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Avenue Cheikh Anta Diop, Angle Canal IV
P.O. Box 3304, Dakar, SENEGAL
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Researching Gender Relations in Africa: Directions and Landmarks in Feminist Research Methodology

Josephine Ahikire*

Abstract

This article is a reflection on critical perspectives on researching gender relations. It is an overview of the landmarks in feminist methodology and the quest for greater inventiveness and sensibility in researching gender relations in Africa. Critical questions include: What milestones have been reached and why? What flaws do we need to correct and what will it take? The article was generated as part of feminist research methodology training at CODESRIA. It is designed to be a contribution to the ongoing African feminist conversation around the critical need for debunking colonial discourses and developmentalist buzzwords in researching gender relations, and the need for African realities to inform research and knowledge generation on gender relations on the continent.

Résumé

Cet article est une réflexion sur les perspectives déterminantes de la recherche sur les relations de genre. C'est un aperçu des points saillants de la méthodologie féministe et de la quête d'inventivité et de sensibilité dans la recherche sur les relations de genre en Afrique. Les questions essentielles sont notamment : Quels objectifs ont été atteints et pourquoi ? Quelles lacunes devront être corrigées et comment y parvenir ? Le présent article a été rédigé dans le cadre d'une formation à la méthodologie de recherche féministe au CODESRIA. Il est conçu comme une contribution à la conversation féministe africaine en cours sur la nécessité cruciale de démystifier les discours coloniaux et les mots développementalistes à la mode dans la recherche sur les relations de genre, et le besoin des réalités africaines pour informer la recherche et la génération de connaissances sur les relations de genre sur le continent.

* Associate Professor, PRINCIPAL, College of Humanities & Social Sciences (CHUSS) Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda / Honorary Professor, Nelson Mandela University, South Africa. Email: ahikirejosephine@gmail.com; josephine.ahikire@mak.ac.ug

Introduction

In the 1980s Marjorie Mbilinyi observed that the academic field of women's studies was simply catching up with the policy-oriented applied research (POAR) trends and reliance on external funding that had been characteristic of social science in general in neo-colonial Africa (1984:291). Mbilinyi sought to highlight the fact that the general roll-out of women's studies at the time did not promise enough in the direction of rigorous questioning, with many efforts locked up in the integrationist mode of the Women in Development (WID) discourse (Ahikire 1994; Mama 1996). Hand in hand with a donor-driven agenda was an apparently detheorised and depoliticised body of knowledge threatening to become the sole representation of women's studies.

Writing in the 1990s, Amina Mama (1996) (http://www.agi.ac.za/agi/gender-studies/gws) documented the fact that women's studies in Africa had steadily gained strength as a growing number of indigenous scholars, and women in particular, became involved in studies of gender relations. Mama indicates that even though the study of gender relations was still largely dominated by philosophical, theoretical and methodological concerns emanating from Western constructions, there was a growing body of thought that could be seen to constitute African feminism. This observation indicated relative progress in the building of feminist knowledges by and for Africa.

In very specific ways, social research has today embraced the concept of gender as an important tool for social analysis. In contrast to the last three decades or so, when social science discourse was overtly blind to the gender variable, the current period shows that there is, in general, a tacit agreement that gender can no longer be ignored. As demonstrated by the ground-breaking volume, *Engendering African Social Sciences* (Imam, Mama & Sow 1997), there is at the same time increased legitimacy for a feminist critique. Indeed the feminist challenge in the field of knowledge has gained momentum on the global scale generally and in Africa specifically. Imam aptly asserts this rising legitimacy when she argues that:

> …a social science which does not acknowledge gender as an analytic category is an impoverished and distorted science, and cannot accurately explain social realities and hence cannot provide a way out of the present crisis in Africa (1997:2).

This article deals with the question of what feminist methodological questions are especially raised in the African context and aims to contribute to the intellectual and political project of building a feminist body of

thought that is grounded in, and responsive to, local conditions and peoples' struggles in Africa. This for instance, is part of what Tamale (2020) envisions as the ability to become fluent in our cultural systems, to cultivate critical consciousness thereby reclaiming our humanity.

Situating Feminist Methodology

Definitional questions may serve many purposes, one of which might be to pursue an exclusionary agenda: 'what it is not'. The question 'what is feminist methodology?' is instead inclusive, relating to what broad principles might guide feminist research. This question has been posed by feminists as well as anti-feminists. While those hostile to feminism (anti-feminists) will pose the question, in many cases, to ridicule and/or dismiss the knowledge produced through such methodologies, feminist scholars engage with the question to fulfil a specific intellectual and political project. In very broad terms, feminism is a movement and a set of beliefs that problematise gender inequality (DeVault 1996). Coming into the arena of knowledge at the level of critique, feminism has the double duty of challenging the patriarchal order in a fundamental way, particularly at the point of knowledge production, and of working to create solid alternative frameworks. In this sense, DeVault offers a good reminder that feminist methodology will not be found in some stable orthodoxy but rather in an evolving dialogue (1996:31).

In posing the famous question, 'Is there a feminist method?', Harding crystallised the debate on feminist methodology and sought to clearly articulate what feminist imperatives bring to social research. According to Harding, a research method is simply a technique for gathering evidence, whereas methodology is a much more rigorous arena, embracing theoretical and epistemological questions (1987:2). Taking this perspective, feminist research methodology is not just about the techniques used in the field on women or by women, to gather evidence, but rather the entire research process from the formulation of questions, the assumptions behind the different formulations, the interpretive and justificatory strategy, information tools and their use, as well as the manner of utilisation of that particular research output. This means, as has been argued by a number of scholars, that feminist methodology is not just a matter of adding women to the sample or to the research fraternity, although these aspects are part and parcel of the whole feminist challenge.

The feminist challenge goes further, requiring a retheorisation of what is being studied and why. It also includes addressing the manner in which

the intellectual and practical aspects of the research are executed and the specific location of women therein. This is the argument that feminists have made: we cannot afford to merely add women into traditional frameworks of knowledge because those very frameworks are based on misogynist notions, hence there is a need to deconstruct them and reconstruct new knowledges informed by feminist imperatives. Furthermore, feminism requires knowledge explicitly dedicated to the transformation of gender relations – the social configuration of maleness and femaleness across all spheres of life, and the implications for theory and practice. The fact that this knowledge has been historically ignored therefore brings up the issue of the need to deconstruct existing knowledge.

The daunting task for the feminist researcher is the 'how' of this deconstruction and reconstruction. If we are to use the famous feminist argument with regard to history, the fact that the women's story is left untold (say in narratives on colonialism in Africa) does not mean that half the story is left untold. Rather it means that the story has to be told anew. As Oakley puts it, this brings up the problem, 'not of gender and methodology, but of the gendering of methodology itself as a social construction' (1998:707).

Research is principally about the power to define reality and, in effect, make some claim about the world. In as far as feminist research is concerned, the very central question is from what point of view is reality being defined and what claims are made, especially with regard to women's location and gender relations in general? This goes hand in hand with the acknowledgement that each aspect of reality is gendered and ingrained within a dynamic social process of specific contexts. To address that question through the entire research process, a series of questions ought to be posed at each level. For example, what informs the choice, why are the questions identified important at all, and what are the underlying assumptions, especially about men and women?

If we think about research as a series of steps relating to assumptions and procedures, these are basically four. One is the very starting point of formulating the questions and/or the identification of the research problem; two is the setting up of tools and gathering evidence; three is the interpretation of evidence and four, the dissemination of the research outputs. And specifically, what is the location/place of 'woman' as a fundamental focus for feminism? Such questions then determine the choice of tools as well as the overall interpretive strategy.

On Gender and Epistemology

Epistemology – the theory of knowledge – is an important arena in feminist research. It primarily addresses questions of what knowledge is, how knowledge is acquired and what the means of production of that knowledge are. According to Harding, epistemology:

> answers questions about who can be a knower…what tests beliefs must pass in order to be legitimated as knowledge; …what kinds of things can be known… (1987:3).

Epistemological questions hence form part of the fundamentals of research methodology and ways of knowing. As such, the feminist challenge begins at this very point, meaning that the ordering of the knowledge production has to change to include women as well as the consideration of relations of gender as part of what needs to be known.

Feminist knowledge proceeds from the position that women have been silenced and made invisible in the knowledge enterprise. In specific relation to social research, the premise is that traditional social science ignores or marginalises women, that all the major social theories explain the world from the masculine point of view (Ahikire 1994; Imam 1997; Oakley 1998). Hence, as a starting point, feminist methodology involves 'conceptualising women as knowers' (Obbo 1997) and giving them a subject as opposed to an object status in the research process, validating the voice of the researched (Harding 1987).

Yet, voice is not an unproblematic issue. There are questions about the extent to which claims of giving voice to research subjects are real. A number of critics have posed questions about whether or not the pretext of giving voice carries with it a danger of recreating inequalities in knowledge production thereby masking a deeper form of exploitation.

The way out of this impasse is however not to abandon the whole concept of the voice of the researched. The orientation of constructing the women as knowers, and not just as a source of *raw* data, is key to feminist research. Giving, or rather allowing for, voice of the researched, especially women, is about validating their experiences and using those experiences as a basis for further theorisation. Principally, feminist research is concerned with the fact that women's voices ought to be captured and validated to inform the conceptual and interpretive strategy.

When looking at the question of who holds the power in research, another question that needs to be considered is that of standpoint. Standpoint epistemology is a theory of knowledge that attaches importance

to one's position in society. Narayan argues, for instance, that oppressed social groups have an epistemic privilege in terms of knowledge about both their own position and that of the dominant groups – what is sometimes referred to as 'double vision' (1989:265). The argument here is that the location of oppressed groups allows them knowledge of both their own contexts and those of their oppressors since they must survive in a society governed by the practices of their oppressors.

If we look at women as an oppressed social group, we can place women in different groups based on social cleavages such as class, race, ethnicity, religion and age. Standpoint epistemology regarding women in the research process would mean that women would generally have an epistemic advantage over men in terms of the understanding of gender relations. In terms of intra-gender power relations, this would also mean that women from relatively disadvantaged groups have more epistemic privilege than women from dominant groups. What then does standpoint epistemology mean for feminist research in the African context?

At the very broad level, there have been robust feminist debates around the question of race and the fact that white feminists have tended to dominate 'Third World' feminist scholarship. Amadiume (1997), Mohanty (1988), Oyewumi (2000, 2013) and many others critique the fact that Third World women have been predominantly viewed through the lens of white women thereby distorting their reality. In her 1988 article, 'Under Western Eyes', Mohanty offers a forceful critique of the assumption of women as an 'always-already' constituted group in the particular case of the 'Third World' as a manifestation of colonial discourse and Western ethnocentrism. Amadiume's 1990s thesis of 'Re-inventing Africa' basically stems from her long time battle with what she terms:

> the racist division of the world and the indifference to those being studied – in the attitude and politics of western feminists to Third World women (1987:2).

Amadiume strongly argues that the generalisation about African women is a false imposition and a key methodological problem in feminist research in Africa. Mohanty also asserts that the problem is not only in relation to Western researchers but that it also pertains to what she terms 'identical analytical principles employed by Third World scholars writing about their own cultures' (1988:62).

In effect, the imperative here is that Black/African women are in a better position to write about and analyse their contexts. This is a very significant area of the politics of knowledge especially with regard to feminist knowledge where there is already an accusation of it being an

imposition from the West. Yet this should not necessarily lead to the kind of fundamentalism expressed in the phrase 'it takes one to know one'. It only means that African women scholars or African feminist scholars generally ought to have the capacity to control the means of discourse about their experience (Narayan 1989). Controlling the means of discourse about the African experience means that African scholars in a very general sense are at the forefront of the theorisation and determination of the direction of the knowledge enterprise. In a sense, the epistemic privilege question should be posed at all levels – men versus women, Black women versus white women, middle-class versus poor women and so on.

Feminists have emphasised the fact that conducting feminist research needs to be framed in a way that allows for a transparent acknowledgment of power relations in the research process with equally transparent mechanisms to deal with those relations. The feminist researcher must constantly engage with the question of what power relations exist between the researcher and the researched. In this way feminist research is not merely an 'extraction of data' but rather a process that leaves the researched more empowered.

The issue here is that power dynamics in the research process should not be assumed to operate in a particular direction, as class and status are in fact highly complicated in contemporary contexts. It should indeed never be surprising if a woman employs the very constructions that oppress women to refer and /or relate to a fellow woman. Women's actions must be understood within their context of subordination. Women employ the ideological constructions – whether ethnic, cultural or religious – available to them as members of specific communities.

On the whole, epistemological questions are very significant for feminist research and more so in the African context. Although these arguments about 'us' and 'them' could relate generally to the entire field of social research, it is also true that through the feminist engagement, the subject woman has engendered new insights into the debate. What needs to be underlined is that epistemological issues need not be posed in a way that causes paralysis. Morsy (1998) in her exposition of studying her Egyptian homeland demonstrates the complexities of epistemic advantage and concludes that Arab women researchers no doubt have the opportunity to make important theoretical contributions towards the understanding of their society but hastens to add that:

> Our direct experience in our homeland is only an opportunity for knowing, not knowledge itself (1998:90).

Narayan similarly argues against a reification of the doctrine of 'double vision' into a metaphysics that serves as a substitute for concrete social analysis (1989:268). A critical point in the above assertions is the reminder that African feminist researchers should steer clear of the tendency to assume that mere location in the continent necessarily passes for epistemic advantage, where the African woman becomes 'data' itself. It is an opportunity for knowing that should be nurtured and contextually legitimated rather than taken for granted.

Quite honestly, a crude construction of difference, for example epistemic advantage and how it should inform the claim to knowledge, may turn out to be counterproductive. Differences of say, Black, white, middle class, peasant, grassroots can be used as dichotomies, and invoked to invalidate whatever any woman has to say. A good example is how, in the African context, women scholars are often accused of taking advantage of poor women and assuming to speak on their behalf. This calls for a good amount of reflexivity in the research. Ultimately, the feminist researcher does not have to be apologetic about 'speaking on behalf' – instead it is turned into the strength of what is written and/or advanced.

Researching Gender Relations: Representing Women

Researching gender relations involves the analysis of how gender structures relationships and how, at the same time, gender is structured through other social processes. According to Imam, research on gender could take three forms: One, it may be focused specifically on women (or men) so long as the analysis clearly recognises the gender relations which historically construct its subject. Two, it may also focus specifically on some referent of gender relations such as conjugal relations (husband/wife). And three, researching gender may also be about integrating the feminist insights into the understanding of almost any phenomenon (1997:5).

In Africa, it is observed that the broad span of feminist studies mainly falls in category one and two, while very little falls in category three. Several studies have analysed women's positions and conditions in specific political economic social and cultural settings. For example, there are studies about women's access to different spaces including education, health, employment, production inputs and public office to mention but a few. There are also studies on the status of women in different cultures as well as studies on the different roles of women ranging from social movements to household provisioning and reproduction. A few studies also take on the gendering processes at societal level, deepening the understanding of the complexity of national and international processes through a gendered analysis.

Whatever the choice of level, it is important that key questions are posed at each stage of the research with this central concern: 'how feminist'? The key questions relate to assumptions about women and men's role in society, issues of agency and particularly how women are represented, issues of agency as well as assumptions about women and men's role in society. Fundamentally, what does it mean to do African feminist research?

Representation: Hearing, Seeing Women and the Question of Agency

As noted above in the discussion on epistemology, feminist researchers in the Third World generally and in Africa in particular have challenged the paternalistic and ethnocentric generalisation of Third World women as poor and helpless – eternal victims. For example, stemming from what Lazreg (1994) calls a tendency to reduce women into one dimension of their lives such as family and housework, the discourse on Third World women has been overly totalising. Over the years there has been a strong insistence on according women a subject rather than an object status in research. Currently, there is a strong inclination towards approaches that seek to make African women visible. Indeed, as already indicated, the majority of feminist studies actually focus on women.

Yet the issue of representation is not answered by visibility alone. Attendant questions must be posed with regard to how visible, which aspects are made visible and which ones are silenced, and with what consequences, both in theoretical and practical terms. Going back to the issue of women as eternal victims, several African feminist researchers (see for example Obbo 1980; Amadiume 2000) take the orientation of looking at African women as social agents. The point here is that whereas it is an undeniable fact that women have been historically disadvantaged relative to men, looking at them as eternal victims creates a discourse of lamentation. 'Victimologies', as Harding observes, 'tend to create a false impression that women have only been victims, that they have never successfully fought back' (1987:5). Notions of vulnerability and the need to empower women then become so pervasive that they tend to displace their agency and the need to contend with the social structure.

Going beyond victimologies means that we need a different conception of power that always anticipates some space for contestation, or 'at the very least passive resistance' (Crehan 1997:231). This does not at all imply that we lose sight of power regimes (Fraser 1989). For example, systemic male privilege in public politics cannot be ignored. However, power is seen both in its coercive nature and resistance to it, such that we are able to capture processes of contestation.

While victimologies have been relatively dominant in the research with a development leaning, historiographies have been able to excavate some interesting modes of resistance. Studies on Buganda culture reveal that although installation of an heir is publicly a male affair, it is actually female folk that sit the previous day to decide on which man/brother becomes heir to their father (Sacks 1979; Musisi 1991). Historiographies like Van Allen's 1976 analysis recreate and rename the struggles of women in early twentieth century Nigeria rescuing it from the British colonialist's label of 'Aba Riots' and recognising it as the 'Women's War'. Such studies have restored history to women and in effect also restored women to history.

These studies demonstrate the fact that there is need for more and far-reaching African feminist historiography. In Uganda there is a popular local saying among the Basoga which goes like this: *omwami kyakoba nange kyenkoba*, which means 'what my husband says is what I say or follow'. This response has been encountered by researchers in this region where, after asking the man, they would then ask the woman what she had to say. The women would naturally say that all had been said, even when they had contrary views. Hence a fruit-picking researcher would quickly assume that women's powerlessness is an orthodoxy, yet the actual terrain could present heterodoxy if it were explored more thoroughly.

Furthermore, there should be caution about romanticising direct speech and 'what people said'. Feminists have particularly come under attack on the basis that recording the direct speech of the women in itself is used to prove the truthfulness of the accounts (Hardiman 1986:289). There are many factors that mediate oral evidence, including the fact that the way women talk about their lives is already embedded in the ways women think about themselves – and what they are supposed to think about. Women can even give the inquirer not only what they think they want to hear, but also deliberately and tactfully minimise their powers to conform to the dominant ideologies (Ahikire 1994). Instances of women professing oppression even in cases where they have power are common in matters to do with sexuality, family decisions and ownership of property. Conversely, men may also play powerful without showing the limitations of their masculinity in their actual lived experiences.

Do these cautions therefore mean that the researcher has to treat oral evidence (from women or men) with contempt? The answer is NO. The issue is not so much about truths as about rigorous social analysis. These dilemmas only alert the feminist researcher to the need to employ ingenuity and tools that can simultaneously capture voice as well as analyse concrete reality. In this way, instances of women deliberately downplaying their role in society are part of the material to be analysed which would further

explicate the nature and character of gender relations. This also avoids the reproduction of stereotypes about women and men where general actual social practice has long moved beyond professed normative standards.

