Psychology's Feminist Voices Oral History Project

Interview with Puleng Segalo

Interviewed by Amanda Nkeramihigo & Desirée Salis
Boston College
Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts
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AN: Amanda Nkeramihigo, Interviewer
DS: Desirée Salis, Interviewer
PS: Puleng Segalo, Interview Participant

AN: So, thank you for accepting this project. The first question is very simple. Could you please tell us your full name and year of birth?

PS: My name is Puleng Segalo., and I was born in (. . .).

AN: Could you tell us a little bit about how you began to relate to feminism or womanism or anything like that?

PS: Where do I begin? I think it's something that has always been there for me because I grew up in a community surrounded by women. I've always had my aunts around me, my grandmothers around me, my mother, a community of women, really. And those connections and engagements were very meaningful in shaping me, in shaping how I see the world. And of course, at the time, the language of feminism and womanism was not really part of my vocabulary. And I think coming to academia, the university, and starting to think critically about women, relationships, engagements within communities, within families, and the complexities thereof started getting me to think about what that means in terms of framing it from a theoretical perspective and I think that's when I got acquainted, if you will, with the idea of feminism. It was not something that was really at the center within the discipline of psychology. So, gender and psychology or feminism and psychology was not really something that was there, especially at undergraduate level. I think when one gets to independent thinking at master's and doctoral level, this is when one starts being in conversation with these different ways of trying to make meaning of these relationships and interactions with women. So, it started early, but I think thinking about it critically and from that academic perspective was when I think I started with my graduate studies.

AN: And how have you merged these values with your work as a psychologist? And how does holding feminist value influence your own research or practice? [02:49]
PS: I think, as I've said, within psychology, as I entered psychology, it was a very male - dominated discipline. Male-dominated in a sense of the professors that were in front of the lecture hall. Almost all my professors were men. But also, even in what we were taught and the theorists that we drew from. I think many students can tell you that at the undergraduate level, we all know about Gordon Allport, we know about Freud, we know about Bandura, we know about Carl Jung, all of them. And there weren't really women scholars who were centered within the psychology discipline. And so, at the beginning it wasn't there, and it was missing. So when I started with my graduate studies, I think that's when I really started being in conversation with many women scholars and I use that also as a way to speak back, to critique and to challenge the discipline because I was very interested in the idea of trauma and the idea of identity, and in how those are also or can also be looked at from a gendered lens, coming from a country where gender -based violence and femicide are really a challenge and trying to understand from a psychological perspective: Where does that come from? What does that mean? And even from a structural level, not just intimate partner violence, but also understanding that from a broader structural level, that's when I really started getting into questioning the discipline and its role and its silence when it comes to the gendered nature of some of the psychological problems and challenges that we have. And so that's when my own research at master's and doctoral level really started zooming in on the idea of trauma and suffering, but from a gendered perspective. And yeah, so that's how I came into it.

AN: It makes a lot of sense. So basically, the way that you got into psychology I'm getting in this way, you started with wanting to understand what was happening at home – is it in Pretoria or somewhere else?...

PS: No, I grew up in the Free State, which is in a different province altogether. So, Pretoria is in a different province. I went to Pretoria to study. I studied at the University of Pretoria in the province of Gauteng, a formerly Whites-only institution, which came also with its own politics and complications, so again, these intersectionalities around race and gender also became very prevalent. So it was within the classroom, but also outside the classroom in terms of the experiences. So, that's when it all really started for me.

AN: Maybe I'll go a little bit more into that, where when you're in undergrad and this is not happening, and it sounds like it's not very feminist, it's really white-oriented or more oriented to white epistemologies, at which point do you realize something is missing? At which point do you realize this other thing that I know in my family or in my country is not represented?

