintain a white supremacist order in which to be human is equated to being European (see Magubane, 1996; Mbembe, 2017; Dladla, 2020; Modiri, 2021). This became the basis of justifying why the so-called 'civilised humans' had to conquer the lands of so-called savages and help bring them into civilisation (see Magubane, 1996; Mills, 1997; Pateman and Mills, 2007; Mbembe, 2017; 2001).

Sobukwe, one of the founding figures of the PAC, is known for his rejection of the logic of racialism. He has been quoted as having said, "[t]he Africanists take the view that there is only one race to which we all belong, and that is the human race. In our vocabulary, therefore, the word 'race' as applied to man, has no plural form" (Sobukwe, 1959). This statement was in no way a form of race denialism that sought to ignore the fact of the racialisation and the blackening of the indigenous peoples of South Africa through colonial conquest. Instead, his reasoning exposed that the logic of the blackening of the indigenous peoples hinged and depended on colonial conquest. In other words, through colonial conquest, the ordering of humanness came to be instituted, and the categorisations "Black" and "white" only served to index the persistence of the colonising logic that Sobukwe sought to resist. This order is what Wynter refers to as a regime that inaugurated a taxonomy based on the physiognomic schema of race. By rejecting the legitimacy of colonial conquest, Sobukwe also was also questioning the logic of racialisation which facilitated the blackening of the indigenous people (see Dladla, 2020).

The year 1994 saw a transition from the end of formal apartheid into the so-called new South Africa as heralding a new dawn for the indigenous conquered people, but it was rejected by activists and theorists of the Azanian tradition as a façade to keep colonial conquest intact unabated (see Dladla, 2018; 2020; 2021; Modiri, 2021). For instance, the #RMF moment is one of the many in post-1994 South Africa where the indigenous peoples expressed their discontent with the so-called 'new South Africa'. It bore testament that South Africa's colonial history continues to live comfortably in the post-1994 dispensation. The past refuses to pass. Modiri (2021:43) maintains that "the true radical challenge of the long Azanian tradition lies not in its critique of the negotiated settlement and post-1994 constitutional democracy but rather in its contestation of the very idea of 'South Africa'. For the Azanians, attaining a liberated Azania entails the repudiation of South Africa, not only at the political level but also at the cultural and epistemological level. As Dladla (2018:417) aptly puts it, "Azania may be understood as the ends to which Africanist ideology and liberation philosophy are aimed" because 'South Africa' is the "ultimate philosophical problem for the indigenous people conquered in the unjust wars of colonisation." (Dladla, 2018: 415).

Therefore, the declaration that "South Africa belongs to all who live in it, Black and white" is not only a statement that implies the acceptance of the colonial foundations of South Africa but one that is also willing to accept and legitimise the racialising logic of that colonial situation. For the Africanists, if Azania were to be free, it would have to be a wholly African polity; politically, economically, culturally and epistemologically free from the clutches of

Eurocentricity (Dladla, 2020). Racialism would have no place in it, and it would be a truly non-racial African polity. And thus, as per the dictates of the Azanian philosophical tradition, a true African polity would be one that is politically, economically, culturally and epistemologically free from the clutches of European imposition. The next section will focus on the question of epistemic imperialism and how it continues to shape knowledge production and theorisation in South Africa.

### 2.2.3 *Project South Africa and the Social Sciences*

In her article titled "South African Social Science and the Azanian Philosophical Tradition", Anjuli Webster makes the compelling argument that colonial conquest did not depend on the use of force alone, it also relied on the use of the "production of an epistemic and symbolic order and power over the representation of history" (Webster, 2021:111). This is necessary because as Webster maintains, while colonial conquest on the one hand serves the function of destroying an existing order, it also works to establish a new order. Therefore, the realm of epistemology plays an important role in the legitimation and the "naturalisation" of the new order. Webster then demonstrates how the social sciences in South African universities became "a central mechanism of conqueror South Africa" (Webster, 2021:113) in the process of legitimising "the historical injustice of conquest" (Webster, 2021:113).

Take for instance the case of the Randse Afrikaanse Universiteit (RAU). In 1967, the apartheid government founded the RAU as part and parcel of broader plans to consolidate colonial conquest and Afrikanerdom. During the opening of the institution in 1967, the then Chancellor of the university, Diederichs, who also went on to serve as the ceremonial State President of Apartheid South Africa, is quoted saying:

> In a tense restless world … more and more knowledge is sought … that must serve as an instrument of economic and military power, whereby nations that feel themselves to be threatened can materially arm themselves to ensure their safety and continued existence … our survival as white, Western people and the place that we will take in the world, will be determined to a large measure by the extent of the knowledge that we acquire and apply. (Beale, 1996: 19)

Diederichs' words in the above quote are just one example that shows how RAU was founded primarily to advance Afrikanerdom and, more importantly, white supremacy through knowledge production.

Moreover, this example demonstrates how knowledge production at RAU and other South African institutions of higher learning more broadly has been historically weaponised in service of a conquering white supremacist order. Reflecting on the evolution of the field of anthropology, Webster (2021:116) indicates that in the early stages of colonial conquest,

anthropologists were primarily invested in inventing myths about the "other" to legitimate the colonial enterprise (also see Mudimbe, 1988). Later, once colonial conquest was established, the tune of the discipline changed to one which sought to understand the best way to administer and rule over the native. During this second stage, invented myths about the native would be of no use to colonial administrators, and anthropologists working in service of this order understood this. What became important during this phase was to study and understand the 'native' and his/her culture for the purposes of state administration.

Later the social sciences and other disciplines would be used to erase colonial conquest from historical memory (Webster, 2021: 120). According to Webster (2021), part of this endeavour to erase conquest necessitated that the social sciences usher in an order where their theories and methods did not require conquest to be understood as "foundational and unjust violence, which must be addressed through restitution and reparations. Rather, the outcome of the conquest of the indigenous people in the unjust wars of colonisation is taken for granted, and the colonial situation built on the foundation of conquest is represented as a legitimate political and legal system" (Webster, 2021: 120). In other words, colonialism depended on the symbiosis of the use of force to conquer, and the production of an epistemic order that legitimises conquest. Thus, any scrutinization of this propped up epistemic order threatens the survival of the colonial polity itself. To maintain conquest, the social sciences have had to avoid scrutinising the prevailing epistemic order. Therefore, South Africa, with its attendant Eurocentric political, economic, cultural, and epistemological make up are then framed as an inevitability that doesn't warrant scepticism or critique, lest its (South Africa's) foundations also be questioned and delegitimised.

The fact that conquest is not placed as central to the theories and methods of the various disciplines in the social sciences today is suspicious since foundationally, conquest – along with the need to sustain and legitimate it – was always central to knowledge production in the colonies of South Africa. This is in spite of the fact that "these knowledges and traditions (which shape teaching and research in the academy) derive their vocabulary, problems, criteria, methods, categories, and definitions from philosophical and scientific traditions born from and shaped by the cultural perspective and historical experience of colonial and imperial Europe" (Modiri, 2021:47). Edward Said (2003) makes a similar argument in his most prominent work, *Orientalism.* In his work, he exposes how the academic world and the knowledge produced within it are deeply implicated in the colonial project of fashioning and interpreting the colonised countries in accordance with the coloniser, while simultaneously framing these (colonial) works as neutral.

In the context of South Africa, Modiri identifies three trends characterising the South African academy post 1994 and its neglect of "Black-centred race-critical scholarship" (Modiri, 2021:51). The first trend is the dominance of "white moderate politics that presents itself as opposed to racial discrimination and subjection while also rejecting race consciousness and downplaying the significance of racism" (Modiri, 2021:51). The second trend is that which he draws from Pillay's interrogation of knowledge discourses of post-1994 transformation that tend to privilege 'deracialisation' over 'decolonisation', thus leaving Eurocentric theories and knowledges unchallenged. The third trend is the dislocation of studies and theory building on South Africa from other diasporic Black radical traditions and failing to foster networks with diasporic political and epistemic movements of the Black radical tradition (Modiri, 2021:55). All these trends are identified as foundational to the maintenance of a colonial epistemic order where truly decolonial knowledges are pushed back and silenced.

The concerns that the scholars of the Azanian tradition raise manifest in various ways within gender studies. In some cases, a racial analysis is completely absent from gender analysis, with scholars focusing on the subjectivities and experiences of wom[x]n without accounting for how race is complicit in shaping those very subjectivities and experiences. In cases where race is taken into consideration, it is treated using an intersectional framework that treats race and gender as variables that are commensurate and not contingent (gender being contingent on race). The intersectional framework then produces subjects that are thought of as Black *and* woman *and* classed etc., an assumption I challenge in the succeeding chapter when I argue that the process of colonisation and racialisation poses a challenge for those dehumanised to be thought of as gendered. Moreover, the uncritical adoption of the category called 'Black womxn' then forecloses opportunities for scholars to enquire about alternative forms of subjectivities that are indigenous to South Africa that don't necessarily align with the logic of the sex/gender anatomical schema of the Western world. In this dissertation, I not only challenge the uncritical adoption of the conceptual category 'woman' as it pertains to Black people in South Africa, I also explore alternative indigenous subjectivities and modes of being.

### 2.3 Gender Discourse through Azanian Eyes: a CDA

As discussed above, the Azanian philosophical tradition problematises the neglect and decentring of the question of colonial conquest and its attendant cultural and epistemic imperialism in knowledge production within the South African social sciences and humanities. The critique is that until this is done, it will be difficult to produce theories and knowledges that are truly decolonised and Afrocentric (Africa-centric). I adopt this critique to look at the

question of dominant sex and gender discourses within the South African social sciences and humanities. I interrogate how they have they been constructed and how this has foreclosed space for Afrocentric interpretations and theorisation on the same phenomena to assume centrality. In other words, I locate dominant sex and gender discourses within the South African academy as products of a colonial order that has become naturalised by moving incognito in the South African academy, while continually shaping what we know about sex and gender, and how we come to know it.

However, I not only aim to show how dominant sex-gender discourses have contributed to the distortion and erasure of indigenous knowledge alternatives and framings of subject formation, but also how the uncritical adoption and universalisation of the languaging of gender, and in particular, the category 'woman' in many ways has historically been discursively weaponised to dehumanise Black people and render them as gender delinquents. By gender delinquents, I mean those that need to be taught how to be men and women proper because they are thought of as naturally existing outside the sex-gender schema, therefore justifying the liberal pretence that colonialism primarily served to civilise Africans and bring them to the stage of full humanity (through cultural assimilation).

I undertake critical discourse analyses at the levels prescribed by Fairclough; the level of text, the level of discursive practice and the level of social practice (Fairclough, 2013). At the level of text, which could be in the form of speech, writing or visual images, I focus on analysis at word level. The premise that informs analysis at word level is the belief that the words we choose and use in writing or speaking reflect our attitudes about a given subject. Examples of some of the key concepts that I grapple with at this level are woman, umfazi, and other indigenous kinship terms such as umakazi and ubawokazi among others. I use lexico-semantic techniques and engage semantics and sociolinguistics to unpack what the different words and concepts tell us about the attitudes and views of authors (or speakers) of a text and the communities they are part of.

At the second level, I look at discursive practice which has to with the production and constitution of text. At this level, analysis is focused on the ways words are used and sentences are constructed in a text, because the way they talk about a subject shows an author's views on the said subject. Fairclough, like wa Thiongo, maintains that language is not neutral, thus the words we choose in speech and writing and the way we use them reflect our values and attitudes on a said subject.

At the third and final level, I look at social practice which concerns standards of society and social structures. It is an analysis at the level of what is called the norm level. For

Fairclough, language creates opinions, and these engagements are associated with power since language for Fairclough is a power tool. Along with our choice of words, language creates and shapes social relationships, it reflects the communities in which we are located and are part of. The remaining chapters in this dissertation grapple with all three dimensions of discourse analysis and demonstrate how discourses produce, reproduce and maintain the epistemic and social order where Eurocentric knowledges and theories on sex-gender systems remain predominant in the South African academy.

## 2.4 Why I do not use Traditional Feminist Methods: the Cure and the Cause

In mid-2021, I attended the Social Science Research Council (SSRC) Next-Generation methods workshop where I was required to present my research. At the end of my presentation, my mentor confessed that although she was impressed with my doctoral project, she was tempted to ask where the "research" was in my project. I found the question striking. I interpreted it as signalling the growing dominance of empirical research in gender studies. I recognise and acknowledge the vital contribution empirical qualitative research has made in helping us study and understand the experiences of some of the most marginalised subjects in history. However, equally, I wish to highlight how the uncritical adoption of these methods has been complicit in the epistemicide committed against African indigenous knowledge(s) and modes of being (see Amadiume, 1987;1997; Oyěwùmí, 1997; Thomas, 2007; Curry, 2017).

To give a brief background, Feminist methodologies were created as a result of the historical absence of women from scientific inquiry and knowledge production and output. It was in this regard that feminist scholars intervened. They sought to rethink and reimagine what an inclusive knowledge production process would entail. According to Mangena (1991:4), "the task of feminism was to take issue with masculine science which didn't always present balanced accounts and therefore tended to be distortive science. On this basis, women scholars occupied themselves with theoretical innovations in scientific methodology". This endeavour aimed to achieve the kinds of methodologies, methods, and epistemologies that could reflect women's experiences in knowledge production and output. The feminist project sought to recalibrate how mainstream 'knowledge' was thought to be constituted.

However, this process also exposed some contradictions, complexities and challenges within feminist research and scholarship that mirrored those that feminist scholars had criticised malestream knowledge for. The first challenge is that of making claims of 'knowing' what is true about social reality. According to Ramazanoglu and Holland (2002: 10), "the modern scientific method is a form of the pursuit of truth, in the sense that scientists do aim to

specify connections between ideas (scientific theories), experience (what our senses and experiments tell us) and reality (what actually exists independently of human thought)". However, is there always a clear connection between ideas, experience, and reality? Put differently, what is true in social reality and what constitutes reality? In thinking through these questions, the other question is what authority (authoritative knowledge) can be claimed from the knowledge that results as output without being stuck in the same malestream trap of seeking compulsory (positivist) connections between ideas, experience, and reality. Ramazanoglu and Holland (2002:24) acknowledge certain 'hang ups' from malestream knowledge that feminist scholars cannot entirely escape because feminist research is not conducted from a blank slate but from "particular ways of thinking about producing knowledge and claiming truth".

Moreover, feminist methodology itself is also implicated in politics of the power of the knower / the knowledge producer and cannot entirely escape this problem. For example, the South African context has witnessed scholars such as anthropologist Hunter (1934) making proclamations about the gendered nature of amaMpondo society and delineating how this perceived gender hierarchy plays out in practice. I argue that being a white woman at the height of colonialism in South Africa, Hunter held the epistemic power and privilege to frame amaMpondo society in accordance with an episteme that was informed by her worldview. [7] Her positionality afforded her space to occupy the position of the knower over those whom anthropology sought to know, the indigenous people.

The above speaks to the second challenge, and the most important one concerning this research project, that of creating universal categories of 'women' and 'females' uncritically without considering differences in race, class, ethnicity, culture, location, and other factors that complicate or even negate, the applicability of the category of 'woman' to some subjects. For this reason, Black feminist and African feminist/ gender scholars (see Hull, Bell-Scott, Smith, 1982; Amadiume, 1987; Crenshaw, 1991; and Mangena, 1991 among others), have critiqued mainstream feminism for being too white and ignoring the experiences of Black womxn, colonised womxn and other womxn of colour.

[7] I remind the reader that in the introductory chapter, I introduced Oyěwùmí's (1997) idea of a worldview versus world-sense. Ethnography primarily depends on what the researcher observes in a particular community and interprets what is observed using their frame of reference. Oyěwùmí's provocation however, is that in order to make sense of phenomena, especially in the African context, one ought to employ other sense other than just sight, to make sense of those said phenomena. And thus, part of my critic of Hunter is her reliance on her worldview to make sense of amaMpondo ways and modes of being which, I argue, resulted in distortions in some areas. I elaborate on this in the fourth and fifth chapters.

Thus far, the solution of feminist thinkers has often been to call for the need to adopt an intersectional approach when studying human experience (see Mangena, 1991; Collins, 2000a; Collins, 2000b). The controversy here is that by calling for an intersectional approach, feminism still relies on the upholding and reproduction of the subjectivity called 'woman' which it maintains is the basis of their oppression, but simultaneously central (and necessary) for its (feminism's) political mobilisation. Thus in many ways, the subjectivity called 'woman' is both the cure and the cause of feminist political mobilising (see Brown, 1997; Butler, 2011)

Oyěwùmí (1997), on the other hand, takes a more radical approach by challenging the idea of a universal gender categorisation through which society becomes organised. In particular, and drawing from the context of the Yorùbá of Nigeria, she highlights how Western political thought creates societies in which the body (the corporeal) becomes a key determinant for one's social standing, determining the level of privilege and access to which one is entitled (Oyěwùmí, 1997). Her work also includes a critique of how scholars have overlooked "indigenous categories and experiences" when conducting research (Oyěwùmí, 2016b: 2). Oyěwùmí's observation is that the reluctance to situate ideas and research in the context from which they emerge engenders the problematic extrapolation of Western experiences and realities to the rest of the world. In her book, *What Gender is Motherhood? Changing Yorùbá ideals of Power, Procreation and Identity in the Age of Modernity* (2016), she argues that her "objective is to document the indigenous epistemology that has been shunted aside as the new gender-saturated colonial epistemology gains ever-deeper resonance" (Oyěwùmí, 2016b: 2).

Oyěwùmí (1997) understands that by adopting feminist methods and analyses in the study of African societies, one automatically assumes the existence and presence of a subject called 'woman' that becomes the central object of study, and it is precisely the existence of the subject called 'woman' that Oyěwùmí challenges. Her research shows how the invention of the subject called 'woman' among the Yorùbá was a direct result of coloniality. And thus, her work locates questions of gender categorisation in the fact of colonial conquest. Likewise, I aim to avoid entering this research with the uncritical assumption that there is a subject called 'woman' that ought to be centralised in this research. After all, the aim of the study is to make an inquiry into the existence of such a subject within indigenous social formations and modes of organising. Thus, uncritically adopting feminist methodological approaches and theoretical lenses would render this project redundant.

## 2.5 Conceptual Framework: Afrocentric (non) Gender Studies

As noted already, Amadiume (1987) and Oyěwùmí (1997) are two Afrocentric scholars who centre the fact of coloniality in their treatment and analysis of gender and the 'woman' question in Africa. For this reason, I use their works as the conceptual framework that guides this study. Their work does not merely deal with the different configurations of gender in different societies, but questions gender categorisation itself. Their analyses focus on African kinship systems and draw from ideas on what status and/or (dis)privilege is allocated to different kinship group members. In drawing on the work of these scholars, I occasionally supplement their arguments with other African scholars such as Nzegwu who also address related questions.

The work of Amadiume (1987) and Oyěwùmí (1997) provides an interesting framework through which one can read alternative modes of being through an Afrocentric lens. Oyěwùmí (1997) is significant because she raises the importance of using language as a site of archival knowledge about a people and their culture in her analysis. In particular, she looks at how Yorùbá society is organised to argue that social institutions and practices of the Oyo-Yorùbá, in correspondence to their language, do not show evidence of an inherent gender system that is a primary mode of social organising and source of status and/or (dis)privilege. She does this by looking at the institutions of family and marriage, economics, and other areas as sites to substantiate her argument.

Amadiume's (1987) project, on the other hand, provides an interesting opportunity for theorising alternative sex/gender systems within various African contexts. Amadiume establishes a dual-sex system which she argues is characteristic of the Nnobi of Nigeria, and indeed many, although not all, African societies. Her idea of a dual system comprises a matricentric unit which is the domain of females and a patricentric unit which primarily is the domain of males, but is also presented as gender fluid. Her theorisation mainly makes a case for a gender-fluid system in which gender is not fixed and does not always result in the subordination of womxn. She is a compelling thinker to contrast with Oyěwùmí (1997), who has been accused of gender denialism. Amadiume (1987), on the other hand, has been accused of writing gender into Nnobi society by interlocutor Nzegwu (1998). A synthesis of the two provides an opportunity to provide some valuable tools that we can adopt in thinking through Afrocentric sex-gender systems.

### *2.5.1 Answering Back: Brief Notes on the Afrocentric Paradigm*

Amadiume makes a distinction between "protest" research/literature and *Nzagwalu*, which is an "Igbo word meaning answering back" (Amadiume, 1997:4). As praxis, answering back entails moving beyond scholarship which merely critiques European racism and coloniality and embarks, instead, on a journey to place Africa outside of European construction(s). Amadiume advocates for Africans to tap into Afrocentric research by studying and understanding African culture and philosophy to write about Africa and make sense of African ways and modes of being. Afrocentricity mainly focuses on African culture and how culture influences and shapes other aspects of African life, ways of being and thought. According to Mazama, Afrocentricity is a paradigm that scholars ought to adopt when undertaking Africological research. Africology, according to Mazama, is the "Afrocentric study of phenomena, events, ideas and personalities related to Africa" (Mazama, 2001:397).

In pursuit of her vision towards an Afrocentric scholarship, Amadiume invests time in studying the work of Pan-Africanist scholar, Cheikh Anta Diop, who makes a case for an "organic and dignified cultural identity for Africa" (Amadiume, 1997:1). According to Amadiume, protest literature has been too invested in critiquing various fields of study and disciplines such as anthropology for their racism and Eurocentrism. *Nzagwalu* literature moves beyond mere criticism and is devoted to producing Afrocentric research from the ground up, as Cheikh Anta Diop has done. While *Nzagwalu* is a very compelling concept for scholars invested in dismantling the hegemonic power of the Western canon in the academy, it does present potential pitfalls if approached uncritically.

The languaging of the phrase "answering back" implies an exchange or a response; it, therefore, prompts one to wonder between whom does this exchange occur? Amadiume addresses this question by urging African scholars to

> make primary fieldwork a priority, to begin to open a dialogue which acknowledges the voices from the wide-ranging bodies of knowledge that have developed within and between cultural groups on the continent of Africa, and in the course of Africa's various historical contacts with other nations and peoples other than Europeans. (Amadiume, 1997:4)

That is, if *Nzagwalu* is undertaken, as the above quote suggests, in dialogue with other groups other than, or not limited to Europeans, then the distinction made between *Nzagwalu* and 'protest literature' becomes concrete. As Garuba warns, one must be cautious of creating the impression that "third world texts only acquire legitimacy and significance to the extent to which they engage in the discourses of the West" (Garuba, 2001:66). Mgwayi reminds us of

the possibility of Africa writing back to itself as opposed to a Western other, as is often assumed (Mgwayi, 2009:ix).

Garuba (2001), too, is critical of the wave of post-colonial literature which is preoccupied with 'writing back' to the Western canon. He recognises how discourse around writing back is in itself implicated in the very discourse it seeks to move away from and challenge. Instead, he advocates for a sort of writing in which one should write "from their own perspectives in their own voice … with a focused intensity on the exploration of issues of discourse/power and marginality, the same issues that engaged the Eurocentric narratives, but this time from a different viewpoint" (Garuba, 2001:68). Mgwayi, on the other hand, warns critics of post-colonial literature to guard against the tendency to assume that work by non-western scholars is always a response to the West thereby maintaining Western hegemonic status (Mgwayi, 2009:ix). Therefore, it becomes evident that there are multiple ways in which scholars can adopt a *Nzagwalu* approach and that there is a need for these nuances to be explored further. Consequently, various scholars have sought to undertake research that untangles the history of the land and its peoples from Western bias as articulated by Amadiume. [8] Likewise, this project further contributes to *Nzagwalu* research.

While Afrocentricity appears to be very attractive to scholars who seek to undertake research on Africa, it also risks the potentiality of homogenising and essentialising the 'African experience' (Adeleke, 2009). For instance, in her essay titled 'The Afrocentric Paradigm, Contours and Definitions', Mazama (2001:389) maintains that "[o]ur liberation and Afrocentricity contends and rests upon our ability to systematically displace European ways of thinking, being, feeling, and so forth and consciously replace them with ways that are germane to our own African cultural experience". While the call made in the preceding quote is noble, one cannot help but wonder if there is a single 'African cultural experience' that 'Africans' can collectively draw from to resist European ways of thinking (also see Adeleke, 2009).

Indeed, and in further support of this perspective, Amadiume (1987) shares her irritation with works that tend to lump "the African experience" as has been done by white anthropologists and feminists when they spent minimal time studying particular societies then extrapolate their findings to reflect the 'African experience' (Amadiume, 1987:3). Adeleke (2009) also critiques the tendency of Afrocentric work to call for what is often perceived as a homogenous 'African' voice which tends to essentialise experiences of Africans across space and time and overlooks various particularities. Therefore, while the unifying call that

[8] See Ngubane, 1963, Magubane, 1970; 2007, Dladla, 2017.

Afrocentricity makes can be valuable, it is also crucial that it remains cognizant of and appreciates the heterogeneity of the African continent. Thus, I use the term Afrocentricity with caution. I am aware of the burden and criticism levelled against this perspective. However, notwithstanding the criticism, I make use of the Afrocentric paradigm because it allows me space to ground my project in African knowledge systems and allows me space to mine indigenous archives for alternative ways of thinking about indigenous modes of being.

### *2.5.2 Oyěwùmí: The Case of the Yorùbá*

To return to Oyěwùmí, who, right at the beginning of her book, *The Invention of Women*, makes the bold declaration that "this book is not about the so-called woman question" (Oyěwùmí, 1997:ix), thus already signalling her intention to disrupt what has been accepted as a given in the field of gender studies up until that point. She defines gender as "an institution that establishes patterns of expectations for individuals [based on their body type], orders the social processes of everyday life, and is built into major social organisations of society, such as the economy, ideology, the family, and politics" (Oyěwùmí, 1997:39). According to this system, anatomy determines the hierarchy and status of human beings in society and other areas of life. Therefore, males occupy a higher social standing purely based on the fact that they are male, and females occupy an inferior position because they are female. This hierarchy that is based purely on body-reasoning; what Wynter (1990) refers to as the sex/gender anatomical schema that is also often thought of as divinely ordained by a Christian God in the case of the West.

To put it in Oyěwùmí's words, in the West "the body is the bedrock on which the social order is founded … [it] is always in view and on view" (Oyěwùmí, 1997: 2). Considering the heavy reliance of the West on the body and what is seen to determine hierarchy, status and/or (dis)privilege, Oyěwùmí concludes that indeed, within the Western episteme, 'seeing is believing' because knowledge is predicated on what can be evidenced through sight. Oyěwùmí calls this mode of knowing that depends on what is seen a 'worldview'. She then contrasts the idea of a 'worldview' with that of a world-sense', which is an Afrocentric method of knowing that relies on "privileging senses other than the visual or even [employs] a combination of senses" (Oyěwùmí, 1997: 3). As will be demonstrated later, an Afrocentric system that moves beyond what is seen (visually) to organise society opens up possibilities for various configurations of being that cannot be thought possible within the confines of rigid Eurocentric sex/gender regimes, for example, subjectivities such as male mothers and female fathers.

Oyěwùmí (1997) consistently argues that questions of gender and sex, women, and men, are primarily Western preoccupations that have been exported to other contexts and

subsequently universalised as systems and institutions that transverse temporal and spatial locations, and are framed as omnipresent. As Oyěwùmí puts it, "due to imperialism … [the gender] debate has been universalised to other cultures, and its immediate effect is to inject Western problems where such issues originally did not exist" (Oyěwùmí, 1997:9). Oyěwùmí (1997) then dedicates her intellectual project to exorcising the Oyo Yorùbá culture of this imposition by showing how the Oyo Yorùbá have lived since time immemorial without organising their societal, economic, and religious institutions in terms of sex and gender.[9] She maintains that the central conceptual unit that should be used when studying Oyo society is age or seniority and lineage. Oyěwùmí deliberately conflates the usage of the conceptual categories 'gender' and 'sex' in her analysis because, as she argues, sex and gender are social constructs that essentially feed into one another in one way or another.

However, Oyěwùmí's (1997) analysis could have been made richer had she used the two terms (sex and gender) separately, and in conversation with the conceptual terms she creates to refer to anatomical differences, namely anatomical-sex (anasex), anatomical female (anafemale) and anatomical male (anamale). For instance, while the premise of Oyěwùmí's (1997) argument is that the Yorùbá do not do gender, Amadiume's (1987) argument is not that the Igbo do not have a sex/gender system but rather that sex and gender are not configured according to the logic of the sex/gender anatomical schema. For the Igbo, one's sex need not necessarily correspond to their gender. Amadiume's (1987) argument is an interesting case in point of the inauguration of a complex system that refuses the neat binary placed Western gender system, which gained prominence with the advent of Western modernity. Still, Oyěwùmí's (1997) project is important because her work, which relies on language and everyday practices of the Oyo Yorùbá in pre-colonial times, convincingly demonstrates that the key units of analysis to study how status and/or (dis)privilege are allocated in traditional Oyo Yorùbá society is a mixture of kinship status/lineage (whether one is an insider or outsider within a given kinship group) and age/seniority. Her account is radical because, in her view, the question of one's anatomy and gender does not feature in her account of social stratification.

### *2.5.3 Amadiume: The Case of the Nnobi*

That said, Amadiume's (1987) point of departure is different to that of Oyěwùmí because, in her analysis, the presence of a sex/gender system among the Nnobi is very established and can

[9] While I disagree with Oyěwùmí's (1997) conflation of sex and gender in her analysis, I will not at this point engage in a critique of why it could have been beneficial for her to treat gender and sex separately even as she argues that the two are western social constructs and can therefore not neatly apply to pre-colonial Yorùbá society and cosmology.

therefore be witnessed in all spheres of life. Her point of divergence from dominant scholarship on sex and gender is two-pronged. First, she argues that Nnobi society was historically matriarchal, and patriarchal dominance began to gain prominence from the pre-colonial period until its total triumph over matriarchy with the advent of colonialism which entrenched a patriarchal system. Second, notwithstanding the presence of a patriarchal system among the Nnobi, she maintains that their sex/gender system is very fluid and illegible to an untrained Western eye which tends to universalise rigid sex/gender systems that almost exclusively result in the subjugation of wom[x]n. While the premise of Oyěwùmí's (1997) argument is that the Yorùbá do not do gender, Amadiume's (1987) argument is not that the Igbo do not recognise sex and gender but rather that sex and gender are not configurated in the same way as they are in Western scholarship. One's sex and gender do not necessarily correspond

For instance, Amadiume (1987) purports that traditional Nnobi homes have two units, the matricentric unit and the patricentric unit. The patricentric unit, which is the homestead, is where males exercise dominance. The matricentric unit (the compound in the homestead) is where wives/ those that marry into a lineage (along with their offspring) reside and exercise power. However, gender roles are not fixed in this system. Amadiume maintains that daughters that are unmarried are able to play the role of males in cases of the absence of a male heir that will inherit the homestead. In other cases, a daughter that is married will be recalled from their marital home to their homestead to occupy the position of a male, in the absence of a male heir. Amadiume refers to such daughters as male daughters.

Amadiume (1987) identifies multiple sites in which matriarchal power is harnessed, and in some cases, supersedes patriarchal power. These avenues include the presence and influence of the divine Goddess Idemili and the status she grants womxn to whom she grants the honour of holding the Ekwe title. [10] Ekwe title holders are afforded the opportunity to enlist other womxn's labour either voluntarily or by engaging in a womxn-to-womxn marriage and taking wives. Amadiume refers to womxn who take on wives as female husbands. They are then entitled to their wife's labour. According to Amadiume, "the female-husband might give the wife a 'male' husband somewhere else and adopt the role of a mother to her but claim her services. The wives might also stay with [the female husband], bearing children in her name" (Amadiume, 1987:42).

[10] Titles are a source of status and prestige in Nnobi society. The more titles one has, the more influence one holds in various aspects of Nnobi life, including politics, judiciary and economics.

Also central to the matriarchal system is the status accorded to motherhood and the power which stems from there. Amadiume (1987), like Oyěwùmí (1997) bemoans and challenges universalised notions of womxn's position according to Eurocentric and Western-centric feminist accounts. She argues that,

> To [Western feminist scholars], the universal social and cultural inferiority of women was a foregone conclusion: 'sexual asymmetry is presently a universal fact of human life'. This kind of global presupposition is itself ethnocentric. Furthermore, the domestic/public dichotomy which led them to the conclusion that maternal and domestic roles were responsible for the supposed universal subordination of women was a feature of their particular class and culture [...] Hence their call for changes in two directions: one, that men should be made to participate in the domestic spheres of childcare and housework; two, that women should 'participate equally with men in the public world of work'. (Amadiume, 1987:66)

Because of the gender fluidity of the Nnobi, their system does not set in stone the sex of the people who play particular roles within both systems. Therefore, womxn are also able to access positions of influence, which would be typically reserved for males. Additionally, like in the system of the Oyo Yorùbá Oyěwùmí expands upon, seniority also play a role in according one status and social capital in the case of the Nnobi.

### *2.5.4 Consolidating Oyěwùmí, Amadiume through Nzegwu*

Nkiru Nzegwu (1998) metes out a harsh critique against Amadiume for imposing foreign concepts into her reading and translation of Igbo society. Nzegwu (1998) focuses on several glaring inconsistencies and shortcomings apparent in Amadiume's (1987) book. In her article titled 'Chasing Shadows: The Misplaced search for Matriarchy' (1998), Nzegwu problematises Amadiume's (1987) insistence on employing a gendered lens to read the Igbo society, which forces her into the trap of thinking in binary and oppositional terms. These binary oppositions include: *mkpuke* versus *obi,* matriarchy versus patriarchy, and male versus female. [11] Nzegwu (1998) maintains that because gendered thinking is foreign to the Igbo and the Igbo world-sense, Amadiume (1987) then becomes forced to create a third and awkward "gender neuter" category which Nzegwu sees as a tool which Amadiume employs to create false gender flexibility in Nnobi, which not only is fabricated but is unnecessary, in a society where gender historically has never been an idea of compartmentalising human beings.

[11] Mkpuke refers to the matricentric unit which is a site of matriarchal power according to Amadiume (1987). This bears similarities to what Oyěwùmí (1997) refers to as the family compound. In South Africa it is referred to as indlu. Obi refers to the patricentric unit, which is the site of patriarchal power. This is similar to what Oyěwùmí refers to as the homestead where all the family compounds are located. In South Africa, this is referred to as umzi.

According to Nzegwu,

> Amadiume manufactures a "neuter gender construct" (a third classificatory system) to deal with the occasions when "men and womxn share the same status and play the same roles without social stigma". In other words, she tries to bypass the internal inconsistency of the theoretical postulations that men and womxn, who are basically gendered, at the same time can be neuter-gendered. (Nzegwu, 1998:601)

Nzegwu (1998) attributes this shortcoming to the fact that Amadiume (1987), although aware of the impact of colonial contact and domination among the Igbo, falls into the trap of adopting concepts that came with colonialism uncritically and imposes them where they do not belong. Adopting a gendered framework for studying the Igbo society results in reading (into Igbo society) gender inequality, patriarchy, and wom[x]n's subordination.

Consequently, Nzegwu (1998) demonstrates that Amadiume's (1987) analysis, although attempting to make a case for a society in which matriarchy and patriarchy exist side by side, ends up becoming a society in which maleness is privileged and matriarchal power always becomes overshadowed and overcome by patriarchal power. Sex differentiation quickly assumes sex discrimination and the ultimate standard of being becomes male, just like in Western patriarchal society. This becomes evident in the fact that, even in Amadiume's (1987) gender flexibility, the gender street becomes a one-way road, and the only way to become is male. Daughters become male, and wives become husbands. We are not told of instances where males become daughters or wives.

Furthermore, according to Amadiume's (1987) account, the womxn who get the 'privilege' of becoming husbands and making it into organisations and political structures typically reserved for men are very wealthy and exceptional. This creates an impression of a society that privileges maleness and has womxn who have penis envy. In other words, Amadiume paints a picture of a society in which gender flexibility is predicated on the exceptionalism of womxn. Only then do they get to graduate into the status of maleness. The case of the institution of male daughters, suggests that daughters/females are 'othered' in relation to males/sons who are then presented as preferable, especially in the enterprise of continuing the family name and lineage.

Nzegwu's (1998) intervention is a productive bridge between Amadiume's (1987) and Oyěwùmí's (1997) contributions. It does a stellar job at marrying the two projects. Through Nzegwu (1998), we are able to imagine the existence of kinship systems that have matricentric units that are not exclusively female and patricentric units that are not exclusively male. These units can be thought of alternatively through Oyěwùmí's lens of outsiders who marry into a lineage (matricentric spheres) and insiders of a lineage (patricentric units). And thus, the status,

power and influence that flows from each sphere does not flow from one's anatomy but status as insiders/outsiders in that sphere, and their age/seniority.

## 2.6 Consolidation of Conceptual Framework

Given a general reading of the works of Amadiume (1987), Oyěwùmí (1997) , Amadiume and Nzegwu (1998), I have selected certain themes to guide my study. I look at the following sites and institutions: language, lineage, marriage, and the role of the sacred and/or ancestral ties. The work of Oyěwùmí (1997) and Nzegwu (1998) emphasises the importance of using linguistic evidence coupled with everyday practices and discourse to unearth the deeper meanings and significance of cultural practices. In both Yorùbá and Igbo languages, there is no substantive linguistic evidence to suggest the existence of a society that organises human beings in terms of their sex and gender. Instead, in Yorùbá society, Oyěwùmí (1997) indicates that there is rather linguistic evidence to suggest the presence of a system that orders humans according to seniority and kinship status. Indeed, when comparing the linguistic evidence with everyday practice, Oyěwùmí (1997) found a corresponding system in everyday practice that allocates status and privilege to senior members of society. Likewise in this project, I make use of language as an evidential field coupled with everyday practices to unearth indigenous modes of social organisation.

The second theme that runs consistently through the works of the aforementioned scholars is that of the importance of looking at lineage structures as a unit of analysis. Coupled with this aspect of lineage is the corresponding theme of marriage. Both Amadiume (1987) and Oyěwùmí (1997) speak to dual kinship structures that are constituted by consanguine lineage members and those that marry into a family. In the works of both scholars there is evidence to suggest that consanguine lineage members enjoy more status and privilege in relation to those members that marry into the family. Thus, what Amadiume (1987) has called the matricentric unit and patricentric units appear instead to be centres of power that are occupied by those that marry into families but remain not fully assimilated into a family and centres of power that are occupied by consanguine kinship members.