A related aspect of women's visibility is resistance. Women's resistance to institutionalised patriarchy takes many covert and overt forms, and feminists have demonstrated the power of silence as a form of resistance. In this sense, a feminist researcher ought to have the appropriate tools to 'hear silence', so to say. The apparent invisibility of women in many accounts of African historical experiences has been attributed to the inability of many a researcher to take cognisance of women's different struggles. Referring to Algerian women, Lazreg (1994) for example argues that women's silence registered by the colonial society gave rise to stereotypical views about them, specifically arising from the lack of understanding of the dynamics of the Algerian communities. Consider, for example, this quote from a poem by Adrienne Rich:

> Silence can be a plan
> Rigorously executed
> The blueprint to a life
> It is a presence
> It has a history of form
> Do not confuse it with any kind of absence

Yet, at the level of political practice, silence maybe a controversial term, in that there is a danger of romanticising women's agency. Moreover, Edholm *et al.* flagged a warning against looking at women in isolation and making them powerful 'in their own spheres'. They argued that:

It is not necessary to look behind manifest social forms in order to see women because such a perspective reinforces the notion of separate spheres of men and women, while leaving women appear as of marginal relevance in the analysis of fundamental social structures (1978:126).

The central concern for feminism, especially in the African context, is therefore the need for a proper and concrete analysis of power regimes – beyond generalisation. In this way it is possible to recognise African women's positions and how they sometimes create spaces for themselves in systems that are evidently oppressive to them. The challenge here is to recognise power regimes without collapsing into stereotypes and generalisations.

The tendency to generalise about women and especially African women has been conflated with the problem of Western ethnocentrism but we can also argue that these may be separate concerns. Mohanty (1998) argues

that colonial discourses have been employed by Western researchers and researchers in the South alike, and this can be seen in the way African rural women are generalisable the same way in which African/Third World women were generalised in Western discourse. In effect the rural has been constructed as a repository of knowledge – the rural woman as the authentic woman (Ngaiza & Koda 1991) and 'the other'. The way we recognise the fact that Third World women are not generalisable should be the way we look at rural women. They are not homogenous, neither are they eternal victims.

The other methodological challenge is the definition of women's roles in relation to the normative male world (Arnfred 2002). One clear example is the issue of looking at women as in need of help to catch up with the masculine mode in spaces from which they have historically been excluded. This, for instance may come up in the analysis of women and public politics where the conclusion is often that one needs to train women to be effective, meaning that there has been a methodological failure to appreciate and analyse institutionalised gender power relations. This is why the emphasis should move beyond the individual and take on the gendered ways in which society is structured.

Historiography poses its own methodological challenges for feminist research. Part of the explanation for the generalisation and stereotypes about African women is the historical vacuum. The written record (archives), as many feminists have observed, is gender-blind with ingrained male bias. The strong urge to have feminist theorising grounded in the historical context is based on the fact that understanding the past also helps to explicate the present and perhaps the future. Due to the limited written record, African feminism has the duty to reconstruct history through ingenious triangulation of hearing, listening and content analysis. This has led to the emphasis on orature, oral history and biography which writers such as Mama (1996) have observed.

The Qualitative/Quantitative Debate

Quantitative research is concerned with numbers while qualitative research leans more on meanings and explanations. The qualitative versus quantitative debate may or may not be a methodological one depending on the perspective that one takes. The 1970s saw an intense debate centring on whether quantitative or qualitative research methods were more appropriate and more scientific. To a large extent feminist researchers have preferred qualitative approaches because quantification as a research tradition tends to obscure power relations and thus make women's realities of less importance. What needs to be clarified, however, is that these are not necessarily feminist methods per se, but rather methods

that feminists, especially in the African setting, have found appropriate for the 'excavation' of women's voices as well as the reordering of knowledge for gender transformation. Reinharz argues that:

> Because feminist research stems from the critical distrust of earlier non feminist research and because much of earlier work was conducted using quantitative methods, a symbiosis has occurred between feminist and qualitative…qualitative methods are thought to be the methods that protest against the status quo, just as feminism does so generally (1993:69).

Methods have a strong relationship with the type of questions asked. For example, there is a need to do more listening if one wants to capture people's/women's lived realities which have been hidden from the dominant narrative. Because quantitative methods were historically embedded within the positivist tradition, there is a tendency to equate qualitative with feminism and quantitative with non-feminist research. However, it is now clear that feminist research may employ quantitative as well as qualitative methods as long as the assumptions behind such research, as well as the interpretive frameworks, are about the central subject of feminism.

Use of quantitative data and statistical analysis may be useful in determining trends and what they mean for policy reform. Worldwide, there has been a demand for the gender category in official statistics. At the very basic level there has been a demand to include women's work in what is officially computed as work and the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of economies. This demand comes from the realisation that underestimation of women's activities in different fields leads to the under-allocation of resources and opportunities to women and programmes that affect them.

In Africa in particular, the critical issue is that research and planning frameworks often operate on assumptions regarding occupational and familial roles which are culture-bound and inappropriate to the African context (Oppong 1987). For example, notions of women being 'just' housewives while men are breadwinners are imported from the Western context and imposed on the planning framework in Africa, whereas the centrality of women's labour is evident in both pre-colonial and post-colonial production systems in Africa.

During the 1970s and 1980s, the Women in Development (WID) crusade brought the realisation that the invisibility of women in national statistics was partly the reason for the lack of attention to women in macro-planning exercises. African delegates in the Nairobi United Nations Conference on Women, for instance, noted the failure of planning agencies to incorporate women on an equal basis with men into macro-economic planning both as decision makers and as a focus of concern (Oppong 1987:3).

In the contemporary era this desire to invade the world of quantification grew stronger as the articulation of feminism in the development arena gained momentum, particularly in the field of gender budgeting, focused on economic governance. Research and activity around the United Nations's 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development with the imperative to track progress has renewed interest in quantification. But quantification should not just be quantification for its own sake, neither should it be the kind that objectifies people, and women in particular. Rather quantitative data should be used to enable women to make a claim on resources, both tangible and intangible. More specifically, feminist researchers with the capacity to unpack numbers need to make profound inroads to this field to operationalise gender analysis into macro-planning frameworks. In this way, feminist research will not only reveal the relative gender disparities in policy and implementation but also have the capacity to comprehensively identify critical intervention points. Similarly, once feminism makes inroads into the world of statistics, it will be able to truncate the hegemony, intellectual or otherwise, of positivist frameworks. In a way, this is one of the values of Feminist Economics, a field that still needs to be strengthened especially in the African setting.

Thinking and Practice: Gender and Participation

The feminist critique of traditional knowledge frameworks highlighted the position of the researched, especially the woman subject. The urge to make women visible and audible was all essentially about the participation of the researched. Emerging within a specifically development context, participatory approaches are about enhancing the ability of the poor to generate and control their own knowledge and to control the means of production of knowledge. The basic principle of participatory research (PR) is that research should benefit the people, be pertinent to their needs and aspirations, and ultimately lead to action.

Principles of Participatory Research

Problem-centred
Action-oriented (in principle but not always)
Researcher has a subjective commitment to the target community and to the betterment of the human condition
Collaborative research process
Respect for people's knowledge
Release of human potential

Source: Maguire 1988

Feminist scholars have been central actors in the debate and practice of participatory research because the participation prerequisite has allowed for the raising of feminist concerns broadly in the knowledge enterprise. Depending on the orientation of the research, the above aspects may be integrated into the research process in varying degrees. Feminist concerns have engendered an expansion of participation to look into all aspects of power in the research process and to underline the importance of people's positioning.

Group discussion has been one of the commonly used participatory methods in feminist research. Group discussions may be in the form of Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) where 6 to 10 participants with shared interests are brought together to discuss a matter that affects them directly. These could also be general discussions with a larger number of participants. This type of broad discussion may focus on a matter that directly affects the participants, or on a general issue of social significance in their setting. For example, an issue about violence against women may be posed in general terms and not directly focused on the personal experiences of the participants. Such discussions have the value of unearthing people's perceptions, interpretations and aspirations in a much more relaxed setting than in the one-on-one interview. Such forms of groups can also be used as a vehicle for consciousness-raising.

Emphasis in current research has been placed on women-only groups. Having moved from androcentric approaches that regarded only men as 'knowers', there is now a popular assumption that one should strive to derive 'pure information from women' – that which is collected without the interruption of men. Mixed groups are only organised as control samples. Emerging evidence on the other hand seems to suggest that mixed groups of men and women, or groups containing people of mixed class and status, create real-life situations. Researchers should be able to adequately deal with the outcomes such as silences and exclusions as part of the research process. Research experience has shown that women's silence is not eternal. It largely depends on the issues at hand and the way the discussions are handled and that in some cases, mixed group discussions could have the additional value of naturally uncovering critical points of contestation in local situations. The important point is for the researcher to take cognisance of the fact that group discussions might yield superficial information in some cases, since what one says in a group may well be influenced by who is present.

Again, the caution here is that not all participation, even that of women, will qualify as feminist research, or even participatory research. There are questions about possible manipulation of participants and the kind of instrumentalism that may result from participatory research especially in development practice contexts.

By Way of Conclusion

There is a need to build resources for bottom-up agency (for women and/or men). The idea is that feminist research in Africa ought to liberate itself from developmentalism which threatens to empty it of its political imperative. Even within the extreme condition of deprivation, feminist research should not only focus on influencing top-down change in terms of policy for addressing 'women's problems'. Scholarship on gender studies will have to fundamentally shift from a particularistic approach, in many cases focused on the category 'women' in isolation, to comparative studies and continent-wide research addressing critical identified silences and focused on theory building.

Notes

1. This however does not imply homogeneity in the sense that all work in the area of women's studies would be put in this category. Rather it refers to dominant trends at the time.
2. It is important to spell out at this point that the term feminism may be a controversial one, especially in the African context. Over the years there has been a tendency to shy away from the word feminism by academics and activists alike, because it has been a historically polluted term identified with Western values and by extension, Western cultural imperialism. As a result, it may seem that we have gender research in opposition/addition to feminist research. The use of 'gender' as an alternative seems popular because the latter appears less threatening– even 'good women' can use it. We need to understand that the concept of gender was ideally supposed to operationalise feminism at the analysis level. In this sense therefore research that falls under this broad rubric will be referred to as feminist research. And when we consider politics of naming, it is through the firm naming of what feminists do that we will create a fundamental challenge to knowledge hierarchies both in the academy as well as in the social practice world.
3. The two have different imperatives. The latter is principally dismissive while the former is about according legitimacy to feminist ways of knowing as part knowledge of production
4. The debate about the power of the researcher may not necessarily assume that the researcher holds power all the time: this may not hold in some cases. Gender politics may indeed destabilise conventional power arrangements, as when visibly poor women/men may exercise enormous power on the so-called middle-class researcher.
5. Due to the reality of deprivation and economic crisis, especially in Africa, research may tend to show the problem in the empirical sense so as to have an impact on policy.

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What Has Worked or Failed with Feminist Scholarship in Academic Spaces in Africa? The Case of the School of Women & Gender Studies, Makerere University

Jackline Kirungi*

Abstract

Gender inequality remains pervasive in Africa, despite the proliferation of scholarship on feminism on the continent. Yet over the last two decades, progressive intellectual arguments for feminism in Africa have contended that addressing patriarchal practices that underlie gender inequality was paramount to productivity and efficiency emphasised in development projects. In this light, this study explored the transformative potential of feminist scholarship at the School of Women & Gender Studies at Makerere University. It illuminates the politicisation of gender and sexual relations through thought-provoking forums and the pro-women principles contributing to aspirations of feminism scholarship in Uganda. Nonetheless, ongoing scholarship needs to ensure that feminist scholarship philosophies adjust to represent the experiences and struggles of women and their communities in Uganda. The research was qualitative in approach. It employed purposive sampling, participant observation, and consequently interpretive analysis. Data from eight key informative interviews with founders of the school, senior teaching and administrative staff, and PhD graduate students, as well as document review, informed the study.

Résumé

L'inégalité de genre reste omniprésente en Afrique, malgré la prolifération des bourses de recherche sur le féminisme sur le continent. Pourtant, au cours des deux dernières décennies, les arguments intellectuels progressistes en faveur du féminisme en Afrique ont soutenu que la lutte contre les pratiques patriarcales qui sous-tendent l'inégalité de genre était primordiale pour la

* University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee graduate student in the Department of Africa and Africa in Diaspora Studies. Email: Jkirungi@uwm.edu; kjacklime@gmail.com

productivité et l'efficacité mises en avant dans les projets de développement. Dans cette optique, cet article a exploré le potentiel de transformation de la recherche féministe à la School of Women & Gender Studies de l'université de Makerere. Elle met en lumière la politisation de genre et des relations sexuelles par le biais de forums stimulant la réflexion et les principes pro-femmes qui contribuent aux aspirations de la recherche sur le féminisme en Ouganda. Néanmoins, la recherche en cours doit s'assurer que les philosophies de la recherche féministe s'adaptent pour représenter les expériences et les luttes des femmes et de leurs communautés en Ouganda. La recherche a été menée selon une approche qualitative. Elle a utilisé un échantillonnage raisonné, l'observation des participants et, par conséquent, une analyse interprétative. Les données issues de huit entretiens informatifs clés avec les fondateurs de l'école, le personnel enseignant et administratif, et les doctorants, ainsi que l'examen des documents, ont alimenté l'étude.

Introduction

Feminism remains political, and to many, it causes the imagination to reconfigure social relations. Feminism is the political and intellectual movement for women's liberation (Mama 2005). In 2017, the CODESRIA Gender Institute, one of Africa's premier research institutes, explored the theme 'Feminist Scholarship, Universities, and Social Transformation.' Following the Institute's call, I explored how feminism has evolved and been transformative at the School of Women & Gender Studies (SW&GS)–Makerere University, the most prominent women and gender study site in Africa (Mama 2004). The inclination to explore feminist scholarship's transformative capacity follows the persistent gender inequality amidst the proliferation of feminist scholarship (Cornwall and Rivas 2015). In this article, I draw insights from Pulkkinen (2016), who has conceptualised transformation in feminist scholarship. Existing scholarship suggests that feminism is sometimes denounced (Tamale 2006; Ahikire 2014a). However, feminist innovations continue to influence academic engagements and political establishments. The African Union has identified gender equality as one strategy to hasten Africa's desired change. For example, in Agenda 2063, Africa's blueprint document espouses the African Union's visions of gender equality as a strategy to achieve 'global quality life measures' (African Union Commission 2014:3). Little, however, is known about what the African Union is doing to enhance gender equality while implementing Agenda 2063 to cause the desired change (Hingston 2016). By exploring feminist scholarship and its transformative potential in the academic space in Africa, I contribute to the framing of gender in the context of Africa and envisage possibilities whereby scholarship on feminism can contribute to gender equity in the future.

Concerns of Feminist Scholarship in the Academy in Africa

The transformation of power relations remains one of the significant concerns of feminist scholarship. Feminists have committed to exploring the capacity of various activities and programmes in influencing gender relations and transforming power relations at the public and household levels in society (Cornwall and Rivas 2015; Ahikire 2014a; Diaw 2007; Shackleton 2007). Gender remains a primary focus of feminism in academia and development programmes. Feminist scholars in the 1980s expressed concern about the relationship between women, gender and development. Of concern at the time was that innovations to address the emerging gaps in the evolving approaches to development from WID (Women in Development) to GAD (Gender and Development) occurred without serious efforts to reverse structural inequalities (Rathgeber 1989). Cornwall and Rivas (2015) noted that unequal gender relations were overlooked in the new framework of women's empowerment that emphasised efficiency, investment and returns, a framework preferred by corporate and development actors (*ibid.*:10). As a result, there remained tensions between development and feminism in both practice and academia. The contradictory relationship between gender and development has remained of significant concern to feminism in Africa (Cornwall and Rivas 2015; Ahikire 2014a; Ossome 2015; Diaw 2007; Shackleton 2007; Cornwall, Harrison and Whitehead 2004; Mama 2004; Steady 2005).

The mushrooming academic engagements in learning institutions for instance focused on 'development' that silenced feminist concerns about sexuality, violence against women, and patriarchy (Mama 2004). Women and gender studies in Makerere university meant focusing on 'gender training as a skills-giving experience and appl[ying] gender concepts to develop interventions to improve their quality' (Kasente 1996:52). In the process, the gender studies mandate was overwhelmed by gender training for development projects while sidelining women's voices in rural Uganda (Kasente 1996). In most universities in South Africa, the gender agenda focused on diversity and emphasised sex-disaggregated data (Shackleton 2007) instead of the substantive representation of women. In Senegal's Cheikh Anta Diop University of Dakar (UCAD), gender concentrated on increasing women's access to computers while neglecting the patriarchal structural inequalities that systematically led to women's marginalisation (Diaw 2007). Most African universities thus attempted to further development goals without addressing the marginalised status of women. Gender became a mystification 'that prevents a sharper focus on inequalities and discrimination precisely because it is too blunt and generalizing a tool

to get at some of the real issues at stake' (Cornwall and Rivas 2015). The concept of gender and its consequent programmes and projects led to a redirecting of resources that limited their ability to occasions to tackle the more pressing issues about gender relations and the gender inequality that ensued. Scholarship still showed the need to explore the potential in feminism to cause gender equality and women's emancipation.

Criteria for Transformative Feminist Scholarship in Academia

Scholarship on feminism ought to trouble, question and transform power relations if it is to be transformative (Cornwall and Rivas 2015; Pulkkinen 2016). In the process, institutions restructure social ties through the politicisation or the provocation of gender activity (Pulkkinen 2016:13). According to Pulkkinen (2016), politicisation includes raising awareness of the possibility of changing normative gender relations and provoking thought to express what is desired versus the undesired in social (gender) relations. The process also involves coining, initiating and finding words to describe the undesired, suppressed and nameless habits. Cornwall and Rivas (2015) and Pulkkinen (2016) complement each other in their conceptualisation of the transformative aspects of feminism scholarship. The former emphasise the transformation process, and the latter dwells more on the transformative indicators of feminist scholarship. For instance, Cornwall and Rivas (2015) note that all that is transformative in feminist scholarship must lobby for change in its temporality given the continuous flux of gender relations. However, Pulkkinen (2016) emphasises indicators of transformation resulting from scholarship on feminism. These include finding words to express wrongs and relatedly enhancing the survival of gender and feminist academic activity, space and forums that provoke thought. Words and language developed in the educational space later become tools for campaign and advocacy in the women's movement. In so doing, feminist scholarship enhances transformation. Cornwall and Rivas (2015) and Pulkkinen (2016) provide us with processes and signs to measure the change caused by feminist intellectual engagements. The study therefore explored forums, the lobby processes, and debates initiated by the school.

Feminist Methodology

Intuitions from feminist methodology guided the study. Scholarly investigation in feminism denounces the idea of a standard feminist methodology. Hence feminist researchers' practice of explaining their

research process : method for a given research question, purpose, and the competence of execution of the research methods used (Jayratne & Stewart 1991). I employed a qualitative research approach to explore the transformative possibilities of feminism, the foundation of women and gender studies. Individual experiences were instrumental in 'interpret[ing] and analyz[ing] observations' (Hordge-Freeman 2018:2) in the academic space. As a graduate student, I participated in several activities in SW&GS. My 'lived experiences' at the school were 'a criterion of meaning' and therefore 'a way to make knowledge claims' (Collins 2000:255).

Furthermore, my identity as a female and student of gender and feminism influenced my observations and analyses (see also Hordge-Freeman (2018:3) quoted from Charmaz 2017b). In so doing, I echo Carr and Thesee's (2012) call for critical pedagogy. Students' capacity to influence change towards the desired goal is possible when they independently make value judgments and enhance 'consciousness and critical intervention in reality' (rephrasing Freire 2005:81 as quoted in Carr and Thesee 2012:26). The university is a critical space for enhancing this environment, and given the persistent and unrestricted explorative environment inherent in the institutions' activities and programmes. Thus, the concern to speak to feminist scholarship and its transformative potential as a student.

