ABSTRACT

Despite ten years of democracy, gross inequities continue to permeate South African society, implying the need for emancipatory theory and practice. Furthermore, despite a minority critical voice, South African Psychology, as elsewhere, has been a generally conservative discipline. In this paper I explore how a radical plural feminism provides a resource for liberatory theory/practice. Drawing on Foucauldian discourse and postcolonial insights, this framework performs a ‘both/and’ (rather than an ‘either/or’) function in the theorising and practice of diversity/unity and micro/macro-level politics. This theory is installed in practice through intellectual activism. Intellectual activism implies in this context: refusing abstractions that pre-define who one is, while at the same time strategically deploying plural identities around contingent issues; working in the bordersites of dominant understandings; identifying, communicating and acting upon transversal relations of commonality; identifying and inhabiting the contradictions and disparities
contained in dominant and oppressive discourses; and being constantly vigilant and reflective in terms of self, other, context, process, assumptions and theory.

KEY WORDS: Feminism; activism; South African Psychology
The recent move to post-structuralist theorising/practice has meant that our conceptualisation of a dualism between theory and action has become untenable. Theory is always already a practice (whether in production, debate or reading), infused with power relations that centre around race, gender, class, ability, age and sexual orientation. Furthermore, practices are always already shot through with theory (at the very least assumptions about the nature of personhood, society, relationships, services etc.), whether this is tacit and unacknowledged or overt and acknowledged. Therefore, in attempting to understand the relationship of theory to action we need to pose the question in a way that understands theory as a practice and practice as theory. Nevertheless, as with the individual/society divide with which Henriques et al (1984/1998) grappled, the theory/action dualism remains a complex one, with deconstructive efforts being counterbalanced by the seeming re-assertion of the dualism.

How, then, are we to consider the relationship of theory to action and what is the role of theory in action? I believe that the starting point in considering these questions should be to specify and contextualise the action/theorising about which one is talking. What are the ends of this specific practice of theorising or taking action and where is it located? Otherwise we risk (perhaps inadvertently) universalising practices of theorising and action where such universalism may be unfounded. For this reason I have positioned this paper within the contradictory context of Psychology in post-Apartheid South Africa. I have posed my central questions as: How does a radical plural feminism that draws on Foucauldian and post-colonial theory provide a resource for emancipatory or liberatory analyses and practices in Psychology in post-Apartheid South Africa? And how does this theory as practice install itself in practice as theory?
My basic argument is this: While South Africa has one of the most progressive constitutions in the world (for example, gay rights are enshrined in the constitution) and a multi-party democratic system, gross inequities (such as access to land, water, employment, health services, and education) continue to exist. These inequities tend (although not exclusively) to fracture along race and gender lines. Furthermore, post-Apartheid South Africa has, after the lifting of various forms of sanctions, been pulled further and further into the global network of post-capitalism, developmentalism, and neo-colonial cultural hegemony. Within this context there is a need for the deployment within Psychology of theoretical resources that have liberatory effects not only within South Africa but also in terms of South Africa’s interpellation within the post-colonial, global community. I believe that a radical plural feminism that draws on Foucauldian analytics of power and post-colonialism (see further explication of this framework later in the paper) provides such as resource as it:

(1) Deconstructs the ‘centre’ as the normalised present, foregrounding the ‘periphery’ or the absent trace (e.g. those marginalised or else exoticised by mainstream psychological and political theory and practice), while at the same time avoiding the search for the myth of origin through totalising or essentialising the experience, mentality or subjectivity of the ‘Other’;

(2) Theorises hybridity and multiplicity while not slipping into rampant relativism;

(3) Challenges theoretical assumptions produced and circulated in well-resourced ‘first world’ centres of psychological scholarship while avoiding calling into question the entire epistemological edifice generated there;

(4) Attunes its pronouncements on liberatory practices and discourses to social and historical conditions;

(5) Interlinks micro- and macro-level analyses and actions;
(6) Deploys multiple sources of resistance along chains of equivalence or transversal relations of commonality;

(7) Replaces a unitary notion of gender identity with a dynamic, plural and relational model of subjectivity constructed within power relations.

This theory as practice may be installed in practice as theory through intellectual activism (that takes a variety of forms).

In fleshing out this argument, I, firstly, provide a thumb-nail sketch of challenges to mainstream Psychology in South Africa from the 1980s. This will contextualise the need for a liberatory focus to psychological theorising in this country. Secondly, I explore European and North American feminist critiques of Foucauldian analytics, as these critiques need to be taken into consideration in formulating a radical plural feminism that draws on Foucauldian theory. Thirdly, I argue that while these feminist debates concerning Foucauldian discourse provide some useful insights for South African feminists, what is missing from these discussions is the postcolonial problematic. I discuss postcolonial writers’ engagements with Foucault and briefly outline a Foucauldian postcolonial radical plural feminism. Finally, I discuss how intellectual activism forms the forward slash (/) of theory/practice in this particular instance.

