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INTERGENERATIONAL TRANSMISSION OF INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE AND DESCENDANTS OF THE ENSLAVED IN CAPE TOWN, SOUTH AFRICA

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Abstract: Intimate partner violence is a global challenge particularly in South Africa. Colonial legacies are often not included in related research, yet colonial violence and intimacy continue to shape the domestic and present conditions of slave-descendant families. Drawing from the work of South African feminist writer Pumla Gqola and American scholar Christina Sharpe, this article analyses contemporary levels of intimate partner violence among slave descendants in light of slave memory and intimacy in this case study of Cape Town, South Africa. Research conducted for this study explored the transmission of intergenerational violence with three generations of enslaved descendants within families of mixed racial origin. The findings indicate that intimate partner violence was one of the effects of the slavery – a trauma that was often intergenerationally transmitted through silencing. The article contributes to understanding intimate partner violence among descendants of the enslaved in a (post-) colonial context.

Keywords: intimate partner violence, colonial legacies, intergenerational transmission of trauma, slave heritage, post-humanism

Introduction

Intimate partner violence (IPV) has been coined the “shadow pandemic” in South Africa (CSVR 2024). This was due to the sharp increase in IPV since the South African government introduced lockdown protocols to manage the COVID-19 pandemic in 2019 (Jain 2021). According to crime statistics for 2023/2024, there were 14,401 grievous bodily harm assaults, 10,516 accounts of rape and 1,515 cases of attempted murder against women in South Africa (SAPS 2022). The country remains in a crisis with 5.5 women killed by intimate partners per 100,000 women between 2020 and 2021, femicide rates have remained high, according to the South African Medical Research Council (SAMRC 2024). Intimate partner violence can be

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defined as all acts of physical, sexual, psychological, and emotional violence committed by a current or former intimate partner or spouse (Barnett et al. 2011). It includes actions which intentionally and unintentionally harms the partner. Family violence is conceptualised as physical, sexual, emotional, economic, and spiritual abuse which takes place between immediate family members: husbands, wives, children, and parents (Warren et al. 2024).

In South Africa, IPV is often framed within the context of apartheid and individual pathology; however, there is sufficient historical data to indicate that intimate partner and family violence occurred on a regular basis from 1700 to 1900 in the Cape Colony among slave owners as well as among the enslaved (Murray 2010; Scully 1995; Shell 2001). Research by Brown et al. (2022) concluded that colonisation was a driver of IPV in postcolonial countries and that patriarchal postcolonial countries had higher risks for IPV than countries which had not been colonised. The study found that colonialism imposed patriarchal beliefs and together with continued structural inequities made women vulnerable to violence (Brown et al. 2022). Therefore, the colonial context is important for situating the ways in which racist sexualisation, derogatory representations of black bodies, and suffering find its ways into the present framing of gendered violence (Boonzaier 2023).

Black and indigenous scholars describe how historical traumas of slavery and colonisation have contributed to the high levels of violence perpetrated against black and indigenous women today (Baderoon 2015; Burnette 2015; Gqola 2010). For example, Sarah Baartman, a Khoisan woman serves as a representation of how black women's bodies have been commodified and sexualised over centuries. In 1810 she was labelled as the Hottentot Venus and "Hottentot" is one of the derogatory names which indigenous people were referred to in South Africa (Aiswarya and Anu 2024). Sarah was forced to work as a domestic help and a slave for white farmers after the Dutch settlers killed her father and husband on her wedding day, when she was coerced to go to London by a British surgeon to be displayed in London's Piccadilly where people would pay to see her. Eventually Sarah was sold and displayed in France's Palais Royale. Her brain and genitals were preserved for research, and the findings were presented to the Academy of Sciences. A plaster cast of her body was also made, and it is preserved in the Museum of Natural History along with her skeleton. Both her brain and genitalia were on display in the Musée de l'Homme (Museum of Man) until 1972 (Aiswarya and Anu 2024).

Atrocities like the dehumanisation and enslavement of Sarah Baartman were largely ignored and forgotten by society. Jessica Murray (2010) stated that enslaved women's voices have been silenced in historical records. This article puts to work Pumla Gqola's (2010) slave memory project and Christina Sharpe's (2016) "Wake" as a post-humanist framework enabling us to re-imagine slave memory. By re-imagining the past, we may find new ways of inhabiting the present. Re-imagining slavery is about ethical remembrance of a human atrocity rather than memorialising the enslaved as victims or choosing to dissociate from the memory. What is often forgotten or "unremembered" is that both slavery and colonialism were gendered projects. Gqola (2010: 8) uses the term "unremembering" to describe a calculated act of exclusion and erasure inscribed by power hierarchies. Unremembering can be viewed as the deliberate exclusion of enslaved women's narratives from public discourse. "Unremembering" can also occur when societies deny events took place because it threatens their sense of safety or stability and is often referred to as dissociation. It is a common response to trauma (Stein 2012).

