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Decolonizing Higher Education: Black Feminism and the Intersectionality of Race and Gender

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Abstract: Drawing on black feminist theory, this paper examines the professional experiences of postcolonial diasporic black and ethnicized female academics in higher education.[1] The paper explores the embodiment of gendered and racialized difference and reflects on the power of whiteness to shape everyday experiences in such places of privilege. The powerful yet hidden histories of women of color in higher education, such as the Indian women suffragettes and Cornelia Sorabji in late nineteenth century, are symbolic of the erasure of an ethnicized black feminist/womanist presence in mainstream (white) educational establishments. The paper concludes that an understanding of black and ethnicized female agency and desire for education and learning is at the heart of a black feminist analysis that reclaims higher education as a radical site of resistance and refutation.

Keywords: black feminism, postcolonial theory, decolonization, race, gender, social class, higher education, intersectionality, inequality, diversity

Introduction

In order to tackle race and gender inequality in higher education, it is imperative to understand the nature of power relations and the ways in which racialized, classed and gendered boundaries are produced and lived through black/postcolonial female subjectivity in our places of learning and teaching. To undertake the task of decolonizing our spaces of higher education, this article begins by addressing two necessary and fundamental questions that underpin the black feminist struggle to find a voice in the educational landscapes of academe. First, how do racial and gender distinctions come to structure the experiences of black and ethnicized women in our places of learning? This question addresses the issue of black and ethnicized female identity and subjectivity and the way her "difference" is systematically organized through social relations in our political and economic structures, policies and practices. Second, I ask why, in the context of endemic race and gender inequality, is there a persistent expression of educational desire and optimism among black and ethnicized women? To answer these two questions, I take a black feminist insider/outsider view of the ways in which gender and race difference is lived out in the contingent historical specificity of our universities. My aim here is to clarify our understanding of the multiple and complex ways in which structures of power reproduce social divisions in the everyday lives of women of color. I examine the processes of social inequality and systematic institutionalized discriminatory practices in the context of raced and gendered human agency which frames the black and ethnicized female struggle for life chances and educational opportunities.

Black Feminism and "Embodied Intersectionality"

The black feminist framework I employ in this paper seeks to reconfigure the complexities of black and ethnicized female marginality in an intersectional analysis where race, class, gender, and other social divisions are theorized as lived realities. Intersectionality, a term coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989; 1991), rearticulated concerns about black female marginality in mainstream theorizing that were voiced in the scholarship of African American black feminists such as Angela Davis, Patricia Hill Collins and Audre Lorde (Cho, Crenshaw and McCall 2013). Intersectionality provides a complex ontology of "really useful knowledge," which systemically reveals the everyday lives of black and ethnicized women who are simultaneously positioned in multiple structures of dominance and power as gendered, raced, classed, colonized, and sexualized "others." Intersectionality signaled a move away from the inadequate additive models of double or triple jeopardy and the seemingly meaningless listing of never-ending hierarchies of multiple social positions and identities. Black and ethnicized women, of different ages, with various caring responsibilities, coming from particular cultures, religions, nation-states, with or without citizenship and human rights, live in the dominant modalities of race, class and gender (Brah 1996; Brah and Phoenix 2004). A black feminist epistemology is contextual and contingent, and it examines the differentiated and variable organizing logics of race, class and gender and other social divisions such as sexuality, age, disability, culture, religion, and belief that structure women's lives in different historical times (Yuval-Davis 2006) and geographic places (McKittrick 2006).

The notion of "embodied intersectionality" seeks to make sense of the black "othered" woman's symbolic and narrative struggle over the defining materiality of her educational experience. Felly Nweko Simmonds, a black woman academic who writes of this embodied experience, says: "The world I inhabit as an academic is a white world … in this white world I am a fresh water fish that swims in sea water. I feel the weight of the water on my body" (1997, 227). It is a powerful statement about the personal costs of marginality for black women and the profound experiences you have when moving between "worlds" of difference in higher education. As black feminists, we need to ask questions about what shapes these worlds and how we are implicated in racist and sexist discourses through our inclusion, exclusion, choice, and participation. A task I now turn to through a historical lens in the following section.

