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3. LOCAL CONTEXTS, LOCAL THEORY

Revisiting Standpoint Theory through Situated Ethnographic Vignettes

INTRODUCTION

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

This essay is positioned from a theoretical rather than an activist stance, and while some writers in the academy might still feel a lingering sense of guilt at 'doing' theory rather than practice, it is felt that while theory and practice are distinct, they are to be seen as one reciprocally feeding into the other. A good case in point is standpoint feminism or standpoint epistemology, which is critical social theory maintained as having as its starting-point, the lived experience of real women and their lived contexts. But of course all women are real women, in real-life contexts. More important is the exigency of knowing *which* of the very many real women out there we are referring to- for whatever it is we are saying.

This taking note of 'which woman' is thus, *core,* and feminists have quite rightly scrutinised and indeed criticised the tendency of dominant groups to unthinkingly universalise their own values and practices (Lawson, 1999: 25), and the feminists from within the dominant groups have also not escaped this scrutiny and criticism. That said, the essay does not claim to be definitive and is, rather, poised to offer some thoughts to the discussions around standpoint theory. It does this by drawing

J. Etim (Ed.), Introduction to Gender Studies in Eastern and Southern Africa, 41–64.

on several of my earlier studies and ethnographies that sought to provide some insights around the specificity of Black African women's experiences within South Africa. Given the positioned framework of this piece, it is not possible to go into great detail with the rich data collected in the ethnographies mentioned, nor the individual methodological approaches adopted, which are published elsewhere (see Naidu, 2009a; Naidu, 2009b; Naidu, 2011; Naidu, 2013). However, I attempt to selectively draw little narrative 'clips' or what I shall refer to as 'ethno vignettes' that will hopefully act as lenses framing what I attempt to say. What is offered is proffered in the context of the possibility of tangible pockets of insights that may be extracted from ethnographic research, which could in turn resonate with the work of other researchers. This is attempted here, through the rich stories shared by the participants.

As the noted African 'feminist' Amina Mama (2007: 152) points out, feminist intellectual work has spawned intense ferment across all the conventional disciplinary landscapes. Indeed work in feminism and gender is generated from multiple disciplinary foci, perspectives, methodologies and theoretical pedigrees. Thus, one can be a feminist anthropologist or feminist geographer in as much as one can be doing eco-feminism and Marxist feminism and so on. What gives me pause though is not concern about insular boundaries on who is authorised to write what, and from what knowledge-producing disciplines, but that I, like many others, Indian and White[2] (and some African) feminist writers, are guilty of having been 'breast-fed' and raised on the canonised thoughts and texts of mainly White feminist writers, and so quite possibly guilty of allowing ourselves certain "theoretical luxuries" (Harding, 2004), or what I call 'colonial colloquialisms', that women outside of particular Western situated contexts cannot.[3] This is where I believe a disciplinary perspective of anthropology and anthropological training comes in with its signature emphasis on cultural relativism and intense methodological training around working from *within*, as well as *outside* one's own cultural *et al.* specificities. One of the ways it does this is through the emphasis on rich ethnographies and thick data elicited from participants through sustained levels of immersion and naturalization in the spaces of the people being observed, as well as emphasizing rapport and relationship with the people themselves. It is these contexts that help generate the data which in turn is used to generalize and theorise from. This becomes then, 'embodied data', (rather than data *disembodied* from socio-cultural realities) and (generated) theory that has actual empirical reference points.

In assuming this approach and the above context of ethnographies, I chorus concert with Mikell (1997) that African feminism/s and gender discourses distinguish themselves from their counterparts in the global north by attention to what are termed as critical indices of 'bread, butter and power' issues. This essay proceeds in turn through the refractive lens of selected empirical studies of African women and their experiences in various examples; of bread, butter and power issues. The essay attempts to illustrate, through a discussion drawing from these ethnographies that any understanding of gender and what we term African feminism and a standpoint

epistemic has to make contextual and situational sense to African women, and their local lived experiences and realities.

My starting point is that there is something called 'African Feminism/s. It was Mekgwe (2008: 11), writing in the context of feminism in Africa, who reminded us that feminism, "both as an activist movement and as a body of ideas", underscores the necessity for a "positive transformation of society" where women are not marginalized but recognized and respected as "full citizens in all spheres of life". Mekgwe went on to sound the rather gloomy warning that this proposition, had however, been alarmingly over theorised. Since her announcement (or dire pronouncement) in 2008, arguably, perhaps not too much has changed. We are thus still confronted, amidst the fine hair splitting (ball busting?) around whether there is such a thing as an African Feminism or not, as *just how* to have sub Saharan women fully recognized as bearing the cross of a double vulnerability and being given the passport to full citizenship and out of the entanglement of some aspects of that vulnerability.

For me, an important aspect of this full citizenship, alongside what has been termed the "bread and butter and power" issues (see Mikell, 1997; Akin-Aina, 2011) of African women, is that of ownership of body and sexuality. This core issue of the right to perform and enact one's body within personally chosen labour, sexual identity and sexual(ity) scripts is fundamental to owning that citizenship passport.