Trauma scholars refer to this denial of traumatic historical events by society as the "conspiracy of silence" (Danielli 1985). The term was based on the case of holocaust survivors as victims were rendered silent because they feared no one would believe them or listen to them. Furthermore, the silence is maintained by society. The trauma of enslavement has resulted in descendants not wanting to remember their past. Cape historians often refer to the "amnesia" of Cape slave descendants not recalling their slave heritage (North 2020; Shell 2001; Worden 2016). The amnesia is about trauma that is being dissociated and cut off not only for the individual or family but for society more broadly (Stein 2012). Tracing the longer history of the violence at Cape Colony may therefore enable us to interrogate the ways this violence has been reproduced intergenerationally.

Historical Context

Southern Africa was inhabited by indigenous groups which predate the first Dutch settlers in 1652 by centuries. Collectively they are called "Khoisan," made up of two groups, namely the San and the Khoi. The groups had encountered Europeans between 1487 and 1488 when the Portuguese went on an expedition led by Bartolomeo Dias, seeking a route to India (Verbyst 2022). The ship passed the southern tip of Africa which was known as the Cape of Good Hope. Eventually the Europeans engaged with the Khoisan hoping to trade. The first recorded incidence of violence occurred between the Khoisan and Europeans when the Europeans attempted to take water protected by the Khoisan.

The seventeenth century was the start of European colonisation of Southern Africa marked by the arrival of the first Dutch settlers in 1652 who brought with them African and Asian slaves. Although the Cape formed a small part of the Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie (Dutch East India Company – VOC) it was strategically valuable because it served as a refreshment station halfway between Europe and Asia. By 1731 the enslaved made up 42% of the population (Worden 2016). The shifting pattern of slave trading in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries from the Asian to the African Indian ocean meant that the enslaved who were brought to Cape Town were from East Africa and Mozambique. By 1807, African slaves were in predominance.

By preferring Asian and local born enslaved above African enslaved people the Dutch had set up the racial hierarchy within the Cape where mixed race or creolised slaves became more sought after and valued entrenching the racialised gendered relationships (Shell 2001; Worden 2016). This pattern of racial hierarchy was continued when the British occupied the Cape Colony. For example, a British traveller to the Cape in the early nineteenth century noted the racial appearance of the enslaved: "the Mozambique and Madagascar slaves are at once distinguished from the Malays by their black colour, woolly hair and negro countenance" (Burchell 1822-24, I: 33). Nigel Worden (2016) described how the Customs Controller in Cape Town in the 1820s categorised the enslaved at the Cape "into three classes: the Negro, the Malay, and the Africander" (locally born slaves). Both Worden (2016) and Robert Shell (2001) analysed the origins of the enslaved in the Cape and the historians also noted that there was a gender imbalance in Cape slavery with enslaved women consistently being in the minority. Jessica Murray (2010) discussed the gendered and patriarchal nature of the Cape Colony in the eighteenth century, when both enslaved and free women experienced domination by white males.

Murray (2010) explained how intimate partner violence among the enslaved and slave owners was prevalent in the eighteenth-century Cape Colony. The racial and patriarchal nature of the Cape society legitimised violence against enslaved women (Murray 2010). Men would be the head, and everyone would be subordinate to him. Enslaved women were often forced to have sex with visiting Europeans by their slave owners for the owner to profit from the situation either by being paid for the slave or by benefitting when the slave became pregnant (Murray 2010). Though male slaves were also deemed powerless, in their intimate relationships they appear to project their powerlessness on the enslaved women they were in relationship with. Violence and the threat of violence were also a means of social control, reminding the enslaved of their powerlessness. Cape white families who were slave owners were patriarchal with the husband being the head of the household and ruling over his wife and children. His slaves were given the status of children and were denied opportunities to become adults. Infantilising the enslaved, slave owners referred to male slaves as "boys" and female slaves as "girls" (Shell 2001).

What made Cape slavery unique was that many slaves, particularly women, worked in the homes of their owners rather than on plantations. Alan Mountain (2004) postulates that the ramifications of the enslaved being integrated into free burghers' homes was an ambiguous intimacy. They were slaves, but the patriarchal nature of the Cape household provided a quasi-sense of family. Many enslaved women were used as nannies and surrogate mothers. Slaveholders in the Cape regarded enslaved women and girls as easily available to them for sexual relationships (Shell 2001). Even though these relationships were not always violent, from a gendered perspective, enslaved women were exceptionally vulnerable because of their status.

Gendered divisions of labour within slaveholder families brought about division between enslaved women and men because enslaved women were employed in the houses of slave holders while enslaved men worked in the fields (Shell 2001). For 200 years, the enslaved were not allowed to marry one another. Pregnancies resulting from rape or relationships between slave owners and slave women in the Cape Colony often led to violence with male slave partners accusing mothers of infidelity (Murray 2010). Enslaved women's sexual vulnerability was acute because their freedom was associated with having a white slave owner as the father of their children. If slave women had children with their owners, the owner could choose to marry them, making the children legitimate. Roman Dutch Law at the time provided some safety for the child born of a free person or slave owner, in that the child could not be sold, and neither could the mother of the child be sold. In this way slave mothers and their children could not be separated (Vernal 2008).