Postcolonial Bodies: "Being and Becoming" Gendered and Raced

Experience, as revealed by black ethnicized female oral histories, autobiographies, historical diaries, and photographs, makes visible the ways in which regulatory discursive power and privilege are "performed" or exercised in the everyday material world of the socially constructed black and ethnicized woman. In this paper, I draw on such personalized "embodied" narratives to demonstrate the processes of "being and becoming" a gendered and raced subject of academic and educational discourse. For postcolonial women of color it is impossible to escape the body and its constructions and reconstructions as we negotiate daily our embodied social situations.

What must it have been like for one of the first women of color in an elite white male university in Britain? There is a hidden genealogy of black and ethnicized women's presence in higher education in England. Cornelia Sorabji, who was Indian, went to Somerville Hall, Oxford in 1889. She was the first woman ever to study law in a British university (Visram 2002; Burton 1998).[2] Cornelia, who was by no means a feminist or a radical (she was in favor of British rule and against Gandhi's independence movement for India), wrote of her special treatment at Somerville in her diary (she was a consummate diarist). She always wore a sari and

was introduced into influential literary and political circles. She was given special privileges (a fire to dress in the morning) and was chaperoned to lectures. Though she was never allowed to practice as a solicitor in Britain, as a woman she demanded and got special dispensation to sit her law exams. She writes that the male students were so kind, giving up a book if the librarian said she wanted it. This special treatment exasperated her, and she said of her tutor, "I wish he would treat me like a man and not make gallant speeches about my intellect and quickness of perception" (Visram 2002, 95). Cornelia Sorabji returned to India and championed the property rights of the Purdahnashin (veiled women confined to the private domain by religious practice) but lived her final years in England in an asylum, where she died in 1954. Such a sad revelation makes me wonder about the "weight" of living a nonwhite existence in a consuming white world. Kathleen Casey describes how black women's innocent expectations and eager quest for knowledge can take them on an unexpected journey "to another place" where they are transformed by the consuming, monolithic power of whiteness:

> young black women set off into the white world carrying expectations of mythic proportions ... their odysseys, they believe, will transform their lives ... but separated from their cultural communities these young women's passages turn out to be isolated individual journeys ... "into the heart of whiteness." (Casey 1993, 132)

Being a curiosity, a special case, "one in a million," can be an emotional and professional burden to black and ethnicized women in the academy. To be an exotic token, an institutional symbol, a mentor and confidant, and a "natural expert" on all things to do with "race" is something that many black women academics recount experiencing in their careers in the academe (Williams 1991; hooks 1994; Spivak 1993; Mirza 1995; Simmonds 1997; Razack 1998; Essed 2000; Ahmed 2009, 2012). But we need to be careful how we situate these "tales of dark-skinned women," for, as Gargi Bhattacharyya (1998) eloquently argues in her eponymous book, such heroic "new" stories in themselves do not counter invisibility and negative stereotypes deeply embedded in our thinking. Acknowledging and celebrating their "difference" is not enough; rather, it is the *kind of difference that is acknowledged* that we as black feminists must be ever vigilant of (Mohanty 1993).

