Epistemic Enucleation: A Sangoma's Removal of the Imperial Gaze in Higher Education in South Africa.

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SHORT BIO

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ABSTRACT

Speaking in tandem with existing literature and drawn from my experiential knowledge journey into becoming a Sangoma, this article argues that the decolonisation of knowledge within higher education in South Africa requires the complete removal of the imperial gaze. I define the imperial gaze as a colonial mechanism of viewing and, subsequently, organising people and their knowledges through the constructed distinctions that the imperial gaze creates between itself and those it relegates to inferiority. Central to this is the assertion that the politics of knowledge are connected to the politics of the body. When certain knowledges are devalued, the bodies of the people who create and embody those knowledges are also devalued. I argue overcoming these knowledge and body politics requires a deliberate process of epistemic enucleation that I define as a removal of the imperial gaze in all its manifestations. To do this, I, first, engage with the concept of the imperial gaze as a colonial worldview and subjugation device that creates epistemic hierarchies. Second, by examining the dismissal of iZangoma as knowledge producers, I problematise how academic institutions naturalise certain bodies as perpetual producers of knowledge whilst others are reduced to perpetual consumers of knowledge. Using the term "uGogo" as a double entendre denoting "grandmother" and what a Sangoma is referred to, I suggest re-centering uGogo as a challenge to the naturalisation of the white male body in South African higher education institutions. Drawing from the divination practice of iZangoma, I offer ukuboniswa as an orientation of knowledge-making that removes the imperial gaze.

KEYWORDS
Sangoma healing, Matriarchy, Indigenous knowledge systems, Decolonisation, Higher education

Introduction

This article argues that the politics of knowledge are connected to the politics of the body as when certain knowledges are devalued, the bodies of the people who create and embody those knowledges are also devalued.[1] Additionally, I argue that the decolonisation of knowledge within higher

[1] Hugo Canham. "Reviled bodies of knowledge in the South African university," *Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies* 40, no. 2. (2018): 5.

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education in South Africa requires the complete removal of the imperial gaze. I define the imperial gaze as a colonial mechanism of viewing and, subsequently, organising people and their knowledges through the constructed distinctions that the imperial gaze creates between itself and those it relegates to inferiority.

I situate this paper alongside many other decolonial feminist works that challenge the gendered and racialised nature of how knowledges are categorised, specifically how African-Indigenous knowledge systems are often treated as marginal epistemic paradigms. Many African feminist scholars, such as Lewis and Tamale,[2] have critiqued the ways in which the bodies of Black women have been subjugated by the imperial gaze in ways that, not only erodes their knowledge contributions, but also reduces them to just physical "bodies incapable of rationality and thought".[3]

This article contributes to decolonial feminist scholarship through a focus on how the knowledge systems and knowledge ecologies of iZangoma (plural form of Sangoma[4]) have been devalued and that this is causal to, and a direct consequence of, how the bodies of iZangoma, as black women, have also been devalued. This is not to suggest that only women are iZangoma as there are practitioners who are men, but, rather, to emphasise that the practice of Ubungoma[5] has historically been a woman-dominated practice. Thus, in the Nguni context of Ubungoma, Black women have historically been the custodians of ritual knowledge and divination praxis. I argue that to overcome this knowledge and body politics requires a deliberate process of epistemic enucleation. That is, as a removal of the imperial gaze in all its manifestations. To begin, I offer that the imperial gaze can be understood as a colonial worldview that, subsequently, acts as subjugation device that

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2 See Desiree Lewis, "Representing African Sexualities," in *African Sexualities: A Reader,* ed. Sylvia Tamale, (Pambazuka Press, 2011), 199-216; Sylvia Tamale, "Researching and theorising sexualities in Africa", in *African Sexualities: A Reader,* ed. Sylvia Tamale, (Pambazuka Press, 2011), 11-36.

3 Oyèrónké Oyěwùmí. "Visualizing the body: Western theories and African subjects," in *African Gender Studies: A Reader*, ed. Oyèrónké Oyěwùmí. (Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 5.

4 A Sangoma is one who conducts spiritual divination within the Ubungoma spiritual healing context.

5 Ubungoma denotes the theoretical, practical, and ethical frameworks that informs the work of a Sangoma.

organises the world and assesses the knowledges of the world according to colonial hierarchies. In this way, we can understand the imperial gaze as a cartographic system that classifies some knowledges as "academic" and "scholarly" while others are considered "folklore" and "traditional". Central, here, is the fact that what the imperial gaze often appraises as "credible knowledge" is that which coincides with the white male ontological and epistemological experience. Thus, I argue that the imperial gaze can be understood to be an epistemic gate-keeper that functions to keep subjugated knowledges out of academic spaces, leading to a "monocultural dominance".[6]