Emancipation and the Early Twentieth Century

Emancipation in 1834 did not necessarily lead to the end of oppression for both the enslaved and free women. After emancipation, most liberated slaves were integrated into their former owner's families. Often, they were forced to live in the same lodgings their former masters provided when they were still enslaved. On the other hand, there were cases where single women were evicted from the lodgings of the slaveholders (Ross and Martin 2021). Historical records of court cases between 1896 and 1939 reveal how little women's positionality in Cape society changed after emancipation. Women were still being controlled by men, the state and religious institutions in society. Court cases reveal how women were punished for having abortions and conducting abortions (Moore 2021).

In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, most slave women left their former masters' homes after emancipation and went to live with their husbands who supported them (Ross and Martin 2021). This indicates that while enslaved women were emancipated, they remained dependent on men. In Cape Town, women who were the descendants of slaves were generally only allowed to be domestic workers or washers. The availability of domestic labour and the economic struggles of previously enslaved families meant that girls often left school at an early age to work for white families.

In the 1890s women were not granted divorces even when they were in violent relationships and they were regarded as legal minors and had to be represented by a male member of their family in legal matters (Moore 2020). The law during the nineteenth and early twentieth century in South Africa did not protect women against domestic violence. Courts did not always believe women, nor did they punish domestic violence, and the outcome would be in the husband's favour. The physical violence black women experienced at the hands of men in the twentieth century should also include the state violence of apartheid, which has been documented in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa (TRC 1998), whose report dedicated a chapter to the atrocities committed against women. Furthermore, structural inequalities, and unemployment among black men challenge notions of masculinity and contribute to feelings of powerlessness. In South Africa, black men were and are equally victims and perpetrators of violence, but men's vulnerability is often ignored.

Violent Intimacies

The focus of the article is on the silences and intergenerational transmission of violent intimacies such as intimate partner violence (IPV) and family violence. Intimacy studies have predominantly focused on the domestic sphere which has meant associating intimacy with positive outcomes and relationships. Intimacy is also associated with continuing connectedness, interdependencies and relationalities of intimate lives and related to gender and class of intimate practice (Jamieson 2013). However, critical scholars believe that intimacy is a space of contested power and that closeness and proximity is not a neutral practice. According to Asli Zengin (2024) intimacy can also take on violent forms. Violent intimacies centre on the formation, organisation, and circulation of intimacy through violence. Zengin (2024) purports that the state uses intimacy as a weapon of power within relationships of closeness and that violence and intimacy may work concurrently to shape institutions, forms of control and power.

In Cape Town, South Africa, IPV and family violence occurred within the context of structural violence of colonialism and apartheid. The violent legacy of colonialism is manifested both in the creolised racial identities and intimate relationships of descendants of the enslaved of the Cape Colony today. According to Voit et al. (2020) it is the intersection of race and gender that creates the context for IPV. Racial and gender oppression has resulted in gendered, social, and economic inequalities for black people in South Africa and those who have been previously colonised. The implications for black women in South Africa are that they are oppressed due to both their gender and race. An intersectional approach views IPV not just about gender but also about race in order to encompass all parts of an individual's identity (Crenshaw 1991). I argue that it is not only the context of slavery and colonisation, but also the ongoing oppression and marginalisation of black bodies that keep the "past" violence in the present.

Slave Memory and Post-Humanism

Pumla Gqola (2010) and Christina Sharpe (2016) have argued that traumatic memories of slavery have been transmitted through historical consciousness and through the collective values and beliefs of society. The "transmission of memory is a process by which biographical knowledge contributes to the construction of collective memory (representation of a shared past) from one generation to another" (Svob et al. 2016). Memory resists erasure and is important for the symbols through which communities re-invent themselves. Memory makes it possible that the legacy of intimate colonial relationships be transmitted to multiple generations today. In other words, colonial intimate violence can be viewed in the postcolonial present where slave descendant families experience high levels of IPV and family violence.

Gqola (2010) and Sharpe (2016) offer a post-humanist framework in which historical experiences of slavery, colonialism, and apartheid are not mutually exclusive but embedded in each other. Sharpe's "Wake" (2016) is a concept which describes the mourning and grieving of black people, which is ongoing, as their grief related to the violence of slavery as well as to contemporary violence in which black people's experiences have not been legitimised. This grief is also about the effects of the trauma of slavery which continue. Similarly, Karen Barad (2018), from a post-human feminist perspective, discusses the indeterminacy of time and the fact that each history co-exists with other histories. Therefore, post-humanism presents opportunities for interconnections with the material settings in which we live: with each other, and with the environment and all that it contains. Material settings in post-humanism refer to something which contains matter, it can be human or non-human. According to Jasmine Ulmer (2017), in post-humanism researchers come to understand how "matter comes to matter-." Interconnections with material settings in post-humanism open creative ways of understanding that the interconnections or interactions between humans and non-humans may be relevant for research. What this means is that we can learn from the intimate experiences of the enslaved even though they are long dead, as if they are present. Memories of the past that have been transmitted from the enslaved may not be their exact replicas, as intergenerational relationships can produce both continuity and changes to behavioural patterns, but it can still allow researchers to gain a deeper understanding of the enslaved. Humans who are alive are therefore not the only subjects we can do research with. We can therefore engage with the "ghosts" of the "past."