Methods

I used open-ended key-informant interviews to allow extended conversations about the topics of interest related to the study's purpose. The study followed the CODESRIA's call to explore 'Feminist Scholarship, Universities, and Social Transformation' in 2017. The study focused on women and gender studies at Uganda's most comprehensive and oldest public university – Makerere University. Data was collected using eight key informant interviews, participant observations, primary document reviews (reports), and publications. I used snowball sampling to identify respondents for the study. The school's staff was small, yet it did excellent instruction, gender awareness-raising, and gender mainstreaming in academic spaces, national programmes, and non-governmental organisations. Thus, convenience sampling was the best way to access the dispersed staff. With the recommendations from the dean of SW&GS and the deputy academic registrar of the college of social sciences, I conducted the research. I obtained participants' verbal consent through phone calls and face-to-face interaction with them.

Data Analysis

The researcher used a thematic analysis to organise, identify emerging themes, and synthesise the data collected. The research explored the following questions: why was the school founded, and what was its role in improving women's status and reconfiguring power relations?

Limitations of the Study

The study focused on the activities at the School of Women and Gender studies at Makerere University. Therefore, it does not give insight into the school's relationship with the rural communities. Future studies will need to explore the school's relationship with rural populations as feminism has been associated with elite women and not rural women. The study findings are also not generalisable. The results and conclusions of the study are exploratory and thus open for testing. The study focused on PhD students, senior lecturer(s)/administrative staff, and founder members. There will be a need to explore the perspectives of master's graduate students on the feminist transformative potential of the school. They made up the school's highest number of graduate-level students.

SW&GS–Makerere University as an Academic Space

SW&GS–Makerere University was the site for the study. In 1990, the school began as a women's studies department (Ankrah 2018). The department evolved into the SW&GS–Makerere University. It is the most prominent women and gender study site in Africa (Mama 2004). The school operated under the College of Humanities and Social Sciences–Makerere University and has been in existence for over three decades. It envisages being a 'center for academic excellence in women & gender studies at the local, national, and international levels.'

The school has a prominent national and regional influence. It evolved with the women's movement that flourished with the coming to power of the National Resistance Movement. Historically, females have been central in the formation, leadership and organisation, and anti-establishment, in pre-colonial, anti-colonial and postcolonial Uganda (Mulindwa 2011). Following the ceasefire after the five-year guerilla war (1981–86), women joined in service in the new avenues enabled by democratic governance implemented in the 1990s. The Local Government Act of 1997, the 1995 Constitution of the Republic of Uganda, the Uganda Land Act 1998, the Uganda National Gender Policy, and affirmative action of 1.5 points to women joining public universities, among other developments, facilitated the school's coming into

existence. Through affirmative action, policies institutionalised women's participation in Uganda's political, social and economic processes. The school also benefited from the UN's support for women's involvement in development throughout Africa (Munah 2007; Ahikire 2007).

The women and gender studies centre worked with national, regional and international bodies. At the continental level, the school fostered senior staff skills and knowledge in other regions of Africa including at Great Zimbabwe University. It has also been pivotal in the operations of the gender mainstreaming department of Makerere University. In addition, the school provided employment, resources and academic and professional growth. As a body of knowledge, it helped scholars attain qualifications – PhDs, master's, bachelors and certificates. It also served as a service discipline to other departments through offering teaching and learning sessions on gender, feminism and women. The school's academic staff was involved in several research networks across the globe: Ethiopia, Nepal, Sweden, Norway, Vietnam, to mention but a few.

The school focused on sensitising the various constituencies interacted with (students, government and non-government organisations) on the conceptualisation of gender and feminism. Scholars were also involved in analysing gender equality and gender equity across the different programmes in Uganda (GLED Task Force, SW&GS 2016). In so doing, academic engagements involved examining challenges experienced by women and men in attempting to benefit from development opportunities in the country. In 2016, the school assessed the Gender and Local Economic Development (GLED) course, a one-year postgraduate diploma in women and gender studies (GLED Task Force, SW&GS 2016). The course was offered to local government officers to foster their skills to integrate gender in the different government programmes they oversee (*ibid.*). The school had examined 'the long-term impact of the course and its relevance. Findings revealed that students had recognized the importance of involving women and men in district development programs pioneered by Uganda's government. In this regard, one of the officers had begun linking women to Savings and Credit Cooperatives Societies (SACCOs). As a result, they got a loan to start micro-enterprises' (quoted from GLED Task Force, SW&GS 2016: 19). The training involved women and men in programme activities to increase productivity through 'promoting efficiency and effectiveness in social service delivery. It also aimed to enhance employment creation, increase agricultural production and productivity, improve competencies and value addition, and increase the quality of existing public infrastructure' (GLED Task Force, SW&GS 2016:12).

The school also ran a Master of Arts in gender studies programme with courses such as (1) gender and economic development, (2) gender, state, and public policy, (3) gender and development management, (4) gender, institutions and social transformation, (5) gender and economics in developing countries, (6) gender, conflict and displacement, and (7) theoretical perspectives in gender and development. Also, the school registered PhD students directly under it. These efforts culminated in an edited book volume by academic staff and students pursuing their doctorate degrees (Muhanguzi, Ahikire, Gerrard *et al.* 2014). With support from SIDA and Makerere Institutional Development Programme, the school also implemented a programme on Capacity Building of Women in Leadership and Gender Mainstreaming in Higher Education in Uganda 2015–2020 within public universities: Kyambogo University, Busitema University, Gulu University and Mbarara University. In addition, the school was piloting a PhD in gender studies involving other public universities. The school supported the development of other academic units, including the Network of Ugandan Researchers and Research Users.

The school progressed with female leadership and administration. Beginning as a department, Professor Victoria Mwaka was its first head. She later joined parliament as a Member of Parliament. Professor Joy Kwesiga succeeded her, who was succeeded by Professor Grace Kyomuhendo Bantebya. As a school, Associate Professor Consolata Kabonesa was its first dean, followed by Associate Professor Josephine Ahikire and Associate Professor Sarah Ssali, its current dean. The institution's women leaders were assigned higher posts at different universities following their SW&GS services. For example, Professor Joy Kwesiga later became dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences and a member of the University Council. She also headed the Makerere Gender Mainstreaming Division before becoming Vice-Chancellor for Kabale University. Professor Maria Musoke, a founder member of the school and first documentalist of the women and gender studies centre, was the Deputy Vice-Chancellor, academic affairs, at Kyambogo University. Professor Josephine Ahikire, a former dean of the school, was the Deputy Principal Academic Affairs–College of Humanities and Social Sciences, Makerere University. The school has played a pivotal role in providing women with opportunities to take up higher positions at the university. The SW&GS as an academic space offers hands-on experience to women and therefore empowers and prepares them for higher leadership positions.

Consequently, it can be argued, the school has grow administrative skills among women academics who have ended in administrative positions at the university. For example, as deans or heads of the department, women are

engaged in designing university policies. In addition, female professors provide mentorship to students seeking to obtain higher degrees. In so doing, women serve as role models. They also support students find scholarships besides intellectual and emotional support.

Findings of the Study

Women, Development and Feminism in the School's Initial Stage

The study examined the motives behind the foundation of SW&GS. The overall objective was to understand the school's contribution to feminist scholarship at Makerere University. The desire to improve women's status at the university caused women to establish the school. They aimed to heighten their recognition within the university. With the establishment of the school, women would acquire positions as administrators and academics within the university. 'The women in the university, though qualified to be university employees, hardly gained leadership roles. The few women in leadership at the time were also demoralised' (Interview III, July 2018). Therefore, the school provided an autonomous space for women.

The school's establishment was also supported by previous actions of solidarity by women in Uganda to mobilise in pursuance of their welfare (Mulindwa 2011). Women's organisations like Action for Development (ACFODE), the National Council of Women, and the Association of University Women, for example, played a pivotal role in forming the school. Women's efforts were also supported by the UN's programming with developing countries that expanded in the 1980s (founder member, 1 July 2018). Through the UN Decade for Women campaign (1975–85) the UN intervened to reduce poverty due to the economic challenges that resulted from Structural Adjustment programmes administered in independent African countries. These efforts influenced several pro-women structures across Africa (Munah 2007; Abdullah 2007). In Uganda, the efforts were more evident in the increased participation of women in politics. The school created a space for women to participate in public affairs.

Women also preferred the idea of development in the early stages of forming the women and gender study centre to feminism:

> We focused on women, equality, development, and peace. How women can be equal to men was one of our concerns. How can women get educated? Women extremists introduced feminism to cope. Even the word feminism was not in the first letters we drafted. But, of course, the countries are low developed countries – before women develop, how can one talk about sexuality?' (Interview, 1 July 2018).

The ideas that informed the women and gender studies centre also highlighted concerns of the Fourth World Conference on Women held in 1995 in Beijing convened by the UN. They included equality, development and peace.

Women more quickly related to equality, development and peace than with feminism. Discussions of sacred topics like sexuality pushed founders of the school away from feminism (Interview I, July 2018). The uproar that followed the support of homosexuals by a Makerere University don in 2003 showed the difficulty of dealing with sexuality questions that underlie feminism (Tamale 2007). In worst-case scenarios, resistance to open discussions on homosexuality led to the death of homosexual activists (*ibid.*). However, the school progressively facilitated public dialogues on heterosexual relations such as sexual harassment among students and staff of the opposite sex within the university. Furthermore, the embedment of feminism in Western discourse such as 'behavioural psychology and anthropology' (Interview III, July 2018) also caused women to detach from it. Women desired to advance agendas that were imbued in the struggles and beliefs of their people. Nonetheless, feminism was deemed necessary in the school's instructions and activism actions though women preferred a 'small link – feminism, social theory and social reform' with it (Interview I, June 2018).

Three decades since its existence, the school has remained relevant to supporting women in leadership positions challenge male hegemony. Women made progress in administration but were struggling to ensure representation of women's interests in different spaces and forums such as in parliament (Kawamara-Mishambi and Ovonji-Odida 2003). One of the founders of the school was concerned that most educated women occupied 'functional tasks along gender lines' as gender flourished more at men's service than women's. While women divorced, 'men [easily] took on two or three women and made it difficult to divorce' (Interview III, July 2018). In so doing, gender became an 'organizing principle in accumulation and operation of colonial and transnational capital and the allocation of resources and privilege' in Africa (Steady 2005:314). Gender and development operations were supported and funded as they reproduced gender inequalities.

Feminist Forums and Engagements in the School

The school created and maintained great feminist forums and debates. The forums were short-term and long-term. The forums examined in the study were the intensive course that lasted ten days and the Gender Identity Week run once a year. The research did not include long-term forums like the MA programme and undergraduate-level class sessions. They required historical and pedagogical lenses and resources to explore, whose mobilisation

was not within the means of the study. Besides, Bozalek and Zemblylas (2017) have shown that many negotiations and adjustments occurred in classroom settings at the interpersonal level whenever instructors conveyed feminist knowledge. The transformation potential of a classroom setting in scholarship on feminism in the Ugandan case will need attention.

The short-term forums held by the school were very productive. They enhanced courageous discussions on intimate relations among students and staff. This was true of the North-South Intensive Course and the Gender and Identity Week Campaign Forum. While one lasted ten days, the school ran the other once a year, beginning in 2017 and lasting a week.

The North-South Intensive Course focused on the individual students questioning and voicing taken-for-granted experiences with the body. Administered for ten days (16–23 August 2010), the course targeted MA and PhD students at SW&GS–Makerere University. It was entitled: 'Gender, Nationalism & the Body: Post-colonial and Intersectional Perspectives on Situated Knowledge.' The course illuminated interdisciplinary questions regarding gender and sexuality, embodiment, nationalism, policymaking, agency and resistance. The meetings enhanced personal stories and evoked memories concerning the body, sexuality, agency and resistance.

The course was divided into three clusters. In Cluster 1: constructions of gender and sexuality, students were subjects and objects in research. Based on their own experiences and memories, they constituted material for analysis. Students were required to write about memories of their bodies in the third performance narrative. Cluster 2 focused on nationalism, gender and embodiment. It was on embodied subjectivities. Students and facilitators explored how bodies are policed and regulated by institutions, practices and discourses. Deliberations in Cluster 2 also involved analysing representations of bodies concerning resistance, agency and subversion. Hence discussions on policing/regulating bodies, presentations of diseased, disabled and un/altered bodies, beauty, pornography and eroticism. Cluster 3 focused on policy, agency and resistance. In so doing, students focused on policy analysis, different perspectives on the politics of knowledge production, deconstructive approaches to policies and critiques and counter-critiques of Northern construction theories of the body and sexuality.

The North-South Intensive Course was different from the traditional curriculum for the MA programme in women and gender studies. The MA curriculum was composed of courses such as (1) gender, state and public; (2) gender and economic development; (3) gender and development management; (4) gender, institutions and social transformation; (5) gender, conflict and displacement; and (6) theoretical perspectives in gender and development. The

courses focused on development, a situation attributed to marketisation, that took over feminism empowerment agendas (Mama 2004:122). SW&GS had been in this dilemma since the 1990s (Kasente 1996).

I also examined the Gender Identity Week Campaign of 2018 through participant observation. The event lasted a week. It kicked off with a walk through the university. It aimed at raising awareness of the gender platform in the university. Participants were involved in presentations and panel discussions throughout the week. They were reflexive of the campaign's theme: 'Transformations for Empowerment of Rural Women and Girls: Opportunities and Challenges.' The theme ensued from the National Women's Day celebrations in the same year. The student body and staff from the school and other schools in the university participated in the activity. The activity involved officials from gender and social justice-related non-governmental organisations. The theme attracted discussions on positive masculinities, social-economic transformation, sexual harassment policing, women's rights to productive resources, and women and political participation.

Of interest were the deliberations on sexual harassment policy issues. The session was the most informative compared to the other sessions I attended. Students revealed what happened to girls who testified they were experiencing sexual harassment during the discussions. They observed that current avenues for registering sexual harassment seemed to expose girls to other forms of vulnerability, such as dismissal from school and humiliation. Girls explicitly and implicitly called their perpetrators to order and staged open resistance to organisations and beliefs that informed girls' sexual exploitation. Girls normalised the accountability process among their contemporaries and the university at large.

It is important to note that Makerere University amended its sexual harassment policy in 2018, the same year in which the dialogue on sexual harassment policing took place. However, it was difficult to conclude the extent to which the conversation influenced the amendment of the university's sexual harassment policy. The policy hardly indicated how students were involved in the deliberations that led to its revision. Following events on the sexual harassment policy in Makerere University, students, through the female guild president, still demanded a 'say on sexual harassment policing' (URN 2020 ; URN 2021). But the amended University Policy and Regulations Against Sexual Harassment (UPRSH) pronounced: 'zero tolerance' for sexual harassment within the university community. Furthermore, it empowered victims to seek redress when harassed and 'impose[d] such sanctions and corrective action regarding acts of sexual harassment' (UPRSH 2018:4). The policy objectives, therefore, directly contested sexual harassment.

Considering the North-South Intensive Course and the Gender and Identity Week Campaign, it would be argued that the school was instrumental in sustaining dialogue between men and women on delicate topics. The discussion enabled voicing the complex relations and experiences in and outside the university. The meetings also revolved around women's and girls' experiences helping voice women's concerns. Unfortunately, women's voices have been silenced in most cases simply because women's experiences have highlighted the downsides of men's power in most patriarchal societies like Uganda.

The forums were however short-term compared to the MA programme in women and gender studies and the GLED course that focused on development. The forums that focused on feminism's topical questions like sexuality and the body lasted the longest, ten days in a year. But academic, administrative and support staff coordinated the activities in collaboration with their patrons. The school staff was employed and renumerated by the government of Uganda in partnership with its donor community since Makerere University remained a public university. The state, therefore, played a significant role in maintaining the staff in SW&GS. However, findings showed that staff spent less time on activities and debates that enhanced accountability on sensitive gender relations – sexual relations.

Publications

Publications by SW&GS remained a central instrument to sustaining feminist engagements within national and international academic spaces. Collaborating with the University of Tromso–Norway, the school co-edited and published a book: *Gender, Poverty and Social Transformation: Reflections on Fractures and Continuities in Contemporary Uganda* Kyomuhendo, Gerrand, Ahikire, *et al*. 2014). The book is a collection of works from the staff's research areas of expertise. Doctoral students also contributed to the reader. The school launched the book in two forums: 1) the Women's World Congress in India, organised by the Israel Association for Feminist and Gender Studies President in 2014; and 2) the Makerere University-Main Campus forum organised by the staff of SW&GS in partnership with the University of Tromso–Norway, in 2017. The book has raised awareness about the school's academic space at global and national levels, sustaining gender and feminist forums.

The authors illuminate realities about gender relations in Uganda in the book. However, they note that their research did not reflect the rate at which changes were taking place in gender relations: whereas gender relations are in a continuous flux, scholarship in the field had not kept the pace (Muhanguzi, Ahikire, Gerrard *et al.* 2014). The research mainly focused on women's plight

rather than on men in Uganda's use, access and negotiation of critical resources. Structures like decentralised land governance, microfinance, and information communication technologies (ICT) to extend services to local communities risked increasing male hegemony in sophisticated ways (Madanda 2014; Nsibirano and Kabonesa 2014). For example, women negotiating land rights through local government structures risked mistreatment and rejection in society. Society still considered the land a male rather than a female resource (Ahikire 2014b). With the mushrooming of microfinance institutions in Uganda, businesswomen continued to operate with insignificant returns (Ninsiima 2014). Thus, women pressed on to survive amidst a community still aggressive to them (Musiimenta 2014; Muhanguzi, Ahikire, Gerrard et al. 2014). More than the tales on women, the book supported feminist academic engagements in and beyond Makerere University.

Feminist Theories to Embody Local Ugandan Experiences

Use, Adoption, Adaptation and Relationship with Feminism

The study revealed that few disciplines evolved with feminist theories in their work. Scholarship on feminism was thus hardly incorporated in other disciplines: 'feminism theories are used but accidentally. They are used as an add-on, as most academics remain immersed in theories of traditional disciplines they learned before feminist theories' (male respondent I, June 2018). Yet, like people elsewhere, Africans live diverse and complex lives whose nuances disciplinary-based academic paradigms cannot capture. Plus, disciplinary-based paradigms, if anything, fragment and reduce the many truths out there rather than representing the multicultural competency needed in a new era (Mama 2005:113). Embracing feminism in disciplinary-based paradigms would enhance multi-disciplinary approaches to knowledge production.

The study also established that the development practitioners were not curious about feminist theories as they were interested 'in anything feminist.' The school offers expert services to development practitioners, different from the teaching and learning services provided to local government officers undertaking the GLED diploma course. But discussions revealed that:

> The few agencies that hire gender experts from the university are interested in anything feminist ... the community workers hire out gender experts to help them resolve community concerns in general. Practitioners (development organisations or social workers) do not want to know which theory you are drawing from to come up with particular ways to handle a particular challenge in the community; they just want a set of solutions from the gender expert which they are to draw on to solve an issue in the community' (female respondent, June 2018).

Academics were concerned that development practitioners applied feminism to implement community projects in reckless ways as they were not committed to any strand of feminism in their development work. Each school of thought in feminism was by a different knowledge strand: liberal, radical, African, and Black feminism perspectives. Interest in 'anything feminist' by development agents, as noted above, supposes that the different schools of thought in feminism did not matter. Yet the reasoning that led to African or Black feminism's advancement was different from the reasonings that advanced radical and liberal feminism. Thus, the lack of a preferred school of thought in feminism when implementing development programmes was another way not to commit to feminism in general. Since different feminisms speak to a different audience and emphasise different values, deciding on a particular strand of feminism would improve accountability and adaptability to feminism in development. It would be necessary for development agents to know which school of thought in feminism they are applying and are accountable to in their development plans.