I consent that many aspects of the emancipatory agenda that holds the attention of gender activists in the global-north may well be foreign in both grammar (ideas) and speech (actions) to the women in the global south, especially in Africa, where reproductive rights and gender equality are perhaps differently understood (or differently positioned) by African women. However, I don't agree with Gwendolyn Mikell (1997) that African feminism is not preoccupied (or should *not* be preoccupied) with the female body, with perhaps the same intensity as are women in the north. Quite the contrary, in many respects, and as the qualitative illustrations in this essay reveal, it is the bodies of women in the developing nations and the bodies of African women in the global south that have been rendered especially docile (Foucault, 1982) by a cluster of colonial and postcolonial historical entanglements as well as by complicit African traditional and cultural scripts that hold sway over how her body, her labour and her sexuality should be enacted and enjoyed. The texture and shape of the particular specificities of women's experiences in any geo-cultural context becomes apparent when one turns to actual empirical experiences and face to face encounters with the women themselves, through qualitative work with the women

Anthropology, the signature perspective from where I write, and within which I am located, privileges rich 'face-to-face encounters' or thick ethnographies. While life is full of (very) naturally occurring (multiple) face-to-face encounters, ethnography is the conscious methodological seeking out and documenting of such encounters as part of a fairly meticulous disciplinary methodological praxis where we further refract these culturally relevant frames of reference through particular

theoretical lenses. By drawing on ethnographic material collected as part of several other studies, in my career as anthropologist working with Black African women in South Africa, the piece attempts to revisit standpoint theory and what the notion of epistemic privilege may offer to a discussion of African feminism/s. The ethnographies in turn looked at:

- A group of Black African women cleaners working at a University (Naidu, 2009a);
- A group of Black African women working as Zulu dancers (Naidu, 2009b; 2011);
- A group of Black African women who self-identify as lesbian and active Christians (Naidu, 2013).

These stories are for me, and the anthropologist in me, powerful empirical points of reference. Likewise these narratives are offered as a kind of excavation of shared stories that can be re-interpreted and re-assembled for meaning, but re-assembled and reconstructed *with* the insights, thoughts and emotions that the narrators themselves, and the narratives offer us. The stories can be taken as prosthetics that we can use in attempting to get 'inside' the women's lived story and experiences of themselves and their 'phenomenal bodies'. As such, my cue is to allow the women's voices to dominate to show how theory articulates through their powerful stories, rather than frame a theoretical piece to which relevant data is attached. It is believed that it is through such stories that we can 'get at' what Lila Abu-Lughod (1991: 137) terms as "ethnographies of the particular".

My aim here is to see how the particular lived contexts and social realities of the groups of Black South African women that I worked with can be brought into dialogue with certain hermeneutical strands of standpoint theory. I in turn, attempt to take up this conversation by offering up particular 'ethno-vignettes', ethno-illustrations or extracts from my earlier qualitative studies. I begin by turning attention to a group of female cleaners,[4] working at a University.

VIGNETTE: THE (AFRICAN) FEMALE BODY AND 'WORK'

Background…

As academics, much of the work day begins for many with the regular cleaning staff, usually female, weaving in and through our work spaces as they quickly and deftly clean and tidy up in readiness for us to us begin our day. This was no less true for me. These were bodies that I saw on a daily basis, regular inhabitants of university spaces, not as so called intellectual consumers – the students or as so called co-constructors or teachers of knowledge as the faculty staff; but as labourers cleaning the spaces of both students and teachers. Their presence however, more often than not, is made noticeable when they are absent; when the bin stands brimming over or the desk lays covered with dust.

The cleaning women at the University that I was based at, were predominantly, although not exclusively, from the local regional *isi*Zulu-speaking African

communities. They were in the age group spanning 30–52 years. Of the 56 women interviewed, some were married, others lived with their partners or headed single households. Many of the African women cleaners traveled far, often taking more than one mode of transport to get to work (i.e. public bus and then public taxi or two different taxis). In many instances, the women had to get their school-going children or grandchildren ready and off to schools before themselves setting off for work.

All the women left home dressed in their 'day clothes' but changed immediately into their prescribed light blue uniforms when they reached the University; changing back at the end of the work day. My interactions with these women was sparked by what the women wore on their bodies immediately upon beginning the work day and how wearing the uniform further encoded particular subjectivities that were in turn consciously or subconsciously *enacted, and could be in turn critically read* as assertions of subordination and or of creative agency. After a period of establishing rapport and relationship through which the women granted access and glimpses into their daily realities, I was able to ask the question that sought to open the window into their experiences; *"would you consider wearing the uniform straight from home… to save time and effort?"*

Forty-seven year-old Lily, a married grandmother with one daughter and three grandchildren, had to use two taxis to get to work from her home in Umlazi. Lily looked astonished at my question as to whether it would save time to leave home dressed in the uniform. Her reaction made it clear that she thought it somewhat bizarre that one would consider wearing the uniform from home, or even straight from work back onto the taxi. Her answers were unhesitatingly, "no" and "never" to the question of whether she might consider coming dressed for work in her uniform. Thirty-four year-old Zulu-speaking Dorothy from Lamontville, an unmarried mother of three, was even more forthright in her answer, telling me she would never consider leaving the house in the morning in her uniform because "people would laugh at her", and that she "could not do this" because "it made her look old". Nomsa, forty-eight, echoed these sentiments confirming what all the respondents answered to the same question asked in different ways, that they would "never" come to work dressed in the uniform as it was "too ugly". She added an idea shared by more than two thirds of the participants, namely saying that the headscarf they were forced to wear as part of the uniform outfit, made her feel "like an old woman". Thirty-eight year-old Jabu, mother of two teenage children, explained to me that she could never leave her house in her cleaning uniform…although it would save precious time in an otherwise rushed morning , exclaiming; "No! No! They would laugh at me because it is too ugly". It was not clear exactly 'who' was meant by reference to '*they*' in the protestations of "they would laugh". When asked, most of the women claimed that this meant all who saw them.

During the early interviews with Nombusa, she indicated that she did not mind the blue colour of her present uniform "too much". She had thought however, that perhaps the workers could have been given "different colour dresses" so that they

could “look different … sometimes”. She continued to tell me that “when we walk together” everyone “can see cleaners walking” and that sometimes people tossed their “papers” into boxes or bins they were holding, or approached them with the sentence “the toilet is dirty” and “they must please come clean”. “The people are not rude” she said, “lots of the students and lecturers say hello or good morning, some of them know our names … but … we still look like cleaners … that’s why they know us.”

