

An African feminist standpoint?¹

Danai S. Mupotsa

On Bodies, Sex, Respectability and Social Reproduction²

Impassioned by a personal interest in the gendered socio-political, economic and historical meanings attached to the body; and with the contention that the female body, as opposed to the normative (or rather socially *normalised*) male body, has been discursively constructed as pathological according to dominant paradigms of knowledge and social practice; while simultaneously considering the role of the processes of conquest, colonialism, imperialism, racism and apartheid in similarly pathologising black bodies; I entered this research project with an interest in dissecting the manner by which such discourses then translate into common-sense understandings about how ‘we’³ both dress and perform our bodies in various social spaces; about how we begin to construct the discourse of ‘our culture’, of good girls and social misfits, who wear the labels of ‘prostitute’, ‘lesbian’, or ‘rural’, (despite our true actions or conditions) within urban spaces in contemporary Southern Africa; considering the impact of the history of a geographical apartheid, a migrant labour system, the production and re/production of notions of femininity closely associated with domesticity and the very dominant narrative of female respectability as dominant themes.

This considered, I described my research aims as endeavouring to interrogate the shifting meanings and treatments assigned to the body, through things such as dress, skin, hairstyling or hygiene, for example; examining how such treatments function within different contexts of space and time; of and by women aged between 12 and 19 living in Guguletu. I also argue that to better enrich this work, close attention to the specific history of Guguletu and the Western Cape is relevant in understanding the subjective experiences of youth. To do this, I conducted multi-generational interviews with women who were among the first to move into Guguletu in the 1950s and 60s, when it was created as a new ‘black’ township for ‘surplus blacks’⁴. The second group of women included women who are in my own generation and who were ‘young’ during and after apartheid. The final group of women were within the category of 12 to 19 years of age in 2006. In considering their accounts of life in Guguletu, I also hoped to reveal some intergenerational shifts, if any in regards to bodily practices and the social meanings attached to young women’s bodies in Guguletu and the Western Cape in general.

As a foreigner; that is, as a young, black, middle class, Zimbabwean woman whose only prior engagement with Guguletu involved driving past the great expanse of informal settlement on either side of the N2 between Cape Town and Cape Town International Airport; I was most fortunate to have a research companion whose aid has been immeasurable and who mediated my entry into a part of her world that has shaped, re/shaped and configured my research project, enabling me to complete the task of adding to a growing body of African feminist knowledge. I met Ms. Toetie Madlingozi through a mutual friend and soon after I joined forces with her to become a part of Project Siyenza⁵. Recalling my first visit to Guguletu to meet some of the young women that I worked with, in comparison to my last visit with them I am completely amazed first, at how much

they have grown and second, how much I have grown since we all met. I walked in there overcompensating, stuttering, frightened and with a set of clever little ideas about how to do social research and what to fall back on when methods one through twenty had all failed. I walk away with a healthy appreciation for simple ‘girl talk’, as in this case I found that there is no easier way to do social research than to approach it as a conversation with your friends.

Being young in South Africa: The model of spectacle

Reviewing the literature on young people and youth cultures, particularly located in the townships of South Africa, one cannot help but see a very grim picture; one similar to what Njabulo Ndebele comments on in saying that “the history of black South African literature has largely been the history of the representation of spectacle”⁶, continuing to add that:

What is on display here is the spectacle of social instability. The necessary ingredients of this display are precisely the triteness and barrenness of thought, the most deliberate waste of intellectual energy on trivialities. *It is, in fact, the ‘emptying out of interiority to the benefit of its exterior signs, (the) exhaustion of the content by the form’.* The overwhelming form is the method of displaying the culture of oppression to the utmost in bewilderment.⁷

In Cape Town, such bewilderment is easily viewed, because of the representations of this city/space, which perpetuate an image of a city that is ‘dangerous’, due to its proximity to the ‘illegal’, informal (hence criminal) settlements of persons living on the margins of this city. People wearing black bodies, whether living in brick houses or illegal shacks on the Cape Town periphery continue to wear bodies that are hyper-dramatised as criminal in current discourse as these places are seen as both the source and often the site of the worst violence in South Africa, a country which itself continues to be scripted as one of the most violent places in the world. It is not my intention to suggest that there is no crime in Guguletu, or in South Africa, or that the conditions under which young people are constructing their lives are ‘just’. Instead my work intends to take on the challenge posed by Anthony Bogues, that is for those of us involved in intellectual production to shift some of ‘our’, “labour into understanding a new set of relationships and subjectivities,” continuing to add that he wants us “to think about the relationship of power in its ‘capillary forms of existence’, how power as a field of force exists in other ways than its conventional state forms and how in these ways, it becomes productive creating geographical spaces of violence and death while re-mapping sovereignty,”⁸ urging us to think about the manner by which geographical spaces construct our subjective experiences through an understanding of violence, as it is mapped on our bodies.

