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The Emergence of Gender Scholarship in South Africa – reflections on Southern Theory

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Abstract

The late 20th century saw a steep rise in published works on gender in South Africa. This article analyses the production of gender research against a backdrop of current interest in southern theory, theory that is produced to analyse and challenge existing global knowledge inequalities. As a domain of research, South African gender writings draw both on global feminist impulses as well as national and local ones. We discuss what this means for understanding the particularity of South Africa's gender scholarship which we trace back to the writings of Olive Schreiner at the beginning of the 20th century. In this paper we quantitatively identify the trajectory of gender research in South Africa and consider the genealogy of South African feminist writing. We show how the focus of gender research evolved noting that it sometimes was divided on grounds of race, but often was united by opposition to patriarchy which took forms of activist scholarship. We focus on a number of themes to show how feminist scholarship developed out of engagements with questions of inequality, race, class and gender. While gender research featured a strong, almost obsessive, engagement with local, South African issues which serve to give this body of work its cohesion, it also manifested divisions that reflected the very inequalities being researched.

Introduction

From the 1980s onward, but particularly in the second half of the 1990s the production of published gender work in and on South Africa boomed. By analysing two library data bases we show that there was a steady then dramatic increase in gender publishing that peaked in 2010 (see Figure 1). What gave rise to this trajectory, what were its significant trends and how do we explain this in terms of Southern Theory are the concerns of this paper.

Second wave feminism in the 1960s and 1970s had a major influence on knowledge production. The world was introduced to Betty Friedan, Mary Daly, Gloria Steinem, Andrea Dworkin and Juliet Mitchell. Academic journals began to devote more and more attention to gender as a subject of research, women's and gender studies departments sprang up at universities. But the fact that this revolution was based in the North and addressed a particular context did not go unnoticed. From Spivak onward, challenges were launched at Metropolitan scholarship in general and at Western Feminism in particular (Lorde, 1984; Mohanty *et al.*, 1991).

In the last ten years the angle of critique has changed and the geopolitical has been emphasized. Raewyn Connell (2007) and Jean & John Comaroff (2012) have both focused attention on ongoing global inequalities in the realm of knowledge production. They both explore how this knowledge inequality is expressed and suggest that the inequality is being challenged but that the development of theory in the South remains a political agenda into the future.

One of the issues raised by this new scholarship is the relationship of the North to the South (although the core definitions are themselves disputed). How is knowledge produced? Is, as Connell (2007) following Hountondji suggests, knowledge produced by a process of extraversion whereby data is extracted from the South and analysed in the North so that value accrues to and in the North? Or is there cross-over and sharing of knowledge making, a more collaborative model? Or is the process one of borrowing, where theories produced in the North are applied in the South despite different contexts?

We argue that the publication trajectory (see Figure 1) is likely explained by the growth of academic interest in gender in the North and its spread to the South, new publishing opportunities and the increase of interest in gender by students and researchers in South Africa. But we resist the conclusion that this is just a knee-jerk response, a derivative process that replicates metropolitan work. Instead we argue that South African gender research also reflects organic national developments in the academy and in politics where the period covered in this review coincides with increasing opposition to apartheid including a rise in guerrilla warfare, trade union organisation and the popular mobilization and in 1990 to the freeing of Nelson Mandela and in 1994 to the first democratic elections. We point to a longer trajectory of gender research, showing how it was linked to feminism in South Africa and how it sought to analyse patriarchal relations while also contributing to civic actions that challenged it.

In this paper we are interested to explore the question of the ways in which South African gender research drew on Northern or Western Feminist concepts and approaches and how it was influenced by what Andy Dawes in the context of the discipline of Psychology has called "eco-culturally sensitive interventions" (Dawes, 1998: 4). Dawes investigates the distinction between the demand for the rejection of colonial knowledge and its replacement with indigenous approaches. He contrasts this with "the appropriate application" of theory to research questions in African contexts (Dawes, 1998: 4).

Dawes' position shares with Connell a reservation about 'ethno knowledges' which was the object of Hountondji's critique in the early 1960s (Hountondji, 2002). Hountondji was amongst the first to point out the limitations of exchanging one form of knowledge with another and instead drew attention to unequal knowledge relationships and the way in which this impacted specifically on knowledge production in francophone Africa. Hountondji argued that Europe was distorting knowledge production, using Africa as an experimental lab, drawing primary research data from the continent and then processing it for metropolitan ends that led to the underdevelopment and dependence of the research sector in Africa.

Houtondji and Connell, as well as Comaroff & Comaroff (2012), have revealed the mechanisms at work in perpetuating geopolitical knowledge inequalities. The difficulty remains, however, of using a binaried model (North and South) of knowledge constellations. The danger is that these geographical categories artificially separate out or categorize works. In our argument we aim to show that while gender research in South Africa drew on existing debates in the North, it also engaged with debates and thinking emerging out of local concerns that contributed to and developed global debates as well. We explore whether this body of South African gender work was distinctive, 'eco-culturally sensitive', because the context in which the concepts were used was very different from those in the North as were the context specific questions that were raised.

Methodology

This article uses basic quantitative bibliometric method to establish the trend of gender publishing in South Africa over a particular period (1960-2014). By drawing on two data bases that collect specifically South African material we count the number of gender publications in and about South Africa and present these numbers in Figures 1 and 2 below.

Bibliometric methods "define general productivity in a given area" (Andres, 2009: 9). A key element of a bibliographic search is coverage – "the extent to which the sources processed by the database cover the written scholarly literature" (Andres, 2009: 10).