The women’s stories of how they experienced and felt about themselves in the day-wear they chose for themselves in relation to how they experienced themselves in the prescribed uniforms, indicated that the uniform was experienced as making their bodies highly conspicuous as *cleaning women.* All the women (except in the later focus group meetings), spoke to me alone (during their tea or lunch breaks), away from the buildings they worked in and thus there was no opportunity for them to mimic each other’s responses. All the women mentioned that they felt that “everyone saw” them as cleaners and far from being invisible, they were highly conspicuous. Beauty, a single thirty-year-old mother of two, added that even though everyone saw her in her blue dress, she still “felt like a nobody” wearing it. “So why must I wear it from my home?” She claimed that even though it was difficult to “wake up very early” and “take a taxi and a bus”, to get to the University, she would, “No … no … not ever wear the uniform from home” as everybody would know that she was “working as a cleaner”. She laughingly replied to the question of whether she thought men asked women in cleaner uniforms for dates, by saying “No, we look too old for them”. All the women said that they arose fairly early to travel from their respective homes, in most instances using one, sometimes two modes of crowded public transport. Some mentioned that they had to “clean and make food”, before coming to work. However, all were exceedingly skeptical of the suggestion that they might come for work dressed in the uniform in order to save time. The hidden subtext was also of course that when they arrived at work, only minutes later they would change into that same uniform.

The experiential import of the uniform as being “too ugly” or “really not very nice”, as a few other participants phrased their response, was a sustained refrain in both the personal one-on-one encounters as well as during the later focus group discussion. Many women exclaimed that “you don’t look nice’ or ‘it is not nice”. Forty-four year-old Xhosa-speaking single mother, Princess, originally from the Eastern Cape and now living in Kwa-Mashu, in the KwaZulu-Natal province, confided that she was “sick and tired of it” and it was clear that she would never entertain the idea of wearing the uniform for *any time longer than was absolutely necessary*, or *outside of where it was absolutely necessary.* Others were not coy in sharing that “you don’t look nice” and their initial responses were all fairly revealing with their strongly articulated “No! No!” Clothing is instrumental in representing one’s identity to others and acts as a kind of visual metaphor of identity (Droogsma, 2007: 296). While, for the cleaners, this seemed far from a desirable

state of being (identified), it seemed that for obvious reasons it was tolerated within the context of organisational work, but not beyond.

Another woman, Gladys, claimed that the uniform was dirty and "full of germs" and she "could not wear it" to her home. However, further gentle probing revealed that she wore the same uniform the next day and that with just two uniforms, practical constraints meant she was unable to wash the dresses daily. The notion of 'dirty germs' must thus be refracted through other complex perceptions about the uniform which was deemed by mere necessity to be *okay* and wearable at work, but not to be worn outside the work parameters. Upon further probing Gladys revealed that she was not overly bothered about 'the germs', but sighed that the "uniform does not look nice".

Clearly, the women all understood that the practical exegetics of their work demanded that they needed clothing that they could actually work in, and possibly even risk soiling. In listening to them describe what they did wear to work and why they experienced the uniform as being ugly, it became clear that their notions of 'not nice' and 'ugly' went well beyond the material aesthetic, and was deeply entangled with what the uniform signified, i.e. cleaning work…which was experienced as almost a bodily tattoo once they put it on.

The beginnings of 'cleaning' can be traced as being part of women's physical/bodily work at home and of course the association with nonproductive and unpaid labour. On the hierarchy of domestic tasks, cleaning is positioned at the bottom of the rung (see Messing, 1998: 178/179). Writing in the South African journal *Agenda* more than a decade ago, Grant (1997: 62) drew attention to the then operating ideological framework for domestic labour within the country, claiming that South African society had historically attached a low premium to both the categories of women's work and to that of Black labour in general. Domestic work especially was perceived as particularly undervalued because it had traditionally been treated as women's unpaid duty in marriage, which extended outside of marriage when many 'unskilled' non White women entered the workforce and were obliged to take on cleaning work in private homes and organisational institutions, schools, universities, factories, and indeed the nooks and crannies of many economic institutions. Grant goes on to say that many Black African women found themselves in the position where they were obliged to perform underpaid, undervalued (women's) work, and returned home to do exactly that – women's work again as wives and partners, sometimes also undervalued, and in this context also unpaid (see Naidu, 2009a). To me there exists a clear continuity between the domains of private and public in the context of (Black African) women's cleaning work. Indeed, Lan (2003: 188) brokers a theoretical convergence of the two domains by viewing unpaid household labour and paid domestic work as structural continuities across the public and private spheres.

Observing and listening to the women revealed that within the public domain and work space of the University, the uniform acted as a powerful conscripting symbol,

visibly conscripting them into the cleaning work. The uniform as an artifact and symbol of obligatory organisational dress is of course not limited to categories of only female cleaning staff, or only African women. However, there were particular "techniques of the body" (Messing, 1998: 177) associated with the uniform of the African female cleaning staff that I spoke to. In many of the interviews, the women spoke about why it was important for them to remove the uniform and its deeply imbricated associative meanings of cleaning and change into their own clothing at the end of the work day, so that they might shed the image of cleaner, if only "while going home".

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

The time spent with the female cleaners showed that, while at work, aspects of the women's personality were entangled with 'being-in-the-uniform'. Their narratives shared that the single-layered garment worked to discipline the body and strip down the complex multi-layers of their personality and attempted to naturalise their status as cleaners. The women's narratives revealed their attempts of subtle subversive resistance or counter dominance in attempting to destabalise this conscription, if only outside the spatial and organisational domain of the work space. For in both the later focus groups and in the earlier one-on-one interviews, the women spoke in poignant terms about how they experienced themselves while wearing their uniform within the spatial organisation of work, and how they experienced themselves in their own self-selected items of identity.

