



Women (African/Black) in Theological and Education spaces, in search of a Decolonial Philosophical Perspective

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to highlight the plight of women (African/Black) and how they are being excluded from theological and educational spaces, practices and leadership positions in African schools and universities due to patriarchal structures, cultural insensitivity, and colonial and post-colonial pasts. This research used an interpretive paradigm and a qualitative approach to explore the need for a decolonial feminist perspective to promote equity and opportunities for women in academia. The findings revealed the need for theological and educational spaces to reset so that these spaces could be challenged in terms of the shape of language, power structures and leadership opportunities. The researcher recommended decolonisation in higher education, focusing on women's experiences and incorporating women-specific embodiment in educational and theological spaces, to offer a more comprehensive perspective on complex dialogue including changing policy formation. The study provides a decolonial feminist approach which could guide women in religious and educational settings, enabling them to become leaders and change the trajectory of these fields, promoting fairness, diversity, and inclusion.

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INTRODUCTION

African women scholars are systematically underrepresented at the national level. Of 151 nations for which data are available between 1996 and 2021, Institute for Statistics (UIS) data indicate that only around one in four have reached gender parity.¹ In addition, women made up fewer than half of all researchers in 127 nations, and of those, less than a third were found in about 56 countries.² African women's values and cultural identities are often ignored in educational settings and instead swayed toward dominant patriarchal hegemony.³ Pietersen suggests that a socially just pedagogy is a useful

¹ UNESCO, "UNESCO and the Promise of Gender Equality: Key Actions of 2018 and 2019" (Paris: UNESCO, 2020), <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000372716>.

² Heidi Prozesky and Johann Mouton, "A Gender Perspective on Career Challenges Experienced by African Scientists," *South African Journal of Science* 115, no. 3–4 (2019): 1–5.

³ Joyce F Mthethwa et al., "The Lived Experiences of Women Principals in Rural Secondary Schools Regarding Their Career Pathways," *E-BANGI* 19, no. 7 (2022): 207–23.

way to encourage a reflective process in which the voices of girls and women in education are heard,⁴ effectively challenging the existing male power bases as a way to encourage interrogation into colonial spaces in both education and theology spaces to ask decolonial questions within these spaces.⁵ Azzoni, argues that if decolonial questions are not asked, these spaces may heighten the discriminatory and undervalued views men have of women in the higher education environment,⁶ not only in leadership but in many ways that would negatively influence women's leadership and power.⁷

This work is foregrounded in coloniality and decoloniality perspectives because it is a framework that will speak to each other but then again it is used within the lens that empowers epistemologies and embodiment.⁸ Colonisation was a subtle manifestation of political, economic, cultural and religious beliefs taking possession and control of victims' minds by colonisers.⁹ The purpose of colonisation was to introduce new forms of seeing reality and unconsciously or consciously abandoning cultural norms and adopting new ones.¹⁰ Its primary aim was to twist the logic and take over the thought and actions of its victims in a manner that was less violent as violence would only ensure that the victims were openly resistant to incorporate the new desired change.¹¹ This is the cry of women from a perspective of systems that tend to be positioned as free and liberal spaces in higher education but, in fact, needs decolonisation in its robust because these spaces are often spaces of colonial agendas.¹² Grosfoguel, situates this tendency as institutions serving "capitalist/patriarchal western-centric/Christian-centric modern/colonial world system".¹³ This must be confronted by women for women as a way of change. This change was led by African women who understand their own embodiment to be poignantly put in the words of Malabou, "Then at last comes the time when she goes off on her own when she acts without, abandoning all her previous encounters to begin to speak and to establish herself in an entirely new territory, the outline of another body, another essence. This is where she feels hope - perhaps delusional - beyond essentialism and anti-essentialism, a new idea of the feminine that starts from her own philosophical impossibility This begs the question what is decolonisation for women in higher education spaces where capitalist and patriarchal stances are not imbibed by those in control of these systems".¹⁴ The structure of this research is to critically examine from a decolonial feminist lens the structural violence that remains in many educational institutions and systems, particularly in education and theological spaces, but more so within the higher education spaces in South Africa.¹⁵ This will be the focus of the first part of this work. The second part of this work explores the challenges, barriers and intersections women face in educational and theological spaces in South Africa. Lastly, the inclusion of women in the aforementioned environments to cultivate positive movements and embodiment that will help direct the advancement of women from a decolonial and feminist pedagogical viewpoint.

⁴ D. Pietersen, "Gender Equality in Educational Spaces and Practices: A Feminist Pedagogical Inquiry," *Litnet Akademies* 20, no. 3 (2023): 682–99.