PS: It was at a later…Well, at an advanced stage of my undergraduate studies. But at the time I think, you know, as an undergraduate student, you don't really think you have the authority or the power to challenge but it's something that's sitting with you that something is not right.
[07:11]
I was a tutor at undergraduate level and so working very closely with the professors and feeling very unsettled about the status quo, but like I said not having the vocabulary or even thinking that I have the power to even speak back, like they would look at me and say, "How dare you, the audacity!" But I think when I got to postgraduate level, I found my voice [she laughs]. Yeah, I found my voice. And I think that's when I really studied now consciously, challenging and verbalizing and speaking about how the discipline actually is doing a disservice in terms of how we are understanding psychological well-being and not really understanding all the different layers of what well-being is and what it looks like, especially when it comes to the kinds of experiences, in particular, Black women's experiences that I have observed in my community and how that also speaks to the ways in which we need to understand psychology and how those experiences were absent in the curriculum, but also in the psychology that we're practicing. And so that's when I started writing about it and speaking about it in platforms as well. So that's when it really all began for me.

AN: Thank you. Maybe then we can go into your own involvement in community psychology, working, with the communities directly and any kind of involvement that you have with the feminist activist organization or you getting involved in anything like that or creating anything like - Do you want to speak to that a little bit?

PS: Yeah. I mean, when I finished my studies, then I started working as a, we call it junior lecturer. So, in teaching again, saying what is it that I'm teaching? How am I teaching? And how do I change or reframe this teaching? What does the lecture hall offer the students? And what would it mean if maybe the teaching also happened outside of the classroom, and there were opportunities to also engage with the communities. But also, being conscious about how we are engaging with the communities. And so, it was at master's level when I really started getting involved and engaging and connecting with the communities around me. And then I came into contact also as part of another bigger project, a music project of celebrating 10 years of democracy in South Africa, that's when I got connected with the women collective that do work on embroidery. And most of the work that they were doing was really around making embroideries for self -sustenance. So, it's part of empowerment and providing for themselves and for their families. And so, I started thinking, what would it mean? What would it look like if we also push beyond just making embroideries that can then be sold for self-sustenance but also use that as a

tool and a voice to also speak to broader structural issues that are happening. South Africa comes from this dark history of apartheid and even when we go back to after 1994 when we got our independence and looking at ways in which we can think about reconciliation, even that process did not really have women at the centre. So even when they were talking about the gross human rights violations, they were not talking about the everyday violence that women were experiencing in the communities, the harassment from the police, every day. So, what was happening with the kind of trauma that women experienced as a result, that every day the police [11:43]
can come in at any time, they can arrest you, they can arrest your children.

And so, the setup of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission did not really offer space for those kinds of narratives. Some women were incarcerated and their womanhood, their very womanhood, was questioned, and they were made to feel stigmatized and to feel ashamed that you're a woman and look at where you are, look at what has happened to you. And so, the very womanhood and reproductive nature was attacked. And to now go to a public space such as the Truth and Reconciliation, which was broadcast on television, to speak about some of those things was very difficult and challenging for many women. And so, I was then interested in saying how do we within the community create spaces that are safe but that offer voice for many of these traumatic experiences that women, in particular, who grew up during apartheid can also be able to tell their stories, can also be able to find a platform to be heard. And that's when I think [I] gravitated towards embroidery, a skill that is already there that women already know and say how can we tell these stories through a medium that's not going to force people to retell and sometimes because words are insufficient especially for the kind of traumatic experiences that some of the women have encountered or have endured.

So that's when I think the activism work started. Because from then as a genesis, we also started doing dialogues in the community and with the women themselves also as custodians and as voices to be able to speak to others in different contexts as well. So, that's how all of that, I think, started within the communities and remains in the community. So, I tried to create this space between academia and the community - academia with its expectations: you need to publish. Yes, fine. You need to publish. Who's going to read? Can I take this article and take it to the community? No. So what are some of the ways in which we can also create work or knowledge that is accessible to the communities themselves? And that's when, I think, for me, the visual methodologies made sense in that way. And also reaching out, of course, to some of the public broadcasters to be able to speak about the work, especially for the national and Indigenous language community radio stations where we can be able to engage on this work. And I think that's where the activism part also comes in.

AN: Maybe then this is a very large question, but within what you've done, which is with this example, but in your work in general, it seems like academia is one thing, but the knowledge cannot exist just within academia, it doesn't belong to academia, this is how I'm reading it?

PS: Yes!

AN: I understand that this embroidery also has been used to teach, is that correct? [15:25]

PS: Correct.

AN: Is it school or is it just kind of community as you were saying?