**Challenges to psychological theorising and practice in South Africa**

South Africa is the African country in which the most engagement in the theory and practice in Psychology has taken place (Gilbert, 2000). This is partially because of the country’s historical legacy of an extended form of colonialism in the form of a home-grown system of segregation and oppression (viz., Apartheid) and partially because of South
Africa’s relative wealth on the African continent. Psychology established itself in universities, industries, the health and education sectors and private practice at various times from the early 20th century. Psychological research, teaching and practice have been, for the most part, conservative. An a-political, value neutral model of research has been practised; curricula reflective of European and North American texts and courses have dominated the lecture halls; a private enterprise, individual intervention mode of practice has been adopted; specialist areas, such as Industrial and Educational Psychology, have served the interests of the white capitalist elite; and the category of professional psychologist has been and continues to be predominantly occupied by whites. There have, however, also been strong, minority voices challenging mainstream Psychological theory/practice and practice/theory. Some of these challenges have been formulated within theories used by European and North American Psychology to critique Psychology’s endeavours in these contexts (e.g. Marxism, feminism, post-structuralism, Lacanian-based psychoanalysis). Others have located their critiques within theories of Black Consciousness and post-colonialism.

As pointed out by many post-structuralist writers, theory/practice is always contingent, historical and contextual. In the following I trace some of the developments of a Critical South African Psychology since the 1980s within the political context of the time. Of necessity this is an abbreviated version in which the richness of the debates around particular issues will not be reflected (see Painter & Terre Blanche, 2004, for a more comprehensive review).

The 1980s were a time of brutal racial repression and political uprisings in South Africa. During this time, however, the lowest proportion of articles dealing with race appeared in
the *South African Journal of Psychology*. This is probably because researchers adopted a value-free medical model of their research, thus ‘legitimately’ ignoring issues of race (Durrheim & Mokeki, 1997). Simultaneously, however, a group of psychologists began what came to be termed the **relevance debate**, in which the relevance of Psychology in the context of Apartheid South Africa was called into question. Psychological theory and practice were accused of ignoring the dialectical relationship between individuals and the socio-political context within which they live (Anonymous, 1987), and of adhering to a non-critical, conservative ideology which either actively or inadvertently supported Apartheid ideology (Dawes, 1985), ignored working class issues (Dawes, 1986), perpetuated inequities in mental health service provision (Vogelman, 1986), lacked constructs for dealing with the process of change, and viewed culture in a mechanistic manner (Gilbert, 1989). At the same time, certain forms of Community Psychology (see Seedat, Cloete & Shochet, 1988) and what Painter and Terre Blanche (in press) refer to as ‘proto-critical Social Psychology’ (e.g. the work of Don Foster & colleagues) emerged as sites of struggle against the practices of Apartheid and the mental health implications thereof. Others argued for the continued relevance of certain clinical therapeutic skills (Perkel, 1988), for the maintenance of a division between political beliefs and scientific work (Biesheuvel, 1991) and for an authentic indigenous African Psychology, with ‘Western’ Psychology being described as ‘impoverished in soul and poor in spirit’ (Holdstock, 1981, p. 128). An ‘alternative’ or ‘oppositional’ journal, *Psychology in Society*, appeared for the first time in 1983, with an editorial masthead to critically explore the nature of theory and practice in Psychology in Apartheid and capitalist society. Anti-apartheid groupings like the Organisation for Appropriate Social Services in South Africa (OASSA), Psychologists Against Apartheid, and the South African Health and Social Services Organisation were formed.
Early 1990 saw the release Nelson Mandela from prison and the beginning of the time of transition. Publications relating to mental health practice and policy (steeped in the hope of providing equitable, primary mental health care to all) appeared. An active promotion of an understanding of mental health as related to social policies, and the decentralization of mental health care were called for (e.g. Freeman, 1991; Freeman & De Beer, 1992; Pillay & Freeman, 1996). Articles dealing with race began to take a more political, critical stance (Durrheim & Mokeki, 1997). Black psychologists (e.g. Manganyi, 1991; Nicholas, 1993; Nicholas & Cooper 1990), drawing from post-colonialism, Black Consciousness and Soviet Psychology, challenged both the liberal and socialist traditions in South African Psychology for their treatment of race and racism. For example, Manganyi (1991) stated that he had ‘little interest in the fashionable but sterile notion of a “relevant” psychological theory and practise … This form of intellectual tinkering in the past produced isolated interventions of the “Jim-comes-to-Jo’burg” variety, so-called cross-cultural explanations … [and] reinvent[ions] of the traditional healer’ (p. 120/1).

The ‘miracle’ of the first democratic elections in 1994 saw the introduction of the Mandela era of reconciliation, with terms such as the ‘rainbow nation’ being coined. The Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), the ANC’s economic manifesto that emphasised basic needs provision and inclusive economic growth and development, was superseded in 1996 by the Growth, Employment and Redistribution Policy (GEAR), which firmly entrenched neo-liberal orthodoxy aimed at the integration of the South African economy into the global market place (a shift that has been severely criticised by trade unions – Madisha, 2000). Transformation became the key activity in a number of areas, including Psychology. A new framework for practice was introduced by the Professional
Board\textsuperscript{2}, and the Psychological Society of South Africa (PsySSA) was launched, integrating previous voluntary associations of psychologists and social service providers that were split along ideological and (mostly) racial lines. Both these developments have, over the years, been subject to intense controversy, with legal action being taken in some instances. In this period, two special editions of the *South African Journal of Psychology* appeared, one devoted to gender issues in Psychology and one to black scholarship (appearing in 1995 and 1997 respectively). These challenged the relative silence of South African Psychology on issues of gender and race.