The story of Indian women suffragettes to which I now turn reveals not only the collective amnesia about the embodied presence of postcolonial women in higher education but also their construction as benign "multicultural" others. Indian women remain largely outside the historiography of British suffragettes. However, one of the most active Indian suffragettes was Sophia Duleep Singh, daughter of Maharaja of the Punjab, whose sisters Bamba and Catherine were together with her at Somerville College in the 1890s, along with Cornelia Sorabji. Why, in all my years as a feminist living in the West, did I not know this? In the corner of a dark display cabinet on the suffragette movement in the Museum of London, I stumbled upon a small crumpled photograph of the Indian suffragettes at the 1911 Women's Coronation Procession.[3] I was excited by the excavation of Indian women as activists, scholars and writers. Women like me, in demonstrations back then, in a time when we were not even supposed to have an existence (Spivak 1988)! The Procession was a huge rally organized by the suffragettes to highlight their struggle during the coronation celebrations of George V. There were 60,000 women and 1,000 banners, and the column of marchers snaked for seven miles. In the picture, under a banner with their emblem of an elephant, were assembled several Indian women suffragettes. The Indian women at the procession were described by a governor of an Indian province as "striking and picturesque.... In beautiful dress ... the most significant feature of the whole procession" (Visram 2002, 164). In contrast to the "staunch," "defeminized" and "dangerous" white suffragettes, the Indian women were seen as no more than an "oriental" spectacle, strange and exotic creatures to be gazed upon—to be "known" better than they "know" themselves. Simmonds discusses how racial knowledge is

constructed about "the other" and how being seen as a "curiosity" is far from innocent. She writes about how she is *seen* as a black woman:

> Adorned and unadorned I cannot escape the fantasies of the western imagination…. this desire for colonized bodies as spectacle … is essentially an extension of the "desiring machine" of capital. (Simmonds 1997, 232)

I had always thought the struggle for a space in higher education was a "white woman's history"—as indeed I thought that the suffragette movement was a white woman's movement—but history is about what gets chosen to be revealed by whom and when. Chandra Talpade Mohanty (2003) writes against a hastily derived notion of "universal sisterhood" that assumes a commonality of gender experience across racial and national lines. Feminist scholarship, she argues, inadvertently produces Western women as the only legitimate subjects of struggle, while "Third World" women are only heard as fragmented, inarticulate voices in and from the darkness. The erasure of black and postcolonial women's genealogy from British academia exposes a "countermemory" of the women themselves, which tells a different story of (an) other "truth." Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1998) calls such conscious negation in discourse of women of color a form of "epistemic violence."

By telling the stories of Sophia and Cornelia I am not advocating that it is enough to state that "black women were there too," as some sort of a triumph, that numbers and presence is all! This would be to invoke a benign multiculturalism that suggests that "diversity" in and of itself—that is, the mere presence of the postcolonial female body—signals the attainment of equality. I tell the stories of these lost and invisible pioneers because for black and ethnicized women existence is not just about physical space—it is also about the power to occupy a historical space, as Hazel Carby explains:

> The black woman's critique of history has not only involved us coming to terms with absences: we have also been outraged by the ways in which it has made us visible, when it has chosen to see us … we cannot hope to constitute ourselves in all our ill-conceived presences that invade herstory from history, but we do wish to bear witness to our own herstories. (Carby 1997, 45)

Race and the "Politics of Containment" in Higher Education

> Whereas racial segregation was designed to keep blacks as a group or class outside centers of power, surveillance now aims to control black individuals inside centers of power when they enter the white spaces of the public and private spheres.
> — Patricia Hill Collins, "Fighting Words: Black Women and the Search for Justice"

Black women are increasingly visible in public spaces as professionals in places that were previously homogenous with respect to race and gender, such as universities, the judiciary and the media. The black feminist writer Patricia Hill Collins (1998) suggests, in the above quote, that this shift in the positioning of race, gender and class through changing power relations and privatization has led to reconfigured patterns of institutionalized racism. In what she calls the "new politics of containment," surveillance strategies become particularly important when middle-class black and ethnicized women enter institutional spaces of whiteness in the increasingly devalued public sphere from which they were hitherto barred. Collins argues that black women are "watched" in desegregated work environments to ensure they remain "unraced" and assimilated (1998, 38). Being seen to be assimilated is important, as standing out can invoke deep feelings of need, rejection and anxiety within the "white other" (Ahmed 2012). To be unassimilated or "stand out"

invites a certain type of surveillance that appears benign but can be deeply distressing for black and ethnicized women.