In each homestead, it appears that the centre of power lies with blood relatives that share the same ancestor. From this point on, I wish to term this system a 'kinshiparchy', a system that privileges the status of those that are born into a lineage and share ancestral ties and clan names with the rest of the kinship group (consanguine family members). This group is distinguished from those that marry into a family through the exchange of bride wealth, those

that Oyěwùmí (1997) refers to as ‘outsiders’ that never fully become assimilated into the new family.

Linked to the question of lineage and kinship is that of marriage. While the logic of the kinshiparchy establishes the elevated status and position of kinship members that are born into a particular lineage in relation to ‘outsiders’, it is evident that the diminished status of ‘outsiders’ is only to the degree that they are not in their own homestead among their own blood relatives. When they are among their people, their status increases in relation to outsiders within that context. Thus, a kinshiparchal system is also a system where one’s status and/or (dis)privilege is constantly in flux, depending on the context, and is relational.

The final theme that I adopt to guide my research is the aspect of the role of the sacred and/or ancestral ties in the allotting and/or withholding of status and/or (dis)privilege. In the works of both Amadiume (1987) and Oyěwùmí (1997), the sacred plays an important role. Oyěwùmí (1997) refers to the important role of ancestral ties in establishing the strong bonds between consanguine family members. Amadiume (1987) also makes reference to the important role the sacred, in the form of the Goddess Idemili, plays in conferring increased status among womxn in the form of titles. Likewise, I explore the role of the sacred in the context of South Africa and its function the process of allotting and/or denying status and/or (dis)privilege.

## 2.7 Conclusion

This chapter has covered the research design of this study. In it, I’ve discussed the methodology, the methods used for data collection and analysis, and the theoretical framework that informs the lens through which I approach this study. I make use of CDA to examine how dominant discourse(s) on sex and gender in SA have presented, concealed and distorted knowledge(s) on indigenous sex/gender systems and modes of being. I approach CDA using a mixture of textual analysis, linguistics, archival work and historical method. I read and make sense of the various discourses on sex and gender in the context of South Africa using the Azanian philosophical tradition as a theoretical framework.

The Azanian philosophical tradition demands that the fact of colonial conquest and coloniality be centred in knowledge production in order to challenge the prevailing tendency in the humanities and social sciences of adopting and making use of methods, vocabularies, categories and definitions that are products of coloniality and that serve to maintain a colonial epistemic order. To that end, to unmask the coloniality and Eurocentricity that characterises sex/gender discourses in SA, I make use of the work of Afrocentric scholars Amadiume (1987),

Oyěwùmí (1997), and Nzegwu (1998) whose work complicates the logic of the sex/gender anatomical schema.

In the next chapter, I examine dominant discourses on sex and gender as they pertain to those that have been colonised and racialised as Black. I centralise the question of race to demonstrate that race and gender are contingent conceptual categories, with gender being contingent on race.

# Chapter 3: On the Impossibility of Black Woman: A Literature Review

*Biology is destiny ~ Sigmund Freud*
*Obsession with the bio-logic ~ Oyeronke Oyěwùmí*

## Part 1: The discursive construction of 'woman'

### 3.1 Introduction

The call for the re-reading of African sex/gender systems using Afrocentric frameworks arises from observing the inadequacies of the western feminist framework when it comes to making sense of indigenous ways and modes of being. In efforts to remedy the erasure and distortion that results from the inadequate universalisation of the female experience by mainstream feminisms, different branches of feminism have emerged over time, such as Black feminisms and African feminisms, which have sought to respond to the demands of their key constituencies. While I recognise these interventions, I argue that the feminist framework(s) has baggage in the form of language and the concepts inherent in it (see Bucholtz, 1996). This baggage cannot be extricated from it unless feminism ceases to be. For instance, the literature which traces the genealogy of the feminist project points to the European context. This historical detail is significant because it points to the context that necessitated the emergence of the feminist movement. Moreover, it serves as a clue to why it is difficult for some scholars from the Afrocentric tradition to see the feminist project as useful and applicable in making sense of African ways of being.

This two-part literature review is also two-pronged. Its overarching aim is to bring to light some of the shortcomings of mainstream feminism in theorising Black womxn. Part 1 deals with the Western context and grapples with literature that demonstrates that the episteme from which feminism emerges renders the idea of 'woman' that is Black impossible. Part 2 focuses on the South African context and scans some of the earliest feminist works that attempt to make sense of the place and the idea of 'Black womxn' in the Black nationalist movement of the 20$^{th}$ century. Here, I demonstrate that, while the Black nationalist movement may have fallen short in centring Black womxn's demands, literary accounts suggests that the Black womxn themselves didn't necessarily organise their political activism around the category of 'woman'.

That is, the chapter first unpacks the subject of 'woman' as per western liberal, radical and postmodernist traditions. It demonstrates that it is not uncommon in Western philosophy to find 'woman' theorised as the ontologically displaced other. Moreover, the literature demonstrates that the category 'woman' is not just descriptive but also prescriptive and that whiteness is integral to this prescription. I maintain that there is a level of coherence demanded from wom[x]n to merit their identification as 'woman'. Likewise, the scholars covered in this literature review mostly theorise gender as a social construct contingent on various aspects such as gender performance, sexuality, and desire and pay scant attention to the subject of race, which is an important determining aspect in the process of the creation of the subject called 'woman'.

In Part 1, I demonstrate that at both the theoretical and empirical level, because of the historical dehumanization of Black people, 'Blackness' has been discursively constructed as a repellent to genderedness. I maintain that for Blacks to be gendered, they would first have to be considered fully human, and thus cease to be Black. At the theoretical level, the chapter establishes that, although 'woman' itself is a category of negation, it still exists within the domain of humanity because 'woman' is discursively constructed as the female other of the human species. However, if we recognise Blackness as a category of those denied humanity, allocating the category 'woman' to those deemed non-beings becomes impossible. At the empirical level, I draw on the experiences of Black womxn such as Sojourner Truth and others to demonstrate how historically, Black womxn's lived experiences are different from the Eurocentric gender norm because of their Blackness. As already mentioned in the previous chapter, one of the three trends that Modiri (2021) is critical of in the South African Social Sciences and Humanities is the dislocation of studies and theory building on South Africa from other Black radical traditions. The coloniality that plagues South Africa is not unique to it, it also affects diasporic Blacks and people of colour living outside of the African continent, albeit in different shades. In heading the call of the Azanian tradition to foster theory building networks with diasporic Blacks, I draw from the work of Wynter and her critical analysis of the workings and tiers of 'othering' in a colonial situation, especially because she provides me with the tools to articulate specifically the condition of 'blackening' in ways that the primary scholars I use in my conceptual framework (Amadiume, 1987 and Oyěwùmí, 1997) are unable to.

I use Wynter's (1990) critical analysis of Caliban's womxn as a gateway to contextualise the position of indigenous, colonised and dehumanised (Black) womxn. Their position (colonised indigenous womxn) is juxtaposed to that of Miranda who represents the

quintessential white woman. Wynter's allegory of Caliban's womxn captures the complexities of how subjectivities are formed and stratified in a colonial situation like South Africa. For this reason, I use it as a point of entry to make a case for why I maintain that the category of 'woman' is complicit in questions of coloniality and racialisation.

### 3.2 Locating Caliban's Other in Western Feminist Literature

Using the Shakespearian play, *The Tempest*, Wynter (1990) narrates the shift in human taxonomies that occurred with the European expansion to the 'new world'. She maintains that this shift ushered in an ontological and epistemological mutation where previously the ordering of humans was in accordance with a sex/gender divide that relied on anatomical difference. The anatomical schema was thought to be divinely ordained. The man was the head, and the woman was to submit to him. With the expansion to the 'new world', the enslavement, and the colonisation of Africa(ns), a new order of human categorisation was inaugurated. [12] The primary determinant of hierarchy shifts from the sex/gender anatomical schema onto the centrality of physiognomy.

As Wynter (1990) observes, in *The Tempest* we see how the sex/gender anatomical schema becomes subject to the physiognomic schema of race in the 'new world'. The new physiognomic schema took precedence over the anatomical. *The Tempest* is a play by Shakespeare about a ruler of Milan, Prospero, who has been exiled to an island by his power-hungry brother, Antonio. The small island where Prospero has been exiled was once ruled by Sycorax, depicted in the play as an evil witch. Prospero takes on rulership of the island and all the spirits and beings that inhabit the island, which includes Caliban, who is the son of the late Sycorax. Caliban is, in fact, the rightful heir to the island by virtue of being the son of the previous ruler. However, with Prospero now taking rulership of the island by force, Caliban is demoted to being Prospero's least favourite servant. He is portrayed as a monster, unlike other characters in the play who are human. His ontology is questionable. The recurring theme as it pertains to Caliban is that he rejects Prospero's rulership and wants to kill him (Shakespeare, Raffel and Bloom, 2006).

Various scholars have interpreted *The Tempest* as a play about the European expansion into the 'new world' (see Griffiths, 1983; Skura, 1989; Willis, 1989). According to Griffith (1983:160), "the main focus has been […] the relationship between Prospero and Caliban, the

[12] While I mainly focus on the experience of Africans, I am aware that the work of Wynter is inclusive of the Latin experience as well. This is an area that is beyond the scope of this study. Thus, I will exclusively focus on the experience of enslaved and colonized Africans for the purposes of this dissertation.

coloniser and the colonised, the ruler and the ruled, the white and the Black, the aristocrat and the democrat". Although male, Caliban is relegated to the category of non-human. He is not as human as Prospero, who is framed as fully human and rational. Caliban becomes the opposite – savage, native and irrational. According to Wynter (1990), the physiognomic schema that runs parallel to the antecedent sex/gender anatomical schema promotes Miranda (Prospero's daughter) to a position closer to that of Prospero and furthest from Caliban. Her position is that of a subject that, although she may be considered irrational as a woman, is "capable-of-rationality" (Wynter, 1990: 358) as a white woman. Miranda's superiority over Caliban is guaranteed by her positioning as belonging to the category of human, of which Caliban does not.

Wynter (1990) notes how, despite the debasement of Caliban, the most invisible character that does not even merit mention in the play is Caliban's womxn, the native womxn. For Wynter, the silencing and erasure of the native womxn indexes the erasure that Black womxn have experienced in the writing of history. Even mainstream feminist accounts and scholarship have tended to focus on the experiences of Miranda, the white woman while excluding Calaban's (Black) womxn's experiences and existence.

Wynter's (1990) critical analysis of Caliban and his 'other' is useful for this project because it articulates an account of subject formation in a colonial situation like South Africa. Like Caliban, the indigenous peoples of South Africa where immediately constructed and viewed as the enemy by their coloniser. Writing of the first encounter of Dutch settler colonialists with the indigenous peoples of South Africa, Bernard Magubane (1996) maintains: "once the importance of the Cape as a place to colonize was accepted, "the Bushmen, the Hottentot, and the Kaffirs" […] "were the natural enemies of the Europeans in South Africa". Thus, like the case of Caliban and Caliban's womxn, the entry of settler colonisers in the Cape marked the theft of the land of the indigenous peoples of South Africa, and they became vilified in the process. This is how the indigenous peoples came to be marked as the inferior 'other'.

Therefore, I use Wynter's (1990) critical analysis of Caliban's womxn to map out the plethora of literature and discourses from which this study draws. The first group of literature is drawn from the Western feminist canon theorising the subjectivity of the proverbial Miranda as a 'woman' proper. From this group of literature, the erasure of Black womxn from being articulated as 'woman' is apparent. This gap informs the second body of work reviewed, literature that marries the subject of race to gender and is critical of Western feminism's neglect of Black womxn in their analysis.

## 3.3 The Creation of Miranda

### *3.3.1 The Liberal Tradition and its Treatment of Sex and Gender*

As is well documented, the earliest feminist literature emerged in the late 1700s as a response to the winds of change sweeping through the Western world, notably the beginning of the abolitionist movement, the French Revolution and the Haitian Revolution (Ferguson, 1992:82). Two noteworthy writers in this respect are Wollstonecraft and de Gouges, both of whom also happened to be anti-slavery abolitionists. Writing from the liberal tradition, they sought to appeal to the existing structures of the state apparatus as vehicles to achieve liberation and equality for women. For them, prejudice could be remedied through education, reason, and changing of oppressive laws (de Gouges, 1971; Wollstonecraft, 2014).

When France's National Constituent Assembly drafted the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen* in 1789, women were excluded from public life, although the decisions made within the political sphere also affected their lives. In response to the persistent exclusion of women from attaining civil rights, French political activist and playwright de Gouges wrote *The Declaration of the Rights of Woman and the Female Citizen* (1791), which sought to confront the displacement of (white) women from personhood. *The Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen* was meant to champion the inalienable civil liberties inherent to all human beings. However, the exclusion of women from this momentous document exposed their subordinate status in French society. Also in response to this occasion, Wollstonecraft authored one of the earliest feminist works, *The Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (first published in 1792). It made a case for equal educational training for men and women to allow them to exercise their rational faculties and move away from concerning themselves with frivolous activities such as beauty and fashion (Wollstonecraft, 2014). These early feminist writers and theorists justified their claims to full humanity and personhood using the very same language employed to deny their status to full humanity, the language of rationality.

For example, the postscript of de Gouges's *Declaration of the Rights of Women and the Female Citizen* (1791) reads, "woman, wake up. The powerful empire of nature is no longer surrounded by prejudice, fanaticism, superstition, and lies. The flame of truth has dispersed all the clouds of folly and usurpation" (de Gouges, 1791). In this statement, the centrality given to reason becomes evident. De Gouges's (1791) position is not one against the subordination of women on an ethical basis. Instead, her attempt at making a claim for the recognition of women as humans hinges on the claim of rationality. In other words, her position says that white women ought not to be subordinated because they too are rational subjects and thus fully

human. The implication then becomes that the subjugation of those deemed irrational/non-rational somehow becomes justified.

Ferguson (1992) provides historical background of the context in which Wollstonecraft wrote *The Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) and other influential texts demanding justice and equality for all human beings. Living through the early stages of the slavery abolitionist movement in England and later the Haitian revolution, Wollstonecraft was very aware of the plight facing Black people and native people in the Americas, Western Europe, and Africa. She often used the metonym of slavery to describe the plight of white women in Western Europe. Ferguson maintains that the *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* "contains over eighty references" (Ferguson, 1992:82) to slavery. This shows the parallels Wollstonecraft drew between the plight of slavery and the subjugation of (white) women. Thus, her work allows us to witness a context in which the two schema's that Wynter highlights intersect, namely, the anatomical schema of sex/gender hierarchy and the physiognomic schema of racial hierarchy.

Throughout *The Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft (2014) uses the generic "man" to index white men, and her use of 'woman' is used exclusively to refer to white women. The enslaved are treated as being without gender. All we know about them is that they are slaves. In lamenting the treatment of women and the enslaved, she maintains that "formed to live with such an imperfect being as man, they ought to learn from the exercise of their faculties the necessity of forbearance; but all the sacred rights of humanity are violated by insisting on blind obedience; or, the most sacred rights belong *only* to man" (Wollstonecraft, 2014:111). Historical evidence tells us that slaves, being constituted by both male and female sexes, were equally dominated by white men, as were white women. Thus, the 'man' that Wollstonecraft refers to in the text are, in fact, white men. Her treatment of white men as the normative 'man' implicates her in a discourse that refuses to see the enslaved as full human beings that warrant gender distinction.

My submission here is not that I agree that gender distinction ought to be a prerequisite for the status of humanity. Instead, I am engaging Wollstonecraft (2014) with an understanding that within the context in which she wrote, gender difference was considered a marker of humanity and civilisation. I also maintain that her framing of the enslaved as existing outside of gender implicates her in a discourse of their dehumanisation. The discourse Wollstonecraft (2014) was contributing towards is one which framed the anatomical schema of sex/gender and the physiognomic schema of race as co-constitutive, i.e. complimentary in the making of a human. In other words, if the civilising mission aimed to civilise non-humans to the status of

humanity, this also entailed teaching the colonised and enslaved how to be gendered, primarily because they were not thought of as gendered to begin with. The two projects were complimentary. It is in this sense, therefore, that the works of Amadiume (1987), Oyěwùmí (1997) and Najmabadi (2005) demonstrate that societies whose modes of being existed outside of the Western binary oriented, cis-gendered heteronormative distinction came to be interpreted as indexing a society that was yet to evolve to the status of civility.

*The Vindication of the Rights of Women* is a contradictory text that advocates for the rights of women and the enslaved while simultaneously evoking discourses that entrench the subjugation of both groups, but mainly the enslaved. Ferguson describes it as a text that "trips over itself, its variant vindications ideologically incompatible" (Ferguson, 1992:98). Wollstonecraft seems to, at some level, understand the parallels that exist between the sex/gender anatomical schema and the physiognomic schema of racial difference. Both were propped up for and by the white man. However, she also seems oblivious to her positioning at the intersection of these schemas, although the discourse she is part of exposes her position as one that is superior to the genderless "savages" (Wollstonecraft, 2014:219).

Likewise, Wollstonecraft's (2014) integrationist proclivity is even more evident in her assertion that "If… [women] be really capable of acting like rational creatures, let them not be treated like slaves; or, like the brutes who are dependent on the reason of man, when they associate with him; but cultivate their minds, give them the salutary, sublime curb of principle, and let them attain conscious dignity by feeling themselves only dependent on God." (Wollstonecraft, 2014:61). In this statement, the attempt by Wollstonecraft to redeem white women from the ontological dislocated status of the 'other' by distancing herself from the slaves becomes very evident. Wollstonecraft, in this instance, firmly occupies the position of the proverbial 'Miranda' of which Wynter speaks. In other words, her feminist project became an integrationist project onto an already existing episteme that has the logic of exclusion as its basis.

### *3.3.2 Radicalised Mirandas and their Rejection of Prospero*

Having briefly touched on the early feminist writers of the liberal tradition; I move on to the radical tradition. Radical feminism emerges near the end of the 1960s. Murphy and Livingstone indicate that "it grew out of the failures of the socialist movement to deal adequately with the oppression of women" (Murphy and Livingstone, 1985:61). As the second wave feminist movement gained traction, the civil rights movement was also underway. Once again, critical events in feminist history were running concurrently with key moments in Black history of the

Western world. However, it should also be noted that the global anti-colonial movement was also afoot in many parts of the African continent at the same time.

At the risk of sounding redundant, radical feminists took a radical approach to diagnosing the oppression of women. As maintained by Murphy and Livingstone (1985:62), they perceived the subjugation of (white) women as the primary oppression, above classism and racism and other forms of oppression. According to this view, *all* men oppress *all* wom[x]n, regardless of race and class (see Murphy and Livingstone, 1985). For radical feminist scholar Firestone, the basis of the oppression of women is found in nature – the biology of women and men. Thus, the only way to overthrow the system of heteropatriarchy would require conquering nature itself. Consequently, according to Firestone (2015:8), some things are a matter of fact about the human species, including that reproduction happens through males mating with females. However, females shoulder the burden of falling pregnant and carrying a foetus to full term – a period through which she is dependent on the male/father figure for subsistence. Also, the infant's dependency on the mother for survival means that for an extended period post-partum, the mother and the child remain vulnerable and dependent on the male figure for their survival. Firestone identifies this natural phenomenon as the basis of a sexual division of labour between males and females, which later became institutionalised into a patriarchal system that keeps women subservient to men. And thus, for her, the solution lies in modifying the institution of the family and reproduction.

Firestone (2015:10) maintains that "the natural is not necessarily a 'human' value. Humanity has begun to outgrow nature: we can no longer justify maintaining a discriminatory sex class system on the grounds of its origin in nature. Indeed, for pragmatic reasons alone, it is beginning to look as if we *must* get rid of it" (emphasis original). She proposes using science and technology for fertility control among biologically born females. Moreover, because she identifies pregnancy as one of the critical sites that result in the sexual division of labour, she proposes the use of artificial reproduction using artificial wombs so that "children would be born to both sexes equally, or independently of either" (Firestone, 2015:11). Her utopian vision is a society in which sex distinction is abolished entirely. At the risk of introducing arguments made in the conceptual framework too prematurely, it is important to highlight that the work of Amadiume (1987, 1997) and Oyěwùmí (2000; 2016) present a counterargument to the universalising posture that Firestone assumes that mothering is inherently a disempowering thing for wom[x]n. In many African societies, motherhood is a source of prestige and status for wom[x]n. This point will be expanded upon in the subsequent chapters. Therefore, it is

evident that the 'woman' central to her framing is not generic. She is white and of Western origin.

Radical feminist scholars also went on to demonstrate that the reach of the patriarchal oppression of men over women was not only restrictive but was also prescriptive. Another feminist scholar from the radical tradition, Rich (1980), refers to this regime as "compulsory heterosexuality" – a system that seeks to control and discipline how women live and exist. According to Rich (1980), the patriarchal project of gendering constructs and controls all aspects of the lives of its subjects. For instance, on the question of desire, Rich (1980) indicates how a vast literature in the social sciences portrays the lesbian experience as deviant, as either pathology or as a deliberate rebellion against men by bitter women. The assumption here becomes that women are inherently sexually attracted to men, and anything outside of this scope is considered a pathology (Rich, 1980:632). The idea of being a woman 'proper' then hinges on the condition of one's exclusive sexual attraction to men. Once again, later chapters of this dissertation will demonstrate that the society that Rich theorises as having a compulsory heterosexual order is Western and white. The works of thinkers such as Morgan and Reid (2003), Nkabinde and Morgan (2005), Nkabinde (2008) and Stobie (2011) provide counter evidence of the existence of indigenous spiritual practices in South Africa that necessitate same-sex coupling. Therefore, the notion of "compulsory heterosexuality" is not necessarily a universally occurring phenomenon.

Still, the contributions of radical feminist scholars demonstrate that what the Euro-modern society has come to accept as natural is, in fact, a social construct. For example, compulsory heterosexuality dictates that women 'desire' men and depend on them economically. Living in a society with a gendered public-private divide insists on the private sphere being the only domain where women legitimately exist and belong. Women's survival, the primary task of subsistence, hinges on them having relations with men, who society has also constructed as the workers and breadwinners (see Pateman, 1988). Therefore, the nuclear heterosexual family becomes necessitated, normalised, and naturalised through sociogeny. In this way, compulsory heterosexuality becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.

The primacy given to the issue of patriarchal oppression above other forms of oppression presented real challenges to radical feminists regarding the problem of race. Many radical scholars chose to ignore this aspect, while some, like Firestone, sought to subsume the question of race under her broader analysis of patriarchal oppression. In other words, the analysis of the sex/gender schema took precedence over the physiognomic schema of race in radical feminist thought.

### *3.3.3 Miranda on Caliban and his Other*

When radical feminists attribute the oppression of women to men, they mean all men. They do not account for the racial, class and sexuality dynamics that contribute to the constitution of the subjects 'man' and 'woman'. This is an aspect that I find particularly interesting about this branch of feminism. Firestone's *Dialectic of Sex* (2015) contains a chapter titled "Racism: The Sexism of the Family of Man", in which she quotes Angelina Grimké's letter to Theodore Weld. The letter reads: "the slave may be freed, and woman be where she is, but the women cannot be freed, and the slave remain where he is". The quote extracted from Grimké refers to "women" and "slaves" in distinct ways. The assertion is that were slaves to be freed, their freedom would not necessarily result in the emancipation of women, but if women were to be free, their liberation would somehow culminate (or result) in the freedom of the slave. I am not necessarily interested in the question of how this would take place. Instead, I seek to unpack who the 'women' and the 'slaves' that Grimké refers to are. To begin with, it seems unlikely that Grimké would envision a world where all white women and only half of the slave population – namely female slaves – would be freed independently of the male slaves. This would be absurd and impractical; how and on what basis would only one half of the slave population be freed? Therefore, Grimké's case would make more sense if, by 'women', we understand her to be referring to white women. However, this would, in turn, mean that the 'slaves' that she refers to are constituted by both male and female slaves at best. At worst, it would mean that Grimké thinks of the enslaved as all male, thus meaning that the female slaves are not thought of nor framed as women. Either way, the implication is that Grimké, like Wollstonecraft, frames the 'slave' as positioned outside the gender schema. They are collectively thought of in terms of the physiognomic schema of race.

Firestone (2015) seems to want to erase the fact that she (like other Western feminist writers before her) sees Black people mainly through the physiognomic schema of race. She asserts that racism is, in fact, a form of sexism among men, with the white man being the most dominant. Firestone (2015) borrows from psychoanalysis the Electra and Oedipus complex to communicate her point. She thinks of the relations between Black people and white people in terms of a nuclear family situation, with the white man being the father figure, the wife being a white woman, and the Black people as their children. For her, the Black male envies the 'father's masculine power and wants to be him. In other words, he wants to be 'the man'. This desire to be the 'father' also means that the Black man desires his 'mother' – the white woman (Firestone, 2015:111).

This characterisation is similar to Curry's assertion that

> if whiteness is masculine in relation to Blackness, then Blackness becomes relationally defined not as masculine and feminine, but it lacks the power of white masculinity. Thus, Black maleness is, in fact, a de-gendered negation of white maleness that is feminine because of its subordinate position to white masculinity, but not female, because Black maleness lacks a specific gender coordinate that corresponds to either white maleness or white femaleness. (Curry, 2017:6)

On the other hand, the Black womxn is portrayed as either envious of her 'father' (rejecting the female in herself) or desiring her father sexually (putting herself in competition with the white woman).

Firestone's framing of Black men and womxn renders them agnostic to the categories of "men" and "women". They are perpetually portrayed as variants. The Black man is not a man but a "pimp" (Firestone, 2015:114). He is a "degraded male" (Firestone, 2015:114). On the other hand, the Black womxn is not a woman but a "whore" (Firestone, 2015:115). She then concludes that the relations among Black people "become corrupted – not like that of man over woman, husband over wife, but like that of pimp over whore." (Firestone, 2015:114). Thus, Firestone (2015) fails to realise that her 'sexism among men' theory is actually racism denialism that she fails to confront. If Black people are denied the status of men and women, it appears to stem from the fact of their Blackness. Thus, the physiognomic schema in this sense overdetermines the sex/gender anatomical schema in her analysis in that when it comes to Black people, their race and status as slaves (enslaved) makes the fact of their sex and gender inconsequential to Firestone. They are not seen as gendered beings.

### 3.3.4 *Post-Structuralist Feminism: The Deconstruction of Miranda*

The feminist traditions I have dealt with thus far treat patriarchy as repressive and restrictive power. They mobilise around the key subject of feminist discourse, the 'woman' (Butler, 2011:75). While the theorising around the category 'woman' made sense for purposes of political organising, the uncritical adoption of this language forecloses opportunities to grapple with how it is entrenched in the very episteme that has legitimated the oppression and othering of the female sex. As Allen maintains, "modern power subjects individuals, in both senses of the term; it simultaneously creates them as subjects by subjecting them to power" (Allen, 2016). This comes from the understanding that any subject, whether raced, gendered, or classed, is a product of sociogeny and is discursively constructed. I now turn to post-structuralist feminists who, drawing from the work of Foucault, are more interested in exploring productive power (Allen, 2016), which is a more insidious power that society tends to overlook.

For instance, Butler (2011), a post-structuralist feminist, explores questions of "subjectivation, the strength of hegemonic norms, performativity, intelligibility and desubjectivation" (Chadderton, 2018:47). Drawing from Butler, Chadderton (2018:48) maintains that "norms, often considered to be identity categories, produce subjects, rather than reflecting or describing (pre-existing) subjects … From a Butlerian point of view, an individual is subjectivated, or rendered a subject through norms and discourses". Thus, the category of 'woman' beyond being descriptive is prescriptive because "the qualifications for being a subject must first be met before representation can be extended" (Butler, 2011:76). Part of qualifying as 'woman' entails that one ought to be intelligible as such. According to Butler (2011:119), "intelligible genders are those which in some sense institute and maintain relations of coherence and continuity among sex, gender, sexual practice, and desire".[13] Anything outside this scope becomes unintelligible and thus questionable to the sex/gender anatomical regime.

This, therefore, raises questions around what it means for the subject to accept and evoke an identity marker that represents the basis of their oppression. In other words, by mobilising around the category of 'woman', feminism becomes implicated in constructing and (re)producing the very subject it later comes to represent. And to borrow from Butler, this process does not only function to define or describe, but also prescribes, controls and disciplines the subject as well (Butler, 2011:77). For example, historically, 'woman' has been recognised as a subjectivity that dresses a certain way and performs roles often associated with care work. Rich (1980) demonstrates that women's sexual desire has also been historically prescribed. These are aspects that have predominantly been socially constructed. However, Anne-Fausto Sterling (1993) and Butler's (2011) work demonstrates that even elements of 'woman' that have been primarily thought of as natural are, in fact, products of sociogeny. As Butler (2011) indicates, the idea of 'sex' is often thought of as pre-discursive, a naturally occurring phenomenon outside of human meddling. However, Butler's work shows that sex is just as much a product of sociogeny as gender is. Both sex and gender become products and instruments of a particular patriarchal, compulsory heterosexual regime that constructs its subjects in a binary fashion.

Fausto-Sterling (1993; 2000) further demonstrates this argument by documenting the history of Western medicine's investment in disciplining the body into neat categories of either male or female. The inability to conceive of sex outside of a rigid binary system resulted,

[13] I also add race to the criterion for womanhood. However, since I am dealing primarily with the works of Butler and Anne Fausto-Sterling (1993; 2000) who do not address the question of gender as it pertains to racialized subjects, I will momentarily not add this aspect to this portion of the discussion.

consequently, in the framing of intersex people as possessing anatomical features that are both male and female. The concept of "intersex" makes evident the extent to which the premise of the "sex" logic is predicated on the idea of there being two sexes that are opposites. One end of the pole is male, and the other is female. Intersex is then framed as occupying a position in the middle of a very rigid and closed spectrum of male and female. The devotion to maintaining and entrenching the logic of sexual dimorphism is most blatantly evident in the popularising of 'corrective' surgical procedures performed on intersex babies, often at birth.

Fausto-Sterling (1993:22) maintains that "recent advances in physiology and surgical technology now enable physicians to catch most intersexuals at the moment of birth. Almost at once, such infants are entered into a program of hormonal and surgical management so that they can slip quietly into society as 'normal' heterosexual males or females". This obsession to 'correct' and thus discipline bodies is evidence of a regime that refuses to imagine being and subjectivity outside of a strict male/female binary. According to this bio-logic regime, to be a true male/female entails that a particular sequence of chromosomes and reproductive organs such as ovaries or gonads and genitals is achieved. Inconsistencies in a specific sequence are perceived as demanding correction in accordance with a compulsory heterosexual order (to invoke Rich). This preoccupation with successfully 'correcting' one's sex then spills over to gender and sexual preference. Once one is re-assigned to a particular sex, parents are encouraged to raise their child as a specific gender (which corresponds to the sex that they have been assigned). The entire procedure is deemed successful only when the 'patient' enters a heterosexual coupling later in life (Fausto-Sterling, 1993).

The dominant belief in the medical fraternity is that these 'corrective' procedures are humanitarian. Once they leave the hospital, infants born intersex enter a binarily constructed world that demands that they be either male or female. In the 1600s, one's sex had implications for "questions of inheritance, legitimacy, paternity, succession to title and eligibility for certain professions to be determined" (Fausto-Sterling, 1993:23). Therefore, the disciplining of 'unruly' bodies has had implications beyond just which toilets one will use. They extend to questions around where one is then placed in the hierarchy of human beings. The burden of gender intelligibility is pegged to allocating or withholding personhood status. However, what is missing from this analysis is what happens to the question of gender intelligibility when a Black body is a conduit through which one's personhood is established or withheld.

### 3.4 Introducing the Impossible

In answer to this last provocation in the preceding section, this section ushers in an unpacking of what happens when the ideas of 'woman' and 'Black' converge. Butler (2011) uses discourse analysis to unpack the role of social, political, and juridical discourse in the formation of gendered subjectivities. This is meant to strip bare the category of gender to expose just how much it relies on norms, performance, and discourse to find resilience. In this section, I wish to bring attention to the way dominant feminist literature has been characterised by the exclusion of Black womxn from gender discourse. I argue that the discourse of silence and absence pertaining to Black womxn (Caliban's other) in mainstream feminist theorisation can be interpreted as central to the process of rendering Black womxn unintelligible as women and human.

The silence of earlier feminist theorists on Black womxn should not be interpreted as void and meaningless. Sendbuehler (1994:1) reminds us that "silences can be meaningful, just as language can be without meaning". Silence has been employed as an agentic action that the powerless employ to communicate their pain and grief when verbal articulation becomes too challenging (see Motsemme, 2004). It has also been used by the powerful and those that benefit from the status quo to stifle awareness raising and possible resistance (see Alcántara-Plá and Ruiz-Sánchez, 2018). As Achino-Loeb maintains, "the road to overt ideological domination rests on a bedrock of silence running through different layers of suppression that […] begin at selective perception of significance and end in consensus that […] is the necessary condition for the effective wielding of power" (quoted in Schröter and Taylor, 2018:2). I argue that the absence and silencing of Black womxn from mainstream feminist discourse is informed by the dominant position of white women and their complicity in the racialisation of Black people. Those othered through the physiognomic schema of race became automatically unintelligible to the sex/gender anatomical schema. To be blunt, the 'gender criterion' appears to insist that before anyone can be a man or woman, they must be first fully human (Lugones, 2010, 2016).

Critical race theory scholars such as Chadderton (2018), Mbembe (2017), Dladla (2018; 2021), and Magubane (2019) demonstrate that race is not a construction that flows naturally from the phenotype of the racialised; it is a product of a socio-political process. In the case of South Africa, colonialism (as a socio-political process) played a critical role in the subjectivation of the indigenous peoples, which saw them constructed as outside the bounds of civility, and thus became (de)subjectivated (Magubane, 1996; Dladla, 2018). Returning to Wynter's critical analysis, Caliban (and his other) are not constructed as other merely because they are. Their otherness stems from a historical process that has at its core the arrival of

Prospero (a colonial figure) on the island and the subsequent subjugation of Caliban and his people. Once one unpacks this process, one realises that Caliban is not subjugated because he is a monster. Caliban is framed as a monster in order to be subjugated. It is this historical process of the blackening and othering of Black people that Mills (1997) attempts to bring to light in his book, *the Racial Contract,* which I will expand upon in the sections below.

### *3.4.1 Caliban's Other as a Non-Signatory*

Pateman (1988) and Mills (1997) in particular, have critiqued the project of western 'modernity' for the creation and entrenching of various social ills such as racism, patriarchy, and capitalism as inextricable parts of the modern state. Both scholars have taken on intellectual projects that demonstrate the extent to which the philosophising and writing about the emergence of the modern state by so-called 'social contract' theorists such as Thomas Hobbes, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, John Locke, and John Rawls, among others, disguise the reality of the racist and patriarchal nature of the modern state.

The racial contract theory accounts for how the physiognomic schema of race came to be instituted in the modern world. It is a theoretical account of the genesis of the modern polity and an alternative to the hypothetical 'social contract' accounts of philosophers such as Hobbes, Rousseau and Locke. The accounts of the latter silence and erase the racial nature of the foundation of the modern polity and the denial of natural rights to Black people and the indigenous peoples of the Americas, Australia and Africa. They also silence the history of the exclusion of Black and indigenous people from citizenship and political participation. Mills (1997) demonstrates that the colonial process, although justified as the expansion of civility and civil government to the indigenous people, never sought to incorporate them into this creation. The indigenous peoples and Black people were discursively formulated as existing outside of the bounds of civility, and they were to remain there (see also Césaire, 2000).

According to Mills (1997), what philosophers such as Hobbes, Rousseau, and Locke refer to as a social contract that establishes civil society is, in fact, a racial contract because the beneficiaries are primarily white men. This contract which facilitates the creation of civil society with its attendant business of making laws, governing, commerce and economics, becomes the sole preserve of white men to the exclusion of Black people and native people of the Americas and Australia. While white men become signatories to a contract that facilitates movement from the hypothetical state of nature to civil society, the deliberate exclusion of Black people and native people from political life implies that they are then left out of civility.

Discursively, they are constructed and thought of as remaining in a state of nature, which is then characterised as barbaric (Mills, 1997).

Much earlier than Mills (1997), Pateman (1988) meted out her critique of social contract theories for only telling half of the story of the formation of the modern polity to the exclusion of (white) women. Apart from articulating the gendered nature of the social contract, Pateman also does something noteworthy that departs from Mills. She argues that while white men become the sole signatories of the sexual contract, in her scenario, white women are not exactly 'left behind' in the state of nature as described by Mills (1997) in relation to Black people. Instead, she acknowledges that, although civil society in this patriarchal regime is not constructed as a place for (white) women, they are still essential for the reproduction of the white family. Pateman's (1988) theorisation then necessitates that she theorises a liminal space where the white woman exists, not too far from white men, but still in the state of nature, so also not in civil society. For Pateman, this liminal space is then constructed as the so-called private sphere. The private sphere exists at the border of the state of nature and civil society, beyond the reach of both spaces (Pateman, 1988).

When read side by side with the sexual contract, the racial contract greatly illuminates the workings of project Euro-modernity as it pertains to the ordering of humans into what Wynter (1990) refers to as genres of humans, i.e., establishment of a system of ordering human beings – from human, not-so-human, to non-human – and allocating civil liberties and rights accordingly. According to Curry (2017:7),

> *genre* indicates the disruption of the order founded on European man and woman, which is expressed by the term of gender. The contact of Europe with non-Europeans reordered the gender schema because the primary code of difference now became that between 'men' and 'natives,' with the traditional 'male' and 'female' distinctions now coming to play a secondary – if none the less powerful – reinforcing role within the system of symbolic representations.

Consequently, it is apparent to Pateman (1988) and Mills (1997) that theorising race necessitates that it is done side by side with gender and vice versa. As a result, they collaborated on a book project titled *Contract and Domination* (2007), where the sexual contract would be in conversation with the racial contract.

In *Contract and Domination* (2007), they acknowledge that their initial projects on the racial contract and the sexual contract, made generalisations that failed to account for both the gendered nature of racialisation and the racialised nature of gender. Thus, this new project became an attempt to synthesise their work in ways that did not erase Black womxn, who are subjugated by the intersection of the racial and sexual contracts. This synthesis made space for

the creation of the conceptual category of 'racial-patriarchy' to undo the erasure of Black womxn. Their endeavour is not a new one in this regard. Black feminist scholars such as Thiam and Blair (1986) Crenshaw (1991), Lewis (1993), Collins (2000a, 2000b) and Davis (2019) among others, have demonstrated how writing solely on patriarchy to the exclusion of race, or race to the exclusion of gender, renders Black womxn invisible because they get left out in both discourses. The discourse on racism tends to centre on the experiences of Black men, while the discourse on gender centres on the experiences of white women.