The Mbeki era (from 1999) is characterised by a focus on Black Economic Empowerment (chiefly aimed at large-scale private enterprise), a commitment to GEAR, and the strengthening of South Africa’s continental role primarily through the New Economic Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD). While much has changed since democracy, much has remained the same, with poverty and inequities in wealth and resource distribution remaining primary problems. Psychology reflects this. On the one hand, psychologists continue to uncritically apply the value-neutral, scientific model of research and ‘Western’ oriented theories and practices (in particular medical aid focussed individual therapeutic models). In a recent situational analysis of psychological research (Macleod, 2004) it was found that a minority of studies illuminate the interweaving of the individual with the socio-political context and that knowledge is being generated chiefly about urban, middle-class adults living in the three wealthiest provinces. On the other hand, there has been a strengthening of what broadly could be called a Critical Psychology network in South Africa. The annual Qualitative Methods conference (started in 1995) has become more prominent; some books (e.g. Duncan, Van Niekerk, De la Rey & Seedat, 2001; Hook, Mkhize, Kiguwa & Collins, 2004) that interweave the personal with the
Various forms of social constructionism, post-modernism and post-structuralism have become popular theoretical resources from which critical psychologists in South Africa have drawn. Academics and practitioners have been attracted to these approaches as they are attentive to power relations, and deconstruct dominant understandings of being human, allowing space for the Other. The multiple points of diffraction around which ‘Other-ness’ is constructed (gender, race, class, and sexual orientation and, within these, site of living, access to basic amenities, means of survival, ability, and age) and the power relations contingent upon these, are highly visible in the South African context. Levett & Kottler (1997), for example, argue that in South Africa the category of gender is too simple, and hence feminism is too simple.

Yet while these theoretical turns, together with discourse analysis, represent somewhat of a growth industry in South African Critical Psychology, there have also been debates about the usefulness of these paradigms (see, for example, the exchanges between Van Staden (1998) and Terre Blanche (1998) and between Painter and Theron (2001a; 2001b) and Durrheim (2001)). In this paper I wish to explore the link between a specified type of post-structuralism, which draws on Foucauldian analytics of power, and emancipatory practice. I agree with Mouffe (1995) that the conflation of post-modernism (and social constructionism) with post-structuralism has been unhelpful and has led to confusion in feminist debates. Even within these broad theoretical fields there is a range of conversations and practices, as pointed out by Kenneth Gergen (1998) with regard to social
constructionism. For these reasons, I advocate greater specificity of theoretical foundations in the discussions on theory and practice.

The need to infuse post-colonial insights into Foucauldian-based feminist analytics

Foucauldian analytics have been received with varying degrees of enthusiasm amongst feminists. His work has been seen by some feminists as fertile ground for feminist analyses and action. This is largely because he shared with feminist thinking a concern with sexuality as a key area of political struggle; with expanding the political to include everyday social domination; critiquing biological determinism, humanism, and the search for a scientific ‘truth’; and undermining the modern conceptualisation of the rational subject (McNay, 1992). Others, however, see Foucauldian analytics as incompatible with feminist theory. In the following section I discuss these critiques as they need careful consideration in the exposition of a Foucauldian-informed, radical plural feminism.

I want to point out, however, that these critiques and the responses to them (outlined below) emanate chiefly from European and North American feminists. I argue that while these discussions provide some useful theoretical insights for African feminists, for a number of reasons they are insufficient in the task of theorising and practising feminisms in the South African context. Firstly, the socio-historical circumstances of the rise of feminisms in South Africa differs from that in Europe and America. Certainly, there has been a fair amount of strategic usage or appropriation of feminist ideas and practices generated in ‘Western’ contexts but, importantly, South African and African women’s movements and feminisms have emerged chiefly out of women’s engagement in national liberation
struggles (although African feminists have asserted that African women’s resistance and activism against asymmetrical gender power relations pre-dates colonialisation – Guy-Sheftall, 2003). This has created a tension for South African and African feminisms in that the criticism of African gender relations is seen by some as potentially weakening Africa’s resistance to neo-colonialism (Arndt, 2002). Secondly, while some feminists located in ‘First World’ resourced contexts recognise the politics of their location (see, for example, Burman, 1998), all too frequently the former colonies or ‘Third World’ act as the suppressed absent trace6 to the pre-occupations of the gender-race-class relations of the ‘First World’. Roth (2003) asserts that this has been equally true for US-based black feminisms. There is little acknowledgement of the manner in which the ‘periphery’ (the colonies, the ‘Third World’) inhabits and defines the ‘metropole’ (the parent country, the ‘First World’). This relationship is historical, material (e.g. structural adjustment programmes that are imposed on ‘developing countries’ by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund; sweatshops located in poor countries) and discursive (the ‘developed’ world only has meaning in relation to the ‘developing’ world). Thirdly, where ‘Third World’ women do appear in the theorising of Euro-American scholars, they are frequently homogenized into a single category (see Mohanty’s (1991) analysis of this), or have been excavated as a resource for ‘Western’ theory (Lal, 1999). Lastly, the social realities of South Africa’s history of racialised political repression and oppression, struggle politics, exile and return, and current issues around HIV/AIDS, land rights disputes, developmentalism (in the socio-economic sense), continental militarization and political instability together with refugee-ism, global capitalism, poverty, and neo-colonialism (in addition to the challenges of heterosexuality, racism, class struggle, and domestic violence) imply an added complexity of feminist theorising and activism concerning the history and current circumstances of gender relations in the South African (and African) contexts. For
these reasons, I believe that post-structural feminism in South Africa should be infused with post-colonial insights that draw on and extend Foucault.