I then shift my discussion to how this monocultural dominance relates to how certain bodies become naturalised as perpetual producers of knowledge while others are confined as consumers of knowledge. Key, here, is the devaluation of iZangoma as producers and practitioners of knowledges, a consequence of the entangled devaluation of African Indigenous knowledge systems and the bodies of Black women, who are custodians of knowledges within the Ubungoma context. I do this through discussing the demonisation of Ubungoma, the dehumanisation of Black women's bodies, as well as the ageist discarding of elderly Black women who have otherwise been historically revered as knowledge archives, specifically within Ubungoma. The works of Babalwa Magoqwana and June Bam are critical for discussing the discarding of the elderly Black woman, or *uGogo* (grandmother), as epistemicide. To challenge this epistemicide, I propose a centering of *uGogo* as an archive of knowledge that contests the imperial gaze's naturalisation of the white male body in academic institutions. Additionally, centering uGogo, typically not "learned" in the institutional sense, is a provocation of the imperial gaze's colonial and gendered knowledge categorisations. I use uGogo as a double-entendre, denoting a grandmother as well as a term to refer to a Sangoma. Indeed, all of iZangoma are referred to as Gogo, regardless of their gender. This is in recognition of the fact that, as alluded to before, Ubungoma has historically been a female-led practice, and the elderly Black woman is revered as a source of spiritual knowledge and wisdom. Thus, to speak of uGogo can also refer to both iZangoma and the grandmother in Nguni contexts. Finally, to completely remove the imperial

[6] Johnnie W. F. Muwanga- Zake, "Building Bridges Across Knowledge Systems: Ubuntu and Participate Research Paradigm in Bantu Communities." *Discourse Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education* 30, no. 4 (2009): 414.

gaze, I suggest ukuboniswa (loosely translated as "being shown") as an orientation to knowledge and knowledge-making both in and outside of academic spaces.

I write this paper as a Black woman who is a practising Sangoma, Gobela[7] and, begrudgingly, finds herself in academia. I offer this paper as a contribution to the many decolonial feminist works that contest the ways in which knowledge hierarchies within academia render many of us as invisible and "inconsequential others".[8]

Situating the Imperial Gaze in the Context Of Higher Education in South Africa

This section contextualises the imperial gaze within South African higher education. I highlight how the imperial gaze, as a colonial subjugation device and colonial lens through which Indigenous peoples are engaged, has functioned to preserve a particular worldview. This worldview has normalised, not only who is perceived to be the perpetual producer of knowledges, but also which knowledges are deemed "credible, academic knowledges". Of course, the arguments I make here are not new and I situate them alongside the many scholars who call for the decolonisation of higher education in South Africa through the decolonisation of knowledge.
There were three types of universities established by the Apartheid government: English universities, Afrikaans universities, and "Black-tribalized universities".[9] A common denominator amongst these institutions is that their establishment served a racialised purpose and were, therefore, products of an imperial gaze that, subsequently, created social, economic, and knowledge hierarchies between these universities. Even "progressive" institutions, like the University of the Western Cape, remain entangled with the racialised purpose of their establishment as they were created for a particular racial demographic. Furthermore, despite the various distinctions

7 A Gobela is a Senior Sangoma who initiates those who have an ancestral calling to train to become a Sangoma.

8 Canham, "Reviled bodies of knowledge in the South African university," 5

9 Mothusiotsile Edwin Maditsi, Modjadji Mandy Rasehlomi, and Thato Hazel Seemise, "A quest for decolonisation: incorporating Indigenous pedagogies to foster teaching learning at Higher Education institutions in South Africa," *Journal of Mother-Tongue Biblical Hermeneutics and Theology*, 6, no. 5 (2024): 80. https://doi.org/10.38159/motbit.2024653

between the universities in South Africa, due to their establishment by the Apartheid government, they functioned as spaces that stifled Indigenous knowledge systems.[10]

Samaradiwakera-Wijesundara argues that the purpose of the establishment of academic institutions in South Africa was for colonists to recruit people into the epistemic technologies of the subordination of Indigenous peoples.[11] Furthermore, the purpose of academic institutions in South Africa was to memorialise colonisation, white hetero-patriarchal capitalism, and the sustained denigration of Indigenous knowledge systems.[12] Ultimately, academic institutions in South Africa were designed, as tools and sites of the perpetuation of the imperial gaze, to facilitate the discharge of white supremacy.[13] Therefore, higher education in South Africa cannot be separated from broader conversations on the Apartheid State, the hegemony of white supremacy, and the perpetuation of a colonial worldview predicated on white male superiority.[14]

The heteropatriarchal structure of higher education in South Africa, coupled with an enduring legacy of coloniality, position higher education institutions as spaces that centre the white heterosexual male as the benchmark of, not only what constitutes a "full humanity", but also as the only credible knowledge source.[15] Higher education institutions in South Africa remain products of that coloniality through sustained epistemic violence and the