⁵ Oluwaseun Matiluko, "Decolonising the Master's House: How Black Feminist Epistemologies Can Be and Are Used in Decolonial Strategy," in *Decolonisation and the Law School* (Routledge, 2024), 79–93.

⁶ A. Azzoni, *The Private Lives of Women in Persian Egypt* (University Park: Penn State University Press., 2013).

⁷ C Schultz and E Rankhumise, "Constraints and Contributors in Advancing Black Women Academic Researchers at a University in South Africa," *South African Journal of Higher Education* 37, no. 4 (2023): 248–65.

⁸ Aneta Hayes, Sylvie Lomer, and Sophia Hayat Taha, "Epistemological Process towards Decolonial Praxis and Epistemic Inequality of an International Student," *Educational Review* 76, no. 1 (2024): 132–44.

⁹ Selaelo T Kgatla, "The Decolonisation of the Mind-Black Consciousness Community Projects by the Limpopo Council of Churches," *Missionalia: Southern African Journal of Mission Studies* 46, no. 1 (2018): 146–62.

¹⁰ A. Yakubu, "In the Heart of Colonialism: Is Conrad's Heart of Darkness a Friend or Foe of Africa," *The International Journal of Humanities & Social Studies* 8, no. 6 (2020): 145–49.

¹¹ S. Biko, *I Write What I Like: Selected Writings* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015).

¹² Suren Pillay, "The Problem of Colonialism: Assimilation, Difference, and Decolonial Theory in Africa," *Critical Times* 4, no. 3 (2021): 389–416.

¹³ Ramón Grosfoguel, "Decolonizing Post-Colonial Studies and Paradigms of Political-Economy: Transmodernity, Decolonial Thinking, and Global Coloniality," *Transmodernity: Journal of Peripheral Cultural Production of the Luso-Hispanic World* 1, no. 1 (2011).

¹⁴ C. Malabou, *Changing Difference: The Feminine and the Question of Philosophy* (Cambridge and Oxford: Polity, 2011).

¹⁵ Thandokazi Maseti, "The University Is Not Your Home: Lived Experiences of a Black Woman in Academia," *South African Journal of Psychology* 48, no. 3 (2018): 343–50; K. Pithouse-Morgan, D. Pillay, and I. Naicker, "Autoethnography as/in Higher Education," in *Handbook of Autoethnography* (Routledge, 2021), 215–27.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Decoloniality is framed against theological education that rejects the ways that the European and American colonial projects have harmed indigenous people and created institutions, laws, and customs that serve to further their objectives.¹⁶ What does this decolonisation mean for black women in Africa (South)? If this were to be traced and challenged in higher education from a women's perspective, it would be, as Kang states, decolonisation "... most resources for theological education—institutional, financial, and human—with enormous means to research, archive, and disseminate knowledge, have resided in the global North, while the dire need for theological educational infrastructures and resources has drastically grown in the global South."¹⁷ Having insight into the global south one recognises that gender is at the center of social construct that shapes behaviour and interactions in educational spaces.¹⁸ When decolonisation is further interrogated from a feminist lens one can interpret it to be moving from an understanding that colonial and patriarchal prejudice against women can be identified and address the transformation of higher education spaces that see women feel welcomed and see them flourish in all forms of embodiment. Because sometimes not dealing with this can often be dismissed to frame these problems as 'complex' to deal with. Knowles situates this argument as follows: "African feminisms provide a lens that allows us to see not only how the knowledge economy in many South African universities is structured to limit the success of young blacks and women."¹⁹ Brower on the other hand, positions this from a sociological lens. This is to say that "sociologically speaking, the primary way we learn is through watching, listening and experiencing others around us. This means that each woman's choices and behaviours have a powerful effect on those around her..."²⁰

In other words, African women are able to encourage and uplift women of all communities and cultures by fostering environments and institutions that value respect,²¹ value and inclusion for all kinds of difference.²² In addition, women develop policies and programs for every stage of life and work, from caregiving and flexible work to hiring, promotion, and attraction to supporting the structural and systemic factors that promote success for more African women.²³ This will empower and enable African women to advance their careers. This is a perspective that comes from HR practitioners that have engaged women in institutions of higher learning, and it can be said from the author's experience that these have taken little to no advancement in these institutions. This perspective also highlights mechanisms that help to decolonise women's experience from a sociological stance,²⁴ to face the fact that women are human beings sometimes stuck in violent policies and programmes so that these are corrected for women to flourish in all education and theological spaces.²⁵

¹⁶ Walter Mignolo, "What Does It Mean to Decolonise?" in *On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analysis, Praxis*, ed. Walter D. Mignolo and Catherine E. Walsh (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018), 105–34; Marilyn Naidoo, "The Mediation of Coloniality in Decolonisation Developments in South African Theological Education," *Religions* 15, no. 2 (2024): 160.