As Ndebele suggests:

We must contend with the fact that even under the most oppressive of conditions, people are always trying and struggling to maintain a semblance of normal social order. They will attempt to apply tradition and custom to manage their day to day

family problems: they will resort to socially acquired behaviour patterns to eke out a means of subsistence. They apply systems of values that they know. Often those values will undergo changes under certain pressing conditions. The transformation of those values constitutes the essential drama in the lives of ordinary people. The range of problems is ordinary enough but constitutes the active social consciousness of most people.⁹

My project intends to investigate the ordinary practices of life, as a means of overcoming an obsession with spectacle. This position arises from my own desire to attempt a narrative of youth culture that moves beyond a description of the exterior and to find a way to account for the *interior* in my own effort to describe human life. In feminist intellectual practice, we have come to understand the personal as political and to value the meaning of ordinary social life as deeply contested political practice. I am personally interested and invested in moving beyond the model of spectacle which has affected the theoretical and methodological choices I make in shaping a narrative of social life for young women in post/Apartheid Guguletu. Additionally, as a young black woman, then living in the Cape Town Metropolitan area, the symbolic and real experience of wearing a black woman's body place/d me in constant insider/outsider-ness, which draws me into deep debates about how one can consider 'experience', as the basis for describing how one comes to possess a particular 'standpoint', and it is from this position that I shall enter my discussion of feminist standpoint theory.

Methodological choices: An African feminist standpoint?

Ways of knowing have been at the forefront of feminist debates, nothing that "every theoretical and methodological framework of knowledge production has implicit values and assumptions about the nature of society, and will be resisted by those who do not have the same position."¹⁰ In an essay titled 'Engendering African Social Sciences: An Introduction', Ayesha Imam continues to note that in an African context the notion of an 'objective' truth or knowledge has always been under scrutiny as "there had always been those who made anti-imperialist and class critiques in full recognition of their political implications," in contrast however, "the gender political implications of the sorts of knowledge produced has been almost studiously ignored and rejected by many African social scientists."¹¹ These omissions are important to note, considering that quite simply put, half of human society is constituted of people gendered as feminine and as Imam so aptly states, a social science that does not recognise gender as an critical category is "an impoverished and distorted science, and cannot accurately explain social realities and hence cannot provide a way out of the present crisis in Africa."¹²

Northern-based proponents note that traditional philosophies had, central to their imagination the notion of objectivism which presupposed that "knowers must detach themselves from their embodiment and their various beliefs,"¹³ but as Assister offers "feminist epistemologists have gone further, therefore and have argued that value-neutrality in science is a myth, because the descriptions, interpretations and explanatory phenomena in science inevitably involve social values. [And as] we are embodied and embedded creatures...these facts about us matter when making claims to know something."¹⁴ It is from this epistemological position that "women's experiences cannot be understood within the consciousness of those who rule; instead, feminism needs to

develop a social form of expression and intelligibility that is separate from the male standpoint,”¹⁵ which as Sandra Harding says, “while studying women is not new, studying women from the perspective of their own experiences so that women can understand themselves and the world can claim virtually no history at all.”¹⁶

Standpoint theories emerged out of critiques of universal objectivity, but also importantly out of an interest in using “material experience to build collective theoretical understandings.”¹⁷ This is crucially important to note, because it highlights the importance of *experience* in constructing a standpoint, but what ‘experience’ actually entails also makes this discussion more interesting and also more difficult as women are not all the same and we do not share the same material experiences and therefore basing feminist standpoint theory on ‘women’s experience’ can be dangerously universalistic. As Blunt and Rose argue, “[claims] to know for absolute certain the true nature of all women, depend on and produce a space in which essence of femininity is immediately accessible and transparently obvious.”¹⁸