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10 Maditsi et al., "A Quest for Decolonization," ; Mlamuli N. Hlatshwayo, "Being black in South African Higher Education: An intersectional insight," *Acta Academica,* 52, no. 2 (2020): 163-180. http://dx.doi.org/10.18820/24150479/aa52i2/9

11 Charmika Samaradiwakera-Wijesundara, "#GenderBasedViolenceMatters: Colonisation, contract and co-optation in the university under a neo-liberal regime," *South African Journal on Human Rights* 40, no. 1-2 (2024): 4. https://doi.org/10.1080/02587203.2025.2472658

12 See Samaradiwakera-Wijesundara, "#GenderBasedViolenceMatters," 4; Hlatshwayo, "Being black in South African Higher Education"; and Kudzaiishe Vanyoro, "Learning how language is used in Higher Education to strategically marginalise female, queer and gender non-conforming people: an autoethnographic account," *Educational Research for Social Change* 9 (2020): 1-14. https://doi.org/10.17159/2221-4070/2020/v9i0a1

13 Samaradiwakera-Wijesundara, "#GenderBasedViolenceMatters," 4.

14 Hlatshwayo, "Being black in South African Higher Education," 166; and Samaradiwakera-Wijesundara, "#GenderBasedViolenceMatters,"

15 Vanyoro, Learning how language is used in Higher Education, 2.

epistemic exclusion of the Black[16] intellectual.[17] Furthermore, this exclusion is a product of the historical construction of "Black" being synonymous with "non-human" and, therefore, incapable of epistemic deliberation.[18] The construction of Blacks as being non-human automatically relegates them to being a "thing", which, Makhubela argues, makes knowledge production an exclusive "prerogative of whites".[19] This can also be explained by the fact that the imperial gaze introduces and maintains an ontological and epistemic order within higher education where colonial epistemologies are often absorbed as part of the intellectual and academic culture in universities.

Of course, the exclusion of the intellectual contributions from Blacks is gendered.[20] Black women often experience the intersection of race, gender, and class as oppressive systems within higher education institutions. Indeed, this is not new information at all.[21] Tacit racial and gendered prejudice are often carried out through "microaggressions", microinsults, and "microinvalidations", which are defined as "name-calling", "threats", insults that imply "deficiency based on race and its intersections with gender, class, sexuality", and the dismissal of emotions and the denial of racism.[22] In discussing the veiled nature of racism, particularly when it is entangled with other forms of oppression, Perlow conceptualises microaggressions as the "tyranny of niceness", which she defines as a disposition of supposed neutrality that privileged individuals assumed to "maintain their innocence"

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16 The term "Black" is used to describe the racial category formalised by the Apartheid government in South Africa that denotes people of Indigenous African descent. While there may be resistance to its use, I use it here to highlight that though "Black" may be an Apartheid invention, it does not eliminate the harm experienced by peoples who exist within this category.

17 Malose Makhubela, "'Decolonise. Don't diversify': Discounting diversity in the South African Academe as a tool for ideological pacification," *Education as Change* 22, no. 1 (2018): 1. https://doi.org/10.25159/1947-9417/2965

18 Makhubela, "Decolonise. Don't diversify," 2.

19 Makhubela, "Decolonise. Don't diversify," 2.

20 Mlamuli N. Hlatshwayo and Bongiwe M. Ngcobo, "Are we there yet? An intersectional take on Black women academics' experiences in a South African university," *Journal of Education* 92 (2023): 169-185. http://dx.doi.org/10.17159/2520-9868/i92a10

21 Hlatshwayo and Ngcobo, "Are we there yet?", 172.

22 Dina Z. Belluigi and Gladman Thondhlana, "'Your skin has to be elastic': the politics of belonging as a selected black academic at a 'transforming' South African university," *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 35, no. 2 (2022): 144. https://doi.org/10.1080/09518398.2020.1783469

in relation to systemic, relational, and structural injustices.[23] The insidiousness of the "tyranny of niceness" is that it is psychological warfare that presents the perpetrator as innocent while simultaneously presenting the victim as irrational because the perpetrator has been so "nice".[24] Anecdotally, I can attest to this, particularly when the absence of "explicit" hostility is mistaken for "niceness" and "collegiality". Challenging this has led to being branded as the "angry Black woman", a historic caricature of Black women's dissent. The "angry Black woman" stereotype is undeniably violent and psychologically harmful in that it immediately dismisses the very real experiences of racism, patriarchy, and epistemic silencing that Black women experience in universities. One may argue that this stereotyping of Black women's dissent can be defined as an imperial gaze in how it constructs Black women in deliberately oppressive ways and controls how we are perpetually viewed.