Formal dress (unlike that of the staff at an outlet like a McDonald's) is associated either directly or indirectly with the category of 'professional', even if they might well not be from a professional affiliation, such as the uniform worn by bank workers, etc., alluding perhaps merely (see Anat, Rafaeli, & Pratt, 1993: 38) to a particular organisation. However, there is not much that is unique about the dress of the cleaners. Their uniform-dress is very similar in design to the uniform of other cleaners in other companies and indeed, as pointed out by the narratives of the women, is a source of immediate association with the kinds of cleaning work that they perform. The women spoke about "how ugly" the uniform was and "how ugly and old" it made them "feel". Women especially seemed to resent having to wear the headscarf, which was part of the uniform ensemble. Peoples (2008: 37) states that particular relations of power appear to be masked in the hyper-visibility of Black American women.

Forms of expression through dress or what one wears or is made to wear take a multiplicity of forms, and are positioned in relation to constructs of race, gender, sexuality and power and operate across a broad range of historical and contemporary contexts. The narratives of the cleaning women reveal particular epistemic vantages of both subordination and subtle agencies that attempt to negotiate and perhaps in their own way, resist the constructs erected on their uniform coded bodies, thereby showing awareness of the workings of the inscriptions, and in turn a questioning of the power-relations stitched into the uniforms.

VIGNETTE: THE AFRICAN FEMALE BODY AND WORK (AND SEXUALITY?) IN TOURISM

Background…

Continuing to hold the gaze on body and the embodied power in clothing (or lack of it) took me to the site of a cultural tourism village in 2008–2009 which employed male and female Zulu dancers. Situated in the rather hilly and picturesque outlying area aptly named 'Valley of a Thousand Hills' was the extremely popular Phezulu Cultural Village. The village employed about 16–20 Zulu male and female dancers who performed three times a day over seven days of the week. The performance comprised a set 45 minute portrayal of Zulu 'traditional' drumming, dancing and short enactments of Zulu customs accompanied by a live guided narrative explaining the events to a largely (although not exclusively) overseas and predominantly 'White' audience. The cultural village had a long and continuous history and claimed to have employed largely the same two Zulu family members for many years. While my larger study focused on the construction of (African female) indigenous bodies in South African cultural tourism (Naidu, 2011) a smaller bolt on study (Naidu, 2009b) focused the gaze on the two younger girls; Pumi and Zodwa and their particular positionings in the cultural enactment.

Pumi and Zodwa are examples of girls that have entered, usually through other family members, the tourist industry as so called "ethnic" (sic) performers, or "Zulu" dancers. Unlike the older women in the group, when Pumi and Zodwa perform the Zulu cultural dance for tourists, they dance bare-chested, wearing only a beaded skirt (with shorts underneath) and beaded jewelry around the waist, ankles, and sometimes around the neck. This is explained by the guide as signifying that the young girls are *intombi* or unmarried *virgin maidens*. This signification is also something that many tourists claim to be aware of, from their reading of postcards and other popular tourist literature.

Introducing Pumi

Pumi is a beautiful and slightly built girl who is fifteen years old. She flashes a radiant smile that extends to her eyes as she coyly betrays that "yes" boys do

"interest" her, although pointing out that many are just plain annoying. She tells me that she enjoys many subjects, but finds some are "boring" and says that her mother thinks that she ought to spend more time with the school books. At this point Pumi's narrative strays from what could well have been the text in the story of a fifteen year old living anyway and becomes a local story. While not wanting me to note the name of the school she attended, she pointed out that it was urgently in need of "text books" and teachers "who cared". Pumi also tells me that she worked over most week-ends and the holidays, and "helped her mother". She tells me that, as her mother works all week in the Cultural Tourist Village as a "Zulu dancer", *she* takes care of the "cleaning and cooking". On the week-ends however, she "helped her mother" at the tourist village and "danced as well". She had accompanied her mother to the tourist village most days as a little child. The mother worked from eight to four thirty, and was allowed to bring her little children "to work". Pumi tells me that as a little girl, she would occasionally "join in", much to the delight of the foreign tourists here, who were charmed at the sight of a three year old in a beaded skirt. She sighs that, "of course" she then grew old enough for school. She pulls a face and tells me that she then no longer accompanied her mother but was watched by her aunt, while her mother was at work. She tells me that she has "good" memories of those times when she had spontaneously won over the tourists.

Introducing Zodwa

Zodwa's quiet nature and pretty 'little girl' features belies her fourteen years. She attends the same school as Pumi and is in grade 9, a grade behind Pumi. Unlike other fourteen year olds who may scramble to music and dance classes, Zodwa has "to help her mother" during the week. She tells me that she does the cooking as her mother returns from work "late". Like Pumi she works at the Cultural Village over the weekends, although in her case, it is her aunt who invites her to join the group. She tells me that the people at the village are all related to each other and are in some instances, mother and daughter, or father and son, or sisters and immediate cousins. As her mother "worked elsewhere" she was not brought here as a child. She had begun coming to the tourist village when Pumi had started coming over about two years ago. Zodwa tells me that "everybody here is family". Zodwa reveals that the men and women here had been performing for many years. Some of the women had been working here continuously for about 17 years, some for about 14 years. For some of the women it was the only paid work they had ever engaged in. From what the girls described it appeared that, unlike the other performers who were paid a set weekly wage for working 6 days week, the girls were paid for just the week-ends they worked. This money, they claimed, went to their families rather than being spent on themselves.