**Feminist critiques of Foucault**

In terms of his actual analyses, Foucault has been accused of covert androcentricity in some of his work. For example, in his work on prisons, he did not consider how the treatment of male and female prisoners differed (Soper, 1993). At an epistemological level, feminist critiques centre around two main concerns, viz. nihilism and relativism. These, in turn, lead to charges that Foucauldian analytics leave no space for emancipatory practice and for macro-level structures of domination to be analysed or undermined (Balbus, 1988; Deveaux, 1999; Harding, 1992; Hartsock, 1990, Hawkesworth, 1989).

Foucault is accused of being nihilistic as he does not provide criteria by which to judge either one regime of truth as superior to another, or societies or relations as better or worse than each other. This means that there is no standpoint from which to engage in emancipatory politics and nothing to strive for. Since power is everywhere, it is ultimately nowhere making it impossible to distinguish between malign and benign forms of power. This makes social improvement impossible, as successful resistance means simply changing one discursive identity for another, thus creating new oppressions. Foucauldian discourse risks sliding into depoliticised relativism where every viewpoint becomes equally valid and true. There is no indication of what action follows from analysis as there is no normative or theoretical basis for making political judgement or statements.
Post-colonial engagements with Foucault

As with feminists, many post-colonial writers have been critical of post-structuralist theory, overtly rejecting it as a ‘Western’ model of critique. Others have constructively engaged with Foucault, seeing Foucault as useful because his genealogies of the ‘West’ provide a powerful critique of the rule of modernity that the colonies experienced in a peculiar form. For example, Prakash (1995) notes, with regard to India, that the power of ‘Western’ discourses operates through their (‘Western’ discourses) authorization and deployment by the nation-state, while in the ‘West’, Orientalist discourse plays a ‘vital role in projecting the First World as the radiating centre around which others are arranged’ (p. 89). He believes that it is for this reason that Foucault’s (and Derrida’s) critiques of ‘Western’ thought intersect with postcolonial criticism.

Edward Said stands out as the theorist who initially deployed Foucauldian insights in a post-colonialist project (most notably in Orientalism). Said (1993) acknowledges his indebtedness to Foucault (in particular Foucault’s genealogies), but critiques him for the ignoring imperialism in his work. Said takes up this challenge, asserting that Orientalism represents a colonial discourse that is deployed in the management of colonial and post-colonial relations. Said’s relationship with Foucauldian analytics shifted over time, however. As with the feminists mentioned above, he became increasingly sceptical of Foucault’s micro-physics of power and the possibility of resistance within this framework (Kennedy, 2000).

While Said’s work is an important starting point for a Foucauldian-based understanding of post-colonialism, there are also difficulties with his use of Foucault. He has been accused of
drawing on the conflicting methodologies of Foucault, Gramsci and humanism, and of representing Orientalism as always and everywhere the same, in contradistinction to Foucault’s model of discourse as entailing multiple (at times contradictory) institutional and discursive practices (Kennedy, 2000). Bhabha (1994) takes up the last point, utilising the concepts of heterogeneity, hybridity and mimicry in response to what he calls the ‘underdeveloped’ sections of Orientalism (see later discussion). As with Foucault, Said is accused of gender blindness (e.g. assuming similitude between male and female colonial travellers) and of not considering that women may speak for themselves (Kennedy, 2000).


There has been some controversy concerning how Foucault has been taken up in South Africa. For example, Butchart (1998) admits in his genealogy that there is a diversity of readings of Foucault (and hence that a range of methodologies is possible). However, he is
less tolerant of this in an earlier article (Butchart, 1997). Here he asserts that Foucault has received a limited and distorted reception in South African socio-medical sciences. The distortion he refers to is the attempt by some authors to press Foucault into liberal-humanist or Marxist directions. While I agree that this is true of some of the examples he quotes (e.g. Dawes, 1986), his reading of others (e.g. Wilbraham, 1996, 1997) does a disservice to the incisiveness of the Foucauldian analyses deployed in this work.