In this article, I interact with the sociological "ghosts" of the past by examining the narratives of my participants and the enslaved heritage they are connected to. These "ghosts" are the post-humans which Barad (2018) refers to by drawing on Jacques Derrida's (1994) "hauntology". Hauntology is the study of "politics of memory, of inheritance and of generations" (Derrida 1994: xix). Slave memory always evokes ambivalence and shame (Graff 2007), but a more-than-human turn in research offers a different set of methodological possibilities, beginning with the timeframes in which and about which we produce knowledge. As scholars, we should be interested in how we come to imagine new ways of knowing the past beyond factual archives and how we come to recognise that the past is not yet past but may resurface as toxic debris (Stoler 2008). The concept of intergenerational trauma and intergenerational transmission of violence provides us with an explanation to connect historical experiences of trauma such as colonial violence and the trauma of enslavement with contemporary traumatic and violent experiences.

Intergenerational Transmission of Intimate Partner Violence

Intergenerational transmission of violence occurs when the trauma of the violence is not processed or worked through by the individual, family, or community (Stein 2012). Intergenerational transmission also occurs when traumatic memories are transmitted intergenerationally through collective memory. Two key means of intergenerational transmission of violence are enforced silence and socialisation. Socialisation is a means of transmitting emotions, values, and rules onto the next generation. Enforced silence refers to isolation and indifference, "to be treated as if nothing terrible had happened as if there was no reason to be upset" (Stein 2012: 180). This silencing also transmits the violence and trauma to the next generation because the individual or group has not been able to process the traumatic experience either through talking about it or making sense of the experience through self-reflection. In the context of family violence, intergenerational transmission refers to the socialisation and social learning that helps to explain the ways in which children growing up in a violent society and family learnt violent roles and, subsequently, may play out the roles of the victim or victimiser in their own adult families (Pinna 2016; Voith et al. 2020; Wareham et al. 2009). Understanding the mechanisms of transmission helps one to identify what is being transmitted and how it is being transmitted from one generation to the next. According to Ibrahim Kira (2001), there are two kinds of intergenerational transmission. The first type happens within a family, for example, intergenerational family violence. The second takes place in a collective setting and is divided into two kinds: historical trauma like genocide or slavery, and social or structural trauma. This means that individuals can be exposed to trauma collectively through socio-historical events as well as within their families.

Colonisation and Contemporary Intimate Partner Violence

Black feminists such as Katherine McKittrick (2006) suggest that there is a long settler colonial history of sexualised violence against black women's bodies which has implications for contemporary violence against women. While the literature on the intergenerational transmission of family and intimate partner violence focuses on violence that occurred in the last three decades, indigenous scholars such as Brave Heart and DeBruyn 1998; Duran and Duran 1995; Menzies 2007 have explored how colonisation has contributed to contemporary levels of intimate violence today. They argue that disenfranchised grief has transmitted the colonial trauma over multiple generations of indigenous communities and families leading to effects such as intimate partner violence and high rates of substance use. The term disenfranchised grief can be defined as the types of losses and grief that families, communities, and societies refuse to recognise as legitimate or do not acknowledge. The term has been applied to histories of colonisation and loss of life and land as well as slavery (Doka 1989). According to psychoanalysts, when people are not allowed to grieve, or their grief and trauma is silenced they may re-enact the traumatic experience causing those around them to feel traumatised (Kogan 2012). Moreover, if grief and mourning are repressed or dissociated, enactment occurs where the individual or group "acts out" to avoid painful experiences related to the loss. Enactment is the externalisation of traumatic themes from the past in the form of non-verbal behaviour and violence is one of the ways people may act out (Kogan 2012).

Methods

The present article is based on an empirical study of three generations of seven families who were descendants of the enslaved. I chose a multiple case study design, in which each family represented a case or the unit of analysis. This methodology allows one to focus on the complexity and details of relationships between people. The phenomenon which I studied through qualitative research interviews with participants who were descendants of the enslaved, was the historical trauma of slavery and the resulting transmission of violence.