For example, surveillance means being accountable and having more attention than others heaped up upon you. As one of the first black British female professors in the 1990s, my "rare" appointment was met with fanfare and excitement. I was seen as a "special case"; one in "a million"; a black female "diversity" trophy. I was on the front page of the university news and invited to many high-profile functions and events. Though it was not part of my job, in the first week I had to publicly present a detailed five-year plan for delivering equal opportunities and race equality to the senior managers and executives of the university. By three months, I had been required to write five reports on my targets, attainments and strategies, and also found myself accountable to three different line managers (as it could not be decided to whom I should report to, the executive, academic area, or the faculty). Their "kind and supportive" attention was all-consuming, but I received no real support for my academic research and teaching. No other professor in my university had received this exhausting and intense level of scrutiny or expectation over such a short space of time. Finally, I became seriously ill and had to leave (Mirza 2009, 167).

There is an irony to heightened visibility for the "invisible" in our polite and genteel corridors of higher education. National surveys of ethnic minorities in UK higher education have found women of color were more likely than any other group to report being the victim of sexual harassment and discrimination at work (Bhopal and Jackson 2013; Equality Challenge Unit 2009, 11). This raises many questions about the safety of black and ethnicized women in public spaces. The historic case of Anita Hill, the African American woman who brought a high-profile case against the African American Supreme Court nominee Clarence Thomas, demonstrated how sexual harassment can be racialized within an institutional context. Hill lost her case and it is argued this happened because of the way the "black woman" is constructed and given meaning in the public discourse on "race" (Morrison 1993; Collins 1998). Anita Hill did not fit any of the stereotypes of "the black woman" (i.e., she was not an "overachiever" or a "welfare mother"), thus she could not be easily understood and received no sympathy in the African American and White public mind. She was not seen as a credible defendant and was labelled as a "traitor to the race" by many in her own African American community because of her public denouncement of a senior black male colleague. As Collins (1998, 38) points out, the "black woman" is predetermined by an already-written script in which she is visible yet silenced. Her body becomes "written on" by other, more powerful interests, rendering her powerless to speak for herself.

A black women's journey into higher education takes her into the "heart of whiteness" where the homogenous identity, *the black woman*, is created by "a white gaze which perceives her as a mute visible object" (Casey 1993, 111). Being a "mute visible object" is something that consumes your very being. As bell hooks (1994, 74) argues, black women need healing strategies and healing words to enable them to deal with the anguish that racism and sexist oppression create in daily life. She suggests black women need to theorize their experiences from a "place of pain," which enables a woman to remember and recover *who she is*. hooks explains such a location is experienced and shared by those who are "aware" of the personal and collective struggle that all forms of domination, such as homophobia, class exploitation, racism, sexism, patriarchy, and imperialism engender. She suggests exposing courageously the "wounds of struggle" as a way to teach and guide us on new theoretical journeys to challenge and renew inclusive feminist struggle.

Such a "place of pain" manifests itself in many ways. Recently, I attended an equality and diversity workshop where we were asked to identify experiences of institutional racism. A young Iranian woman, a graduate student, recounted how her Iranian husband, a qualified medical doctor, was experiencing racial discrimination when trying to get a placement in the National Health Service (NHS). An older white male

member of the group, an established academic, piped up and said, "Don't worry, love... It wouldn't happen to you, as you are so attractive." In that one moment, all the women of color in the group were rendered speechless, reduced to no more than their embodied "otherness"—mute visible objects, their bodies empty tablets for him to write his laden script upon. His racist and sexist comment was made possible by the unspoken power of whiteness, his situated patriarchy, and the inherent entitlement it bestows on his authoritative gaze.

