

Introducing Black Academic Voices

South Africa and Beyond

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This special issue is part of efforts by the Department of Leadership and Transformation, at the University of South Africa (UNISA) in Pretoria, to make a contribution towards the building of the scholarship of transformation. Again, this special issue builds on the work started in the 2019 award winning edited volume *Black Academic Voices: The South African Experience*, which shared the multiple stories of Black Academics in the higher education sector. The only exception in this issue is that the experiences shared include those from other parts of the world. From the multiple launch seminars hosted for Black Academic Voices (2019) it became clear that there are multiple Black academic voices in the university that require our ear, thus this special issue provides the much-needed reflective space for the unpacking of the politics of being black in the academy. In South Africa such reflective undertakings are recent and timely as show in works by Mabokela and Magubane, 2004; in Khunou, Canham, Khoza-Shangase, Phaswana, 2019; Magoqwana and by Maqabuka, and Tshoedi, 2019.

Transformation in the South African higher education sector has been an issue of interest since 1994, and it has been articulated in policy, employment equity measures including affirmative action and opening access for students among other aspects. Most recently with the #FeesMustFall Movement it began to take a particular turn towards epistemic justice (articulated as decolonisation). Again, with the #FeesMustFall Movement important issues like insourcing of workers in the sector saw a revival which addresses issues of the capitalistic logic of profit before people. One of the currently emerging transformation related topics of interest in the higher education sector is what are the experiences of Black women leaders in the academy. We have observed in the South African media the brutalization of the few Black women

leaders we have had thus far. This vilification of Black women is also seen in how they are not supported in their leadership, how they are compared to men who have come before them without looking at the dynamic context of their leadership (Khunou, Segalo and Phaswana, 2022). This vilification of Black women leaders is a natural outgrowth of how Black women's contribution is generally minimized and or completely erased (Magoqwana et.al 2019; Mabokela et.al 2004). One of the effects of the juniorisation and lack of support of Black women contributes to their early exit and low numbers in administrative and research leadership positions (Magoqwana, 2019; Rugunanan et.al, 2012).

This attempt to minimize or completely erase the contributions of Black women is not only a reality in the academy, but in society generally. In the introductory article of the special issue the African idea of Africa, Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Ngqulunga (2022) lament the lack of contributions in the issue on African women leaders and their ideas on the African idea of Africa. They argue that this glaring omission in their special issue is not a true reflection of the existence and contribution of African women leaders to the making of Africa. The tendency to exclude Black women is a global phenomenon, and it is intended to mute the distinctive standpoints women's contributions make (Hill Collins, 1986; Mabokela et.al 2004). Notwithstanding these attempts to erase women's contributions; feminists and decolonial feminist scholars have been at work to unmute and reposition Black women as credible knowers, leaders, teachers, and knowledge creators (Khunou et.al 2019; Magoqwana et.al 2019). In this issue, this trend continues with several of the contributions focusing specifically on the experiences of Black women in the academy.

The work of unmuting the contribution of Black scholars is equally carried out by decolonial scholars throughout the diaspora. The intention of decolonial scholarship is not only to critically engage with existing knowledges but also to reclaim knowledges that have not historically featured as knowledge (Mignolo, 2009). Most importantly for this special issue is engagement with the questions of what it means to be Black¹ in the *Western Academy*² so as to excavate and archive the voices of Black academics, students and other communities that make up the academy.

1 Black in this special issue is define as captured by Steve Biko (see Khunou, 2019 et.al, page 1).

2 In this issue, the university/academy is understood as defined in Mignolo 2009.

This special issue is also interested in continuing the debate and theorizing not only from the experiences of Black beings in the academy but also in affirming the importance of reflectivity and biography as decolonial methodologies. Given the histories of silencing and disbelief associated with Black Biography (Khunou et.al, 2019); it is the intention of this special issue to center this approach as fundamental for remembering the marginalized and their ways of knowing and doing.

The articles in this issue contribute from multiple geographical locations including South Africa, Canada, and the United States. Their focus is on the experiences of being Black in the higher education sector. The articles in this issue illustrate how knowledge by Black knowers remain a challenge in the current Western University model that is the reality for South African universities. The significance of these articles is that they help us navigate the terrain of recentering the Black body in thinking about what is wrong with the higher education sector and how we can find humanizing solutions. The articles expand the exploration of what it means to be Black in the Western Academy by providing nuances and similarities of experiences by Blacks in the Canadian, South African and US academy. The academy in this volume is understood as captured in Mignolo (2009).

The article by Mudavanhua, Adam, and Aduseic, titled, *Transferring while Black: Intersectional experiences of Black college-to-university transfer students in Canada*, provides a critical lens into how college to university transferring processes fail to adhere to policies of inclusion and equity. The article uses intersectionality as a theoretical lens to show us how the knowledge creation space in Canada problematises Black bodies.

The article by Mudavanhu and Batisai, address itself to questions of the hiring of Black women in universities in Canada and South Africa. The article is titled, *They Bring Standards of Academic Excellence Down”: A Critical Analysis of Rebuttals by Social Media Users to Targeted Hiring of Black Women Faculty Members in South African and Canadian Universities*. This article builds on its title to critically engage with how Black women are viewed in ways that empty out their humanity and diminish their abilities. The article rightfully centres how racism and sexism negatively impact the mental health of Black women in the university sector.

Similarly, the study by Muthala and Pillay, titled *Experiences of work-life balance of Black female academics: Gauteng South Africa*, unpacks an important

aspect of how Black women academics experience the academy with regards to their well-being. The study illustrates that the well-being of Black female academics is out of balance as the context somewhat treats them like mules with unequal workloads, lack of recognition of the contributions they make, and no respect for their personhood. The paper illustrates how the socio-economic context of the society including patriarchy negatively impacts Black women's ability to be active knowledge production players.

Taking the discussion of how multiple isms impact Black women further, Hunt-Khabir discusses how intersectionality is made complex by the dynamic experiences of Black women. She shows in the article titled, *Is Intersectionality for Black Women Complicating Our Love for Intersectionality?* how access to higher education is just the beginning of challenges that Black women deal with. The article illustrates that barriers to qualification completion for Black women in the United States remains an important obstacle for their higher education success.

In the article by Motlhamme, we see how autobiography is an important archive for understanding the contribution of Black academics to African epistemology. The article, *Black Academics in Higher Education, Autobiography and Decolonisation 1940s-1990s*, provides an analysis of the autobiographies of ZK Matthews, Chabani Manganyi, Eskia Mphahlele, Bernard Magubane Mamphela Ramphele and Mabogo More. These scholars the author argues have been marginalised as knowers and their contributions is at danger of being buried lest we do the work of excavating via multiple methods of reclaiming including what the author does in this article.

In the article, *Wrestling to exist: Womanist struggles of junior scholars in Higher Education*, we see how the experiences of Black women in the South African higher education system are filled with daily struggles. Olivier, Shange and Ntsele illustrate how post-graduate studies especially Black women in a precarious position as both insider and outsider (teacher and student). This article provides an important lens into the transitory experience for Black women post-graduate student in an unchanging context where movements for change, advocacy and policy works evokes equality, but the actual experiences suggest rigidity and unshifting institutional cultures.

Through a phenomenological reflection of five African women leaders in South African universities, the article, *We are not fully Citizens of our Universities: African Women Leaders, Non-belonging and Construction of New*

Cultures and Citizenships in South African Higher Education, by Siphokazi Tau examines the ways in which citizenship and belonging are navigated through the mapping of their leadership trajectory. The article holds that African women leaders utilise their agency to determine what she called “humanizing institutional cultures”.

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