PS: So, they've been used in various ways, they've not been used in schools to teach as part of curricula, but they've been used in communities as part of opening up conversations. So, they've been used as part of community dialogues. We've been to a number of communities and having these used as community dialogues. So, we have the actual embroideries themselves. But, from the embroideries, we also created accessible booklets in various local languages that we can then share. So, these are taken to the schools. And then with the young people in the schools, we have workshops. And then we actually brainstorm and work and look at the content of the booklets and then have conversations around the meaning that the young people, the school learners, give or make from the visuals that are there but also the accompanying captions, if you will, that are in the booklet. So it's created in such a way that it's not your typical academic book, but a book that also tells the important stories that we would like to tell. So, it works in that way in terms of having it as teaching tools for communities. But also, for other elders in the community. And here this is where then the women collective themselves are the facilitators or the presenters, if you will, in those spaces where they then share the knowledge with other people or other elders in the community and then open up that conversation that people often don't have in the community. And challenge even the government or the system based on some of the promises that were made as a result of the independence and people voting and some of the disappointments that are there also, especially looking at apartheid and then now. So that was the initial work that we did. And of course, the work has then opened up other avenues for other conversations for us to be able to have, looking at what it is that we are facing as a people, as a country. And I think that is when the broader work around gender-based violence came in, and then engaging on that work as well, building on where we started.

AN: Thank you. This is a question perhaps that can be answered forever and change as time goes, but this sounds like feminism, feminist psychology and decolonial psychology, so perhaps some kind of decolonial feminist psychology - is that what it is, and what would be or what is decolonial feminist psychology? What should it be?

[PS laughs]

AN: I realize the question is broad and it is discursive and will change through time perhaps, but right now, what do you think about when you think about it?

PS: Absolutely, I mean, yeah, there is no straightforward answer to feminist psychology or decolonial feminist psychology, but it's really about challenging psychology to look at itself and
[19:45]
to look at its history, to look at its contributions, but to also look at how it has and continues to be implicated in how it has not really given attention to women's challenges because it assumes that the human is the same thing and not taking into consideration all the structural challenges
that actually influence how the human in the form of a woman or a man, depending how a person presents themselves, is really influenced and determined by the system, the structures that they exist within, that for a very long time women, particularly in a context such as South Africa, were treated as perpetual, well, children, as subhuman, as second-class citizens, that you could go to school and get educated, but as soon as you get married, you lose all those privileges. So, what does that do to someone's psyche, to their identity, to how they come into the world, and how psychology has been very silent around those kinds of experiences. And for me challenging that and speaking about gendered psychological well-being, that is the work or the move towards decolonial or rather feminist psychology. And then taking that further in terms of problematizing the idea of gender and woman's role and place is then when we move to now a decolonial move, to say the experiences of women in the home, in the community, how they move in the world has been very much influenced by the colonial system…the colonial system and of course in South Africa the apartheid system, so it's these layers. And how we cannot understand for example gender-based violence as it manifests without understanding that history, without understanding how colonialism affected the ways in which men relate with one another, relate with the women in their families and how they were reduced to being called ‘boys’ and treated like perpetual ‘little boys’, and how they were taken from their families and could not support their families, how they were denied an education that was to afford them a decent life, and therefore, in turn, how that then influences the African family that was disintegrated as a result of apartheid, as a result of

colonialism, and how that inferiorization and emasculating of men also has a direct impact in the ways in which men relate with women today.