Patricia Williams, an eminent African American law professor, talks of the collective trauma such everyday incursions into your selfhood engender:

> There are moments in my life when I feel as though part of me is missing. There are days when I feel so invisible that I can't remember the day of the week it is, when I feel so manipulated that I can't remember my own name, when I feel so lost and angry that I can't speak a civil word to the people who love me best. These are times I catch sight of my reflection in store windows and I am surprised to see the whole person looking back... I have to close my eyes at such times and remember myself, draw an internal pattern that is smooth and whole. (Williams 1991; quoted in hooks 1994, 74)

The Excluding Power of Whiteness in Higher Education

I belong to a generation of postcolonial women who have struggled together in the world of academe since the 1970s. We have now established a small but important community of women scholars of color in Britain. There is also a new generation of hopeful young black and ethnicized women challenging the traditions of the academy—but even then we are still so few in number, an endangered species! Research shows that only 85 of the UK's 18,500 professors are black (University and College Union 2013), and only 17 are black women (Grove 2014). Higher education in Britain still remains a "hideously white" place, rarely open to critical gaze (Back 2004, 3). It is not a place in which you expect to find many black bodies. Being a black body "out of place" in white institutions has emotional and psychological costs to the bearer of that difference (Ahmed 2012, 153).

There are costs to "just being there" in higher education. Black and minority ethnic students are more likely to leave university before completing their course than any other group. As Helen Connor et al. (2004) argue, the most influential reasons are unmet expectations about higher education. While financial and family difficulties, institutional factors (such as poor teaching), and wrong subject choice also feature, ethnic minority people reported additionally the feeling of isolation or hostility in academic culture. These are worrying findings, as they signal the fact that many black students do not feel they "belong." The findings of Diane Reay, Miriam David and Stephan Ball (2005) have shed some light on the process of exclusion experienced by young working-class and ethnic minority people seeking to enter higher education. They suggest young people can engage in a process of self-exclusion when making university choices. Drawing on Bourdieu, they show processes of exclusion work through having "a sense of one's place which leads one to exclude oneself from places from which one is excluded" (Reay, David and Ball 2005, 91). For the working classes, it is about what they must give up of themselves to belong, as one student at an elite university explains: "What's a person like me doing in a place like that?" (161). Working-class survivors in elite universities had learnt to navigate the hostilities of higher education through reflexively incorporating dominant middle-class academic dispositions into their own working-class habitus (Reay, Crozier and Clayton 2009).

Processes of exclusion in higher education are difficult to unpack as they are underscored by the complex dynamics of class, gender and race. Experiences are complex and relational and are located at the intersection

of structure, culture and agency. For some, university can be a positive experience. As Shirin Housee demonstrates, young South Asian women can find a space at university to express assertive, independent personas which enable them to freely express their religious identity. In opposition to the stereotype of Asian women as victims and recipients of patriarchal culture, they were "fighting back … and were not going to accept racism, sexism or any other -ism" (Housee 2004, 69).

However, while spaces of opposition can and do open up, Les Back (2004) suggests there are two antagonistic forces at play in higher education. One moves unconsciously and haphazardly towards what Stuart Hall has called "multicultural drift" (Hall 2000) and the other remains the "sheer weight of whiteness" (Back 2004, 1). With regard to the latter, in some institutions the "sheer weight of whiteness" is overt and almost impenetrable. Research looking at the University of Cambridge shows how elite culture is self-reinforcing. The university was perceived by non-elite and female respondents at Cambridge as a white, male, "tough and macho" culture that was "secretive, intimidating and insular." It was assumed by respondents at Cambridge that those in privileged positions were there because of their ability and merit. However, over 70% of readers and professors had a degree from Cambridge and a third of academics had no experience of any other university, the majority being there for over 20 years (Schneider-Ross 2001).

Nirmal Puwar (2004) draws on the social theorists Bourdieu and Foucault to explain how cultures of exclusion operate within contested social spaces such as universities:

> Social spaces are not blank and open for any body to occupy. Over time, through processes of historical sedimentation, certain types of bodies are designated as being the "natural" occupants of specific spaces…. Some bodies have the right to belong in certain locations, while others are marked out as trespassers who are in accordance with how both spaces and bodies are imagined, politically, historically and conceptually circumscribed as being "out of place." (Puwar 2004, 51)