The research in Cape Town focused on families who had typical slave surnames such as Titus, Scipio, September, and February, as well as various Muslim surnames that were slave surnames (Shell 2001). Pseudonyms have been used in the article so that participants and their families cannot be identified. The participants originated from one of apartheid's racially designated groups, namely "Coloured." In the 1820s the word "mulatto" or creole slave was conveniently replaced by the word "Coloured" and Shell (2001) noted that this term "Coloured" has stubbornly persisted. Creolisation occurred when enslaved women living in the Cape gave birth to children who were also enslaved. The families lived in one of the largest "Coloured" communities established during apartheid due to forced removals under the Group Areas Act of 1950. Due to structural inequalities of the past, the community experiences high levels of poverty, crime violence, and substance use. These are also known risk factors of IPV.

My qualitative, interpretive research methodology involved seven families and twenty-one participants. According to intergenerational trauma literature, one can identify the transmission of trauma from one generation to the next by focusing on two or three generations.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical clearance from the University of Western Cape was obtained. Furthermore written, voluntarily informed consent was obtained from participants. All participants were informed that external support or counselling was available due to the types of questions posed in the interview schedule. Prior arrangements with a counsellor were made and there were no costs for the participants. Some of the participants were experiencing the long-term effects of trauma and were offered the opportunity to go for counselling with an independent trauma counsellor, which they took up.

Data Collection

Life histories, semi-structured interviews, and focus groups were utilised to collect the data. The focus groups consisted of three or two generations of each family, with each family forming a separate focus group. Family history covering three generations can easily cover over a century and include historical events and social changes that affected the family over that time (reference). The life histories consisted of two interviews, one being largely unstructured and based on two questions: "Can you tell me about your life, living and growing up in Cape Town?" and "Could you please tell me about your family history or what you know about your family's history?" In the second, semi-structured, interview participants were asked to talk about their lives before they were displaced and their slave heritage. The main questions posed to participants were "Can you please tell me about any significant events in your life or your family's life?" and "Describe how you feel about the fact that your family has a typical slave surname given the history of slavery in the Cape?"

The six phases of Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis were used to examine the data. The themes revolved around intergenerational trauma and slave heritage. Once all the data had been collected from all seven cases, themes were generated. Themes started to emerge on experiences of displacement, loss and nostalgia, poverty, alcohol abuse and drug abuse, and community and family violence, specifically intimate partner violence and slave heritage. I did not ask the participants to discuss IPV, but the participants disclosed IPV as significant events in their lives.

Discussion

While the article is about IPV, other forms of violence that made up the daily experience of the participants cannot be excluded. According to Zengin (2024) intimacy with violence is often the lived experience of marginalised groups. Voith et al. (2020) found that IPV is influenced by historical and socio-cultural forms of oppression and violence experienced by men of colour, and these include racism. IPV is an outcome of colonial violence by slave owners, enslaved men, and colonial governors (Ramphele 1989). On her examination of rape in the Cape Colony Pamela Scully (1995) stated that race, gender, and class guided colonial rule and that the sexual violence perpetrated against black women during colonial rule remains underinvestigated. Therefore, race operates as a form of symbolic violence.

Sexual Violence

Patriarchal beliefs and assumptions that women are required to fulfil men's sexual needs underpin the sexual and physical violence that both enslaved women and descendants of the enslaved experienced (Murray 2010). The vulnerability of the women in my study revealed how the oppression of race and gender remains operational in families of enslaved descendants. The women in my study disclosed the sexual violence where intimate relationships had become sites of violence:

> "I became so scared of him because I thought he was going to kill me. He said I am either going to kill you or do this or take you out of Cape Town. And I thought what could I do, I don't recognise this man [husband] and then he raped me. I was so scared. It felt like a stranger who was raping me." (September, second generation)

> "I know that my mother was pregnant with me because my father raped her. I also experienced the same thing [rape] and I also never spoke about it." (September, third generation)

> "I'm [an] abused woman, I had to flee, because of what my husband did to me. Everyone knows what my husband does. But I don't talk." (February, second generation)

> "I was four or five years old. So, this man called me in the house and then he would tell he would give me money. Because there are sometimes things that you can't remember, but if it's something you will always remember. And you will grow up with it. But I hope that he doesn't do what he did to me to other children. Because I don't know if he's still out there may be doing it [sexual abuse] still, because of that cycle that he is in. And this other guy, I was also…in grade 6… he used to touch me. I told my mother, I don't think she believed me. But this [sexual abuse] I never told my mommy and my daddy all she would [say to] me is don't tell your father what happened. And I kept my mouth because I was still a child. She never told my father." (February, third generation)

The trauma of sexual violence may permanently damage one's ability to become intimate and form healthy attachment and close relationships (Cassidy 2001). As can be seen in the third generation September participant, the daughter knew that her father had raped her mother, because her mother explained this to her when her father was imprisoned. The quotes indicate how the participants felt that they should not speak about their traumatic experiences. Silence also communicates that the trauma is indescribable. In this way, third-generation children share the trauma without knowing any details of the traumatic experiences of the second generation who were the mothers of the third generation. Therefore, the trauma is transmitted through indirect "knowing" (Hoffman 2004). The narratives of the participants reveal their powerless position as women in addition to the long-term effects of the trauma of sexual violence. Moreover, the quotes demonstrate how violent intimacy challenges the boundaries of what is private and public, personal and political, also of what is local and global (Zengin 2024). On the one hand sexual activity is perceived as private and personal and on the other hand sexual violence has become both a public and political matter in South Africa. In a local and global space, black women's bodies remain a site of violence connecting the participants intimately with black women who have experienced sexual violence. The potential for resistance can therefore also emerge from sites of violent intimacies where women find their collective voice as has been the case in South Africa where violence against women has been placed on the political agenda of the president.