This choice, sampling, always poses a challenge and in this case we were led by available repositories and our research resources (Williams & Bornmann, 2014). We enlisted the support of the UCT library who recommended that we search the Africa Wide database via EBSCOhost – a narrower set of Africa-orientated publications, and a database geared to more precise searching. Africa-Wide Information combines databases (African Studies, South African Studies, and African Healthline) to form a multidisciplinary aggregation offering unique and extensive coverage of all facets of Africa and African studies. We searched it for "South Africa" and (gender or femin* or masculin*). The search which was conducted in March 2015 brought up 7,854 hits, including many medical journals which were more concerned with the biological sex of patients, rather than gender as such. We therefore refined the search with the command "SU" which restricts the search only to those terms in the assigned subject field. ["South Africa" and (SU gender or SU femin* or SU masculin*)].This brought up 2984 results ranked by date. We then further reduced the list using the 'Scholarly Journals' limiter. This generated 736 results though a casualty was that chapters in scholarly books and theses were omitted. The results seemed to go back to 1965, with a few entries undated. We also sourced, separately, a data set from Harzings publish or perish (http://www.harzing.com/pop.htm). We searched (using the general Citations Tab) for all articles containing 'South Africa' and any of the words, 'gender', 'feminism', 'femininity' and 'masculinity'. This resulted for the time scale 1900 to 2015 in 1000 hits (the maximum that this search will deliver) organised by year.

Once we had the list we operationalised a process to sift through each entry. We excluded from the list all articles that were not related to South Africa or that referred to biological sex rather than gender. In addition we excluded items that were not discoverable on Google (using the Google Scholar finding aid) or in cases where no author was referenced. Conversely, we included all articles which contained gender in the title or as a keyword and those where 'masculinity' and 'femininity' were topics. We included book reviews in the data base. The result of the sifting process was that we obtained 404 publications from the Africa Wide Information data set and 322 from Harzings Publish or Perish, providing a total of 726. In Figure 2 below we see that both data sets reveal similar trends.

Figure 1

Works on Gender published in Journals and Books in South Africa 1960-2014 (N=726)
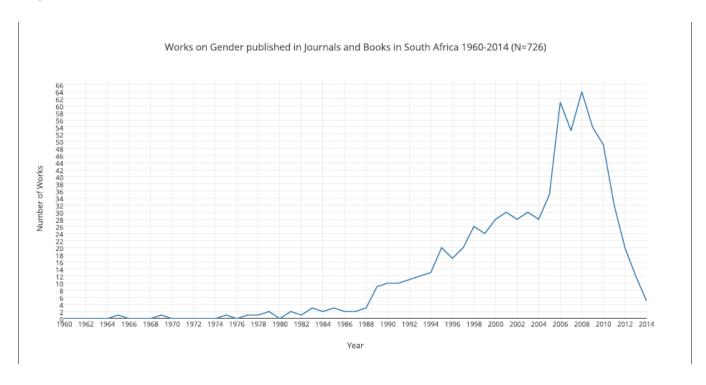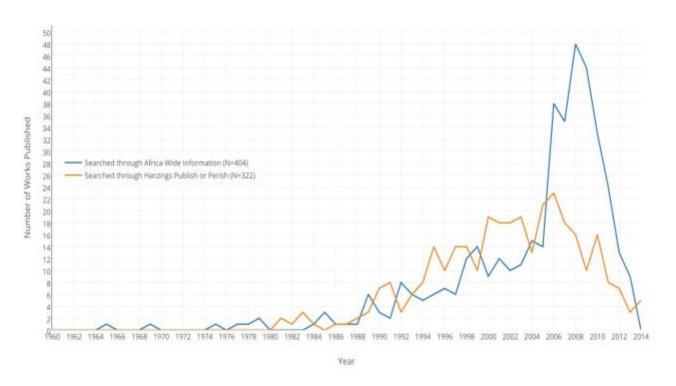

Figure 2

Works on Gender published in Journals and Books in South Africa 1960-2014 (N=726)

The data bases do not include all publications for the period 1900-2014. Publications in the early period are not visible, probably because they have not been converted into electronically searchable form. Nevertheless, the figures show that there was negligible gender publishing prior to the mid 1970s. From then there was a fairly steady increase that begins to rise sharply from around 1988-1990 and then reaches a plateau in the mid 1990s followed by another rise in the late 1990s and then a veritable explosion of publications from 2005. A peak of publishing is reached in 2009 whereafter there is a curious decline which becomes accentuated the closer one comes to the chronological end point of the data set.

Figure 1 confirms what might be expected. Following the growth of second wave feminism in Europe and the US in the 1960s, there was a spread of interest in gender especially in those countries with strong cultural and political ties to the global north. South Africa, despite the global isolation developing as a result of its apartheid policies, was a fertile ground for radical politics and readily drew on the counter-cultural and anti-colonial literatures that developed after the Second World War. In what follows we discuss the growth of gender research in South Africa, reflecting on its diverse manifestations, its relationship to activist politics and its conceptual and theoretical lineage.

North, South and in-Between

In 2007 Raewyn Connell published her book called simply *Southern Theory* and thereby brought again to the fore questions of global inequality that have been a feature of anti-colonial literature for a century. Whereas much previous work had focussed on economic inequalities Connell focussed her attention on knowledge production particularly in the discipline of sociology but with reference more broadly to the humanities and social sciences. Her book was an examination of the production of sociological knowledge and a critique of Northern orthodoxies. It made a number of key points. Northern theory was presumed to be the only voice in the room. It made no reference to its global location and ignored colonial and imperial legacies. In this process it succeeded in silencing or marginalising alternative theories. It contributed to elitist forms of knowledge production that did not contribute to addressing social, political and economic problems in the South while using the South as a place for experimentation. Five years later, Jean and John Comaroff provided a different but complementary spin with their *Theory from the South* (2012) which shared with Connell a critique of knowledge and power inequalities and pointed to forms of knowledge making and praxis in Africa which are now, in their

view, making a distinctive contribution to knowledge than could in time have greater potential for insight than the old and stale approaches of the North.