¹⁷ Namsoon Kang, "Envisioning Postcolonial Theological Education: Dilemmas and Possibilities," *Theological Education in World Christianity*, 2010, 30–41.

¹⁸ Rachel Tolhurst et al., "Intersectionality and Gender Mainstreaming in International Health: Using a Feminist Participatory Action Research Process to Analyse Voices and Debates from the Global South and North," *Social Science & Medicine* 74, no. 11 (2012): 1825–32.

¹⁹ Corinne Knowles, "With Dreams in Our Hands: An African Feminist Framing of a Knowledge-Making Project with Former ESP Students," *Education as Change* 25, no. 1 (2021): 1–22.

²⁰ T. Brower, "New Study On Women In Leadership: Good News, Bad News And The Way Forward," 2021, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/tracybrower/2021/10/10/new-study-on-women-in-leadership-good-news-bad-news-and-the-way-forward/?sh=7322291924b7>.

²¹ Mikateko Joyce Maluleke, "Culture, Tradition, Custom, Law and Gender Equality," *Potchefstroom Electronic Law Journal/Potchefstroomse Elektroniese Regsblad* 15, no. 1 (2012).

²² Endalcachew Bayeh, "The Role of Empowering Women and Achieving Gender Equality to the Sustainable Development of Ethiopia," *Pacific Science Review B: Humanities and Social Sciences* 2, no. 1 (2016): 37–42; Mandy Jollie Bako and Jawad Syed, "Women's Marginalization in Nigeria and the Way Forward," *Human Resource Development International* 21, no. 5 (2018): 425–43.

²³ Marcel Weideman and Karl B Hofmeyr, "The Influence of Flexible Work Arrangements on Employee Engagement: An Exploratory Study," *SA Journal of Human Resource Management* 18, no. 1 (2020): 1–18.

²⁴ Mlamuli Nkosingphile Hlatshwayo and Innocentia Alexander, "'We've Been Taught to Understand That We Don't Have Anything to Contribute towards Knowledge': Exploring Academics' Understanding of Decolonising Curricula in Higher Education," *Journal of Education (University of KwaZulu-Natal)*, no. 82 (2021): 44–59; Sharlotte Tusasiirwe, *Decolonising and Reimagining Social Work in Africa: Alternative Epistemologies and Practice Models* (Routledge, 2023).

²⁵ A. A., Coetzee, "African Feminism as Decolonising Force: A Philosophical Exploration of the Work of Oyeronke Oyewumi" (Stellenbosch University, 2017); Monique Kwachou, "In Response to Acker: Black and African Feminist Theories on Gender and Education," *Comparative Education* 59, no. 2 (2023): 169–92.

Even though the majority of women in South African higher education institutions are female, gender and feminist themes are often absent from the transformative education agenda.²⁶ The underrepresentation of women in leadership roles is another instance of prejudice in education and theological spaces. It can be argued that education is becoming a more liberating space, but theology spaces are lagging behind.²⁷ The reason for this experience and the denying of women occupying theological spaces can be attributed to women still being under-represented in prominent academic roles, despite attempts to advance gender equality.²⁸ For example, in theology men in South African universities men are still almost exclusively Deans of Faculties, prominent journal editors and chairs of academic research associations.²⁹ This leads to men being in charge of knowledge creation, leaving women outside of this process and denying embodiment. The lack of mentorship and support for women in academia,³⁰ as well as gender preconceptions that suggest men are more capable of leadership, are both contributing factors to this discrimination.³¹

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative approach supported by the interpretive paradigm to understand this phenomenon of Women (African/Black) in theological and educational spaces. The first part of this research part of the article explores the literature on some research that highlights women's experiences particularly African (South) in higher education spaces both in education and theological spaces. These highlights draw concepts of knowledge creation, barriers to entry for women and intersections that allow or disallow women to flourish or ought to flourish in higher education spaces. The second and last part of this article will explore some splitting thoughts which include recommendations as the research deals with the research problem.