Based on the above, it becomes clear that even institutional policies aimed at "diversity" and "inclusion" are inept at tackling the pervasive nature of the imperial gaze and how it constructs certain bodies while naturalising others and establishing them as the standard. Furthermore, despite "diversity" and "inclusion" Black women remain subjugated in academic spaces that create an "insider-but-still-an-outsider" experience of being in the academy.[25] Madlingozi labels this "insider" and "outsider" paradox as a state of "pariahdom":

> [a] constitutive and foundational settler-colonial condition that confines Indigenous people, historically enslaved people and other oppressed people to lived experiences of unhomeliness, namelessness, rootlessness, homelessness and ultimately wordlessness.[26]

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23 Olivia. N. Perlow, "Getting' free: Anger as resistance to white supremacy within and beyond the academy," In *Black women's liberatory pedagogies. Resistance, transformation and healing within and beyond the academy*, eds. Perlow, O.N, Wheeler, D.I, Bethea, S.L, Scott, B.M. (Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 111.

24 Perlow, "Getting' free,"111.

25 Mlamuli N. Hlatshwayo, "The rise of the neoliberal university in South Africa: Some implications for curriculum imaginations," *Education as change* 26 (2022): 1-21. https://doi.org/10.25159/1947-9417/11421

26 Tshepo Madlingozi, "Social movement struggles for decolonisation and (re) constitution from below: Abahlali baseMjondolo's strivings against pariahdom," In *Research*

Despite being physically within the institutional building, pariahs are still relationally and situationally in exile as the imperial gaze confines us to a marginal existence. Therefore, even as employees, we remain on the outskirts of institutional, collegial, and epistemological culture.[27] Tshisa and van der Walt argue that this happens through both covert and overt ways such as the maintenance of organisational cultures that are linked to oppression.[28]

Drawing this section to a close, the imperial gaze must be understood as both a colonial lens and an instrument of systemic and institutional power. As a tool of social and epistemic organising, it is central in the creation of multiple systems of oppression, such as racial, gendered, and epistemological oppression. It is pervasive because it rationalises itself through the sustained hierarchisation of knowledges where its epistemologies are ingrained within the very functioning of universities in South Africa. The imperial gaze has remained resilient even in the dispensation of procedural democracy because it is also reflective of the social context in which it exists. South Africa remains a deeply racist, sexist, and homophobic country and universities are spaces that reflect that.[29]

The Imperial Gaze and its View of the Knowledge Ecologies of iZangoma

A Sangoma is one who is born with an ancestral calling and is required, by their ancestors, to undergo a process of ukuthwasa (a rigorous "internship" guided by a Gobela or established Sangoma). The primary work of

Handbook on Law, Movement and Social Change, eds, Steven A. Boutcher, Corey S. Shdaimah, and Michael W. Yarbrough (Edward Elgar Publishing, 2023), 2; Tshepo Madlingozi, "Plaatje's discursive battle against colonial pariahdom in Mhudi: A century later," *BKO Magazine,* 4, no. 2 (2020): 20-22, https://www.spu.ac.za/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/BKO-Magazine-Mhudi-A-century-later.pdf

27 Hlatshwayo, "The rise of the neoliberal universal," 2022; Madlingozi, "Social movement struggles for decolonisation," 2023.

28 Nkosana Tshisa and Freda Van der Walt, "Discrimination challenges and psychosocial well-being of black African queer employees," *SA Journal of Industrial Psychology* 47 (2021): 4. https://doi.org/10.4102/sajip.v47i0.1835

29 Thabo Msibi, "Queering transformation in Higher Education," *Perspectives in Education* 31 no. 2 (2013): 65-73.

iSangoma is divination: connecting with ancestral spirits through the burning of *impepho* (a plant critical for engaging the spiritual realm) and the throwing of "bones" whose position on *ikhukho* (reed mat) when they are expelled from *ingxowa yamathambo* (bag of bones) provides insights on a patient's affliction(s).[30] iZangoma are a complex group to understand as the ancestors are simultaneously outside and inside of them, whereby the ancestral spirits share iSangoma's corporeal body, which is how the process of *ukuvuka kweDlozi* (rising of the ancestral spirit) happens. Ancestral spirits live within the iSangoma's body in a "passive" or unconscious state, meaning that they are present but do not infringe on the autonomous functioning of the Sangoma in her everyday life. Specific rituals and objects can trigger the ancestral spirits that then move from a "passive", unconscious state to an active one. The ancestral spirits, then, assume joint autonomy of the corporeal body, along with the Sangoma, and speak through her to deliver messages. I intentionally use the pronoun "her" as within Ubungoma, specifically, Black women have historically been the custodians of the practice. The movement of ancestral spirits from a passive state to an active one is often misnamed as "possession", which is what Van Binsbergen does in his paper discussing the various typologies of African divination systems.[31] Mpono argues that it is incorrect to call it "possession" as the "ancestors are not entities existing in another dimension but are part of the diviner and there are various means to awaken such spirit in certain people".[32] Additionally, "possession" implies a foreign entity forcefully entering the corporeal body of the diviner, which, in this instance, is not the case.[33]