For me, as an ‘African feminist’, in defining and locating myself in this position I am already dealing with the tensions of ‘experience’, and feminist epistemology: in applying the ‘additive’ approach to feminism/s, beginning by locating myself as ‘African’, I am first suggesting that ‘feminism’ alone is not adequate in describing my political and intellectual investments; I am also therefore suggesting that I am uneasy that a ‘feminist standpoint’, alone is not a possible epistemological and methodological option for me as well. I began this paper in a footnote, describing the great pains I have endured in attempting to name and hence locate the site and praxis of my own feminist standpoint.¹⁹ Sitting in the middle fence between two intellectual traditions,²⁰ which despite radical attempts within both disciplines, continue to leave me ‘feeling a fool’, for all intents and purposes, as who I am and what *experience* I present as a Southern and particularly African feminist, is an invisible and often tenuous position to maintain. How does one arrive at a standpoint? Do all women share a standpoint? All women, or all black women? What are the parameters for describing this shared experience?

Some Southern-based feminist theorists, suspicious for these reasons find feminism in its Northern-dominated form too risky; as they re/create mimetic representations of black/African/Southern women that are universalistic and essentialist. To simply work within the framework of ‘feminism’, for me in my own political/intellectual location, as a black/African/Southern woman with the standpoint of that embodied experience, that is from “the position of a politically marginal grouping [that] can open the eyes of all to blind spots in science,”²¹ has been complicated by Uma Narayan. Narayan complicates this view in stating that she would “like to balance this account with a few comments about the ‘dark side’, the disadvantages, of being able to or *of having to* inhabit two mutually incompatible frameworks that provide differing perspectives on social reality.”²² Her reasons involve the fact that the researcher who inhabits these two frames²³ may dichotomise her life, using one frame in a particular context and the other in another. Another reason is that the person may also attempt to reject the practice of her own context in favour of that of the dominant context, attempting to adopt as much as the dominant group’s practice as possible.

This ‘complication’ offered by Narayan is useful, as it brings to a head what it means to be a feminist (as it is so Northern-dominated in mainstream discourse); what it is to practice said feminism in intellectual discourse (living in two frames: social life; and social life which one in turn, intellectualises); and really also, what it means to in her case label oneself as ‘Non-Western’, as categorisation which I myself initially did not find useful. There is no ‘West’, or ‘North’, for example, as through the historical processes which have produced me at least, one would probably find it impossible to be an African who was not produced in European modernity and the predominance of the ‘Western’ episteme which characterises it. We all live in a ‘Western’ frame in this sense. However, there is also a subordinated non-Western political and lived social experience that remains in the sideline and is often discursively limited to being a defensive position.²⁴ Straddling such mutually exclusive worlds is complicated, yet many of us as feminist researchers continue to live in these plains!

Having located my study in a ‘foreign’ space, not only nationally or geographically, but in regards to ‘class’ position as well, and coming from the position of a ‘social scientist’ this relationship with dominant culture becomes even more contested. While my subjectivity may mean that I will be asking different questions and I may have a different ‘entry point’, into the research process, as a western/educated person conducting academic research I am functioning in a highly hegemonic space, whose language I must use to mediate this ‘othered’, context and be as fluent, or more so in it, than members of that dominant group to have such research taken seriously. This can cause great confusion and as an attempt at a solution, Narayan offers that “this sense of alienation may be minimized if the critical straddling of two contexts is part of an ongoing critical politics, due to the support of a deeper understanding of what is going on.”²⁵ My personal engagement with mediating the language of the academe and the social language with my research participants, who as I argue, I share a ‘language’ or ‘discourse’ with about bodily management in that ‘we’ share in *wearing* ‘black female, bodies’, (in a particular space and time); is one I have been embroiled in for a great portion of my not-so-long life. This is a challenge which must translate into a shift in the discourse of the academe that accounts for different presentations of theory.

Speaking in regards to the alienation felt by ‘non-Western’ feminists conducting research, Marnia Lazreg says “some Third World women find comfort in acquiring a Western-style feminist identity that presumably dissolves their cultural selves and enables them to take their distance from those who resist looking at themselves through Western feminists’ eyes. The problem for Third World women is that their writing is constrained by the existence of an imperious feminist script. This, instead of being emancipatory, writing for them is often alienating.”²⁶ For Narayan, this alienation stems from the fact that “some themes of feminist epistemology may be problematic for [‘non-Western’] feminists in ways that they are not for western feminists,” as she believes that feminism has a much narrower base in most non-Western countries and in her understanding, feminism is primarily of importance to *some* urban, educated middle class, and “hence relatively westernized women, like [herself/myself].”²⁷ Her contention is related to the role of tradition in non-Western contexts and how one then begins to speak of women’s

experiences in a context which is totally different to a 'traditional' frame. I am not entirely satisfied with this position. For me, non-Western feminisms, (and again, for me), African feminisms: have long traditions of intellectual, political and social practice, simultaneous to; and possibly despite of the predominance of 'Western' dominance, that is within non-Western frames.