DISCUSSION

Knowledge, Culture and Women in Higher Institutions

African women frequently confront patriarchy in education; it manifests itself in discrimination, social and cultural restrictions, and limited access to resources.³² There are several crucial actions that can be taken to address this patriarchal bias in education.³³ The response most women are required to respond to right now is to adopt a more feminist and decolonised approach to education and theological spaces where female voices are heard and celebrated. This means that maintaining gender inequalities and stereotypes that diminish, devalue, ignore, and obstruct women's equal participation and contribution in both the public and private domains of life is one of the worst kinds of power over women.³⁴ It is also true that stereotypes and conventional gender roles have a significant impact on how gender roles

²⁶ Juliet Ramohai, "A Black Woman's Perspective on Understanding Transformation and Diversity in South African Higher Education," *Transformation in Higher Education* 4, no. 1 (2019): 1–10; Zamambo Mkhize, "Is It Transformation or Reform? The Lived Experiences of African Women Doctoral Students in STEM Disciplines in South African Universities," *Higher Education* 86, no. 3 (2023): 637–59.

²⁷ Zorodzai Dube, "The African Women Theologians' Contribution towards the Discussion about Alternative Masculinities," *Verbum et Ecclesia* 37, no. 2 (2016): 1–6.

²⁸ Hannelie J Wood, "Gender Inequality: The Problem of Harmful, Patriarchal, Traditional and Cultural Gender Practices in the Church," *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 75, no. 1 (2019).

²⁹ Linda Naicker, "The Journey of South African Women Academics with a Particular Focus on Women Academics in Theological Education," *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 39 (2013): 325–36.

³⁰ Hleliwe Khumalo and Ayanda Kevin Ndlovu, "Mentoring as a Form of Transformation in Academia," *African Journal of Inter/Multidisciplinary Studies* 6, no. 1 (2024): 1–10.

³¹ Emmerentia N Barkhuizen, Gwendoline Masakane, and Lidewey van der Sluis, "In Search of Factors That Hinder the Career Advancement of Women to Senior Leadership Positions," *SA Journal of Industrial Psychology* 48, no. 1 (2022): 1–15; Ifeanyi Mbukanma and Kariena Strydom, "Challenges to and Enablers of Women's Advancement in Academic Careers at a Selected South African University," *International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research* 21, no. 12 (2022): 44–64.

³² Makuena Bereng and Edmore Mutekwe, "Examining the Manifestations and Ramifications of the Patriarchal Ideology in Female-Led Schools in the North West Province of South Africa," *Perspectives in Education* 39, no. 2 (2021): 191–207.

³³ Abiola John Asaleye and Kariena Strydom, "Promoting Women's Empowerment: Linkages between Financial Development, Employment and Economic Growth in Selected African Economies," *Sage Open* 13, no. 4 (2023): 21582440231202412; Kariena Strydom, Joseph Olorunfemi Akande, and Abiola John Asaleye, "The Quest for Female Economic Empowerment in Sub-Saharan African Countries: Implications on Gender-Based Violence," *Journal of Risk and Financial Management* 17, no. 2 (2024): 51.

³⁴ Corinne R Knowles et al., "The Politics of Knowledge in South African Universities: Students' Perspectives," *Transformation in Higher Education* 8 (2023): 244.

are divided into theological and educational spaces. These differences are frequently apparent in society, the workplace, and the home.³⁵ Put differently, within the aim of this article on coloniality and decolonisation of education and theological space, one can argue that “coloniality is reified in cultural and structural ways within education. Policies, institutions, groups of people, and individuals are key agents implicated in the (re)production of coloniality in ways that are normalized, naturalized, and rationalized.”³⁶

African women should play a crucial role in the creation of knowledge and culture in theological and educational spaces,³⁷ more broadly in higher education environments. As such, they should be recognised, respected and encouraged as they participate in the construction of knowledge.³⁸ Women in theological and education spaces just like many underrepresented spaces in higher education institutions have high aspirations for their own growth and advancement: they should be supported in their development through learning communities.³⁹ They are key players in the value chain of education. Advancement through cultural decolonisation for women in higher education spaces from this positive value chain perspective can also be framed against Meier and Hartell’s Decentralised Theory, which propagates that, “decentralisation is an explicit project for heterogeneity (conceptually recognising difference through homogenising the rights, not the identities, that come with a difference). Simultaneously, the principle of decentralisation permits, if not the reproduction of key racial features of the old order, then certainly the remaking of those old features in new forms.”⁴⁰

This research as a sub-theme contends that African women’s economic power partially counters the coloniality of power that has systematically relegated them to more precarious positions in the global mobility structure, yet in the process creates ambivalent fast tracks that change the content yet reproduce the terms of the same coloniality.⁴¹

The gender gap in fields requiring technical skills, the lack of education opportunities, and the absence of policies that support and enhance women’s employment are all potential causes of the underrepresentation of women in entrepreneurship in South Africa and other comparable countries.⁴²

