

Horizons of Political/Poetical Contestation: South African Intersectional Perspectives across Disciplines and Languages

Call for papers – 8th Colloquium on Afrikaans and South African Studies – Ghent University

20 - 21 November 2024

Keynote speakers: Christi van der Westhuizen and Anastasia de Vries

In current times, intersectionality takes on various guises all over the world. “South Africa is no exception,” state Moletsane and Reddy (235). From the 19th century, where the early roots of intersectionality can be traced to African American black feminist pioneers, it successfully entered the academic scene. In this context, inaugural contributions emerged from leading authors such as bell hooks, Kimberlé Crenshaw, who is credited with the coinage of the term, and Patricia Hill Collins with her “matrix of domination” (12). Well into the 21st century, intersectionality is still ubiquitous with scholars like Jennifer Nash and Anna Carastathis. The latter points out its continued and perhaps even increasing pertinence since “oppressive power relations have become increasingly mystified, inequalities seemingly more intractable, and institutions seemingly more difficult to transform” (3).

An ‘intersectional’ approach seeks to unpack structures of power by laying bare the interconnectedness of multiple systems of social categorisation that impact and shape people’s lives and experiences. Requiring a shift in thinking about identities, intersectionality has been described as “difficult work” (Nash), but also as the “most important contribution that women’s studies have made so far” (McCall 1771). It is an analytical tool that facilitates the understanding of social phenomena, such as the interpersonal and cultural domains of power (Collins and Bilge 7). Intersectionality, however, is just as much an everyday practice, a way of how we as individuals navigate our lives and interactions with other people and various institutions.

Although the dominant tradition is situated in the Global North, an intersectional lens, both as a critical concept and practice, can provide a useful tool to scrutinise power structures in all regions characterised by inequalities. In the context of South Africa, Moletsane and Reddy (235) argue that “while the country has a rich (and celebrated) diversity in terms of race, ethnicity, class, religion, gender, sexuality, language and so on, these markers also highlight the deep inequalities that characterise human relations in the country.” Shefer (382) finds that the intersecting and multidimensional forms of oppression persist tenaciously in the post-apartheid era. Consequently, scholars such as Christi van der Westhuizen, Amanda Gouws, Barbara Boswell, and Desiree Lewis and Gabeba Baderoon have adopted a South African intersectional perspective. Currently, a special issue of *Tydskrif vir Letterkunde* is being completed on feminisms and South African literatures. Moreover, the Zuid-Afrikahuis in Amsterdam recently launched Footnotes, an online series on intersectional strategies in Southern Africa.

Our call for papers invites proposals that address such South African intersectional trends, and that consider the heterogeneous manifestations these can assume, both historically and contemporarily. Inspired by Carastathis (141), we believe that intersectionality should be understood not only on a personal level but as a “horizon of political contestation”. We encourage diversity in terms of academic domains by adopting an interdisciplinary stance. Although intersectionality has a long history in critical race studies and women’s studies, it has been implemented in diverse fields ranging from literature (Gqola) and linguistics (Levon) to history (Hendricks *et al.*), art (Ankyiah and Bamfo), musicology (Decoste), theatre sciences (Wijesiri), law (Schiek), sociology (Choo and Ferree) and political science (Hughes). Besides traditional paper presentations we will consider more creative or visually orientated contributions, panel discussions, and interviews. Our colloquium will take place in a hybrid

format with both live presentations and online contributions, allowing as many people as possible to participate and attend. Publication of (a selection of) the presented papers in a special issue of the academic journal *Gender Questions* is intended.

Abstracts

Please submit your abstracts for 20-minute papers in Afrikaans, Dutch or English of max. 500 words to afrikaans@ugent.be by 31 May 2024. For more information about the colloquium or alternative presentation proposals please get in touch with the organisers, Martina Vitackova (martina.vitackova@ugent.be) and Lieselot Tuytens (lieselot.tuytens@ugent.be).

Recommended reading

Boswell, Barbara. *And Wrote My Story Anyway: Black South African Women's Novels as Feminism*. Wits U P, 2020.

Gouws, Amanda. "Feminist Intersectionality and the Matrix of Domination in South Africa." *Agenda: Empowering Women for Gender Equity* vol. 31, no. 1, 2017, pp. 19-27.

Lewis, Desiree & Gabeba Baderoon. *Surfacing: On Being Black and Feminist in South Africa*. Wits U P, 2021.

Moletsane, Relebohile & Vasu Reddy. "The National Development Plan as a Response to Poverty and Inequality in South Africa." *Poverty & Inequality: Diagnosis, Prognosis, Responses. State of the Nation*, edited by Crain Soudien, Vasu Reddy & Ingrid Woolard. HRSC Press, 2019, pp. 235-352.

Shefer, Tamara. "Narrating Gender and Sex in and through Apartheid Divides." *South African Journal of Psychology* vol. 40, no. 4, 2010, pp. 382-95.

Van der Westhuizen, Christi. "Race, Intersectionality, and Affect in Postapartheid Productions of the 'Afrikaans White Woman'." *Critical Philosophy of Race* vol. 4, no. 2, 2016, pp. 221-238.