For Mills (2007), the racial-sexual contract can only be made sense of if the scope of its objects and subjects is expanded from the binary of 'signatories and non-signatories' to the racial/sexual contract, to that of contractors (signatories), sub-contractors (signatories to only one aspect of the contract, whether racial or sexual), and non-contractors (those who are not signatories to both the racial and sexual aspects of the racial-sexual contract). His logic then becomes that white men remain the sole beneficiaries and full contractors of the racial-sexual contract. White women are granted the status of sub-contractors because he is of the view that while they may not be signatories to the sexual contract, they benefit from the racial contract. On the other hand, Black men are said to be sub-contractors too because while the racial contract oppresses them, they benefit from the sexual contract. Black womxn then occupy the position of those subjugated by the racial-sexual contract in its entirety (Mills, 2007).

While the work of Mills and Pateman (2007) is not groundbreaking when it comes to synthesising the workings of racism and patriarchy to theorise racial patriarchy, I find the grammar that they employ particularly useful in helping me unpack how the workings of racism affects subjects differently from the workings of sexism, both being very ruthless notwithstanding. For instance, I find the difference in how the two authors theorise the treatment of the non-signatories of the contract to be very telling. To begin with, in the sexual contract, Pateman concedes that while white women do not enter civil society upon the formation of the polity (by white men), they also cannot be said to remain in the state of nature. Thus, the recognition that the private sphere is, in essence, a liminal space between the state of nature and civil society is very significant. This liminal space is not a luxury that Black people enjoy because, as Mills makes clear in his *Racial Contract* (1997), when white men form a polity, Black people are left in the state of nature. The historical actuality of the racial contract suggests that, as Mills aptly puts it, Black people take the state of nature with them wherever they go. This irredeemable quality leads me to conclude that Black people, in this instance, become the state of nature. They come to represent all that is backward and uncivilised (see also Fanon, 2008; Wilderson, 2008; Curry, 2017; Mbembe, 2017).

Thus, from the work of Mills (1997) and other critical race scholars, we gather that the creation of the modern state bifurcates the world into the world of the civilised and uncivilised. To put it in the language of contract, if we understand race to be the category that permanently condemns Black people to the state of nature and thinghood, then 'woman' elides Black womxn because, as Lugones (2010, 2016) argues, women are females of the human species and the logic of coloniality reserves the status of full humanity only for whites. Perhaps Spillers (1987) captures this point aptly when she argues that in the 'new world', the

> diasporic plight marked a theft of the body – a willful and violent (and unimaginable from this distance) severing of the captive body from its motive will, its active desire. Under these conditions, we lost at least gender difference in the outcome, and the female body and the male body become a territory of culture and political manoeuvre, not at all gender-related, gender-specific. (Spillers, 1987:67)

Meaning that once enslaved and racialised as 'Black', people of African descent ceased to be human and this negation also meant that everything else that would otherwise be associated with being human consequently evaded them, including the possibility of being thought of as gendered. They became labour, property, and commodities – that is, everything except human beings who merit gender distinction.

### 3.5 When Caliban's 'Other' Speaks

Western Black feminism(s) emerges due to the ambivalent discursive positionality Black womxn have historically occupied between Black men and white women. They perceived the subjugation of Black womxn as not solely based on race, gender, sexual orientation, or class, but on all variables simultaneously. And therefore, any politics which fails to take on an intersectional approach in grappling with the oppression of Black womxn is proved inadequate. This was the case during the civil rights movement in the United States of America, which mainly focused on issues of race and racism (see Crenshaw, 1991; White, 1999; Cho et al, 2013). The mainstream feminist movement, on the other hand, was mainly fixated on the question of gender and failed to account for the complex ways in which race, class, sexual orientation, and gender intersect in the subject formation of Black womxn and the implications thereof.

The disgruntlement of Black straight and lesbian womxn with the limited praxis of traditional feminism in America was captured in the Combahee River Collective Statement (1983), which is a single example of various efforts by Black womxn to be included in the feminist agenda. The historic Combahee River Collective statement maintained that "[w]e believe that sexual politics under patriarchy is as pervasive in Black womxn's lives as are the

politics of class and race. We also find it difficult to separate race from class from sex oppression because, in our lives, they are most often experienced simultaneously" (Combahee River Collective Statement, 1983). The Combahee River Collective then went on to declare that

> [a]lthough we are feminists and Lesbians, we feel solidarity with progressive Black men and do not advocate the fractionalisation that white women who are separatists demand. Our situation as Black people necessitates that we have solidarity around the fact of race, which white women, of course, do not need to have with white men, unless it is their negative solidarity as racial oppressors. (Combahee River Collective Statement, 1983:4)

They had to navigate questions of race, class, sexuality, and gender. Therefore, the need to grapple with the idea of a "we" among "women" became necessary when it became evident that the dominant voice was that of the archetypal woman who was the cis-gendered, heteronormative, middle-class white woman.

That is, writers from the Black feminist tradition have used the speech attributed to Sojourner Truth to highlight the precarious and negating relationship Black womxn have had with the category of 'woman':

> That man over there says that women need to be helped into carriages, and lifted over ditches, and to have the best place everywhere. Nobody ever helps me into carriages, or over mud-puddles, or gives me any best place! And ain't I a woman? Look at me! Look at my arm! I have ploughed and planted, and gathered into barns, and no man could head me! And ain't I a woman? I could work as much and eat as much as a man - when I could get it - and bear the lash as well! And ain't I a woman? I have borne thirteen children, and seen most all sold off to slavery, and when I cried out with my mother's grief, none but Jesus heard me! And ain't I a woman? (Truth, 1852:1)

Truth's speech raises several questions that become important in how we proceed to make sense of the place of Black womxn in the feminist movement and feminist philosophical paradigm, which is deeply rooted in the Western episteme. According to White (1999:14), Truth drew "on her slave experience to demonstrate how slavery and racism made a mockery of the logic upon which sex discrimination was based … The safety of a pedestal, questionable as it was, had not been extended to her". In other words, the brutal system of slavery in the USA and apartheid in South Africa saw Black womxn unintelligible as women.

If the Western gender regime governed by the logics of the sex/gender anatomical schema prescribed for 'woman' to be confined to the domestic sphere, doted over, raise children, and not perform hard labour, then Black womxn were exempt from this prescription. In the statement above, Truth (1852) highlights how she was coerced into performing hard labour and denied the privilege of raising her children, who were sold to other slave masters. The slave *qua* Black condition stripped Black womxn of gender and denied them the status of

motherhood (Spillers, 1987:74). Drawing from Meillassoux, Spillers highlights how children born of slave womxn existed on the 'boundary'. They were not considered to belong to the mother, nor could they be claimed by the father. They only counted as property owned by their master. This process of reducing Black womxn to raw material is a compound denial, a denial of being, gender, and motherhood (Spillers, 1987:75).

As part 2 of this literature review further demonstrates, the denying of the status of motherhood to Black womxn is a phenomenon that South Africa is all too familiar with as well. Black womxn who work as domestic workers – the single largest employment for Black womxn – have, since the earliest days of colonialism in South Africa, been confined to their employers' homes, raising their employer's children. In contrast, children of the domestic workers are left alone in the townships and rural areas to raise themselves (see Cock, 1989; Ally, 2009). [14]

Another example in the South African context where we witness the negation of Black womxn from the category of 'woman' is with the enactment of the Women's Enfranchisement Act 17 of 1930, which sought to extend the vote to [white] women in South Africa. The Act stipulates that

> notwithstanding anything to the contrary in any other law contained, every woman who (a) is a Union National; (b) is of or over the age of twenty-one years; (c) is not subject to any of the disqualifications mentioned in section two, shall, at and as from the first biennial registration of voters […] be entitled to be registered as a voter […] and to vote at any election held after the coming into operation of the voter's lists revised after the said registration in any division in which she is registered as a voter (The Women's Enfranchisement Act 17 of 1930).

The disqualifications outlined in section two that bar one from voting include committing treason against the Union of South Africa or being sentenced to imprisonment. Although millions of Black womxn living in the Union of South Africa weren't imprisoned nor had committed treason at the time of its enactment, they were not to be beneficiaries of this Act. Strikingly, the Act's 'interpretation of terms' is more straightforward in its motif. The Act becomes precise, that 'woman' means "a woman who is wholly of European parentage, extraction or descent" (The Women's Enfranchisement Act 17 of 1930).

Thus, this legislation was very explicit that, in South Africa, women were those that are of European origin. The rest of the females were thus cast into a genre agnostic to the category of 'woman' and could, therefore, be denied the franchise. To return to Truth's (1852) question at the Women's Rights Convention in Ohio, "Ain't I a woman?" The colonial answer to Truth

[14] See works by (Cock, 1989) (Ally, 2009) (Magona, 2016).

(1852) is clearly, "no". The reason for this assertion is because, as Lugones aptly puts it, "the semantic consequence of the coloniality of gender is that 'colonised woman' is an empty category: no women are colonised; no colonised females are women" (Lugones, 2010:745).

Euro-modernity and its process of creating the imperial man as the ultimate human being, who is white, male, cis-gendered and heteronormative, does not only negate "woman", it also denies Black people the status of being. It Blackens through the act of depriving people the status of humanity. Therefore, if one moves away from the tendency of theorising gender in isolation, the question of race demands that we grapple with the possibility of Black womxn, who experience a negation as Blacks, to be denied even the status of 'woman', which is a further negation. This liminality *cum* erasure is aptly captured by the title of the classic Black feminist anthology: *All Women Are White, All Blacks are Male, But Some Of Us Are Brave* (Hull, Bell-Scott, Smith, 1982). This feminist anthology, edited by Akasha Gloria Hull, Patricia Bell-Schott, and Babara Smith was published towards the end of the Civil rights movement and the second wave of the Feminist movement. The provocative title of the anthology meant to bring attention to the erasure that Black heterosexual and Black lesbian womxn endured in both the discourses of the civil rights movement which mainly focused on Black men, and the discourse of the second wave feminist movement which focused on white women. The irony was that in the civil rights movement, it was primarily the voice of Black men that was prominent, to the exclusion of Black womxn. Thus, it was almost as if to be Black was to be a man. Similarly, in the Feminist movement, the 'women's' demands that were spoken of and defended were those of white women, thus, to be 'woman' in such a context meant to be white. Hence the title of the anthology by the Combahee River Collective that tongue in cheek proclaimed *All Women Are White, All Blacks are Male, But Some Of Us Are Brave.*

Once we begin to speak about Black and 'woman', already we are talking about subjects (or non-subjects) that are both racialised and gendered. This tells us that these are subjects that are constructed by and exist within the modern paradigm. However, it is important to remember that while we unpack the workings of the binary that is created by and persists with the advent of Western modernity, there is a third space outside of the Western episteme where the baggage and language of the modern do not exist. It is within this space that I situate Afrocentric knowledge. In the context of an Afrocentric world-sense, we would have to employ a completely different grammar to make sense of different subjectivities. For instance, I introduce the indigenous signifier of umfazi as an alternative to 'Black womxn'. Umfazi is a signifier that cannot neatly exist within the logic of the anatomical sex/gender system that has

defined the Western paradigm of subject formation, especially since it insists on direct translations of men and women.

### 3.6 Conclusion

As Curry (2017:2) reminds us, there is the need to "clarify the relation between socially constructed categories (such as race and gender) and the biological bodies that possess them" when doing work on gender and sexuality. Such an endeavour compels us to draw a distinction between the physical bodies of the subjects under study and the socially constructed meanings we attach to those bodies. In the case of the writings and history of the Black nationalist movements of the twentieth century, we see male and female bodies enter the historical arena as Black men and Black womxn respectively. Consequently, this sex/gender anatomical fixation has foreclosed possibilities for alternative ways of thinking about indigenous subjectivities outside of the man and woman binary.

As illustrated above, the subject of 'woman' in the Western tradition is highly saturated and not without contestation. While de Beauvoir proclaims that "one is not born, but becomes woman" (de Beauvoir et al., 2012), Riley, another white feminist scholar, faced with the question of the idea of 'woman' probingly enquires "Am I that name?" (Riley, 1988). Therefore, it makes sense to inquire as to why it is that in her autobiography, South African struggle stalwart, Ellen Kuzwayo, boldly demands "Call me woman" (Kuzwayo, 2016). It is also important to note that, Kuzwayo didn't proclaim, 'call me *a* woman' which could be referring to a subjectivity, her utterance "Call me woman" (Kuzwayo, 2016) goes deeper, it evokes the *idea* of woman, the very thing that scholars such as Riley, (1988), Butler (2011), and de Beauvoir ( 2012) have sought to grapple with. In other words, she demands the very idea that I argue becomes an impossibility when met with Blackness.

In the subsequent section of the literature review, I focus attention on literature that documents how the gender question was engaged in the South African Black nationalist movement of the 20th century, which saw womxn organise the historic 1956 womxn's march to the union buildings where they chanted 'Wathint'bafazi, wathint'imbokodo'. Khuzwayo's "Call me woman" demand invites us to probe if the idea of 'woman' that she evokes is the same as 'umfazi' which was evoked by the womxn at the Women's march. This inquiry is useful in helping us grapple with the question of how the indigenous people conceptualized their own subjectivities *vis a vis* the sex/gender anatomical schema of the West.

# Part 2: Womxn, Mothers and Abafazi

## 3.7 Introduction

As part of providing a further case of how the erasure of Black womxn through the racial and sexual contracts is a global phenomenon, this part of the literature review maps out how the 'woman question' has been engaged in the political discourse of the Black nationalist struggle of the 20th century in South Africa. Specifically, the section analyses the Congress tradition, the Azanian tradition, and the Federation of South African Women (FEDSAW) as part of illustrating how these progressive and liberation movements participate in the inherited colonial matrix of subsuming Black womxn. Literature on the conceptual category of 'woman' in South Africa is vast and cannot be covered in a single literature review. However, I focus on the Black nationalist struggle because it has come under heavy scrutiny by feminist scholars such as Gqola (2001), Gasa (2007), and Erlank (2003) for its failure to include 'wom[x]ns' issues in the struggle for Black emancipation, echoing the critique of Black feminist activists and scholars of the Third wave feminist movement in the USA covered in Part 1 of this literature review. I explore how the subject of 'Black womxn' is discursively framed and engaged in the Black nationalist struggle and what this means for theorisation of Afrocentric sex/gender systems and subject formations.

Before Fallists such as Dlakavu (2017), Khan (2017), Mavuso (2017), Ndlovu (2017) and Xaba (2017) raised concerns about the patriarchal overshadowing and the erasure of the contributions of womxn and the LGBTQI community in political movements, earlier feminists and gender scholars had already engaged in heated debates on the place, role, and contributions of womxn in the South African Black nationalist struggle of the 20th century. An even more contested discussion was on the terms by which Black womxn organised in political formations such as FEDSAW and the purpose of that political organising. The first camp constitutes those scholars that maintain that while there is historical evidence to prove that Black womxn did fight in the anti-apartheid struggle, the auspices under which they organised were based on their identity and roles as Black mothers (in service of the Black family, i.e., Black people in general) and not as individual womxn (see Walker, 1991; 1995; Hassim, 2006; Stevenson, 2011; Healy-Clancy, 2017). This framing has had implications for how we theorise the teleology of the wom[x]s movement: was it one that sought to fight racial oppression for the liberation of the Black family, or was it aimed at dismantling patriarchal oppression? The second camp argues that the wom[x]n's movement was, in many ways, intersectional, fighting against both racial and patriarchal oppression simultaneously (see Gasa, 2007). However, I am

not interested in debating or proving whether Black womxn mobilised politically in service of feminist or Black nationalist goals. It could very well be both. However, I am interested in mapping how this moment of political upheaval signals an entanglement of two regimes; one that is individualistic and relies on a bio-logical framework and one that is communal in its orientation and privileges an Afrocentric world-sense.

The history of the Black liberation movement of the 20th century in South Africa suggests two things: firstly, the earliest political formations, the South African Native National Congress (SANNC) in particular, excluded Black womxn from political participation (Ginwala, 1990; Walker, 1991) based on an identity marker called 'woman' that was associated with their physical bodies, drawing from a sex/gender anatomical regime. Black womxn, in contrast, seem to have had a complex relationship with the category of 'woman' and often mobilised primarily as mothers. We witness the coexistence of the categories of 'mother', 'woman', and 'umfazi', at times appearing complementary and in other instances in tension. I grapple with this complex relationship to gain insight into what it tells us about indigenous subject formation and the allocation of status and/or (dis)privilege.

## 3.8 Unresolved (non)Gender Mysteries in Black Nationalist Political Parlance

### 3.8.1 *Congress Tradition*

Historical writings about the Black nationalist movement of the 1900s in South Africa struggle with the unresolved questions around gender that lurk in the background. The unresolved nature of the question of gender *vis-à-vis* Black liberation revisited South Africa during the #RMF protests that called for the decolonisation of South African universities. It appears that, in the fight against colonisation and white supremacy and the quest to have the right to "call our souls our own" (Sobukwe, 1949), we have not resolved the question of what the place of 'the gender question' is in the larger scheme of things. In this section, I provide a background of the literature that documents the climate of the Black nationalist movement of the 20th century and its treatment of the gender question. Here, I focus particularly on the Congress tradition, which took on a more liberal and assimilationist posture during the Black liberation struggle and then the subsequent section deals with the Azanian tradition, which was a lot more radical in its treatment of the question of colonialism.

Upon the formation of the African National Congress in 1912 (originally called the South African Native National Congress [SANNC]), womxn were not permitted to join as full members. This became the status quo for the next 30 years after its formation, with womxn only gaining access to the status of full membership in 1943 (Ginwala, 1990; Walker, 1991).

In 1919 when the SANNC adopted its first constitution, the decision was made that womxn would be permitted to participate in the party as auxiliary members. According to the SANNC constitution, membership in the SANNC would be

> open to all womxn of the aboriginal races of Africa over the ages of 18 years, who shall be members of the Bantu Women's National League of South Africa […] as auxiliary members under the auspices of their League whenever required shall provide suitable shelter and entertainment for members or delegates to meetings of the Association. (South African Native National Congress, 1919: n.p)

The limitation of the role of womxn in the SANNC to traditional caregiving roles such as the provision of shelter and entertainment was interpreted by some feminist scholars as a testament to the patriarchal nature of a movement that failed to see womxn outside of the role of caregiving (Walker, 1991).

Ginwala (1990) makes an important observation. She highlights two noteworthy differences between the 1912 draft constitution of the SANNC and the final one that was adopted in 1919. According to Ginwala (1990:85), "[t]he original reference to 'wives of members … and other distinguished African ladies' was altered to 'woman'". She also highlights that the second draft makes a provision for 'women' as a group to organise politically independently of the SANNC. It is unclear whether the SANNC saw the conceptual categories of 'wife', 'lady' and 'women' as synonymous. It would have been beneficial to have clarity on what inspired the move from 'wives' and 'ladies' to 'women'. Still, this initial move by the SANNC is interpreted by scholars such as Walker (1991) to have set the tone for how womxn would be treated within the party going forward – as peripheral.

However, Ginwala (1990) and Erlank (2003) help us shift the scope of our understanding of the SAANC's treatment of womxn away from limiting it to a patriarchal discourse to a colonial discourse. The work of Ginwala (1990) and Erlank (2003) suggest that the actions of the SANNC are better accounted for once one understands that the SANNC had bought into a colonial order that categorised the world in terms of a physiognomic schema of race that pegged notions of humanity to civility. Erlank (2003:656) captures this when she argues that

> [d]uring the 1920s and 1930s, South Africa's urbanised Black middle class aspired to modernity and a white middle-class existence. For them, a Western-style family life represented a modern model of social relations and the antithesis of savagery […] modern family life, therefore, served as an index of civilisation for the African petty bourgeoisie.

The African elite appears to have subscribed to a liberal ideology that framed them as capable of being taught civilisation. They were determined to prove that they too had attained civility and were ready for civic participation (see South African Native National Congress, 1919).

In further support of such a reading of the African elite's white posturing and drawing from Steve Biko's ideas, Dladla (2020:264) maintains that

> The [white] liberals argued (by implication) that some Black people could, in fact, attain full humanity, since the problem was not biological but civilisational. On condition the conditions of cultural and religious assimilation to be achieved through submission to Western education, Black people were allowed to participate in a predetermined political system as citizens.

Aspiring to graduate to the status of full humanity within the physiognomic schema of race, they embraced the attendant anatomical schema of sex/gender. Limb (2002) argues that Britishness was so entrenched in the identity of the African elite that even their version of African nationalism was couched in Victorian ideals of being. Ultimately, they assimilated into the Western liberal frame of organising humans, which necessitated that the African ontology that relied primarily on an African world-sense became wholly abandoned in this discourse, and humans became organised purely based on their biology which could only be detected through seeing.

Moreover, in *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon says, "[t]here is a fact: White men consider themselves superior to Black men. There is another fact: Black men want to prove to white men, at all costs, the richness of their thought, the equal value of their intellect" (2008:2). For Fanon, Black men crave the approval of white men because Black men want to be white; because to be white is to be human (Fanon, 2008). In fact, Ghaill (1994:608) can be read as interpreting the actions of the ANC in this light by pointing out how they were basically assimilating into what was, at the time, an expression of (white) hegemonic masculinity. According to him,

> in addition to oppressing wom[x]n, hegemonic masculinity silences or subordinated other masculinities, positioning these in relation to itself such that the values expressed by these other masculinities are not those that have currency or legitimacy. In turn, it presents its own version of masculinity, of how men should behave and how putative 'real men' do behave, as a cultural ideal. (Ghaill, 1994:608)

In colonial and apartheid South Africa, politics was the domain of men, and the men of the ANC wanted to participate and be recognised within this domain.

In her efforts to demonstrate the extent to which the general political climate discouraged the womxn's political participation, Ginwala (1990:79) cites a case in August 1908 where Dr Rubusana was appointed to speak on behalf of womxn and voice their concerns to the mayor. A white mayor would refuse to meet and interact directly with womxn, and womxn were barred from any form of political participation, more so if they were Black. Likewise, the ANC leadership bought into an order that had the exclusion of womxn from political participation at

its foundation and their rhetoric too became deeply steeped in masculinist notions of political struggle and liberation. Erlank refers to statements by key political figures in the ANC such as Alfred Bitini Xuma, who justified his claim to political participation by maintaining that he had come to the "status of full manhood" (2003:653), or Anthony Lembede "who wrote a charged newspaper article describing how a 'young virile nation' was in the process of being rebirthed" (2003:653). The use of masculinist grammar and connotations such as 'manhood' and 'virility' to index suitability to participate in politics lends politics to the domain of masculinity. It implies that politics is the business of men.

Before the Union of South Africa came into being on 31 May 1910, the Cape Colony – in keeping with the liberal tradition – had extended the vote to some African men on the condition that they were propertied and educated (Trapido, 1964:44). On this basis, they would pass the test of 'civility' and be recognised as men worthy of the vote. With the Cape model in mind, once the union of South Africa was consolidated the African elite within the ANC made demands for the right to vote based on the same criteria as that of the Cape Colony, for the vote to be extended to Black men who are propertied and educated. Therefore, the ANC leadership appears to have favoured the dismantling of what Mills (1997) terms the "racial contract", which serves to exclude Black people from political participation and opted instead to buy into what Pateman (1988) calls the "sexual contract", which is predicated on the exclusion of womxn from political participation.

The exclusion of womxn from the ANC is primarily explained "as the result of the dominant gender ideology of the period, originating from a model of domestic relations adopted by the emergent African elite at the end of the nineteenth century, rather than conscious political action" (Erlank, 2003:655). Being second-generation Christian converts, the ideology that the African elite adopted during this time was heavily influenced by Western Christian ideology (Erlank, 2003:656). And thus, Ginwala (1990) regards critiques that find the ANC to be patriarchal because of their exclusion of womxn from membership as unfounded. She maintains that the ANC "adopted the style of the conquerors and addressed the authorities in ways that would be acceptable to whites and would not alienate them. They saw the franchise as a gateway to this society and focused their political demands on it" (Ginwala, 1990:78). Here we see the ANC being framed as a victim of circumstances. The exclusion of womxn from full membership comes to be seen as a form of pragmatism. Perhaps this stance becomes convincing once one considers that the ANC was consolidated during a time when not even white women were granted access to civic and political participation. And thus, one cannot

overlook that the template for political participation that the ANC was introduced to was male, white, and upper class.

Likewise, Suttner (2005) argues that assertions that sought to affirm the manhood of the men in the ANC did not happen in a vacuum. They took place in a context where Black manhood was challenged to justify colonisation. He quotes a speech by former prime minister General Hertzog who said,

> next to the European, the native stands as an 8-year old child to a man of great experience – a child in religion, a child in moral conviction; without art and science; the most primitive needs and the most elementary knowledge to provide for those needs. If ever a race had a need of guidance and protection from other people with which it is placed in contact, then it is the native in his contact with the white man. (Suttner, 2005:73)

Adult Black men would be referred to as boys and adult Black womxn as girls, even by white people that were their junior (Langa *et al.*, 2020:9).

In her autobiographical papers, Ngoyi shares the pain she experienced in her childhood when she realised that "[t]he whites were white, it did not matter how our Black fathers' ages or education were more than a white boy of five years. Because of our skin, we remained boys and girls" (1972:2). The colonial regime perceived Black people as perpetual minors. Consequently, Blacks were forced to show reverence even to the youngest white member of each family. And thus, the need for African men to assert their manhood could be interpreted as a rejection of a colonial logic that saw them excluded from political participation. This rejection could also be understood as an effort to affirm their status not merely as men but also as human beings. As Suttner (2005:77) puts it,

> raising the notion of a 'native union', the ANC was, in fact, advancing in embryonic form the idea of an alternative or counter-nation, at first comprising only Black men. The organisation did not at its inception envisage nonracialism, nor did it include womxn as members. Implicitly then, the notion of the national with which the ANC initially worked was one comprising African men only.

For the African elite, joining the ANC and becoming politically active was seen in and of itself as an initiation into manhood (Suttner, 2005:79). Thus, one could see how and why 'manhood' came to assume a central position as the lingua franca of Black nationalist politics.

### 3.8.2 *The Azanian Tradition*

Similar to the Congress tradition, the discourse of the Azanian tradition, although focused on the question of conquest and racism, did not address the gender question. The BCM, which forms part and parcel of the Azanian tradition, came under heavy scrutiny for its focus and usage of the generic 'Black man' in its political parlance. For some, this form of languaging

implied the silencing and erasure of the experiences and contributions of Black womxn in the struggle (see Yates, Gqola and Ramphele, 1998; Gqola, 2001). For instance, consider this quote by Bantubonke Stephen Biko, one of the progenitors of the BCM, speaking at the height of apartheid South Africa:

> The Black man we have today has lost his manhood. Reduced to an obliging shell, he looks with awe at the white power structure and accepts what he regards as the inevitable position. Deep inside him, his anger mounts at the accumulating insult, but he averts it in the wrong direction […] All in all, the Black man has become a shell, a shadow of man, completely defeated and drowning in his own misery, a slave, an ox bearing the yoke of oppression with sheepish timidity. (Biko, 1977: 130)

As apparent in this quote, the language of the 'Black man' is a recurring feature in many of the writings of the BCM, and it is this aspect that feminist scholars have critiqued. Scholars such as McFadden (1992), Moodley (1993), Yates et al. (1998) and Gqola (2001) have argued that Black liberation movements in South Africa have historically prioritised demands for racial justice while putting on the back burner the need for gender justice.

In particular, in her critique of the BCM, Gqola argues that, "BC ideology rests on the unsatisfactory premise that race is the primary oppressive force for all those racially subjugated in South Africa. This supposition is puzzling in that it pronounces a hierarchy of oppression(s). It is also ironic that exploring the "primary" oppression invariably leads to the repudiation of all other forms of oppression" (2001:134). Gqola laments that, in attempts to forge a united front against the apartheid regime, the BCM shied away from embracing intragroup differences because they were perceived as posing a threat to Black solidarity. Strikingly, Gqola seems to be sceptical of her own critical position because she also maintains that "in English, the rallying cry of Black Consciousness became, 'Black man, you are on your own'. Had the same sentiment been expressed in one of the country's indigenous languages, the message would have been less exclusionary and would have meant 'Black person, you are on your own.'" (Gqola, 2001:141). This quote suggests that Gqola (2001) recognises that African indigenous languages do not centralise one's anatomy when identifying a subject, which is different to Western traditions that have gender identification built into their languages. Still, even with her scepticism of the role of the English language in masculinising BCM political discourse, Gqola (2001:134) still maintains that the BCM adopted a "ready-made masculinist discourse that had been used by many Black nationalist struggles in other parts of the world, particularly Negritude and the US Black Power Movement".

According to Gqola,

> the generic male means that all womxn safeguard the foundation of the symbolic order, without ever gaining access to it [ …] In Black Consciousness discourse the man is in the position of 'empowered speaker' while the womxn's absence from the referent is symbolic of her place in Black Consciousness thought – which is that of the 'powerless and voiceless' who plays largely ancillary roles in BC leadership. (Gqola, 2001:141)

However, it is also interesting to note that the use of the generic 'Black man' was not unique to males or the BCM. For instance, Ngoyi, a Black womxn who comes from the Congress tradition, shares an anecdote of her first act of resistance against the apartheid regime under the Defiance Campaign of the ANC. Her mission was to write a telegram to the then Minister of Justice from a section reserved for white people at the post office. The letter read, "Please stop your ruthless laws, other wise [sic] the Black man is rising" (Ngoyi, 1972:4). Here we see a womxn who was highly active in the anti-apartheid struggle referring to Black people resisting the apartheid regime as the 'Black man'. Her biographical notes do not clarify why she chooses to use this form of languaging.

BCM thinkers and activists such as Mangena (2008) and Deborah Matshoba came to the defence of the BCM, making the argument that while gender may not have been central in the language of BC politics, it does not mean that womxn occupied a marginal positionality within the movement (Alexander, Mngxitama and Matshoba, 2008). Mangena (2008) has argued that the BCM was a movement that, in practice, was invested in the equal treatment of men and womxn. She cites the election of Manana Kgware into the leadership structures of the BCM right at its inception as one example to demonstrate her point. For her, the generic 'Black man' should not be understood to refer to Black males exclusively because within the BCM, "a special language evolved" (2008:256). As an example, she refers to the invention of BCM concepts such as "non-white" that were used to refer to someone who was perceived to be "mentally enslaved by the ideology and values of the oppressor: A human being in need of freedom from mental colonization" (Mangena, 2008: 257). Thus, for the BCM, the 'Black man' was a gender-neutral referent that included all conscious Black people framed as not mentally enslaved. Mangena and Matshoba's contributions demand that we consider alternative ways of thinking about subject formation that go beyond rigid Western constructions of what it means to be a subject beyond a gendered identity.

## 3.9 Wathint' Abafazi Wathint' Imbokodo

### *3.9.1 The Road to 1956*

The preceding sections focused on the masculinist languaging and grammar that characterized the political discourse of the Congress tradition and the Azanian tradition. I briefly touched on

the ways in which Black womxn were discursively framed *vis-à-vis* the political formations and how this shaped how the *telos* of the political movements came to be interpreted by feminist critics – as mainly concerned with racial emancipation while neglecting the emancipation of womxn. This section focuses on FEDSAW, a specific wom[x]ns political formation that was an umbrella body for various wom[x]ns organisations during the anti-apartheid struggle. It grapples with how wom[x]n discursively framed their own subjectivities and their role in politics.

The efforts to restore the history of womxn's political contributions in the fight against colonialism and the apartheid regime have not been without contestation among gender and feminist scholars. Scholars such as Wells (1982), Govender (1987), Ginwala (1990), Walker (1991, 1991), Hassim and Walker (1993), Gasa (2007) and Healy-Clancy (2017) have engaged in a fierce debate in attempts to make sense of early wom[x]n's political mobilisation. Earlier contributions such as those of Wells (1982) and Walker (1991) situate the 1900s wom[x]n's struggles as primarily motherist and not necessarily feminist. Motherist struggles, in this instance, are thought of as struggles by womxn motivated by the wellbeing of their (Black) families and broader (Black) society. Within these struggles, the individual concerns of womxn as a group are not primary (Wells, 1982; Walker, 1991, 1995; Gasa, 2007).

That is, the conceptual category of 'mother' is a recurring one in the literature on the history of wom[x]n's political participation in South Africa. Some literary accounts suggest that mobilising on the basis of the identity of mother instead of 'woman' tended to be more effective in securing the commitment and support of many African womxn during the apartheid struggle (see Wells, 1982; Walker, 1991; 1995; Miller, 2009; Stevenson, 2011; Healy-Clancy, 2017). Thus, this suggests that motherists mainly focused on fighting for Black people as a collective, not merely themselves as a (gendered) group. This argument does not only have implications for how we situate the history of womxn's participation in the anti-colonial/apartheid struggle but also helps us unpack how, historically, Black womxn have continued to make sense of themselves and the subject positions that they occupy.

For Gasa (2007), the framing of womxn's political activism as a choice between feminist concerns for freedom from patriarchal oppression or nationalist concerns towards racial liberation, is problematic. She makes a case for an intersectional approach that understands that Black womxn have never had the choice between fighting against either racial oppression or gendered oppression. They have always had to fight against both systems of oppression simultaneously. Her stance is consistent with Black feminist concerns articulated by scholars such as Hull, Bell-Scott and Smith (1982), Thiam, Blair (1986), Crenshaw (1991), Lewis

(1993), White (1999), and Davis (2019), as already outlined in the first part of this literature review. While I agree with Gasa, I maintain that the conceptual units and language employed in making a case for the complex subject position that Black womxn occupied and continue to occupy in contemporary South Africa need interrogation.

### *3.9.2 Mothers in the struggle*

The historic 1956 wom[x]n's march to the Union Buildings was organised by the Federation of South African Women (FEDSAW). FEDSAW was a multiracial umbrella organisation with branches nationwide that mobilised wom[x]n from organisations and structures affiliated with the Congress Alliance to take political action against the apartheid government (Gasa, 2007:210). It was founded on the 4th of April by two white women who were members of the SA Communist Party, Ray Alexander and Hilda Bernstein (née Watts) (Healy-Clancy, 2017:853). I mention the fact of their whiteness to highlight that culturally, they were not brought up and socialised under African values and systems of being. Although FEDSAW was created to mobilise wom[x]n exclusively, there have been multiple debates on whether or not it could be said to have been a feminist organisation mobilising primarily for women's rights (see Govender, 1987; Walker, 1991; Hassim and Walker, 1993; Gasa, 2007; Healy-Clancy, 2017). Part of the scepticism with viewing FEDSAW as a feminist organisation was the centrality that the ideology of motherism assumed in mobilising wom[x]n. Mainstream feminist ideology has been highly sceptical of the institution of motherhood, viewing it as an extension of patriarchal prescription and imposition of what it means to a woman (see Rich, 1980; de Beauvoir, 2012; Firestone, 2015). Thus, that some of the Black womxn in FEDSAW saw their role and positions as mothers as the primary motivation for their political activism, became difficult for others to register as feminist.

Healy-Clancy (2017:853) notes that the first invite sent out by Alexander and Bernstein to the wom[x]n's groups that FEDSAW was recruiting read, "[t]he battle for democracy and liberation can only be won when wom[x]n, mothers of the nation – half of the whole population – can take their rightful place as free and equal partners with men. Throughout history, wom[x]n have struggled side by side with men for justice". What is striking about this invite is that the first draft of the circular did not contain the words 'mothers of the nation'; it only referred to 'women'. As Healy-Clancy (2017:854) indicates, the final version was "translated into isiXhosa and signed by sixty-three women from across the country". This piece of information is essential because it suggests the possibility that it was through the influence of

the African women that translated the draft invite from English to isiXhosa that the words "mothers of the nation" came to be incorporated into the invite.

Part of the challenge with any organisation that is constituted by people from different walks of life is that any assumption that there is a universal understanding of what "motherhood" entails is flawed. As Walker (1995) indicates, while various scholars in South Africa have written on motherhood, in 1995, there was still an "absence of an explicit definition of motherhood in most if not all the literature" (Walker, 1995). In her book, *What Gender is Motherhood* (2016), Oyěwùmí is reluctant to translate the Yorùbá category of *Ìyá* to the English category of 'mother' because of the gender burden intrinsic in the Euro-American category of the mother. For Oyěwùmí, "[t]he category of mother is perceived to be embodied by wom[x]n who are subordinated wives, weak, powerless, and relatively socially marginalised" (Oyěwùmí , 2016b:58). Again, in her article titled 'Family Bonds/Conceptual Binds: African Notes on Feminist Epistemologies' (2000), Oyěwùmí (2000:1094) bemoans how, in the Euro-America episteme, mothers are constructed primarily as wives. She maintains that in the African household, "where there are many mothers, many fathers, many 'husbands' of both sexes, it is impossible to present the relationship between mother and child in those terms" (Oyěwùmí, 2000:1097). In the Western episteme, not only are wives perpetually thought of in relation to men but they are also seen to belong to the home, the so-called private sphere. The public sphere, on the other hand, where business, industry and politics take place, is constructed as the domain of men.

Healy-Clancy (2017) critiques tendencies to universalise wom[x]n's experiences from Eurocentric models. Her article, titled 'The Family Politics of the Federation of South African Women: A History of Public Motherhood in Women's Antiracist Activism', offers an alternative way of thinking about the public motherhood that characterised wom[x]n's political organisation in the anti-colonial and anti-apartheid movements. She bemoans dominant feminist accounts that view the public motherhood demonstrated by African womxn in these movements as a radical break with the (indigenous) norm. Healy-Clancy demonstrates that African mothers have always been involved in public sphere business, even before the advent of colonialism.

For her, "biological and symbolic motherhood had long been associated with responsibility for public social life in the region" (Healy-Clancy, 2017: 844). And thus, it is from this history and experience that African womxn draw in order to mobilise for their political demands. Moreover, Healy-Clancy maintains that when African womxn speak of their activism as emanating from the public sphere, it is in efforts "to make themselves legible as

social actors, both to agents of the white-controlled state and to allies in South Africa and across transnational networks. In turn, those allies emphasised their own public motherhood to legitimate themselves to African activists" (Healy-Clancy, 2017:844).