Barriers for Women in Higher Institutions

Women in many international countries also lag behind their global peers in terms of their ability to advance as leaders and professionals in the higher education space, more particularly in education and theological spaces.⁴³ This is emphasised by South Africa reaching the 21st position out of 65 countries in terms of women’s advancement globally in 2021.⁴⁴ Reasons why this is possible in general but more specifically in education and theology spaces one can ascribe to the denial and the generalisations about technical skills, the lack of education opportunities, and the absence of policies that support and enhance women’s employment in these spaces.⁴⁵ All these potential causes of the underrepresentation of women in education and theological spaces in South Africa and other comparable countries.⁴⁶

³⁵ Naznin Tabassum and Bhabani Shankar Nayak, “Gender Stereotypes and Their Impact on Women’s Career Progressions from a Managerial Perspective,” *IIM Kozhikode Society & Management Review* 10, no. 2 (2021): 192–208.

³⁶ G T Reyes, “Pedagogy of and towards Decoloniality,” in *Encyclopedia of Teacher Education* (Springer, 2022), 1238–44.

³⁷ Sabelo J Ndlovu-Gatsheni, *Coloniality of Power in Postcolonial Africa* (African Books Collective, 2013).

³⁸ J. W. Kariuki, “Theological Feminism in Africa: Historical Development of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians,” in *Women Empowerment and the Feminist Agenda in Africa* (IGI Global, 2023), 141–56.

³⁹ Zdzisława Dacko-Pikiewicz and Magdalena Kot-Radojewska, “Culture of Educational Institutions on Psychological Empowerment of Women Employees in Higher Education Institutions,” n.d.

⁴⁰ Corinne Meier and Chris Hartell, “Handling Cultural Diversity in Education in South Africa,” *SA-EDUC Journal* 6, no. 2 (2009): 180–92.

⁴¹ M. Boatcă and Roth, J., *Women on the Fast Track? Coloniality of Citizenship and Embodied Social Mobility. Gender and Development. The Economic Basis of Women’s Power* (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2018).

⁴² Dee Khosa, “Gender Equality or Inequality in Learning Institutions in South Africa: A Case of the Professional Advancement of Women,” *Educational Leadership* (Routledge, 2021) 126 (2023): 34.

⁴³ Karen A Longman and Patricia S Anderson, “Women in Leadership: The Future of Christian Higher Education,” in *Re-Imagining Christian Higher Education* (Routledge, 2018), 24–37.

⁴⁴ T.N. Radebe and M. Smith, “The Current State of Women’s Entrepreneurship in South Africa,” WOMEN’S REPORT 2023: Paper 1, 2023, <https://www.womensreport.africa/wr2023-paper-one/>.

⁴⁵ Toyin Ajibade Adisa, Issa Abdurraheem, and Sulu Babaita Isiaka, “Patriarchal Hegemony: Investigating the Impact of Patriarchy on Women’s Work-Life Balance,” *Gender in Management: An International Journal* 34, no. 1 (2019): 19–33.

⁴⁶ Norlan Josue Hernandez and Leon Harris, “Theological Education in and for Black and Brown Communities,” *Christian Higher Education* 21, no. 5 (2022): 358–76.

Depending on whether women find themselves in parts of the country that also tend to empower or disempower them to flourish in educational and theological environments.⁴⁷ For example, if one were to scrutinise further some diverse and metropolitan cities such as the Western Cape and Gauteng, one may find that educational and theological (academic) spaces have particular barriers for women to flourish, these include access to funding, gender bias, networking and role models, and lack of education and training. Proper funding opportunities for women can be further broken down to stereotypes within the workplace and institutions, and proper training and development for women through grants and subsidies. Nevertheless, one can also at the same time observe that while women face these challenges, they still approach these spaces with an understanding of adversity faced by women in theological and educational spaces.⁴⁸ It is important because this also adds to their courageous tenacity to aim to grow in these spaces wherever they find themselves in South Africa.⁴⁹

Men in the global south and Africa at large still act as gatekeepers in the way educational practices and spaces are organised. For many women, this is perceived as violence done to them by educational institutions. Women in Africa still face structural violence, shown by the unequal distribution of power and resources in many schools and universities.⁵⁰ Barriers are critical to understanding if things were to be implemented to change this deep-seated colonial recycling.

African women face many obstacles accessing and completing their education. These include poverty, cultural beliefs, lack of resources and discrimination. Despite these challenges, many initiatives aim to improve opportunities for African women, including scholarships, mentoring programmes, and community-based education projects.