And so, a decolonial lens or perspective forces us to look at all these different layers. Before we can say "gender-based violence, a man has abused a woman, or a man has killed a woman". And yes, there's justice that is needed. There's responsibility that needs to be taken. However, if we only look at that, then we miss the whole picture. We miss out on understanding the systematic nature of all of this. We take a man away from society, we imprison him because he perpetuated this violence. He comes back into the very same broken society and family. That becomes perpetuated. So, if we understand the fundamental problem and the roots of the problem, then we can start going back to saying, how do we reclaim? How do we re -socialize? How do we create critical consciousness of love, of learning to love ourselves again so that we can raise boys and girls that understand and appreciate each other as human beings. Because if we don't do that, then we run the risk of only dealing with symptoms and not the core of the problem. And that's what a decolonial lens assists us to do. And for me, that is my understanding of a decolonial feminist psychology, that if we want to understand psychology from a feminist lens or a decolonial lens, we need to understand that this history is very important for us to understand, the
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here and now. And of course, coming from an African context, we understand that the relationship between men and women, or the role that women have always had in communities were never in opposition to the role of men. So, women have for a very long time held various important positions in society. If you go into our indigenous languages, I have many nieces and nephews, so I'm a *rakgadi*, which is like a female father to my brother's children, right? And as *rakgadi*, I hold so much power, which I'm very proud of, in terms of the decisions that need to be made within the family when there are disputes, when they're ready to get married, and all those things in terms of family gatherings, etc. So, women have always held positions within community. So even when we speak about feminism, it has to be understood from a contextual basis, right? That there's been many waves when it comes to feminism. And there's also been challenges around whose feminism? How do we understand feminism? What do you mean when you say you want to have the right to work? As a Black woman, I've always worked all my life, right? And also, as an African woman, I don't have an oppositional relationship with my male counterparts. It's a system that has created the kind of environment that we're finding ourselves in. So even as we are in the struggle, we are in the struggle alongside one another. Yes, we hold them to account when they kill us, when they abuse us. But at the same time, we also understand that this is a historical, systematic problem that was very much intentional, because it aimed at disintegrating and breaking up the African family.

So, I think, yeah, an answer to a very big question, (laughs) but yeah, so that's my take on it in terms of how I come into this work and understand decolonial feminism, in particular within a psychology perspective.

DS: I know that you have made that connection a lot with like trauma and gender, which you have already talked about, and kind of these institutional forms of trauma. I believe you have referenced Lucy Thompson in some of your work on institutional trauma, making those connections within psychology is that kind of what you're referring to in terms of holding psychology accountable, turning its own lens back on the kind of concepts that it uses to conceptualize, gender-based violence and what is going on in women's lives?

PS: Yep, yep.

DS: Tremendous! Okay, so can you tell us some more about the trajectory of your career, some of the themes and topics of your research, your practice, your other work, and what accomplishments do you most value?

PS: [laughs] I mean, coming from social psychology and community psychology, I've always been interested in issues of identity. And maybe that has got to do with the history of being a displaced person or coming from a history of displacement where we were rendered as less than
[29:40]
human within South Africa. And so, what that does to how someone comes to define who they are, understand who they are, that self identity, place identity, group identity, has been very, what, instrumental in how I think about myself within psychology. And then, of course, from that bigger perspective, I've, again, been very much interested in issues of gender. And I think that has very much been influenced by my own upbringing and the women that I grew up
around, and the women that still continue to surround me right now, both in my family, but in the community more generally. So that for me was a starting point in terms of how I think about my contribution in psychology and what I bring into psychology and how I then challenge myself, but also challenge my students in how we think about what community is, what community looks like, and the kind of work that we need to do. And not just to think about these frameworks of intervention strategies and just empowerment of communities, but also thinking about the humility that is needed and just being present and observing what's around you and taking that in with humility and then learning from that. And in a way then redefining what community is or could look like, but also Community Psychology itself. So, I've done a lot of research work around how I

understand trauma and challenging trauma from how it has been defined within and by psychology and then of course looking at that from a gendered perspective.

So that's been my work for maybe the past decade, decade and a half. But also, I'm interested in the bigger project of whose knowledge counts and what counts as knowledge, and I think this is when or where decolonization work comes in. And part of the work that I've been doing over and above just work on gender is really rethinking the frame of reference when it comes to who gets to produce knowledge. And so, one of the projects that I'm working on with colleagues is really focusing on rebalancing the scientific knowledge production ecosystem. Again, challenging this idea that knowledge is only produced from the so-called global north and that the global south is just the recipient of knowledge. And this has really played out or played into this development gaze that we find so much. I mean, when we're talking about donor funding, when we're talking about aid, even when we're talking about research grants, right? That much of the research grants would be made available to our colleagues in the Global North. And then we come in as research partners, as team members, and often we're not the PI [Principal investigator] in the research. And that plays into, again, that knowledge production politics, that the theorizing only happens from one center of the world, and then the rest will only draw from that. And I think, for me, that's the bigger project of challenging the existing imbalances. So, even as we speak about issues of gender, about the issue of climate change, even as we speak about many other challenges that are confronting the world right now, even AI or innovation, we cannot move forward if we do not challenge and shift that power imbalance that exists when it comes to the knowledge ecosystem and the assumption that knowledge can only be produced from one center of the world or innovation can (only) happen from one center of the world. So that's another bigger project that I'm looking at.