Puwar suggests black bodies out of place are "space invaders." She argues there are several ways in which black bodies are constructed when they do not represent the "racial somatic norm" within white institutions (Puwar 2001; 2004). First there is "disorientation," a double take as you enter a room, as if you are not supposed to be there. You are noticed and it is uncomfortable. Like walking into a pub in a town where you don't live. There is confusion, as you are the not the naturally expected occupant of that position. I know this well: In many meetings, even though I am a professor, I have been mistaken as the coffee lady! Even students do a double take when they see you are the social-theory lecturer. Second, there is "infantilization"—here, black lecturers are not only pigeonholed into being "just race experts" but also seen as less capable of being in authority. This can mean black staff are assumed to be more junior than they are (I have been told to get off the photocopier, as it is not for administrators). There is a constant doubt about your skills, which can affect career progression. Third, there is the "burden of invisibility" translating into hyper-surveillance. Here you are viewed suspiciously and any mistakes are picked up and seen as a sign of misplaced authority. You have to work harder for recognition outside of the confines of stereotypical expectations and can suffer disciplinary measures and disappointment if you do not meet expectations in your work performance.

Sometimes I am shocked by the deeply racist comments I hear in everyday life in the higher echelons of our "civilized" universities. Recently, I was on a search committee for the appointment of a chair in a prestigious university. I was sent an e-mail by a senior white male academic about the applications. He stated there had been several candidates, who were described in terms of their research (they were white and not racialized), and then he mentioned one application from a "not very credible Indian." Why was "the Indian" racialized and none of the others? What difference did it make that he was Indian? What was I being "told" in this coded message? Was it that "all Indians want to come to England and will try anything"? Or that other trope,

that "Indian qualifications are not very good, and anyway an Indian can never be as good as a white (British) academic"? Why did the white *male* academic who sent the e-mail not think about what he was saying to me—a women of Indo-Caribbean heritage? Was it because even though I am one of them (an Indian) I am now also one of "us" (an honorary "white" who can speak their language)? Why did he say it at all? Maybe because he could.

Frantz Fanon's timeless prose can help us understand the personal costs of the racialized phenomenon of "a not very credible Indian":

> We have a Senegalese teacher. He is quite bright…. Our doctor is coloured. He is very gentle. It was always the Negro teacher, the Negro doctor… I knew, for instance, that if the physician made a mistake it would be the end of him and all those who came after him. What could one expect, after all, from a Negro physician? As long as everything went well, he was praised to the skies. But look out, no nonsense under any conditions…. I tell you I was walled in; no exception was made for my fine manners, or my knowledge of literature, or my understanding of quantum theory. (Fanon 1986, 117)

Marginality, Resistance, and Decolonizing the Academy

From the diaries of Cornelia Sorabji (Visram 2002) and the eloquent lectures of Patricia Williams (Williams 1997) we can begin to open up and understand the complex, multidimensional embodied world black and ethnicized women inhabit on the margins of white institutions. Moreover, we need to understand black and ethnicized women's agency and subjectivity in relation to decolonizing their space on the margin. Marginality, as bell hooks (1991) argues, can be a space of radical location in which women of color can situate themselves in relation to the dominant group through "other ways of knowing." hooks recounts her own story of leaving home and going to university and becoming a successful academic: "When I left that concrete space on the margins, I kept alive in my heart ways of knowing reality … [I was] sustained by remembrance of the past, which includes recollections of broken tongues that decolonize our minds, our very beings" (hooks 1991, 150). She argues that we should reclaim the word "margin" from its traditional use as a marker of exclusion and see it as an act of positive appropriation for black women:

> Marginality is a central location for the production of a counter-hegemonic discourse—it is found in the words, habits and the way one lives…. It is a site one clings to even when moving to the center … it nourishes our capacity to resist…. It is an inclusive space where we recover ourselves, where we move in solidarity to erase the category colonizer/colonized. (hooks 1991, 149–50)

Black women appear to occupy parallel discursive spheres—a "third space" of radical opposition and alternative citizenship (Mirza 1997). Nancy Fraser calls this third space "hidden counter public" spheres; they are arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses, which in turn permit them to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests and needs (Fraser 1994, 84).