Misrepresentations, and even the demonisation of the practices of iZangoma, are the result of the imperial gaze. In 1957, the Apartheid government of South Africa passed the Witchcraft Suppression Act No. 3 as well as the Criminal Procedure Act No. 5 of 1977 to ban the practice of all

30 Wim Van Binsbergen, "African Divination across Time and Space: Typology and Intercultural Epistemology," in *Reviewing Reality: Dynamics of African Divination*, eds. Walter E. A. van Beek and Philip M. Peek (Liter Verlag, 2013), 339-375. https://www.quest-journal.net/shikanda/topicalities/binsbergen_in_van_beek_and_peek.pdf

31 Van Binsbergen, "African Divination across Time and Space," 350.

32 Lindelwa Judith Mpono, "Traditional Healing Among the Nguni People," (Master's Dissertation, University of Kwa- Zulu Natal, 2007), 29.

33 Mpono, "Traditional Healing Among the Nguni People,"30.

forms of Indigenous healing modalities.[34] The imperial gaze of the Dutch Reformed Church heavily influenced, not only the institutionalisation of Apartheid as a social, political, and legislative system, but also the homogenisation of Christianity as the only credible religio-spiritual practice.[35] The Dutch Reformed Church recruited biblical scriptures to substantiate its demonisation of Ubungoma. One of the scriptures widely used was Exodus 22:18 that states "Do not suffer a witch to live",[36]which consequently led to the harming of Black women who the imperial gaze perceived to be practising "witchcraft".

Besides the alleged "ancestral worship", the practice of *ukuhlola,* or divination, became the focal point of the imperial gaze's demonisation of Ubungoma. Colonial scholar Burden defines divination as the "art of obtaining special information from spiritual beings" or "magic", which he qualifies as a practice of having "intercourse with spiritual and supernatural beings".[37] Semenya and Letsosa argue that divination and establishing communication with "the dead" is evil and it is the devil who is the source of any divinatory insights that iZangoma receive.[38]

In true colonial epistemological fashion, these arguments and definitions are premised on a constructed binary whereby "malevolent, illegal magic" is referred to as "black magic", while "benevolent, legal magic" is referred to as "white magic".[39] The former is associated with evil, with the use of "curses, spells, destruction and alliance with evil spirits",[40] and the latter with the removal of curses and spells through working with "supernatural forces for the good of oneself and others".[41] The male "magician" is understood to represent "white magic" while "black magic" is a practise that only women

34 Mpono, "Traditional Healing Among the Nguni People," 2.
35 Saul Dubow, "Afrikaner nationalism, Apartheid and the conceptualization of race," *Journal of African History* 33, no. 2 (1992): 209-237.
36 David Semenya and Rantoa Letsosa, "Biblical principles as an answer to African people's questioning of witchcraft," *Verbum et Ecclesia* 33, no. 1 (2012): 2.
37 Jasper. J. Burden, "Magic and divination in the Old Testament and their relevance for the church in Africa," *Missionalia* 1 (1973): 103.
38 Semenya and Letsosa, "Biblical principles as an answer to African people's questioning of witchcraft," 2.
39 Burden, "Magic and divination in the Old Testament," 104.
40 Burden, "Magic and divination in the Old Testament," 105.
41 Burden, "Magic and divination in the Old Testament," 105.

engage in.[42] Exodus 22:18 affirms this belief of the inherent evil nature of iZangoma. Indeed, the Hebrew word used in the original text, "Mekassefah", has a gendered connotation. It has been translated into "witch" or "sorceress" and inevitably defines the spiritual practices of iZangoma (who have historically been women) as witchcraft since witches have a "mysterious interaction with another world and that witches are qualified individuals who, through their expertise in mystic power, use it for malicious purposes against other people".[43] Burden qualifies this by stating that, a "woman who has inherited her evil powers from her mother is a witch".[44] Furthermore, he claims that "by day she is an ordinary, healthy woman unaware of her dreadful powers, but by night she becomes an evil person".[45] As argued by Bam, the imperial gaze's focus on demonising the matrilineal inheritance of spiritual knowledges and practices is deliberate as it recognises that Black women have historically been custodians of the spiritual knowledges within Ubungoma, specifically.[46] Furthermore, in reflecting on the narratives by Indigenous peoples on the Cape Flats, Bam notes that knowledges around healing rituals were exclusively taught to girls.[47]

Therefore, one can conclude that the demonisation of Ubungoma is inextricably linked to the historical and present-day demonisation of Black women and the various knowledge ecologies that we embody. As Crenshaw argues, the imperial gaze's perception of Black women is that of angry, bitter, aggressive, mystical, and witchy women[48], and is inevitably tied to how iZangoma are viewed. Moreover, the imperial gaze has historically dealt with the bodies of Black woman spiritual practitioners in ways that pathologise them, much like the treatment of the body of Sara Baartman.[49]

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42 Burden, "Magic and divination in the Old Testament," 105.