African 'heritage', 'traditions' and 'culture' have found consumer markets in global cultural flows and the transnational movements of tourists. Echtner and Prasad (2003: 66) note that the primary targets of marketing efforts with respect

to tourist destinations, are located in the First World, as the so called developed countries are the main generators or producers of tourists. In KwaZulu Natal, 'Zulu' and 'Zulu heritage' and particularly the Zulu dance, have emerged as popular products that have found a demand in such global markets. Most foreign tourists that were approached confirmed in conversations that they wished to view "exotic" and "iconic" images in the dance of the "Zulu Warrior" and "Zulu dancing maiden".

MacCannell (1992) claims that the global diffusion of western culture and the accompanying institutions of tourism create a niche for the showcasing of deterministic forms of ethnicity. He points to (constructed) ethnicities in tourism, where so called exotic cultures become tourist attractions. 'Zulu' is one such ethnicity, and cultural commodities such as the Zulu dance narratives and 'Zulu' bodies showcased in cultural villages are likewise increasingly positioned to meet tourist expectations (see Naidu, 2009b).

Pumi and Zodwa performing topless in the cultural village is quite possibly about allowing the tourists to experience (constructed)-ness and *seeing the Zulu maiden*. It is also perhaps less about preserving cultural heritage, and possibly more about re-creating or reifying cultural identities as products that have found a supply in global tourism consumption.

While anthropological and sociological studies in tourism have alluded to the 'post-tourist' (see Urry, 1990; Ritzer & Liska, 1997) who is fully aware of the simulated scenes of '*authenticity*' in tourism products, the point is that the tourist still persists in searching out these created products, thereby feeding a growing market. In turn the tourist market and marketers are kept busy positioning the so called real and authentic. As part of this positioning, bare-breasted females, unmarried and culturally assumed to be virgins, are often seen performing the Zulu dance for the tourists. The rationale on the part of the tour managers in charge of tourist villages is that this is deemed culturally acceptable and indeed a part of Zulu 'culture'. Zulu-speaking girls, when interviewed about what *they* thought of the tourists' consumption of female 'cultural' bodies, reveal that the issue of *what is cultural,* and *for whom,* is complex and tiered with layered understandings. The experiences shared by Zodwa and Pumi, as the girls who perform for the tourists, also indicate a cultural discordance between how they see and experience themselves as Zulu girls and how they perform their *Zulu-ness* in the dance narrative. The narrative they share, show that while they are at times "fine with" dancing for tourists, there are many instances when they are extremely uncomfortable when it seems like they have to dress the part (or in this case un-dress the part) of Zulu girl. Of course in many of the constructed meetings or intercultural participation in tourism encounters, African-*ness* or specifically Zulu-*ness,* is the "specificity" (Van Binsbergen, 2003: 400) that is required to make the experience 'successful' for the tourist. This means that the girls, as young virgins are posed bare-chested or topless when they dance.

Thus, to satisfy tourists' demands, host culture comes to be performed or 'staged' and comes to be *consumed* in tourism. It was not so much that Pumi and Zodwa

were staging, or being made to stage being virgins. The *staging* in this context as the girls' narrative reveals, is about them having to perform bare-chested, to *sell the idea* of Zulu, and virgin body.

In the case of the women working as cultural dancers, there is another kind of hyper-visibility operating that to me is but a guise of invisibility. We see the 'Zulu' dancer, in the brochure and in the Zulu dance performance, but the woman in front of the tourist is relatively invisible alongside the robust image she is popularly packaged as projecting, that of the animated and beautifully beaded maiden on the ubiquitous postcard.

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

It is claimed that inhabitants in the so-called Third World countries, more often than not spatially organised in the South, are usually more exposed to the tourist gaze. In many instances the locals are said to conform to and "mirror what the tourists want", and in so doing they enact the "Western imaginary" (Maoz, 2006). The fact that the female performers that I spoke to are at some level compelled to adopt a smiling disposition for the tourists reveals an ongoing display and consumption of so-called 'culture' and, more importantly, the 'cultural bodies' of the African women in tourism (see Naidu, 2009b; 2011). Again, the so-called First World has a seemingly never-ending queue of consumers of culture and bodies deemed exotic and available from the (sic) Third World. From the several observations of the performances and the narratives shared by the women and even the young girls Pumi and Zodwa, it is clear that they were well aware of the multiple worlds they straddled.

VIGNETTE: FEMALE AFRICAN BODIES IN CHURCH

Background…

Women's bodies and in this instance, the bodies of African women in the global south have been caught in an intersectional web that has defined and inscribed their behaviour in a multitude of ways. This is no less true for their sexuality, additionally reinforced by what is construed and constructed as African traditional norms and customs. A chance meeting with a woman who shared her painful encounter with the

pastor in her Church prompted a study in 2013 with a small group of women who were very clear about who they were; they were lesbian and they were Christians. This sense of 'self' however, is to be understood as cast against the wider social landscape that saw those two labels as mutually exclusive and not able to be appended to the same individual.

This prompted work with a small group of 12 women who were prepared to share stories of their experiences in various mainstream Churches. The thick descriptions shared by the women reveal bodies read within a narrow religious grammar that sentenced, robbed and stripped the women of their personhood and decried them as being possessed or demonic.