In my research on African Caribbean women educators working in black community schools (supplementary or Saturday schools), I found black women worked alongside the dominant educational discourse (Mirza 2009). In their space on the margin, with their quiet and subversive acts of care and "other ways of knowing," these women operate within, between, under and alongside the mainstream educational and labor market structures, subverting, renaming and reclaiming opportunities for their children through the transformative pedagogy of "raising the race"—a radical pedagogy that ironically appears conservative on the surface, with its focus on inclusion and dialogue with the mainstream.

Black women appear to seek social transformation through educational change. The African Caribbean women teachers in black supplementary schools, as indeed those working and studying in universities and schools, struggle for educational inclusion in order to transform opportunities for themselves and their children. In covert and quiet ways (unlike street riots, which signal masculine social change), these women work to keep alive the black communities' collective desire for self-knowledge and a belief in the power of schooling to militate against racial barriers (Fordham 1996, 63). As Casey writes, education acquires a different meaning in the context of racist oppression:

> In a racist society … to become educated is to contradict the whole system of racist signification … to succeed in studying white knowledge is to undo the system itself … to refute its reproduction of black inferiority materially and symbolically. (Casey 1993, 123)

For African Caribbean women, educational institutions are not just mechanisms through which individuals are unconsciously subjected to the dominant ideological system but rather, as the Brazilian critical theorist Paulo Freire argues, education is the terrain on which they acquire consciousness of their position and struggle (Freire 2004). Just as the black women educators have, through their experience, developed a strategic rationalization of their situation and opportunities, so too have black and ethnicized women in higher education developed a sense of their space on the margin through self-actualization and self-definition.

Conclusion

I began by asking the question, "How do racial and gender distinctions come to structure the experiences of black and ethnicized women in our places of learning?" This paper addresses the issue of black and ethnicized female identity and subjectivity by exploring the way the intersectionality of race and gender is systematically organized through embodied social relations in our places of higher learning. The Indian suffragettes and Cornelia Sorabji in late nineteenth century are symbolic of the erasure of an ethnicized black feminist/womanist presence in mainstream (white) educational establishments. An analysis of their embodied subjecthood illuminates the invisible ways in which their raced and gendered intersectional "difference" is lived out in the contingent historical specificity of the academic and educational discourse. They are "mute visible objects" excluded through processes of containment or surveillance, located on or in the margins of structures that conceal the technologies and power of monolithic whiteness. The second question—"Why is there a persistent expression of educational desire and optimism among black and ethnicized women?"—is addressed through an understanding of the ways in which women of color continually resist and rename the regulatory effects of discourses of educational inequity and subjugation in higher education. Ultimately, black and ethnicized women engage in embodied work to decolonize higher education. They challenge systematic institutionalized discriminatory practices deeply embedded in the academy through their collective agency and educational desire for personal transformation through knowledge and educational opportunities.

Notes

1. In this article I use the term "black and ethnicized women" (interchangeably with "women of color"), as being or becoming "ethnicized" brings into play the power relations that inform and structure the gaze of the "other" and

symbolizes the movement between the culturalization of race and epidermalization of racial identification in different national discursive contexts (Mirza 1997b). While official policy terms in the UK, such as "black and minority ethnic" (BME), denote the social construction of difference through visible racial (black) and cultural (ethnic) markers, they do not emphasize the process of racial objectification (see Bhavnani, Mirza and Meetoo 2005).

2. For an image of Cornelia Sorabji, see the website of the National Portrait Gallery at http://www.npg.org.uk/whatson/display/2012/cornelia-sorabji-indias-first-woman-lawyer.php. Accessed 6 October 2014.

3. The image may be viewed on the Museum of London website: http://www.museumoflondonprints.com/image/79116/photograph-of-indian-suffragettes-on-the-womens-coronation-procession-17-june-1911. Accessed 6 October 2014.

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