Perhaps this dynamism is best captured by Ngcobozi (2017) when she maintains that historically, African mothers had to simultaneously exist in 'two publics', a concept coined by African scholar Ekeh (1975). Ekeh speaks of two publics that are a result of colonialism in Africa. The first public is one of popular politics and civil structures and is "historically associated with the colonial administration" (Ekeh, 1975:92). The other is a primordial public that is "moral and operates on the same moral imperatives as the private realm". The private realm that Ekeh (1975) refers to here is the African kinship collective and/or community. Ngcobozi (2017) highlights that historically, Womxn's Manyano a Methodist Christian organisation made up of African mothers, have been dominant in the primordial public and marginal in the civic public. Thus, Healy-Clancy's work demonstrates that African mothers have had to navigate the two spaces simultaneously. In the civic domain, they had to employ a language of civic politics and articulate their position in a way that renders them coherent to actors that occupy that space. But, in the primordial African space, public motherhood is a phenomenon that the indigenous peoples are familiar with. Likewise, Stevenson's (2011) research documents the historical Munsieville Mother's March, a political activism event that took place in 1986 in Munsieville, west of Johannesburg, during the apartheid era. She maintains that the mothers drew motivation to participate in politics from traditional Tswana models of motherhood, whereby "they were able to reclaim their traditional role as public decision makers, leaders and actors" (Stevenson, 2011:133). The role of Black womxn as decision-makers and leaders in the public realm has been in direct contradiction with the Christian missionary imposed roles that sought to confine them to the home (Ngcobozi, 2017; Stevenson, 2011).

Although there are continuing debates over whether the Black womxn of the late 19th century and twentieth century mobilised primarily to fight against racial domination, patriarchal domination or simply both, one thing has been difficult to ignore, African womxn organised primarily based on their identities and roles as mothers. In fact, Healy-Clancy (2017) argues that it was the ability to mobilise as mothers that attracted so many African womxn to some of the most historically potent movements, such as the Federation of South African Women, which was responsible for the 1956 wom[x]n's march to Pretoria.

Healy-Clancy's (2017) conception of motherhood notwithstanding, Ngoyi thinks of motherhood as an aspect that wom[x]n from different walks of life could find common ground

in, regardless of their race. When she recalls her experiences fighting against the apartheid government, she shares the sentiment that "the main thing is we do not want to discriminate. As mothers, a child is a child" (Ngoyi, 1972:19). However, the motherhood that Ngoyi spoke of must have been different from the motherhood of many white women living in colonial/apartheid South Africa. Colonial white motherhood discriminated against and prevented Black womxn from being mothers to their own children.

For instance, Ngoyi also gives an account of her childhood. She shares that

> [s]ometimes I would be absent from school to attend to my younger brother, and my mother would take me with her to her place of employment. We would never be allowed in to [sic] the house of her employers, we would remain under a tree, whilst my mother was ironing in the beautiful house, and she was not allowed to breastfeed her child in that house, she would come to us outside under the tree. (Ngoyi, 1972:1)

Thus, here we see evidence of a white colonial motherhood that is predicated on denying Black womxn access to performing mothering duties to their own children. Stevenson makes sense of this outsourcing of childcare by white women by maintaining that; "while the discourse of white motherhood was broadly seated in the good mother who cares physically and emotionally for her children, the discourse of Black motherhood did not necessarily emphasize direct involvement in child care, but rather prioritized their responsibilities for financial support and discipline" (Stevenson, 2011:144). What is missing from this statement is that it is the brutal conditions of colonialism and apartheid that saw Black womxn leave their children in the care of relatives while they went to look after the children of their white employers for a small wage.

Walker (1995:418) views any attempts that frame motherhood as universal as misguided and/ or signalling political opportunism. Similarly, Healy-Clancy (2017) thinks of motherhood as being multivalent. While different wom[x]n from different racial and cultural groups may have come together under the banner of motherhood in FEDSAW and other political formations, there is a recognition that this did not imply a homogeneity in how they conceptualised and experienced motherhood. Moreover, it is not merely a question of a multiplicity in how motherhood is understood and what it entails, but also of the geographies in which motherhood occurs. While motherhood in the Western context is primarily thought of as something that concerns a mother and their nuclear family in their private home, in an African world-sense, the role and responsibility of motherhood transverses the private and public spheres. Healy-Clancy's (2017:845) conception of public motherhood "highlights both the extended family and the broader society as spaces where mothering happens". She maintains that it draws legitimacy from the spiritual authority that womxn gain by virtue and

the ability to create and give life. Oyěwùmí (2016b:58) refers to this spiritual force as matripotency.

According to Oyěwùmí,

> at the core of the seniority-based system is Ìyá, who symbolises what I describe as the matripotent principle. Matripotency describes the powers, spiritual and material, deriving from Ìyá's procreative role. The efficacy of Ìyá is most pronounced when they are considered in relation to their birth children. The matripotent ethos expresses the seniority system that Ìyá is the venerated senior in relation to their children. Since all humans have an Ìyá, we are all born of an Ìyá. No one is greater, older or more senior to Ìyá. (Oyěwùmí , 2016b:58)

An additionally important aspect of the notion of public motherhood is that it does not have the prerequisite that the public mother has to also be a biological (or otherwise) mother in the private sphere, nor does it germinate from that context, especially because in pre-colonial South Africa, the private and public spheres coincided (Healy-Clancy, 2017:848). As Healy-Clancy and Hickel (2014:9) put it, "the pre-eminent space of 'public' debate – the cattle byre – was entirely encompassed by the 'domestic' space of the homestead". However, in her attempt to critique universalising tendencies of Eurocentricity, Healy-Clancy falls into the same trap. She frames the space of 'public' debate – the cattle byre – using gendered language and thinking, even though she tries to nuance it.

She maintains that oral traditions attest to the fact that access to this internalised public space was restricted by gender and generation: premenopausal wom[x]n were traditionally barred. Yet motherhood authorised wom[x]n's power in the houses that encircled the byre (Healy-Clancy, 2017:848). She goes on to say, "most important, the mother of the male homestead head claimed great spiritual authority over the public life of the entire homestead. The homestead head's mother traditionally resided above the cattle byre, in the 'great house' at the homestead's apex, closest to the ancestors and ritual objects. Male-dominated political space hinged on the maternal authority of wom[x]n, especially older wom[x]n" (Healy-Clancy, 2017:848). Here, we see that mothers occupy an important position within a context of a homestead. Their position is elevated because of their status of motherhood. As Stevenson (2011:140) puts it "in roles outside the position of wife, however, such as mother and senior consanguineal kinswoman, wom[x]n are deferred to and wield considerable power and authority" (see also Lebeuf 1953). These accounts are similar to Oyěwùmí's (2000;2016b) account of the power and authority that African mothers wielded in pre-colonial African societies.

### 3.10 'Wom[x]n' in the struggle

Gasa (2007) revisits the monumental day of the 9th of August 1956, when 20 000 wom[x]n from different walks of life walked to the Union Buildings in Pretoria to protest the extension of passes to Black womxn. During this march, the demographics were both multiracial and multicultural. This is reflected in the makeup of the chosen leaders that led this march, Moosa, who is Indian, Ngoyi, who is Black; Joseph, a white woman and Williams-de Bruyn, who was of coloured descent. Black womxn constituted the majority of the wom[x]n who attended the march. For this reason, the march was intentionally organised to take place on a Thursday, the so-called 'Lizzies Day' when domestic workers would get a day off from work. Domestic work was the single largest employer of Black womxn during the apartheid era, and this continues to be the case in contemporary South Africa (Cock, 1989; Ally, 2009). Thursdays are also important in South African Black womxn's history because, as Ngcobozi (2017) indicates, they were set aside for Manyano womxn's church meetings so that Black womxn, who were primarily employed in the domestic service sector, could attend.

One of the most widely circulated images captured at the march is that of three Black womxn standing side by side (Figure 1). One of them has a toddler on her back. Most of the Black womxn in the pictures taken on the day have their heads covered, including the two that are most visible in the picture discussed. One is wearing a beret, and the other has a doek (head-scarve). They are holding up placards that read "Women do not want passes" and "With passes, we are slaves". The invocation of 'women' and 'slaves' side by side is another instance where we see issues that emanate from the logic of the physiognomic schema of race existing side by side with those that stem from the logic of the sex/gender anatomical schema, being grappled with simultaneously. It goes without saying that, although the march to the union buildings was multiracial and the generic term 'woman' was used in the placards to communicate disapproval with pass laws, it is essentially Black, coloured, and Indian womxn who were under the threat of having pass laws imposed on them. [15] So, when the placard reads, 'with passes we are slaves', the threat of 'slavery' did not affect white women. Still, the generic 'woman' was used to make sense of the individuals that attended this historic march, which continues to be called 'The Women's March' to date.

[15] Although I mention Black, Indian and Coloured womxn separately, according to the Azanian tradition, they would all be classified as Black womxn.




**Figure 1: Women's march, 1956**
Image sourced from South African History Online (https://www.sahistory.org.za/article/1956-womens-march-pretoria-9-august

Similarly, in the early stages of the post-Apartheid period, we witness the generic usage of the category 'women' in multiracial contexts that claim to fight for women's rights and advancement. As part of a larger post-Apartheid project to build the 'new' South Africa, the Women's National Coalition adopted a women's charter in February 1994. The document's first page boasts a declaration that "[t]he Women's Charter gives expression to the diverse experiences, visions, and aspirations of South African wom[x]n. We are breaking our silence. We claim respect and recognition for our human rights and dignity. We require effective change in our status and material conditions in the future of South Africa" (Women's National Coalition, 1994). The preamble of the charter echoes similar sentiments when it says, "[a]s wom[x]n, we have come together in a coalition of organisations to engage in a campaign that enabled wom[x]n to draw on their diverse experiences and define what changes are required within the new political, legal, economic and social system" (Women's National Coalition, 1994).

The Women's National Coalition was constituted of various civil society organisations, academics, and experts from different walks of life. The coalition's mandate was to "ensure that wom[x]n's issues were raised during the negotiations for the democratic South Africa" (Harper, 2002:5). The moment of political transition into the 'new' South Africa was an opportunity for feminists, wom[x]n, and gender activists to ensure that the wom[x]n's agenda would be put on the table. Talks of 'diverse experiences' and 'coming together' make evident

that the drafters of the charter were aware of the heterogeneity of the experiences and social standing of the wom[x]n that formed part of the process that led to the drafting of the Women's Charter for Effective Equality. Still, regardless of the variety in racial, class, sexual orientation, ethnicity, culture and religious groups, the participants were mobilised and worked together based on their identity as 'women'. This space is what scholars such as Molyneaux would characterise as an autonomous space, where wom[x]n "elaborate their own programme of action, debate their own goals, tactics and strategy, free from outside influence" (Hassim, 2006:9). The idea of an autonomous space for wom[x]n entrenches the idea of the oneness and concreteness of the category called 'woman' around which females from all walks of life can organise.

Speaking to the general nature of wom[x]n's movements in postcolonial contexts, Hassim (2006:9) maintains that because womxn have had to navigate oppressions that stem from racism, classism, and sexism simultaneously, their political activism has depended on their ability to form alliances with other groups whom they share some aspects of struggle with, for example Black men, working class people and people with disabilities. While this is true, the danger with framing alliances such as those that form between wom[x]n and 'others' is that it fails to recognise the wom[x]n's movement itself as an alliance. This is especially true in the South African context, where Black and white wom[x]n have been in alliance at various pivotal moments that have informed what is characterised to date as the history of wom[x]n's struggle, including the pivotal moment of the 1956 wom[x]n's march to the Union Buildings. It is important to acknowledge that wom[x]n's movements themselves as alliances, because they are constituted by diverse people with diverse experiences, interests, social standing and varying degrees of access to power. Ultimately, Black nationalist movements are not unique in having intra-group differences.

### 3.11 Conclusion

The literature reviewed above paints a fascinating and complex picture of how the gender question has been handled in the South African Black nationalist struggle of the 20th century. While some feminist scholars have been critical of the absence and lack of prioritisation of the struggles of Black womxn as a gender group, it appears that the Black womxn of the Black nationalist struggle had complex attitudes about mobilising and organising on the basis of an identity marker called 'wom[x]n'. Instead, the theme of motherhood comes out strongly as an alternative subjectivity that the wom[x]n of the Black nationalist struggle preferred to organise around.

However, what is missing from the literature is the question of why it is that the idea of ‘mother’ appealed more to some Black womxn than that of ‘woman’ in their political mobilisation. The literature does not make clear what it was about the idea of motherhood that made African womxn, even those without biological children, gather in their numbers to fight against colonialism and apartheid. The only thing that we can gather is that motherhood in the African imaginary affords status and honour to African womxn. Secondly, we gather that African mothers' political activities undertaken in the name of motherhood were meant to benefit a larger collective instead of individuals. These are questions that future research on motherhood could tackle.

In the debates between the feminist and motherist camps about the basis on which the wom[x]n in the Black nationalist struggle organised, there is the unresolved question of the figure of ‘umfazi’ that the wom[x]n of the 1956 Womxn’s march invoke when they chant ‘Wathint’bafazi, wathint’imbokodo’, which has been typically translated to “You touch[/strike] the wom[x]n, you touch[/strike] the rock” (Gasa, 2007:223), thereby placing the figure of a womxn (not a mother) right at the centre of one of the most central political events in South African history. While this dissertation cannot exhaust this question, I use the interlude that follows this chapter to complicate the taken for granted assumption that indeed, umfazi and ‘wom[x]n’ speak to the same idea.

## Interlude: Woman as/and/or umfazi

While I have already grappled with and complicated the conceptual category 'woman' as it applies to Black people, I use this interlude to stretch my critique by applying it to the South African context specifically and juxtaposing it to the conceptual category of 'umfazi'. I pay specific attention to the lexical item 'umfazi' to unearth the cultural particularities that could potentially be hidden in treating umfazi as the cultural equivalent of 'woman'. To that end, this interlude serves two functions. Firstly, it provides space to ponder deeper about the conceptual category 'woman' vis-à-vis the Black nationalist struggle in South Africa and what it means for indigenous modes of social organisation. Secondly, it serves to tie the first part of this thesis, which is mainly focused on the political climate that necessitated this project's probing of the subject 'woman' and her place in a context of a colonised South Africa, to the second part which primarily focuses on indigenous modes of subject formation and social organisation that I maintain are not fixated on the bio-logic.

As noted already, the #RMF movement is the most contemporary case of a political movement where once again we witness questions of wom[x]n's political mobilising being brought up in conjunction with question of the emancipation of Black people. While the earlier generations of feminist scholars were critical of the Black nationalist movement in South Africa, the most scathing feminist attack came from the #RMF. Overall, the #RMF was a non-partisan student movement. However, various aspects of it echoed the history and legacy of the Azanian tradition. The struggle songs that the activists sang and the language of an 'Azania' that was to come evoked the memory and legacy of the Azanian tradition (see Dladla, 2020). The student activists explicitly stated that the pillars of the #RMF movement were Pan Africanism, Black Consciousness, and later after much contestation, Black Feminism came to be included in the fold (see Mangena, 1991; Xaba, 2017; Ahmed, 2020).

Gender discourse entered the #RMF space through the demands of Black womxn (see Dlakavu, 2017; H. Ndlovu, 2017; M. Ndlovu, 2017; Xaba, 2017) and the LGBTQI+ community who protested the "sexism, heterosexism, homophobia and transphobia" in the movement (Ndelu, Dlakavu, and Boswell, 2017:2), and the erasure of the contributions made by womxn and the LGBTQI+ community (see Dlakavu, 2017; Khan, 2017; Mavuso, 2017; H. Ndlovu, 2017; M. Ndlovu, 2017). Documenting her journey, Kunene (2018:1) shares how feminist activists had taken on the slogan "[t]his revolution will be intersectional, or it will be bullshit". This mantra made a demand for all bodies, in their varied "corporeal forms" (Camminga, 2018:121), to be embraced and acknowledged as contributors to this historic

moment. Intersectionality is a Black feminist framework coined by Crenshaw to "denote the various ways in which race and gender interact to shape the multiple dimensions of Black womxn's… experiences".

For Crenshaw, "while the primary intersections […] explore[d] are between race and gender, the concept can and should be expanded by factoring in issues such as class, sexual orientation, age and colour" (Crenshaw, 1991:1244). Thus, it is no surprise that minoritized groups tend to gravitate towards this seemingly inclusive framework that enables the simultaneous representation of one's race, gender, sexual orientation, and age (among other aspects of their identity) in political mobilisation. The proclivity towards intersectional frameworks is best captured by Matandela when she speaks of the Fallist movement:

> What I hope for is that people will look back at this movement one day and see how a small group of Black feminists changed the politics of a Black Consciousness space – a space that has previously excluded these populations. They will remember how Black womxn and members of the LGBTQIA (Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex and asexual) community became valued members of one of the most important movements in the university's history. (Matandela, 2015;n.p.)

Matandela's (2015) sentiments are not new nor unique, and the feminist activists of the #RMF movement ensured that history did not repeat itself. They would not be as forgiving as some of their predecessors. They insisted that questions of 'gender and representation' be addressed as part and parcel of the struggle for a decolonised university and a liberated Azania (see Ndelu, Dlakavu and Boswell, 2017).

Interestingly, the moment in which #RMF momentum was picking up and spreading to other institutions of higher learning under the banner of the #FeesMustFall (#FMF) coincided with the visiting professorship of Professor Oyěwùmí at the University of South Africa. This moment was catalytic in many ways to my intellectual journey because, while I was witnessing Black radical feminists make a claim for the representation of womxn and gender non-conforming people in the struggle for Black liberation, I was also following the work of Oyěwùmí (1997) which posited gender as a colonial imposition that merited interrogation by Africanist scholars. Her groundbreaking work, *The Invention of Women* (1997), gives an account of how gender categorisation, the category 'woman', was imposed on the Oyo Yorùbá (and a significant part of Africa) by Europeans through the process of colonisation.

Although progenitors of the Afrocentric tradition such as Amadiume (1987) and Diop (1987; 1989) had done work on the question of 'gender' on the African continent prior to Oyěwùmí's (1997) work, their projects had not confronted the category of gender itself. Their work focused on dispelling some assumptions made by Western feminist gender discourse that

assumed the existence of a universal patriarchal system that oppressed wom[x]n as a group. To bolster their argument, Amadiume (1987) and Diop (1987; 1989) introduced an alternative African history that had witnessed queen mothers, matriarchies, male daughters, and female husbands; systems that suggested a gender fluidity that betrayed rigid notions of a binary system. However, none of them had challenged the applicability of gender categories to the African continent. Oyěwùmí's (1997) position was radical because she argued that African modes of being and organising had not relied on biology to find coherence. Thus, one's anatomy mattered very little in determining one's status and standing in society (Oyěwùmí, 2016b, 2000; 1997).

It then struck me that if one takes Oyěwùmí (1997) seriously, one cannot engage in gender discourse without confronting the various ways it is underscored and maintained by coloniality in Africa. Moreover, one must probe whether gender, in turn, maintains coloniality. This is especially important if we speak of a political project that promises a post-conquest African polity as its goal. Would gender thinking have a place in it, and how would it find expression if it did? However, it did appear that the #RMF activists did somehow think of gender as a colonial category in some ways (see Lugones, 2016; 2010). For instance, the usage of 'womxn' as a preferred alternative to 'women' when referring to the #RMF collective indicates this consciousness. According to Matandela (2017), the act of spelling 'womxn' with an 'x' is one that is "cognizant of the complexities of the coloniality of gender in postcolonial contexts and is inclusive of transgender identities that challenge the dichotomies of both sex and gender" (Khan, 2017; Matandela, 2017:12). I seek to push this line of thinking further to argue that, although the framing of 'womxn' speaks to the agentic action of claiming one's identity beyond the confines of the dichotomy prescribed by coloniality, there is also a need to acknowledge that those designated womxn have historically been repealed by the category of 'woman', as I demonstrated in Part 1 of the literature review. The trans-womxn, Lesbian womxn and Black people were always, at best, considered agnostic women.

Furthermore, I maintain that the act of claiming an alternative productive space of *being* should not serve to erase this critical history of sex/gender taxonomies since the category of 'woman' has not always been equally available to all. Put differently, my submission is that whether we think from the vantage point of the prospect of a liberated Azania, or the reality of an occupied Azania, gender discourse sits uncomfortably in both scenarios and demands further interrogation. I make this claim moving from two premises. The first one is that, in the context of a conquered Azania (South Africa), if, in line with the Azanian tradition, we treat the category "Black" as a colonial white supremacist marker imposed on

beings that are denied the ontological status of "human" (see Mbembe, 2017), we ought to interrogate the basis on which we claim that the category of 'woman' can comfortably coexist side by side with the category "Black" (see Lugones, 2016, 2010). Secondly, if we recognise the coloniality of gender as something that we seek to reject, then this task also demands that we do the work of unearthing who and what indigenous people are outside of coloniality. Suppose they were never colonised; who would they be? How would they think of their subject formation? These questions are equally important.

Undoubtedly, the danger with treating gender as a purely colonial construct is that it ignores the *matter-of-factness* of its introduction and entrenchment within the African continent. It is a phenomenon people experience materially to date, as articulated by #RMF activists and other feminist scholars (Matandela, 2015). This project is not interested in being gender denialist. However, simultaneously, I also want to argue that an invocation of gender discourse, especially when it applies to Black colonised subjects, as presupposed and without interrogation, has a serious potential of veiling the persistence of a colonising order in contemporary South Africa (Webster, 2021:113). Failure to account for gender as a colonial construct amounts to epistemic injustice.

As a result, in order for such critical work of self-reflection to occur in a meaningful way, I have to grapple with an example of how the gender coloniality can be observed in a linguistic context. This illustration serves to foreground my analysis of the South African anthropological tradition and how it engages with and translates indigenous ways of being. In particular, I am interested in unpacking why the conceptual category 'umfazi' should not be translated as the equivalent of the conceptual category 'woman'. I introduce some arguments that I elaborate on in chapter 4 and 5 that within indigenous sex/gender systems, one's identity and social standing is contingent and constantly in flux depending on the context. That is, anatomy is not the end all and be all, as the logic of the sex/gender anatomical schema would dictate. For this reason, I demonstrate that the conceptual category of umfazi cannot be really said to speak to the same thing as does the idea of 'woman'.

### 3.12 On Translation:

Kenyan author and academic Ngugi wa Thiong'o reminds us of the importance of language. It functions as a communication tool and a cultural archival site (wa Thiong'o, 1987:13). He argues that the African child is orientated to a culture other than their own because of speaking and learning in English. For him,

> culture does not just reflect the world in images but actually, through those very images, conditions a child to see that world in a certain way, the colonial child was made to see the world and where he stands in it is seen and defined by or reflected in the culture of the language of imposition. (wa Thiong'o, 1987:17)

The argument that wa Thiongo (1987) is making here is that cultures are carried through languages, and thus words are not neutral since they are embedded within specific cultures. Therefore, to speak English is to communicate English culture, similarly with indigenous languages, to speak isiXhosa is to communicate the isiXhosa culture and world-sense that is embedded in the language.

For this reason, the work of translating languages with the aim of finding 'equivalents' ought to be interrogated. I raise the question of translation because, as indicated above, the iconic mantra of the wom[x]n that marched to the union buildings in 1956 was 'Wathint'bafazi, wathint'imbokodo', has been translated numerous times as "You touch[/strike] the wom[x]n, you touch[/strike] the rock" (Gasa, 2007:223). However, As I demonstrate in the sections below, a deeper linguistic probe into the conceptual category 'umfazi' makes evident that it would be closer to translate the mantra 'Wathint'bafazi, wathint'imbokodo', into 'you touch[/strike] the great mortal , you touch[/strike] the rock'. Upon closer scrutiny, the comparison of a great mortal to a rock is a lot more compatible than the figure of a 'woman' who has been discursively constructed as a negated 'other' as demonstrated in Part 1 of the literature review.

The translation of African languages into English in South Africa mainly happened in the 1800s by Christian missionaries and anthropologists. What is striking about the work of translating umfazi to the conceptual category of 'woman' (see Döhne, 1857), is that they did so within a context in which it was still believed that indigenous people were not 'women' and 'men' proper and needed Christianisation and civilisation to be trained into proper womanhood (see Ngcobozi, 2017). Mbembe captures this apparent contradiction very well when he maintains that the logic of the colony "consisted in not accepting difference, and … refusing similarities … By hoping that the colonised would imitate it, while also prohibiting such imitation" (Mbembe, 2017:107). My suspicion is that the colonial project necessitated that umfazi and woman be constructed as equivalents to make apparent just how far behind in the process of evolution 'umfazi' was from becoming 'woman', following the logic of Darwinian evolution.

A popular saying among amaXhosa is 'isiXhosa asiTolikwa' (see Masola, 2020; Dowling, 2021), which could be loosely translated as 'the isiXhosa language is not one to be translated' or 'one cannot translate isiXhosa'. This philosophy understands that language is a

carrier of culture, world-senses and modes of being. Moreover, it understands that any attempt to make an outsider understand a world-sense by altering it to fit what is familiar to them (the outsider) becomes futile, because this process of translation necessitates that some things are lost and some are accentuated in the process. Ultimately, by attempting to translate isiXhosa into a different language, what will come out as the product will be so altered that it might not resemble the original. To borrow from Jacques Derrida (1985) and his allegory of the Tower of Babel, God interrupts the project of the Semites who sought to build a tower that would reach the heavens in order to make a name for themselves, by disrupting the monolingualism that had facilitated their unity. By imposing multiple tongues (languages) on them, the Semites are longer able to understand one another, and thus fail to continue with the project of building a tower that would reach the heavens. According to Derrida (1985:170), God "at the same time imposes and forbids translation". That is, he makes translation necessary and yet impossible at the same time. Indeed, one could say that the 'curse' of Babel persists to date where translation 'proper' remains an impossibility.

Post-structuralist thought has had an understanding that every culture has its own particularities. To understand the particularities of a culture, one must immerse oneself in that culture, which also entails learning the language of that culture (Merrill, 2013:758). Similarly, Talaal Asad maintains that the job of an anthropologist entails more than just merely "matching sentences in the abstract" (Asad, 2008:149). It necessitates that an anthropologist must learn to *"live another form of life* and to speak another kind of language" (Asad, 2008:149). [16] This exercise becomes particularly important in the process of translation because it opens an opportunity for the translator to understand what Spivak refers to as 'the difference of language' (Spivak, et al., 1996). After all, as aptly captured by J.M. Coetzee, "[t]here is never enough closeness of fit between languages for formal features of a work to be mapped across from one language to another without shift of value […] something must be 'lost'" (quoted in Spivak, et al., 1996: 273).

Rudolf Pannwitz's work, in many ways, supports Asad's (2008) argument. Part of what makes 'translation' not without fault is that translators, who are often speakers of dominant languages and carriers of dominant cultures, tend to want to turn (translate) the original language into their own language instead of finding ways to manipulate their language to capture what is said in the original language (quoted in Asad, 2008: 157). In other words, translating is not merely a translation exercise but also a colonising exercise. It reconfigures

[16] Emphasis his

and creates the world of the indigenous peoples in its own image. The controversy here becomes that coloniality transforms indigenous cultures in its process of translating and that the original cultures become devalued in the process. The task of ethnographers translating what they 'observe' into English has multiple implications for how the culture of the indigenous people is then framed in text and understood by both the translator and the indigenous people. Here I understand the task of translation into English not as a mere linguistic translation but also a cultural translation, to borrow from Asad (2008). And thus, it is not surprising that the perpetual subject of feminism, even its African/South African variants, is 'woman' and not 'umfazi'. My intervention thus becomes preoccupied with attempting to rescue African concepts from colonial clutches because, to borrow from wa Thiong'o, there is no amount of Senghorian "black blood" (wa Thiong'o,1987:7) that can be injected into the rusty joints of 'woman' to make it 'umfazi'. These are two cultural concepts which need to be treated differently.

According to the *Zulu-Kafir Dictionary* by Reverend William J. Davis (Döhne, 1857), the etymology of the word 'umfazi' is a combination of umFo and azi. Azi is defined as "to know, acknowledged, distinguished; the primary meaning of which is: to conceive, to generate, to increase; hence, to conceive and bring forth young. Other dialects have fadi, fatsi. Sis.: mosadi and mosari, then literally: a wife-man; a woman; a human female; a wife" The root word 'Fo' refers to a mortal being (Döhne, 1857:81). Davis also highlights that kazi (azi) morpheme is also used to denote to know, acknowledge, and distinguish. Although Davis is aware of the multiple meanings of the morpheme 'kazi', he insists on defining it as a gender signifier. On the other hand, Maseko challenges the idea that 'kazi' is a gendered signifier. She maintains that "kazi reinforces the intensity of the idea of the root word, not in size, but in attributes" (Maseko, 2018:51). For Maseko, kazi "adds a superlative, a degree of greatness and awesomeness in the noun" (Maseko, 2018; 50). Following Maseko's logic, umfokazi (umfazi) can be translated into 'a great mortal being'.

Maseko's (2018) position becomes even more convincing when one considers the diminutive suffix 'ana' (see Mohlala, 2003), which can be considered the opposite of 'kazi'. For instance, Mager (1996), limiting ubufazi (the institution of being umfazi) exclusively to married females, indicates that there are three categories associated with the office of ubufazi. The first one is umfazana, a newlywed. Umfazana must "work for their mothers-in-law until the birth of a second child when they might ascend the hierarchical scale, becoming umfazi" (Mager,1996:16). Then there is umfazi omkhulu, a wife who has reached a level of seniority or is the first wife in a polygamous setting. Thus, umfazana refers to a diminutive version of

umfo (mortal), while umfazi is the superlative version of the same. In fact, African linguist, Mohlala (2003) highlights that "in the context of disgust and/or insult, a diminutive noun may convey a derogatory or pejorative significance". Referring to someone as umfazana could be perceived as an insult depending on the context because it is diminutive.

Therefore, Maseko's (2018) observation that the morpheme 'kazi' cannot be said to be a gender signifier has some validity. As will be elaborated upon in the subsequent chapter, the morpheme 'kazi' is also used in compound words that are typically used to refer to male figures, words such as ubawokazi, which means great father, a paternal uncle in English. An additional example that Maseko refers us to is umhlekazi, which can be loosely translated as the beautiful one. Umhlekazi is often used similarly to how an English honorific such as 'sir' would be used; mainly aimed males (Maseko, 2018:50). Therefore, Maseko correctly indicates that considering the morpheme 'kazi' as a gendered signifier is a limitation. Both Maseko (2018) and Davis (Döhne, 1857) recognise that the 'kazi' morpheme designates being distinguished and set apart.

Based on the above linguistic evidence, I maintain that 'umfazi' should not be treated as the equivalent of the conceptual category of 'woman'. To begin with, 'umfazi' is not an exhaustive category; it is contingent, and its contingency is not solely predicated on biological and material influences. Depending on their context, the social standing of abafazi (plural of umfazi) alternates. For instance, Black theologian and womanist Kobo (2016) has grappled with the place of abafazi within traditional Xhosa homesteads and kinship groups, and her work has inadvertently revealed the complexity of the category of umfazi. She discusses the importance of what Healy-Clancy (2017) refers to as the cattle byre, which in isixhosa is known as ebuhlanti. Traditionally, ebuhlanti is a revered space at the centre of each umzi where cattle are kept. This space serves multiple important functions and is thus highly guarded. Not just anyone gains access to it. To begin with, it is a sacred space where the living and the living dead of each kinship group are connected and communicate. Furthermore, it is an economic hub because wealth in precolonial South Africa was tied to cattle. It is also a space of politics and public deliberation on matters pertaining to the kinship group (Kobo, 2016; 2020).

When Kobo (2016) first wrote about ebuhlanti, she fell into the trap of adopting a gendered framework to make sense of ebuhlanti and its significance. Her article was titled after an isiXhosa (Xhosa) idiom which says "umfazi akangeni ebuhlanti emzini", which Kobo (2016) translated to mean "a woman is not allowed in the homestead cattle kraal/byre". This led her to conclude that ebuhlanti is a male-dominated patriarchal space where womxn are not

allowed. Her article was dedicated to condemning Black men for dislocating Black womxn from this vital space. In her own words,

> [t]he dichotomisation of spaces by dislocating womxn from ebuhlanti, a governing, ethical artefact *of amaXhosa*, a place where economics, politics, spirituality and faith of a Black home reside, and allocating them *egoqweni/eziko,* where even the patriarch rules, leaving the womxn completely disempowered, maintains a dualism of power structure that is irreconcilable. (Kobo, 2016:4)

However, in her later work, Kobo (2020) adopts a more nuanced approach to studying ebuhlanti. She begins to unpack the complexity of translating the category of 'umfazi' to 'woman'.

To begin with, she reflects on her own experience with her family. In her 2020 article titled "Ebuhlanti Amandla ngawethu"*,* she adds a footnote that is also meant to be a disclaimer. In it, she shares the following:

> Disclaimer: as a way of introduction without attempting to be autobiographical, I reflect briefly on the experience I share in the processes of the kraal. I was born and bred in the Eastern Cape, for the first 5 years of my life, I was nurtured by my maternal grandparents in the rural area in the outskirts of King Williams Town. My umbilical cord was buried there and my rituals are performed there to this day. This is where my home is, even though my family home is in East London. So every time I travel to the Eastern Cape I must go to my rural home, to the kraal! ebuhlanti! When I enter I take off my shoes and then an elder will start reciting our clan names, ooZikhali, ooJojo, ooTiyeka, Butsolo Bentonga, Mbizana … and present me to my ancestors, then I will also start by reciting them 'sicamagushe'. Thank them for good health, protection … (sometimes with libation)… Camagu! (Kobo, 2020).

The quote above complicates the earlier assertion that ebuhlanti is a space where womxn are dislocated. According to a Western worldview, Kobo herself would be characterised as a womxn because she is what Oyěwùmí (1997) refers to as an anatomical female (anafemale). However, suppose we adopt the isiXhosa idiom Kobo quoted earlier, which says "umfazi akangeni ebuhlanti emzini". In that case, it then implies that somehow, Kobo is rendered outside of the category of 'umfazi' or is able to suspend her status of being umfazi to gain access to this space (ebuhlanti). This then begs the question, who and what is umfazi?

Mkhize and Ntšekhe (2021) also grapple with this question. These authors maintain that among the Zulu, not just any female is designated as umfazi. Only those females that are either married or are advanced in age are perceived as umfazi. Above, we discussed the three categories associated with ubufazi as Mager (1996) outlined, namely umfazana, umfazi and umfazi omkhulu, complexifying the category of umfazi even further. Grappling with the complexities of the question of 'umfazi' in relation to the sacred space of ebuhlanti, Kobo concludes that

> [t]here is something strange about African languages, in particular isiXhosa language, in the sense that one word can have so many connotations and meanings. In the word umfazi, already the contradictions are dealt with because it is translated as womxn, but it can also mean a married womxn or a young woman. A married womxn is the one that is denied access in [a] kraal, but has access in her own home. An unmarried womxn has access to ebuhlanti (Kobo, 2020:3).

Kobo's (2020) explanation appears to be slightly complex, confusing, and perhaps somewhat misleading. Ultimately, Kobo (2020) attempts to convey that every female is allowed access to ebuhlanti in her birth home/ among her kin to whom she has ancestral ties. These are consanguine family members who share common ancestors and common clan names. For this reason, when Kobo goes to her grandparents' house, she is able to enter ebuhlanti and call on the names of her ancestors. I expand on this phenomenon of the privileges that come with being amongst one's kin in Chapter 4 of this dissertation. In the case with Kobo (2020) as discussed above, she is among her kin and her ancestors, what would be generally known as amawabo.[17] Thus, it is evident that to say there is a section of the population known as 'woman' that is not allowed to enter ebuhlanti is simply not true.

I maintain that a kinship lens has to be employed in ascertaining who gains access to ebuhlanti, and who doesn't because a sex/gender framework is inadequate. For instance, Sacks (1982) abandoned the blanket category of 'woman' when making sense of African indigenous social and familial sytems among the Mbuti, the Lovedu, Buganda and amaMpondo. She realised that the difference in standing and status among females who had married into a given family and those among the kin of that family are vast. Thus, Sacks (1982) concluded that sisters and wives hold different statuses and authority within a kinship group, albeit they are all female. This demonstrates that status and (dis)privilege among South Africa's indigenous people is contingent and context-bound.

In that sense, what this interlude has demonstrated, albeit short for now, is the complexity of the category of umfazi and why it cannot be neatly treated as the conceptual equivalent of 'woman' as has been done in the 'wom[x]ns movement'. However, it is evident that further research needs to be conducted to unearth the circumstances and context under which one

[17] Initially I had used the term 'amawethu' consistently throughout this dissertation which is an isiXhosa and isiMpondo term used to refer to ones lineage/kin and their ancestors as indicated by Kuckertz (1983:114). However, Professor Zethu Cakata in her examination of this dissertation indicates that amawethu, which is a word constituted by the root of the word 'wethu' which means 'ours' and 'ama', which signals a plurality or 'multitudes', can only be correctly used when one is referring to themselves. In third-person narration, the grammatically correct term is amawabo, 'wabo' means 'theirs'. Therefore, Professor Cakata maintains that amawabo refers to "the multitudes of the third person's ancestry". Furthermore, Professor Cakata's position is that amawethu and/or amawabo refers to mainly departed members of one's kinship group or lineage. For this reason, in places where I refer to one's kin that are both living and departed, I will mention both the terms 'kin' to refer to the living alongside 'amawabo' to include those that have departed.

becomes umfazi, what it means and what obligations, responsibilities, status and/or (dis)privilege is attached to this office. Furthermore, this signals that subject formation within indigenous South African cultures is a lot more complex than the mere categorisation of humans as men and wom[x]n based on their anatomy. Given the above analysis, the question that remains is, on what basis was the 1956 collective chanting of "Wathint'bafazi, wathint'imbokodo." made? (Which I maintain ought to be thought of as meaning 'You touch[/strike] a great mortal, you touch[/strike] the rock'). Furthermore, what are the implications of this chant for how we conceptualise the subjectivity of the Black womxn that participated in this march? While these are questions that the current thesis cannot answer at this moment, they are important to foreground as informing its critical orientation towards the politics of gender in South Africa.