Some members of the intellectual community doubted the relevance of scholarship on feminism because of the limited knowledge production regarding institutions foundational to Ugandan society, like the family (male respondent II, June 2018). One graduate, for instance, observed that scholarship on feminism needed to advance schools of thought that exemplified Uganda's support systems like the family. The family was and remained an emotional and economic safety net for most people in Uganda, especially the vulnerable people, following the poor service industry in the country. Family catered to the needs of groups of people at the margins like teenagers/youths, young, aged, pre- and post-natal mothers, and the mental and physically challenged. A significant population in Uganda was also hardly able to secure health insurance amidst privatised and inaccessible selective primary care services in Uganda (Hawkins, Ronald, Lance et al. 2021). Family contained challenges of the populations at the margins and thus the significance of evaluating its operations in educational institutions. Mama (2005) has also noted the need to pursue and develop feminist intellectual capacities grounded in contemporary African social and political realities as a means of attaining new levels of activism demanded by the complexities of the times (Mama 2005). Therefore, the school needed to invest in research and publication on family life as a significant structure in Uganda.

Research findings also revealed that Ugandans had connected with different strands of feminism in ways that needed investigation. Radical feminism, for instance, stirred a significant debate among Ugandans. These

developments need to be explored by the school as the leading educational institution on feminism scholarship in Uganda and Africa at large.

> Radical feminism has attracted many conversations in and outside the university. [But] it is associated with specific individuals in the university who have not formally contributed to radical feminism. Such individuals are associated with radical feminism because of how they approach particular issues in society' (male graduate student, 2 June 2018).

There was the need to explore debates around radical feminism and the different ways society in Uganda connected to it. The school needed more academic engagements to advance feminism frameworks considering Ugandans experiences with feminism.

Discussions also revealed that students had remained incurious about feminist theorising and conceptualisation despite their relevance in teaching and learning. 'Students do not engage theories; they do not critique and therefore do not learn. They do not engage any concepts' (female respondent 5, June 2018). The school offered a course on theories titled 'theoretical perspectives in gender and development' in its MA programme. In this course, students studied different kinds of feminisms. As an alumnus of the school, theories taught included radical, liberal and socialist feminist theory. Less was noticeable regarding African feminism, Black feminism, and African-womanism. It would be essential to explore how the school has been receptive to other theories. Drawing on my experience as a graduate student of the school (2007–10), having a critical understanding of a theory that interested you (the student) was important to writing a dissertation thesis. It was unimaginable to complete a dissertation thesis without a thorough understanding of the feminist theoretical framework and concepts guiding your project. It would be essential to know how students succeed in women and gender studies when they have not seriously engaged with its theoretical foundations.

Discussion of Findings

This study examined the transformations that SW&GS achieved for scholarship in feminism. Important was the level at which the school's activities and contribution disrupted gender relations to enhance equitable distribution of power. Through its academic and administrative staff, the school had been influential in initiatives to voice experiences of women, girls and their male contemporaries in the university, at national, regional and international levels. In addition, the school facilitated discussions on sensitive questions like sexuality at the university. The successive deans of the school were experts in feminism, women and gender studies and proceeded as leaders in higher academic and political positions outside the school.

In addition, the women and development agenda, embraced more at the beginning of women and gender studies than feminism, endured predominantly in the school's services and academic programmes. Thus, the school offered essential skills for implementing development projects at national, regional and international levels. Development and gender were tangled together in the school curriculum. Less was discernible on how development and gender contributed to the school's vision of being a centre for academic excellence in women and gender studies at local, national and international levels. Besides this there was the limited influence feminism had on other disciplines. Yet feminism continued to be taught.

But the scholars in the school contended that feminism needed to be engaged to its core. Thus, concerns about practitioners wanting anything feminist to implement their projects. In addition, concerns were raised by those interviewed about the incuriosity with which students engaged with feminism and the limited ways in which feminism influenced other disciplines. Scholars noted the need to engage feminism exploring its concepts and theories, which were the foundation of creating a new agenda. Feminism, moreover, was associated with the potential to guide studies on institutions that underlie Ugandan's existence, like the family. Academics in feminism, gender and women's studies infiltrated departments, community development projects, and research. The scholarly community can no longer take feminism lightly in the university. It needs to be engaged with to understand its limits and possibilities in the existence of Ugandan society.

Conclusion

The study results extend current knowledge on the relationship between development, gender and feminism. They demonstrate that women and gender studies' connection with feminism can facilitate gender equality and stimulate intellectual ambitions to make feminism work for Ugandans. But it requires productive engagement with feminism to grapple with concerns about the limited inquisitive investment in philosophies that inform feminist practices.

In addition, the women and gender studies centre demonstrated the potential to coordinate several academic and development projects and policies at national, regional and international levels. As a result, it was noted as being highly influential. But unfortunately, its blind spots, like its contributions, can be far-reaching for communities in Africa and beyond. Hence the relevance of voices calling for a productive engagement with women, feminism, and gender studies to use it to serve well the interests of their people.

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Feminist Scholarship, Femocracy and the Glass Ceiling in Zimbabwean Politics

Patience Chadambuka*

Abstract

This article analyses the contributions of feminist scholarship in enhancing women's political participation in Zimbabwe. After years of critical and feminist theory and quota systems it is noted that women's participation in politics has achieved insignificant contributions towards the attainment of gender equality. The article uses the glass ceiling concept to argue that the presidium marks women's glass ceiling in Zimbabwean politics. Zimbabwe is yet to acknowledge and accept that women are presidential material. It is further argued that female politicians have embraced their ascendancy to the country's higher political offices as an end in itself and not as a means to uplift women's lives. Using Crenshaw's concept of intersectionality, the article also brings to light how female politicians seem to be engendering agendas that have nothing to do with women as they are used as objects to further patriarchal power struggles. It is thus recommended that there is a need to create synergy between feminists and female politicians in order to earnestly represent the needs of women once they get into political office. It is argued, however, that this transformation should begin with educational institutions which are still male-dominated. The idea is that universities and political offices need to prioritise gender equality so that Africa's social transformation that uplifts the lives of women may be achieved.

Résumé

Cet article analyse comment les études féministes contribuent à l'amélioration de la participation politique des femmes au Zimbabwe. Après des années de théorie critique et féministe et de systèmes de quotas, on constate que malgré la participation des femmes à la politique, les contributions sont insignifiantes quant à la réalisation de l'égalité de genre. L'article utilise le concept de

* Sociologist, Chairperson and Lecturer, Department of Community Studies, Midlands State University, Zimbabwe. Email: pchadambuka@gmail.com

plafond de verre pour soutenir que le présidium marque le plafond de verre des femmes dans la politique zimbabwéenne. Le Zimbabwe n'a pas encore reconnu et accepté que les femmes sont présidentiables. Il est également avancé que les femmes politiques considèrent leur ascension aux plus hautes fonctions politiques du pays comme une fin en soi et non comme un moyen d'améliorer la vie des femmes. En utilisant le concept d'intersectionnalité de Crenshaw, l'article met également en exergue la façon dont les femmes politiques semblent engendrer des programmes qui n'ont rien à voir avec les femmes, celles-ci étant utilisées comme des objets pour faire avancer les luttes de pouvoir patriarcales. Il est donc recommandé de créer une synergie entre les féministes et les femmes politiques afin de représenter sérieusement les besoins des femmes lorsqu'elles accèdent à des fonctions politiques. Il est clair que, cependant, cette transformation devrait commencer par les établissements d'enseignement, qui sont toujours dominés par les hommes. L'idée est que les universités et les politiques doivent donner la priorité à l'égalité des genres afin que soit réalisée la transformation sociale de l'Afrique qui améliore la vie des femmes.

Introduction and Background

This article analyses the contributions of feminist scholarship, particularly feminist advocacy for gender equality through women's participation in political spheres, using the case study of Zimbabwe. Feminist scholarship has arguably proved its relevance as a political movement that seeks to address gender equality across the world. Feminism, especially through the social sciences and arts, has informed critical analysis and it has also made its way and registered relevance within African universities. Zimbabwean universities have incorporated feminist scholarship in Gender Studies and feminist-informed gender-mainstreaming in various academic disciplines in the belief that this political agenda will result in social transformation that is characterised by gender equality in postcolonial Africa (Chauraya 2011). Gender equality has been identified as one of Africa's panaceas to poverty. As such, Africa's development blueprints such as Agenda 2063 recognise the utility of gender equality in the fight against poverty. Aspiration 6 of Agenda 2063 clearly calls for the emancipation of women through gender equality as one of the drivers towards the continent's transformation. After years of critical feminist theory and quota systems, there is thus a need to review the gains that have been made by feminist agendas towards the transformation of the continent through gender equality. In doing so the article assesses the possibility of merging university-informed feminism and female politicians in enhancing women's political participation. It discusses some of the dynamics that have inhibited women's ultimate political leadership in Zimbabwean politics. It is highlighted

that though feminist agendas have made some strides in addressing issues that speak to the particular needs of women in postcolonial Zimbabwe, particularly through the quota system and other strategies, it appears as if women's political participation has been a victim of patriarchal power contestations.

The role played by feminist scholarship in enhancing gender equality and women's emancipation through political participation, as well as the weaknesses that are being faced in advancing the feminist discourse and cause, are also examined. It is also observed that patriarchy remains a stumbling block in women's political leadership. Thus the patriarchal leadership in state universities and the broader public arena, the persistent traditional bias about women's capacity, and state capture of the gender agenda, are some of the dynamics and challenges concentrated on. All these dynamics are analysed in light of their implications for gendered wealth, power and status in relation to women's emancipation through the feminist discourse. Using Crenshaw's (1989) intersectionality concept and the glass ceiling concept, the article highlights how women's limited political experiences are influenced, enhanced or constrained by intersectionalities of gender, class, marital connections, and to some extent ethnicity. It is highlighted that Zimbabwean women are not necessarily a uniform group and therefore their experiences and needs are not universal. It is also argued that feminist projects such as the quota system and equal political participation can be captured by patriarchal agendas and women appear to stand on certain men's shoulders in order to gain political ascendancy. The article is based on secondary data analysis using scholarly and press articles to analyse the roles played by feminism and 'leading' female politicians in Zimbabwe.

Definition and Conceptualisation of Feminism

Feminism and feminist scholarship are somehow controversial to define. This controversy can be attributed to a number of reasons which include the debate surrounding the etymology of the term feminism. It is noted that early 'feminist' movements and early feminist writers such as Mary Wollstonecraft (1759–97), Harriet Martineau (1802–76 and Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1815–1902) did not actually call themselves 'feminists' (Freedman 2001). Freedman (*ibid.*) also opines that some women's rights groups in the second wave feminist movements of the 1960s and 1970s did not identify themselves as feminists. She further points out that the term was originally used in French medical circles in 1871 to describe feminine biological characteristics in men and boys. Feminism has also been difficult to define because it is a fragmented analytical strand clouded in an existence of different types of feminists such as liberal feminists, Marxist feminists, African feminists, Black feminists, Jewish

feminists, Christian feminists, among others (Chauraya 2011). However, despite these differences, it is generally agreed that feminism has a collective goal, that is, to emancipate women in all spheres of life.

Ritzer (2015:41) defines feminist theory as a 'set of ideas critical of the situation confronting women and offering solutions for improving, if not revolutionising, their situation'. Feminism has also been defined 'as a concept that can encompass both an ideology and a movement for sociopolitical change based on a critical analysis of male privilege and women's subordination within any given society' (Offen 1988: 151). Feminism is thus an ideology and a practical political agenda. From this background it can be asserted that feminist scholarship does not have to operate in isolation in universities. Instead it needs to be brought to life outside universities; it has to practically fit into the transformation agenda. This explains why it is politically correct to refer to early thinkers and activists such as Wollstonecraft, Stanton and Martineau as feminists despite the fact that they did not use the term themselves. It also makes sense to use the term feminism to refer to both activism and intellectual movements that are preoccupied with the emancipation of women. To that effect, it is therefore argued that the word feminism is a verb and not necessarily a noun. Feminism is a doing word, it is action towards women's emancipation and gender equality. Thus this article conceptualises all strides that have been made towards women's emancipation as having been informed by feminist scholarship from the first wave of feminism to the present.

Feminist Scholarship in Africa and Zimbabwe: An Overview

Feminist scholarship as both an intellectual and political movement, which is geared towards women's empowerment, gender equity and equality has been at the forefront of the development discourse in both the developed and the developing world. Feminist informed jargon of gender equality has been part of the transformative agenda in postcolonial Africa. As institutions that are entrusted with the mandate of social transformation, universities have been assigned pertinent roles that are supposed to deal with and address the demands of their society (Kariwo 2007). Gender equality, equity and women's empowerment are some of the issues that universities have attempted to address, chiefly through feminist discourses which challenge androcentrism and patriarchy, two jargons which have for a long time put women at the peripheries of development (Chauraya 2011). As a result, African developmental discourses have recognised the utility of universities and gender analysis as the tools with which to realise social transformation on the continent (Mama 2001, 2015). For instance, in Africa, CODESRIA, the oldest pan-African organisation of academics on the continent, has been

working towards the transformation of the continent through education that addresses the demands and needs of Africa. Through its African Gender Institute, CODESRIA has been pivotal in 'building knowledges for gender equality in an African context' (Mama 2001:5).

Feminism and Women's Emancipation in Zimbabwe

Even though there appears to be a lot that still needs to be done, it can be argued that the feminist discourse has managed to make great strides towards women's empowerment and gender assertiveness in postcolonial. This has been evidenced by gender-mainstreaming policies and practices across socio-political and economic spectrums. Zimbabwean women's participation in politics, economy and even academic circles has greatly improved over the years surpassing some fellow sub-Saharan countries (Shizha and Kariwo 2011). In universities, feminist-informed Gender Studies modules and degrees have enjoyed prominence and importance. For instance, through its Gender Institutes, the Midlands State University offers Gender Studies as a compulsory module across all faculties. Hence every undergraduate student from each and every department from Medicine to Arts takes Gender Studies in the second year (Chauraya 2011). Besides the introduction of Gender Studies as a distinct module or degree programme, gender analysis has been mainstreamed in most degree programmes and gender has since become an area of analysis that is required in most dissertations and theses across faculties. It can therefore be argued that this recognition will contribute towards ensuring gender assertiveness in both female and male graduates in questioning patriarchal ideologies that subjugate women and impede their empowerment.

The importance of feminist-informed gender analysis has not been confined to the educational system only, but it has also been enshrined in international, regional and national policy frameworks that Zimbabwe is signatory. Gender analysis that is meant to transform the lives of women politically, economically and socially has been adopted by the Zimbabwean government. To that effect, Zimbabwe has ratified various international and regional conventions that pay particular attention to feminist-driven gender dimensions of development (Chauraya 2011; Shizha and Kariwo 2011). These include (internationally) the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA), the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), (continentally) the African Charter on the Rights of Women and (regionally) the Southern African Development Community Protocol on Gender and Development. Nationally, Zimbabwe has also placed gender at the core of its development agenda (Charaya 2011; Chabaya *et*

al. 2009). Zimbabwe's supreme law, the Constitution of Zimbabwe (2013), stresses the need for gender equality and women's empowerment.

National policies such as the National Gender Policy (NGP) have also been crafted in a bid to document and address women's needs and possible interventions in Zimbabwe. Strides have also been made to research the position of women and their needs in Zimbabwe, for example, the country's statistics agency, ZIMSTAT, periodically conducts research that is meant to capture the situation of women and men in the country in areas such as education, health and politics (Chauraya 2011). Politically, feminist-driven activism has been adopted and progress made towards ensuring equal political representation and participation of women especially through an affirmative action quota system. Adopted in 2013 as a way of increasing female parliamentarians, the quota system in Zimbabwe reserves sixty seats for non-constituency female legislators and it was meant to last for ten years. The strategy saw female parliamentarians increasing from 18 per cent in the 2008 parliamentary elections to 32 per cent in 2013 (Maphosa *et al*. 2015). However, even though the quota system has been hailed as an effective strategy that is meant to ensure women's participation in politics, a critical evaluation still needs to be conducted regarding the roles of women in politics towards emancipation of women. For example, Tarusenga (1999:54 quoted in Muyengwa-Mapuva 2015:55) points out that 'although Zimbabwe is signatory to the UN Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), there has been little change in the status of women in the country'. This therefore calls for more scholarly enquiry and analysis.

Feminist Scholarship in Zimbabwe

Zimbabwean women's stories continue to be profiled by significant women who have taken initiative to tell the story of a Zimbabwean woman. These include novelists such as Yvonne Vera, Tsitsi Dangarembga and Vivienne Ndlovu, among others. Some feminists have captured Zimbabwean women's narratives in film such as the director Tsitsi Dangarembga whose film *Everyone's Child* depicted how widows and the girl child struggled to survive after the death of their husbands and fathers. There are also seasoned gender writers and researchers, such as sociologists Rudo Gaidzanwa and Chipo Hungwe who have been involved in gender research that aims to capture Zimbabwean women's lived experiences (Gaidzanwa 2007). Zimbabwe also has several women's interest and advocacy groups whose goal is to address and emancipate women from challenges such as domestic violence, general poverty, hunger, forced marriages due to religion and culture, early marriages, forced school dropouts, illiteracy, HIV and AIDS, female-headed

households, and caring and upbringing of extended family members and orphans, among others (Chauraya 2011; Maphosa *et al.* 2015). These include organisations such as the Msasa Project, Women's Action Group (WAG), Women in Politics Support Trust (WIPSU), Women of Zimbabwe Arise (WOZA) and Women's Trust, among others.

Feminism and Women's Political Participation

Since this article aims at discussing women's political participation, there is a need to refer to global literature, on this subject. Women's participation in politics can be traced back to the first wave of feminism. Early feminist scholars and activists such as Wollstonecraft (1796) and Stanton were preoccupied with the need for women to participate in politics. Elizabeth Cady Stanton also led suffrage movements in the 1840s which consequently led to women's participation in voting in the United States, while women such as Lydia Becker and Millicent Fawcett also led suffrage movements in Great Britain in the early 1900s (Freedman 2001; Muyengwa-Mapuva 2015). The belief was that if women actively and effectively participated in politics, they would be in a position to influence policy that transforms women's lives. Muyengwa-Mapuva (2015) traces women's participation in politics in Zimbabwe colonial times whereby women joined the liberation struggle and fought alongside men until independence was attained in 1980. It is also worth noting that the first attempt to fight the colonialists soon after European conquest in 1896 during the First '*Chimurenga*' (rebellion) by the Shona people in Zimbabwe was led by a female spirit medium, Nehanda Nyakasikana (Davidson 1987). Nehanda led African resistance and even though Africans lost the war to the colonialists, Nehanda remained an iconic symbol of colonial resistance and she is said to be the motivation behind the war of liberation, or the Second *Chimurenga*, that culminated in the end of colonial rule in Zimbabwe (Beach 1998). She is said to have fiercely led African resistance and when she was captured and subsequently executed by the British she encouraged Africans to fight the colonialists proclaiming that Africans would eventually win the struggle because her bones would resurrect and lead them to victory. Thus women have been historically iconic in Zimbabwe's political struggles.