And again, it's also about the decolonial project at the core of it. That the concepts and the
[35:00]
theories that we use assume that knowledge can only happen from one place. So, from that bigger scale, if we challenge and shift that narrative, it will also shift how we form partnerships in research, how we collaborate in research, and then fundamentally, it will then go down to the knowledge production itself as well. Because if the shift happens at that level, then it also means knowledge production and how we collect data and how we theorize will also shift, which will then influence the kind of work that we do at the grassroots level. So yeah, so those are just some of the aspects of the work that I do. I want to see a world where we all live in harmony with one another, in a non -racial, non -sexist society. So having to carry that legacy also then speaks to the kind of work and projects that we then do. So, we do a lot of archival work and a lot of really

excavating some of the hidden narratives. And then this also means really centering some of the contributions that women who came before us have made, but whose stories and whose contributions continue to not be taught, not known, and not written about. So that's also at the core of part of the project that I'm currently working on.

DS: Sounds like your trajectories, your career trajectories and the things that you've accomplished throughout your career are deeply interconnected with...

PS: Absolutely, yes, yes.

DS: Okay, have you experienced discrimination based on gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, age, being a feminist. What was that like for you? How have you dealt with it?

PS: (Laughs) Sure. Where do I begin? Just recently, a colleague came to me and said, "You know, some colleagues are scared of you because they think you're strong-willed and you come across, you know, as someone who is..." Yeah, how did you put it? I have to translate it to English now, but that it... Yeah, "don't come across as very approachable within the academic or university system." And this, of course, is directly linked to the fact that there is a certain expectation on women more broadly or generally. There's a certain expectation on women academics, as thinkers, as knowledge producers. And often, I think, when one enters into a space or exhibits a kind of persona that is often not associated or expected of a woman or a woman scholar, then that creates a certain level of anxiety. And so, I think that's just one of the ways. But also, working in an institution that is deemed as a formerly White institution meant that coming in as a very junior scholar and researcher, having to navigate that space was not easy. First of all, what do you know you're just a child, you're 22 years old, what do you know? So, then it gives the right to a White colleague to come to your office and just kick your door, because you are not in your office when they came to look for you, you know, which is very disrespectful. But then feeling that they have the right to do that because "who are you and what are you", right? How do you come and just kick, you know, my door and throw a tantrum? So
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those are some of the things that one had to navigate, having entered a space and a system that was not created for you. And perhaps in some ways [was] not ready for you. There was this forcing, or people feeling compelled to accommodate and welcome you because now the new law says they must. So, the fact that the doors are open does not automatically mean that you're going to be welcome, that you're now going to be able to move freely in the corridors of the university Because there are those who've been there

for 10, 15, 20, 30 years, who have created this identity and link and ownership to the place. And you coming in as a black person, as a woman, you are not welcome.
And of course, at the moment, I'm holding the position of Chief Albert Luthuli Research Chair. And this is a legacy project, paying homage to Albert Luthuli, who was also a struggle hero and a freedom fighter in South Africa and in Africa more broadly, a Pan-Africanist who was seen as disrupting that harmony or equilibrium. And therefore, of course, the kind of treatment that you would get would also show or speak to the fact that you're not welcomed here. So those are some of the experiences, earlier on, that I had to contend with, and while trying to find my way within academia as a junior scholar and trying to make sense of it all, it was just quite difficult. It was quite difficult. I always say it forces one to develop a thick skin, but it was part of the journey.