Connell and the Comaroffs were building on a long history of anti-colonial theorising that in Africa featured the writings of Amilcar Cabral, Sekou Toure and Julius Nyerere as well as university-based scholars and activists such as Walter Rodney and Samir Amin. The works of Said and Spivak inaugurated a heightened awareness about the politics of representation and voice which was taken further by critiques of knowledge inequalities that showed, inter alia, how centres (and provinces) were created (Chakrabarty, 2000), how modernity was naturalised and privileged as a European moment (Bhambra, 2007) and how 'the other' was constructed as inferior to European norms (Sinha, 1995). At the same time, the claims to epistemological legitimacy of indigenous knowledge were pressed. Responses to 'Europe's one-sided impositions' (Keita, 2014: 25) and the destruction of local knowledges included pointing out how voices of indigenous women in Africa were denied by the colonial and postcolonial states and how European understandings of gender were unhelpfully imposed on analysis of African societies (Amadiume, 1987; Oyewumi, 1997).

Both Connell and the Comaroffs agree that there have been important shifts in scholarship with Connell pointing out that almost all gender courses now include global issues as part of their curriculum and acknowledge the importance of developments occurring outside the north.

Yet there is still a fundamental problem with this literature. Almost all the feminist thought that circulates internationally and addresses economic or cultural globalization is based on concepts and methods developed in the global North.

> 'Most of the research that circulates widely, and that is accessible through mainstream databases, remains deep in the theoretical world of Karl Marx, Michel Foucault, Margaret Mead, Simone de Beauvoir, Juliet Mitchell, Judith Butler, and Joan Scott. This literature works on the tacit assumption that the global South produces data and politics, but doesn't produce theory. By "theory", here, I mean creating agendas of research, critique, and action; conceptualizing, classifying, and naming; and developing methodology, paradigms of explanation, and epistemology' (Connell, 2014a: 520).

In terms of this reading, the intellectual authority of the North is still intact and has to be challenged. There are implications in this view for how we regard work that is

produced in the global South and especially how we regard work produced by gender scholars in South Africa. Before we examine these implications, we discuss Connell's efforts to escape what she describes as "a dilemma about how to understand the foundations of feminist knowledge and the status of concepts ranging from 'patriarchy' and 'identity' to 'gender' itself" (Connell, 2014a: 521). Rejecting a 'mosaic approach' which suggests that there are many different ways of approaching gender and each should be regarded as worthy, she argues instead that "feminist researchers in different parts of the world urgently need ways to cross-fertilize, rather than to separate, their work" (Connell, 2014a: 522). She proposes two steps to facilitate this process: recognize "the degree to which feminist thought is embedded in a powerful global economy of knowledge that is structured by the inequalities of metropole and periphery" and that,

> 'despite the operation of this structure, the periphery does produce theory—theory of depth and importance. From these starting points, a range of issues open up about the coloniality of gender, the workforce of feminist knowledge, and counterpublics on a world scale, all of which offer new perspectives for feminist theory' (Connell, 2014a: 522).

She elaborates by clarifying:

> 'The problem is not that local content is absent from Southern writing, but that local realities are reduced to the status of a 'case' framed by metropolitan conceptualizations. A typical gender studies article from the periphery combines local data or examples with one or other theory from the metropole' (Connell, 2014a: 525).

While Connell has shown how theory in general can be constructed in such a way as to reflect particular assumptions and political realities that undermine their usefulness in other contexts, she has not taken into account that at least some concepts in the North were created as part of an emancipatory project which had a great deal in common with the particular struggles being waged in the colonized South. Many of these concepts were produced precisely out of a critique of Northern society, its economics, politics and world views. Virtually the entire Marxist lexicon (see Bottomore, 1983) was developed to critique capitalism and contribute to its downfall. Foucault's engagements were informed by various experiences in marginality, including teaching in Tunisia and being a gay man in post-AIDS Paris. His work reflected an interest in a broad leftist project in North Africa and the Middle East. Connell's approach explicitly operates on an understanding that the global economy "doesn't produce a simple dichotomy" but rather "massive structures of

centrality and marginality, whose main axis is the metropole-periphery, North-South relationship" (Connell, 2014a: 526). Yet by holding onto a model where concepts are linked to geography, she has difficulty in avoiding a slide back into a North-South binary.

It is possibly for this reason that Connell herself finds it difficult consistently to operationalise the fluid and politically helpful definition of 'South' and 'North'. Reviewing literature from South America she chooses three examples of Southern theory but in each case there is, unsurprisingly, a trace of Northern concepts. In the case of Heleieth Saffioti, Connell notes her work contains a "sophisticated Marxist-feminist theorization of sex as a form of social stratification" (Connell, 2014a: 528). Teresita de Barbieri "makes a critical appropriation of Northern work, generating a distinctive theory of gender that historicizes the structural analysis of gender relations" (Connell, 2014a: 529). So here we see Connell providing examples where 'Northern' concepts are applied to Southern contexts in ways that generate Southern Theory.

One of the major theoretical drivers of Connell's view is the work of Paulin Hountondji (2002), who, it should be added, developed his theories in France by engaging with the work of the German philosopher Edmund Husserl. Hountondji developed a theory of extraversion. For the purposes of this article, there are two elements of this theory. The first is that primary data is mined in Southern contexts and then processed (theorized) in the North with no regard for the context out of which it was extracted or for the interests of those from whom it was obtained. The second is that a Northern theoretical language is hegemonic, prescribing particular formats and concepts to researchers and in this way controlling knowledge production in locations far from the Metropole. It is on the basis of the latter point that Connell has reservations about the models of Southern theory that she identifies in South America.