My response to this would be similar to that offered by Patricia McFadden and Molokomme, who offer discussions of African feminism. The notion that feminism is 'unAfrican', because it does not fit into prescribed notions of 'African traditions', (or 'non/western', ones as Narayan suggests,) is built upon dominant imaginations of what it means to be an African man or woman. McFadden defines feminism in Africa "as being fundamentally the struggle by women against patriarchal control and exclusion. Most importantly, it is a struggle which African women have engaged in, as individuals and now as collectivities of women for millennia," continuing to add that "the struggles of particular groups of women – in this case white, middle-class, northern women – may have been hegemonic and dominant in terms of the discourses around notions of women's freedom from patriarchy, and there are very good historical reasons for that, amongst which colonization and enslavement are high on the list."²⁸ She notes the hostility that Africans hold towards feminism, but also importantly notes that this antagonism is also harboured by Northern men and women towards African feminists, which she understands to be as a result of the fact that they "themselves were intent upon studying African women as peculiar and different from the Europeans they left in the cold north."²⁹ This position brings us back to the power of knowledge production, as she notes a part of western feminist agendas was to conduct studies of African women that reproduced dominant masculinist and imperialist paradigms.³⁰ This also highlights the importance of African women describing themselves and each other as yet another feminist epistemological strategy, although for me this must be complicated further. 'Conducting research', as a means of accessing academic achievement is something which is done from a particular class position and the 'power-play' between 'researcher' and 'researched' persists and it must continue to be interrogated. However, those of us who inhabit 'feminist' spaces that are not hegemonic must recognise and articulate our own feminist standpoints, to better elaborate on the parameters of 'experience' that we are referring to in our work.

Patricia Hill Collins and 'Black Feminist Thought'?

One mapping of 'alternative' standpoints which seems quite famously used is that of Patricia Hill Collins' 'Black Feminist Thought',³¹ where she begins in arguing that "Black women have had to struggle against white male interpretations of the world in order to express a self-defined standpoint."³² This particular standpoint is designed to encompass "the experiences of being both Black and female in the United States,"³³ and is rooted in an "Afrocentric feminist epistemology" which in turn, "is rooted in the everyday experiences of African American women."³⁴ There are two main and interrelated problems that I have, with the approach taken by Hill Collins (and she has also been challenged by many other Black feminists,³⁵) which I shall use as an entry into thinking about different ways of conceiving the parameters of experience and the feminist standpoint.

First, in positing ‘Black Feminist Thought’, Hill Collins begins in critiquing black feminist thinkers who include any black woman in the realm of ‘Black feminism’, stating: “from this perspective, living as Black women provides experience to stimulate a Black feminist consciousness. Yet indiscriminately labelling all Black women in this way simultaneously conflates the terms *woman* and *feminist* and identifies being of African descent – a questionable biological category – as the sole determinant of a Black feminist consciousness.”³⁶ However, in her own definition of ‘Black feminist thought’, (the alternative to such biological essentialism), in using a standpoint theory, Hill Collins is also looking for where one can begin to see not only a ‘standpoint in experience’, but also how this standpoint has been ‘politically active’, and ‘feminist’ as well. As a result, the ‘Afrocentric feminist epistemology’, from which ‘Black feminist thought’ emerges, is a phenomena of ‘everyday life’. That is, material conditions have “led African American women to use alternative sites such as music, literature, daily conversations, and everyday behaviour as important locations for articulating the core themes of a Black feminist consciousness.”³⁷ I find this interesting and as I have already argued, I do believe that non-dominant feminisms have and are living in alternative spaces such as these and should no longer be invisible in light of mainstream articulations of feminist thought. However, I cannot help but to return to Hill Collins’ own critique, whereby African American women all become feminists, in their everyday social practices – although now, not due to any biological determinism.