That is, the similarities between the categories of 'umfazi' and 'mother' that appear in the literature on gender and the Black nationalist movement is that they both appear to be contingent and heavily steeped in ideas of kinship and a broader collective that supersedes the individual (another key aspect of the political liberal tradition). In defence of the kinship model, and attempt to resolve the question of whether, indeed, there is an equivalent to what is understood as 'woman' in the Western imagination and how it finds expression within indigenous South African systems, the next chapter explores further various indigenous forms of social organising and modes of being. It does so by, firstly, giving a brief overview of how early anthropological works are implicated in the privileging and imposition of gendered analyses on their objects of study while concurrently rendering them delinquent to this gendered regime. Secondly, the chapter then discusses how the insistence on analysing the ways and modes of being of the indigenous people of South Africa through a bio-logical lens in many ways distorts complex socio-cultural phenomenon that demand a different reading to be fully appreciated.

# Chapter 4: On Subjectivities Born Not of Flesh

## 4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I am primarily in conversation with the work of South African scholar Hunter (1933; 1934a), whose anthropological work has been ground-breaking and has shaped subsequent anthropological works that sought to make sense of indigenous modes of social organisation among Abantu. Her work focuses on amaMpondo, one of the many subgroups of Abantu of South Africa. She supplements her work on amaMpondo with ethnographical work that studies the experiences of amaXhosa, because overall, there are more similarities than differences among the cultures of Abantu. Following Oyěwùmí (1997) and Maseko (2018), I make use of linguistic and discursive evidence to demonstrate that Hunter's (1933; 1934a) account of the modes of social organisation of amaMpondo (and other Abantu subgroups) is compromised by her privileging of a Eurocentric gendered lens to read these societies.

I provide an outline of the workings of a kinship-based system to illustrate the complexity that flows from indigenous modes of social organisation that defy a binary orientated gender system. I demonstrate that Abantu system(s) of social organisation make space for the existence of fluid and complex configurations of subjectivities such as those of male mothers and female fathers, indicating a collectivised system of responsibility on kinship members. My contention is that anthropological works have missed this complexity due to a dedication to Eurocentric gendered frameworks that are often applied when studying African societies and therefore overlook key aspects of indigenous culture that are different from dominant Eurocentric systems of social organisation based on a sex/gender anatomical regime.

Secondly, I demonstrate that Abantu kinship-based systems have a dual insider/outsider framework that is key in determining the level of status and/or (dis)privilege that members enjoy. I make the argument that scholars that are interested in studying indigenous modes of being ought to take this unit of analysis seriously since it plays a pivotal role in bringing to light the workings of a kinship-based system. Lastly, I discuss the institution of amadikazi to demonstrate that indeed one's status and how they are perceived in society was traditionally contingent on context and one's location within a kinship-based context. Overall, my argument is that within indigenous modes of social organisation and being in South Africa, it is difficult to make a case for the existence of a homogenous group of a subjectivity called 'women' who share similar experiences across the board. The contingency and fluidity of one's identity and status are based on contextual demands. Therefore, other units of analyses need to be employed to gain a more accurate perception of various phenomena.

I borrow conceptual tools from Amadiume (1987) and Oyěwùmí (1997) to propose an alternative reading of indigenous modes of social organisation, away from a primarily gendered lens that reads African societies as primarily gender fixated and patriarchal, to one that adopts a kinship-based lens to locate status. The universalisation of the idea of binary orientated gendered societies has been so pervasive in Western scholarship that all are guilty until proven innocent. For this reason, scholars such as Oyěwùmí (1997) have had to do extensive work to plead the case that 'Yorùbá's don't do gender'.[18] And even then, they have been critiqued and labelled as gender denialists (see Adesuyi, 2014; Apusigah, 2008; Yusuf, 1998). Seemingly, kinship analysis has not been able to escape the omnipresence of a framework that assumes the existence of gender and sexual inequality in every society. This chapter grapples with the multiple ways in which the logic of gender and sexual oppression has permeated understandings of South African kinship systems. Following Amadiume (1987) and Oyěwùmí (1997) Amadiume, I make a case for alternative ways of reading indigenous societies that do not necessarily place primacy on the bio-logic.

### 4.2 Situating Monica Hunter

Hunter completed the final draft of her PhD when she was 26. Two years later, the dissertation was published as a book, *Reaction to Conquest* (1934). The book rapidly gained great esteem within prominent circles. Colonial official General Jan Smuts, who was heavily invested in the establishment of anthropology as a discipline in South African universities (Webster, 2018:401), penned a laudatory foreword to the original publication, describing the work of young Hunter as the "most interesting account of native life in the process of modification under European influence" (Hunter, 1934:ix). Francis Wilson, son of Hunter, notes in the 2009 edition of *Reaction to Conquest* that world-renowned anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski and the African National Congress struggle stalwart Oliver Tambo are just two examples of other prominent figures who praised *Reaction to Conquest* for its thorough extensiveness (Wilson, 2009:1). According to Wilson (2009), young Monica Hunter had grown up attending school at the Lovedale Missionary School, often attending side-by-side with Black people. She soon realised that "the history she was being taught by white teachers was decidedly one-sided" (Wilson, 2009:4). One can understand the context of her PhD research, therefore, as being an attempt to write a balanced account of the history of the land and its people.

[18] *Yorùbá's Don't Do Gender* is the title of Bakare-Yusuf's critical review of Oyěwùmí's book, *Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses*. She adopted the title from Oyěwùmí's Book, *Invention of Women*, where Oyěwùmí refers to a feminist classic titled *Doing Gender*.

In her critique of the discipline of anthropology, particularly as it emerges in the context of colonial south Africa, focusing on the Department of Social Anthropology at the University of the Witwatersrand, Webster (2018) speaks of the evolution of the discipline of anthropology in South Africa and the ways in which the discipline was instrumental in propping up and maintaining colonial conquest. Her work highlights that although early European travellers and writers had constructed various myths about the perceived 'savages' that they encountered in the African continent, the context in which Anthropology emerges in South Africa is one that necessitated a serious engagement with the so called 'Native question' to help the colonial state administer 'native' affairs. She maintains that "Anthropology's construction of 'primitive'/'savage' and 'advanced'/'civilised' slots was articulated through the nexus of social anthropology, white liberalism and the conceptualisation of the so-called 'Native Question', a set of colonialist concerns about how to manage Africans within the changing racial jurisdictions of South African society" (Webster, 2018).

The shift in the focus of anthropological studies was necessary for the colonial state because of the influx of African migrant labour into the urban areas from 1910-1950. The colonial state sought strategies for how to manage natives, and anthropology was to be instrumental in generating the knowledge necessary for this strategizing. Thus, there emerged a need to align "knowledge projects with the demands of administering native populations" (Lalu, 2011). Webster's thorough account of the evolution of anthropology involves multiple shifts in the discipline and the roles played by prominent academic figures who oversaw and facilitated these shifts, from Winifred Hoernlé and Clement Doke, to younger anthropologists who were mentored by the earlier ones such as Monica Wilson née Hunter and Wilson's mentee Archie Mafeje. [19] Mafeje who was a prominent Africanist scholar known for his critique of the discipline for its "colonial epistemic schema" (Webster, 2018:409) and who also outright "reject[ed] the possibility of African anthropology" (Webster, 2018:409). For him, anthropology as a discipline could not be separated from its colonial roots.

Although Hunter is framed as a scholar that was primarily dedicated to giving an accurate account of the lives of the indigenous peoples of South Africa, one must acknowledge that her education and training influenced and shaped the lens through which she would make sense of the world, and by consequence, her object of study. Bank (2009:29) indicates that during Hunter's second year at Girton College, Cambridge, where she was undertaking her doctoral

[19] I will henceforth refer to her as Hunter because the primary text that I am in conversation with, *Reaction to Conquest,* which is her earliest work, was published under the name Monica Hunter.

studies, she attended a seminar given by feminist author Virginia Woolf who was at the height of her career. This moment was pivotal in shaping young Hunter's ideas about the subject of 'woman' in the world. And thus, it is not surprising that she had initially set out to study the effects of conquest on Abantu womxn and later aborted the study for a more general one that focused on the amaMpondo and amaXhosa (Bank, 2009:30). However, I argue that while the project Hunter decided to proceed with no longer explicitly centred 'woman' as its subject, it is very evident that the framework she used to make sense amaMpondo society was largely gender-centric.

Conducting her research in the early 1930s, a time when South Africa in its totality had been conquered, she adopted as her methodology what Bank describes as an "anthropological participant observation" method of research (Bank, 2009:30) which tends to afford greater significance to what the ethnographer observes in the immediate as opposed to relying on the indigenous archive and historical evidence. It was almost as if Hunter believed that by collecting evidence from a so-called native reserve, she would be travelling back to the past to collect evidence of what life before colonial conquest would have been like for amaMpondo, not realising that life for amaMpondo in the native reserves was already shaped by colonial conquest and influence. This is particularly striking because she maintained that "any culture can only be fully understood in its historic context, and when the culture under consideration has undergone revolutionary changes within a generation, the relative importance of the historical context is very much greater than when the culture has been comparatively static" (Hunter, 1934b:337). However, it appears that Hunter could not take her own advice.

In fact, according to her account:

> After three preliminary months in Auckland, therefore, I decided that (a) since no adequate data on the people whom I was studying before their contact with Europeans was available, the most possible method of gauging the changes resulting from the contact was to compare areas subject to different contact influences and that (b) the study would be simplified if I began in the most conservative area, that is, the one least affected by contact influences. I chose as representative areas for study; Pondoland, a reserve which has had less contact with Europeans than any other in the Cape Province, a block of European farms on which there are Bantu who have lived for two or three generations on European farms as servants, and who have no stake in any reserve, and the Native quarters of two European towns, East London a seaport and Grahamstown an inland town. Auckland, as a reserve that has been in long and close contact with Europeans, represents the fourth type of area. Each area chosen is typical of contact conditions widely spread in the Union of South Africa. (Hunter, 1934b: 337)

In this account, Hunter (1933; 1934a) relies on the rural Africans to be a site from which the notion of an authentic "African-ness" and Africanity can be explored. She falls into the trap of thinking of what is authentically African is what existed in the past, outside European contact

and modernity. What this exercise often implies is that "Europe" and "whiteness" are catalysts for movement/change while all that is 'traditionally African' is assumed to be fixed, unchanging, and un-evolving.

Hunter was influenced by anthropologist Driberg to adopting a participant observation method of study. Driberg shunned so-called 'armchair' anthropology in favour of what Bank calls the Malinowskian method of intimacy with the object of study. According to Bank, Driberg believed that "a year or two years of intimacy will give amazing results, but it must be complete intimacy in which we are prepared to share in all the pursuits of our hosts: to play their games; to eat their food; to live, in short, as they do" (Driberg cited in Bank, 2009: 48). Francis Wilson also notes that Hunter had an "excellent understanding of isiXhosa" (Wilson, 2009:3), and thus, at surface level, when one considers that Hunter had spent a few months living 'intimately' with amaMpondo and could understand isiXhosa, one would assume that she must have had the competence to understand and document the life of amaMpondo with a level of sophistication.

She also relied on guides and informants who gave her oral accounts of amaMpondo ways and modes of being before the formal annexure of Mpondoland by Europeans. Bank indicates that Hunter was hosted by Mary Drier, the granddaughter of Tiyo Soga. Soga was the first Black South African to be ordained as a church minister, and played a pivotal role in translating the Bible into indigenous tongues (Bank, 2009:562). However, I want to argue that, even after spending a few months living intimately among amaMpondo and enlisting the services of nameless informants, Hunter's research is fraught with biases that are shaped by her Eurocentric education and cultural upbringing which reads subjects primarily as gendered and their roles and status as emanating from their gender. In other words, Hunter's view of the world was informed by, among other things, the logic of the sex/gender anatomical schema and this is evident in the way she analyses amaMpondo society. I will expand on my critique of Hunter's analysis in the sections below.

### 4.3 AmaMpondo According Hunter's Eyes

Hunter (1933; 1934a) primarily studies amaMpondo people living in the so-called native 'reserves' in attempts to understand what an authentic life of amaMpondo outside European influence looked like. Although I cannot capture all aspects that Hunter covers in *Reaction to Conquest*, here I give a brief account of the kind of family and society Hunter says she encounters and presents as authentic to amaMpondo. To begin with, she indicates that among amaMpondo, a family is organised along kinship lines and is not a nuclear family typical to

Europeans. As Rubin indicates, "in pre-state societies, kinship is the idiom of social interaction, organising economic, political, and ceremonial, as well as sexual activity" (Rubin, 1975:169). And thus, often, kinships would be self-sufficient units. Hunter (1933; 1934a) reads each kinship group as comprising a man who is the head of the kinship group, his wives, his sons and their wives and children, and his unmarried daughters. Hunter goes on to indicate that "formerly, as many as twenty married men related in the male line lived together in one umzi". However, by the time she did her ethnographic research, an average umzi contained four to five adults, and four children (Hunter, 1934a:15).

From the above, it is evident that the kind of society that Hunter (1933; 1934a) observed mainly centred on the male, especially in his role as sole husband and father. It is principally described with everyone in relation to him – his wife, his sisters and his brothers. At the centre is him – the male head. This sort of analysis that centralises the role of the male is not unique to Hunter. A scan of important works on kinship systems signal some implicit theory of sexual oppression that has a male as the head of a kinship group and everyone else as subservient to him (see Rubin, 1975; Schneider, 1984; Levi-Strauss, 2016).

Keeping with the theme of a male centred patriarchal society, Hunter (1933; 1934a) also observes that marriage in amaMpondo society is patrilocal and polygynous. She indicates that the marriage process entails the passing of cattle (ikhazi) from the groom's family to the bride's family.[20] Through this process of ukulobola (the exchange of cattle), the groom's family gains the bride and access to the paternity of her offspring. Hunter quotes an informant who told her that "a womxn who is not *ukulobola* has no honour there (at her husband's umzi), for no matter how many children she bears, her brother can come and take her daughters away" (Hunter, 1934a:190).[21] The provision of access to paternity being contingent on the exchange of cattle is so strict that even biological fathers of children born outside of wedlock can only claim paternity after five heads of cattle are gifted to the mother's family (Hunter, 1934a:208). This applies even if he is no longer in a romantic/sexual relationship with the child's mother. Hunter then also indicates that a typical practice that involves initiating a new bride into the homestead is that she must live in her mother-in-law's hut and work for her and the entire kinship

[20] Cakata & Ramose (2021) indicate that among amaXhosa, what is today known as lobola (the exchange of cattle) was traditionally known as ikhazi. They indicate that lobola is derived from the verb "ukulobolelana which means a process of becoming associates or building relations […] it denotes a form of sharing […] In the context of isiXhosa marriage, [it speaks to] an exchange of gifts from both the bride and the groom's side in the process of building an associateship." (Cakata & Ramose, 2021:6)

[21] Given that Monica Hunter italicised indigenous language words, I have kept this iteration for all instances where I have cited her work directly in this chapter.

homestead (umzi) before she can get her own hut and be released from her mother in law's hut. Hunter estimates that this process typically takes around a year (Hunter, 1934a:15).

Once Hunter (1934a) has established the structure of a typical amaMpondo family, she proceeds to give a detailed account of aspects such as respect protocols within the family (isihlonipho), chores and obligations, rituals, property ownership, the ancestor cult and many others. While it is not feasible within this study to provide a detailed account of all the observations and conclusions Hunter (1934a) makes, a simple scan of the book reveals that the lens and framework through which she sought to make sense of amaMpondo society is informed by a rigid Eurocentric gender lens. It is replete with accounts of how a wife (who is primarily read as 'womxn') conducts herself in the homestead of her in-laws, what practices and speech she avoids, the rituals she observes in her marital home, her property rights (and lack thereof), among many other aspects. Her extensive detailing of the role of wives (who are read and framed as womxn) in amaMpondo society leads Bank to conclude that "any close reading of *Reaction to Conquest* reveals that the experience of womxn is at the very heart of the book with the world of Pondo men relegated to an afterthought in the tenth chapter of this tome" (Bank, 2008:30).

Unsurprisingly, drawing from the findings of her ethnography in Mpondoland, Hunter (1933) went on to pen an article explicitly dedicated to the 'woman' question titled: "The Effects of Contact with Europeans on the Status of Pondo Women". What makes Hunter's (1933; 1934a) work striking is that, some limitations notwithstanding, she was an anthropologist ahead of her time in many ways. She was able to recognise that there were glaring differences between the status of amaMpondo womxn and women in Western societies. For instance, speaking of the economic position of traditional amaMpondo womxn, she maintains that:

> Womxn of the Amampondo were economically self-supporting and their status was in no way servile. Grain, maize and millet was the staple food of the people, and the womxn were chief producers of grain…. the bargaining power gained by womxn by this fact does not seem to have been realized by earlier European observers whose own womxn were in economic subjection, but who were self-righteously shocked at what they thought to be an unfair division of labour between the sexes of the native tribes. (Hunter, 1933:260)

At the end of her article primarily dedicated to the 'woman' question, she concludes that "we have come to no definite conclusions as to the changes in the status of womxn as the result of contact with Europeans, but find opposite tendencies arising from the complex economic and social changes" (Hunter, 1933:276).

After studying aspects (before and after European contact) such as womxn's economic status, rights of property, the practice of ukulobola (cattle exchange for a bride), relations between husband and wife and womxn in public life, she concludes that in some respects the status of amaMpondo womxn did indeed improve after contact with Europeans, and in others, it had deteriorated. Her work makes evident that she treated the females she encountered in her study as a collective which she called 'womxn', who shared similar experiences by virtue of their anatomy, from which social standing and status flowed.

In detailing Hunter's (1933; 1934a) account of the life of amaMpondo, my aim is not to dispute or challenge her findings. Instead, what I am aiming for is to make a case for how an Afrocentric reading of her findings, which goes beyond the bio-logic mode of reading and understanding the ways and modes of being of amaMpondo, might provide us with an opportunity to understand differently the question of the status of amaMpondo womxn with which she grapples. I argue that this alternative reading of amaMpondo society relocates power from a lens that is fixated on the logics of a sex/gender anatomical schema to the kinship group, governed by the sacred ancestral cult, a system which I refer to as kinshiparchy. Following Amadiume (1987) and Oyěwùmí (1997), I argue that within a kinshiparchal system, status is predicated on a complex web of determinants such as one's kinship status, age, and sex, with kinship status being chief among all units of analysis. In this system the role of one's anatomy (sex) in determining one's status is relatively insignificant.

I touch on five themes that arise in Hunter's (1933; 1934a) work that, I argue, are framed primarily from a Eurocentric perspective informed by the logic of a sex/gender anatomical schema, and provide a nuanced interpretation of the phenomena under discussion. The first theme that I address is the assumption of the centrality of the male figure in Hunter's (1933; 1934a) account of the structure of the family yamaMpondo, the sole father and husband who has around him his wives, children, sisters, and brothers. The second aspect that I address is the simplistic claim that the Mpondo (and Abantu) societies have patrilineal systems where linage is primarily passed down through male ancestors purely because they are male. Thirdly, I engage with the framing of the institution of marriage as primarily an affair between a husband who is male, and a wife who is female. Attached to this aspect is the uncritical framing of females as wives primarily, and using the category of 'woman' as shorthand for all females. The fourth aspect is Hunter's (1934a) framing of the practice of isihlonipho from a purely gender-centric lens that interprets the practice as one targeted at womxn. Last, I address Hunter's (1934a) treatment of 'amadikazi' as oscillating between perceiving them as unmarried

daughters of a homestead to 'loose' womxn; I explore other possibilities for thinking differently about amadikazi.

## 4.4 (Re)thinking Afrocentric Kinship Structures

As indicated above, the kind of kinship group that Hunter presents is one which centres around the male figure who is also interpreted as the patriarch of the kinship group. He is primarily constructed as a husband and a father and everyone else is made sense of in relation to him, *his* wife, *his* children and *his* sisters. Of course, what follows from such an analysis is that he is the holder of power and authority and everyone else (who is female) is subservient to him. However, I seek to introduce an alternative framework which conceptualises a kinship group not as constituted by male and female bodies, but rather insiders and outsiders/newcomers in a kinship group which I draw from a synthesis of the works of Amadiume (1987), Oyěwùmí (1997), and Nzegwu (1998).

A traditional amaMpondo family structure, which is also typical among other Abantu groups in South Africa, is one that is organised along kinship lines as Hunter indicates. Table 1 below gives a brief outline of how I argue the two units that make up typical homesteads are constituted and operate. I do not go into detail on the structure and the different functions of the two units of the homestead; this initial discussion and the table is meant to orient the reader to the general structure and workings of a traditional homestead of Abantu of South Africa.

**Table 1: The two units of a traditional homestead**

| | **Umzi (patricentric)**<br>**Kinship homestead** | **Indlu (matricentric)** |
|---|---|---|
| **Headship** | Typically a senior male of kinship | mother/wife |
| **Unit composition** | Headship over:<br>• The entire Umzi/kinship group | Headship over:<br>• Children of the mother |
| **Economy** | • Depended on the different indlu for sustenance.<br>• Controls cattle. | • Autonomous<br>• Smallest productive unit<br>• Has own access to agricultural space<br>• Owns property in cattle |
| **Ideology** | Kinshiparchal | Matricentric |

Amadiume (1987) offers us a useful framework to adopt in making sense of African kinship structures. She makes a case for a dual system that has a matricentric unit and a

patricentric unit. The patricentric unit is what Oyěwùmí (1997) refers to as a homestead, and among the Abantu of South Africa, umzi is a kinship compound that is made up of different housing units which among the Abantu of South Africa are called indlu. In the patricentric unit, authority primarily lies with the collective that Oyěwùmí refers to as 'insiders' of a kinship group. These are individuals that are born into a particular kinship group and are bound together with other members of the kinship group by blood and a common ancestor. Among Abantu of South Africa, these are known as 'amawethu' (see Kuckertz, 1983), which could be loosely translated as "those who belong to us" and "those to whom we belong". [22]

For Amadiume (1987), the matricentric unit is a unit that is occupied by outsiders (wives) that marry into a kinship group. While they join the kinship group through the institution of marriage, they are never fully assimilated into the kinship group into which they marry. However, they remain full members of their own kinship group, albeit separated from it physically and residing within their marital homestead (see Hunter, 1933:40). It is in this unit that the authority of the mother resides. Among Abantu of South Africa, this unit is known as indlu. Nzegwu (1998) theorises this space as a bridge between a wife's ancestral home and that of the marital home in which she is somewhat of an outsider. The significance and implication of this liminal space demands further research as it is not thoroughly explored in this project.

Amadiume's (1987) conceptualisation of a matricentric unit and patricentric unit bears similarities to Oyěwùmí's (1997) idea of insiders and outsiders/newcomers, namely *oko* and *aya*, whom, as she maintains, have erroneously been translated as, and equated to, 'husbands' and 'wives', following Western predominant framings. According to Oyěwùmí (1997:46), *aya* are those individuals who marry into a homestead and proceed to live with their *oko*. The *oko* are consanguine members of a family who are born into the homestead and are part of the family lineage, they are connected to members of the lineage by blood. However, because the institution of marriage in the Oyo Yorùbá tradition is predominantly patrilocal – an aspect that Oyěwùmí does not extensively elaborate on given its relevance for the topic of sex/gender systems – it is primarily anafemales who move to the homestead into which they marry and are thus referred to as *aya*. Therefore, *aya* are the anafemales who marry into a homestead and live with their *oko*. *Oko* are both anafemales and anamales. In such a context, the *oko*, all the consanguine members of a homestead, enjoy a higher status than the *aya* (those that marry into a family) purely by virtue of being insiders (by blood) in a kinship group.

[22] As mentioned in page 88, 'amawethu' is only grammatical correct when one is speaking in the first person, otherwise in third-person narration, the term becomes amawabo. Therefore, I will be mostly using 'amawabo' to ensure grammatical correctness in the rest of the chapter.

Oyěwùmí's main point in this regard is that status in such a system is not conferred according to who is male and female but rather, who is a child of the homestead (*oko*) and who is an outsider (*aya*). Furthermore, because of seniority and timelines of when the *aya* joined the homestead, they can enjoy more status than *oko* who are born after the *aya* is married into the family; the new arrivals will then not refer to the *aya* as *aya* but *iya*, which means mother (regardless of who gave birth to them) (Oyěwùmí, 1997:45). In other words, their status increases with time, especially in relation to the newcomers that come after they are introduced to their marital home.

I argue that, using this dual framework of an umzi and indlu / patricentric and matricentric units as occupied by insiders and outsiders, we are better equipped to make sense of amaMpondo systems of social organisation beyond the limitation of the logic of the sex/gender anatomical schema. This framing moves our units of analysis away from the bio-logic which tends to centre the male, to the kinshiparchal which factors in multiple determinants in the allocation of status and/or (dis)privilege. The logic of the kinshiparchal also frustrates the logic of a binary orientated sex/gender anatomical schema.

### *4.4.1 The Linguistic Disruption of Gender Binary in amaMpondo Kinship Systems*

In this section, I move analysis away from the father/husband figure that Hunter centralises in her reading of the amaMpondo, and shift attention to the kinship group as a collective. As a way of grounding my analysis, I centre the figure of a child and theorise the rest of the kinship group in relation to them to demonstrate the complex nature of amaMpondo (and other Abantu) social organisation. Hunter's (1934a:15-61) account of amaMpondo kinship and social organisation is replete with framings of kinship members in accordance with the logics of a rigid and binary orientated sex/gender regime where husbands are assumed to be male, and wives female. Likewise, in accordance with this regime, mothers are assumed to be female and fathers male. However, I maintain that linguistic and discursive evidence suggests that, in the world-sense of amaMpondo (and Abantu in general), mother and father, similarly husband and wife are not gender bound categories. I will begin by breaking down the kinship structure of the maternal side of each kinship group and then later move to the paternal side.

Among amaMpondo, amaXhosa and other Abantu groups, one has (u)ma (mother), who is the biological mother. Then, there is umakazi (the mother's sister), the direct translation of u-ma-kazi is contingent on whether one understands the morpheme 'kazi' to be a gendered signifier or one which designates greatness as discussed earlier. Just to briefly recap the controversy around the morpheme 'kazi' as discussed in part 2 of the literature review, Maseko

(2018) challenges the assumption that the morpheme 'kazi', which appears in several isiMpondo and isiXhosa words such as umfazi, ubawokazi, umhlekazi, is a gender signifier. She demonstrates that words such as umhlekazi (which is often used similarly to how an English honorific such as 'sir' would be used; mainly aimed males) or ubawokazi, which is used to refer to one's father's brother (the so-called uncle in English culture) proves that indeed, to think of 'kazi' as a gender signifier is inherently flawed.[23] For Maseko, kazi "adds a superlative, a degree of greatness and awesomeness in the noun" (Maseko, 2018; 50). Thus, if one treats 'kazi' as a gender signifier, then u-ma-kazi becomes directly translated as female-mother. However, if 'kazi' is treated as a morpheme that makes the root word superlative, the translation of umakazi then becomes great mother. I am more inclined to believe that umakazi means great-mother, and I will elucidate on this below when I discuss ubawokazi. There is also umalume (mother's brother) which can be directly translated as a male-mother. U-ma-lume is a compound word constituted by ma, which refers to mother and lume used as a masculine designation in various Abantu languages (see Doke and Vilakazi, 1972:480; Kuper, 1979:375).

And thus, from the above we gather that, based on the number of siblings one's birth mother has, the world-sense of Abantu makes provision for one to have a variety of mothers of any gender. Furthermore, all these mothers have obligations towards the child, and therefore this is not just a matter of titles but also responsibility and duty towards the child. On the paternal side, a child's biological father is referred to as (u)bawo. Then there is ubawo-kazi (father's brother), a combination of ubawo (father) and the morpheme '-kazi'. With u-bawo-kazi, it becomes evident that to think of the morpheme 'kazi' as one that signifies femininity is incorrect because referring to the father's brother as a female father would simply be illogical (see Hunter, 1933:54). Indeed, following Maseko (2018), u-bawo-kazi then only makes sense to mean great-father.

Kuper (1979:375) makes the interesting observation that it is "only parents same-sex siblings [who] are normally distinguished as 'older' or 'younger' 'father' and 'mother'". Kuper's observation is apt as it pertains to other Abantu groups such as the Zulu, Batswana and Basotho. For instance, to refer to one's mother's sister, an alternative to the term u-ma-kazi is u-ma-omncane (young mother) or u-ma-omkhulu (older mother), and the same 'omncane' (young) and omkhulu (older) applies in the paternal side as it pertains to the variations of 'father'. However, interestingly among amaMpondo, when it comes to the paternal side,

[23] While I maintain that the usage of 'umhlekazi' is similar to the ways in which in English the term 'sir' would be used, I do not mean to imply they mean the same thing or speak to the same subject.

whether they are younger or older, same-sex siblings are referred to using the 'kazi' morpheme, which adds a superlative effect to their title, in the absence of the specification of whether they are older or younger to the biological father.

Lastly, there is dadebawo (who is one's father's sister). Dade-bawo is directly translated as sister-father. However, scholars such as Hunter (1933:54) document it as dade bobawo, which could be translated as 'sister of the father', similarly, Kuper (1979:375) also frames dade-bawo as dade-waobawo and translates it as 'sister of my father'. However, I argue that both these translations by Hunter and Kuper are incorrect. For instance, among the Basotho and Batswana, the word for 'father' is 'rra'. The father's siblings are ra-mogolo (father's older brother), which directly translates to older-father and ra-ngwane (father's younger brother). The father's female sibling is referred to as ra-kgadi, which means great father. Ra-kgadi's husband is also referred to as ra-kgadi, once again reinforcing the fact that the morpheme kgadi, which is a cognate of kazi, is not a gender signifier. Thus, it becomes evident that the idea of a female father is not an impossibility in the cosmology of Abantu. The move to convert sister-father to a sister *of the* father when translating dadebawo speaks to an attempt by translators to give coherence to a system which is incoherent to the Eurocentric imagination which is bound to the logics of the sex/gender anatomical schema.

To substantiate the argument I make above, I make use of the work of Magadla et al. (2021) who point us to the controversy that ensued in July 2013 within the Mandela family. Mandla Mandela, who is a grandson of the late head of state, Nelson Mandela, and who was chief of the Mvezo traditional council, had exhumed the remains of three family members from their place of burial in Qunu and moved them to Mveso without consulting the rest of the family elders. The Mandela family, under the leadership of the eldest surviving daughter of Nelson Mandela and his first wife Evelyn Makaziwe Mandela-Amuah filed an interdict with the Eastern Cape high court to order Mandla to return the remains that he had exhumed back to Qunu. Makaziwe Mandela-Amuah, by virtue of being Mandla Mandela's father's sister, was his dadebawo. According to Magadla et al. (2021), "the debate that ensued regarding the cultural rights of Makaziwe Mandela-Amuah and Mandla Mandela […] are illustrative of the particulars of African gender structures that are not constrained by biological sex".

Chief Phathekile Holomisa (2013), who is the traditional leader of the Hagebe clan of the Thembu and the president of the Traditional Leaders of South Africa, attempted to make the argument that Mandela-Amuah could no longer make decisions as it pertains to the affairs of the Mandela's because she was wedded and therefore belonged to her marital home, that of the Amuah's. He maintained:

> Nkosi Mandla Mandela (ah! Zwelivelile) the heir-apparent to the Madiba dynasty, and *Mrs* Makaziwe Amuah, umafungwashe (the senior daughter, the one by who we swear), are the chief protagonists in the drama.[24] Both of them are holding their respective positions by default by reason of the fact that Zwelivelile's father and Makaziwe's older sister (after whom she is named) passed away before they could take up their respective leadership positions. From what we see in the media, each believes they are senior to the other.
>
> Of course, the fact of the matter is that there can only be one leader in any institution and in this case the person whom the Dalibhunga house designated senior leader is Zwelivelile. This does not take away the fact that *Mrs Amuah* is entitled to deference, by virtue of her being sister to Zwelivelile's father and *older* than him by age.[25] Zwelivelile has to make major decisions affecting the family after consultation with her, much more so than he is obliged to the other family members. (Holomisa, 2013; n.p)

Magadla et al. (2021) use the rebuttals by Mndende (2013) and Sesanti (2013) to expose how Holomisa (2013) sought to weaponize Makaziwe-Amuah's status as a married womxn, to strip her of her rightful place as a father (female-father) to Mandla Mandela and thus occupying a higher position in the leadership hierarchy of the Mandela clan by virtue of her seniority and status as father.

According to Sesanti (2013:n.p),

> … even after being married to the husband's family, the wife continues being referred to by her clan name. The assumption of husband's surnames by married womxn is not an African cultural practice… when the Congress of Traditional Leaders of South Africa (Contralesa) president Chief Phathekile Holomisa refers to Makaziwe Mandela as Mrs Makaziwe Amuah, even when the latter prefers to be referred to by her maiden name, this is as baffling as it is ironic.

Sesanti (2013) makes this argument to remind the reader that in accordance with the culture of Abantu, the institution of marriage does not uproot the wife from their family completely, an aspect I will elaborate on later in this chapter. Therefore, he sought to remind us that Mandela-Amuah was still as much part of her family as she was before she wedded. Mndende (2013) continued to argue that "Makaziwe is an umfazi (married womxn) to her husband's family; but she is an intombi (daughter) to the Mandela family. She has specific roles to play. Makaziwe, as the only surviving child of Madiba's first marriage, has the right to intervene when she sees something going astray" (Mndende (2013:n.p). Mdende (2013) too falls into the trap of translating Dadebawo as (father's sister); however, in the same article, she returns to say that "Makaziwe is Mandla's father, in the true sense of the word, without looking at her gender". Thus, the fact of her gender, or that she was married at the time of the family dispute, do not

[24] Emphasis mine
[25] Emphasis mine

take away that she was the only surviving father Mandla Mandela had and was entitled to a level of deference from the chief.

Magadla et al. (2021) also make reference to a different incident, when a speech was given by Winnie Madikizela Mandela's nephew, Thembelani Madikizela, at her memorial service in April 2018. Thembelani is quoted to have said:

> She was always close to us, especially after our father's passing. At her home, or at her father's homestead, CK [Columbus Kokani], our grandfather, they were left as four girls. She was the oldest. The ending of her marriage helped us. I see those who were distraught, saying that she was deserted by her man. Exclaiming that she failed in marriage. At home, *we rejoiced because we gained a father.*[26] *(*quoted in Magadla et al. 2021:525)

The cases quoted above demonstrate that fatherhood and motherhood in the world-sense of Abantu is not a phenomenon that flows from the body. It is allocated in terms of a complex system that goes against the bio-logic that insists that mothers are females and males are fathers.

It is therefore not surprising that American anthropologist Henry Morgan concluded that among the Zulu people,

> my mother's brother is my uncle, umaluma (sic), but he calls me his son. The relationship, therefore, is not reciprocal, and it raises the presumption that *the relationship originally was that of the father*.[27] His children are each my cousins, umzala, but they call me brother. Here again, the relationship is not reciprocal, and it leads to the same inference. The children of these cousins are my sons and daughters, and their children are my grandchildren. (Morgan, 1870:465)

However, the noun malume is self-explanatory, it refers to a male mother, and therefore Morgan is incorrect to assume that the relationship was originally that of the father, it would have been more apt had he chosen to use the gender-neutral term 'parent', and it is for that reason that umalume calls the child of his sister their own son/daughter. This system only becomes complicated when one insists on translating umalume, which means male mother, into an English construct called uncle. As Engels (2010:180) indicates, the titles given to mother, father or child are not merely nouns used for address. Instead, they speak to serious obligations that the said subjects have to one another.

### *4.4.2 (Un)Gendering the Kinshiparchy*

The second assumption that I find prevalent in the works of scholars such as Hunter (1934a:52) and Kuckertz (1983:144), and seek to address, is that the lineage of a clan in amaMpondo (and other Abantu) society is passed down patrilineally. This assumption is often used to cement the

[26] Emphasis mine
[27] Emphasis mine

idea of the existence of patriarchal societies that are primarily organised in terms of the logics of the sex/gender anatomical schema which tends to privilege male figures, and I seek to complicate this simplistic reading. While I concede that it appears that the ancestor whose name inaugurates a clan and is carried down from generation to generation appears to be that of a male, I argue that the criterion determining how the clan name is passed down is not bound to a logic animated by the sex/gender anatomical schema but rather, one's kinship and marital status. I argue this because, as I demonstrate below, females are legitimate carriers of the clan name of their kinship group as everyone else, even post-nuptial.

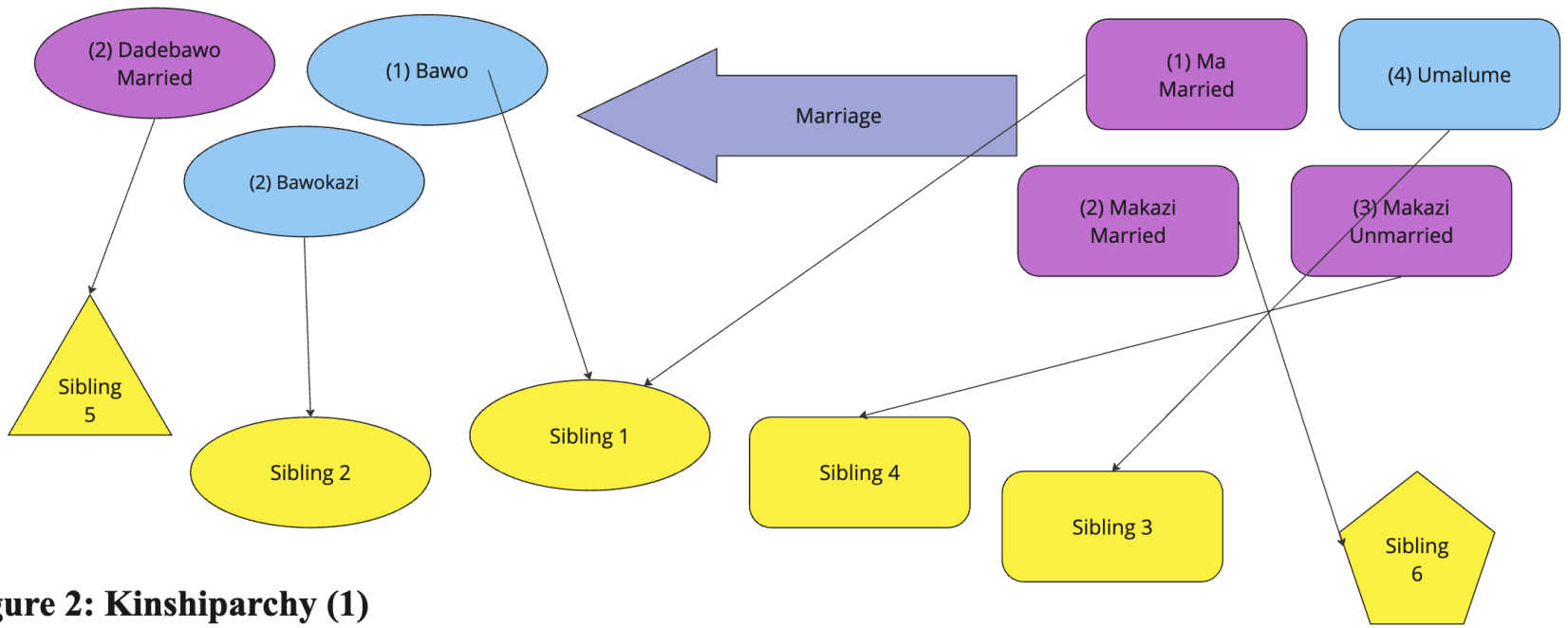



**Figure 2: Kinshiparchy (1)**

The diagram in Figure 2 illustrates how the logic of a kinshiparchy applies to a complex system of multiple mothers, fathers and siblings. Here again, we see the distinction between siblings of one's kin who are insiders of the primary kinship group and share common ancestors (amawabo) and outsiders. Consider the maternal kinship group illustrated in the diagram above. Umalume's (male mother 4) children are insiders of the kinship group of the mother because umalume has claimed his children through the institution of cattle exchange (ukulobola). However, the children of mother (1) and mother (2), while siblings, will often not share clan names because they are claimed by their respective paternal kinship groups through the institution of cattle exchange (ukulobola) (see Hunter, 1934a:190, 208). And thus, their primary kin, through their clan names, become those of their paternal side of the family. Note that sibling 1 and sibling 6 are represented by different shapes in the diagram; this serves to indicate that their primary kin are of different clans. However, because mother (3) is unmarried and her children are not claimed by their father through cattle exchange, they retain her clan as their primary kin. For this reason, they share the same shape as umalumes' (mother 4) children.