It must be said that these barriers mentioned in this section are part of the daily private and public discourses in higher education institutions in education and theological spaces, which are still greatly influenced by the colonial power matrix, which is why it is necessary to make a “decoloniality turn” now.⁵¹ But, if higher education institutions were prioritised in this project, Africans (South African) would have the opportunity to redefine their identity and future while simultaneously resisting Western hegemony in all facets of life. This will be accomplished by using African and decolonial epistemologies.⁵²

Intersections and Women in Higher institutions

Education is often regarded as a neutral space where knowledge is transferred from teacher to student and the curriculum is designed to promote learning and critical thinking. However, education is not a neutral space and the power dynamics imbued in the violence of curricula can reinforce and perpetuate existing social hierarchies.⁵³ Similarly, the hidden curriculum, which refers to the norms, values and beliefs that are implicitly taught through educational practices, can reinforce dominant cultural and social norms and perpetuate inequalities.⁵⁴ These interconnected issues that are often displayed in the curriculum as violence are not necessarily associated with overt symbols; instead, they reside in

⁴⁷ Anaïs Llorens et al., “Gender Bias in Academia: A Lifetime Problem That Needs Solutions,” *Neuron* 109, no. 13 (2021): 2047–74.

⁴⁸ B.G. Haddad, “African Women’s Theologies of Survival: Intersecting Faith, Feminisms, and Development” (University of KwaZulu-Natal, 2000); R. M. Gabaitse, “Towards an African Pentecostal Feminist Biblical Hermeneutic of Liberation: Interpreting Acts 2: 1-47 in the Context of Botswana” (University of KwaZulu-Natal, 2012).

⁴⁹ Nobuntu Penxa-Matholeni, “Endleleni: Political Activism of Winnie Madikizela-Mandela as Pastoral Caregiving,” *Stellenbosch Theological Journal* 8, no. 2 (2022): 1–22.

⁵⁰ Rene W Albertus, “Decolonisation of Institutional Structures in South African Universities: A Critical Perspective,” *Cogent Social Sciences*, 2019; N T Zulu, “The Struggles and the Triumphs of South African Black Women Professors,” *South African Journal of Higher Education* 35, no. 6 (2021): 239–57.

⁵¹ Boris Bertolt, “Thinking Otherwise: Theorizing the Colonial/Modern Gender System in Africa,” *African Sociological Review/Revue Africaine de Sociologie* 22, no. 1 (2018): 2–17; S. Chiumbu, “Reporting Sexual and Gender-Based Violence: A Decolonial Gaze on Women Journalists in South Africa,” in *Women Journalists in South Africa: Democracy in the Age of Social Media* (Cham.: Springer International Publishing, 2022), 31–47.

⁵² Thinandavha D Mashau, “Unshackling the Chains of Coloniality: Reimagining Decoloniality, Africanisation and Reformation for a Non-Racial South Africa,” *HTS: Theological Studies* 74, no. 3 (2018): 1–8.

⁵³ Nuraan Davids, “Reconceiving a World around Our Bodies: Universities, Gender-Based Violence, and Social Justice,” *University Education, Controversy and Democratic Citizenship*, 2020, 13–30.

⁵⁴ L. Chouliaraki and N. Fairclough, *Discourse in Late Modernity: Rethinking Critical Discourse Analysis* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2021).

implicit signals.⁵⁵ Put differently, higher education's political economy is involved. The most significant barriers to decolonizing the curriculum seems to be reliance on foreign funding, a lack of domestic resources for research and publication in comparison to international competition, and national quality assurance standards.⁵⁶

Educational and theological spaces in South Africa are violent because they are designed to promote social cohesion, inclusivity, and respect for diversity. The curriculum is based on the principle of a non-racial, non-sexist, and democratic society and seeks to address the historical injustices of apartheid by promoting social justice and equality.⁵⁷ The curriculum emphasises the importance of critical thinking, problem-solving, and creativity, which are essential skills for personal and societal development. Therefore, South Africa's educational and theological spaces at the tertiary level are violent because they promote social intolerance and violate women's embodiment. Therefore, a decolonised action is needed to frame women as primary actors and not enactors of colonial spaces. This action can be understood as, the curriculum and the lingering effects of this deliberate white supremacist epistemological dismantling are directly challenged by changing the goal of doctorate education to procedures that support Black and African Indigenous-centric voice.⁵⁸

It is crucial to understand that educational and theological spaces are not neutral environments in considering the function and effects of higher education on society and women and their embodiment. The decisions made on what should be taught and what should not are a reflection of the values, opinions and pursuits of women to flourish so that they have the authority to be agents of change. As a result, it is essential to have frank and thoughtful discussions about women's development and advancement because between those pillars are key intersections to either change or embrace more inclusive, equitable educational institutions in order to not promote violence against women.