> 'Extraversion in this sense is as widespread in gender studies as in other fields of knowledge. Metropolitan texts about gender are translated and read in the periphery, and treated as authorities. Gender researchers from the periphery travel to the metropole for qualifications and recognition. Whole frameworks, terrains of debate and problematics are liable to be imported' (Connell, 2014b: 5).

Yet one wonders if the latter point should go unchallenged. The idea that concepts originate in a sealed off context (such as the North) has been questioned in the critiques of the equation of modernity with Europe and the assumption that Europe

was an economic, cultural and intellectual pressure cooker isolated from the rest of the world (Bhambra, 2007; Chakrabarty, 2000; Dirlik, 2011). The linear model that has theory travelling from the metropole to the periphery is challenged by works that show that the direction could be changed and that important innovations in fact came from the South and were then taken up by the metropole. Keith Breckenridge shows how the biometric administrative form originated in the context of South Africa's nineteenth century mining industry (Breckenridge, 2014). Similarly the influence of the periphery on metropolitan politics and the shaping of metropolitan contexts by the periphery also call into question the idea that concepts should be considered as pure and to have a particular belonging (Hall, 1992; Magubane, 2003; Narayan, 1997). Arif Dirlik (1996) shows, for example, how the idea of the orient was not simply a European invention but was shaped by engagements with Chinese scholars. Another reason for resisting the idea that particular concepts belong to and should be claimed by the North are the claims made on these theories. South African sociologist Herbert Vilakazi, for example, claimed Marx for a race-emancipatory project by claiming that he was 'black' (Vilakazi, 1980).

The question of how theory travels, is received, changed and adapted (Said, 1983) is a key element of postcolonial scholarship. Said's work exposed the politics of knowledge but he also critiqued the idea that knowledge can be 'owned'. Theories, like people, inevitably travel and they travel in all directions. While they are all produced in different contexts, the way in which they are deployed is not predictable. It is not obviously the case that because a theory was created by somebody living or working in a Northern context, that such a theory will forever be tainted by this context. On the basis that the origin of a theory cannot simply be taken to confer intellectual authority or to determine whether a theory is useful or not, we now turn to examine the how feminist theory in South African gender research has been mobilized.

The Origins of the Rise of Gender Research and Publication

One stimulus for the growth of gender research in South Africa in the 1970s was the political and intellectual energy unleashed by various counter cultural and oppositional forces in the 1960s. Second wave feminism was one such force. This line of critique coincided in South Africa with a tide of revisionism in the humanities (Razis, 1980; Saunders, 1988), particularly in the discipline of history where largely Marxist critiques of apartheid and capitalism began to invigorate a new generation

of radical politics (cf. Bozzoli, 1979; Davies *et al.*, 1976; Legassick, 1974; Webster, 1978; Wolpe, 1972). Mostly white students who had studied in the UK returned to South Africa, many as academics and many with activist leanings which were converted into actions (Friedman, 2014). The focus was frequently on worker action and trade union support, and documented by those active in the Trade Union movement (Horn, 1991a, 1991b, 1995). In parallel, there was the emergence of a strong black consciousness tradition, pioneered theologically in the late 1960s (Pityana *et al.*, 1991) and then developed most prominently by Steve Biko (1978). But also in the academy by diasporic South Africans working in the US (Magubane, 1979).

South African feminist work in this period largely addressed the failure of Marxist-inspired work to acknowledge the importance of gender and patriarchy. It used feminist critiques that were available at the time, applying these to the unique circumstances of South Africa as a way of adding theoretical muscle to existing women's movements (Beall *et al.*, 1987; Eales, 1989). In its insistence on the importance of race, class and history which anticipated the later acceptance of intersectionality as a key concept, it contributed to a third world critique of Western feminism which was considered narrow, individualistic and racially blinkered (Mohanty *et al.*, 1991).

Leftist debates in South Africa had long recognised that emancipatory theory would have to be adapted – as the Native Republic (1929) and colonialism of a special type (1963) initiatives demonstrated. In South Africa, while the initial inspiration was largely British, it did not take long for refinements of Western feminism (including the concept of 'triple oppression') to be taken up in South Africa. These are important in a context where it was not infrequent that efforts to de-legitimate feminism in South Africa were carried on a critique of feminism as alien, either because of its metropolitan origins or because of the racial identity of most South African feminists (Hassim, 2014; Meintjes, 2011). The infusion of feminist ideas and the work of scholars who had trained overseas made a major impact on gender scholarship. This work cannot be separated from 'genuine', indigenous South African work as though it were authored by emigres or foreign transplants. This point is made powerfully in relation to China where foreign trained scholars returned to debate China's late 20th century future and in this way influenced and enriched debate (Wang & Karl, 1998). In the case of South Africa we shall show how feminism, particularly in the early period, went hand in hand with activism.

In what follows we show how South African gender research has drawn largely from feminist theories developed in Europe and North America but also from other parts

of the world, how it has used the concepts to advance understanding of gender in South Africa and in the process how it has established the importance of history and context and 'coloniality of power' (Quijano, 2000). At the same time, the feminist research in South Africa has reflected national imperatives and sensitivities and the deep divisions within the country. The analytical and political place of race in research and analysis has been contested. Some have argued that feminism is irrelevant to and in South Africa because it is 'white' (Qunta, 1987). Others have argued that particular forms of feminism are tainted because they carry Western and/or racist or other elitist) agendas (Lewis, 1993). But many scholars have found great value in drawing on feminist theory to explain South African society and the position of people within it, including writers with an interest in race and rural relations (Bozzoli, 1991; Gasa, 2007), the working class (Brink, 1987), land (Meer, 1997b), psychology (Campbell, 1997; Langa, 2010; Strebel, Stacey & Msomi, 1999), intimate partner violence and rape (Wood & Jewkes, 1997), public health (Klugman, 1993; Jama-Shai *et al*, 2012), history (Sapire, 2000; Thomas, 2006) and men and masculinity (Morrell, 1998; Ratele, 2008).