The diagram above further illustrates a complex family setup characterised by members of various clans who are bound together by the institution of ukulobola (cattle exchange) while simultaneously maintaining membership in their primary kinship groups held together by their respective amawabo. Therefore, following the logic of a kinshiparchal system, sibling 1 and sibling 2 will enjoy greater status among their paternal kin, and sibling 3 and sibling 4 will enjoy greater status among their maternal kin. Also note, since marriage is patrilocal among amaMpondo (see Hunter, 1933:15), on the maternal side, it is only umalume (mother 4) who is guaranteed that once married, all his offspring will grow the kinship group since they are guaranteed to retain his clan's name. For mother 4, the expansion of her own kinship group is contingent on whether her offspring is claimed by their paternal side and if she chooses to wed.

This system is not unique to amaMpondo (or Abantu in general), Amadiume (1987) speaks of similar systems among the Igbo, where daughters who chose not to marry, or those called back from their marital homes to their own homesteads, could conceive and give birth to children that would carry their clan name instead of that of the father of the child. Ultimately, these children would have as their primary kin their maternal side of the family. Amadiume (1987:409) refers to this institution as that of male daughters, although she admits that the Ibgo word for this role is *di-bu-no* which is a gender neutral term which means 'family head'. Therefore, if we were to use the genderless *di-bu-no,* females in a headship position are not portrayed as what would be implied to be 'honorary men' as is the case when the English concepts "male daughter" and "female husband" are used (Amadiume, 1987:90). This also

disrupts the notion that what is normative is a male figure in a head of house position and potentially opens up the space for other aspects, besides biology, to determine who best ought to occupy such positions.

Applying a gendered lens to make sense of the system through which kinship status along with clan names are passed down, as Hunter does, tempts one to conclude that it is passed down patrilineally. For instance, Hunter (1933:57) maintains that

> as members of one clan trace their descent from a common ancestor, so a number of clans may trace back their relationship to a still more remote ancestor, each clan being a branch of one main stem […] the new clans consist of all the descendants in the male line of one chief.

The insistence to read systems of descent from a gendered perspective then poses problems when the researcher must make sense of why the children of unmarried mothers, who are not claimed by their biological fathers, carry the name of the mother's clan. Hunter (1933: 47), for instance, then goes on to conclude that so-called 'illegitimate children' inherit the names of their maternal grandfather or maternal uncle, and thus *ipso facto* belong to the grandfather or uncle. However, this reading erases the mother's full-fledged membership in the kinship group and her status as a full carrier of the clan name no less than her father or brothers. The fact remains that the mother, grandfather and maternal uncle of a child all carry the same clan name, and thus, one wonders what it is that makes Hunter (1933; 1934a) overlook the mother's membership in the clan and give guardianship of the child to male relatives even when the child's mother is alive. A simple explanation is that once a scholar concludes that a system is patriarchal and patrilineal, it becomes difficult for them to fathom the possibility that a mother could pass down their clan names to their own children. So instead, she replaces the mother's right over the child with that of male relatives to sustain the narrative of a patriarchal and patrilineal system.

Access to paternity is contingent on ukulobola (cattle exchange) as has already been discussed. Hypothetically speaking, one can argue that if the system of ukulobola (the exchange of cattle) did not exist among amaMpondo, all the children born into amaMpondo society would carry the clan names of their mothers because ultimately, they would primarily belong to the kinship group of their mothers. Similar to the Oyo Yorùbá of which Oyěwùmí speaks, it is through the system of the so called bride-wealth that a father is granted access to the paternity of the child (see Oyěwùmí, 1997:50). The question around bride-wealth is a hotly contested topic among feminist and gender scholars, often portrayed as the buying and selling of womxn.

According to Oyěwùmí,

> In Oyo Yorùbá society, marriage was essentially a relationship between lineages. Contractually, it formalised the conferral of paternity rights of the lineage of the groom to the children born in the course of the marriage. In exchange for this right, goods and services were transferred from the groom's lineage to that of the bride. The goods were given as the bride-wealth, while the services were rendered lifelong. The payment of the bride-wealth by the groom's family conferred sexual access and paternity. It did not confer rights over her person or labor. (Oyěwùmí, 1997:50)

According to the Oyo Yorùbá, anamales do not have automatic claims to fatherhood over their children if the bride-wealth has not been exchanged. In other words, the only way for anamales to access rights to fatherhood is through the exchange of bride-wealth. For the anafemale, however, the children to whom they give birth are theirs, and they do not have to perform anything extra to secure title to motherhood. This of course raises some concerns. For instance, the claim that by paying bride-wealth, the groom secures sexual access to the bride raises several questions pertaining to the bride's rights as an individual. Especially given that the issue of marital rape for so long was not recognised and is a point of contention (see Gqola, 2015). Therefore, does the act of giving bride-wealth and rendering the services amount to consent by the bride? What are the implications of this ruling regarding issues such as marital rape? These are questions that Oyěwùmí (1997) does not address.

Still, Oyěwùmí's (1997) framing of the bride price as an instrument that ensures access to paternity and therefore fatherhood is significant. Especially since she is not the first scholar of African studies to make this assertion. Mark Hunter (2006:100) makes the compelling argument that "as a consequence of the centrality of childbirth, ilobolo was less a 'bride price', as it was commonly called, and rather a child-price – an exchange for a womxn's reproductive capacity rather than the sale of a womxn". For instance, in the absence of a bride price and access to paternity, the implication here is that the mother will then pass down her clan status and lineage to her child. This then complicates the logic of a universally patrilineal system and opens up space for us to imagine dual systems of descent that aren't fixed nor determined by gender but are contingent on other factors such as bride/child-price and kinship status.

Even if a child's mother is no longer in a romantic relationship with the child's father, once born, the father must exchange cattle for the child to claim paternity. It is only through this process that a child carries the clan names of his father. Failure to give cattle to claim paternity results in the child carrying the mother's clan name and thus remains primarily an insider of their mother's kinship group. And, if they are male and choose to wed later in life, their offspring too will carry the clan names of his mother, which are, in fact, the clan names of his kin and amawabo (see Hunter, 1933:166). The above scenario demonstrates how the

notion of a neatly patrilineal system in which kinship membership and clan names are passed down exclusively through the male line is a distortion of a much more complex system.

Therefore, this section demonstrates that patrilineality is contingent on the institution of ukulobola (cattle exchange) in the absence of which, mothers pass down their lineage to their offspring. In the case of marital unions, the institution of cattle exchange also plays the role of uniting two families, those of the bride and the groom. I discuss this aspect in the subsequent section.

### *4.4.3 Whose Wife is it Anyway? Umakoti Ungowethu*

As already indicated, amaMpondo, like other Abantu, are communal people. The collective supersedes the individual. This section is dedicated to elucidating the institution of marriage, displacing it from the Eurocentric idea of a marriage union being a private affair between two people – one male and the other female – to one that involves entire kinship groups (see Mulaudzi, 2013). I maintain that if one prioritises a kinshiparchal lens to study marital unions among amaMpondo, the findings suggest that while it is only a single partner that has legitimate sexual access to the bride, a wife is claimed by the kin of the husband in totality, with some people such as the mother-in-law wielding higher authority over her than others, her husband included. Furthermore, I aim to bring attention to the collective nature of the institution of marriage among amaMpondo whereby, in a kinship group into which a bride marries, all siblings of a conjugal partner are considered her husband, regardless of their sex and/or gender. I also demonstrate that this phenomenon of male and female husbands is not unique to amaMpondo, but can be witnessed in different regions of the African continent albeit with variations.

In the modern Eurocentric imagination, a marriage is a union between a man and a woman, who will later bear offspring and live in a nuclear family, happily ever after. Within this context, the man is the head of the household, which is the site in which power and authority reside. It is this idea of a compulsory heterosexual nuclear family that radical western feminist scholars such as Rich (1980) and Firestone (2015) have problematised. However, among amaMpondo, marriage is the affair of a coming together of two kinship groups in complex ways. One thing is very glaring about this complex union system; a bride is not claimed by a single individual upon marriage. She is claimed by the entire kinship group (constituted by both males and females) into which they marry. The degree of influence over marriages that the kinship group has is so powerful that Hunter observed that the single most potent impediment to a marital union between lovers is usually their kinship group. This is

because if kin disapprove of a union, the marriage will not be realised, so much so that the couple may be forced to elope (Hunter, 1934a: 189). It is for this reason that typically during a wedding ceremony, the family of the groom will sing the classic wedding song (Umakoti ungowethu) documented below:

> Umakoti ngowethu; Siyavuma
> azakusi phekela asi ayinele
> Siyavuma sithi yele yele yele siyavuma
>
> The bride is ours; we approve
> She will cook for us and iron our clothes
> The bride is ours; we approve
> We approve, and we say yes, yes! We approve[28]

It is no coincidence that the lyrics make reference to 'umakoti ungowethu' (the bride is ours) and not umakoti ungowami (the bride is mine). This song emphasises the communality of marriage in the society of amaMpondo. It refutes the logic that womxn are exchanged from the hands of one patriarch to be owned by another and suggests, instead, that it is the entire kinship group of the groom that claims the person and the labour of the bride when they sing, "she will cook for us and iron our clothes" (Mtose, 2011:98).

A marriage entails the process of cattle exchange, which is pivotal for legitimising a marital union. Anything outside of the exchange of cattle in traditional amaMpondo society would not be recognised as a legitimate union. According to Hunter (1934a:190), "without the passage of cattle, there is in Pondo law no marriage, even though a womxn has lived long with a man and borne him children". This is the case across all Abantu that occupy modern-day South Africa. Take, for instance, a classic Setswana wedding song which was popularised by the late South African jazz artist Gwangwa (2001), titled Kgomo. It goes:

> Kgomo di tlile di tshelela (Six cattle have arrived)
> Ya bosupa e supile masupatsela (The seventh one leads the way)
> Nna ga di sa fella nka di busa (If they are not all here, I'll return them)
> Nna ga di sa fella nka di busetsa morago (I will return them if there are not the required number) (Mulauzi, 2013: 47)

The above song bears testimony to the primacy of the practice of cattle exchange before any marital union can be considered legitimate by both sides of the family of the bride and the groom. Mulaudzi (2013:44) writes: "in this song, Gwangwa wants the listeners to understand the significance of blood as a dynamic symbol that unifies families in society". This is consistent with Hunter's observation that, among amaMpondo, "cattle are very closely linked

[28] Translation by Mtose (2011:98)

with the ancestral spirits and the clan … cattle received as the ikhazi of a daughter of special ritual importance … the passage of cattle puts the girl received in exchange for cattle in close relationship with the ancestral spirits of the family from which the cattle came" (Hunter, 1934a:192).[29] Thus, once again, we see that the union of the bride is indeed not only with the individual groom but with the groom's kin in their totality, both male and female, both living and departed. I wish to emphasise that the cattle that are passed to the bride's family during the marriage ceremony, in fact, belong to the groom's kinship group as a collective and not just the groom.

For instance, Kuper (2016:274), documenting bridewealth practices among the Nguni, states that,

> Ideally (and probably in practice), when a man had sufficient cattle, he provided the bridewealth for the first wife of the oldest son of each of his "houses." In exchange, he could claim the bridewealth cattle paid for this son's first daughter. Wives for whom a man's father paid the bridewealth, the "*household" wives*, had the highest status.[30] There were also "house" wives. A man might acquire a wife with the cattle received from the marriage of a sister in the same "house." The womxn then had a claim on her brother's house. It was, in a sense, *her* house and she could make free with its goods. She would also require an appropriate return for the bridewealth she had brought in: among the Nguni, a co-wife to live with her in a subordinate position; among the Sotho-Tswana, a daughter to marry her son.[31]

The passage above indicates that the cattle transactions that occur during marriages are highly complex; describing them as simply a transaction between a husband and the bride's family is not enough. Moreover, equally complex relations result from these transactions. In the above scenario, a sister of a husband might have an equal claim to her brother's house because the wife of that household was acquired using the cattle gained through her (the sister's) marriage.

Moreover, Kuper (2016:274) also indicates that the Batswana have instances where ones' malume (male mother) contributes to the cattle that are exchanged for the wife of his male child (nephew in the English culture). In return, the male mother might gain cattle exchanged for their female child (niece in the English culture). This complex set of relationships leads Kuper (2016: 264) to conclude that "it would therefore be misleading to say that men were exchanging womxn between themselves. Rather, men and womxn exchanged certain rights in womxn and cattle". Similarly, when Ellen Khuzwayo (2016) writes about her experience among the Batswana of South Africa, she too indicates that "formerly, marriages in this community was the concern and involvement of the whole family… A young husband could remark: 'Pulane

[29] Ikhazi means bridewealth in the form of cattle.
[30] Emphasis mine
[31] Emphasis his

ke Mosadi oa Khomo tsa ntate, Ke Mma bana ba ka' (Pulane (the wife's name) is the wife of *my father's herd of cattle,* and a mother of my children" (Kuzwayo, 2016:291).[32] If one understands a father within this context to be an individual, they will conclude that the speaker is referring to a single individual who owns cattle and exchanged them for his son's bride. However, if one considers the diagram in Figure 4, then one comes to appreciate that the figure of a 'father' is indeed a complex one that necessitates moving beyond the individual to the collective.

The questions around shifting ownership of cattle used in the marital cattle exchange ceremonies has implications for how we think about the marital union itself. Is it one between a husband and a wife or one uniting two kinship groups? I argue that it is the latter. This also has implications for the level of status that new brides (outsiders/newcomers according to Oyěwùmí's theorising) have in relation to the insiders of the kinship group they marry into. Therefore, status and (dis)privilege within this context is not allocated in terms of the bio-logic; one's sex and gender do not determine their social standing, there are other determinants.

### 4.5 On Female Husbands or Husbands that are Female?

The idea of husbands that transcends biological dictates is useful in helping us think deeper about the privilege that Oyěwùmí (1997) maintains comes with being an insider in a kinship group *vis-à-vis* an outsider/newcomer (wife). It demands that we relocate the source of power and privilege away from a purely/primarily gender lens that is premised on the logic of the sex/gender anatomical schema to one that must take into consideration the intersection of factors such as kinship status, age/seniority and where sex plays a very minimal role in the determination of status and/or (dis) privilege.

To recapitulate, I have already mentioned in earlier sections that Oyěwùmí (1997) discusses the office of *oko* and that of *aya* which, she maintains, have erroneously been translated as, and equated to, the office of husband (*oko*) and wife (*aya*) following Western predominant framings. According to Oyěwùmí (1997:46), *aya* are those individuals who marry into a homestead and proceed to live with their *oko*. The *oko* are consanguine members of a family who are born into the homestead and are part of the family lineage, they are connected to members of the lineage by blood. Therefore, *oko* are insiders of a kinship group through birth and *aya* are those that marry into a kinship group. While it is predominantly anafemales who marry into their conjugal partner's homestead, Oyěwùmí (1997:48) indicates that there

[32] Emphasis mine

are instances where the anamale moves into the anafemales homestead upon marriage and, in this case, it is the anamale that would be the *aya* and the kin of the anafemale would become their *oko*. However, she does indicate that this is not a prevalent practice and historically occurred in cases where the anafemale came from a wealthy family or was of royalty and did not want to move out of their family homestead. Nonetheless, Oyěwùmí (1997) shows that while it may appear to the untrained eye that *aya* and *oko* designate sex/gender roles, it is not the case, the offices of *oko* and *aya* are not determined through body reasoning.

Oyěwùmí's (1997) alternative presents a possibility where an individual (regardless of their sex), marries into a family and becomes an *aya*, to a family of *oko* that is constituted by both anamales and anafemales. Therefore, one can see how translating '*aya'* as wife and '*oko'* as husband can tend to be misleading and fails to capture the complexity of the Yorùbá system. Moreover, it is important to also remember that Oyěwùmí (1997) maintains that *oko* always enjoy elevated status in relation to *aya* based on their insider status within the kinship group, a home advantage of sorts for both male and female insiders. Similarly, the case of amaMpondo complicates the neat relationship that exists in the western imagination that assumes there to be a subjectivity called 'woman', that marries a man and becomes a wife (to a husband), and then subsequently has both male and female in-laws that are gender distinguishable through language and naming practices such as sister-in-law and brother-in-law.

I borrow Oyěwùmí's (1997) theorisation of the genderless office of *oko* and *aya*, along with the privileges attached to the office of *oko*, to make sense of the system of marital union among amaMpondo. I maintain that similar to the case of the Oyo Yorùbá, higher status is primarily vested with the insiders of a kinship group who share amawabo, regardless of their sex and gender in relation to wives (newcomers/outsiders) who marry into a kinship group. I maintain that the differential status of a wife *vis-à-vis* the insiders of a kinship group is shaped primarily by a matrix of factors such as her kinship outsider status, seniority, status of motherhood, and that their sex plays a minimal role. This is primarily because a wife, based on her status of outsider shows deference to the various insiders of the kinship group into which she marries, who are considered her husbands, regardless of their sex. Her status within the kinship group improves over time through the passage of time, and as she bears children, although she is never fully assimilated into the kinship group into which she marries (see Sesanti, 2013; and Madende, 2013). Speaking of wives, Hunter (1934a: 43) writes that "the longer she is married the more closely she is assimilated to the new clan; in time even the restrictions on her behaviour are gradually relaxed and she becomes an ithongo (ancestral spirit) to her children who belong to her husband's clan, but *she is never completely*

*assimilated*".[33] Hunter (1934a:40) also indicates that part of the avoidance practices (ukuhlonipha) which fall on a wife's in-laws is that they avoid calling her by her name. Instead, they refer to her using her clan name. This bears testimony to the fact that one's membership into a blood/ancestral kinship group is eternal, and both males and females of a kinship group are equal bearers of the clan name of amawabo.

According to Hunter (1934a: 35),

> the position of a wife in an umzi is very different from that of a daughter or a sister. The first virtue demanded of a bride is that she should be *khuthele* (diligent, eager). She rises at dawn, before anyone else, and goes to fetch water… Every day she should go to fetch wood, and it is she who in winter goes to gather wild spinach from the distant fields.[34]

AmaMpondo brides (more so newlyweds) are more accountable to their mother-in-law than to their husbands. This phenomenon is similar among Batswana who are known to sing a classical Setswana traditional song on the day of the wedding celebration to the wife:

> Fiela fiela fiela ngwanyana
> Fiela ngwanyana
> O se jele matlakaleng
>
> Mmatswale ke chobolo
> Chobolo ya mosadi
> Fiela ngwanyana
> O se jele matlakaleng (see Dikotla, 1996)

English Translation:

> Sweep, sweep, sweep, girl
> Sweep, girl
> Don't eat in a dirty home.
>
> Mother-in-law is strict
> A very strict womxn
> Sweep girl
> Don't eat in a dirty home.

If one were to insist on reading the above through a Western lens which insists on making the bio-logic the primary site through which inequality is read and understood, then the fact that a womxn is tasked with performing all these tasks would potentially suffice as proof of the existence of a system that systematically oppresses womxn because of their anatomy. However, the fact that a wife is primarily accountable to their mother-in-law more so than their husband complicates a neat, gendered understanding that positions womxn as a group primarily

[33] My emphasis
[34] Italics hers

oppressed by men. Here, we witness a system whose hierarchy does not necessarily flow from the body. It is one predicated on kinship insider/outsider status, seniority and then among other determinants, one's sex.

Consider Hunter's observation that "[w]ives of [a] younger brother must treat a womxn [sister of the brother] with great respect, calling her *indodakazi* (literally, female husband) or *nina ka* – (mother of – ).[35] When she comes to visit her brother they must wait upon her, and make no complaint" (Hunter, 1933:33). Equally, in her extensive account of the supposedly socially acceptable gender-based violence among the amaMpondo, Hunter (1934a: 30) maintains,

> … every brother claims authority over the wives and children of another, although he be senior to them. A man's brothers, even his younger brothers, claim the right to order about his wife, and to beat her if she annoys or disobeys them, 'because she has been *ukulobola* with the cattle of the *umzi* and 'her husband's brother *indodake* (is her husband).[36]

Not surprisingly, while Hunter (1934a) seems to be aware that indeed marriage among amaMpondo is a collective affair that involves the kinship group as a collective, her commitment to a strict binarily placed gendered lens leads her to only see the male members of the husband's kinship group as also husband to the wife, and not the womxn, even when the evidence is clear that the idea of a "husband" within this context is not sex/gender bound.

There are variations of the phenomenon of female husbands within the African continent. Amadiume (1987) is among the earliest African scholars to theorise the phenomenon of female husbands, drawing from the experience of the Igbo people in West Africa. However, the phenomenon she documents is different to the one I maintain exists among amaMpondo. Amadiume's (1987) case is one of direct womxn to womxn marriage. In such a case, "a female husband is a womxn who pays bridewealth for, and thus marries (but does not have sexual intercourse with) another womxn. By so doing, she becomes the social and legal father of her wife's children" (Oboler, 1980:69). She documents the experiences of Ekwe titled womxn (some of whom were married to men) who became so successful in their respective trades, that they could afford to marry multiple wives that would give birth to children in their name to continue their legacy. The number of wives and children that these womxn have would rival those of their own husbands and other men within the community. According to Magadla et al.

[35] Italics in the original quote by Hunter
[36] Italics in the original quote by Hunter

(2021: 518), Amadiume's (1987) work provides a conceptual space to explore alternative formulations of female power within African societies.

In the case of the Igbo, the female husbands gain their wives by directly paying bridewealth for them. However, in the case of amaMpondo, the kin of the conjugal partner of a bride become her husbands (both male and female) by virtue of the blood ties they share with the groom, along with being stakeholders in the property of the cattle that are exchanged during the lobola process (see Hunter, 1934a:30). The marital system of ama Mpondo shares similarities with the case Yaliwe Clarke (2021) describes in the Zambian context. Here, relatives of one's conjugal partner do not have to directly pay bridewealth towards a bride to qualify as their husband, they gain the title by virtue of being kin with the conjugal partner to which a wife is wedded. Clarke shares an encounter that took place at the funeral of her brother in-law, where a woman of older age introduced herself to Clarke as her husband.

According to Clarke (2021: 578),

> As I entered the sitting room, I noticed about thirty elderly womxn sat in rows on the floor with their backs leaning against the wall […] when I reached the sixth woman, she held my hand and asked (in Nyanja) 'Do you know who I am.' I said I did not know. She asked me again 'Do you know who I am'. I said no. She then asked me 'Are you not the one who is married to the son of …' I said yes. She asked me again 'Do you know who I am?' I said no. I was sure to keep looking at the floor, as eye contact with an elderly woman who is an in-law is not considered respectful. She sternly remarked 'Don't you know that I am your husband!'

Clarke's (2021) work brings to our attention that within the African continent, there are variations of the "female-husband" phenomenon. She indicates that in some contexts such as those discussed by Amadiume (1987) and Oboler (1980) (who works on the Nandi of Kenya), the relationship of a wife in relation to her female-husband is both heteronormative and yet gender fluid, in that the female husband is able to tap into privileges and power that come with occupying a typically masculine position, that of being husband.

Typically, it would be older womxn who had not been able to birth sons to inherit their property who would then marry a younger bride that would be allowed to have sexual relations with other men and birth children in the name of their female husband. The children would be considered to belong to the female husband and sons would be heirs to the female husband's estate. The urgency to have sons as inheritors of property leads Clarke (2021) to conclude that this gender fluid system is in some ways still in service of a patriarchal order that privileges maleness. It would also be interesting to know the indigenous words that are used to refer to these phenomena, to establish if indeed the office (husband) is in anyway linked the body (female). For instance, Clarke (2021) indicates that her female-husband referred to herself as

Clarke's husband in Nyanja, one of the Abantu languages that is spoken in some parts of southeast and East Africa. Immediately after noting this, Clarke (2021) goes on to refer to her as her 'female-husband', thus returning the bio-logic to the office of 'husband', even when it is obvious at this point that, in this case, the office of husband cannot be solely associated with maleness.

The same can be said for the concept of 'wife', which, in the Eurocentric worldview, is laden with assumptions about the holder's anatomy, sex, gender, and status. This is not a phenomenon that is unique to amaMpondo (and other Abantu groups) of South Africa only. For instance, speaking of the Igbo in West Africa, Amadiume (1987) indicates that

> [t]he Igbo word for wife, *onye be*, is a genderless expression meaning a person who belongs to the home of the master of the home. The other words for wife, nwunye or nwanyi, female or woman, also denote one in a subordinate, service or domestic relationship to one in a master position. It was, therefore, possible for some men to be addressed by the term 'wife', as they were in service or domestic relationship to a master. (Amadiume, 1987:90)

The fact that genderless terms such as *onye be, nwunye* and *nwanyi* which speak more to one's position in relation to an authoritative figure (a master), have been translated into gender saturated conceptus such as wife, who is automatically assumed to be female and a weaker vessel (1 Peter 3:7) and thus in a position of subordination, and husband who is male and always assumes the role of the head, speaks to the act of translation as a colonising process as discussed in the interlude of this dissertation. The translators of Igbo into English sought to mirror the Igbo family structure to the Western nuclear family structure which is primarily constituted of a husband and a wife in line with the logic of the sex/gender anatomical schema.

### *4.5.1 Avoidance Practices, Isihlonipho*

Avoidance practices are an additional site that is often evoked to make a case, not only for the universality of a binary orientated gender system, but one which is unequal, rigidly characterised by superior males and inferior females. There is a branch in sociolinguistics in South Africa that is particularly interested in studying isihlonipho, which is sometimes referred to as isihlonipho sabafazi and can be loosely translated as womxn's avoidance/respect practices. Although there has been some degree of acknowledgement from scholars of South African sociolinguistics such as Finlayson (1984), Zungu (1997) and Rudwick and Shange (2006) that the practice of ukuhlonipha (avoidance/respect) is observed by both men and womxn, depending on the context, there remains a dominant current that reads the practice of ukuhlonipha (avoidance/respect) from a gendered perspective. AmaMpondo are not spared

from this indictment. I want to argue that any attempt to understand avoidance practices by prioritising a gendered perspective robs the researcher of an opportunity to unpack a complex system that moves beyond the bio-logic. Once again, for this section, I borrow the theoretical tools of both Amadiume (1987) and Oyěwùmí (1997) to complexify our understanding of avoidance practices beyond a Western feminist lens.

For Abantu of South Africa, isihlonipho forms part and parcel of a general code of ethics that governs people regardless of age, class and gender. According to Bongela (2001:9), "the concept of hlonipha in an African society is all embracing. It does not, as some people think, involve only the exclusive hlonipha language for abakhwetha (the initiates) and o'makoti, that is, womxn who have recently married and who are therefore subjected to a set of hlonipha rules and language". The dominant tendency to theorise isihlonipho as a practice that is exclusively observed by womxn leads Bongela (2001) to make the disclaimer that hlonipha is not a practice which only binds a small group of people, particularly womxn. This is because, once the practice of ukuhlonipha becomes read as a gendered phenomenon, it becomes inevitable that it is then theorised as a tool aimed at the disempowerment of womxn.

For instance, speaking of amaZulu, Rudwick and Shange (2006: 478) make the argument that

> there is little doubt that, by employing the linguistic register (*isihlonipho*), females not only show respect but also subordination in a particular situational context.[37] It may indeed be argued that isihlonipho is, among other things, a linguistic manifestation of the general position of subordination and disempowerment of Zulu females in relation to men.

Similarly, Thetela highlights, for instance, that womxn will use euphemistic terms such as kuku (cake) to refer to a vagina or kwae (cigarette) to refer to a penis during police interviews with rape victims (Thetela, 2002: 180). Thetela (2002) then concludes that the usage of the isihlonipho dialect is complicit in the "reproduction of hegemonic social relationships" (Thetela, 2002:180) among men and womxn. The scenario that Thetela (2002) presents becomes a valid cause for concern when one operates from the premise that the said male official(s) that the rape victims communicate with when pressing charges cannot understand the isihlonipho dialect or the victim's euphemistic terms. However, we find out in the same article that the police officer who was taking a statement from the victim did indeed understand what the victim was referring to when using euphemistic concepts such as kuku (cake) and

[37] My addition for purposes of clarifying exactly what the author makes reference.

kwae (cigarette) because they too form part and parcel of the community that uses such euphemistic terms to be respectful.

Thetela (2002) also indicates that male reporters from a Lesotho based police newspaper also use the isihlonipho dialect to report rape and other violent crimes. Oddly, when the user of isihlonipho is a male, gendered oppression ceases to be evoked as the reason the user chose to use the language. When faced with the task of making sense of why it is that male reporters decided to make use of isihlonipho when writing about rape in newspaper articles, Thetela (2002:181) argues

> The choices of the *hlonipha* terms with reference to rape above could be seen in the reporters' awareness of a wide range of readership (including children, who should be protected from sexual explicitness) for the newspaper.[38] By avoiding swear words and profanities, for example, the authors of these reports enter into a negotiation of cultural meanings with their readership, and in this way, ensure social acceptability, and possibly promote the sale of the newspaper.

The obvious controversy here is whether using such euphemisms does, in fact, compromise the case of the victim during rape trials. It is beyond the scope of this project to grapple with this aspect. However, I seek to indicate that theorising isihlonipho as a gendered phenomenon is misleading. Researchers of the isihlonipho practice understand that both males and females employ it as part of social etiquette. Thetela (2002), for instance, evokes the fundamental question of age when she mentions the possible readership of children as a reason for making use of the isihlonipho dialect in the newspaper. Although she mentions age, she quickly abandons it to return her focus to a gendered analysis and thus, loses the opportunity to grapple with the implications of age as an additional unit of analysis. There is an insistence on mainly theorising it as an exclusively gendered phenomenon.

As quoted above, Rudwick and Shange (2006: 475) maintain that isihlonipho is a manifestation of the subordination of womxn. In the same article, they make the argument that "it is important to point out that *hlonipha* practices occur not only among females but among all isiZulu-speakers. The crux of the custom simply lies in the significance of interactional politeness linked to societal power dynamics". They then go on to refer to Irvine and Gal (2000), who argue that the male usage of isihlonipho has been deliberately ignored by European observers who've insisted on documenting the use of isihlonipho as exclusively "womxn's speech – ignoring its political dimension and its use by men" (Rudwick and Shange, 2006:476). From the above-cited authors, we see no less than two units of analysis that become overlooked

[38] Italics hers

when studying isihlonipho from a gendered framework, namely, age and kinship rank. To the end of addressing this lacunae, the next section elucidates the practice of isihlonipho within the context of a kinship system. Additional units of analysis such as seniority, insider/outsider status and kinship rank are used to grapple with the practice of isihlonipho to complicate the prevalent gendered analyses.

### *4.5.2 Isihlonipho Within a Kinship System*

#### 4.5.2.1 Bride and Groom in Relation to In-Laws

Similar to the Oyo Yorùbá, within the Nguni cultures, when a new bride joins a marital kinship group, she assumes the position of a newcomer. Likewise, there are certain practices she must observe as she becomes initiated into her new home. Some practices fall away over time, and some she must keep observing permanently.

Although Hunter (1933: 36, 44, 57, 60, 87, 173, 185) does not explicitly frame isihlonipho as a practice that is exclusively performed by womxn, the majority of the references to the practice that she covers are those that pertain to wives. Therefore, after reading *Reaction to Conquest,* one is left with a feeling that isihlonipho is a practice that primarily involves womxn. Hunter (1933) is no exception in focusing on womxn when making sense of isihlonipho. According to Finlayson (1984:138) isihlonipho "concerns the conscious avoidance in the womxn's everyday speech of the syllables occurring in the husband's family's names… from the time that the womxn enters her in-laws' home she may not pronounce words which have any syllable which is part of the names that occur among her husband's relatives". The wife avoids saying the names of "her father-in-law, mother-in-law, father-in-law's brothers and sisters and their wives and husbands and extending back usually as far as the great-grandfather" (Finlayson, 1984:139).

Consequently, at surface level, one could easily conclude that isihlonipho is a practice that is primarily determined according to the logic of the sex/gender anatomical schema that subjects womxn to the authority of men. However, upon closer scrutiny, it becomes glaringly evident that the people whose names the wife (newcomer) avoids are those of elderly people, those belonging to the generation of the bride's mother-in-law and father-in-law. And thus, it becomes apparent here that age and one's status as an outsider/newcomer, and not gender, are key factors in determining eligibility for being a beneficiary of isihlonipho. Reciprocally, the wife's in-laws are also tasked with avoiding the names by which her (the brides) kinship group use to call her. Hunter (1934a:40) indicates that her in-laws would rather call her by her clan

name, prefixing it with uma (mother). For example, if one's clan name is Tolo, they will be referred to as umaTolo (mother Tolo).

Although the focus of this section is mainly dedicated to linguistic isihlonipho, it is worth highlighting that there are other non-verbal avoidance practices that a wife is meant to observe in the homestead into which she marries. An example of one such practice that Hunter (1934a:36) documents is avoiding accessing certain spaces such as the cattle kraal of the homestead that she marries into. The cattle kraal is often documented as a space exclusively for men. However, interestingly, while the bride avoids the cattle kraal in her in-law's homestead, she need not do that in her own home (see Kobo, 2020). Therefore, this phenomenon raises questions of whether a gendered analysis is sufficient to explain why it is that a female is not allowed to enter a so-called men's space in her marital homestead (where she is an outsider/newcomer) but is allowed to do so among her own kin (where she is an insider). As already discussed in part 2 of the literature review, if we were to employ a gendered analysis in making sense of the above phenomenon, we would have to account for why one's biology merits restrictions in one context (her marital home) and not the other (among one's kin).

While it is evident from the above analysis that beneficiaries of isihlonipho cannot be determined along gendered lines but rather lines of seniority and kinship insider/outsider status, we still must determine whether the burden of ukuhlonipha lies only on wives. As already mentioned above, the in-laws of a wife, regardless of their sex, are also expected to avoid using the daughter-in-law's names. Instead, they make use of her clan name prefixed with 'uma'. Similarly, Hunter (1934a) and Bongela (2001:34) indicate that, just as a wife is expected to avoid the names of her in-laws, so too is her conjugal husband expected to avoid the names of his mother-in-law and other seniors such as his wife's grandmother. Once again, we see evidence of seniority playing a pivotal role in determining eligibility for being a recipient of isihlonipho – ukuhloniphiwa (being respected/revered).

Bongela (2001) undertakes an extensive study dedicated to the practice of isihlonipho among amaXhosa. While it is not in the scope of this project to delve deep into his study, it is worthwhile to note that he covers all the isihlonipho practices that are observed by males, females, children and initiates in various contexts. A close reading of his work makes it evident that, in order to properly understand isihlonipho, one ought to employ a complex framework that takes into cognisance the context(s) that necessitates isihlonipho, the age of the subjects in question, their kinship status/rank given the context, and their insider/outsider status within a kinship group/clan, among other things. AmaMpondo, like the rest of Abantu, are communal,

and an individual's status is relational and thus constantly in flux depending on the context and the people that surround them at any given time. And therefore, the idea of the existence of an absolutely inferior or superior being based on their anatomy becomes very difficult to prove.