**Foucauldian post-colonial radical plural feminisms**

As seen above, feminist and post-colonial writers’ responses to Foucault have been varied, with even the critiques at times contradictory. For example, contrary to the accusation of relativism, Spivak (1988) accuses Foucault of utopianism. These differences in response have largely to do with particular interpretations of Foucault’s work, and the period of his writing upon which authors focus. Foucault’s early works centred on the analysis of historically situated systems of institutions and discursive practices. His methodological treatise, the *Archaeology of Knowledge* (Foucault, 1972) attempted to work out a theory of rule-governed systems of discursive practices. In his genealogical work (e.g. *Discipline and Punish* (Foucault, 1977) and *The History of Sexuality: Vol. 1* (Foucault, 1978)) he isolated components of present-day political technologies and traced them back in time, concentrating on the relations of power, knowledge and the body in modern society. These genealogical studies tended to focus on the micro-physics of power, hence the feminist objections raised above. His interviews, which he viewed as part of his work, focussed more specifically on the political nature of his work than did his books, which he saw as historical treatises (Deveaux, 1999). In his series of lectures in 1978 on governmentality (Foucault, 1991; Gordon, 1991) Foucault argued that the same style of analysis which he
used to study the installation of power in everyday relations and practices could be applied
to techniques and practices of governing populations of subjects. In his last works, Foucault
(1985, 1986) turned his attention to the formation of subjectivity, and what he called the
‘techniques of the self’.

In this section I discuss some responses to the critiques outlined above, and propose a
radical plural feminism that is based on Foucauldian theory infused with post-colonial
insights. I have borrowed the term ‘radical plural feminism’ from Sawicki (1991) who
discusses Foucault in relation to feminism. The feminism proposed is radical in
contradistinction to liberal notions of multiplicity and plural as it takes into account
diversity (within a chain of equivalence – see later discussion).

It is true that Foucault was reluctant to delineate a clear-cut political agenda because of his
sense of the dangers of programmes based on grand theory. However, his writings were
clearly political. Determining the liberatory status of any discourse, for Foucault, is not a
matter of theoretical or political pronouncement based on meta-narratives. Rather, these
determinations are a matter of social and historical inquiry (Sawicki, 1988). For example,
he observed that psychoanalysis played a liberating role in relation to psychiatry, but as a
global theory it has contributed to forms of social control and normalisation. Similarly, in
South Africa, there is a small, but active natural childbirth movement that attempts to wrest
reproduction from the oppressive effects of its medicalisation and return it to the home. On
the other hand, maternal deaths in certain areas (particularly former homelands) are high
owing to poor or non-existent health-care facilities. Here the lack of choice to access
health-care when in need is oppressive and lobbying for increased quality and quantity of
medical facilities liberatory.
The acknowledgement of the social and historical contingency of emancipatory discourses and practices does not mean a slide into rampant relativism or a postmodern pastiche opposing imperial grand narratives. Lather (1992) points out that those writers who accuse Foucault of relativism do so from a modernist definition in which relativism is an evil to be avoided at all costs, as this means giving up all notions of truth, falsity and rationality. The notion of relativity assumes a foundational structure or Archimedian standpoint. From a Foucauldian perspective, the definition of knowledge as absolute or relative is misconceived. However, in rejecting a search for absolute grounding, Foucauldian analytics does not reverse the binary opposition and advocate relativity. Instead, the absolute/relative opposition is collapsed. While knowledge is seen as contextual and historical, notions of truth are not abandoned – they merely cease to take on the aspect of absolute Truth.

Foucault’s asserts that power does not exist in a bipolar form. Instead it is ‘employed and exercised through a net-like organisation’ (Foucault, 1980, p. 98). Furthermore, power is not localised in a particular institution or person nor can it be appropriated as a commodity. Thus within a radical plural feminism, the bipolar position of men or colonialists as possessing power and women and the colonized as powerless ceases to be an option. Instead, we are all enmeshed in power relations that are neither stable nor unitary. This does not, however, mean that there is no domination. While men’s and ‘white’s’ enmeshment in the patchwork of patriarchal and neo-colonial power can be acknowledged, this does not mitigate the fact that they have a higher stake in maintaining institutional and domestic power relations within which they occupy dominant positions. Thus in a radical plural feminism, the commonality around gendered relations remains, but one strategy of
resistance is not privileged over another. Indeed, Foucault insisted on the multiplicity of sources of resistance. There is ‘no single locus of great Refusal, no soul of revolt’, but rather shifting points of resistance that ‘inflame certain parts of the body, certain moments in life’ (Foucault, 1978, p. 96).

Resistance is possible through reverse or subjugated discourses that seek to subvert hegemonic discourses. ‘It it through the re-appearance of this knowledge, of these local popular knowledges, these disqualified knowledges, that criticism performs its work’ (Foucault, 1980, p. 96). The ‘centre’ becomes de-stablised or de-totalised through the insertion of the ‘periphery’ (in its multiplicity). Bhabha’s (1994) notions of mimicry and hybridity have pertinence here. Mimicry is when the colonized rewrite colonial discourse, thereby turning that discourse into a hybrid product. It is essentially a deconstructive practice, whereby the colonized, through language and practice, reveal the contradictions and inconsistencies in colonial discourse and utilise this as an in-between space for resistance and subversion. An example within Psychology is the work of Manganyi (1973, 1991), one of the first trained black clinical psychologists in South Africa, who wrote about the psychological experience (colonial discourse) of black people from a Black Consciousness perspective (hybrid product).