One of the women, twenty seven year old Mindy, who was previously a follower of *Jehovah's Witness,* which is strongly anti-homosexual, shared that *"The pastors and the other congregational members found it very hard to accept me into the church."* She narrated that *"they say that you cannot be gay and praise God because what we are doing is a sin."* She looks crestfallen as she tells me that, *"in the eyes of society, being lesbian or gay is a sin and some even believe that we are satanic and possessed…as far as they are concerned, we sin and don't belong in a Church with straight people."*

Thirty four year old Gloria shared that *"they find it hard to accept that we can be strong followers of the Lord because they* [referring to her old pastor and the Church members of the African Indigenous Church] *say we are sinners, we are sin…and we are not God's Children."* Jabu, who was from the Covenant Fellowship Church, and who was a university graduate in her mid-twenties, said she was not accepted by the pastor there. She articulated her experience in terms of doctrinal constructions of heaven and hell, and said that *"people think we will be accepted into heaven depending on things we have done"*. She continued, *"in terms of this, they say we have sinned and done evil actions. They make us feel our bodies need to be cleansed… it's difficult to stand up to them… so we just leave off going to Church…".* Other women spoke about being preached at, indirectly through the pastor's sermons, and directly through aloof 'silences' from the congregation. They also spoke about being made to feel *different,* being told that they were acting like "*white ladies who sleep with each other"* and accused of being *"white in a black devil's skin".* They spoke about being told that they *"had no right to praise the Lord",* and that *"they were not the children of God"*.

Gamson and Moon (2004: 51) point out that sexuality, and the meanings people impute to them *create* and *reproduce* sexual categories, as well being fecund in creating and perpetuating gendered relations of power. And while bodies may well be a vehicle for *staging* cultural, sexual *et al.* identities (see Brush, 1998) the study shows that in this particular context, the bodies of these lesbian women were *inscribed and read* within a repertoire of 'sexual difference' (Naidu, 2011). The body, far from being (only) biological materiality, is the 'site' where interactions of persuasion, discourse, and power (as well as agency) play themselves out. Colebrook (2000) maintains though, that thinking about the body beyond sameness

and difference allows us to see that the body is not a pre-representational ground, but an effect of representation. The female lesbian body' is labelled and made visible within a particular signification of *sin* even though the sexual orientation is not visibly discernible in the same manner that certain other physical (dis)abilities may be. Yet it is afforded the same (dis)function and acts to divide the lesbian women from the heterosexual women. It also appeared that amongst these women, it acted to divide them from 'other' African women. For the sense of sin appears amplified within the African Churches because, as they women pointed out, sex between two women is constructed as a western and white invention, that further 'betrays' that these women do not belong in the Church.

Queer theory claims that sexual power runs throughout social life, and is enforced through "boundaries and binary divides" (Stein & Plummer, 1996: 134). These boundaries and binary divides inhere between the lesbian female (one gazed upon) and the heterosexual, or the one who *gazes*. The lesbian women emerge as bounded bodies, bounded by the *invisibly-visible* markers of their sexual preferences and as (sexually) othered bodies.

STANDPOINT AND SITUATED VANTAGES

How can the various excerpts and ethno-vignettes presented above, help us frame an understanding about epistemic privilege? My opening words adopted Harding's (2004) thesis that standpoint theory (as feminist critical theory) attempts to explain the relationship between the production of knowledge and practices of power. The latter parts of the essay then went on to show the (routinised) experiences of women in a clutch of local African contexts and the 'entangled' and meshed particular historical connections of various groups of African women and various embedded asymmetries that spoke to the production of power of their bodies, labour and sexualities.

Thus for example, returning to the context of the cleaning women, we see that there has always been poor value and prestige associated particularly with the labour of cleaning work. One can perhaps trace the cleaning women's vehement aversion to wearing the uniform publically to their awareness of the exegetics of visible artefact of the uniform. The panoptic uniform clearly signaled their status and their place in the pecking order within the organizational work space of the university. The women are rendered bizarrely invisible through a process of hyper-visibility, and they share awareness of this. We see the cleaner as she is clearly to be 'seen' in her uniform, but she is, to all intents and purposes, also invisible as she looks like every other cleaner and is meant to do the work of any other and every other cleaner. As the women shared: "the people see us, but maybe they don't see us". The stories that the women shared showed that their uniform was acting as a sort of material exercise of disciplinary inscription, and emerged as a mode by which the cleaners are homogenously objectified and plastically turned into visibly working 'subjects' (Foucault, 1982). The observations and insights shared by the women show that

even in a post-apartheid South Africa many categories of Black female bodies are valued insofar as they kinetically hold the potential or become agents of (physical) labour. Thus, the uniforms of the African female cleaners acted as much more than an abstract object framed by the practical exegetics of work, as something that they just wore at work.

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

This consumption and the women's reaction showed itself in different ways. In the case of the girls in the tourism village as well as the lesbian women attending Church, they all said that they were aware that they "were looked at", and sometimes it was "awkward". While the young Zulu girls bore this as part of their employment and erected protective structures (such as dancing somewhat further off and behind the male dancers where they could), the women who self-identified as lesbian, in many instances turned away from the fellowship (sic) of institutionalised mainline Churches while not turning their back on their faith. In both instances, the women had their own (different) ways of subverting the gaze on their bodies and their sexualities.

The (often one sided) pleasure of looking, according to Freud, derives from the sexual drive, and inherent voyeurism in these instances is linked with dominant-submissive behaviours seen to operate between host and tourist and the paternalistic-condemning behaviors on the part of the officiating pastors and Church congregations. The gaze is situated somewhere between the eye and what is seen, "since the gaze is pre-existent to the eye" (Johnson, 1996: 9). Looking involves not simply the act of seeing, but also translating and interpreting (Coorlawala, 1996: 19), and these are powers and prerogatives that lie with the on-lookers.