## 4.6 Amadikazi

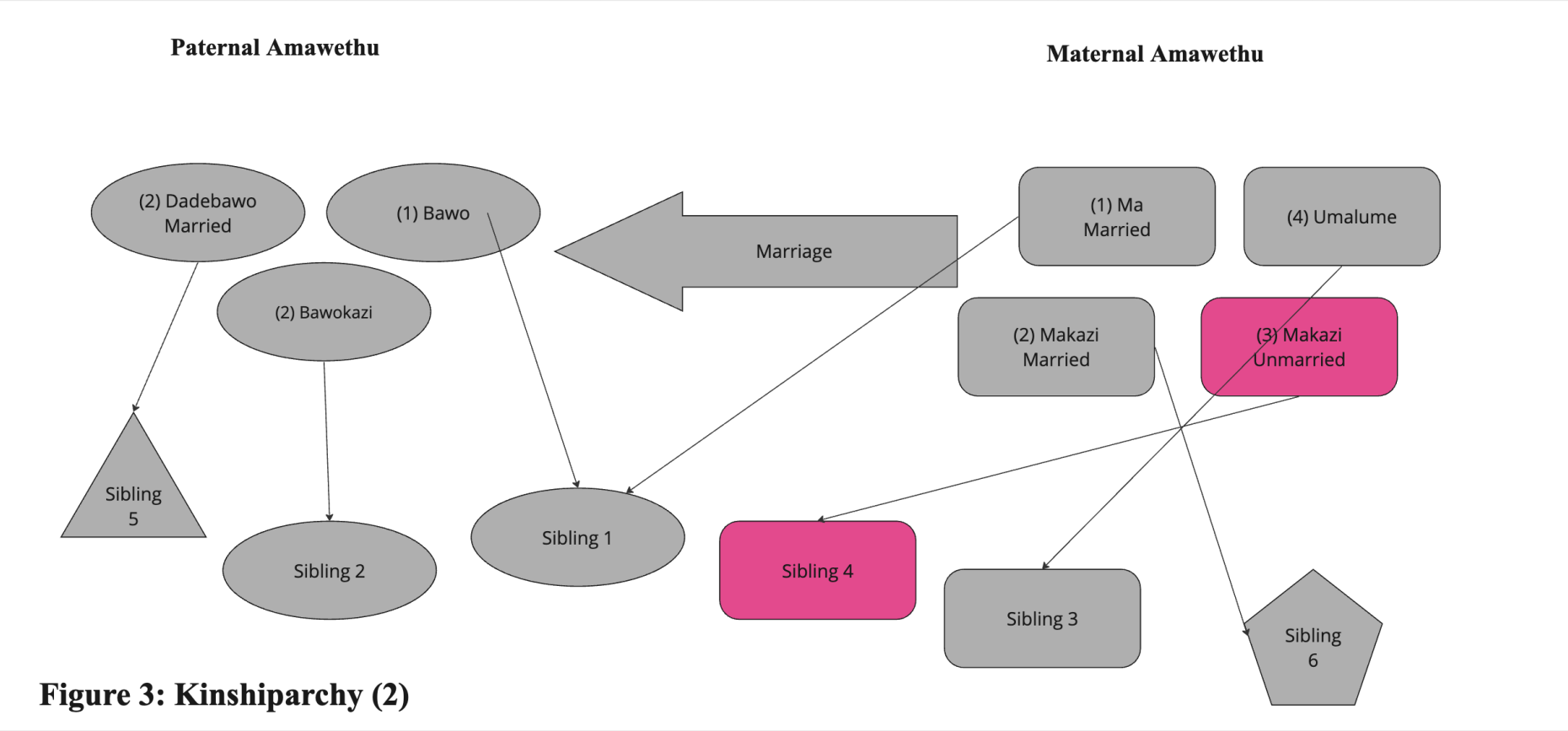



**Figure 3: Kinshiparchy (2)**

AmaMpondo and amaXhosa society has a group of womxn who are very interesting to look at for the purposes of this study. They are referred to as Amadikazi, defined by Lamla (1985:20) as the "liberated womxn". According to the etymology of the word, Lamla (1985:22) maintains that they are the "idikwamzi", which translates to 'those who are fed up/disgusted with the homestead'. In contemporary South Africa, to be idikazi is not to have a good reputation in amaMpondo society and tends to be associated with ideas of promiscuity and moral depravity. For instance, in their definition of idikazi, Doke and Vilakazi (1972:146 ) indicate that the term idikazi "carries a certain savour of insult, as indicating a woman no longer a virgin" (Doke and Vilakazi, 1972:146). The stigma attached to amadikazi is more apparent in Lamla's (1985) work than in Hunter's (1934a). However, there is already evidence in Hunter's work of the deteriorating status of amadikazi. For instance, Hunter oscillates between defining amadikazi as a term denoting "womxn living at the umzi of her father or brother" (1934a:34), and in other parts of her work, she uses the term to denote "loose womxn" (1933: 266) without accounting for the difference in translation. Given that there is a five-decade gap in the works of the two scholars, one cannot help but wonder if the status of amadikazi deteriorated over time due to various influences. Still, I am of the view that amadikazi are a productive site to look at for an indication of what life is like for those females that choose to remain within the homestead of amawabo.

Amadikazi are females who were either never married, are divorced, or are widowed (Hunter, 1933:266; Lamla, 1985:20; Matinga, 2010:216).[39] In Figure 3, I depict Makazi (in red) as an unmarried daughter/member of the kinship homestead, and thus she could be referred to as idikazi (a singular of amadikazi). Notice that Makazi's offspring retains the shape (square) used to designate her kin to portray that, because she is unmarried and the biological father of her child has not claimed the child through cattle, the child's principal amawabo are that of their mother. Thus, Makazi's offspring belongs to the lineage of her people. And the child will pass on their mother's clan name to their offspring.

Hunter maintains that historically, amadikazi enjoyed a particular lifestyle that would not necessarily be freely available to married womxn, especially those living in their marital homes. These include the freedom to go out to drink beer, to enjoy sexual relations with

[39] While Lamla (1985) adds divorced and widowed womxn to those who would historically be classified as Amadikazi, Professor Cakata contests this. She indicates that among amaXhosa in particular "oomabuya ekwedeni" is a concept used to refer to divorced womxn and "aba hlolokazi" is a concept used to refer to widowed women. I resolve to leave this debate open and rather focus on "Amadikazi" to explore what their position was *vis-a-vis* married women and explore the status that came with one remaining among their kin in their homestead.

whomever they wish, even with multiple partners if they so wish, and the freedom to migrate to distant places in search of employment (Hunter, 1933: 194, 205). Lamla adds that

> many good and socially valuable things are done by amadikazi. Many of them are the artists of the community. Because they have more free time than married womxn, they are able to indulge in producing elaborate beadwork and embroidery for themselves and for their lovers and are noted for their fine handicrafts. (Lamla, 1985:23)

In many ways, the lifestyle that amadikazi are said to enjoy is nothing out of the ordinary as Hunter (1934a) writes of amaMpondo society as one in which men frequently go out to drink beer and have sexual encounters at will with multiple partners.

What makes amadikazi stand out for Hunter (1933; 1934a) and Lamla (1985) alike is that amadikazi are female. And thus, the proclivity to treat females as a homogenous group called 'womxn' leads them to perceive the behaviour of amadikazi as a deviation from the 'norm'. However, a kinshiparchal reading would demand that one shifts one's gaze away from the logic informed by the workings of a sex/gender anatomical schema to the fact of their position and status among their kin. And thus, it becomes evident that unmarried females, as is the case with their male counterparts, by virtue of residing among their kin, do not have the same amount of restrictions/avoidance practices to observe in the presence of their own kin as would be the case if they were among another (marital) kinship group.

According to Lamla:

> Amadikazi can frequently be observed in gala dress, often wearing heavily braided skirts, embroidered white shoulder blankets, beadwork and obviously new handkerchiefs. Their lovers usually give them many presents. They are easily distinguished by the large number of ornaments they wear. They can also be identified by the elegance of their clothes, usually presented to them by their lovers. At Ludeke Trading Centre in Bizana in August 1983, a man buying ten rows of braiding for his wife remarked: 'That's plenty. It is only for a wife and not for an idikazi'. Undoubtedly, had it been for an idikazi, he would have bought much more. Putting it to him that a wife should surely benefit most, he replied: 'she will forget that she is a wife. She must learn to bear hardships (ukusokola). (Lamla, 1985:23)

This observation by Lamla suggests that perhaps in our endeavour to study prestige systems and systems of oppression, the institution of marriage merits a thorough investigation. For instance, one could not be faulted for wondering whether amadikazi noticed earlier on that distance from one's kinship group necessarily meant forgoing certain privileges that they ordinarily enjoy when living among their kin.

Matinga (2010:270) makes a similar conclusion in her participant observation study. She found that married womxn were expected to perform chores that amadikazi did not necessarily perform during ceremonies. She notes that,

> one example was the fact that in 2007 at funerals, people often asked me to do different kinds of work while other womxn would ask why I do this as if I am a makoti… After several funerals, I (tested this strategy) and refused to do work and wash teacups, replying that I am not a makoti. This was enough for me to be released from this obligation and join amadikazi who were chatting. (Matinga, 2010:270)

And thus, one can conclude that amadikazi are held to a different social standard than is the case with o'makoti. Matinga (2010) does not indicate if the married females (o'makoti) that were expected to perform labour were wedded to the same kinship group or if the amadikazi were presumed to belong to the same kinship group. However, it is beneficial to consider that Matinga's (2010) study was conducted over a century after Hunter's, and practices could have evolved within that period.

There are various accounts in different contexts of the African continent that demonstrate the unique role that womxn who remain among their kin (unmarried womxn, recalled womxn, divorced womxn) played in the kinship.[40] For instance, writing about the Igbo of Nigeria, Amadiume (1987) shares the experience of Nwajiuba whose father had no sons, and his brothers had died. Upon his death, his property would not be inherited by anyone, and his land would possibly be redistributed to the extended family. To mitigate this challenge, he recalled his daughter Nwajiuba from her marital home to occupy the role of the 'male daughter' in order for her to inherit the land (Amadiume, 1987:32). At the one level, this case could be interpreted as according womxn an honorary male status. However, suppose we adopt Oyěwùmí's approach of analysing what language tells us about the world view of the Nnobi. In that case, we find that what Amadiume (1987) labels a male daughter has very little to do with anatomical sex and instead speaks to being an individual who belongs to a particular patrilineal lineage, similar to the system of the *oko* and *aya* discussed above. Amadiume indicates that firstborn daughters could also inherit land if, upon their mother's passing, they would marry a woman who would be in charge of farming as their mother had previously done, therefore becoming a female husband (Amadiume, 1987:34). A male daughter would perform all the duties a male would typically perform, such as paying taxes and attending meetings typically attended by males.

Nzegwu (1998) refers to the institution of idigbe, idegbe, or mgba, which she argues has nothing to do with the gendering that Amadiume (1997) imposes on it in her analysis. This gendering then displaces daughters, who are now valued differently because of their sex. She maintains:

[40] Recalled womxn are womxn that were married but requested by their kin to return to their homestead to fulfil a certain role.

> There used to be (and may still be in some communities) a widespread formal institution of considerable import known as idigbe, idegbe, or mgba. This institution enables a daughter to remain in, or to dissolve her marriage and return to her natal home to have children who are assimilated into her own lineage. (Nzegwu, 1998:605)

Nzegwu (1998) describes two ways in which this institution finds expression among the Igbo. However, in both instances, the primary fact is that the daughter of the obi, whether she has a 'paramour' or not, retains her status as a daughter, does not wed, and therefore no bridal price is paid for her. In turn, this means that the children she bears are born into her ancestral home and thus take her name and remain under her and her family's custody. This point would coincide with Oyěwùmí's (1997:52) position that the bridal price given during a wedding is not the purchasing of a wife but a means through which a man gains access to fatherhood. This is a testament to the fact that children primarily belong to their mothers. Nzegwu (1998) indicates that, that the daughter can have such a responsibility towards her ancestral home speaks to the fact that all family members are equally important in ensuring the preservation of a lineage, regardless of their sex. Therefore, status, in this case, is not derived from ones' anatomy and sex but rather, membership into a lineage or family.

In the context of South Africa, an interesting case to consider is that of Princess Mkabayi who was daughter of King Jama kaNdaba. Mkabayi is a very important figure in the history of the Zulu people who influenced the ascendence to the throne of three Zulu Kings, namely King Senzangakhona, King Shaka and King Dingane (see Shamase, 2014). Mkabayi deliberately chose not to wed so that she could remain within her kinship group and retain the privileges, power and influence that come with being an elder daughter. Unpacking Mkabayi's praise poem, Shamase (2014:18) writes that

> The opening address of *Soqili,* 'father of guile' addressed Mkabayi as a male and the unmarried one of the royal blood. She was commonly referred to as Baba, indicative of importance and high standing among the Zulu people. This transformed her from the subservient and insignificant status of a woman to one of a prince and later a fatherly figure, commanding the utmost respect and obedience.

However, Shamase (2014) then goes on to quote Turner who maintains that "the morpheme – so- does not necessarily mean father or owner of anything" (Shamase, 2014:18), thus meaning while 'so-' could be used to signal respect, it isn't necessarily a gendered marker.

Similar to the cases discussed beforehand of Makaziwe Mandela-Amuah and Winnie Madikizela Mandela being referred to as 'father' among their kin, the case of uMkabayi further demonstrates that being among one's kin, one's status is elevated and one can occupy positions that are typically thought of as 'male' in the Western imagination, thus frustrating the logics of the sex/gender anatomical schema.

Although the case of Mkabayi can hardly be equated to a typical case of an unmarried daughter, what is important is that her case, like that of other ordinary unmarried daughter, frustrates a neat framing of a society where certain roles and privileges are accorded based on one's biology. Amadikazi and o'makoti (brides/ wives) cannot be said to have a singular lived experience that is informed by a purely somatocentric regime. Various socio-cultural aspects of their lives need to be considered before accounting for the differences and similarities in their access to status and/or (dis)privilege. I maintain that a kinshiparchal lens provides an opportunity for one to study this interesting phenomenon that has not been thoroughly researched, more holistically.

## 4.7 Conclusion

This chapter has highlighted how the somatocentric sex/gender regime that characterises Western thought has plagued and distorted works meant to interpret and make sense of indigenous ways and modes of being. In particular, the work of anthropologist Hunter has been used to illustrate how her work was influenced by a Eurocentric educational and cultural background. To that end, her attempts to study amaMpondo modes and ways of being fail to do so from an unbiased perspective. Instead, her work has been shown to impose a gendered lens which, in turn, results in the misinterpretation of multiple phenomena, which I argue ought to be studied and understood outside of the logic of the sex/gender anatomical regime. I have also introduced the concept of a kinshiparchy as an alternative lens to study amaMpondo (and other Abantu groups) modes and ways of being. I maintain that the introduction of the idea of kinshiparchy allows the researcher an increased scope of analysis to determine how different members of a kinship group gain access to status and/or (dis)privilege in various scenarios. Through the application of this lens, one is able to see the multiple ways in which phenomena that has been interpreted on a purely somatocentric basis gain a radically different meaning when a kinshiparchal lens is adopted.

The most important intervention that this chapter has made so far, is that it makes evident the need to de-emphasise body reasoning in making sense of the workings of power in indigenous systems and modes of being. It has also opened up the space for us to reimagine what a contemporary South African society would be like were it to take seriously indigenous modes of social organisation that de-emphasise body reason and gender hierarchies and placed emphasis on aspects such as seniority. That is, for example, if the Fallist movement sought to decolonise, there would have to be a serious engagement with the fact that the sex/gender anatomical schema that informs much of their language of mobilisation is itself a colonial

imposition that ought to be interrogated. Queer theorists are already producing scholarship that introduces alternative forms of subject formation that transcend the logic of the sex/gender anatomical schema. The subsequent chapter grapples with the indigenous institution of ubungoma which also complicates the logic of the sex/gender anatomical schema has often been theorised using the language of Queer theory.

# Chapter 5: Gender in Sacred Places

## 5.1 Introduction

As part of further illustrating how the sex/gender schema is deeply embedded in the production of not only knowledge, but also political praxis, this chapter demonstrates how the institution of amagqirha/ubungoma complicates and complexifies gendered subjectivities. In it, I grapple with the propagation of the queer narrative as emancipatory and demonstrate how it is also implicated in many ways in a bio-logical discourse that underscores the existence of a normative sex/gender regime. My interest in ubungoma stems from the ways in which the proliferation of the scholarship on this tradition in some aspects intersects with the articulation of queer discourse in South African politics during the #RMF and #FMF. In particular, the invocation of ubungoma as decolonised religion that is accessible to all and, therefore, not captured through epistemicide, is interesting to examine with respect to my argument regarding the prevalence of a colonial sex/gender schema language in the very reclamation of queer discourse during the #RMF and #FMF protests.

Queer scholar, Lwando Scott (2022), who was involved in the #RMF movement and experienced first-hand, the marginalisation of wom[x]n, lesbian womxn, trans people and queer people overall in the movement, reflects on what this marginalisation means for queer people in a decolonised Azania. Scott asks:

> What will be the content of the decolonised South Africa, indeed Africa, that we are summoning? How will we know that decolonisation has be achieved? For my politics […] what does decolonisation mean for queerness and its myriad manifestations in South Africa and beyond? What is the place of the queer in the decolonial moment? I argue for queering of the postcolony and suggest that the queer is already in decolonial futures because decoloniality necessitates a decolonisation of sexuality. (Scott, 2022: 88)

While I find Scott's (2022) provocation productive, I seek to pose a different question. Is the queer still 'queer' in the decolonial moment? Put differently, is the queer still read as non-normative in a decolonised Azania? I maintain that if the workings of the institution of ubungoma are anything to go by, then I am inclined to believe that the queer would cease to be queer in a decolonised Azania. I use the term queer as both "a verb (to mean challenging or destabilising heteronormativity and/or gender binaries) and/or as a noun denoting people who are non-heterosexual and non-gender binaried people, including those who identify as lesbian,

gay, bisexual, transgender (LGBT)" (Matebeni, Monro and Reddy 2018:1). When refering to cases that necessitate that I be specific, I then mention particular categories such as 'lesbian' to achieve clarity.

In unpacking the institution of ubungoma and its implications for indigenous sex/gender theorisation, I challenge contemporary literature on the institution of ubugqirha/ubungoma that either imposes the languaging of the sex/gender anatomical schema as is the case with Hunter, or it essentially subsumes ubugqirha/ubungoma within queer discourse and languaging. I challenge the queer alternative framing and theorisation for also being implicated in a bio-logical regime by implying the normativity of the sex/gender anatomical regime. I maintain that queer discourse, although operating within a framework that seeks to disrupt the logic of the dominant binary sex/gender anatomical schema, still relies on the body and what is seen as an evidential field to find coherence. Ultimately, the discourse functions from the premise that there is the existence of a logic of the sex/gender anatomical schema within the institution of ubungoma and that gender logic is queer.

In other words, I maintain that, in framing the institution of amagqirha /ubungoma as queer, the underlying assumption is that there is a normative order that the institution of amagqirha /ubungoma queers. Upon closer inspection, it becomes apparent that the assumed normative order that the institution of amagqirha /ubungoma supposedly queers is the rigid Eurocentric sex/gender anatomical schema. This logic then becomes problematic for the purposes of this doctoral project because, as the previous chapter demonstrates, my core argument is that African modes of social organisation in themselves do not conform to the logics of the sex/gender anatomical schema. To frame the institution of ubungoma as queer assumes the pre-existence of a system that this project problematises in the first place. Therefore, the only way queer discourse would be applicable in making sense of the institution of ubungoma would be if we thought of the institution as queering a regime that is already queer *vis-à-vis* the Eurocentric sex/gender anatomical schema.

## 5.2 Abantu and Ubungoma

The institution of ubungoma/ubugqirha has been extensively explored in Anthropological work on African indigenous systems, but few scholars have explored the institution's theoretical potential for indigenous sex/gender theorisation. However, using the biography of Nkabinde (2008), scholars such as Nkabinde & Morgan (2005), Stobie (2011), Mkasi (2013) and Van Klinken and Otu (2017) have begun to explore what prospects lie dormant in this underexplored site. I focus on the institution of ubungoma as a site where we see the anatomical

and the sacred interact in ways that Western dominant sex/gender frameworks and discourse have been unable to articulate and capture fully.

Hunter's treatment of the institution of ubungoma/ubugqirha is very corporeal. Her account of sangomas is laden with gendered markers such as 'he' and 'she' without the necessary complexification of what the institution of ubungoma/ubugqirha entails. For instance, she indicates that in the time that she spent in the field conducting her ethnography, she knew more womxn amagqirha than men. Hunter reports that she knew a total of twenty six amagqirha, of the twenty six, twenty one were womxn, and only five were men (Hunter, 1934a:320).[41] This causes her to then write of the igqirha/sangoma primarily as a default "she". I aim to complicate this dedication to a bio-logically informed sex-gender anatomical regime and demonstrate that the languaging and logic of a sex/gender anatomical schema is inadequate to account for the complex system of ubugqirha/ubungoma.

The institution of amagqirha/ubungoma is not unique to amaMpondo and amaZulu, as variations of it can be found throughout the African continent. The institution exists among all the indigenous tribes in South Africa with only variations in names which include tangoma among the Swati (see Gort, 1997), igqirha among amaMpondo and amaXhosa (see Hunter, 1934a; Magadla et al., 2021) and ngaka, among Batswana and Basotho (see Comaroff, 1985), to name a few. Afrocentric scholars such as Diop (1987; 1989) and Felix Chami (2021; 2006) have argued that while African cultures cannot be said to be without difference, it would be erroneous to ignore the similarities between them.

An igqirha/sangoma is someone that has gone through the process of ukuthwasa, which is a form of spiritual training and initiation. Initiates must be 'called' into the institution through their spirit guides (ancestors); they cannot join of their own accord (see Magadla et al., 2021; Nkabinde and Morgan, 2005). The calling could be communicated through "dreams, visions and hallucinations which culminate in being led to a trainer and being inducted into the mysteries of healing, both of self and of others" (Stobie, 2011:150). A gobela is a sangoma who is qualified to instruct and initiate other sangomas into the institution of ubungoma (Mikell, 1997: 299; Mkhize, 2018: 136). The term gobela can be translated as "to bow for" (Döhne, 1857:100), speaking to the authority and power that gobelas hold.

Sangomas are primarily concerned with diagnosing sickness and unwellness (spiritual and/or physical) and prescribing treatment for the said diagnosis. Tisani (1987:65) maintains that "[a]maXhosa have always distinguished between two forms of disease (or sickness) as

[41] Amagqira are a plural of igqira. Igqira is an isiXhosa/isiMpondo word for sangoma.

encountered in the community. 'Ukugula' (illness)[…] The second category of disease has been referred to as 'Ingulo' or 'Inkathazo' […] reference here was to the relationship the individual had with izinyanya (ancestors)". For the latter condition, the likelihood that the said individual must go through a igqirha/sangoma initiation ritual increases because their condition could be signalling a 'calling'. Abantu take the spiritual realm seriously. For instance, du Toit (1960) quotes Gelfand, who, referring to a Shona diviner, maintains that

> when a patient consults him for sickness, his first action is to diagnose the cause of the illness, not in physical terms, but in spiritual ones, because Africans believe that sickness is caused either by the activity of spirits (usually those of their dead relatives) or by men and womxn that are evil and desire to harm others. (du Toit, 1960:61)

Thus, although sickness may have a physical and material manifestation, this is only perceived as secondary. The most important aspect is the realm that cannot be perceived and known through sight and the physical alone.

The power and wisdom that sangomas possess which enables them to perform acts of divination is drawn from ancestors who are a powerful force in the cosmology of Abantu (see Magadla et al., 2021). As Tisani indicates, "access into the presence of izinyanya [ancestors] is not available to all, but only to a few chosen and anointed ones. The iinyanga [diviners] are such chosen and anointed people" (Tisani, 1987:71). Traditionally, the izinyanya (ancestors) played such an important role in Abantu society that even the land was perceived to belong to them, and thus, they held the power to nourish the land with rain (Tisani, 1987:22). It is thus not surprising that the history of colonial resistance in Southern Africa has multiple accounts of traditional healers/witchdoctors playing a key role in efforts to ward off colonial intrusion (see Lan, 1985; Tisani, 1987; Chigumadzi, 2020).

Considering Oyěwùmí's (1997) theorisation that the African episteme mainly draws from a world-sense with a holistic approach to knowing that relies on multiple senses, I think of the institution of ubungoma in the same way. In particular, and borrowing from Olaoluwa (2018:26), ubungoma can be said to be

> a cultural category in which linguistic and spiritual interaction between humans, deities, and other non-human categories facilitates an order of symbolic [and material/physical] transgression of sexuality [and subject formation]. Understanding how the interaction works requires that we consider first the fundamental paradigm of everyday practices of human relations.

This is to say, amagqirha/sangomas occupy spaces and subjectivities that transgress and complicate normative ways of being and occupying the world. This in part is because the figure of the sangoma itself speaks to a nexus between the spiritual and physical world. Therefore, I

maintain that, if it is to be theorised and be made sense of (in English), the figure of the igqirha/sangoma demands a different English grammar.

### *5.2.1 Transcending Gender, Sexuality, and Age (Complexifying Subjectivities)*

As already mentioned, the institution of ubungoma is a productive site where we witness the ways in which the logics of the sex/gender anatomical schema become disrupted; the case of Nkabinde (2008) who is well known for being a lesbian sangoma, is a useful contemporary case study to consider.[42] Nkabinde was born in Soweto during the apartheid era. He was named Zandile at birth and was given then name "Nkunzi" (black bull) after becoming a sangoma, adopting the name of his dominant ancestor, who is male. Every sangoma is possessed by multiple spirits/ancestors. However, among those ancestors, there will be a dominant one, and often, some behavioural traits of the dominant ancestor will manifest on the subject whom they have possessed, at times, this includes their sexual desire. For instance, studying sangomas in Swaziland, Gort (1997:299) was told by one of the respondents that "long ago there were many more female tangoma. The male tangoma were like females because female spirits possessed them. If you have a male spirit, you can behave like a man; if you have a female spirit, you behave like a woman".

Zandile Nkabinde's dominant ancestor was Nkunzi, after whom he was named. In fact, saying Zandile was named 'after' Nkunzi is misleading because it does not capture the depth of the phenomenon. When Nkunzi possesses Zandile, it is almost as if Zandile becomes Nkunzi. His power and dominance take over, and so does his sexual desires (Nkabinde and Morgan, 2006; Nkabinde, 2008; Van Klinken and Otu, 2017). Nkabinde shares an experience that occurred during a ceremony that heralded the beginning of his training as a sangoma,

> I heard the sound of the drums beating and felt the rhythm in my body. Suddenly the snake that I saw at my aunt's house appeared between my legs and wrapped itself around me. They say that a powerful man's voice exploded out of my mouth. It was the voice of my ancestor Nkunzi saying that he had come to claim his bag of bones. From this moment, I took my ancestor's name as my own. (Nkabinde, 2008:51)

The passage above illustrates that upon possessing Nkabinde, Nkunzi claims him and his corporeal body as his own, hence the statement "he had come to claim his bag of bones" (Nkabinde, 2008:51). Nkabinde now becomes Nkunzi's vessel in the land of the living.

[42] At the time of the publication of his biography in 2008, Nkabinde identified as lesbian. However later, Nkabinde transitioned and began to identify as a man. Therefore, although I demonstrate the complexity of Nkabinde's subjectivity throughout the chapter, I will refer to him using the gender pronoun 'he' following his decision to transition and identify as a man.

Nkabinde acknowledges that he was a tomboy in his youth and that he became even more masculine-presenting after answering the 'calling' to become a sangoma. He attributes this to the spirit of Nkunzi living within him (Nkabinde, 2008:37). According to Van Klinken and Otu (2017:76), the spirit possession of Nkabinde by a male ancestor has had implications for his gender expression and spills over to the biological workings of his body. For instance, Nkabinde (2008:19) shares that "[s]ince I started to have the spirit of Nkunzi in me I hardly menstruate […] With Nkunzi I can stay up to a year without menstruating". Thus, we see an instance where the sacred alters that which exists in the material world. Even though Zandile was born anatomically female with a womb, his possession by a male ancestor overrides his menstrual cycle. Zabus and Das (2021: 815) articulate this phenomenon as "the female sangoma's body act[ing] as the conduit for the male dominant ancestor, who renders it passive through possession, thereby locating agency outside of the subject". This places Nkabinde beyond sexual dimorphism (Zabus and Das, 2021:824).

Nkabinde's sexual desires are not exempt from Nkunzi's influence. Nkabinde informs us in his biography that his trainer warned him that if his dominant ancestor "loved a lot of womxn" (Nkabinde, 2008:68) while they were still in the land of the living, the same fate would befall Nkabinde. This warning came after Nkabinde shared with his trainer that he had a dream where he had male genitals and was having sexual intercourse with her (his trainer). Thus, although Zandile recognised himself as a lesbian at this time, he attributed part of his desire for womxn to the dominant ancestor that lived within him who was in need of sexual gratification (Van Klinken and Otu, 2017:78). Notice how Nkabinde makes a distinction between his desires and those of Nkunzi, his dominant ancestor. Nkabinde's desire for womxn can be made sense of within the framework of lesbian (womxn to womxn) desire, and Nkunzi's (Nkabinde's dominant ancestor) desires on the other hand can be made sense using the register of heteronormative (man to womxn) sexual desire – both exist at the same time.

Van Klinken and Otu (2017), drawing from Stobie's (2011) analysis of Nkabinde's biography, share their suspicion that Nkabinde could be using the site of the sacred to garner legitimacy for his lesbian sexuality in a society that perceives it as "a socially deviant sexual identity" (Van Klinken and Otu, 2017:77). They make this claim based on how Nkabinde narrates his sexual encounters with womxn as being in service of Nkunzi's desires:

> Nkunzi loves womxn, especially young womxn. If I am with a womxn of 21 or 22, normally Nkunzi will want to have sex with her. I feel his presence as if someone is touching my shoulders, and sometimes I see the legs and genitals of a man. This is one way he shows himself to me. I have more power when Nkunzi is in me, especially when we both desire the same womxn. When this happens, I change. I become so

> strong. He takes control of my body and even the sounds I make are different. The womxn I am with will tell me, "Your eyes are changing." Womxn I have slept with say my eyes become red or green and I become so wild and strong. Womxn tell me my body becomes very heavy and when I come my partner will say, "In that moment you were not yourself. What was happening?" I will make a sound like a lion roaring. That is how I know that Nkunzi is satisfied. (Nkabinde, 2008:68)

In the above quote, we witness an oscillation between Nkabinde attributing his sexual desires for womxn to Nkunzi, "Nkunzi loves womxn, especially young womxn". At times he claims his sexual desire for womxn as his own, "I have more power when Nkunzi is in me, especially when we desire the same womxn". Here we see him acknowledging that while Nkunzi might have a sexual attraction towards the said womxn, he too might have independent desires.

Nkabinde is not an exception; in a different project where Nkabinde collaborates with Ruth Morgan, they interview five other sangomas in same-sex relationships to document their experiences and they find similarities. Of the five respondents interviewed, four have a dominant male ancestor to whom they attribute their sexual desires towards womxn. Speaking of one of the respondents, Nkabinde says that,

> Thandi has ten male ancestors and one female; all of these ancestors have destroyed her sexual feelings towards men. I asked her if a female ancestor doesn't bother her by wanting a man, and she said … they have destroyed my feelings towards men'. Thandi feels that her ancestors didn't like her to be with men. (Nkabinde and Morgan, 2006:13)

It is striking that although the institution of ubungoma presents a complex arena that complicates Western cis-gendered heterosexual ways of thinking about subject formation, it is still predominantly made sense of using the grammar of heteronormativity. This is to say, we see instances where females that are possessed by male spirits sexually desire females, and males possessed by female spirits desire males. Meaning, spirits appear to mainly attract individuals of the opposite sex to themselves, thus making the coupling between the spirit and the desired individual heterosexual, notwithstanding the body that they spirit uses as its vessel. Zodwa was, however, one exception to this rule.[43] She acknowledged that one of the ancestors that had possessed her was a lesbian womxn that had been in a same-sex relationship with another female whilst she was still alive and continues to desire females as a spirit (Nkabinde and Morgan, 2006:13). Zodwa's experience presents an opening for us to think about ancestral possession outside the rigid heterosexual bounds in which male spirits only desire female

[43] Zodwa is one of the sangoma respondents that Nkabinde interviewed as part of her collaborative project with Ruth Morgan.

sexual gratification and *vice versa*. The possibility that one of her ancestors had same-sex desires complicates the neat heterosexual presenting accounts that have been engaged thus far.

It should be noted that the complexification of sangoma subjectivities does not only apply to cases where it has a bearing on the subject's sexual desire *vis-à-vis* that of their dominant ancestor. There are other ways in which these complexities that betray the logics of the bio-logic play out. For instance, in Jen Thorpe's edited volume, *Feminism Is* (2018), Mkhize is in conversation with gogo Ngoatjakumba, a sangoma and a gobela. In line with her office of ugobela, gogo Ngoatjakumba's "initiates call her 'baba', which in common usage is the Nguni word for 'father'" (Mkhize, 2018:136). On the other hand, gogo is an Nguni word that means grandmother. Thus, gogo Ngoatjakumba is referred to as both grandmother and father, albeit she is a female in her mid-thirties who was named Nokulinda Mkhize at birth. When asked how it is that a single individual is referred to using a multiplicity of seemingly contradictory titles, she answered:

> [y]ou see, even my initiates call the man who initiated me 'ugogo'; he is a man, but he gets called by the 'female' designation. The terms are more about the role the person plays rather than the gender, although they capture the gender practices in our societies. The terms are thus transferable across all genders depending on the role you are playing, not so much the gender of the person. In the practice of ukuthwasa, the gogo principle helps you in the spiritual aspects, and your father – ubaba – is the one who helps guide you in the physical world. (Mkhize, 2018: 139)

The previous chapter unpacks the signifier 'ubaba' in ways that attempt to illustrate that thinking of the categories of 'mother' and 'father' as gendered is limiting. I used the examples of dadebawo and bawokazi to demonstrate variations of 'father' that transcend gender boundaries.

Thus, that gogo Ngoatjakumba is called ubaba as per her office of ugobela is not unheard of in the cosmology of Abantu (also see Magadla et al., 2021). As Thornton (2009:29) maintains, "in Bantu languages, there is no grammatical gender distinction between masculine and feminine so the 'grandparent' role of the gobela may refer to either sex". Gogo Ngoatjakumba's titles are thus informed by the roles she plays as per the obligations of the sacred ancestral cult and not her anatomy. The institution of ubungoma has many roles and offices where, like the one of the Gobela, one's subjectivity is primarily made sense of based on the office they occupy, and not their anatomy, the office of unyankwabe which I discuss in the subsequent section is one such office.

### *5.2.2 The Institution of Unyankwabe/ Uhlaka Lwenyanga*

In this section, I focus on the office of an assistant to the sangoma called unyankwabe which has been translated as 'ancestral wife', or "womxn of the gods" (Ramajela, 2011:66). What is striking about this office is that while there is an insistence on referring to it as the office of ancestral wives, there is also an acknowledgement that it can be held by individuals of any sex, both male and female. According to Nkabinde, "unyankwabe is a person you are given by the ancestors, if you are a sangoma you have to have someone to look after you. It may be your husband, your sister or your uncle […] anyone that the ancestors will choose for you to trust and believe him/her, that is unyankwabe" (Nkabinde and Morgan, 2006:14). Linguistically, 'unyankwabe' is different from the word commonly used to refer to a wife in Nguni parlance, nkosikazi. Zabus and Das (2021: 825), however, indicate that Nkabinde used the two terms (nkosikazi and nyankwabe) interchangeably when they interviewed him. Ancestral wives do not necessarily have to be female. They can be male too. And male ancestral wives can also be allocated to male sangomas, one's anatomy does not seem to matter in the determination of who gets chosen and where they are allocated (Nkabinde and Morgan, 2006; Zabus and Das, 2021). Here we see once again a scenario in which the anatomical body is deemphasised.

Although referred to as ancestral wives, the institution of unyankwabe is associated with ideas of sexual purity and innocence. According to Ramajela (2011:66), "[unyankwabe] is a virgin. She is a messenger and acts as a go-between between the traditional doctor and each person who comes to the doctor for divining bones or malopo […] if she wishes to be married, she must go through the proper channels […] after that, a new unyankwabe must be appointed". For this reason, unyankwabe will often (although not exclusively) be a young person of any sex because it is more realistic that they are able to uphold the requirement of sexual purity. It is taboo for a sangoma to have sexual relations with one allocated to them. Morgan and Reid (2003:383) quote a respondent, Gog-Lindi, who explained that "an ancestral wife is an ancestral wife, you are not supposed to sleep with her". The implicit message here is that the ancestral wife primarily belongs to the ancestors and not the sangoma to whom they have been allocated. It is not clear what happens in cases where the ancestors allocate someone with whom the sangoma was already in a sexual relationship prior.

However, some of the respondents that Nkabinde interviewed shared that they secretly had sexual relations with their ancestral wives. For instance, consider the story of Hlengiwe. Her dominant ancestor, Muzi, instructed her husband to find an ancestral wife for her. The same ancestor also instructed Hlengiwe's husband to not have sexual relations with his wife

because that would defile her. After he found an ancestral wife for Hlengiwe, she (Hlengiwe) shares that:

> My relationship with Nomsa [pseudonym] started the day she came out to find out why my husband wanted to pay lobola [bride price] for her although she never met him before. So when we explained everything to her and told her that she will not stay with my husband but with me, I believe that's where it started because after my husband paid lobola for her, she didn't waste any time and moved in with me… two weeks later when we were alone […] she started to ask me if I was a lesbian and why I got married [to a man]? […] then during our lovely conversation, she asked me how I felt about her. Did I feel attracted to her or what? I just didn't know what to say then my heart started to beat so fast that I found myself mumbling. She kissed me and told me that she was a lesbian but that she had to hide it because of how life was in the rural areas. She explained that if you talk about these things, you are a sinner so we should keep it to ourselves. I just shook my head then we kissed and we never told anybody. (Nkabinde and Morgan, 2006:15)

It is not clear if the secrecy around intimacy between Hlengiwe and Nomsa has anything to do with their same-sex sexuality or if it is because that within the institution of ubungoma sexual intercourse is perceived as a practice that defiles the sangoma and is forbidden for unyankwabe. Abantu are not unique in this regard. Zabus and Das (2021:813) share that the hijra of India are often thought of as existing in the spiritual domain and thus as asexual. The implication of this is that their sexuality is often silenced. This is because the spiritual world and the sexual world of the carnal have historically been thought to be separate, with the hijras symbolising the embodiment of the former.

The links between the office of unyankwabe being translated to that of an ancestral wife shares strong similarities with Christian framings of wives as helpers. For instance, the book of Genesis 2:18 says after God had created Adam, "[t]he Lord God said, 'it is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him'". Genesis 2:21-24 goes on to say:

> [t]hen the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. The man said, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman', for she was taken out of man". This is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh.

Thus, in the bible, wives are introduced primarily as helpers. Similarly, one of the sangoma respondents that Nkabinde interviews shares that "unyankwabe is a child that you are given from home to help you when there is a traditional ceremony. She will open, or she will close the ceremony. It doesn't matter if it's a boy or a girl" (Nkabinde and Morgan, 2006:14). What links the office of unyankwabe to that of a Christian wife is that both exist primarily to serve albeit in different ways.

Perhaps the challenge with translating the office of unyankwabe into the english subjectivity called "wife' is that the conceptual category of 'wife' is deeply implicated in the

logic of the sex/gender anatomical schema. In the previous chapter, I demonstrated how within indigenous modes of social organisation, what is understood as "husband" and "wife" are not dictated by and bound to one's anatomy but rather a complex system that is predicated on (among other things) ones status as insider/outsider in a kinship group. However, in the Western episteme, wives are female and they are wedded to husbands who are male. This Western framework doesn't make space for 'wifehood' and 'husbandhood' to be conceptualised outside the bounds of conjugality. Therefore, using the conceptual category of 'wife' to refer to unyankwabe then appears as somewhat of a limitation.