To continue, ‘looking into the ordinary’ in regards to social practices, for the articulation of ‘Black feminist thought’, Hill Collins examines what she calls ‘The Ethic of Caring’, amongst African American women. The ‘Ethic of Caring’ is composed of three elements: it is “rooted in a tradition of African humanism, each individual is thought to be a unique expression of common spirit, power, or energy inherent in all life;” that “emotion indicates that a speaker believes in the validity of an argument;” and finally, it “involves developing the capacity for empathy.”³⁸ While again Hill Collins views their observations as the outcome of material conditions and part of a project to articulate a Black feminist consciousness, I do not find this useful. I do not know how one would take this approach without over-generalising; re/interpreting the social experiences of people and their lives to fit into a theoretical formula, and the fact that these three components cannot surely relate to all Black women. These components may be present discourses amongst African American women, but I found it very difficult to consume these ideas without an urgent feeling of dis-ease within myself – are all Black women living the ‘ethics of caring’? And if they are, is it really due to these particular components? While these components were described in their historical emergences, surely the material conditions under which these discourses were produced also produced other discourses as well?

Return to the ‘African Feminist Standpoint’

I really appreciate the empowering and positive implications in Hill Collins’ approach, but fundamentally, the very humanist approach of her argument makes it quite difficult for me to consider it as a useful standpoint theoretical position. I have instead opted for the anti-humanist ‘subject’, position³⁹ because of the fear of universalising and essentialising women’s experience, and therefore as my way of salvaging standpoint theory. Jumping from Ndebele’s call for a rediscovery of the ordinary, I have selected

discourse analysis as my 'tool', for exploring subjective experience. Amina Mama describes discourses as:

Historically constructed regimes of knowledge [that] include the common-sense assumptions and taken-for granted ideas, belief systems and myths that groups of people share and through which they understand each other. Discourses articulate and convey formal and informal knowledge and ideologies. They are constantly being reproduced and constituted, and can change and evolve in the process of communication. A discourse is a shared grid of knowledge that one or more people can 'enter' and through which explicit and implicit meanings are shared.⁴⁰

Thinking about discourse in this sense, and my particular political/intellectual location and experience functions as a starting point to account for which particular (and multiple) discourses I have an entry point to. For example, early on in my research work, I spoke to the group of young women about my work and asked them if they would be interested in being involved. During the next break, one of them approached me and asked if I would not mind speaking to everyone about body odour, as one of the girls was suffering from that problem and they were all afraid to tell her. She then proceeded to say "Sis! That girl is so rural!"

Now in this example, a number of discourses about femininity and cleanliness were blatant and available, but my own experience of being young and black/African in Southern Africa allowed me to enter other levels of understanding this discourse – because what she was referring to in this statement insinuated a number of levels of meaning (discursive, that is real *and* symbolic) about the urbanisation, industrialisation and racialisation processes of Southern Africa. The linkages of particular smells, not only to women's bodies, as pathological; not only to black bodies as pathological, but an entire history of constructing urban spaces and consumer products was spelled out for me in that instance. There are many layers of discourse in that statement, revealing a great deal about society from which I entered my research project, which I had access to due to my own insider-position – that is, in sharing this material (symbolic and real) experience: and it is not incorrect to call it a black/African experience and standpoint. Additionally, however, there are angles or standpoints from which others could enter that statement and engage with some of the same discourses (those which are dominant), and some who may enter and experience more levels of the discourse due to personal experience of actually being 'rural' and moving into an urban space, for example. However, what standpoint theory does for me here, is that it enables me to align myself with dominant discourse that has defined black female bodies in a certain way, in Southern Africa – to say that as a person who wears such a body and has learned the many methods and means of managing it within that space, even though 'blackness' is actually being discursively constructed in those practices, I can argue for a strategic essentialism that says that I understand blackness and femaleness and bodiliness in Southern Africa better than a person who does not wear that body or live its real and symbolic discursive experience. Now from this insider position, discourse analysis allows me as a researcher to delve into such bodies of *collective memory*, as we find that in Southern Africa, where rural families often visit their generally economically privileged urban relatives this discourse is

particularly strengthened as the social mores of the city, although viewed as ‘corrupting’, or ‘corrupted’, are also ‘modern’, ‘civilised’, and functioning to contribute to the impervious script of respectable behaviour.