Women also participated and fought alongside their male counterparts against the Europeans in the liberation war. There are stories that chronicle the bravery of African women and their role in the liberation struggle. For example, anecdotal evidence has it that the former Vice-President, Joyce Mujuru, was at one time said to have shot down a colonial fighter helicopter during the liberation struggle. The claim was dismissed by the male members

of the ruling Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front (ZANU PF) after Mujuru was fired from the party (Maphosa *et al.* 2015). Nevertheless, women's contributions in both the first and second wars of liberation have been understood as the basis for women's groups' demands for recognition in postcolonial Zimbabwe (Muyengwa-Mapuva 2015). Thus women hold a strong and justified historical influence in Zimbabwean politics.

However, it has been argued that women are co-opted during peace times, yet their contributions are actively sought and tapped in rebellions and even during election times when male politicians seek their votes and support (Hungwe 2006). Chadya (2003) also argues that there exists a system of 'mother politics' in sub-Saharan Africa whereby women are constructed as caregivers, performing 'motherly' roles during conflicts. This mainly happened during nationalist liberation movements which resulted in independence from colonial rule whereby women as mothers cooked, clothed and cared for male liberation fighters who were at that time their 'sons'. Nonetheless, roles changed after independence when the sons suddenly became 'fathers' who took leadership positions, while women remained 'mothers' who were incapable of leading (*ibid.*). They were reduced to voters and party supporters and when they were involved in politics, they were mostly assigned secretarial tasks, singing and cooking duties for male politicians (Siveregi 2006; Mama 2001). These feminine gendered roles were assigned to women in political spheres. However, due to demands from feminist women's movements that demanded equality, including within the public office, patriarchy had to give in. Affirmative action groups that call for women's participation also had their footprints in Zimbabwe and the government gave in to the quota system demands that aim at ensuring that certain political positions are left for women. Nonetheless, as pointed out earlier, it appears as if women's entrance into the political arena has been an end in itself instead of a means, and femocracy has been identified as one of the limitations to women's active participation in politics.

Femocracy in Postcolonial Africa

Mama (1995:41) defines femocracy as 'an anti-democratic female power structure, which claims to exist for the advancement of ordinary women, but is unable to do so because it is dominated by a small clique of women whose authority derives from their being married to powerful men, rather than from any actions or ideas of their own'. The idea of femocracy is nothing new. In fact, it has been studied, and literature around this issue exists, especially in Africa (Okeke 1998; Tsikata 1998; Ibrahim n.d.). For instance, Ibrahim (n.d.) gives an example of Aisha Hamani Diouri, the wife of the President

of Niger, who was reputed to be even more powerful and dominated Niger politics more than her husband. She was later assassinated by the putschists but her husband was spared. Femocrats derive their power and influence from their husbands. Power, therefore, becomes 'sexually' transmitted from men to their wives and lovers and can also be transmitted to their daughters and even mothers-in-law. However, such studies have been conducted and documented in other countries other than Zimbabwe (Mama 1995; Tsikata 1998; Ibrahim n.d.). This concept will also help to account for women's political participation in Zimbabwe since there appears to be a majority of female politicians whose husbands are also leading political figures. The article discusses the political participation roles of leading female politicians who appear to have landed their positions thanks to their husbands, brothers, fathers and even lovers. It will be argued that such strategies might derail feminist agendas and the transformation of ordinary women's lives.

Masculinities and the Construction of Political Participation in Zimbabwe

Political participation and politics in Zimbabwe are jargons that are used within almost every aspect in life. In fact, from time to time, politicians, especially from the ruling party, have warned citizens, civil rights activists, religious leaders, musicians, civil servants and almost everyone else other than themselves to refrain from politics unless they do it in solidarity with the ruling party (Rutherford 2001; 2013). Political rivalries often subject each other to violent persecution; politics in Zimbabwe is therefore arguably reified and almost sacred. Zimbabwean politics has its roots in the historical war of liberation where thousands of freedom fighters lost their lives fighting against the British colonial system. Thus the jargon '*Zimbabwe ndeyeropa*' (Zimbabwe is a product of blood) is usually associated with the country's nationalist politics. This implies Zimbabwean politics is not for the faint hearted; it requires certain individuals with certain strong characters who are obviously not feminine. It is an arena of masculinities; as such women may be perceived to lack certain attributes that are required for a typical successful Zimbabwean politician. Thus as Hungwe (2006) points out, women who participate in politics in postcolonial Zimbabwe constitute an 'unrespectable' section of women. Quite often they are labelled as 'prostitutes'. The reification of politics in Zimbabwe can also be understood by the fact that almost every challenge, misery and problem in Zimbabwe is attributed to 'politics' (Rutherford 2001). For example, Zimbabwe's record-breaking inflation in 2008 and economic meltdown were blamed on politics and Western-imposed sanctions. It therefore becomes interesting to analyse how feminist

scholarship and activism can manoeuvre this masculine construction of politics and usher in an accepted 'feminine' breed of female politicians who can successfully advocate and maintain the interests of women.

The Glass Ceiling Concept

Popularised by the 1986 article in the *Wall Street Journal* entitled 'The glass ceiling: why women can't break the invisible barrier that blocks them from top jobs', the glass ceiling concept has since been widely used to explain how women and minorities are left out of leadership positions within organisations (Benschop and Brouns 2006). The concept was adopted into academic analysis by Morrison *et al.* (1987) and since then it has become instrumental in organisational leadership analysis (Baxter and Wright 2000:276). To Benchom and Brouns (2006:11) the glass ceiling refers 'to hierarchies, to layers with tops and bottoms, it suggests structures, barriers, locations, and movements up and down the ladder'. The metaphor of the glass ceiling therefore 'implies the existence of an impermeable barrier that blocks the vertical mobility of women' (Baxter and Wright 2000:276). The discriminatory barriers 'grow thicker for positions that are higher up in the organizational hierarchy … the obstacles for upward advancement increase in severity at the higher levels' (Folke and Rickne 2014:1). These barrier structures are the ones that confine women and minorities to inferior positions whilst men of privileged races and ethnic groups climb up to pole positions. The concept is thus instrumental to account for women's depletion in leadership positions including political leadership (Galligan 2007; Zamfirache 2010; Folke and Rickne 2014). The concept is thus adopted in this study to explain women's limited participation in Zimbabwe's presidium. The gist is to show how the presidium has been set as a no-go area for women in Zimbabwean politics.

Methodology

The article is based on qualitative research methodology. Much focus was placed on women in politics, concentrating on three major cases of women who have risen to influential political leadership positions in Zimbabwe. Secondary data from newspapers and scholarly articles was used to analyse the dynamics of women's political participation. Feminist theory, particularly Crenshaw's (1989) concept of intersectionality, and the glass ceiling concept, were employed as the theoretical framework with which to analyse the role that feminism plays in both enhancing and confining women's emancipation, particularly through political participation and leadership in Zimbabwe.

Discussion

Before analysing women's role in politics, one needs to look at the gendered composition of university leadership in Zimbabwe since they are the ones that are advocating for intellectual feminist scholarship. An analysis of Zimbabwe's state universities and educational institutions in general reveals that they are still male-dominated in terms of enrolment, leadership and teaching positions (Chauraya 2011; Chabaya *et al.* 2009). The President of the Republic is the first Chancellor of all twelve state universities and of course he is a male. He is also responsible for appointing his Vice-Chancellors who are predominantly male. The gendered political appointment of state university Vice-Chancellors militates against women's progress regardless of their class, race and ethnicity. Zimbabwean universities' student representative councils, faculty deans, and departmental chairpersons are also male-dominated (Chauraya 2011). It should however be noted that over the years, there has been gradual progress towards incorporating more women into Zimbabwean state universities' administrative positions. In such cases, university leadership is a mirror of the wider social structures in Zimbabwe. Skewed gender representation is also reproduced in political representation. A structural glass ceiling confining women's leadership in Zimbabwean universities clearly exists.

If university education is dominated by masculine hegemonies this might have an impact on students and societal perception of gendered leadership. Such a skewed gender representation reflects the wider idea that feminism and women's leadership in Zimbabwean universities is still at an infancy stage. As institutions that are mandated to spearhead social transformation, it can be confidently argued that universities should reflect what they stand for. It has been noted that university education in general and universities in particular are critical in fostering change and development in Third World countries including Zimbabwe (Chauraya 2011). Education and feminism have also been entrusted with fostering citizenship education including women's citizenship (Shizha and Kariwo 2011; Okeke-Ihejirika and Franceschet 2002). It is therefore pertinent to question how the feminist agenda for women can be successfully advanced by universities when in fact they reflect patriarchy. Universities ought to lead by example. Presently, this has not been the case in Zimbabwean universities and such gender imbalances can help create a like-minded gender lens for students, graduates and university workers whereby patriarchy is paired with leadership (Chauraya 2011; Gaidzanwa 2007). Universities consequently become a microcosm of the macrocosm. Power is still centred in the hands of men and women can only be beneficiaries when it so pleases men.

Educational institutions have also been criticised for advancing traditional values including patriarchy (Chauraya 2011). Patriarchal values often encapsulate ideological gains realised by educational gender programmes (Kenway *et al.* 1994). It has also been noted that dominant political ideologies often suppress women's gender agendas. Thus, for instance, in authoritarian regimes, female politicians fail to advance women's issues and are instead used to score nationalistic and ethnic goals (Okeke-Ihejirika and Franceschet 2002; Waylen 2008). Universities also operate in such circumstances; they do not exist in a vacuum.

Gender inequalities that are characteristic of university representation in Zimbabwe are also reflected in the country's political offices. Despite the tremendous alterations in perceptions and the general acceptability of gender assertiveness and women's empowerment that have seemingly been gained over the years of feminist scholarship and gender activism, challenges to women's empowerment still persist in Zimbabwe. This has been evidenced by inconsistent promotion and demotion of women especially in executive political offices. In Zimbabwean history, this was epitomised by the promotion and subsequently the demotion and expulsion of the country's first female Vice-President, Joyce Mujuru. Since her demotion, the Zimbabwean presidium is back to three men. After the much celebrated new dispensation that followed the exit of the former President, Robert Mugabe, on 18 November 2017, Zimbabwe's twenty-two member cabinet had three female ministers against nineteen men. These are worrisome figures especially when one takes cognisance of the fact that public offices are supposed to reflect wider social values. Therefore, as it currently stands, one can argue that Zimbabwean political office does not reflect feminist agendas, gender activism and women's empowerment trajectories which have been advocating for woman's equal representation through the quota system and party constitutions. The ZANU PF constitution states that there should be at least one woman in the presidium (Kamhungira 2018). The continued violation of the ruling ZANU PF party constitution which calls for a female representative in the presidium therefore shows retrogression and lack of political will by the patriarchal powers to advance and safeguard the interest of female subjects. In fact, it can be argued that the forced institutionalisation of patriarchy and androcentrism is an indication that women in Zimbabwe are considered as objects that can only get access to influential positions through their husbands, brothers or boyfriends. Female politicians clearly face the glass ceiling as they attempt to climb the political ladder to the presidium. Selected ministerial positions are their apex; they are not yet given the privilege to go beyond them.

When the issues of the demotion and marginalisation of women in critical office happens, as in the case of Joyce Mujuru, it becomes imperative to question whether patriarchy in Africa in general and Zimbabwe in particular has ever accepted the ability of women to lead. It appears as if the state has captured the gender agenda to further its partisan agendas that have nothing to do with women as a marginalised social group. Apparently, women are still being incorporated as campaign materials through the Women's League but when it comes to the causes of women's political struggle, they are sidelined (RAU 2017). If Zimbabwe has no place for women in the three-member presidium and only three members in the twenty-two-member cabinet, who then is supposed to stand for women's cause, especially after taking cognisance of the fact that politics usually controls the order of the day in Zimbabwe?

Even in instances where women have been involved in political leadership, it has been noted that they appear to do so through the influence of their husbands. A husband has proved to be the ticket available to political leadership at a presidium level. Femocracy is arguably an inconvenient reality in Zimbabwe. Joice Mujuru is alleged to have earned her position of being the country's Vice- President through the influence of her late husband, Solomon Mujuru, who was a close ally of the then President, Robert Mugabe (Maphosa, Tshuma and Maviza 2015). However, when her husband died, she soon faced resistance and was expelled from both the presidency and her party. The same fate was faced by the country's main opposition party, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC)'s Vice-President Khupe who is alleged to have arisen through the ranks because of her late husband's influential position in the party. One of the women who almost rose to the helm of ruling party politics, as well the country's Vice-Presidency, the former First Lady Grace Mugabe, also arguably disappeared from politics when her husband Robert Mugabe was removed from power. She became fiercely powerful during Mugabe's last days in office. Some had tipped her to become the next President of Zimbabwe. All these developments attest to the idea that women's access to the highest political offices in Zimbabwe is not really about them being women. Instead, these dynamics show that women's access to the highest political offices is defined by whom they are married to. Thus, feminism and women's movements still have a long way to go. In fact, it can be argued that there has been a regression in advancing women's causes in Zimbabwe.

The landmark appointment of Joice Mujuru as the country's first female Vice-President in 2004 in a contested ruling followed the ZANU PF cabinet reshuffle that was dubbed 'the night of the long knives' (BBC 2004). Mujuru landed her position under intense pressure since Emmerson Munangagwa was disputed as the most senior candidate to land the post

of Vice-President after the death of Vice-President Joseph Msika. Mujuru is said to have earned her ticket through her powerful husband Solomon who led one faction that was fighting the Emmerson Munangagwa-led faction for the post of Vice-President and possibly control of the ruling party (Maphosa Tshuma and Maviza 2015). It then appears that Solomon Mujuru usurped Munangagwa through the elevation of his wife. This somehow made Joice Mujuru both a pawn and a beneficiary of masculine party internal fights. Similar studies have noted that state feminism is often encapsulated in nationalist and ethnic, often male-centred struggle (Okeke-Ihejirika and Franceschet 2002). Often such contestations have nothing to do with women's transformation.

However, despite the circumstances that might have led to Joice Mujuru's rise, Zimbabwe was praised for being on the right path towards gender equality within the public office. However, this victory was short-lived as Mujuru became the first Vice-President to be fired; she could not finish her term of office. She was later fired and expelled from the ruling ZANU PF party in 2015 after ten years as Vice-President despite the fact that all her predecessors left office by death. Her husband had since passed on and thus her political future was arguably jeopardised. Incidentally, one of the proponents of Mujuru's dismissal was former First Lady, Grace Mugabe. As her husband was the President of both the ruling ZANU PF party and the country, Grace enjoyed her moments of femocracy. She went on nationwide campaigns 'exposing' Mujuru's corrupt activities and her attempts to 'remove' President Robert Mugabe from power. Mujuru denied these claims as being 'ridiculous' (Dzirutwe 2014). Robert Mugabe also attacked Mujuru's political ambition and this led to her sensational demise. Mugabe lamented Mujuru's ambitions saying that he was shocked to learn that 'a woman' wanted to overthrow him (Maphosa *et al.* 2017). The identification of a 'woman' signals that women were not expected to develop presidential ambitions in Robert Mugabe's and possibly Zimbabwean eyes. In such gazes, Mujuru was attempting to do the impossible, trying to manoeuvre through the glass ceiling that did not allow women to tread in male territories. Presidential ambitions therefore signal the epitome of women's glass ceiling in Zimbabwean politics. Women just cannot go that far! Nonetheless, the fights of Grace Mugabe and Joice Mujuru as women for power ostensibly show that they were not necessarily fighting for the common women. The fights might not have had anything to do with women. Instead, it can be asserted that the women were pawns in androcentric wars. Grace Mugabe is purported to have been used by yet another faction known as G40 that was fighting for power and control of the country and the revolutionary ruling ZANU PF party against Emmerson Munangagwa's Lacoste Faction (RAU 2017). Feminism lost.

Zimbabwean opposition politics also attests to the reality of femocracy. Despite being appointed the second President of the main opposition party, the MDC, Thokozani Khupe's life in the opposition party seems to be deteriorating after she and other opposition party members broke away from the main party. When she broke away from the opposition party leading an MDC faction, party fanatics chanted against her calling her a *hure*, which is derogatory vernacular for a prostitute (Chibamu 2018). This signifies some people's perception and ultimate degradation of female presidential aspirants. They are not supposed to manoeuvre through the presidential glass ceiling lest they are equated to prostitutes. Her party with which she has since assumed leadership seems to have a paltry following and she suffered heavy defeat in the 2018 harmonised elections. The same applies to Joice Mujuru; after her husband's controversial death, she got expelled from the ruling ZANU PF and formed her own political party in 2016, Zimbabwe People First. However, as in the case of Thokozani Khupe, Mujuru's party seems to be struggling to find a following. Grace Mugabe is also said to be one of the leading members of the another ZANU PF breakaway party. Likewise, Grace and Robert Mugabe's purported party formed in 2018, National People First (NPF), also has a meagre following. One therefore questions whether women in their own capacity can effectively lead in Zimbabwean politics. It appears that the women who had become very powerful in the last two decades might be facing their political demise. Dead and buried.

All these dynamics do pose a threat to feminist and gender equality nuances since they seem to point to the fact that without their husbands, women do not stand a chance in Zimbabwe's highest political offices. One can thus argue that women's inconsistent and patronage promotion in politics is a microcosm of the macrocosm. Zimbabwean society is still under patriarchal capture and gender equality might still be a distant reality. Thus as Crenshaw (1989) argues, the process of women's life chances is embedded in intersectionality and interlocking systems of oppression that include ethnicity, class and race. Zimbabwean women's value, including their life chances in political affairs, are determined and influenced by their social standing and in this case, their class position as defined by whom they are married to.

A raging debate has also been arisen on the actual role of female politicians in Zimbabwe. For example, an independent male Member of Parliament, Themba Mliswa blamed Zimbabwean female Members of Parliament for being only good at wearing make-up and wigs! He argued that the sixty female parliamentarians were 'useless' and that they were wasting tax-payers' money because they were not delivering. This assertion was challenged by

female parliamentarians; of note is Jessy Majome who stated that Mliswa's statements were derogatory and disrespectful to female politicians (*The Herald* 2018). Even though Mliswa's sentiments sounded sexist, one can argue that there were elements of truth in his claim. This is so because the role of female parliamentarians is very obscured and unclear. The wearing of make-up and wigs to some extent denotes a privileged position in a country that is characterised by poverty and gender inequality. Zimbabwean women still constitute the majority of informal traders and they are also hardest hit by unemployment. Whilst female parliamentarians should be taking advantage of the quota system as a means of enhancing gender equality through their political influence, they seem to have taken their entrance into political office as an end in itself. Thus they are thought of as just going to the parliament to sit. The transformative agenda of gender equality through the political office thus becomes difficult to achieve under such circumstances. Female politicians seem more interested in appearing beautiful and in their interests, which have nothing to do with their fellow women, and who earn their token tickets to parliament through the quota system. This position is however debatable and calls for more research.

Related to the above is the need to assess what female politicians in high political offices have achieved for women. When analysing the potential and actual contributions of female politicians, it is always imperative to ask about the three dimensions of political representation: '*who* represents, *what* is represented, and *how* it is represented' (Zamfirache 2010:182). The case of Grace Mugabe is worth analysing. After being voted the leader of the Women's League in the ruling ZANU PF party, Grace Mugabe became arguably the most powerful woman in the ruling party during her husband's last days in office. At one time, Grace Mugabe declared that she had no ambition to become President as long as her husband was in power because she was already in power through her husband. When she was the Secretary of Women Affairs in the ruling ZANU PF party, Grace Mugabe was quoted to have said 'I'm the wife of the president already… I plan and do everything with the president, what more do I want, for now the position of the women boss is big enough' (News 24 2016). Some political writers opined that Grace Mugabe was 'doing women a disservice' by attacking fellow female politicians in the pursuit of party factional purges (Zaba 2017). Grace Mugabe was criticised for allegedly attacking fellow female politicians in her party ostensibly to win factional fights for male politicians who were pushing for her influence on the backstage. The allegations that Grace Mugabe was disserving women probably show that getting women into political positions does not always guarantee women's transformation.