Foucault (1982), in a paper entitled ‘The Subject and Power’, proposes a ‘new economy of power relations’ in which the starting point is the forms of resistance that oppose the effects of power/knowledge and refuse abstractions which determine who one is. These forms of resistance are transversal, but also immediate in that they focus on issues closest to hand. The implication of this ‘both/and’ (rather than ‘either/or’) reasoning (transversal and immediate) in terms of radical plural feminism is that feminist political practice becomes a
matter of alliances rather than one of unity around a universally shared interest. Unitary notions of gender identity are replaced with plural and complexly constructed conceptions of social identity (Allen & Baber, 1992). Refusal of foreclosed identities (e.g. women as a single oppressed class across space and time) within transversal relations of commonality (e.g. oppressive practices centring around reproduction) becomes possible. Thus, within this politics of difference, the aim is not to overcome differences in order to achieve a political unity, but rather to use difference as a resource around which to establish multiple points of resistance to the myriad of relations of inequality and domination.

Some feminists have expressed concern that the movement away from viewing women as a single oppressed class across space and time has resulted in the total displacement of the category women and therefore the impossibility of feminist political action. While in a radical plural feminism, based on Foucault, the multiple and contingent nature of subjectivity is recognised, this does not mean an equitable plurality of subject positions. Instead, as Mouffe (1995) puts it, there is ‘the constant subversion and overdetermination of one by others, which make possible the generation of “totalizing effects” within a field characterized by open and indeterminate frontiers’ (p. 318). Women cease being a coherent group, but are linked in a chain of equivalence that articulates political issues related not only to gender but also racism, classism, neo-colonialism, heterosexism etc.

An excellent example of this chain of equivalence is seen in the post-colonial feminist writer Mohanty’s (1999) work, in which she examines two instances of the incorporation of women into the global economy (women lacemakers in India and women in the electronics industry in the United States). Her work indicates that despite obvious geographical and sociocultural differences between these women, particular gendered readings allow for
them to be positioned in very similar ways. The chain of equivalence in this case centred around women’s identity as workers being constructed as secondary to their familial and domestic roles. This type of gendered reading, Mohanty points out, is predicated on local and transnational patriarchal and racial hierarchies. A Southern African example is the colloquium on ‘Instituting Gender Equality in Schools: Working in an HIV/AIDS Environment’ with researchers, educators, HIV/AIDS workers, gender activists and non-governmental organisation workers in attendance. At this colloquium (papers are published in *Agenda*, Vol. 53), a need to create space for alternative views, to avoid seeing youth as a homogeneous group, and to craft interventions to suit the specificity of local context was recognised. However, within this diversity, a chain of equivalence was identified as the centrality of gender in discourse and practice surrounding sexuality and HIV/AIDS (Burns, 2002). Thus, in radical plural feminism, while multiple points of intervention and resistance are established according to pertinent social and historical circumstances, commonality around chains of equivalence or transversal relations of power prevents feminism from slipping into rampant relativism.

Within radical plural feminism, feminist critique need forswear neither large historical narratives (say, of patriarchy) nor analyses of societal macrostructures (e.g. sexism). However, theory must be historical and attuned to the ‘cultural’ and group specificity. This interlinkage (between the micro- and macro-level) is made possible by Foucault’s governmental analyses. Although Foucault initially concentrated on micro-strategies and power at its capillary points, he never denied (contrary to some feminists’ reading of his work) that these are taken up in global or macrostrategies of domination. He merely refused to privilege a centre of power and conducted an ‘ascending analysis of power’ (Foucault, 1980, p. 99). Later, in his lectures on governmentality Foucault extended these
analyses, attempting to ‘cut the Gordian knot of the relation between micro- and macro-levels of power’ (Dean, 1994, p. 179) by applying the same kind of analysis at the macro-level that he had previously applied at the micro-level – one that emphasises the practices of government.

Foucault (1991) used the terms government and governmentality in inter-related ways. He defined government as the ‘conduct of conduct’ – an activity (at macro-level) that aims to shape, guide or affect the behaviour, actions or comportment of people (at the micro-level). This concerns the interweaving of the relation of the self with the self, private interpersonal relations which involve some sort of control or guidance, relations within social institutions, and relations concerned with the exercise of political sovereignty (Gordon, 1991). Governmentality he viewed as the rationality or art of government, which he explained as a way or system of knowing and thinking about the nature of the practice of government. Governmentality is a complex system, exercised through an ensemble of institutions, procedures, analyses, reflections, calculations and tactics. The development of the science of government emerged in response to (1) the re-centring of the economy on a different plane from that of the family, and (2) the emergence of the problem of the population. The family disappeared as a model of government and as the site of production. Instead, population (macro-level), its welfare, the improvement of its wealth and health, its capacity to wage war and engage in labour, etc. became the goal of government. The family (micro-level), however, became central to the macro-level as it emerged as ‘an element internal to population, and as a fundamental instrument in its government’ (Foucault, 1991, p. 99). A colleague and I (Macleod & Durrheim, 2002b) have argued elsewhere that feminist-informed governmental analyses may provide the intellectual grounds for holding diversity within commonality (i.e. making the links between micro-
level practices and strategies of resistance and macro-level concentrations of power, e.g. patriarchy).