This masculine gaze is not necessarily more 'chaste' when cast from *within* religion. On a religious level it may play out in seemingly 'gentler' (yet equally violent) pastoral counselling or 'praying for the sinner to be free from the evil in them, a kind of 'religious corrective' where ministries accept the 'sinning (female) soul' so that they can change/fix and save it. On a social level it plays out in horrific 'corrective rape crimes', on the increase in the African communities as violent attempts to 'correct' and 'fix' the lesbian, who are seen as 'unAfrican' as documented in an Act!onaid Report[5] entitled "Hate Crimes: The Rise of Corrective Rape in South Africa". The assaults in these instances are layered with, both, deep revulsion as well as a morbid curiosity that a woman would (dare) choose another woman (as opposed to a man). The women's 'disruptive' bodies ('disrupting' and tempting the minds of other females perhaps) ostensibly provide further justification for their

gendered devaluation within religion where temptation is itself construed as a potential 'sin'. This potential sin is actualised in many Churches in Africa in what is perceived as female lustful same-sex enactments, against (privileged) heterosexual intimacy. Yet the work of Shefer and Foster (2009) as well the earlier work of Steyn and Van Zyl (2001) clearly show that in the South African context, there is a coercive and (continuing) violent nature of heterosexual relationships within which women are rendered, in many ways powerless. This, as studies show, is compounded within many peri-urban African contexts where women in heterosexual relationships are further entrapped by 'traditional' enactments of masculinities (Naidu & Ngqila, 2013).

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

BLACK FEMINISM AND AFRICAN FEMINISM, ENTANGLEMENT AND PRIVILEGE

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

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

Within the literature, Black feminism is most especially associated with the experiences of Black African American women (and Black British women). It was Patricia Hill-Collins (2010) who pointed out that Black feminist thought is conjoined to the specificity of American multiculturalism. Thus, Black feminism articulates within a complex pattern of localised intersecting oppressions and social practices, which although appearing on one level seemingly universal, is entangled with the particular trajectory of American political history. Again reading through the scrutiny of the notion of 'entanglement', we see that the Black African woman and the Black African body is likewise deeply entangled within a colonial and post-colonial history, which in this instance is read within a 'register' (Nuttall, 2009) of South African socio-political archive and specific issues of subjugation, objectification and oppression. The context of post-colonialism is thus multivalent and polyvocal and characterised by uneven processes, playing itself out in sometimes very particularistic ways, in different spatial and geopolitical locations. All of this is clearly captured in the observances and narratives of the women in the various ethno-vignettes.

STANDPOINT THEORY AND AFRICAN FEMINISM: EPISTEMIC PRIVILEGE?

Early feminist standpoint theory (1970s/1980s) held that all knowledge is located and situated and that the experiences of women and their standpoint is to be valued in that it proffers a vantage point that reveals the truth of social reality. Realistically speaking, turning the experiences and potential 'values' in the oppression of African women into epistemic and political resources would demand that these oppressed groups need to be granted access to locations and structures (Narayan, 2004), institutional or otherwise, that give the women the tools to understand the systemic processes in which they are entangled. But this is the catch – the system itself does not easily allow for this and we are back to the reality of Black African women with little or no literacy skills having to take up work as shoddily paid cleaners, and Black African Zulu 'ethnic' women posing for the tourist gaze.

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

equally absurd. Just as it would absurd to simplistically assume that 'blackness' is a braided perverse/privilege and a ticket to empowerment.

The socio-economic scripts that are drafted in the texts of a post-apartheid society have indeed made it possible for (certain categories of) Black African women to legitimately audition for, and rightfully earn, the roles of high-flying corporate executive, complete with all incumbent business perks. Where once she was locked into accessing only particular kinds of lowly paid work as cleaner and being the object of tourism consumption as dancer, she is now able to travel for business and pleasure, and even act as the tourist in other countries, and in this way stake her place as economic and cultural consumer. However, also deeply embedded and entangled with the present are the socio-political scripts that naturalise the role of domestic 'cleaner' as being predominantly Black African women. Just as deeply embedded and entangled with the colonial past and spectacle of the 'exotic', are also reified contemporary images of the 'native'. And alongside a seemingly progressive South Africa constitution that grants full citizenship to all regardless of sexual orientation, (among others of race and gender and religion) sit deeply embedded prejudices and expectations of how Black African women (and men) should behave sexually.

Certainly on some level the behaviour of the women reveals an epistemic vantage in showing that the women understood the patterns of power relations that they are embedded in, as African women and employed in the kinds of work that they found themselves doing, and as African women who exercised their sexual preferences. However, within epistemic privilege is the hidden (imperial and Western?) transcript of epistemic violence. Gayatri Spivak (1988) speaks (and is no less famously and infinitely quoted) of epistemic violence as the projection of a White European epistemology onto the rest of the world (especially the so-called Third World) in assuming that African women necessarily recognise and articulate their resistances in similar ways as Western women. Moreover, the "moment of critical insight" comes through only in political struggle, Harding (2004: 9) tells us, as it is "blocked" and its "understandings obscured by the dominant, hegemonous ideologies and the practices that they make appear normal and even natural".

In my own studies and ethnographies, I was able to see moments and actions of personal insights operationalized, if not on large political contexts, certainly in profound personal contexts. While on one level I did not find the kind of grand large-scale oppositions that I had initially blinkered myself into looking for, I did find narratives of other kinds of resistances. I was reminded that 'power' is but a series of strategic relations (Foucault, 1980), and is in no single particular place but 'everywhere', and if not in one space offers in another, the possibility of resistance, situationally enacted. The women's experiences revealed in ways that may have otherwise been deemed small or indiscernible, that they *did* resist the contexts of embedded power in their work environment.

In the case of the cleaners, this was in the simple, yet profound fact that all 56 women interviewed were adamantly clear that they would never consider wearing

the uniform either to work or from work, even though it might have been simply easier and more convenient. Unlike almost all other categories of workers, the women arrived at work to, only minutes later, change out of their "prettier dresses" and remove accessories of make-up or jewelry and put on the cleaner's uniform. Observing them over several months as they shed their uniforms and dressed again in their self-selected clothing at the end of the work day, showed clearly that this was an attempt to destabilise the work and uniform-induced body hexis, if only *outside* the organisational space of the university. It was much more complex than simply not wanting to soil their clothing. Outside of work they refused to be associated with or be seen as cleaners. They knew that they worked as cleaners, but what they were saying to me, as indeed to all others, was that they were not (just) cleaners.