The presentation of discourse as my primary tool in elaborating a narrative of social and historical life in Guguletu arises from an interest in analysing power in a manner similar to that elaborated in Foucauldian discourse. To do this as a feminist who later describes my methodology as one which appropriates standpoint theory; that is: an epistemological approach which sees as its primary priority a shift from a masculinist dominated/dominant discourse of knowledge, by replacing women (and other subjugated peoples) into dominant discourses as knowers/producers of knowledge and subjects of it. It has been often noted that “the use of Foucault has created a lot of tensions in feminist debates.”⁴¹ This has been due to “the lack of gender in his accounts, the inconsistencies in this portrayal of power and the unsuitability of his ethical framework.”⁴² Standpoint feminists are particularly concerned with his presentation as “this account of power appears to imply that any notion of structural power – say patriarchy – is false.”⁴³ Feminists are not alone in their suspicion of Foucault’s presentation of power, Abiola Irele for example thinks that African writers “cannot afford the luxury of an unexerted nihilism or a morose anti-humanism”⁴⁴ that Foucault’s reading of history and power suggest.

This considered many of us still recognise the usefulness of his work considering “Foucault’s theorisation of the subject as the most interesting area of his work, for feminists.”⁴⁵ Others have noted his presentation of genealogy, writing:

Foucault’s project of genealogy has multifarious ways that the female subject has been historically and culturally constructed...genealogy is Foucault’s suggestion for doing research. It is both a mode of reflection on the nature and development of modern power and a theoretical tool for doing research. A key insight in genealogy is that truth cannot be separated from the procedures of its production. Consequently genealogy is concerned with the processes, procedures and apparatuses, whereby truth and knowledge are produced, in what Foucault calls the discursive regime of the modern era.⁴⁶

I find both theorisations useful and have had to consider a method of appropriating these theories and methods in a feminist manner, that is: in a manner that still offers a structural critique of power, while allowing for the more complex analysis of power that Foucault provides a model for.

The first method of appropriation I employ is in the selection of subject matter. Selecting a research area that involves tracing the genealogy of women’s experience (of youth, the body and space) beings this process. The structure of patriarchal power (like the other structural powers such as colonialism or apartheid) are very difficult to make absent as the discourses produced by/about/surrounding black women in a township in South Africa are unapologetically connected to such structures and their histories. Simultaneously these women are co/producers, participants, resisters and manipulators of

said discourse and Foucault's offering of power as fluid (that is: not just from the top down) and complex allows me to offer what I believe is a 'better' feminist analysis; one that does not contribute to a dominant discourse of black women as the perpetual 'beasts of burden', incapable of action or agency in the face of multiple oppressions.

Lila Abu-Lughod's theorisations of power⁴⁷ are interesting to me in this regard. She notes that the study of resistance has emerged in recent years as 'hot' research areas. In her own appropriation of Foucauldian analysis Abu-Lughod's work is interested in "unlikely forms of resistance, subversions rather than large-scale collective insurrections, small or local resistances not tied to the overthrow of systems or even to ideologies of emancipation."⁴⁸ I have an interest in not only describing the multiple levels of discourse narrated to me during my fieldwork on one level, but I wish to take this further by using the notion of 'resistance', as Abu-Lughod does, that is: to "use resistance as a diagnostic of power."⁴⁹ This does not necessary mean that power will always be located within structures; on the contrary the location of power then becomes more complex and multi-faceted.

In conclusion, I wish to consider Rosi Braidotti's suggestion that:

This recognition of sisterhood in oppression cannot be the final aim women may have common situations and experiences, but that are not, in any way, *the same*. In this respect, the idea of the politics of location is very important. This idea, developed into a theory of recognition of multiple differences that exist among women and stresses the importance of rejecting global statements about all women and of attempting instead to be as aware as possible the place from which one is speaking. Attention to the *situated* as opposed to the universalistic nature of statements is the key idea.⁵⁰

This is useful, to begin to consider how one is both an insider and an outsider within the research process. I have selected the 'African feminist standpoint', to describe precisely this situated insider/outsiderness with which I engage research. African, because of the political, intellectual, historical, social and economic experience, symbolic and real, I have as well as the political investment I have in understanding the social situation of the continent I both embody and whose discursive constructions are central to my own intellectual curiosities. I am an African feminist, politically and intellectually and these are the parameters of my historically-interested position, so working with this has proved useful in my most recent intellectual exercise. Situated in that position, I hope that I have and continue to work against universalism and oversimplifying what are often deeply interesting and complex human and social phenomena.