Radical plural feminism is distinct from liberal pluralism and the neo-colonial notion of multiculturalism (see Beckett & Macey (2001) regarding the oppressive effects of multiculturalism). In the latter, diversity becomes a matter of personal identity, that is to be accepted, understood and tolerated, thus masking power relations (e.g. in the form of the normalised absent person doing the accepting and tolerating, and the inequities inherent in the class, caste, race, gender, religious, ethnic, sexual orientation and national differentiations). Radical plural feminism operates within a dynamic, plural, relational model of identity formed in a context of power relations (Sawicki, 1991). Thus there is a recognition that differentiation is almost always an imbalanced process, with, as Prakash (1995) puts it, ‘the recognition that the functioning of colonial power [and not merely its effects] was heterogeneous’ (p. 96, emphasis in the original).

The bridges: intellectual activism and political reflections

I return in this final section to the question of the relationship between theory and practice. How does theory as practice install itself in practice as theory? What happens at the forward slash (/) of theory/action? Specifically, in term of the radical plural feminism discussed above, I believe that this space is occupied by intellectual activism.

Earlier, we saw how Foucault privileged the re-appearance of disqualified, peripheral knowledge in modes of resistance. This is, in essence, intellectual activism, not necessarily carried out by the acknowledged intellectual or academic, but also by the activist who
understands oppression from within. In terms of radical plural feminism, intellectual activism implies a number of practices.

Firstly, it implies refusing abstractions that pre-define who one is, while at the same time strategically deploying plural identities around contingent issues. For example, activists from South Africa’s Treatment Action Campaign (which describes itself as a grassroots movement for HIV treatment literacy) actively undermine definitions of themselves as sick or as victims. At the same time, they have strategically deployed the identities of poor women infected with HIV and women with no choice in their campaign to force the South African government to offer treatment to prevent mother to child transmission of HIV.

Secondly, intellectual activism means identifying and inhabiting the contradictions and disparities contained in dominant and oppressive discourses, thereby creating hybrid spaces. For example, in ‘The Johannesburg Statement on Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, and Human Rights’ (www.hrw.org/lgbt/pdf/joburg_statement021304.htm), a coalition of African lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender organisations call on African governments to support a resolution before the United Nations Commission on Human Rights. In the statement, they foreground their status as the feared Other (‘That we are targets of … abuse proves that we exist – states do not persecute phantoms or ghosts’ – see, for example, Robert Mugabe’s vociferous denial of African homosexuality). In their appeal to African governments, they occupy notions of African democracy, African communal interrelatedness and interdependency and a time before ‘colonialism cast its stultifying shadow’ (all of which are familiar political discourse in Africa) to create a space for their statement ‘We have and have always had a place in Africa’.
Thirdly, it is the task of the intellectual activist to identify, communicate and act upon transversal relations of commonality or chains of equivalence. Identification and communication may take on a number of forms, including: comparative research (see Mohanty’s research discussed above); fostering spaces (public lectures, workshops, colloquia, seminars and conferences at local, national and international level) for continuous debate that marks multiplicity but also chains of equivalence; and publications in various forms (newspapers, professional magazines, pamphlets, web-sites, and manuals, journals). Actions along chains of equivalence stemming from this identification and communication may also take on various forms that are familiar territory for the gender activist (marches, lobbying, advocacy, legal challenges etc.). The Johannesburg Statement discussed above represents one such action based on communication emanating from a conference.

Fourthly, intellectual activism implies working in the bordersites of dominant understandings, thus allowing for the dislodging of these understandings. For example, in my work on teenage pregnancy I have indicated how the dominant understanding of teenage pregnancy as a social problem is linked to taken-for-granted assumptions concerning adolescence, race, family formation, mothering, and (hetero)sexuality. Intellectual activism means, in some senses, choosing marginality as a site of resistance (for example, choosing to work in less resourced environments or to investigate issues relating to poverty or to identify oneself as a feminist). This is in contradistinction to marginality that is imposed (although the overlaps are clear, with the latter, at times, providing opportunities for subversion into the former). As noted earlier, this does not mean returning to gross culturalism or relativism, but rather that strategic aims are taken at the assumptions inherent in dominant (and marginalised) discourses. Simultaneously the
methodologies of the ‘centre’ (e.g. the use of quantitative data to highlight concerns around women’s access to primary health care facilities) are utilised to local advantage.

Finally, intellectual activism implies being constantly vigilant and reflective in terms of self, other, context, process, assumptions and theory. Much of the discussion concerning this practice has gone under the rubric of reflexivity. In this, the multiple and socially constructed interactive and reflexive positionings of practitioners, researchers, academics and participants along the axes of race, gender, class, ability, sexual orientation and religion are acknowledged and deconstructed. There is a danger, however, of this exercise slipping into a (at times guilt-ridden) confession of the intellectual’s positioning or their emotional investments. This kind of reflexivity may lead to a ‘dizzying regress to residual, difficult to comprehend factors like repression and desire’ (Squire, 1995, p. 157), or may attribute ‘fictive’ status to the work as the subjectivity of interpretation is made prominent (Parker & Burman, 1993).