Social Justice and Women in Higher Institutions

Education can provide many benefits to women in Africa, including improved economic opportunities, increased self-confidence and agency, and better practices in education. Some of the main challenges facing African women are poverty, lack of access to school, early marriage and pregnancy, and gender-based violence. This is why in educational and theological spaces the penetration of decolonisation is an important tool to transform epistemic communities in higher education systems. Okech exclaims that the establishment of gender and women's studies centers in African colleges was a significant intervention in the decolonization processes was critical. The adoption—or lack thereof—of these centers demonstrates how African feminist epistemic communities become important interlocutors in the larger gender-neutral Africanizing and transformation discussions that took place throughout Africa between the 1960s and the 1990s, both politically and institutionally.⁵⁹

This approach to decolonisation through the Feminist lens has helped in this study because it shows how receptive to the demands of marginalised people, particularly African women have become. This study has investigated decolonised theory through a feminist lens and has shown that it can contribute to the creation of safe and empowered learning environments that promote social justice and gender equality in educational institutions.

Social acts such as education and religion can serve as a crucial means of depositing colonial traits into the minds of victims.⁶⁰ From an African-American background, equates the process of the colonisation of the mind to deculturalisation, seasoning and miseducation. Deculturalisation refers to a method of pacification and control while stripping the victims of their culture, history and ancestral

⁵⁵ S.B. Torres, "Beyond Colonizing Epistemicides: Toward a Decolonizing Framework for Indigenous Education" (Loyola Marymount University, 2019); Kristine Grraway, "Children in the Ancient Near East," *Firends of Asor*, 2014.

⁵⁶ Liisa Laakso and Kajsa Hallberg Adu, "'The Unofficial Curriculum Is Where the Real Teaching Takes Place': Faculty Experiences of Decolonising the Curriculum in Africa," *Higher Education* 87, no. 1 (2024): 185–200.

⁵⁷ C. H. Manthalu, A. M. Gunde, and V. Chikaipa, "Towards Communication for Equality: Reconfiguring Pedagogical Relations in Teacher Education," in *Education, Communication and Democracy in Africa* (Routledge, 2021), 33–49.

⁵⁸ Mishack T Gumbo, Christopher B Knaus, and Velisiwe G Gasa, "Decolonising the African Doctorate: Transforming the Foundations of Knowledge," *Higher Education*, 2024, 1–17.

⁵⁹ Awino Okech, "African Feminist Epistemic Communities and Decoloniality," *Critical African Studies* 12, no. 3 (2020): 313–29.

⁶⁰ Kgatla, "The Decolonisation of the Mind-Black Consciousness Community Projects by the Limpopo Council of Churches."

education and replacing them with external (Eurocentric) values.⁶¹ This is a seasoning process that should not be seen as a form of brainwashing.⁶² But rather it ought to be,

“Understanding decolonisation in this sense draws direct parallels to the concepts underpinning Black Feminism. Black Feminism challenges the notion of there being one way to exist as a woman, thereby unmasking the dominant narrative as just one of many available narratives. Therefore, just as the objective behind decolonisation is to open up the way we receive knowledge and avoid perpetuating colonial narratives that continue to other those we consider to be non-hegemonic voices, so it is with Black Feminism.”⁶³

In some cases, when the victims of colonisation accept the values imposed on them by their colonisers, they are rewarded with gifts that make their counterparts who are still outside feel ashamed and inferior.⁶⁴ Colonisation aims to change the African mind (by the coloniser) to adopt the forms of thinking and behavior determined by the coloniser for subjugation. The colonisation of the mind robs the colonised of their dignity and identity and makes them “rootless and nameless” with no right to self-determination.⁶⁵

In summary, the findings indicate that although gender and feminist themes are far and few in between in an African (South) transformational education agenda, a decolonial approach could guide women in religious and educational settings so they can become leaders and change these fields' trajectory in the country. By doing this, academia can endeavour to establish decolonial systems of higher learning that uphold fairness, diversity, and inclusion while avoiding the perpetuation of current power structures and disparities with regard to embodied violence, knowledge systems, and other issues.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Transformational Spaces for African Women in Higher Education