## 5.3 On Knowing and Articulating: Worldviews and World-Senses

Now that the preceding sections have demonstrated the multiple ways in which the subjectivities of sangomas become complexified, this section focuses on the counter-hegemonic/alternative languaging and grammar that has been employed to make sense of these subjectivities outside the logic of the sex/gender anatomical schema. This alternative languaging, which allows for the malleability of sangoma subjectivities, thrusts the institution of ubungoma into the queer discourse. For instance, Zabus and Das (2021) refer to the language used within the institution of ubungoma as 'translects'. I argue that, while this move is useful in helping us articulate the many ways in which the language of the sex/gender anatomical schema limits our ability to account for the workings of the institution of ubungoma, it simultaneously traps us in a framework that treats the sex/gender anatomical schema as normative and foundational. It is the latter aspect that I complicate.

### *5.3.1 (Not)Lesbian Sangomas*

Oyěwùmí's (1997: 77) conception of a 'world-sense' as an alternative to the Western 'world view' is a productive site to think deeper about what it means to make sense of subjectivities that are primarily constructed in the realm of the sacred. This is beside the fact that subjects called to the institution of ubungoma have physical bodies with particular anatomies that society inscribes and assigns meaning to. As already mentioned in the theoretical framework chapter, Oyěwùmí (1997) critiques Western epistemologies for their preoccupation with sight as a primary method of knowing. As the English adage goes, "seeing is believing".

In the Western episteme, sight is the primary tool weaponised in giving meaning to the world, to organise the world, and to allocate status and/or (dis)privilege among people (Oyěwùmí, 1997:3). Oyěwùmí (1997) introduces the alternative of a 'world-sense' to theorise how the Yorùbá and other African societies come to knowing and knowledge, employing a combination of other senses beyond and/or in combination with what can be visualised. Thus

for Oyěwùmí (1997:189), the term world-sense "is a more holistic term than 'worldview' because it emphasises the totality and conception of modes of being". For instance, that Nkabinde is possessed by a male spirit cannot be known purely through seeing. Other senses have to be employed to know this. Moreover, the subjectivity that Nkabinde then occupies once he becomes Nkunzi is also not perceived and understood purely based on what is seen. It is a subjectivity that operates in two realms, the physical and spiritual simultaneously. Similarly, Hunter's assumption that she observed twenty one womxn amagqirha and five men during her ethnography can be challenged as inconclusive since she primarily relied on the anatomies of the said amagqirha to conclude on how to categorise them.

Following Oyěwùmí's (1997) encouragement to excavate knowledge that is informed by a world-sense, I argue that we should complicate the usage of the language and grammar of the queer discourse in articulating sangoma subjectivities, despite its intended disruption of the heteropatriarchy. Firstly, I maintain that the queer discourse itself is in many ways implicated in a bio-logic regime that relies on body reasoning to find coherence. Tied to this point, I demonstrate that the language of the queer discourse in many ways itself is inadequate to account for same-sex relations that occur as a result of ancestral spirit possession, because they (the same-sex relations) are often articulated using the languaging of heteronormativity despite the sameness of the physical sexes of the people involved. Lastly, I argue that queer discourse is predominantly framed as one of intimacy and marginality, whereas within the African episteme, sangoma subjectivities do not occupy positions of marginality and questions of intimacy are not central to their subjectivity.

### *5.3.2 Reliance on the Bio-logic*

The sangomas interviewed for the various studies cited above have been made sense of and written about in a multiplicity of ways. Similarly, when translating their subjectivities into English, they have used various seemingly contradictory adjectives, nouns, and pronouns to name themselves (in English). The sangomas that named themselves as male were translated to be female-men or simply transgender by the scholars documenting their sangoma experiences. In all these scenarios, it is apparent that academic discourses about the institution of ubungoma cannot escape the bio-logic for two reasons. First, such a framing of transgender people, even if queer and transgressive, assumes the existence of a normative and hegemonic cis-gendered heteronormative order that lurks in the background. Second, the anatomy of the respondents (the sangomas) in all the studies mentioned in this chapter became the primary conduit through which anything else they said about themselves and their experiences came to

be interpreted and written about. The body continued to take centre stage even when it is evident that it cannot tell us enough about the subjectivity of an individual sangoma.

Part of the challenge here is that of translating the workings and complexities of the institution of ubungoma into English which is a language that in many ways embeds the logics of the sex/gender anatomical schema. Here I temporarily borrow the concept of "heteronormative" in efforts to demonstrate that the usage of 'lesbian'/'queer' languaging and grammar cannot be said to adequately account for the same-sex sexuality of sangomas whose desire is driven by an ancestor of the opposite sex. An example here is Nkunzi's desire for womxn, it cannot be theorised as same-sex desire primarily because Nkunzi is a male ancestor. And therefore, his desire for womxn is wholly heteronormative. However, I also complicate my usage of the term 'heteronormative' because, while I find it slightly useful in complexifying the idea that what we call "same-sex sexuality" among this group of sangomas isn't in-fact "same-sex" in a strict sense, it is equally important to remember that the heteronormative ideal within these same-sex couples equally cannot be thought of as heteronormative precisely because materially, the conduits through which the desire of the male ancestors such as Nkunzi is met are, in fact, same-sex. Thus, perhaps what I seek to articulate here is a phenomenon whose proper English languaging is an ambiguity between heteronormativity and heterosexuality.

It is also important to note that any attempt to recognise and make sense of lesbian (or gay) couplings relies on a somatocentric regime because ultimately, being legible as 'lesbian' is a configuration that has the logics of the sex/gender anatomical schema as the foundation on which it is predicated. A heterosexual coupling is recognised and made sense of primarily through the reliance on the anatomical and bio-logical; a biological male will be in a sexual coupling with a biological female. The same is true in a lesbian coupling, a biological female will be in a sexual coupling with another biological female. Therefore, here we see how bodies must be constantly emphasised for heterosexuality or lesbianism to find coherence. The corporeal takes precedence in such analyses. Moreover, lesbian couplings will then be framed as an alternative and marginalised sexuality, thereby underscoring the dominance and normativity of heterosexuality.

Thus, although the various discursive accounts that document the phenomenon of sex/gender systems within the institution of ubungoma appear to be making a claim for the existence of sex/gender-fluid and queer systems, in many ways, they rely on the existence of fixed sex/gender systems (in the background) that then ground the basis on which arguments for queer reconstitutions are based. And even for scholars such as Eliason and Morgan (1998),

who present alternative ways of defining lesbian identity, the anatomical and biological continue to assume primacy in the construction of one as a lesbian subject (see Firestone, 2015; Jeffreys, 1993). It is for this reason that I am sceptical of the languaging of queer discourse in articulating ubungoma because, in the world of spirit possession, the corporeal is in many ways de-emphasised and transcended.

Nkabinde (2008), even before being initiated as a sangoma, identified as a lesbian because he, at the time, was a female that was romantically and sexually attracted to other females. And thus, even outside of the fact that a male spirit would later possess him, he claimed his lesbian identity as something independent of Nkunzi (his dominant ancestor). As Zabus and Das indicate, "[e]quipped with only Zulu secret translects, Nkabinde self-identified, in the space of her English-Language autobiography, as a 'tomboy' in childhood; at thirteen, as a 'lesbian', which is a word she looks up in an English dictionary; and later as a 'butch'" (Zabus and Das, 2021:824). A homosexual ancestor, no doubt, could possess someone. And one could be homosexual themselves. But it appears that same-sex sangoma relations that are a result of spirit possession rely on a different grammar and register (that is yet to be achieved in English) for explanation.

An additional example to look at is that of Morgan and Reid (2003). They refer to individual females possessed by male spirits as social males. Zabus and Das (2021:815), on the other hand, refer to them as 'male womxn'. My argument is that, while the said sangomas might be biologically female, they recognise themselves as male as per the dominant spirit that dwells in them, and so does the broader society. Carlson, who studied sangomas among the Shona maintains that,

> [t]he only way in traditional Shona culture to accept a womxn wanting to be with another womxn is if that womxn is a traditional healer who has a male spirit medium. The female healer with a masculine ancestral spirit can properly argue that she shouldn't marry a man because she is now, in the most important sense, a man herself. The gender of her ancestral spirit outweighs her biological gender. (quoted in Morgan and Reid, 2003:378)

Indeed, if we take seriously the accounts of Nkabinde and other sangomas which demonstrate that dominant ancestors influence the conduct and sexual desires of the host and that the sexual appetite of the host is, in actuality, that of the dominant spirit, one can see why it becomes difficult to draw a neat separation between the dominant ancestor and the host. In fact, from these accounts, it is clear that the host becomes the dominant ancestor. Meaning that the dominant ancestor continues to live on in the land of the living using the body of the host as a

conduit. Therefore, it is almost as if the host dies so that the dominant ancestor can live through them.

Riley (2021) shares an excerpt from an interview conducted by Makhosazana Xaba with a lesbian pastor, Zenzeni Zungu, that demonstrates the complex ways in which sangoma subjectivities are constructed. According to Zungu, "[t]here was only one man, a lesbian who was a sangoma, and everyone in society feared her, she had a family, and she would carry a walking stick and smoke, she would be accompanied by her child and her wife" (quoted in Riley, 2021:59). Riley acknowledges that the gender pronouns in the quote would have been absent in the original non-translated quote since Nguni languages do not have gender pronouns. Still, that the said individual is simultaneously thought of/constructed as a man, female and lesbian, speaks of a complexity that opens opportunities for theorising (non)gender and sexuality in alternative ways (Riley, 2021:59). Hammond-Tooke (1975:32) also writes about womxn diviners who are "permitted to carry a spear, a symbol of maleness". He goes on to say, "the few male diviners wear skirts" (Hammond-Tooke, 1975:32). Thus, if one were to read the diviners (sangomas) as a text, it would be a highly complex and ambiguous one that amalgamates both male and female symbols in a single subjectivity. And therefore, to refer to them as 'social males' or 'male womxn' fails to appreciate the extent to which the body becomes de-emphasised within the institution of ubungoma. This is an interpretation of their subjectivity which relies on a different method of knowing, sight is inadequate.

As demonstrated in the previous chapter, it is not only within the institution of ubungoma where we witness complex subjectivities that complicate the logic of the sex/gender anatomical schema. I've also demonstrated that there are indigenous subjectivities such as that of a male mother, who is in-fact a mother, and female fathers that are fully fledged fathers to the children of their brothers. For this reason, it is a limitation to use the language and grammar of the sex/gender anatomical schema when attempting to make sense of indigenous modes of social organising and being.

### *5.3.3 Translects and/or Sangomalects*

Zabus and Das (2021) classified the languaging of various practices within the institution of ubungoma, including the concept of 'sangoma' itself as 'translects'. They maintain that, they

> use "translects" to address the way hijras and sangomas as "transgender individuals" cultivating a culture-specific gender liminality, have used words to refer to themselves, their body parts, sexual orientation, social rituals and practices, usually not in the dominant or standard language and often in a language form intelligible only to them. (Zabus and Das, 2021:812)

The first challenge here is that in South Africa translects become solely relevant for the English language since Nguni languages are gender-neutral. Thus, a vocabulary and grammar that carves a space for gender liminality only becomes necessary when using a language that would ordinarily reproduce and entrench the gender binary, as does the English language.

To put it differently, translects become necessary in as far as the institution of ubungoma needs to be translated into and be articulated in English. For Zabus and Das (2021:815),

> Ancestor dominance comes with an array of isiZulu ceremonial translects, associated with the call (ubizo) from the ancestors (amadlozi), generally through dreams, that act as communicating tools for the Amathwasa or trainees (literally: "children of the ancestors"); as well as with the ceremonial training (ukuthwala) (sic) of male womxn by a spiritual mother; and the relationship which a male woman can have with her "ancestral wife" (unyankwabe) or female sexual partner. Other isiZulu translects include amabhayi (a piece of cloth girdled around a trainee); ekuthwasemi (sic) (sangoma training period); enamo (a place where remedies are concocted); impepho (herb which is burned prior to invoking the ancestors); imyalo (rules of conduct for sangoma); khelela inkani (lit. "cry for stubbornness", a stage in sangoma training involving the dominant ancestor's taming); Mnguni (ancestors from a family line); mteto (a same-sex ceremony in which novices are "married"); mundawu (ancestors often outside the family line); phehla (a sangoma stick); ukubhula (divination), ukuphehla (procedure whereby a sangoma churns a decoction of medicine or unmuthi (sic) in a pot); ukushonisa (a ritualistic invitation to ancestors to seek rest), ukuthwasa (call from the ancestors), unmuthi (sic) (traditional remedy).

What is interesting about the list that Zabus and Das (2021:815) call 'translects' is that the above are standard words and concepts used in the Nguni ubungoma parlance irrespective of the sex/gender dynamic between the sangoma and the spirit that possesses them. All sangomas use this linguistic register. They exist and speak to a realm that is not concerned with the biological and the material. Thus, it would be more apt to refer to the language as "sangomalects" instead of translects.

Equally interesting is that while Zabus and Das (2021) seem to limit the institution of ubungoma to the realm of trans-subject formation, they themselves are critical of a trans framing of hijras, maintaining that the "third gender framing tends to "essentialise" the transgender individual as a single, homogeneous category by collapsing all transgender forms into it" (Zabus and Das, 2021:816). They go on to say,

> whether discussing Indian hijras or Zulu male womxn sangomas, the ancestral transgender grid is now superposed on the western-style transsexual grid so that this conglomerate of ancestral translects is compelled to embrace transsexual, legal, and medical vocabularies. (Zabus and Das, 2021:831)

Here, we see a recognition by Zabus and Das (2021) that framing the institution of ubungoma using the register of trans-politics transposes the institution of ubungoma into queer discourse.

This then displaces the institution of ubungoma from questions of the sacred ancestral cult and how it complicates what is seen in the material world.

In grappling with subject formation among the Ogu, a minority group in Lagos Nigeria, Olaoluwa (2018), attempts to reimagine queer discourse outside of the bounds of the Western LGBTQ framework that primarily reads 'queer' in terms of intimacy and marginality. In his article titled 'The Human and the Non-Human', Olaoluwa (2018) explores the ways in which at the linguistic level, the subjectivities of the Ogu become queered in instances where they interact with deities and non-human objects. He maintains that "the Ogu […] provide an example of a cultural category in which linguistic and spiritual interaction between humans, deities, and other non-human categories facilitates an order of symbolic transgression of sexuality" (Olaoluwa, 2018:26). Focusing on the symbolic and the linguistic, we see a queering of subjectivity that de-emphasises the body. It is premised on a world-sense that allows for a 'queering' of subjectivity that simultaneously transgresses the logics of the sex/gender binary as well as the logics of the traditional LGBTQ frameworks that privilege "embodiment and the reflexes of intimacy" (Olaoluwa, 2018:38). For instance, the office of unyankwabe that has been discussed in the preceding sections cannot be made sense of using the language of intimacy. Similarly, my challenge to accounts that make sense of the institution of ubungoma relying on the queer/LGBTQ register in attempts to escape the rigidity of the sex/gender anatomical schema, is that there ought to be a third space rooted in African indigeneity where we can find the language to articulate the institution of ubungoma.

In grappling with alternative ways of making sense of queer subjectivities using indigenous registers, Matebeni (2021) excavates and reclaims the Nguni concept of unongayindoda which she maintains "exists beyond the confines of gender. In its framing nongayindoda is limitless and its shape malleable. The notion is both man and woman, male and female, subversive and normative, communal and individual" (Matebeni, 2021:574). According to her, "how sex and gender continue to be conceptualised in the African context requires further investigation. There still remains many gaps in understanding African people's lives and realities that are not limited to the gender binary" (Matebeni, 2021:573). Thus, Matabeni's intervention recognises that, while the dominant queer register has been useful for making sense of queer subjectivities in the African continent, it is important to recognise that there are unexplored indigenous archives that can still be mined for alternative ways of articulating non-normative subjectivities using indigenous frameworks. To return to Scott's provocative question, "what does decolonisation mean for queerness and its myriad manifestations in South Africa and beyond?" (Scott, 2022:88), perhaps the answer is that in a

decolonised Azania, the queer will cease to be queer and become unongayindoda. Perhaps there are other indigenous subjectivities that are yet to be excavated that give language to indigenous subject forms that exists outside the bounds of the anatomical sex/gender regime.

## 5.4 Conclusion

This chapter sought to grapple with the institution of ubungoma and how it complicates and complexifies gendered subjectivities. However, it also sought to demonstrates how these complex and non-normative subjectivities that emanate from spirit possession cannot and should not be made sense of using the language and grammar of queer discourse because queer discourse is implicated in a bio-logical regime that underscores the existence of a normative sex/gender anatomical schema, a colonial imposition.

As demonstrated in this chapter, the treatment of the institution of ubungoma by anthropologists and gender scholars is corporeal. However, ubungoma is an example of an institution that relies on a world-sense instead of a world view to be made sense of. In other words, sight is an inadequate methodology to rely on in making sense of ubungoma. For instance, we witness how same-sex couplings that result from spirit possession cannot be made sense of using both the language of heterosexuality and homosexuality. It exists as a phenomenon that is ambivalent to both regimes. The office of unyankwabe is another example that shows how indeed, the body is de-emphasised within the institution of ubungoma. Accordingly, Matabeni's intervention of the idea of unongayindoda reminds us of the existence of an indigenous archive that can be mined for conceptual categories that make sense of non-normative subjectivities in terms of the African episteme.

This chapter shows that although there are indigenous ways and modes of being and sex/gender configurations that complicate the logic of the sex/gender anatomical schema, the languaging and grammar of queer discourse is still inadequate in making sense of these alternative forms of being because it underscores the existence of a normative sex/gender anatomical regime that is Eurocentric at heart. For this reason, I maintain that the answer to Scotts (2022) question "what is the place of the queer in the decolonial moment" is that that the queer would cease to be queer in a decolonised Azania because indigenous modes of social organisation are inherently fluid and complex.

# Chapter 6: Conclusion

## 6.1 Concluding remarks

The aim of this dissertation was twofold. Firstly, it sought to challenge the uncritical adoption of European frameworks in studying and theorising indigenous sex/gender systems. The second aim was to explore the knowledge reserves that can be unearthed by applying an Afrocentric reading of indigenous modes of social organising. To achieve the said aims, the first objective of the dissertation was to interrogate and problematise the basis on which some anthropological and feminist literature construct the sex-gender anatomical schema as a universally occurring phenomenon. The second objective was to mine various indigenous discursive sites to excavate knowledge on indigenous modes of social organisation. I sought to investigate how applying an Afrocentric lens to the study of indigenous sex/gender systems can (re)shape how we think about subject formation differently to the dominant feminist framings.

The main argument I made in this dissertation is that the sex-gender anatomical framework is conceptually inadequate to account for, and make sense of, the modes of being and social organisation of the indigenous peoples of South Africa. To recap, I mentioned in part 1 of the literature review that Wynter (1990) introduces the idea of the sex-gender anatomical schema as a taxonomy that relies on anatomical differences to order human beings. She uses the critical analysis of Caliban in the Shakespearian play, *The Tempest,* to demonstrate how a different taxonomy based on racial difference was inaugurated with the European expansion to the new world and the colonisation of Africa. This new taxonomy based on the physiognomic schema of race took primacy in the European imagination, and the sex-gender anatomical schema became contingent on it. The sex-gender anatomical schema ordered men and women (males and females of the human species). The physiognomic racial schema ordered and categorised humans from non-humans (or not fully human) who were indexed as whites and Blacks respectively. The latter schema necessitated that only those deemed fully human could be considered civilised (and evolved) enough to be thought of as gendered. As Lugones (2010) maintains, women are females of the human species, meaning, before one can qualify as gendered (woman), they need first to access the status of full humanity.

The two-part literature review played a dual role. The first role was to map out literature that has engaged with gender, particularly the subject of 'woman', starting from broader Western perspectives and then narrowing it down to South African perspectives to show trends and existing gaps. The second role of the literature review was to bring to light the discourses

that animate dominant feminist perspectives. The literature demonstrated that dominant Western feminist perspectives primarily focus on the question of gender as it pertains to white subjects. Black people are constructed as existing outside the sex/gender anatomical schema that orders human beings proper. The languaging in the literature suggested that inherent to the process of the blackening of Black people. i.e. the dehumanisation of Black people, is the denial of gender.

The exclusive framing of the generic 'man' as indexing white men and the generic 'woman' indexing white women by scholars such as Wollstonecraft, Grimké and Firestone shows how historically, Black people have been discursively left out of the sex/gender anatomical schema. Therefore, I maintain that the universalisation of a particular sex-gender logic that we witness from Western scholars serves the function of negation – a denial by way of introduction (of gender logic) to other parts of the world that (pre-colonisation) did not necessarily organise their societies primarily according to a bio-logical order. This way, Black people come to the sex/gender anatomical schema as delinquents of sorts, being perceived as in need of Christianisation and civilisation to be taught how to be women and men proper, in accordance with Victorian ideals. This way, we see the sex/gender anatomical schema being weaponised in service of the physiognomic schema of race that has been used for ordering and classifying humans from non-humans. I argue that dominant feminist discourse(s) construct(s) the conceptual category of 'woman' as inherently raced as white. The implication then becomes that the idea of a 'Black woman' is an oxymoron.

Through colonisation, African modes of being were constructed as uncivilised and barbaric. They were made sense of as primitive versions of a stage in human evolution that Europeans had long surpassed. Thus, all aspects of African life came to be interpreted through the lens of the Western worldview, resulting in the distortion and disarticulation of indigenous knowledge and modes of being. However, discursive evidence suggests that the indigenous peoples of South Africa themselves never wholly embraced nor thoroughly imbibed the logic of the sex/gender anatomical schema because it clashes in many ways with their indigenous modes of social organising. The primary difference between the two regimes is that the sex/gender anatomical framework is governed by a patriarchal ideology that renders wom[x]n as a collective subservient to men. On the other hand, I argue that the ideology that governs the modes of social organisation of the indigenous peoples of South Africa is a kinshiparchal ideology that privileges the collective of one's kinship group over the individual. I also demonstrate that the kinshiparchy finds its authority and legitimacy from the ancestral cult, a sacred institution of Abantu of South Africa.

### *6.1.1 Sex-Gender Schema in the Case of South Africa*

In the case of South Africa, literary and discursive accounts portray an uncomfortable and ambiguous engagement of indigenous people with the logic of the sex-gender anatomical schema and the category of 'woman'. The South African Black nationalist struggle is just one temporal location where we witness the negotiation of indigenous people with gender categorisation. In some instances, we see the conflation of the indigenous conceptual category of 'umfazi' with the category of woman. In others, there appears to be a preference for identification on the basis of (public) motherhood instead of gender.

For instance, scholars such as Wells (1982), Govender (1987), Ginwala (1990), Walker (1991), Hassim and Walker (1993), Gasa (2007) and Healy-Clancy (2017) have engaged in a fierce debate in attempts to make sense of early womxn's political participation in the Black nationalist struggle. Earlier contributions such as those of Wells (1982) and Walker (1991, 1995) situate the 1900s womxn's struggles as primarily motherist and not necessarily feminist. Motherist struggles, that is struggles by womxn motivated by the wellbeing of their (Black) families and broader (Black) society. Within these struggles, the individual concerns of womxn as group are not primary ( Wells, 1982; Walker, 1991, 1995; Gasa, 2007).

I also indicated that Healy-Clancy (2017) thinks of motherhood as being multivalent. While wom[x]n from different racial and cultural groups may have come together under the banner of motherhood in FEDSAW and other political formations, there is recognition that this did not imply a homogeneity of their conception and experience of motherhood. While motherhood in the Western context is primarily thought of as something that concerns a mother within a context of a nuclear family in a private home, the African world-sense is different because the role and responsibility of motherhood transverses the private and public spheres.

The difference between the associations of 'woman' and 'mother' contributed to the uneasiness of some indigenous peoples readily embracing the idea of 'woman' over that of mother. The tension between mobilising as womxn versus mobilising as mothers stemmed from the idea that the former is perceived as a very individualist category that is preoccupied with questions of the status of individual womxn *vis-à-vis* patriarchal power. On the other hand, the latter is perceived as in service of a greater good for one's kinship as a collective and the community at large and is informed by a communalist ethos. We also see that the discomfort with gender categorising is not unique to the Black nationalist struggle in South Africa. Indeed, various aspects of indigenous languages and practices also complicate the workings of the sex-gender anatomical schema that is based on a binary logic of male, female, men and women.

### *6.1.2 Kinship as a unit of analysis*

Chapter 4 showed the importance of kinship as a unit of analysis when studying indigenous modes of social organisation. I argued that unlike Western societies that privilege sex and gender when determining the allocation of status and/or (dis)privilege, in the case of the indigenous peoples of South Africa, kinship status plays a central role. I used linguistic and discursive evidence to demonstrate that indigenous modes of being of Abantu of South Africa complicate the logic of the Western sex-gender anatomical schema. I showed how the workings of a kinship-based system are different to those of a Western-style nuclear family. To begin with, I demonstrated that status and/or (dis)privilege does not automatically flow from the body, as is the case within the workings of a patriarchal system that privileges men because they are men. Based on linguistic and discursive evidence, I made a case for why African scholars must depart from frameworks that rigidly interpret social phenomena from Western gender-centric thinking because it tends to be distortive when applied to societies guided by a different register.

The kinship-based system of Abantu has a dual insider/outsider framework that is key in determining the level of status and/or (dis)privilege that members enjoy, primarily privileging insiders who share amawabo based on a commitment to a common lineage and ancestral ties. I provided an outline of the workings of a kinship-based system to illustrate the complexity that flows from indigenous modes of social organisation that defy a binarily placed gender system. I show that within a kinshiparchal system, multiple factors such as kinship insider/outsider status and seniority determine one's social standing and status. Although one's sex may play a role in allocating status and/or (dis)privilege, it proved to be the least influential aspect. It could be easily overridden by aspects such as seniority and one's insider/outsider status within a kinship group.

### *6.1.3 Against homogenising the 'female' experience*

It also became evident that studies that claim to document indigenous sex-gender systems have primarily focused on the experiences of married womxn and have extrapolated these experiences to be reflective of 'wom[x]n's' experiences as a gender group. As Hunter has demonstrated, "the position of a wife in an umzi is very different from that of a daughter or a sister. The first virtue demanded of a bride is that she should be *khuthele* (diligent, eager). [44]

[44] Given that Monica Hunter italicised indigenous language words, I have kept this iteration for all instances where I have cited her work directly in this chapter.

She rises at dawn, before anyone else, and goes to fetch water […] Every day she should go to fetch wood, and it is she who in winter goes to gather wild spinach from the distant fields" (Hunter, 1934a:35). The observation made by Hunter (1934a) shows that although a wife, her mother-in-law and the sisters of her husband are all female, their status and obligations are different. Her status as an outsider wedded into a family sets her apart. She is expected to perform specific duties for a period until such a time that another newcomer (bride) comes to takeover. The point here is that not all females who live within an umzi can then be said to have similar experiences primarily tied to their female identity. Their standing and membership within a kinship group are important determinants.

A scan of literary accounts suggests that some of the experiences that have been portrayed as exclusive to females, such as the observance of isihlonipho practice, apply to both males and females. The framing of isihlonipho as a gendered practice that applies exclusively to womxn because they are womxn has been shown to be erroneous and distortive of a more complex system of avoidance practices for the purposes of showing respect. I also looked at amadikazi to draw parallels between experiences of brides *vis-à-vis* womxn who stay unmarried/widowed/divorced among their kin. I showed that amadikazi, the so-called 'liberated womxn', typically led radically different lives to those of married womxn who lived in their marital homes. Amadikazi were known to enjoy multiple freedoms; freedom to socialise and sexual freedom since they were not tied to a single partner. However, over time, we witness the deteriorating status of amadikazi. In contemporary South Africa, to be called an idikazi is an insult. It is associated with promiscuity and moral depravity. It is unclear what the reason for this shift is. It was also not in the scope of this project for me to explore this question.

### *6.1.4 The sacred and subject formation*

Finally, I looked at the sacred institution of ubungoma, which finds its legitimacy and authority in the ancestral cult, to further demonstrate that indigenous social organisation systems complicate the logic of a sex-gender anatomical schema. I demonstrated that the institution of ubungoma complicates Western normative ways in which subjectivities are thought to be constituted. Within the institution of ubungoma, we witness the intermeshing of aspects such as one's identity, age/seniority, sex designation and sexuality in ways that ordinarily would be considered incoherent. Within the sacred institution of ubungoma, the body becomes the least reliable site that one could look at to make sense of one's subjectivity.

Furthermore, the institution of ubungoma presents great complexity for subject formation resulting from the amalgamation of the ancestral spirit and the 'host'. Because hosts exist in the material world and are thus known through employing the tools of the material world, such as sight, I argued that a language and grammar that elevates the biological and anatomical aspects of being above the spiritual is inadequate in articulating this subjectivity that results from an entanglement of the worldly and otherworldly.

### *6.1.5 Rethinking queer discourse in sacred places*

I problematised the tendency to write about the institution of ubungoma employing the languaging and grammar of gender, lesbian and queer discourse. I argued that while lesbian and queer discourse has radically challenged and complicated the logic of the sex/gender anatomical framework, it too is informed by a somatocentric regime that relies on sight (as a method for knowing) and the body as a site of knowledge. The institution of ubungoma, on the other hand, finds coherence from a different register that relies on the transcendental as a method of knowing. While being lesbian and sangoma are not necessarily mutually exclusive, I argued that they rely on radically different registers to find intelligibility and should thus be treated separately.

I also challenged the translation of various concepts unique to the institution of ubungoma to the English language. For instance, it is difficult to prove that unyankwabe is indeed an ancestral wife, as has been translated. Further research needs to be conducted to prove that unyankwabe, a concept that linguistically has no relation or connection to the idea of a wife in Nguni (inkosikazi), is indeed a wife. This is further complicated by the fact that the office of unyankwabe can be occupied by anyone of any sex, and they will be paired with a of any sex, sometimes a sangoma of the same sex. Ultimately, the body does not play a role in the determination of unyankwabe. It is wholly up to one's spirit guides (ancestors) to appoint a suitable unyankwabe for each sangoma. My contention was not whether ancestors would allocate an ancestral wife to a sangoma of the same sex. Indeed it has already been established that there are cases where a sangoma's sexual desire is influenced by the spirit of their dominant ancestor, as is the case with Nkabinde. Thus, when it comes to sexual desire, it is evident that within the institution of ubungoma, the logic of compulsory heterosexuality does not apply. The point of contention is that naming the office of unyankwabe as that of ancestral wives potentially distorts a significant phenomenon that is yet to be adequately researched.

Overall, the aim of Chapter 5 sought to demonstrate that, indeed, the world-sense of Abantu, which is primarily ruled by the sacred institution of the ancestral cult, cannot be made

sense of by using the framework, language and logic of the sex-gender anatomical schema that relies on the body as a site of knowledge. It also demonstrated that lesbian and queer discourses, although disruptive of the logic of a compulsory hetero-patriarchal order, cannot be employed to articulate the workings of the institution of ubungoma because they too rely on a register that centres the body in its theorising and knowledge making. They also underscore the existence of a normative binary placed sex/gender anatomical framework which I maintain is erroneous in the case of indigenous modes and systems of social organisation.

## 6.2 Contribution to Theory and Practice

In the introductory chapter, I problematised the tendency in the South African social sciences to not centre colonial conquest in the analysis of social phenomena. This is especially true for gender studies. I argued that the social sciences played an integral role in establishing, legitimating, and maintaining colonial conquest in South Africa. Also, we now live in a time when we witness the social sciences being instrumentalised to cover or erase the fact of conquest from historical memory by failing to centre it in analyses. I maintained that the failure to centre the fact of conquest in knowledge production results in knowledge that obfuscates the South African realities and fails to account for how things come to be what they are. I also maintained that centring the fact of conquest in one's analyses equips one with the necessary tools to unearth knowledge that could otherwise be lost and restore knowledge that has been distorted.

In the case of gender studies, traditional methodological approaches take the category of 'woman' as presupposed, and a given. Similarly, they treat the conceptual categories of race and gender as commensurate. I maintain that any scholarly account that claims to study Black womxn and their experiences without considering how they are historically and discursively produced becomes complicit in the epistemology of forgetfulness and erasure. This study demonstrated that discursively, the sex-gender anatomical schema has historically been weaponised to legitimate the physiognomic schema of race. In other words, I shift from perceiving race and gender as commensurate categories and demonstrate that the two depend on each other to find coherence. More importantly, the study shows that the sex-gender anatomical schema and the physiognomic schema of race are products of a Western colonial order that relies on the body as a site through which status and/or (dis)privilege are allocated and/or withheld. The study also shows that indigenous knowledge reserves outside coloniality can be mined for alternative ways and modes of being indigenous to Abantu of South Africa.

It brought to the fore the importance of kinship and the sacred ancestral cult as alternative determinants of different ways in which status can be allocated or withheld.

This brings me back to the moment of the #RMF movement where womxn, and members of the LGBTQ community critiqued the movement for its patriarchal nature and the erasure of their (womxn and queer people) contributions to the movement. My position is that in pursuit of a decolonised Azania that would be finally free from coloniality, we ought to also reimagine ourselves in a decolonial light. This would necessitate that there be a recognition that the process of decolonisation should entail a process of both de-racialisation and de-genderization. In other words, decolonisation should see an end to both the physiognomic schema of race that has resulted in the relegation of the indigenous people to the status of the non-human (or not fully human), along with the anatomical schema of sex and gender which 'others' womxn and queer people. Thus, the #RMF moment was an excellent opportunity for reimagining subjectivities that would exist in the coming Azania instead of resisting patriarchal oppression by upholding the identity markers that uphold both patriarchal and racial oppression, put differently, that uphold coloniality. My provocation is that the figure of Chapungu rising as Rhodes was falling is a productive site to reimagine and rethink indigenous subjectivities that are influenced by the fluidity and complexity that we are already witnessing in our indigenous languages and kinship formations.

### 6.3 Contribution to Existing Research Gaps

The question of the invented-ness of gender has not been adequately explored within the context of South Africa. West African scholars such as Oyěwùmí, Amadiume and Nzegwu were pioneering in many ways in beginning a conversation that interrogates the constructed-ness of gender as a category within Africa, although their work primarily centred on the West African context. In the case of South Africa, Maseko was pioneering. Her work, using linguistic evidence, sought to show that the isiXhosa language shows no evidence of the existence of a system of ordering human beings and allocating status and/or (dis)privilege in terms of their gender.

This project contributes to the Afrocentric corpus of work that seeks to challenge the uncritical adoption and universalisation of the logic of the sex/gender anatomical schema. Like Maseko's project, this dissertation extends the conversation that was inaugurated in West Africa, with the works of Oyěwùmí, Amadiume and Nzegwu to South Africa. Maseko's project laid the foundation for this dissertation. While she focuses primarily on linguistic evidence, I couple linguistic evidence with discursive evidence to question the existence of a sex-gender

regime within indigenous cultures and to argue that discursive and linguistic evidence points to the existence of a system that centres on the supremacy of the kinship group. The most significant contribution of this dissertation is that it brings to light the critical role of the kinship group, which finds its authority and legitimacy in the ancestral cult. Therefore, it is recommended that future research that aims to study the workings of power and social organising within African society take kinship seriously as a fundamental unit of analysis.

## 6.4 Limitations of this Study

The most significant limitation of this study is the scant availability of scholarly work that engages with African modes of social organisation. Literary sources are sparse, especially when it comes to accounts by indigenous peoples themselves. For instance, in Chapter 4 I discuss the existence of the offices of female husbands and male wives. I provide various examples of the office of female husbands across various African cultures and do not cover the office of male wives. This then appears as if there is an overvaluation of the office of 'husband'. However, this lack of balance between the two offices stems from the lack of literary accounts that document the office of male wives. Thus, at this point, it is difficult to produce a balanced account of the existence of male wives and female husbands.

The second limitation is that of researcher bias. Coming ideologically from the Azanian tradition, I am inclined to privilege indigenous systems and frameworks that show any semblance of authentic African existence. However, the limitation with this is that at this point, one cannot travel back in time to uncover that which is authentically and purely African. Some may argue that other foreign cultures have influenced African cultures even in pre-colonial Africa. Thus, what is posited as authentically African modes of social organisation and languages could very well be influenced by other cultures and peoples.

## 6.5 Recommendations for Future Research

There are two areas that I discussed briefly but could not exhaust. The first one is the idea of motherhood in the African imagination and the institution from which it emanates traditionally and draws its authority, the matricentric unit. It would be beneficial for future research to explore how this institution was traditionally, and how it has evolved in the contemporary period in which most indigenous peoples live in nuclear family settings, influenced by Western Christian traditions in which the man is constructed as the head of the home. It would also be interesting to map how this shift impacted the authority of the mother that they traditionally drew from the matricentric unit. This would also illuminate whether the idea of motherhood itself has in any way evolved in the minds of the indigenous peoples from one that drew its

authority from a matricentric unit and was in service to the community at large, to one that is private, individualistic, and predicated on the birthing of biological children.

The second area that could be explored further is the question of 'umfazi' and 'woman'. In this dissertation, I have started to demonstrate that equating the conceptual category of umfazi to that of 'woman' appears to be flawed due to the apparent contingency of the category of 'umfazi'. Using the example of the ebuhlanti (cattle kraal) and the isiXhosa adage that says "umfazi akangeni ebuhlanti emzini" which has been translated to mean "a woman is not allowed in the homestead cattle kraal/byre", I show that there would be a contradiction if we were to read 'umfazi' as 'woman' because, as Kobo (2016, 2020) demonstrates, she (a female) can access the cattle kraal in the umzi (homestead) of amawabo without any controversy, and her case is not an exception. Therefore, we need to explore how if we take the signifier 'umfazi' as one that designates females in their totality, why it is that it appears to be suspended for Kobo (and others like her) when she is among her kin and amawabo. In the discussion between Mkhize and Ntšekhe (2021), we see that it cannot be said to be set in stone that umfazi can be treated as the equivalent of 'woman' without complexity. Ntšekhe maintains that among the Zulu, not just any female is designated as umfazi (Mkhize and Ntšekhe, 2021). For her, only those females that are either married or are advanced in age are designated as umfazi. And therefore, this is an area that demands more research to find a resolution.

What has been consistent throughout this dissertation is that, as Oyěwùmí indicates, in African studies, ideas, theories and methodologies that are animated by the logic of a 'world view' need to make space for those that find coherence in a 'world-sense'. There is still much African knowledge that is yet to be unearthed from the indigenous archive.

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