Intimate Partner Violence

Studies on male perpetrators of IPV in Cape Town have indicated that men become violent towards their intimate partners because they want to control them and thereby affirm successful notions of masculinity (Hoosain and Robertson 2023; Mathews et al. 2015). Several participants in my study disclosed exposure to intimate partner violence. In the interview Mr. Valentine revealed that he had witnessed IPV as a child and he had also been violent in relationships. Mr. Valentine's son, a second-generation participant, also disclosed that he witnessed his father being violent towards women:

> "Then I saw there's violence between my dad and my stepmother but growing up I remember a lot of stuff." (Valentine, first generation)
>
> "One of the first times where I'd seen my father was violent with a woman, and it's something that has always been on my mind, you know. I tried not to go there." (Valentine, second generation)

The quotes indicate the intergenerational nature of intimate partner violence, as well as how both participants remembered the trauma of the experience. For children, family is the main source of socialisation and parents can transmit indirect knowledge and traumatic knowledge to their children. Traumatised people may also re-enact their trauma, exposing those close to them to this trauma. The trauma is then transmitted to those around them. This can take the form of re-enacting violence (Kogan 2012). The quotes of participants above reveal how the Valentine family is attempting to deal with traumatic violence across two generations. The February family and the Valentine family were also trying to deal with the trauma of IPV over multiple generations as the participants reflected on the significant events in their family:

> "My father abused my mother. He abused her and then he would return, then he would come with alcohol. He would lift up the bed then my mother and I are sitting on it. Then

> he would tip the bed upside down. How could he abuse my mother like that? I know we were young, but we saw those things, I grew up with that and it [traumatic memories] will not go away." (February, second generation)
>
> "We women have a choice, my father hits my mother, why she does not divorce him I don't know? When I met the father of my baby, I don't know why he [father of the baby] hurt me. So, I left him." (February, third generation)

In the February family the quotes of the participants indicate that there were three generations who were exposed to IPV. The third generation of the February family was also exposed to parental violence. Exposure to continuous interparental violence has long-term negative psychological, social, and academic effects on children. Patriarchal beliefs remain embedded in South African society due to the intergenerational transmission of knowledge of gender relations and stereotypes through socialisation in family and society. "How can we know something if we were not there?" Barri Belnap (2012) says that some remembrances of trauma are passed down from our ancestors in the form of life lessons.

However, contemporary ways of getting people to narrate their personal stories is problematic for oppressed people because most of the forms of violence committed against oppressed groups and people have been implicit or structural and may remain hidden in personal accounts of trauma (Menzies 2007). Individual stories of personal trauma form part of the larger historical formations of colonialism and violence. Studies on intimacy in relationships reveal the entanglement between power and violence. Scholars of intimacy are not interested in the subjective experience between intimacy and violence but are concerned with the social and political implications of the connection. The connection between violence and intimacy and its social and political ramifications for the descendants of the enslaved has been mediated by time and memory. But if time is understood as cyclical and histories as embedded in each other, as Sharpe (2016), Gqola (2010) and Barad (2017) suggest, then slavery and contemporary violence against black women and men would be connected.

Recalling Slave Heritage

Sharpe (2016: 15) says "In the wake, the past that is not past reappears, always, to rupture the present." For the participants in my study, there was no separation between past and ongoing violence in their lives. Participants spoke as if the violent past was in the present.

> “Hendrik yeah, my grandmother’s husband. He was part of the historical events, the slavery part. How do I cope with it? I overlook it, I have to overlook it now. You see. Because there’s better things to look at. Things to read, understand that’s how I have to cope with it. It makes me stronger. I try not to, like I said I try not to fight them [White people], always try to avoid an argument, if you say something then I say I sorry I didn’t mean it. You know. Rather be the weak one. Or pretend to be the weaker. Rather be submissive, that’s ok, you know you can be strong, just leave it. [Prevent the argument from going further]. There are times where you have to do something about it, you can just keep quiet or run away.” (Valentine, first generation)

Recalling the trauma of his slave heritage, even though Mr. Valentine was born 200 years after emancipation, is an indication of traumatic memory which has been transmitted intergenerationally through socialisation in the family and society. Zengin (2016: 14) views socialisation as a process in which the workings of state power operate through the establishment of intimate (including sexual) links that reach into the inner lives and bodies of its citizens. Mr. Valentine recalls his slave heritage and experiences as if he were his great-grandfather Hendrik. The interview evolved as if it were Hendrik, the great-grandfather, who was enslaved and died, was speaking. The participant relates to his great-grandfather through kinship and reveals how intimacy can also be an embodied experience formed and mediated through social relations, affective ties, and senses (Zengin 2024). I was therefore engaged with the sociological ghost, the great-grandfather of the participant.