Femocracy therefore appears a reality in Zimbabwean politics because during the course of her reign, Grace was blamed for allegedly being occupied with building a business empire for herself and her family.

To some, what Grace Mugabe did for women despite her influence remains unseen. Like most women, Grace Mugabe took over power in the name of women through the influence of her husband. When the ruling ZANU PF power jostling reached its peak just before the November 2017 stepping down of Robert Mugabe, a war veteran leader allegedly accused Mugabe of attempting to 'sexually transmit power' to his wife through a 'bedroom coup' (Plaut 2017). It was alleged that Grace was pushing for her husband, Robert Mugabe, to appoint her as his successor. The war veteran leader was later arrested for his utterances on the grounds of insulting the office and person of the President. Another war veteran later on alleged that Grace Mugabe had no authority or grounds for presidential ambitions in the party. He reportedly quipped, 'Grace is "just" a secretary for women affairs. Where does she have the powers to insult her boss, who is the vice secretary for the party?' (News 24 2017). It is also useful to note that Grace Mugabe had been elevated by the ZANU PF party and by then she was the party's Secretary of Women Affairs. The 'bedroom coup' allegations clearly show how femocracy enables women to smuggle power into highly patriarchal political party territory. Arguably, women who rise in such gendered contexts do so through their husbands – and they also fall with their man.

Maphosa *et al.* (2015) also notes that from its ascendancy to power in 1980, the ruling ZANU PF party spent its first decade promoting women with personal links to male party leadership. Thus women who occupied Zimbabwe's executive political offices were mostly the sisters and wives of leading politicians. These include Sabina Mugabe, sister to Robert Mugabe; Joice Mujuru was the wife of the first Black post-independence Zimbabwe National Army General; and two of the first three female cabinet ministers were wives of powerful men in the ruling party. It appears that the trend of promoting powerful men's wives has continued to characterise Zimbabwean politics. Women are being used to protect their husbands' interests and political ambitions thus showing the intersectionality of gender and marriage on the part of politically connected women. This again attests to the idea that women's access to higher political offices is not a guarantee of transformation of other women's lives.

The marginalisation of women in leadership positions in universities as well as influential political offices can thus be understood as a retrogression

in women's empowerment (Chauraya 2011). High political offices are responsible for formulating policies and laws that affect the lives of citizens. As such, if women are invisible in such offices it inherently entails that gender equalities will persist and the continent's social transformation might not be realised. Africa's development blueprints such as Agenda 2063 might be utopic. Retrogression of women's empowerment in turn entails that feminisation of poverty might persist. This article was written at a time when Zimbabwe was conducting its 2018 harmonised elections, and despite the fact that women constituted 52 per cent of the total population and 54 per cent of voters in the elections, female politicians performed and participated dismally. It appears that female parliamentarians were waiting to be handed over the sixty seats reserved for women through the women's quota as enshrined in the Zimbabwean Constitution of 2013. The Constitution stipulates that affirmative action policies that ensure women's participation in politics be observed. While the quota system guaranteed women's entrance into parliament, women's participation in the elections was still low since women were nominated in just 126 of the contested 210 constituencies. However, the quota system is not applicable to local government and senatorial elections; as such women comprised only 17 per cent of candidates in those elections (European Union Election Observer Mission 2018).

However, for the first time there were female presidential candidates in Zimbabwe's 2018 harmonised elections. Four out of the twenty-three candidates were women including former opposition MDC Vice-President Thokozani Khupe and former Vice-President of Zimbabwe and the ruling ZANU PF party, Joice Mujuru. Nonetheless, female candidates did not perform very well, with Khupe coming third and Mujuru in seventh place in the elections that were won by Emmerson Munangagwa. Khupe and Mujuru won a paltry 0.9 and 0.3 per cent of votes failing to reach 60,000 combined votes in elections with more than 5 million voters. The election results epitomise the glass ceiling and women's limits in Zimbabwean politics. This seems to attest to the idea that Zimbabwean women still struggle in politics, particularly in the presidium, without their husbands. Their sole agency remains unproven. The intersectionality of gender, class, marital status and power therefore comes into play. These elections potentially mark either a demise or a breakthrough in women's ascendancy to presidential powers in Zimbabwe. Social transformation through women's participation in high political office therefore remains utopic.

As these dynamics unfold, there is also the realisation that feminist scholars appear to be taking a backseat. Supposedly due to the reification of politics

as a no-go area for all except for those who went to war and as censorship of universities forced academics detach from politics especially during Robert Mugabe era (Kariwo 2009). During the Mugabe era, it was observed:

> In Zimbabwe, the State and ZANU PF are viewed as the same institution by ZANU PF members who coerce citizens to follow the indoctrination imposed on them by the totalitarian regime …. The content knowledge required to teach pupils about alternative forms of government, democracy, freedoms and human rights and to expand their knowledge of politics beyond the politics of coercion introduced by ZANU PF is lacking in schools. (Shizha and Kariwo 2011:117)

Such revelations therefore show that advocating women's emancipation through university teaching might be difficult given the hegemonic political environments obtaining in the country.

The same applies to feminist scholars and female politicians in Zimbabwe. It appears that just like most disciplines within tertiary education, feminism has been largely confined to the university lecture room. There appears to be a lack of concrete synergy between feminist scholars and female politicians. Even though academics and other feminist scholars such as Rudo Gaidzanwa and Fey Chung have made significant contributions to feminist literature, it appears as if their writings are largely confined to university libraries. They are hardly brought to life outside universities. Likewise, even though the two also tried their luck in political circles as politicians in their own right, they have not succeeded like other politicians to ascend to significant political offices. Therefore, there is a need for more research on how feminist scholars might work together with politicians, including male politicians, in order to realise significant social transformation through women's empowerment. Similar studies have proposed the need for an 'existence of a unified women's movement capable of making political demands' (Okeke-Ihejirika and Franceschet 2002:439). As Shizha and Kariwo (2011:157) argue 'universities in Zimbabwe have the capacity, despite the brain drain, to support the Ministry of Women's Affairs. What needs to be worked out is a relationship for collaboration'. There is an indispensable need for an effective synergy between feminist scholarship in universities and female politicians so as to realise the country's transformation through gender equality. Femocracy needs to be addressed and female politicians need to get out of androcentric political cocoons. The glass ceiling needs to be shifted and female politicians need to be emancipated from androcentric webs and instead focus on women's issues in political spaces.

Recommendations

This article notes that the presidium remains a highly masculinised position in Zimbabwe. Women face barriers that impede them from occupying the country's most influential political office. When they do so their ascendancy is facilitated by their husbands and this proves unsustainable since they usually fall together with their husbands. There is therefore a need for academics, feminists, government departments, women's organisations and political parties to come up with strategies that help ensure that women rise to influential positions in their own capacity. It should be admitted though that this may prove to be a difficult task considering the highly masculine ideologies under which the country operates. It has been noted that there appears to be a lack of synergy between feminist scholarship and women in politics in Zimbabwe. This can be attributed to reification of politics in Zimbabwe where politics has been constructed in a muscular and sacred fashion. Politics has been crafted as a no-go area for the weak, especially women. On the other hand, feminism appears to be taking place behind closed university doors, yet it is supposed to be an action-oriented scholarship that informs policy and social transformation. It is thus recommended that there is a need for more synergy between politicians and academics, in this case between feminist scholars in universities and female politicians such that the two can come up with strategies and policies that can engender gender equality and women's empowerment. In that way it can be reasoned that Africa and Zimbabwe's social transformation could be achieved, and Agenda 2063 might be brought to fruition. Notably, this article is based on secondary sources; it will be useful for future research to focus on lived experiences and agency of female politicians based on primary data sources.

Conclusion

Feminism as an action-oriented theory can be an effective tool to foster social transformation through gender equality and the emancipation of women. However postcolonial Africa, including Zimbabwe, has been struggling with the idea of wholesomely embracing feminist initiative such as women's leadership. Executive political leadership positions still impose glass ceilings on women. This has been noted in both the universities and political offices. It has been noted that women in Zimbabwean politics appear to access leadership positions through the influence of their husbands. Patriarchy still reigns supreme. The article discussed three case studies of women who got to the helm of political leadership through the influence of their husbands

but quickly fell from grace after their husbands' untimely demise. It was also discussed that there appears to be a dearth of synergy between feminist scholars and female politicians. Thus it was recommended that there is the need for synergy and networks possibly between feminist scholarship and women in all spheres, particularly in politics, so that feminism is brought to life outside the university.

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Re-membering Wangari Maathai's Feminist Scholarship in her Autobiography *Unbowed: One Woman's Story*

Stephen M. Mutie*

Abstract

While scholars have proposed to interrupt and resist the prevailing androcentric view prevalent in Kenyan society, and, of course, some of these ways have borne fruit, this article proposes to turn attention to women's narratives as captured in their autobiographies. This article is thus an interpretive analysis of Professor Wangari Maathai's autobiography *Unbowed: One Woman's Story*. Hopefully, personal story will answer particular theoretical questions that underpin the understanding and conceptualisation of feminism by *Wanjiku* (poor women) in Kenya. Under the backdrop of this question lies a fundamental assumption that feminism in Kenya needs a rethinking and a possible reconceptualisation to address past failures and setbacks. While locating its interrogation on postcolonial feminist theoretical underpinnings, the article adopts a qualitative approach as part of the research design. Being interpretive, the study relies on lit-crit methodology to analyse Wangari Maathai's *Unbowed*. The main concern is to interrogate how Maathai's autobiography reframes feminist scholarship in Kenya, particularly by underscoring the significance of *Wanjiku* as a key resource in the whole feminist enterprise.

Résumé

Alors que les chercheurs ont proposé d'interrompre et de résister à la vision androcentrique dominante dans la société kenyane, et, bien sûr, certains de ces moyens ont porté leurs fruits, cet article propose de se pencher sur les récits des femmes tels que relatés dans leurs autobiographies. Cet article est donc une analyse interprétative de l'autobiographie *Unbowed: One*

* Department of Literature, Linguistics and Foreign Languages, Kenyatta University, Kenya. Email: muties13@yahoo.co.uk

Woman's Story par la professeure Wangari Maathai. Nous espérons que cette histoire personnelle répondra à des questions théoriques particulières qui sous-tendent la compréhension et la conceptualisation du féminisme par les *Wanjiku* (femmes pauvres) au Kenya. En toile de fond de cette question, se trouve l'hypothèse fondamentale selon laquelle le féminisme au Kenya a besoin d'être repensé et éventuellement reconceptualisé pour faire face aux échecs et revers auxquels il a été confronté. Tout en basant son interrogation sur les fondements théoriques du féminisme postcolonial, l'article adopte une approche qualitative dans le cadre de la conception de la recherche. Interprétative, l'étude s'appuie sur une méthodologie de critique littéraire pour analyser *Unbowed* de Wangari Maathai. La principale préoccupation est d'interroger la façon dont l'autobiographie de Maathai recadre la recherche féministe au Kenya, en particulier en soulignant l'importance des *Wanjiku* comme une ressource clé dans toute initiative féministe.

Introduction: Wangari Maathai

Born in rural Ihithe, a small village in the central highlands of what was then British Kenya in 1940, Prof. Maathai was the familiar face of an extraordinary Kenyan woman. A trailblazer par excellence, she was the first woman in the East African region to acquire a PhD in 1971 and headed the department of veterinary medicine at the University of Nairobi. Between 1977 and 1979 her personal life experienced a turbulent phase following separation from her husband and their divorce. She lost jobs because of the Kenyan government's malice, was sabotaged by the courts, refused to be boxed in by her gender and battled with riot police officers during the push for multiparty democracy in the late 1980s and 1990s. Years later, her sacrifices were amply rewarded when she broke the glass ceiling to become the first African woman to receive a Nobel Peace Prize in 2004 in recognition of her 'contribution to sustainable development, human rights, and peace.'

In *Unbowed*, she recounts the political and personal beliefs that led her, in 1977, to establish the Green Belt Movement, which spread from Kenya across Africa, helping to restore indigenous forests while mobilising rural communities, particularly women, by offering them small compensation to plant trees in their villages. She introduced the idea of planting trees to serve people. This idea developed into a grassroots organisation, the Green Belt Movement, dedicated to planting trees to conserve the environment and improve quality of life. This movement responded to the needs of Kenyan women who stated that their streams were dried up, their food supply had decreased, and they walked great distances to find firewood. Maathai would pay poor women to plant trees to reforest Kenya. The mission of the movement

is to empower the community through environmental management. This form of community empowerment is a different form of feminist activism that serves the needs of women and children aptly. Maathai recounts:

> As long as the Green Belt Movement was perceived as a few women raising seedlings, we didn't matter to the government. But as soon as we began to explain how trees disappear and why it is important for citizens to stand up for their rights – whether environmental, women's, or human – senior officials in the government and members of parliament began to take notice. (2006:180)

Her rise was marred with numerous challenges that sought to dim her quest for environmental awareness and the fight for democratic space in Kenya. She first attempted to be elected as a member of parliament in 1982 but failed. Her second attempt was in the 1997 General Election when she ran for the presidency and Member of Parliament for Tetu constituency, failing. Her political breakthrough came in the 2002 General Election when she clinched the Member of Parliament seat and was subsequently appointed as an assistant minister for environment and natural resources, a position she held until 2005.

But in all her undertakings, she spoke against the 'marginal and inferior space' (Nyongesa, Murimi and Makokha 2021:1) that women, especially the poor, found themselves. Her fearless and bold nature was evident even in parliament. One time in the Kenyan National Parliament, she was quoted as having told the male members to forget what was below the belt and deal with the substance above the belt. She advised them to stop getting 'distracted by the anatomy below the line and instead the debate [over the Times Complex] required the use of the anatomy of whatever lies above the neck' (Maathai 2006:192). This was *inferiorising* them, as she was one of the few in the country who had attained a PhD.

Maathai also won other notable awards, including the Right Livelihood Award (1984), the Edinburgh Medal (for outstanding contribution to humanity through science) (1993), the Global Environment Award, World Association of Non-Governmental Organizations (2003), Doctor of Public Service (honorary degree), University of Pittsburgh (2006), the Goldman Environmental Prize (1991), the Indira Gandhi Prize (2006), and the Jawaharlal Nehru Award (2005). These accolades project Maathai as a distinguished environmentalist and fighter for democratic space in Kenya. Maathai emerged as a global icon of ecological consciousness, democracy and women rights meaning that she was a threat to the imperialistic world. Thus, the central premise of this article is to interrogate her tenacity to transform feminist scholarship in Kenyan higher. However, her high

achievements in the global arena did not alienate her from her peasant roots. Instead, she chose to oscillate between the two worlds. Of interest here is to problematise how her struggle for gender rights and democracy can be nuanced within her renaming herself 'Maathai' as a hybrid of *Wanjiku* and the elitist feminist. Maathai, therefore, aligns herself as the alternative voice that speaks for the otherised *Wanjiku*. She uses her double worldview as an elite woman and her peasant roots to create a third space that rejects gatekeeping in Kenya feminist scholarship.

Maathai's autobiography, *Unbowed*, shows how she underscores the importance of rural women in feminist scholarship in this personal narrative. Situating the autobiography within the larger postcolonial forces that shaped Maathai's public life, this article interrogates how her life, through her tale and self-definition, can be said to gravitate across and reject the gatekeeping discourses that try to define feminist scholarship in Kenya. She bore the brunt of the patriarchal establishment that sought to defeat her in her struggle against patriarchy.

Locating *Wanjiku* in Feminist Scholarship

The term *Wanjiku* is used in Kenyan parlance to refer to a low-income peasant woman living in low-income neighbourhoods. Among other attributes, this woman has low academic achievement, is economically and politically oppressed, and is less privileged. It is this woman that Maathai fronts in her autobiography *Unbowed*. Right from how the title is framed, this autobiography shows a life-story that personifies the spirit of African feminist scholarship at its core, especially in the way this autobiography intertwines activism with the feminist politics of gender studies in Kenyan universities. Furthermore, the autobiography explores the systemic challenges that the author faces in her profession and how she triumphs over them.

In her first chapter, 'Beginnings', Maathai describes the natural environment of her family's village and the effects of colonial settlement, Christianity and literacy on the native culture of Kenya. How did the coming of white settlers change the native way of life, particularly in terms of families' relations to the land, traditional economy, and education? Because her education was in English (and later provided her entry to the Kenyan professional elite), it had the potential to separate her from people who spoke the native languages of Kenya and for her to be seen as 'a white woman in a black skin' (2006:110). How does she feel about this problem, and how did she address the issue of language in the Green Belt Movement? (Maathai 2006:60, 72).

Unbowed recaptures Maathai's struggles against attempts by patriarchal institutions like the university to re-invent her as a 'proper' woman. The memoir details her rise to prominence and her frustrations of high employment:

> I was very conscious of the fact that a highly educated woman like me ran the risk of making her husband lose votes and support if I was accused of not being enough of an African woman, of being "a white woman in black skin" … it was important for me to demonstrate to people that they were welcome in our home. What they encountered was very different from what they expected … this attitude of many of our people was curious given that Kenyan politicians were part of the elite. Like Mwangi, many had been educated abroad, spoke English at home and in their workplaces … but they wanted to project their "Africanness" through their wives, both at home and in the society. Women are commonly described as carriers and promoters of culture. Yet men are also carriers of culture: why couldn't they express it in these instances? (Maathai 2006:110–11)

Through the autobiography, especially within the lens of postcolonial feminist theory, Maathai's account shows how gender spaces are controlled and maintained through narratives about others and ourselves. In 'White Woman Listen! Black Feminism and the Boundaries of Sisterhood', Hazel Carby (2013) identifies the fissures in theoretical frameworks and generalisations advanced by white feminists when placed alongside the experience of many black women who faced legacies of imperialism, racism and colonialism. Likewise, most feminist undertakings in Kenya have been accused of and rejected as elitist and sometimes urbane. Carby's affront to the superior West seals a firm foundation for fronting a Kenyan feminist self, who can oscillate between elitism and remain relevant to *Wanjiku*'s traditional demeanour. This is the position that I am taking in this article. I believe that Kenyan feminist scholarship is rid of gatekeeping, a process by which *Wanjiku*, a rightful member of a feminist community in Kenya, is restricted access to feminist scholarship and discourse. By this principle, *Wanjiku* is not entitled to access all spaces or participate in all discussions therein:

> It became clear I was being turned into a sacrificial lamb at one point. Anybody who had a grudge against modern, educated, and independent women was being given an opportunity to spit on me. I decided to hold my head high, put my shoulders back, and suffer with dignity: *I would give every woman and girl reasons to be proud and never regret being educated, successful, and talented.* "What I have," I told myself, "is something to celebrate and not to ridicule or dishonor." (Maathai 2006:146)

In the quotation above, Maathai suggests that although she is a 'modern, educated, and independent wom[a]n', she 'would give every woman and

girl reasons to be proud and never regret being educated, successful, and talented.' This shows that she acknowledges her being modern, but she was determined to speak for 'every woman'. In essence, Maathai's modernity refers to a '[t]emporal/historical concept by which we refer to our understanding of the present in its uniqueness that is in what distinguishing it from the past' (Calinescu 1993).