But it also then forces one to reflect, to say what kind of institution or future do I want to see? And those that are coming after me, other students, the kinds of experiences that I would like them to have. So, when a student, a potential PhD student, comes into my office and sits down and tells me about the work that she wants to do. And then we start talking about it, and critically talking about what it would mean to do your work decolonially, and the kinds of questions that you can and should ask. And you should not be apologetic. This is how you can do the work. And then you see the student becoming very uncomfortable and looking at the door with disbelief that you are saying all these things with a door that is open, are you not scared of losing your job? Are you not scared of getting into trouble? And the fact that a student has to carry that burden of having to be scared and be worried because of how the institution has been created to say that you cannot, how dare you speak of such things? Is, I think one of the things that have pushed and propelled me, that I would like to be in a space and create a space where a student can feel OK to just sit and speak freely about their thinking, the questions that they have, the kind of work that they want to do, without feeling scared or without feeling apologetic. And for me, that's an ongoing project. And yeah, that student now is something different from what she was five, six years ago when she started a PhD journey, doing very well, completed, did her postdoc. So, I think there is hope in progress, but that can only happen, I think, if we stand firm in the decolonial and feminist work, and understanding that it's a labor of love, that obviously sometimes it comes with a lot of bumps and hurdles, because you're working within a system that's always pushing back. But also understanding that this is important work that needs to happen.

DS: Can you tell us more about how you are making that happen? We have had discussion
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around just the ways in which decolonial theory and feminist work in psychology is making its way through the discipline, and in your case, so successfully and beautifully.

And I am curious what that process has been like. And we have another question: What advice do you give to feminists and activists who are entering into psychology who want to undertake this kind of decolonial work?

PS: I mean the work can be quite lonely and daunting of course, because you're entering this long tradition of a discipline that has carved a certain brand or a certain definition of itself, and coming to disrupt something that long-standing tradition is not easy, obviously.
And sometimes it's difficult and daunting, but sometimes it's easier, especially if you have a support system. It's not possible at all to do this work without support system. Support system within your institution and sometimes it's not there within your institution and that's when you reach out to your networks outside. And that for me personally has been the lifeline, right. Mentorship, we can never take that lightly. To have those who've walked the path before you to engage with you, to run the race with you, and to have conversations about some of the challenges that you're having, because otherwise, if you're just on your own, it's going to be too much. It's going to be too much, and at some point, you might just want to give up.

So, for me, I think just having a support structure has been helpful. It is helpful. And so, to our emerging scholars, feminist scholars, those who really also want to just make a mark and change the discipline of psychology in such a way that it's open to all these different ways of being… And the hope is that as we're doing this work, those who are coming after us don't have to do so much, that we actually pave the way so that as they come through, it's easier, right? And when you're fighting a system that has got many, many, many, many decades, very much entrenched. So, we also understand that this is an ongoing project, but as we go along to smooth the path for those that are coming behind us as well. But I also must say that sometimes institutional support can be useful. It can go a long way. I'm not sure how this happened, but I think something unique about South Africa was that the decolonial move really took hold in such a way that was welcomed by many of the institutions. Not all the institutions, of course, some are really very much rigid in their ways, and you hear this in conversation with colleagues. But my institution in particular has really said at the core, even as part of the institutional strategic objective, that the Africanization and decolonization agenda is going to be at the core of the work that we do. And this also speaks to even recurriculation and rethinking what we're teaching as well. So that kind of institutional support I think has also gone a long way in assisting and enabling us to do the kind of work that we want to do and the kind of work that we are doing. Because without institutional support, it will be very, very, very difficult. It's going to be very, very lonely. And yes, you hang on to the support structures, perhaps outside the institution, from other feminist scholars and activists even in the community that can assist in thinking with you, but also in being there when it's

just too much for you that also helps you to be able to carry on. But I think the institutional
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support, if it's possible, really goes a long way. And I think I'm privileged in that I have that. So that has assisted me. So, I don't take that for granted. And I'm not going to say that for the work is easier, because I understand that contexts and circumstances differ, but we need to always find different ways in which we can reach out to one another and care for one another. It's very important.

DS: The focus on collective care…

PS: Absolutely, absolutely collective care.

DS: So, you did just speak about the role of being a mentor. Can you speak a little bit about more mentorship in your own career: who were your own mentors, and how did they help to facilitate
this trajectory that you've been on?