The work with the female cleaners showed that while at work, aspects of the women's personality were entangled with being in the uniform. Their narratives shared that the single-layered garment worked to discipline the body and strip down the complex multi-layers of their personality and attempted to naturalise their status as cleaners. The women's narratives revealed their attempts to destabilize this conscription, if only outside the spatial and organisational domain of the work space.

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

In the context of the lesbian women of faith, like many others I spoke to, Mindy had shared that "*The pastors and the other congregational members found it very hard to accept me into the church*". She had added that *"they say that you cannot be gay and praise God because what we are doing is a sin."* However, the situated Black African lesbian women seemed to exercise their own agency within their material reality. They claimed that "just like the man, the pastor was also not needed!" Their conveyed attitudes and words revealed that there was no need for the male for sexual intimacy and 'climax'. So too was there no (need for) recourse to the pastoral figure to mediate, through doctrine and sermon, for the women's religious fulfilment with God. Sexual boundaries are the crossroads where people make connections across borders. The African lesbian woman to me emerges as a 'situated knower' who crosses boundaries and subverts and disrupts 'the dominant social (and sexual) text' (Miller, 1988), which is also very much a traditional African as well as an orthodox religiously scripted text. She is in turn able to set in play the disruptive potential of gender performances (Butler, 1988) within the

social cultural and religious milieu that she inhabits. In so doing she is potentially able to generate the most powerful awareness of its social construction, within Black African Christian religious congregations.

All of this is done through a strong awareness that she is 'not the other' to be privileged or ostracized. When the women were asked if they believed or felt that the Lord 'loved lesbians in any special way', the responses were simple, but eloquent. Sindi, who had sporadically attended the Apostolic Church (where she kept her sexual orientation hidden) said simply, *"The Lord loves us just like He loves straight people, no more and no less."* Eighteen year old Joyce was clear in her answer that *"No, God loves all his children regardless of race, age, sexuality."* It was revealing that the young woman's response placed 'sexuality' third in the line of intersecting variables, *after* (constructed) race and (biological) age. To Joyce, there was no need for any sort of divine privileging regarding her sexuality (just as there was no need for privileging from heterosexual men and women) for the simple fact that she experienced her sexuality (as did many of the other lesbian women) as being both the *norm* and *normal* for her. There was no sense of 'deviance' *that had to be excused*, or 'difference' *that had to be privileged.* Likewise many other women, such as Thandi, echoed these sentiments and did not see themselves as people whose desires lay outside normative heterosexuality, notwithstanding the pervasive sense in many Black African communities that homosexuality and lesbianism is unAfrican (see Msibi, 2012; Naidu, 2013).

Power is not innately hierarchical, so there is no single site of revolt (Barker, 1998: 28), and it made sense that there was no one particular point of highly dramatic resistance on the part of the cleaners and dancers, but ongoing and daily 'little' resistances. The women thus emerge as nodes in a web of relations as they simultaneously exercise some form of control and power over the corporeal (see Grosz, 1994) body and self, even as they experience the effects of power over them and their bodies. These instances of resistances may well appear insignificant or compromised, yet they need to be appreciated within the context of the precarious socio-economic lives of African women who did not wish to jeopardise their jobs.

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

CONCLUSION

Situated and context-relevant feminist theory recognises that not only would there be multiple standpoints, but multiple African feminist standpoints, as the acts of

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

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

Of course the individuals in the ethnographic groups have individual voices, but standpoint theory looks at the specific group and specific examples of power relations that work upon those particular groups of women as they work as groups of cleaners or groups of dancers. In my ethnographic examples, the power relations were enacted via devices such as the cleaners' panoptic, immediately visible uniform and the immediately apprehended visual of 'ethnicity' in the beaded 'Zulu' women. In the case of the lesbian women, their sexuality could be seemingly kept more invisible in some instances, although they did speak of being stripped 'naked' by stares (where their sexual preferences were known) and periodic vitriolic sermons from the pulpit (even when their preferences were kept cloaked).

The above discussion renders clear that there is room for ongoing dialogue for feminist theorising. One vital way of enriching the dialogue is to call for more situated ethnographic contexts of studies that can then be located and read theoretically, allowing multiple African standpoints to be heard and theoretical understandings developed. Clearly though, standpoint theory – as both a "political and social epistemology" still invites much wrestling and debate in terms of what it can offer to the agenda of African feminism/s and the understandings of Black African women's lived experiences.

NOTES

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[2] Much has been captured in sociological and political science scholarship as well as post-colonial literature about the social engineering wrought by apartheid South Africa, and what Homi Bhaba (1994: 7) refers to as the 'past-present'.

[3] Thus the thoughts on 'African feminisms' are proffered with suitable awareness about the possible shortcomings of my positionality and my (somewhat skewed) early intellectual pedigree and tutoring. I am also aware, given all my protesting, that it may appear decidedly odd that I draw somewhat heavily on some White (and Western) feminists. However, it is in the works of some White feminists such Sandra Harding, Nancy Hartsock et al. that we also get a sense of the sub-textualities as well as controversialities, and the contested and multiple positions that are embraced within standpoint theory, which is what I am constructing my discussion around. After all reflexivity does not unreasonably demand that we 'throw out the baby with the bathwater' to quote a rather quaint old proverb, but rather that we are alert to both baby and bathwater.

[4] *Nom de plumes* are used in all instances and in all the ethnographies.

[5] Martine, Andrew; Kelly, Annie, Turquet, Laura and Ross, Stephanie. (2009). Act!onaid Report: http://rapeoutcry.co.za/home/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/correctiveraperep_final.pdf accessed online 30 May 2013.

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