Below we offer a periodisation of gender research that is based on our quantitative bibliographic research. We offer an explanation for and a description of the distinctive features of each of the phases that Figure 1 reveals.

1900-1960s

Our survey reflects virtually no publication in these years but this indicates the limitations of our database more than it does the total absence of gender research and publication in this period. In order to give some foundation for our later discussion, we now provide some national context. In 1900 South Africa was wracked by the South African or second Anglo Boer War that would end two years later with a British victory paving the way for unification of four provinces and a declaration of Union in 1910. This was a period when aggressive state policies entrenched English as the language of government and began to consolidate capitalist development that was both racialised and gendered.

The most prominent writer to foreground the lives of women in this early period was the suffragette Olive Schreiner. Her first novel, *The Story of an African Farm* (1883) highlighted processes producing social inequality that accompanied the mineral revolution. Schreiner's writings were structured around race and gender, and the ways in which white women were implicated in maintaining racial hierarchies. She was a fierce critic of aggressive imperialism and particularly of Cecil John Rhodes,

though she was equally mindful of the discrimination suffered by women both in the public realm (and thus supported the suffragette movement) and in private (Bradford, 1995). Her gender views were expressed in such books as *Women and Labour* (1911) and complemented a broader pacifist politics which generated a correspondence with Mahatma Gandhi and opposition to the First World War.

If Schreiner, as Daymond *et al*. (2003) note, was a pioneer, she was not alone in her thinking. The first half of the twentieth century saw the emergence of high profile militant and effective women leaders who challenged divisions around race, ethnicity, gender and class. Trade unionists such as Ray Alexander and Frances Baard, as well as activists and politicians such as Cissy Gool, Hilda Bernstein, Charlotte Maxeke, Josie Palmer, Ida Mtwana, Albertina Sisulu, Florence Matomela, Ruth First, Fatima Meer, Lilian Ngoyi, Ruth Mompati, Helen Suzman, Dorothy Nyembe, Annie Silinga to name but a few (see for e.g. Russell, 1989; Scanlon, 2007; Walker, 1983; Gasa, 2007).

In the first half of the 20th century South African universities were overwhelmingly dominated by white men in terms of both staff and students. In the late 1940s women made up about 27% of the student body at UCT, with most of these located in the Faculties of Music and Fine Art, fields of study that were considered "academically lightweight" because admission was not premised on matriculation (Phillips, 1993: 226). In 1949 just 63 of the 521 posts in the Faculties of Arts, Fine Art and Music at UCT were occupied by women, with Monica Wilson becoming the first permanent female member of Senate in 1952 after assuming the chair of Social Anthropology (Phillips, 1993: 261, 387 no. 9; see also Hirson, 2001). But women were not entirely excluded from research and the academy. South Africa had a tradition of women anthropologists some of whom (for example Audrey Richards, Ellen Hellman and Sheila van der Horst), according to Andrew and Leslie Bank, were feminists of a kind and pioneers in their field (Bank & Bank, 2013). Nevertheless, the androcentricism of the South African academy was reflected in little research focusing on women and gendered concerns. Women, and women's issues, were relegated to the indexes of what Second Wave feminists and others have described as 'malestream' histories and anthropologies (see Bennett, 2000; Diouf & Mamdani, 1994; Prah, 1999).

Outside the academy, however, the historical record demonstrates that South African women were developing sophisticated – and original - insights into the challenges they confronted. The Federation of South African Women (FSAW) was formed in 1954 (over a decade before the National Organisation of Women was set up in 1966 in the United States) to bring South African women together across race, colour and

creed. In declaring that "freedom cannot be won for any one section or for the people as a whole as long as we women are in bondage" (cited in Walker, 1991: 157) the Women's Charter drawn up by FSAW in 1954 broke significant ground globally even though such thinking remained on the margins of the academy and did not generate conventional scholarly outputs. Not only did the Charter critique ways in which women's subordination in national liberation struggle was perpetuated by men, it also took seriously the concerns and experiences of ordinary women. Taking what today might be termed an intersectional approach, the Charter predated the Combahee River Collective's statement of 1977 by over two decades. The Charter drew on women's personal histories of struggle over race, class and gender to articulate a comprehensive range of objectives including a universal franchise, equal opportunities, equal pay, equality before the law, paid maternity leave, child care for working mothers as well as free and compulsory education for all South African children (Walker, 1991). South African women's experiences were narrated largely through autobiography and fiction in the works, for example, of Noni Jabavu, Nadine Gordimer and Bessie Head (see Hetherington, 1993).

The 1960s featured the 1968 Paris student strikes, Second Wave feminist activism, the Woodstock festival, the US Civil Rights movement, and a dramatic surge in decolonization resulting in former colonies in Africa, Asia and the Caribbean gaining independence. Ironically, at the same time, South Africa was experiencing an authoritarian crackdown resulting in a "decade of quietude" (Worden, 1994: 113). Following the Sharpeville anti-pass law shootings in which 69 black protestors were shot dead, South Africa declared itself a republic (1961) and began a long march into international isolation. Growing repression and the elaboration of the system of apartheid steadily drew international condemnation and internal opposition which contributed to the stagnation of South African academic life. In the late 1960s, however, South Africans who had studied abroad began to return bringing with them new radical ideas that in time breathed new life into higher education and research. Feminism was among the new influences that challenged existing frames and perspectives and drew attention to the subordinate position of women.