¹ I originally began under the title, 'A Radical Black Feminist Standpoint', when I presented at the African and African Diasporic Knowledges Conference (Centre for African Studies, November 2006), as I was attempting to consider such a standpoint as a useful response to the masculinist-dominated radical Black intellectual tradition. I offer special thanks to Prof. Anthony Bogues, who taught the seminar in which this paper was produced. Further thanks to Prof. Paul Zeleza, who responded to this paper during the

conference and Prof. Keisha-Khan Perry who offered some useful comments as well. I continued to consider locating my standpoint intervention not only as an intervention in radical Black intellectual production, but more generally within the realm of African feminist studies. As I write at this point, I still posit the 'African feminist standpoint', with a question mark, further extending this notion to think about this located standpoint as an intervention not only in African/Africana Studies, but in global Women's Studies as well. Special thanks to my supervisor, Dr. Elaine Salo, and Prof. Rosi Braidotti.

² I am drawing from research conducted under the 'SANPAD: Forging Coca Cola Identities', project, which is aimed at investigating the "practices and processes of popular youth cultures of young men and women located on the urban periphery of post-apartheid South Africa [that are] used to inform the formation of gendered identities, and the sexual cultures associated with these." The SANPAD Project aims to examine how urban youth aged between 12 and 19 years, who are living on the social and geographic margins of Cape Town "reinstale, renegotiate, renovate, and change their identities of masculinity and femininity through their use of various urban spaces and through their selective consumptions of local and global aspects of popular culture." The final research project was originally titled, 'Gugule-tois, the Place to Be! On Bodies, Sex, Respectability and Social Reproduction: Women's Experiences of Youth on Cape Town's Periphery.'

³ I begin in describing my research project as one which includes me, with the use of the 'our' and 'we', which as described by Patricia Hill Collins is "a choice that embeds me in the group I am studying instead of distancing me from it". (See Hill Collins. 1991. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and The Politics of Empowerment*. London & New York: Routledge. Pg 202). The 'we' and 'our' in this sense has multiple meanings: I contend that 'we' are all shaped by dominant discourses about bodiliness, regardless of our personal/political locations whether it is race, class, or gender etc...; simultaneously, when I speak of an 'our' that knows the very particular modes of *practicing* the body in a manner that prevents you from being called a 'hure' (a whore, (Shona colloquialism) for example) I speak here of a particular group of women, who I locate in this work as black and women in Southern Africa.

⁴ I dedicated a chapter to considering the history of the Western Cape in this regard, particularly because of the predominant view that 'black' people are 'new' in the Western Cape and also the predominance of the view that 'black' people (as opposed to 'white' and 'Coloured' people in the Western Cape,) and in their 'newness' to the area, are in constant migrations from the Eastern Cape especially and the townships of the Western Cape. I discovered this 'inadequate as truth' quite early on in my research, as I was looking to find evidence of so-called migrations to and from the Eastern Cape, especially as this would be enriching to understanding the relationship between 'urban' and 'rural' as categories used to describe people, depending upon their ability to use and practice urban social mores especially related to bodily practices, such as deodorant and soaps. Due to the fact that all of the people I worked with generally lived in the same section of Guguletu (Section Two), in houses originally designated for families to reside in was of particular relevance, as the apartheid state policy was to consider the rural areas as 'home' for 'African' (black) families and the urban areas as the 'workplace' for the African male population. The people I worked with had a very fixed understanding of themselves as being from Cape Town (with few exceptions) and the move to Guguletu was generally (for first generation) a result of apartheid population policy which functioned to undermine African family life in the Western Cape. All of these factors have extreme relevance to how gendered meanings are constructed and performed on and through bodies, but due to the nature of this paper, I will not enter into this discussion much further.

⁵ This is a women's leadership project in Guguletu, initiated and run by Toetie in 2005. I joined her in 2005 as a co-conspirator of sorts! We organized day-long workshops for groups of young women in Guguletu where we explored ideas about leadership, goal-setting and a guest speaker, who had to be a black woman from Guguletu (or a similar situation/space in South Africa) came in and spoke about leadership. I worked with all the groups of women in Project Siyenza in general, but only 'did research' with the group that lives on the same street where Toetie grew up.