The findings are important as they show that African women in education and theological spaces can find their purpose and realise their career ambitions by creating equal opportunities in educational practices and spaces. This will make African women feel included in the planning and decision-making processes that affect them, ensuring that their voices are heard, and their needs are met. It is also important to note that while equal opportunity for some women in theological and educational spaces may result in shared experiences for African women, distinct groups of people will have unique experiences depending on how identification variables intersect. This is not to say that using the decolonised lens and creating transforming spaces can be too complex,⁶⁶ but it is to say that contexts are much the same as they are different for women in higher education spaces, and therefore change is very possible. Poignantly argued by Ramohai, class, race, and geographic background are examples of characteristics that may characterize a person's location and positionality. People utilize these places as interpretation lenses to help them construct meanings for themselves when they make sense of their social situations. Black women from urban areas with better educational backgrounds, for instance, are far more likely to find work in higher education; women from rural areas with poorer educational backgrounds may be marginalized by socioeconomic systems when they look for work⁶⁷

Decolonisation in Higher Education Spaces for Women: Challenge Power Relationships

Transforming higher education spaces through a decolonised lens in the feminist framework allows for men in theological and education spaces to recognise African women's inherent value and embrace

⁶¹ Ndlovu-Gatsheni, *Coloniality of Power in Postcolonial Africa*.

⁶² Kgatla, “The Decolonisation of the Mind-Black Consciousness Community Projects by the Limpopo Council of Churches.”

⁶³ Matiluko, “Decolonising the Master's House: How Black Feminist Epistemologies Can Be and Are Used in Decolonial Strategy.”

⁶⁴ Biko, *I Write What I Like: Selected Writings*; Kgatla, “The Decolonisation of the Mind-Black Consciousness Community Projects by the Limpopo Council of Churches.”

⁶⁵ E. Mveng, “Impoverishment and Liberation: Theological Approach for Africa and the Third World.,” in *Paths of African Theology*, ed. R Gibellini (New York: Orbis, 1994), 154–65.

⁶⁶ Katherine J C Sang, “Gender, Ethnicity and Feminism: An Intersectional Analysis of the Lived Experiences Feminist Academic Women in UK Higher Education,” *Journal of Gender Studies* 27, no. 2 (2018): 192–206.

⁶⁷ Ramohai, “A Black Woman's Perspective on Understanding Transformation and Diversity in South African Higher Education.”

diversity and inclusivity in these spaces, while at the same time promoting non-violence towards women. It is more aptly expressed in Diko's work, *Intersectionality and the Oppressive Incidents of Women in the Old Testament [Theological Education Spaces] and the South African Context*, when she argues that men/people in charge of repressive systems ought to help challenge these colonial spaces without taking away women's agency and autonomy. She means that women and young girls in South Africa have long been subjected to interlocking kinds of racial, class, and gender-based oppression. Apartheid's legacy of institutionalized racial discrimination severely marginalized and disadvantaged women and young girls, especially those belonging to the previously stated marginalized racial and ethnic groups. A complex web of oppression is thus produced by the combination of historical injustices, patriarchal norms, and socioeconomic disparities. This will demolish the current power disparity that favors men and ignores the opinions and embodiment of women.⁶⁸ The aim of women that have real agency and autonomy in African (South) theological and education spaces should be to establish an inclusive, egalitarian and non-violent educational environment that empowers marginalised women in these spaces, while women and men challenge deeply embedded power relations.⁶⁹ Further research and collaboration among women in educational and theological spaces, policymakers and activists are also needed to deliberately begin to challenge repressive systems, and deroot these colonial spaces.⁷⁰ Therefore, a transformative journey towards a more just and equitable educational system for women in Africa is a real achievement.

CONCLUSION

The researcher's conclusion, based on the data and debate, is that, to provide equal opportunities and equity for African women in academia, a decolonial perspective is required to dismantle male dominance and patriarchy across theological and educational spaces—spaces that occasionally intersect. To create more inclusive and transformative spaces that would not have otherwise rekindled colonial tendencies, this reset can take the form of language, transforming spaces and leadership opportunities in theology and education, and in education to use examples in education discourse that challenge hegemony in the classroom. A reset in the previously mentioned areas could result in more women rising to the top and altering the course of these sectors in South Africa. By doing so, all stakeholders can work towards creating educational systems that promote equity, diversity and inclusion and do not perpetuate existing power dynamics and inequalities, a decolonised framework will enable this.

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⁶⁹ Isabel Apawo Phiri, "Major Challenges for African Women Theologians in Theological Education (1989–2008)," *International Review of Mission* 98, no. 1 (2009): 105–19.

⁷⁰ Sinenhlanhla S Chisale, "Politics of the Body, Fear and Ubuntu: Proposing an African Women's Theology of Disability," *HTS Theologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 76, no. 3 (2020).

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