The quote by Mr. Valentine is an example of how slave memory and hauntology confound linear conceptions of time. According to Barad (2017), in quantum physics, one particle can co-exist across multiple times and spaces which means that we can subjectively occupy multiple spaces in time, and this is how memory can operate over multiple spaces of time. This would explain Mr. Valentine’s knowing the subjective experience of his enslaved ancestors. In addition, the participant’s words are in response to the trauma of slavery and his encounters with racism are an indication of the colonial trauma response which Teresa Evans-Campbell (2008) conceptualised. The colonial trauma response focuses on both historical and contemporary trauma responses where current discriminatory experiences can trigger the individual to connect or identify with a past collective sense of trauma as a member of an oppressed group. When Mr. Valentine states that he "has to overlook it now" he was referring to trauma of slavery and "overlooking it" is a traumatic stress response of avoidance and dissociation, where the individual is disconnecting from the thoughts and feelings that threaten their sense of safety. Mr. Valentine's response is symbolic of how society avoided engaging in slave memories. Participants from another family had similar responses to recalling their slave heritage:

> "If you look at the movies, and you know that's probably the only time where we can really see what slavery meant, because we never lived through that you know. But whether it's now fact or fiction I don't know." (Jacobs, second generation)
>
> "I am not really interested in what they say about slaves, because it's not a good topic for me to speak about or to hear even about. I avoid that topic being a slave." (Jacobs, third generation)

The participant's avoidance is reflective of mourning and grieving for a loss that has not been recognised by society (Doka 1989). Social and collective silence marginalises the process of meaning-making and questioning for people involved and affected by the trauma. Personal memories remain individually isolated and unacknowledged by the larger society. This leaves the younger generation without a context that would connect identity, family, and community with history, culture, and society (Lin et al. 2009). Intimacy according to Cassidy (2001) is about the truth about who a person really is, and if Zengin (2024) purports that we are intimate citizens of the state then citizens descendants may experience a conflict between what they are told by society and what they experience. For example, a participant explained "honestly think we're still living the same, we still getting treated the same, we haven't moved forward ever since. Although the white man is not ruling, there's been so much changes, but it is still not enough for us for what our parents went through" (Jacobs, second generation) The participant's quote demonstrates the conflict and cognitive dissonance descendants experience when they reflect on their positionality in South African society.

Race and Gender

Contrary to popular discourse, racialised gendered relationships – referring to the simultaneous effects of race and gender on relationships – were a feature of Cape society before apartheid had occurred (Scully 1995). While black women shared gender oppression with white women, what white women and the enslaved women did not share was racialised oppression. Writing about the children of enslaved women and white men, Fiona Vernal (2008) noted that there was a "whitening" of Cape Colony slaves through violent intimacy, while Beckles (1996) stated that in Barbados enslaved women were consciously choosing white men to ensure the freedom of their children. Vernal argued that while the narratives of enslaved women may provide indication that not all intimate relationships between slave women and men were violent, the narratives always reveal the extreme vulnerability of slave women's bodies. Vernal's argument demonstrates how intimacy and violent intimacy was used to control the enslaved and their descendants. Even indirectly, my participants cast "creolisation" as problematic on different levels foremost about their identity, as many descendants still have questions about their ancestry.

> "I never looked at my family's surname [typical slave surname] in that way. This history is important to me. I want to know about how my mother's mother lived. I would be interested in looking up my family's surname and history." (February, third generation)

> "I want to know where I come from. I am glad I wasn't born then [during the slave era] but I would like to know where I come from at the end of the day." (Valentine, second generation)

The quotes reflect the silencing both within families and Cape society regarding the history of slavery (Gqola 2010; Wilkins 2017; Worden 2016). Forced creolisation was also damaging for the gender relations between enslaved men and women because it created racial tensions in families and divisions within families that still persist today (Shell 2001). Participants explained the racial hierarchy based on the texture of hair in their families.