⁶ Ndebele, Njabulo. 1991. *Rediscovery of the Ordinary: Essays on South African Literature and Culture*. Scottsville: University of Kwa-Zulu Natal Press. Pg. 31

⁷ Ndebele. 1991: 33 (my emphasis)

⁸ Bogues, Anthony. 2005. 'The Politics of Power and Violence: Rethinking the Political in the Caribbean.' An Essay read at the conference on Caribbean Studies, Yale University. Pg. 3

⁹ Ndebele 1991: 49

- ¹⁰ Imam, Ayesha. 1997. 'Engendering the African Social Sciences: An Introduction', in Imam, A., Mama, A., Sow, F. (eds). *Engendering African Social Sciences*. CODESRIA, Dakar. Pg. 2
- ¹¹ Imam 1997: 14
- ¹² Imam 1997: 2
- ¹³ Assister, A. 2000. 'Feminist Epistemology and Value', in *Feminist Theory, Vol. 1(3)*. Pg. 329
- ¹⁴ Assister 2000: 330
- ¹⁵ McLaughlin, J. 2003. *Feminist Social and Political Theory: Contemporary debates and Dialogues*. Basingstoke: Palgrave. Pg. 57
- ¹⁶ Harding. S. (Ed.) 1987. *Feminism and Methodology*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. Pg. 8
- ¹⁷ McLaughlin 2003: 67
- ¹⁸ Blunt, A. & Rose, G. 1994. *Writing Women and Space: Colonial and Postcolonial Geographies*. New York & London: The Guildford Press. Pg. 6
- ¹⁹ See endnote 1.
- ²⁰ Women and Gender Studies, which for the most part remains quite Northern-dominated, despite decades of Southern efforts to enter into mainstream intellectual production; and that of African and African Studies, which remains male-dominated and those of us who are feminists who continue to invest themselves in it can often be left feeling-a-fool, as 'gender' as a critical category remains reserved as a 'research topic', amongst many others.
- ²¹ Assister 2000: 331
- ²² Narayan, Uma. 1989. 'The Project of Feminist Epistemology: Perspectives from a Non-Western Feminist', In Jagger, A. and Bordo, S (eds) *Gender/Body/Knowledge: Feminist Reconstructions of Being and Knowing*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press. Pg. 266. My emphasis.
- ²³ A 'feminist' (read Northern-dominated) frame and one for one's normal 'non-Northern' life...?
- ²⁴ One which can become dangerously essentialist as well, as most 'defensive' positions are.
- ²⁵ Narayan 1989: 266
- ²⁶ Lazreg, Marnia. 1993. *The Eloquence of Silence: Algerian Women in Question*. London and New York: Routledge. Pg. 11
- ²⁷ Narayan 1989: 258
- ²⁸ McFadden 2000: 2
- ²⁹ McFadden. 2000:2
- ³⁰ See, Mohanty, C. 1997. 'Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses' in McClintock, A., Mufti, A., & Shohat, E., (Eds), *Dangerous Liaisons. Gender, Nation and Postcolonial Perspectives*. For example.
- ³¹ Hill Collins: 1991.
- ³² Hill Collins 1991: 201
- ³³ McLaughlin 2003 64
- ³⁴ Hill Collins 1991: 207
- ³⁵ McLaughlin 2003: 64
- ³⁶ Hill Collins 1991: 19
- ³⁷ Hill Collins 1991: 202
- ³⁸ Hill Collins 1991: 215-216
- ³⁹ Eagleton, M. 1996. *Working With Feminism and Criticism*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers. Pg. 189
- ⁴⁰ Mama, Amina. 1995. *Beyond the Masks: Race, Gender and Subjectivity*. New York & London: Routledge. Pg. 98
- ⁴¹ Tamboukou, Maria. 2003. 'Writing Feminist Genealogies', in *Journal of Gender Studies* Vol. 12. Issue. 1. Pg. 5
- ⁴² McLaughlin, Janice. 2003. *Feminist Social and Political Theory: Contemporary Debates and Dialogue*. Basingstoke: Palgrave. Pg. 120
- ⁴³ McLaughlin, J. 2003: 122
- ⁴⁴ Irele, Abiola. 2001. *The African Imagination: Literature in Africa & the Black Diaspora*. New York: Oxford University Press. Pg. 81
- ⁴⁵ Tamboukou, M. 2003: 5
- ⁴⁶ Tamboukou, M. 2003: 6
- ⁴⁷ As presented in Abu-Lughod, Lila. 1990. 'The Romance of Resistance: Tracing Transformations of Power Through Bedouin Women.' in *American Ethnologist* Vol. 17. Issue 1.

⁴⁸ Abu-Lughod, L. 1990: 41

⁴⁹ Abu-Lughod, L. 1990: 42

⁵⁰ Braidotti, R. 1994. *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory*. Pg. 163