1970-1990

As Figure 1 indicates, there are very few publications in the 1970s. These include articles in the *South African Medical Journal* that debated the use of women doctors

(Kane-Berman, 1979) and a summary in 1975 of Sylvia Vietzen's pioneering work on 'European "Girls" education in Victorian Natal' (1973).[1]

But this begins to change in the early 1980s. One of the earliest texts, *Oppression and Resistance: The Struggle of Women in Southern Africa* (1982), was published in New York by Stephanie Urdang and Richard Lapchick. Urdang was born in South Africa but went into exile and lived in Mozambique working as a journalist. In 1989 she published another feminist study, *And Still They Dance: Women, War and the Struggle for Change in Mozambique* (1989). Lapchick was an American anti-apartheid activist who was particularly active in promoting the sports boycott of South Africa in the 1970s and 1980s. A second publication, '"The crying need of South Africa': the emigration of single British women to the Transvaal, 1901–10", is by van Helten (at the Institute of Commonwealth Studies, London) and Williams, in the *Journal of Southern African Studies* (1983). Van Helten was a student of Shula Marks, a South African born Professor at the School or Oriental and African Studies, University of London and a major figure in Southern African Studies. The piece reflects the influence of Social and Workers' History that was becoming entrenched in the discipline of history through the triennial History Workshop conferences at Wits University. A third example was the *Journal of Southern African Studies* article, 'Marxism, feminism and South African studies' by Belinda Bozzoli (1983). Bozzoli was a South African who completed a PhD at Sussex University before returning to a position in the Sociology Department at Wits University. She also chaired the History Workshop Conference Committee and edited succeeding volumes based on these influential conferences. Her article became a landmark piece in South African gender studies not just because it was one of the first efforts to engage with the big picture of patriarchy, but also because it placed gender analysis within an existing historiography of race and class work.

What is revealing about these three early publications is the strong links with the research institutions of the North and with US civil rights activism. Two of the earliest gender monographs, strangely not captured in the literature search we report here, are by resident South Africans, Jacklyn Cock and Cherryl Walker. Cock's (1980) text *Maids and Madams: a study in the politics of exploitation* was one of the earliest to challenge the idea of a feminist 'sisterhood', employing a Marxist analysis to consider the oppression of women by women and to reflect on ways in which white and black South Africa women were positioned differently. Two years later Cherryl Walker (1982) published *Women and Resistance in South Africa*. It was

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[1] The limitations of the literature search are demonstrated by the fact that the 1973 book is not captured whereas the summary of the book (by Vietzen herself) is.

immediately banned by South Africa's censors. It told the history of women's activism (with a focus on the Federation of South African Women (FEDSAW) from the 1910s to the 1960s, dwelling particularly on the intersections of race and class and the patriarchal nature of the state. Her meticulous research included archival work and interviews with major activists including Ray Alexander, Frances Baard, Amina Cachalia, Helen Joseph and Lilian Ngoyi.

The focus on oppression, protest and resistance in the academy helped inform a shift in analytical emphasis from the state (and structure) to people (and agency) as well as the launch of two feminist journals: *Speak* in 1982, aimed at providing a platform for women to write for 'grassroots' audiences, and *Agenda* in 1987. In 1997, 10 years later, Fatima Meer outlined some of the motivations for establishing *Agenda*. She was a major figure in South African critical research and founding member of FEDSAW who dedicated her writing career to combating race discrimination. She drew attention to women's marginalisation in Southern African Independence struggles and echoed concerns raised about the Civil Rights Movement in the United States. "We were feminists," she declared:

> 'who were fed up with the personal politics of men on the left. While adopting politically correct rhetoric they were able to make their mark in the liberation struggle because they had women to keep the home fires burning, to care for the children and even at times, bring home a significant share of the bread. We wanted to address both the structural and more personal aspects of our oppression… so that the liberation of our country would mean liberation for women' (Meer, 1997a: 6).

Agenda also deliberately aimed to challenge the divide between activism and the academy through an inclusive approach that made space for the publication of creative writing and shorter and more accessible pieces of writing (See *Agenda* 2007 for a reflection on 20 years of African feminist publishing).

By the end of the 1980s then – and underlined by the establishment of UNISA's Centre for Women's Studies in 1984 – a feminist consciousness had clearly emerged in the South African academy. Writing in the early 1990s Penelope Hetherington observes that there were two dominant themes in this writing, one focusing on black women as "oppressed 'victims' of a special kind of capitalism buttressed by the state" and another celebrating the "heroic resistance of women against such oppression" (Hetherington, 1993: 261). Both foregrounded the struggles of black rather than white women, and both continued to be underpinned by a focus on class and race as explanatory variables that mediated the challenge of critiquing South

African patriarchies (Bozzoli, 1983). There was a need, she wrote, for a more intersectional approach to understanding South African inequalities (see Hetherington, 1993; Charman *et al.*, 1992). The advances were not uniform. While there was a growing body of work that, following international trends, could be described as 'recovery' work focusing on women *and* sometimes asking feminist questions, it seldom explicitly laid claim to a feminist perspective [see Journal of Southern African Studies, Special issue (Women in Southern Africa), 1983]. And UNISA's Centre for Women's Studies was an exception in an academy that continued to stereotype (and resist) a feminist theorising it conceptualised as 'subjective' and 'unscientific' (see Erlank & Clowes, 2004; van der Spuy & Clowes, 2007; Hassim *et al.*, 1987).