This article proceeds from this point. While feminist scholarship in Kenya has brought forth a worrying difference between educated feminists and *Wanjiku*, Maathai's feminist undertaking fronts *Wanjiku*, and thus it provides a paradigm shift in feminist scholarship in Kenya. It is true that 'we cannot hope to reconstitute ourselves in all our absences or to rectify the ill-conceived presences that invade *her*story from *his*tory, but we do wish to bear witness to our herstories' (Carby 2013:86). But while Carby's article argues that most contemporary feminist theory does not sufficiently account for the experience of black women, I argue here that a good number of the past existing Kenyan feminist scholars do not seem to adequately articulate *Wanjiku*'s issues, rather their own. To reconceptualise feminist thinking in Kenya, Maathai involves *Wanjiku* in planting seedlings for family welfare. It will be recalled that urbane feminists see the contemporary family as the source of oppression of women:

> It is difficult to argue that the present structure of the family household is anything other than oppressive for women. Feminists have consistently, and rightly, seen the family as a central site of women's oppression in contemporary society. The reasons for this lie both in the material structure of the household, by which women are by and large financially dependent on men, and in the ideology of the family, through which women are confined to a primary concern with domesticity and motherhood (Barrett 1980:214).

This kind of thinking irredeemably severs *Wanjiku*'s 'kind of feminism' from the front of Kenyan elite feminists. Whereas the Kenyan family is seen as pathological by elite Kenyan feminists, *Wanjiku* still holds the institution of marriage dear. It is the reason she opted not to drop her husband's name, Mathai, but instead added a letter to it: 'Maathai.'

In her autobiography, Maathai portrays the lukewarm reception she received from *Wanjiku* who weren't open to the feminist activism she led. This shows the lone tribulations she underwent in her quest to mobilise *Wanjiku* to participate in the struggle. She avers:

> However, the women refused to join us. Many said their husbands had advised them not to be part of that struggle. Perhaps it is not surprising. Those women opposing our campaign were portraying us as women who didn't want to live with our husbands, which of course, was not true. (Maathai 2006:116)

Maathai's autobiography is a *one-woman's story* (emphasis mine) – a story that points to the tenacious spirit of the Kenyan woman. Though well educated, Maathai commits to championing less privileged women in her fight against not only oppressive Kenyan patriarchal systems but also tries to bridge over the gatekeeping that exists in Kenyan feminist scholarship. To make this possible, she involves *Wanjiku* doing what Iheka (2017) calls 'environmentalism for the poor'. Her autobiography broadens our perspective on violent resistance and its complicity in ecological degradation, thus reopening the question of violence that earlier marked the struggle for liberation by such figures as Frantz Fanon; and by involving the village women in planting seedlings for sustainable development and environmental conservation, her autobiography provides a framework within which we can view her feminism as considering the intersections of humans with their environment in those instances of oppression, resistance and agency.

According to Iheka in *Naturalizing Africa*, Maathai's autobiography 'traces her ecological vision to the indigenous practices of her rural Kikuyu upbringing that privileges respect for the environment and the need to nurture the earth that sustains humans' (2017:8). The people Iheka calls 'rural Kikuyu' are *Wanjiku*, the village Gikuyu woman. These are the people that Maathai fights for, speaks for, and represents in all her battles against the Kenyan government under the then president Arap Moi. She chooses *Wanjiku* over elitist women in her feminist reconceptualisation. Maathai suggests that the rural womenfolk nurse and protect the environment through their 'Africanness' through her personal story, an autobiography. However, she hints that not all women can portray this Africanness. She therefore fronts *Wanjiku* as the representation of all underprivileged women in Kenya.

According to Gayle Letherby in *Feminist Auto/Biography,* all research that aims to transform society must be informed by autobiographical experience 'and is an intellectual activity that involves a consideration of power, emotion, and P/politics':

> My argument for theorised subjectivity involves the constant, critical interrogation of our personhood – both intellectual and personal – within the production of the knowledge … as researchers, we become the biographers of our respondents while recognising that the research relationship influences the autobiographies that respondents share with us. (2016:48–9)

According to this position, Maathai's autobiographical voice becomes paramount to transform Kenyan society. Letherby (2016) fronts a position that starts with the subjective. Thus, Maathai's personal story fronts her subjectivity, which mirrors *Wanjiku*'s subjectivity, her 'place', and, of course, shows how *Wanjiku*'s agency has been defined and monitored by others.

Her autobiography narrates *Wanjiku*'s marginalisation and how the elite feminists hurt, discredit and misrepresent them and their plight. A specific case is Mwende in Machakos County whose both hands were chopped off by her husband who accused her of infidelity. In the recent past, Kenya has witnessed serious violence cases against women. These cases range from rape, chopping of hands and stabbing. These setbacks and defeats in the war on gender violence and related societal vices are confounded by the perennial failure of the realisation of the two-thirds gender rule that occasionally threatens the legitimacy of the Kenyan parliament, both the Senate and the National Assembly. The two-thirds rule in Kenya stipulates that all elective bodies should meet the threshold of not having more than two-thirds from one gender. It has been an uphill task since the National Assembly, as the legislative arm of government, has not supported this course.

During the 1990s and 2000s, the context within which *Unbowed* is located, the movement was dominated by female lawyers who articulated their arguments in formal legalistic language to negotiate with male politicians in a style recognised and respected by a patriarchal system. In most cases, male politicians have always accused these elite feminist parliamentarians as being incapable of representing *Wanjiku*. This is because the elite feminist seems to be a lone ranger, fighting patriarchy from an elevated social position, which by its very nature excludes the rural woman. By organising the rural Kikuyu women alongside the 'naturalising environment', Maathai's autobiography fronts a reform process created to enhance women's political voice and access to decision-making and advance women's rights more largely, thus situating women's and the feminist engagement process against the wider political economy of Kenya's political development since the early 1990s. Her autobiography reflects the resilience of long-standing barriers to women's voices and access to decision-making and new constraints and manifestations of resistance and backlash that feminist women face from *Wanjiku* in the post-constitutional reform context.

Interventions set to mitigate gender disparity/violence can only be located within the frameworks of feminist scholarship. However, this article argues that feminist scholarship in Kenya is a guarded space and gatekeeping reigns supreme. This strand of feminist scholarship in academia is elitist and does not take *Wanjiku* on its canvas. Maathai's reflective experience as an agitator for women's rights thus places her in the forefront of unlocking elitist feminists as the gatekeepers of patriarchy. In it lies inconsistencies, abstractions, doublespeak and apparent failures of the feminist enterprise in Kenya.

As a revolutionary figure, Maathai has parallels with Vandana Shiva, an astute woman associated with the anti-GMO movement in India. Both

suave and educated women actively participated in the fight for the otherised women and indicate their holistic approach to feminism in challenging the existing elitism in feminism. Shiva, in *Staying Alive*, mentions the key role played by the women of Chipko Movement, whose mission intersected in the areas of ecological insights and gender activism:

> The recent Chipko movement has popularly been referred to as a women's movement, but only some male Chipko activists have been projected into visibility. The women's contribution has been neglected and remains invisible, inspite of the fact that the history of Chipko is a history of the visions and actions of exceptionally courageous women. Environmental movements like Chipko have become historical landmarks because they have been fuelled by women's ecological insights and political and moral strengths. I will dwell at some length on some of these exceptional women because my interaction has personally inspired me with them, and because I feel that it is unjust that the real pillars of the movement are still largely unknown. The experience of these powerful women also needs to be shared to remind us that we are not alone, and that we do not take the first steps: others have walked before us (Shiva 1988:64).

Maathai's strand of *Wanjiku* feminism acknowledges the marginalised struggles of the peasantry, which remains unrecognisable in scholarship despite her tremendous contribution to ecological restoration and women's rights. Maathai won numerous awards that brought her a lot of fame and money, but her Green Belt Movement associates, primarily women, got the chance to be appreciated. The accolades won by Maathai are metaphors of elitism that Maathai seeks to shed through modelling her feminist underpinnings by thrusting *Wanjiku* into the limelight.

This article aims to show that although feminists in Kenya hope to represent the plight of women in general, this homogenising discourse does not speak for *Wanjiku* in the village. On the contrary, the two sets of women show indifference in income, education and class, which places the urbane female at a more advantageous point than the rural one. This presents a contestation: who speaks for whom? What role do these inconsistencies in Kenyan feminist scholarship portend? To what extent can literature be said to mitigate these inconsistencies?

The goal of feminism is to open a conversation about how gender equality can be achieved, but the efforts to achieve this remain an uphill task. The argument is that the laudable developments enshrined in the Constitution of Kenya 2010 have failed to provide frameworks within which the two-thirds gender rule can be realised. The gender rule in the eyes of the patriarchal establishment is seen as unmerited leadership opportunities for women.

One way to correct this would be to include *Wanjiku* in feminist scholarship by understanding her space. Locating *Wanjiku* in her space would help her understand the masculinities that she fights and the kind of narrative she would use to counter the existing repressive narratives that define women. The question of narrative creation is crucial mainly when applied to an autobiography. Maathai's subjective position in her autobiography is examined alongside other narratives in the 1980s and 1990s, exposing and critiquing the gatekeeping that existed.

Maendeleo ya Wanawake (Progress for Women) is a women's caucus vehemently criticised in Maathai's autobiography. Maendeleo ya Wanawake was the women's wing of the government, a powerful caucus whose core mandate was to voice women's issues in the state. Although it aimed to represent and speak for all women in the Republic, *Wanjiku* felt left out from the conversation and her issues were not well articulated. In her autobiography, Maathai vehemently criticises Maendeleo ya Wanawake as being incapable of helping women. She compellingly avers that when she was undergoing difficulties, instead of the women supporting her, they chastised her telling her to behave like a proper woman. She writes:

> Moi [the then President of Kenya] also suggested that if I was to be a proper woman in the African tradition, I should respect men and be quiet … prompted by President Moi, who wondered in that speech why the women of Kenya had not spoken out against this "wayward" woman, the leadership of Maendeleo ya Wanawake, our former National Council of Women colleagues and now a faithful branch of KANU, criticised me … at one point they suggested that I had "gone astray and should seek guidance from [my] fellow women." (Maathai 2006:196)

The leadership of Maendeleo ya Wanawake was largely elitist. Going by Maathai's criticism of the lobby group, it would have been prudent that the organisation was run as a non-governmental entity that offered an alternative voice for *Wanjiku* predicaments. Although, the caucus was to protect women's rights and articulate women's issues in President Moi's government, Maathai portrays them as opportunistic, blocking social transformation fronted by other women. Being gatekeepers to the seat of patriarchal power, these women prevented other women from achieving emancipation, and the progress for women enshrined in the title of their movement became only emancipation of individual self-interests. Maathai directs her energies in championing *Wanjiku* by calling out the power structures behind the elitist women's groups that had no touch with the rural womenfolk oppressed by President Moi's government. Her Green Belt Movement drive sought to voice the concerns of the peasant woman placed

at the bottom of the social strata. Maathai's feminist drive is anchored on creating a bridge between the elitist woman's (her)story and *Wanjiku* who isn't represented by the elitist women group of Maendeleo ya Wanawake. Maathai's conviction is that 'He who pays the piper controls the tune', thus the lobby group of Maendeleo ya Wanawake could not sufficiently advocate for the true emancipation of *Wanjiku* since it was government-controlled.

Collapsing Elitism into Peasantry Gender Struggles in *Unbowed*

As argued above, what Maathai does, and succeeds in, in her autobiography, is to break the barriers that separate elite feminists from *Wanjiku*. Using herself as a means to such an end, she strides between the two worlds to portray the inescapability of inclusion in the fight against gender oppression. From the available literature sources, it is evident that African women lack a unique expression of feminism. Furthermore, there is a need for African supporters of feminism to re-define feminism as the concept still appears to be a movement without cohesion in the eyes of many. Maathai spearheaded the efforts of self-dependence by encouraging *Wanjiku* to finance her means of living. Such a practice was creative and did not rely on borrowing ideas from Western women's feminism.

Wanjiku's practice of feminism is deeply rooted in the traditional culture and lived experience of African women. Most African women who are mainly poor belong to this type of African feminism. In *Unbowed*, Maathai profiles herself as an academic and an unapologetic peasant. Finding comradeship among the poor women in her ankle-long green Kitenge, Maathai supported their activities. Maathai recalls an event organised by Kenyan peasant women mothers who were agitating for the release of their sons who were jailed in Nyayo torture chambers in Nairobi. Maathai graphically details these peasant women's fearlessness, and the brutal power that the patriarchal system confronted them with:

> The mothers in the tent refused to be intimidated and they did not run. Instead, they did something very brave: several of them stripped, some of them completely naked, and showed the police officers their breasts. (Maathai 2006:221)

In urging the protesting mothers of the detainees to strip when confronted by security officers who were threatening to break up their protests, Maathai argues that the brave women wove traditional beliefs on nudity and gender activism in their fight for democracy. In this incident, Maathai gets involved in the peasantry political struggles of *Wanjiku* through decisive female-gendered activism. By invoking the gendered power

associated with female nudity Maathai presents how older women whose sons were in detentation resorted to the social construct of stripping to counter the police, underlining the move as a special weapon. Stripping as a mode of resistance, especially looking at it through a contextual cultural lens, can only be associated and make complete sense within the contexts of peasant revolution, not from the elitist feminist class. A similar contrasting case was witnessed in Nairobi in 2016. Dubbed 'My Dress My Choice', a feminist protest was organised; but no peasant woman was welcome. The participants were purely elite, from a high-class life judging by their attire, language and mannerisms.

Maathai indeed oscillated between the two worlds, elitism and peasantry, because of not stripping when others were stripping naked, the point she raises in her autobiography is that feminist scholarship will only dismantle androcentricism when feminism theorisations involve *Wanjiku*. Her social consciousness consists of the construction of feminism that considers *Wanjiku* as a significant stakeholder, whose opposition is not men or patriarchy but the social-political evils and class that choke our relationships. Mama (2005:96) argues that:

> The attainment of nation-statehood has made it incumbent on women to pursue their integration into public life, and much energy has been devoted to lobbying for legal and policy reforms, and demanding women's equal representation in the hierarchies of power and fairer access to resources.

In other words, feminism can be understood in women's energy towards mitigating divisive tendencies that characterise their collective march towards global development as women. Women intellectuals like Maathai have used their writings to rout the debilitating deprivations of the social evils that affect the postcolonial Kenyan state. Especially in chapter 5, 'Independence – Kenya's and my Own', Maathai portrays androcentricism in Kenya:

> I decided to pursue the matter in different offices. I found out that the zoology professor had indeed offered the job to someone else, and that that person was someone else … was it also because I was a woman? Perhaps not, but it wasn't long after that, when seeking another job at the same institution, that I encountered sexism from the same men. Both ethnic and gender barriers now were placed in the way of my self-advancement. I realised then that the sky would not be my limit! Most likely, my gender and my ethnicity would be. When I began teaching, all the students were male and they found it difficult to believe that I had the qualifications to be their instructor in anatomy. I was a woman, after all … it wasn't easy to deal with the students and male colleagues. The latter would often tease me: "Do you really have a master's degree in biology?" (Maathai 2006:101–4)

In what Maathai calls 'Difficult Years' (2006:139–63), 'I was also facing the challenge of venturing into what was considered a man's world. Nobody told me that men would be threatened by the high academic achievements of women like me. But Kenyan society idolises education and considers it a panacea for all other problems. Traditionally, society also puts more value on boys than girls: Boys are provided education before girls and boys are expected to be greater achievers than girls. Therefore, it was an unspoken problem that my husband and I had a Ph.D. And taught in the university' (2006:139).

It is noteworthy that scholars in African feminist scholarship have suggested that current approaches to studying women and gender in Africa are rooted in activism (Mama 1996; 2005; Osirim 2009; Fox 2009). For example, Diaw (2007) argues that in 1996, the Senegalese Association of University Graduates held a conference entitled 'Discrimination against women in the workforce'. Scholars decried the under-representation of women at faculty and university assemblies. But, again, those women recruited to the staff of universities faced numerous hurdles in rising to higher academic and administrative echelons. Some of these are occasioned by social and cultural demands on their time, making it extremely difficult for them to devote the kind of time required for excellence in research and scholarship.

This article has interrogated Maathai's autobiography, *Unbowed*, and has noted that, as a pioneer academic, Maathai met several hurdles that curtailed her progress in her career. However, what is important to note is the challenges that she encounters in academia. She writes: 'When I began teaching, all the students were male, and they found it difficult to believe that I had the qualifications to be their instructor in anatomy. I was a woman, after all, and in my mid-twenties' (Maathai 2006:104). This shows the kind of treatment she was to receive in her career; being defined within the lens of patriarchy. However, how Maathai deals with this is admirable: 'I decided to hold my head high, put my shoulders back, and suffer with dignity: I would give every woman and girl reasons to be proud and never regret being educated, successful, and talented' (Maathai 2006:146).

This observation and resolve places *Unbowed* squarely in feminist scholarship. Here Maathai aims to articulate the evils perpetuated on women in academia and give her opinion on the mitigation measures: being unbowed. It is in this spirit and quest that she redefines herself:

> To deal with my terrible feelings of rejection, I got the idea of adding another "a" to "Mathai" and to write it as it is pronounced in Kikuyu. And so I became "Maathai." The extra syllable also signified that although a part of me would always be connected to Mwangi and his surname, I had a new identity. Henceforth, only I would define who I was: Wangari Muta Maathai. (Maathai 2006:147)

Anchoring this article within postcolonial feminist theory as construed by Chandra Mohanty, Ann Russo and Lourdes Torres (1991), I argue that by critiquing femininity, Maathai's autobiography adds to the knowledge of the theory by presenting another aspect of colonialism – within feminist theory itself – that is, African women colonising African women from the class level. Within this colonialism, this article argues that gender violence and related vices continue to ravage *Wanjiku* while the feminist scholar continues with gender theorisations within the confines of university boardrooms. While the university is a site for knowledge construction and dissemination, it is also an ideological state apparatus available to disseminate any type of knowledge.

Much of this theorisation continues to muzzle *Wanjiku*, relegating her to the fringes of society – as a second class citizen. To propose a paradigm shift, Maathai's autobiography fronts *Wanjiku*'s activities in village-based organisations, especially planting trees. While Mohanty, Russo and Torres (1991) deconstruct what they term as a tendency to present and code Third World women as absolute victims of male domination and traditional cultural practices, Maathai's autobiography suggests that there are in the African conception of feminist theory misrepresentations, inconsistencies and doublespeak. This is because feminist scholars and feminists do not consider *Wanjiku*'s voice.

Although Maathai is ready to roll up her sleeves and work for her nation, a set of challenges impinge on her desire. Using the context of her work environment (the University of Nairobi), Maathai reveals the embedded cancers gnawing the marrow or kernel of the nation that include ethnicity, corruption, and gendered discrimination:

> I found out that the zoology professor had indeed offered the job to someone else, and that that person was someone from his ethnic community. To add insult to injury, that person was still in Canada. It was the first time I had encountered that form of discrimination. *Was it also because I was a woman?* ... both ethnic and gender barriers now were placed in the way of my self-advancement. I realised that the sky would not be my limit! Most likely, my gender and my ethnicity would be. (Maathai 2006:101)

Here Maathai intertwines patriarchy and other social evils that hold the country back. Collapsing the above two quotes, I note a motif that seems to propel Maathai: as a nationalist. It will be recalled that feminism has a place in modern Kenyan politics where women struggle to find their rightful position. The job denial ignited the voluntarist spirit of nationalism. Maathai vents her frustrations just like different categories of highly educated graduates with nationalist internationality who return to Africa after studying and working for their continent only to be disappointed. Her activism is a response to the barriers wedged upon her agency.