43 Semenya and Letsosa, "Biblical principles as an answer to African people's questioning of witchcraft," 1.

44 Burden, "Magic and divination in the Old Testament," 111.

45 Burden, "Magic and divination in the Old Testament," 111.

46 June Bam, *Ausi Told Me. Why Cape herstoriographies matter.* (Jacana Media, 2021): 70

47 Bam, *Ausi Told Me*, 70.

48 Kimberle Williams Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics," *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 1, no. 8 (1989): 139-167.

49 Yvette Abrahams, "The great long national insult: science, sexuality and the Khoisan in the 18th and early 19th century," *Agenda.* 13, no. 32 (1997): 34-48; Sara Baartman was a Khoi woman who was human-trafficked to Europe and whose body was paraded there as a physical anomaly.

The imperial gaze puts our bodies in view and perpetually under inspection because it is predicated on the underlying belief that the corporeal body is a marker of destiny and where one fits in social hierarchies.[50] In this way, we can understand that the imperial gaze constructs society purely from its ontologies of the body and, thus, uses the body as a determiner of where one fits in the social order.[51]

The imperial gaze's obsession with the body is paradoxical, however, in that those it places as highest on the social order are associated with "thought", "intelligence", and given epistemic credibility. In contrast, those it places lowest on the social order are reduced to being just bodies, or existing only as physical bodies, inevitably placing them outside of the "community" of rationality and thought.[52] Furthermore, in Euro-Western societies, "the body was seen as a trap from which any rational person had to escape".[53] In other words, on the one hand, those who were categorised as "thinkers" are afforded "bodylessness" and, therefore, do not find themselves in view or of being gazed upon. On the other hand, Black women who have been categorised as "other" are, thus, "embodied", or have bodies and, therefore, are inherently in view, being gazed upon, and restricted from "thinking" and theorising.[54]

How this plays out in higher education is during the recruitment of Black women where it is often tokenistic and cosmetic while the intellectual contributions are dismissed. As a young Black woman who has recently been appointed into a lecturing role within a university, I have had the unfortunate experience of a more "senior" white, male colleague disapprove of the intellectual content of one of my courses. He went as far as to escalate his disapproval to management structures. Besides this being a violent, racialised and gendered microaggression, this encounter exposed the many ways in which Black women, as "embodied others" are often expected to be

50 Oyěwùmí. "Visualizing the body," 3

51 See Oyěwùmí, "Visualizing the body," 5; Siphamandla Zondi, "A fragmented humanity and monologues: towards a diversal humanism," in *Decolonising the Human,* eds. Melissa Steyn and William Mpofu, (Wits University Press, 2021): 251.

52 Oyěwùmí, "Visualizing the body," 5

53 Oyěwùmí, "Visualizing the body," 5.

54 Oyěwùmí, "Visualizing the body," 5.

only disseminators of knowledge and not necessarily capable of participating in any knowledge-making processes.

Pushing Back Against the Imperial Gaze: Engaging the Epistemologies of uGogo

Magoqwana describes the grandmother, or uGogo, as an archive of knowledge, and suggests that the recognition of the grandmother as a knowledge archive and a producer of knowledge is critical for the destabilization of the imperial gaze's construction of who is a thinker.[55] Historically, the "thinker" has been white and male. Redefining uGogo as a thinker challenges ableist and ageist stereotypes as the imperial gaze denigrates older bodies who are deemed "unproductive" and unhelpful to capitalist and imperialist objectives.[56] Additionally, acknowledging uGogo as a thinker is an undoing of the essentialised white, male "bodylessness" and inherent bodiedness/embodiedness of Black women, eroding the imperial gaze's use of bodies as markers of inferiority and superiority. According to Bam and Magoqwana, the role of the grandmother in knowledge creation and dissemination in many African contexts is one that should not be undermined.[57] In a forthcoming paper, I argue that the grandmother is an organic pedagogical practitioner who, through the use of an oral tradition and an embodied pedagogical approach, facilitates the development of consciousness. Magoqwana locates this development of consciousness within the storytelling and spiritual labour uGogo performs.[58] Gogo's practice as a thinker transcends her corporeal existence as when she is an ancestral spirit, she continues to function as a source of insight.