> "I think my grandmother was white. Or mixed race or something, but she had long plaits. My mother them are all grandchildren who could enter the house because they had the "hair" [straight hair.] If you did not have straight hair, then you did not belong to her. My grandmother's sisters' children had hair which was a little curly and she would throw them with plates." (September, third generation)

> "But my wife was not like white, they hold it in such type – in the white line, she was mixed actually, English and Afrikaans. But she was like totally English. And that "Ladie-dah" [upper class] type, and she's like dark of complexion, looks like an Indian complexion wise. And her hair and that type of thing." (Valentine, first generation)

The participants above discuss whiteness and straight hair as markers of European features and as valuable. In fact, the September participant described how her grandmother would give preferential treatment to grandchildren who had white features while rejecting the ones who had curly hair. Only the slave women of the Dutch East India Company's Slave Lodge were allowed to be married, and only because it became embarrassing for a Dutch Commissioner when he saw the number of mixed-race children or what was then called "malutto slaves" (Shell 2001). However, violent intimacies can also be sites of empowerment as Vernal (2008) recalls a single court case where an enslaved woman's plea to free her children from enslavement was granted. This created tensions between enslaved men and women because the women were given preferential treatment. The interference of the colonial state in intimate relationships was a violent intimacy because the enslaved experience the colonial state intimately in their lives. Having a partner who was either white or had white features was also sought after, which can be seen in Mr. Valentine's quote regarding his wife's hair and the fact that she was regarded as "upper class." This is an indication of how enduring the colonial legacies of racial stratification and the ramifications on intimate and family relationships have been transmitted intergenerationally.

Family Life and Children

It is well documented that black women have worked in white families as domestics and nannies since the seventeenth century and still do. Shell (2001) wrote extensively about the history of enslaved women working for settler families and Gqola (2010) discussed black domestic workers in post-apartheid. Although my participants did not make the connection with domestic work as a legacy of slavery, generations of descendants took up domestic work with white families. For example, the second-generation September family member left school in grade four to work for a white family. The participant was forced to leave her own family and live and work with the white family whom she did not know. This took place in 1978. She was chosen because of her gender as well as her European appearance.

> "Mommy said to me, my child you must go with this white woman; you are going to work with her. Like I can remember, mommy packed my poor clothes just like that in a plastic bag. Oh, and I cried. I was just a child, I can't, I am only in grade four how can I leave here?" (September, second generation)

The participant was traumatised by the experience as it was her mother who was supposed to protect her. As a woman, Mrs. September would be perceived as being a bad mother for forcing her daughter to leave school while in grade four. However, working for white families as domestic help and nannies was common practice in the Cape Colony during the period of slavery as well as after emancipation (Ross and Martin 2021). Another participant recalls how she also left school at a young age to work for a white family, and she also mentions that her mother worked and lived with white people.

> "My mother slept in by white people. And my mother worked, so she was not the one who cared for us, but my grandmother cared for us, but ok my mother would see that we had food when she was home on a Saturday. I had to help the family. And then I did not really have much of an education because I was the eldest of the girls and so I also had to work by white people to help my mother." (Caesar family, first generation)
>
> "We did not have the privileges of white people that time [1940s to 1994]. That time my grandmother worked for white people and my aunt worked all the years for white people, my mother also worked for white people." (Caesar, second generation)

In these quotes generations of children were denied the opportunity to be raised by both their parents. For example, a second-generation participant (Caesar family) discussed that he was raised by his grandmother because his mother was working as a domestic for a white family. Through colonial practice and apartheid laws reaching into domestic spheres, the intimate relationships of descendants have been shaped, often resulting in separation and loss of familial figures. The participants' narratives revealed the intergenerational nature of black women's subordinate position and the long-term implications that violent intimacies have on the family life of descendants.

Conclusion

An individual's identity develops within multiple systems and histories. What if those histories are traumatising and not recognised? The stories of participants in the above case study of Cape Town memories allude to a past that is not finished and confounds linear conceptualisations of time. The narratives may represent the notion of the haunting of sociological ghosts, which highlight that a story has not been told, and a trauma has not been mourned. The narratives of the participants highlight that society may try to silence either contemporary intimate violence or the past, however traumatic memories resist erasure.

Within a post-humanism framework, the participant's narratives are also symbolic of history repeating itself. Descendants of both slave owners and slaves have difficulty in engaging with slave memory. Engaging with the sociological ghosts of the past through slave memory can allow us to disrupt discursive knowledge of racialised gender relations which has been transmitted over multiple generations. Re-imagining the past in new ways allows us to transform current practice and spaces with descendants. The concept of re-membering is not about going back to what was, but related to doing justice to those who have experienced past traumas and that makes new histories possible. Re-imagining slave memory creates the space to excavate subjugated experiences and memories bringing to the fore a perspective that culturally hegemonic practices have closed off. In postcolonial contexts, intimate partner violence is not recent, but part of an ongoing oppression of black women while men's vulnerability may be invisible.

Violent intimacies can be sites of oppression, but they can also include resistance where descendants have survived both enslavement and apartheid, and the struggle for black women's empowerment is ongoing and takes place in intimate ways.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest is reported by the author.

Statement of Ethics

Ethical clearance for the study was obtained from the Office of the Dean of Research, the University of Western Cape (UWC), Community and Health Science Faculty Board Research Ethics Committees, and the UWC Senate Research Committee. The Social Work Code of Ethics of the South African Council for Social Service Professions (SACSSP) was also adhered to.

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