PS: I mean, it's actually very ironic that the kind of support and mentorship that I got only started when I was doing my PhD work and when I was in the United States. So that's an interesting turn. My master's (pauses…). My master's qualification and journey was not an easy one. I had a White Afrikaner man as a supervisor, and it was really ticking the box: You need to have so many students, this is one of the students on your list and that's that, and not someone who actually believed in the kind of project and work that I was doing. And it shows in the kind of relationship that you would have with the supervisor. So, I also believe very strongly, even as we're talking about mentorship, that that extends to even the supervision relationship because for many students that's really when one's own academic career and identity starts as you start carving out a topic that hopefully you will build on and develop your career around. So that initial relationship with your supervisor is very, very important. So, at master's level, I unfortunately did not have that. But when I started with my PhD, that shifted. The kind of mentorship, the kind of support, the kind of opportunities that were opened up for me played a very critical role in the kind of scholar that I became following my doctoral studies. And I'd like to believe that that's what I'm passing on and imparting into my own students as well and the mentees that I have. So yes, I studied for my PhD in the United States under Michelle Fine.
And those who know Michelle Fine, I don't need to say anymore. I think the kind of support and generosity that I received as a graduate student contributed immensely in the kind of academic that I became, that I've become and that I am today and how that's also

contributing to the ways in which I approach my own supervision and also how I value mentorship and mentoring other emerging researchers that have been entrusted to me.

AN: I think I have just like my own personal question generally in terms of if you want to go a little bit more into your personal life. If there are people who, within your life, I know you talked about the women in your life, but how has that been? How has your family either supported or
[54:10]
what has that been like while you were going through school?

PS: I've had tremendous support from my family. I was the first-generation graduate in my family, so my siblings did not go all the way, both my parents didn't, so my mother was a domestic worker. So, during school holidays as a child, I would go with her to work, and I would observe and see what she does and the kind of treatment that White employers would give. So again, there I think the kind of consciousness that I started getting at a young age also contributed in molding me and my thinking, you know. When I would say I need to go to the
restroom, she'd say, okay, yeah, go outside, there's one outside. And I couldn't understand why I
had to [go outside], there's one in the house. You know, and of course, I would use the one in the house (laughs). But also, and not really understanding actually the complex political issues surrounding things such as a restroom and which restroom you can use. And I think my consciousness, as I was going to school and as I was going to university that recently opened up to Black people and with a lot of hostility even from other White students and having to navigate that was quite difficult.

But I come from a family that has been very, very supportive. So, my family has been very supportive, even though sometimes they don't know, or they don't understand, or they don't get what I do. But the kind of support that I have received over the years, I think has also contributed very much in also propelling me in the kind of work that I'm doing and really challenging psychology for what it can potentially do and contribute, right? That when I left home and came to the US to live here for several years and leaving my family, that that connection and that bond never broke, right? That every other day my uncle would call me and just ask me what time it is because it didn't make sense to him. This time-difference thing that I'm going to sleep, and you say you're waking up, what? So, it was this fascinating thing and its anecdotes on all things that might be perceived as small but actually in the bigger scheme of things quite big because that kind of support and being in a foreign country where you don't know anybody where you're forced to speak English all the time even though it's exhausting to speak English

all the time. So that phone call that allowed me for a few minutes to not speak English went a long way. So that also contributed.

Yeah, I am raising two boys, so amazing, a headache. But I, again, the kind of love and support and understanding, also for the kind of work that one does as an academic, has really also contributed and I think fires me to keep pushing and pushing. Yeah, for the betterment of all the young girls in South Africa and the world over, but also because I actually believe in the potential of what psychology can contribute if it were to really open itself up to embracing everything else that can enrich it as a discipline.

And hence, my talk earlier about love letter to psychologists because I love psychology and that's
[58:40]
why I'm challenging it so much because I believe that there is so much potential when we speak about psychological well-being, and when we're thinking about humanity and how we can co-exist in this world as human beings, but even more and other objects that are not human but that we rely and dependent on for our survival as well. So yeah, so that's where I come from, and I draw my strength.

AN: That's great. Perhaps that just brought up one last question.

PS: Yeah.

AN: Which is in terms of the development of your consciousness, and your talk today, there's a moment when you spoke to psychology being a Euro-American thing that has just been transported to other places where it does not necessarily fit. And you spoke to experience, for
example, in Queens, I don't know if you want to tell that story because I don't know what you told it, I kind of chuckled to myself, because of course! We are not talking about the same thing, So I don't much want to share that.