1991-2005

From the early 1990s South African feminists were increasingly drawn into broader African feminist debates (see Ogunyemi, 1984; Amadiume, 1987) as critiques of Second Wave feminism gathered momentum (see Mohanty, 1988; Hooks, 1981; Walker, 1982, 1991; Hill Collins, 1990) and as technological change facilitated the rapid movement of ideas as well as people. South Africa's women's movement, consolidated momentarily in the early 1990s into a powerful alliance, the Women's National Coalition, developed feminist insights and fed these into national debates. These were reflected in South Africa's progressive constitution which was passed in December 1996 and came into law in February 1997 (Hassim, 1991, 2006; Nhlapo, 1994). The conclusion, for example, by the ANC in 1990, that a Marxist-Leninist analysis "was appropriate in exploring gender oppression and exploitation in South Africa" (Charman *et al.*, 1991, cited in Hetherington, 1993) came under increasing scrutiny and critique when juxtaposed against women's continued subordination and exclusion from authority in independent African states as described by Urdang and others. As the 1990s wore on a range of writers, exemplified by Shireen Hassim and Amanda Gouws (see Hassim & Gouws, 1998; Hassim, 1999), began to reflect critically on ways in which new relationships between and amongst the state, civil society and women's activist organisations presented both opportunities and constraints for gender equality in South Africa.

One expression of these relationships was an increasing tension between activism and the academy. Surfacing at the first Women and Gender conference to be held in South Africa in 1991 was a robust and heated debate about the politics of identity, about authorial subjectivities and representation, and about racism and androcentrism in the academy itself (see Lewis, 1996). Hassim & Walker (1993)

identify three key issues: The first revolved around the underrepresentation of black women in the academy, the second around allegations of the misrepresentation and misappropriation of black women's experiences by white academics, and the third about academic's accountability to their research 'subjects' as well as to the broader women's movement. This debate was one of the forces that contributed to the massive expansion of feminist and gender research over the course of the 1990s. There was critical and sustained reflection of the relevance and authenticity of South African feminism (Steyn, 1998).

Other drivers of the gender research explosion were the political developments in South Africa themselves. The ANC came to power with a massive majority in 1994 and immediately announced its intention to address gender by creating an Office on the Status of Women and a Gender Commission. This attracted a new kind of gender research, different from the critique of the earlier period. New energy was devoted to imagining and planning a society where gender equality was a central feature.

At the same time, the tolls of mortality and morbidity wrought by the HIV and AIDS epidemic began to attract analyses that situated gender and unequal gender relationships at the heart of the epidemic. In contrast to the North, where gay men bore the brunt of the disease and the associated stigma, a critical focus on patriarchal heterosexualities began to emerge out of approaches foregrounding how race and class intersected with gender and generation to position young black women at the centre of the epidemic.

Yet another catalyst was the opening up of research and academic life after decades of isolation that had included an academic boycott in the late 1980s. The traffic of scholars from other parts of the world and the movement of South Africans out into that academic world produced a host of north-south collaborations that had not been common before. New research agendas were also opened up as South African scholars began to look beyond their borders with new eyes, beginning to draw on new theories and address new global questions (Morrell, 2016). Elaine Unterhalter describes the impact of the fall of the Berlin Wall (1989) and the freeing of Nelson Mandela (1990):

> 'Suddenly you're able to talk about it [citizenship] in a new language because before that the language of that was just a Cold War language; there was a capitalist or there was a communist version of citizenship. But suddenly in the 1990s I think those become new fields of scholarship and South Africa presents this very interesting case of trying to re-write all those prefaces' (Morrell, 2016: 17).

The growing theoretical sophistication of this dramatically expanding body of research saw, over the 1990s, increased emphasis on showing how *all* social and historical processes are gendered. This emphasis was expressed through increased interest in using South African feminist analyses in ways that avoided atomistic foci on 'women's issues' as well as through more inter, cross and multi-disciplinary research. This work spanned a wide number of areas which included Women, Law and Politics; Gender and Economics; Anthropology, Sociology, History; Gender – based violence; Education, Information and Communication Technologies; Masculinities; and Literary and Cultural Studies (Lewis, 2002: 24-27).

One of the areas that 'took off' in the 1990s was 'masculinities' research. The first article with 'Masculinity' in its title comes from Catherine Campbell (1992). She was a pioneer in focusing on connections between gender, masculinity and violence. In her *Journal of Southern African Studies* article in a special issue on Political Violence in Southern Africa, she began to explore connections between violence and masculinity. Her opening is clear, powerful and with hindsight, obvious:

> 'Analyses of South African violence have failed to take explicit account of the fact that the conflict has almost always taken the form of men fighting men. The aim of this paper is to point to a crisis in masculinity amongst working-class African men' (1992: 614).

She was writing against the exceedingly violent backdrop of KwaZulu-Natal where, from 1987-1996, 11 600 people were killed in an 'unofficial war' (Jeffery, 1997: 1-2).

The theme of violence was developed in Robert Morrell's work which engaged with Raewyn Connell's gender theories, especially her concepts of hegemonic masculinity, gender regime and multiple masculinities. He edited a special issue of the *Journal of Southern African Studies* in 1998 and a volume, *Changing men in Southern Africa* (2001). The volume had an international reach as the University of Natal Press teamed up with Zed Books in London and New York. There were 10 articles in the special issue and 18 chapters in the edited collection, all of which focused on aspects of masculinity, most of which used Connell's theories and applied these to violence. Most – but not all – contributors were South African and not all were based in South Africa. There were also contributions from a range of foreign nationals who had spent more (or less) time in South Africa as well as from South Africans who had trained or were training elsewhere. And although all the contributions were informed by the concept of 'masculinities' and the work of

established gender scholars like Connell, Michael Kimmel and Jeff Hearn (based respectively in Australia, the US and the UK) they also drew on – and developed – local theorising. But while these two edited collections were amongst the most prominent examples, there were many others, written by psychologists, anthropologists, sociologists, historians, educationalists, as well as legal experts and medical doctors. As Desiree Lewis noted, in 2001, "essentialist evocations of geographical, national or racial criteria as decisive grounds for defining African feminism' are increasingly untenable in this globalizing world" (see also Salo, 2007; Mtintso, 2003; Msimang, 2002).