An analysis of the ‘politics of location’ and the ‘politics of representation’ seems to overcome these difficulties. Lal (1999), for example, continues to pay careful attention to the multiple, contradictory subject positionings of herself and the participants in her research. However, her analysis of the politics of location as the epistemic privilege of academic discourse, the presumed authenticity of native accounts, and the political intellectual location within which we choose to position ourselves (e.g. feminist, anticolonial, antiracist) moves her reflexive account beyond a scrutiny of individual subjectivity. Mohanty (1995) defines the politics of location as the ‘historical, geographical, cultural, psychic and imaginative boundaries which provide the ground for
political definition and self-definition for contemporary … feminists’ (p. 67). Again the intersection of the social and political with the individual is evident.

The politics of representation is complex. There is inevitably a fissure that exists between the intellectual and the women whom s/he thinks she represents or portrays in her/his writing. Whatever marginality within which the intellectual is interactively positioned or chooses to position herself, s/he remains an intellectual, distanced from those who have not undergone the process and rigour of intellectual debate and argument. Attendant on this is the class status that academia bestows on people. This alerts us to Spivak’s (1988) famous conclusion that the subaltern woman is allowed no discursive position from which to speak herself, as her voice is always already inhabited by masculinist and colonial discourse. Some postcolonial critics have questioned this, arguing that the subaltern may have more agency than Spivak allows, as the ‘dominant culture’ is intricately intertwined with the ‘Other’, thereby constructing themselves in relation to each other (Holton, 2003).

Representation thus does not imply overcoming differences to evidence the true, authentic experience of women in a particular situation. Rather, it is recognising that representation is a process in which the discourses invoked by the intellectual and those invoked by the women in question meet, challenge, dovetail, diverge, and generally construct new, hybrid understandings.

**Conclusion**

South African Psychology has, in many respects, has an ignominious past, bolstering both Apartheid ideals and the capitalist elite. From the 1980s (and somewhat before) voices of opposition within Psychology have become stronger. However, Feminist Psychology in
South Africa remains marginal, appearing mostly as an approach within the rather diffuse category of Critical Psychology. This peripheral status reflects the marginalization of gender issues in national and provincial politics (although a number of statutory bodies, such as the Gender Commission and the Office of the Status of Women exist, the structural constraints within which these bodies operate means that their impact is frequently limited, with gender issues often being viewed as a gross number game).

The implication for feminist psychologists in South Africa is that we need to engage in more intellectual activism, which not only fore-grounds feminist theory but also feminist practice. We need to uncover and resist the patchwork of patriarchies that draw on racial, class, sexual orientation, age, ability and other social vectors. I have suggested in this paper that a theoretical resource for this is radical plural feminism that draws on Foucauldian and postcolonial insights. There is a growing debate about feminisms in Africa (as evidenced in the three special editions of the journal *Agenda* (2001, 2002, 2003), entitled African feminisms), and a recognition that the differential impact on women of sexism, classism, racism, colonialism and heterosexism means that feminist practice has to be a politics of alliance along a chain of equivalences and differences rather than one of unity around a shared unitary gender identity and shared social relations.

Notes

1. I use inverted commas here to denote the problematics around deploying terms such as ‘Western’, ‘First World’, ‘Third World’, and even ‘periphery’ and ‘metropole’. These terms imply the homogenisation of thought and action emanating from particular regions, and the construction of an entity as ‘real’ apart from the relations
of power that constitute it. But, as pointed out by Said (1997), it is equally difficult to avoid these terms. I therefore continue to deploy these terms but in a deconstructed, non-essentialised form that recognises their constructed, socially heterogeneous and historically contingent nature.

2. This policy framework has gone through a number of revisions with many of the initial proposals (e.g. the requirement of a doctorate for registration as a psychologist) eventually being abandoned.

3. As with other post-colonial writers, I use ‘Other’ to mean the excluded or marginalised subject. I utilise the capitalised form to denote the abstract, generalized representation of this subject.

4. As with other theorists, I have found that Derrida complements Foucauldian analytics in post-structuralist feminist analyses. However, given space limitation, I shall not explore this aspect in this paper.


6. I use absent trace in the Derridean sense, viz. the marginalised or subordinated term in a binary opposition.

7. Butchart applauds Wilbraham for seeing subjectivity as the end result rather than the origin of discourse, but accuses her of failing to recognise that discourse and discursive regimes are the outcome of disciplinary fabrication. The causal type of understanding of Foucault (disciplinary technology results in discourse which results in subjectivity) that allows for this critique is, in my view, itself problematic.

8. The Department of Health estimates that national Maternal Mortality Ratio as 150 deaths per 100,000 live births. They state that there are ‘stark differences in the maternal mortality by population group, which is strongly suggestive of socio-
economic status differences and differing levels of access to care’

(www.doh.gov.za/docs/reports.mothers)

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