As a Sangoma, my own grandmother, an ancestral spirit with whom I share my corporeal body, functions as a disembodied source of knowledge. Through her, I have come to learn my genealogy and cultural background as she has taught me *izithakazelo* (clan praises that depict the genealogy of a particular clan), enabling me to trace the historiographies of my people

55 Babalwa Magoqwana, "uMakhulu as a Knowledge Archive," in *Whose History Counts? Decolonizing Pre-Colonial African History*, eds. June Bam, Lungisile Ntsebeza, and Allan Zinn, (African Sun MeDia, 2018): 75-90.

56 Magoqwana, "uMakhulu as a Knowledge Archive,"77.

57 Magoqwana, "uMakhulu as a Knowledge Archive, 77 and Bam, "Ausi told me, 70.

58 Magoqwana, "uMakhulu as a knowledge archive," 77.

based on the information she shares with me. In my practice as a Sangoma, my grandmother has shared medicinal remedies with me (in dreams and visions) that have helped me treat various ailments. Like many African elders, she never completed her primary schooling, but this should certainly not dismiss her as an intellectual or dismiss her as a "thinker". As alluded to before, within the Ubungoma context, knowledge is often shared matrilineally and, therefore, engaging iZangoma is an engagement with the epistemologies of uGogo. This means that the body itself is a fluid entity and cannot be restricted to colonial demarcations. In other words, the relationship that iZangoma have with the grandmother spirit is an invitation to transcend imperial perspectives of not only knowledge being restricted within a particular time and space, but also of the fact that the physical body can be thought of as a vessel and, therefore, not the full reflection of what an individual may know or has the potential to know. In other words, the corporeal body within which one exists cannot act as a full reflection of what one knows or has the capability of knowing. How knowledges are engaged with must recognise that existing within a particular body should not essentialise one as a "thinker" or an another as "biologically inferior". When this happens, it is an affirmation of the imperial gaze and the various differentiations it has constructed between certain bodies.

Epistemic Enucleation: A Removal of the Imperial Gaze

To assist in the removal of the imperial gaze, I draw from the practice of spiritual divination in the work of iZangoma. I present divination, or *inhlolo,* as an orientation to knowledge-making and an approach to engaging with various knowledges. According to Silva, divination is a valuable tool for uncovering the answers to complex empirical questions that may be beyond the scope of human consciousness.[59] A common divination tool amongst iZangoma is *amathambo,* or bones. The divination process of using bones entails speaking with them by reciting one's clan names and asking the ancestors of both the Sangoma and clarity-seeker to provide insight into the clarity-seeker's existential situation. The bones are then expelled from the Sangoma's bag or from their hands and thrown onto the floor. The manner

[59] Sonia Silva, "Object and objectivity in Divination," *Material Religion* 12, no. 4 (2016): 507-509.

they land is then interpreted and discussed by the Sangoma and the clarity-seeker. Additionally, a Sangoma's interpretation or reading of bones calls on all the senses; conclusions cannot be drawn simply from what is visible but is also based on what is intuitively felt. Additionally, unpacking what has been seen by the Sangoma entails dialogue with the clarity-seeker.

Whilst the divination practice of iZangoma may use *amathambo* as tools, it still largely requires the exercising of *umbilini* (intuition) and relies on *ukuboniswa* (being shown) through an engagement with *umbilini*. Being shown can take on many forms, such as clairaudient (hearing) messages or visions that can help them diagnose illness and know which herbs to administer for healing. It is interesting to note that even though the process is of "being shown", seeing does not only come in a corporeal, visual forms, but, rather, is a kind of seeing that incorporates all of one's senses. In this way, the kind of "seeing" that iZangoma represents is one that does not impose a particular construct of what is being seen but includes the consent of the clarity seeker who can, thus, be described as a participant in the divination session rather than just a body in view. What differentiates this form of seeing from the imperial gaze is, of course, the consensual element of it: one is involved in the knowledge-making process and is not solely constructed from the viewpoint of the Sangoma. Additionally, the engagement with their ancestors and, therefore, one's genealogy means that the clarity-seeker is engaged within their specific context. This acts as a removal of the imperial gaze as it does not draw its own conclusions about people by falsely assuming people are a homogenous demographic. Instead, there is an understanding that they are complex, dynamic and ever-changing individuals or communities.[60] The imperial gaze tends to erode the heterogeneity of marginalised groups and engages them outside of their social, cultural, and geographic contexts. Moreover, it assumes that what it knows about one group in one location can be applied to another group in another location. As a result, the imperial gaze participates in an epistemic "monologue", in that it speaks on the behalf of marginalised people without ever intentionally engaging them in a meaningful discussion.[61] Therefore, the knowledge-making process becomes exclusively based on what the

60 Arthur W. Frank, "What is dialogical research, and why should we do it?," *Qualitative Health Research* 15, no. 7 (2005): 964-974.