2005-2014

As illustrated by Figure 1, 2005 marked the beginning of almost exponential growth in publications and while this growth is undoubtedly remarkable, the limitations of the search function suggests that there may have been even more gender publications in this period. How do we explain this growth?

In the first instance there was new interest within a range of disciplines that had hitherto not addressed gender. These included African languages, architecture, biblical studies, development studies, geography, law, library studies and management. Increasingly researchers in these disciplines adopted a gender lens in their work. A second explanation lies in the continuing and even intensifying interest in a few major themes. HIV and AIDS continued to attract research attention from many disciplines. The same was true of violence where rape, intimate partner violence, abuse and sexual harassment were popular topics of interest. Feminism, the search for gender equality and women's organisations were similarly common research subjects. Issues of representation, especially in literary studies, contributed largely to the explosion of research productivity.

There were new and emerging research foci reflecting contemporary concerns around gender and emerging technologies, new media, climate and environment and transgender identities. These were not part of Lewis's schema of 7 relatively coherent foci in 2002 and these may have only been partly captured in our literature search. At the same time as these new research foci were emerging, existing fields of research were deepening. There was major growth in work exploring hetero as well as non-conforming sexualities (see for example Reid, 2006; Hunter, 2007; Bhana *et al.*, 2007; Bateman, 2011; Hodes, 2015). Another example was exploring men and masculinity. Volumes such as Graeme Reid & Liz Walker's *Men Behaving Differently* (2005), Ouzgane & Morrell's *African masculinities* (2005) and Tammy

Shefer *et al*.'s *From Boys to Men* (2007 – another volume not found in the database) continued to challenge the socially constructed disciplinary, geographical and other binaries by drawing on work from historians, geographers, anthropologists, sociologists and so on both inside and outside South Africa (see Gqola, 2009).

In considering changing patterns of research an unmistakable feature of our graph is the decline after 2010 that becomes precipitous after 2011. Here we can only speculate that this is perhaps not an accurate reflection of reality, that perhaps the growing sophistication of gender analysis has seen the relevance of our search categories diminish, that perhaps the terms we used ('gender', 'masculinity/femininity') no longer appear in titles even as research continues to employ a gendered lens. In considering work on masculinities, for example, recent work by South African psychologist Kopano Ratele (2013a, 2013b) that is important for our argument in this paper simply does not appear in the data base. In this recent writing, Ratele foregrounds local realities to test the limits of the concept of masculinities for South African (and global) scholarship. Drawing on the work of local historians, sociologist and anthropologists, Ratele (2013b) engages the work of global authorities to explore some of the problems associated with setting up 'traditional' (i.e. heteronormative) masculinities in opposition to homosexual and other non-conforming masculinities in contexts where processes of imperialism, colonization and missionary work have seen homosexual behaviours written – quite recently – out of cultural practices (see also GALZ, 2008).

Conclusion

Using an archive of gender publications and engaging with Southern theoretical notions of knowledge production and dissemination, we have shown that the gender domain of knowledge in South Africa assumed substantial size in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. This growth demonstrates the viability and growing confidence of local scholarship and in turn disrupts relationships of inequality between 'core' and 'periphery'. Gender scholarship in South Africa challenges metropolitan notions of Africa as a site of unprocessed data, a theoretical *tabula rasa*. The volume of published gender research revealed in this analysis testifies to the influence of Northern scholarship and its ability to catalyze local interest and provide new intellectual impetus for broadening conceptualizations of topics and thus sowing the seeds for new research. At the same time, it shows that the relationship between North and South is not linear nor dependent.

Today South Africa is integrated into global scholarship. South African researchers publish in international journals and overseas scholars publish on South Africa. South African scholars have research collaborations with colleagues in the North and that these same scholars visit and write about South Africa. It is a two-way street.

South Africa's gender research unavoidably reflects the long history of colonialism and the tensions that it produced both internally (in terms of class, race and ideological divides) and externally, in terms of its relationship to the metropole. But these conditions provide the context that is critical to the contribution of South African gender scholars to global knowledge. South Africa has been of interest to scholars because of its history marked by inequalities and legally entrenched racial discrimination. More recently, South Africa's transition from apartheid to post-apartheid has captured world attention and research interest precisely because these developments have been so unexpected and carry such global significance. South African researchers have thus been able to capitalize on the richness of their context.

We started this article with a question derived from Andy Dawes about the nature of knowledge making in South Africa and posing an 'eco-culturally sensitive interventions' approach against other interpretations that see a binaried distinction between indigenous and (neo)colonial knowledges. In this review we have shown that South African gender researchers do borrow from Northern theory but, in doing so, they mould the theories and concepts so that they give analytical insight. In this process, they show eco-sensitivity and remind global scholars that the best work is often done when there are major issues at stake and knowledge has to be forged in a way that addresses these issues.

In this article we have also discussed the idea of Southern Theory and Connell's view about the authority of Northern Theory. We would argue that Southern Theory now also has some authority and does not just bow before its former colonial masters. Rather, we agree with Connell in her observations that,

> 'gender analysis from the global South therefore poses the question of diversity, the multiplicity of gender forms, not at the level of the individual, but at the level of the gender order and the dynamic of gender relations on a societal scale' (Connell 2014b: 9).

The achievement of gender sociology in the South is already to point out the diversities of the gender order.

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