PS: No, I mean, that's one of the social psychology theories, right? The Bystander Effect. So, what happens when someone is in trouble, and everybody looks, and they think this next person is going to help. And it is very interesting, because I also grew up in a community where there's no way that people will just look on because everyone's business is everyone's business. The children belong to everybody, right? Of course, that also, sadly, is kind of shifting again because of this capitalist globalized individualistic bombarding of a different way of living and that's why for me this critical reimagining and consciousness is so necessary because I think again the trajectory that we're going towards can actually be very detrimental to us as humanity.

But yes, so I did my graduate psychology degree in South Africa, and we also have what you call an honors degree which is a kind of a bridging qualification between undergrad and postgrad before you do a masters. So, when I got the opportunity to come to the United States to do my doctoral studies, I always say it felt like literally entering inside the textbook that I had been studying as an undergraduate student in South Africa because everything that I had studied was so far removed and I could not really connect with it. I think from the heart, maybe from the head to some extent to try to understand, "Ok, this is what they mean, this is what they're talking about". But coming to the United States and actually being on the ground in a place where these kinds of experiments or theorizing took place was like an "aha" moment, but also a moment of sadness to say: so, this is what it looks like or it feels like to actually theorize from the ground, theorize from where you are, observe your surrounding and the lived realities and then from that make meaning of it and then write about it in terms of how we understand psychological processes. We are denied that opportunity, because we're only prescribed textbooks that come all
[1:02:30]
the way from America that we then have to buy and read and read and memorize and then take from that and say okay based on this how do I then understand this kind of behavior, that kind of behavior.

So it was that kind of moment for me, so… And that's what Euro-American mainstream psychology has done. This assumption of a universal way of understanding and that theories can just be taken anywhere in the world that they will just make sense. And so, coming here and entering the textbook was that kind of feeling for me, to walk down the streets in Queens and say, "Oh, so this is where Kitty Genovese walked and what happened to her", and then how the scholars, the theorists then came up with the theory based on this experience that actually happened in this country, in this neighborhood, and then based on that we now have this theory, and something that when you're in South Africa you could not relate to, because the theories were not created or are not created that way. Yeah, the closest you can get to trying to make sense of things is by just changing the examples that I used, which I also thought was very violent and wrong, that instead of saying Queens, you just put the name of one of the townships and then you change the name of the person. But then at the core of it, because it's about that theory, you're not really changing anything, because it's about how that theory was developed and where it was developed. So just the symbolic changes are not really dealing with the core of us having to challenge the theories and reimagine the possibility of theorizing from where we are. So that for me was, uh… yeah.

DS: I think you answered all of the questions that either of us had or imagined having. So, I
guess the last question is: there anything that we haven't mentioned that you feel is important, to let us know about yourself, your work, your activism, about psychology, anything you want to add?

PS: I think we've spoken about almost everything. I think for me maybe as a parting shot, it's again really to just re-center the importance of honoring the knowledges that are there in our communities. And I think part of the decolonial work is really trying to encourage and propel us towards that place of saying that we are actually missing out on so much by not offering space to these other ways of knowing and understanding the world and understanding that this was an intentional project of disregarding, of marginalizing, of distorting, of getting rid of people's histories and ways of being. So, we are in a space and a place where we have the opportunity to undo that. We have the opportunity to transform and as the conference theme also says, to reimagine that. And so, it is a responsibility that I think all of us carry. And in the work that I do, I hope that in little ways, I push myself towards that direction. And with the work that I do, I contribute towards that rethinking. And I hope that that's something that can continue being built upon. And I look forward to learning more and more from other spaces and other contexts from the few that I've been in contact with, in Australia and in hearing today also some of the work in the Philippines. It actually breaks my heart that there is so much that we are missing out on, that we could learn so much from each other if we opened up the space for that possibility. Understanding that it was an intentional project to create these divisions and therefore for us to undo or re-learn it's also again going to require an intentional effort from all of us to be able to do this kind of work. And so, for me that's really what I would like to have as a last point to leave with us.

DS and AN: Thank you, thank you so much

PS: Thank you so much for this opportunity. I really appreciate it.

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