61 Frank, "What is dialogical research, and why should we do it?,"966.

imperial gaze constructs, consequently making knowledge a conversation that the imperial gaze has with itself.

Ukuboniswa, or being shown, as a process within the divination practice of iZangoma is a useful orientation towards knowledge. During the process of being shown, iSangoma is not in control of what will be revealed by the ancestors and, therefore, must remain open to any form of insight, even that which may be outside of the Sangoma's experiential context. This highlights how knowledge-making, and even knowledge itself, is a relational process rather than a product. In other words, unlike the imperial gaze that unilaterally constructs knowledge and treats it as a commodity that is credible only once it is obtained in an academic institution, ukuboniswa engages knowledge as a "relational ontology" that can be defined as a focus "on the connectedness of human beings with the earth, land, cosmos, other beings, plants and animals".[62] This would mean that knowledge, as well as the knowledge-making process, is one that has humans and other beings engaging in a collective dialogue that decolonises knowledge through an integration of marginalised and silenced voices.

Finally, enucleating the imperial gaze requires an engagement with the possibilities of entangled knowledge ecologies. To do this, Zondi proposes "diversal dialogue", which is a "horizontal, vertical and inclusive conversation among equals in which diversity is not only tolerated and understood but welcomed and encouraged as a necessary part of being human".[63] This requires dismantling the binary that categorises knowledges as rational or irrational, acceptable or unacceptable, and superior or inferior. The purpose of diversal dialogues would be to decolonise the "human" (specifically since it is a label that has been reserved only for some) and have cross-cultural conversations that can lead to the "bringing about of a pluriversal world".[64] Borrowing from Nadar and van Klinken, "pluriversalism" can be defined as

62 Ronicka Mudaly and Sebastian Sanjigadu, "Epistemic journeying across abyssal lines of thinking: towards reclaiming Southern voices," *Education as Change* 26 (2022): 2. https://doi.org/10.25159/1947-9417/11442

63 Zondi, "A fragmented humanity," 251.

64 Zondi, "A fragmented humanity," 252.

an interrogation of established norms and a deconstruction of binaries.[65] These norms and binaries are what keep certain bodies and certain knowledges out of knowledge-making processes. Additionally, these norms and binaries are also what maintain certain knowledges as "academic" and "scholarly" while others are considered "mythologies" and "folklores".

The other approach to moving towards the possibility of entangled knowledge ecologies would be "globalectics".[66] Globalectics can be defined as a "dialectical interface between many centres mutually enriching one another" that "describes a model of humanism, power and knowledge that supports mutually affecting dialogue or multi-logue".[67] Part of this is the recognition of the violence of silence and how it dis-members knowledges, languages, and the bodies that carry them.[68] Therefore, teaching that engages in the entangled nature of knowledges constitutes a re-membering process, where those historically silenced can participate in the discourse, not as marginal others, but as equal participants.

Drawing to a close, this paper argues that the politics of knowledge are inextricably linked to the politics of the body. The imperial gaze, as a colonial cartographic tool, has constructed, and continues to construct, certain bodies in deliberate and convoluted ways that function to exclude knowledge contributions of those who have been categorised as embodied, as opposed to disembodied. Those who enjoy the social and epistemic privilege of being disembodied are associated with inherent and unearned intellectual credibility that ensures that their knowledge contributions within academic institutions are uninterrogated. Furthermore, these knowledge contributions are then normalised as the epistemic standard. Those who have been categorised as bodied, particularly on account of being Black and Sangoma, are subsequently gazed upon through persistent interrogations of, not only our humanness, but our ability to be intellectual contributors within the academy. In this way, the imperial gaze, as both a colonial lens and an

65 Sarojini Nadar and Adriaan Van Klinken, "'Queering the curriculum': Pedagogical explorations of gender and sexuality in religion and theological studies," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 34, no. 1 (2018):107. https://doi.org/10.2979/jfemistudreli.34.1.16

66 Zondi, "A fragmented humanity," 252.

67 Zondi, "A fragmented humanity," 254.

68 Brian Sibanda, "'Language as being' in the politics of Ngugi wa Thiong'o," in *Decolonising the Human,* eds. Melissa Steyn and William Mpofu, (Wits University Press, 2021): 147.

instrument of systemic and institutional power, is central to the creation of multiple systems of oppression such as racial, gendered, and epistemological oppression within higher education in South Africa. Overcoming the imperial gaze, thus, requires more than just diversity and inclusion policies, but also a concerted effort towards completely removing it. This removal can happen through engaging the practices of iZangoma that prioritise intentional collaboration in knowledge and meaning-making processes, as well as epistemic openness as a relational orientation between not only various knowledge systems but also the various producers of knowledges themselves.

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