The recognition of *Wanjiku* in the feminist discourses in Kenya is based on the importance of women as the overall producers in the food chain in the liberalisation against colonialism. Maathai suits the two types of African feminists as described in her autobiography. Despite the various drawbacks that such women feminists face, Maathai stood unbowed, setting an essential standard for other African feminists to come.

Odiemo-Munara (2008) has rightly demonstrated how female writers in East Africa, through the women figures in their texts, subvert, actively resist, and engage with power/authority; and in the process manage to re-evaluate the dominant zeitgeist, oppositionally establishing the East African woman as an active and speaking subject in the ongoing re-imagining of the East African postcolonies. It is noteworthy that this engagement is political in nature, and that it is largely located within feminist theory whose purpose is to struggle against the oppression of women as women. This widespread oppression results from patriarchy, supremacy of masculine power, and male authority most firmly entrenched (Goldberg 1994; Garber 1992; Fuss 1991).

In Kenya, patriarchy entrenches its hegemony more strongly through nationalism and nationhood and feminism works towards rewriting this hegemony. It is within these frameworks that Maathai's autobiographies can be interrogated, and this article argues that these writers use their memoirs to examine and deconstruct the concepts of Kenyan nationalism and nationhood as male prerogatives. In her memoir, *Unbowed*, Maathai portrays the indefatigable spirit of the Kenyan peasant woman. She is the matriarch of democracy in Kenya. She has fought dark forces which discriminated against her as a woman during Daniel Moi's regime. In dismantling patriarchal notions in Kenya's elite leadership, she uses religion.

Her memoir draws largely from the biblical Book of Acts 3: 1–10 with its mantra 'Rise and Walk'. It will be recalled that in the discourses of resistance to any kind of hegemony in Kenya, religion becomes an important tool in subalterns' quest to refuse to be silenced. Maathai in her memoir immerses her subtle critique of powers that crippled democracy in Kenya. Her resilience is drawn from her earlier relationship with her female mentors. Maathai writes about being particularly devastated by her mother's death (2006:274–6), and earlier describes her relationships with her mother and grandmother when she was a child (2006:13, 36–7). Maathai, therefore, tries to prop *Wanjiku* based on her personal experience as elaborated by her matrilineal ancestry. This reads into Woolf's (1977) formulation: 'we think back through our mothers if we are women'.

Maathai captures this critique thus: 'Throughout my life,' she writes, 'I have never stopped to strategise about my next steps. I often just keep walking along, through whichever door opens. I have been on a journey, and this journey has never stopped' (2006:286). Maathai uses the journey motif to portray the fight against patriarchal hegemony as tedious and unyielding. Because of this hardship, the fighter must never lose faith. Yet, in the same breath, she observes: '[a]s I sat in those cells, denying me the ability to control what happened seemed to me to be the greatest punishment the regime could mete out to me' (Maathai 2006:214).

To buttress her academic (elite) feminist strategies with the *Wanjiku* strategies bore fruit, and people (mostly the elite) were astonished by what her courage could achieve:

> People were amazed not only that one relatively insignificant woman could stop a large project that those in power wanted to see completed, but astonished that it could be done only a year after we had watched in despair as losers of an election were declared the winners. ... To me, this was the beginning of the end of Kenya as a one-party state. (Maathai 2006:204–5)

Fighting these dark forces in Kenya was not a preserve of the women; however, by capitalising on these occurrences in her memoir, Maathai debunks the concept of Kenya's nationhood as a male prerogative. Notably, the issue of agrarian women playing a central role in the whole liberation struggle had also been captured by Ngugi wa Thiong'o in his novel *The Devil on the Cross*, where the author props Wariinga as the face of revolution based on the narratives of the Mau Mau Movement in the nationalist struggle. Maathai's memoir presents her as a fearless intellectual, professor, writer and mother who led a selfless public life of struggle in the quest to fight for social justice.

Her story is based on factual and historical claims that embolden her nationalistic course, as captured in *Unbowed*. Maathai's resisting voice presents Kenyan women as equal partakers of Kenya's post-independence narrative. Therefore, her memoir becomes an astonishing and important recollection of the life and work of a nationalist figure. She applied herself to everything she did with vigour and heart; the opportunity to be educated, something that continues to be lobbied for for so many girls in Third World countries, was a major turning point and became the first of many open doorways she walked through and made the most of, not for own benefit, but always for the good of all. For instance, she actively engaged with the Forum for African Women Educationists (FAWE), which is headquartered in Nairobi.

In Kenya, Maathai often found herself at the mercy of deeply ingrained ethnicity and sexism. What situations stand out most strongly as unjust, and how did she stand up to and try to change the injustices she experienced? Facing the difficulties of departmental politics at the university, Maathai writes, 'I found myself wanting to be more than the equal of some of the men I knew. I had higher aspirations and did not want to be compared with men of lesser ability and capacity. I wanted to be me' (2006:117).

It seems almost like a romantic fantasy to imagine what the world could be like if more women were allowed to gain the necessary knowledge that could enable them to facilitate solutions to village and country problems, that would allow them to live sustainably and not in fear or poverty without understanding why. However, Maathai knew and practised that one person can't change everything. It is through showing and empowering others, and especially *Wanjiku*, that change happens. In *Unbowed*, Maathai offers an inspiring message of hope and prosperity through self-sufficiency. In this profoundly affecting and inspiring memoir, Maathai, the 2004 Nobel Peace Prize winner and a divorcée, recounts her extraordinary life as a political activist, feminist and environmentalist in Kenya.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I would like to reaffirm the idea made earlier in this article: Kenyan feminism has to be rethought to include *Wanjiku*, whom the mostly elitist feminism has not sufficiently captured. This should percolate down to *Wanjiku* and involve her. Kenyan autobiographies, particularly those written by women, have navigated past these muzzling patriarchal concepts and placed the Kenyan woman into the concept of nationalism. Women of all walks of life, including Maathai, have demonstrated that Kenyan elite feminists and authors should communicate a holistic picture of feminism manifested in alliance with women of all ranks. The presence of gatekeeping only slows the argument over liberation. Increasing the status of women is an effective plan, primarily when it is owned and directed by women. Incorporating locally held knowledge and strategies to identify entry points and modes of engagement to shape programming choices might contribute to more effective support and reduce the risk of harm (including rejecting a women's empowerment agenda because it represents foreign or Western values). The conceptualisation of *Wanjiku* feminism reconceived women's empowerment as a powerful agenda – driven and owned by Kenyan women and gender activists to the greatest possible extent.

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Feminist Postproverbial as a Panacea for Decolonising African Feminist Scholarship

Olayinka Adebimpe Oyeleye*

Abstract

Part of the weakness of feminist scholarship in Africa is its inability to turn knowledge generated in universities (*episteme*) into popular opinion (*doxa*), thereby creating a dislocation between academic epistemic space and mainstream society. This article addresses how a decolonised feminist scholarship can ground equality by reconstructing *doxa* from traditional knowledge, as found in proverbs. In accordance with the AU Agenda 2063, it aims to shatter the economic, social and political glass ceiling that has restricted women's progress by undercutting the imperialist language of patriarchy. It purposes to do this using a medium it calls *feminist postproverbials.*

Résumé

Une partie de la faiblesse de la recherche féministe en Afrique est son incapacité à transformer les connaissances générées dans les universités (*épistéme*) en opinion populaire (*doxa*), créant ainsi une dislocation entre l'espace épistémique académique et la société en général. Cet article aborde la manière dont une recherche féministe décolonisée pourrait ancrer l'égalité en reconstruisant la doxa à partir de connaissances traditionnelles, telles qu'on les trouve dans les proverbes. Conformément à l'Agenda 2063 de l'UA, l'article vise à briser le plafond de verre économique, social et politique qui a limité le progrès des femmes en affaiblissant le langage impérialiste du patriarcat. Pour y parvenir, il utilise un médium qu'il appelle les *postproverbes féministes*.

* Department of Philosophy, Faculty of Arts, University of Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria. Email: talk2yinka@yahoo.com

Introduction

Language use is an outstanding yet mysterious fact about humans. It is outstanding because its interaction is with every facet of human life and mysterious in its numerosity. Likewise this is true regarding its origin and the fact that it can only be understood when considered in relation to a society. Language is not only a working system of sounds and symbols used for communication in a particular point and period. Language also serves as a depository and transmitter of the knowledge and values that constitute the culture of a community. The implication of language being a vehicle through which the knowledge and values that constitute a culture is transmitted is that 'existing meanings are not ours to command … to reproduce existing meanings exactly is also to reaffirm the knowledges our culture takes for granted, and the values that precede us – the norms, that is, of the previous generation' (Belsey 2002:4).

Proverbs, and particularly African proverbs, have served as a fine medium through which existing meanings get reproduced and norms and values, even when detrimental, transmitted. Since language is largely the product of its history as well as a source of its own development in the future, proverbs as an intrinsic element of language are as well deeply historical. Barry Hallen (2000) attests accordingly that proverbs are an inheritance from the past. It is this historical sense of language as well as its ability to be a source of its own future development that excites the thesis of this work. Particularly, how women have been subjugated through language use and how women's liberation can be achieved through the same medium.

Catherine Belsey, in her book *Poststructuralism: A Very Short Introduction* (2002), suggests that languages can be altered, so long as the changes are adopted by the general populace. This, however, raises some fundamental questions: are we all equipped with the ability to alter language? We might answer affirmatively to this question, but are we all equipped to make such alterations in language aimed at setting in motion women's liberation? Is it a task for academics only? If it is or is not, what should the mechanics of altering proverbial language, as is the case in this instance, be? How can we make reconstructed language acceptable to the populace? Amidst these questions, we draw from Belsey's suggestion that languages are alterable. It is the intention of this work to alter proverbial language through which the ideological exploitation of woman has been facilitated by turning popular opinion (*doxa*), as can be found in proverbs, into knowledge (*episteme*), thus converting *doxa* into reusable knowledge and returning it to the general populace, again as *doxa*, through mass and social media. It calls the medium it intends to use for this deconstruction and reconstruction *feminist postproverbials.*

Feminist postproverbials, as a feminist perspective to the existing idea of postproverbials, are intended to be insightful linguistic reconstructions aimed at positing woman in an egalitarian standing within a new rhetorical tradition. It aspires as well to be a possible panacea to the feminist decolonisation project by being an indigenous solution to an African problem. This work consequently explores the likelihood of adopting feminist postproverbials as a significant commencement point for an African feminist philosophy of language. This article is divided into three sections. The first section considers the need for a decolonised epistemology and why philosophy of language and feminist philosophy of language as obtainable in the West are not answers to the subject matter of what an African philosophy of language and an African feminist philosophy of language should be. The second section discusses feminist postproverbials and the idea of an African feminist philosophy of language. The third section examines the role of the university in ensuring that feminist scholarship in Africa achieves its goal of social transformation. It concludes by challenging African feminist philosophers to pay critical attention to the structures of language, and how they have evolved over time in line with patriarchalism, and to begin the move towards constructing the much needed enabling language of freedom for women.

Decolonisation as a Clarion Call

The Western imposition of theoretical categories on African thought has essentially called for a measure of reversal to which end decolonisation as both a theory and methodology needs be employed. Removing this colonial encrustation in Kwasi Wiredu's deliberation is to bring oneself to a vantage point for viewing African thought materials in their true light (Wiredu 2002:58). To achieve this, Wiredu suggests that concepts be decolonised. Feminist scholarship globally is, amidst other cares, predominantly concerned with the woman question / the condition of woman. So, to Wiredu's non-exhaustive list of concepts requiring disengagement or delinking from Eurocentric thoughts, African feminist scholarship adds the category of woman.

The consideration to 'decolonise feminist scholarship' in Third World countries emanated from a conscious and deliberate anticipation to move away from the canopy of a Westernised feminist ideal, a feminist imperialism that kept Third World women, who are in no way a singular monolithic, beneath a Western gaze. The corresponding homogeneity of these Third World countries lies in their history of being a colonised conglomerate

who have been forced into the culture of the imperial nation with its remnant cultures destroyed such that it begins to view itself from the lens of the coloniser. To this end, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o points out in his book *Decolonising the Mind* that

> how we view ourselves, our environment even, is very much dependent on where we stand in relationship to imperialism in its colonial and neo-colonial stages; that if we are to do anything about our individual and collective being today, then we have to coldly and consciously look at – what imperialism has been doing to us and to our view of ourselves in the universe. Certainly the quest for relevance and for a correct perspective can only be understood and be meaningfully resolved within the context of the general struggle against imperialism (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o 1981:88).

Africans, for Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, continue to struggle to 'decolonise the mind', that is, 'to seize back their creative initiative in history through a real control of all the means of communal self-definition in time and space' (*ibid.*:18). If colonisation was beyond a single moment, the struggle for decolonisation could not be achieved in an instance. Colonisation had entrenched itself so deeply in our worlds, not sparing our physical world for the world of conscious experience and dropping its anchor in our Popperian Third World of logical content, where intellectual discoveries are produced and critical thinking resonates,[1] the space for this being the academe or our universities. It is the impact of colonisation across these spheres and especially in the sense of our Third World that this article, from a philosophical perspective on feminist scholarship, calls for a decolonisation of our epistemology, our theorised knowledge. The epistemologies that we produce as African feminists should be done using our cultural insights, for us and by us, in order to affirm our agency as Africans. Laudable as this is, its mode however has been problematic due to the inconsistencies in our theorising and the careful denial within some schools of thoughts in academic feminism in Africa about the condition of the African woman. Thus, culture is rather blindly defended against the prevailing condition of woman.

The theoretical grounding of the 'woman question', far from being an empty exercise, is a dynamic and necessary activity in the process of women's liberation. Its ultimate purpose, therefore, is not simply to explain or discuss the phenomenon of women's oppression, but to change and transform it (Petty 1987 in Kuumba 1994:94). The crucial demand that we construct a logical understanding of the condition of woman, which theoretical work is answering to, asks also that we move from the analysis of the problem to answering how the changes and transformation we seek will be actualised. According to Monica Bahati Kuumba, 'theory and action dialectically

interact to provide the stage for women's liberation' (Kuumba 1994:98). In spite of 'the pressure to decolonise feminist scholarship' feminist theorising within the academe in Africa with its ever-pervading tensions thus far has seldom answered 'how?' How do we decolonise feminist scholarship in a postmodern world? The problem this article identifies is a major lacuna in the lack of a decolonising strategy that could enable the reconstruction of the linguistic and ideological structures through which patriarchal and ideological oppression of women is facilitated.

The AU Agenda 2063 – Africa's strategic framework for socio-economic transformation over the next fifty years – states its sixth aspiration as wanting an 'Africa where development is people-driven, unleashing the potential of its women and youth.' This article asks: how do we unleash the potentials of women who have for centuries been subjugated, without first emancipating them from the colonial relationship mirrored in their relations to the African man?

Given the nature of the problems this article identifies, it seeks to propose a possible panacea in suggesting that we make a move towards developing an idea of an African feminist philosophy of language. Before our analysis takes us further into discussing this idea of an African feminist philosophy of language, it is important that we first understand what a philosophy of language is and what its concerns are, as well as what a feminist philosophy of language answers to. With this understanding, we can answer some of the problems this article has identified.

The Philosophy of Language and its African Counterpart

The philosophy of language is concerned with the nature of meaning, reference, learning and thought, intentionality, the relation between language and thought, amongst others. It differs from the more empirical field of Linguistics as the philosophy of language deals with more conceptual issues. Although both are distinct, they are interconnected. Linguistic philosophy takes its roots largely from the logical analysis of Gottlob Frege, Bertrand Russell, (later) Ludwig Wittgenstein, and G. E. Moore at the beginning of the twentieth century. Ordinary language philosophy, as it is also called, was largely a shake-up in methodology besides being a movement, committed to critical analysis of the expressions of language especially those of a philosophical nature; traditional philosophy and the myriad of problems it generated, such as questions about knowledge, ontology, morality, metaphysics. Such problems, for this school of thought, are at a deep level really problems about language and as such the best approach to such problems will be to analyse the meanings of relevant concepts and

propositions. These analyses, according to Peter Lamarque, are likely to show either that the problems are spurious or that they can be illuminated by revealing otherwise unnoticed logical or conceptual relations (Lamarque 1997:1). Philosophy of language, unlike ordinary language philosophy or linguistic philosophy, 'is not a kind of method but a kind of subject matter (i.e., focusing on language and meaning themselves)' (Lamarque 1997:2).

Much as the above concerns about the philosophy of language appear to be objective and thus universal, the language question and the subject matter of what might be termed an African philosophy of language differ largely from what is obtainable in the West. A major chunk of the discussion falls within the purview of what language African philosophy ought to be done in, given the fact that Africa is linguistically and culturally heterogenous. The language question did not arise simply out of a need to choose from the multitude of languages in Africa but out of the disturbing fact that our collective fight against Eurocentrism and imperialism, borne out of the reality of our colonial experience, is done using the language of the colonisers, the language of imperialism. This collective fight against Eurocentrism and imperialism has come to be seen, in some quarters, as a form of decolonisation or/and decoloniality,[2] an enduring confrontation with, and delinking from, Eurocentrism. This delinking, especially in the sense of what Quijano (2007) refers to as 'epistemological decolononization, as decoloniality', is germane to the thesis of this article. However, to understand the essence of our need to delink, it is important too that we understand what we intend to move away from.

Feminist philosophy of language can be seen as a form of *delinking* from what it has come to call 'malestream' philosophy of language. Although it remains a minor area of study in comparison with other fields within feminist philosophy, it has however achieved a lot in a short time. While feminist philosophers of language consider mainstream philosophy of language as 'malestream', arguing that its supposed objectivity is questionable, biased and upholds a male perspective to language use, questions about the nature of meaning are however a valid confluence. Understanding that masculine-oriented modes of reasoning and discourse are not the only way to conceive, represent and express truths, modes of representation and expression seen through a feminist lens have become a necessary alternative.

As part of the ongoing critical work on language and the philosophy of language, the attention of feminists like Dale Spender, Deborah Cameron, Jennifer Saul and Esa Diaz-Leon, amongst others, has been greatly drawn to the supposedly gender-neutral use of terms like the pronouns 'he' and 'man' as denoting all of humanity. Some theorists have argued that 'because these

two words cannot be used interchangeably in all social settings, women are implicitly excluded from some social settings. Others drew the more radical conclusion that terms such as 'man' and 'he' cannot be used neutrally at all' (Gardner 2006:407).

Feminists have also contended that the false gender neutrality of terms like 'he' and 'man' contributes largely to the invisibility of women. This is to say that the use of such terms brings to the mind of the recipient the picture of a male more readily than a female. Similarly, feminists have argued for what Jennifer Saul and Esa Diaz-Leon (2018) refer to as a 'symbolic insult to women'. This argument extends from the false gender neutrality of terms such as 'he' and 'man', and how in a bid to make women more visible, certain occupations, which have been seen as gendered male, have been given female versions. For example, 'doctor' and 'manager' can be replaced with feminine versions of 'lady doctor' and 'manageress'. Feminists have faulted this on the basis that such terms or occupations are premised on the notion of maleness being a norm.

This notion that men are a norm for humanity has immortalised the gendering of occupations to such extent that certain job roles and positions are automatically assumed to be held by a man until stated otherwise. A good example is the riddle of the old grey surgeon.[3] This bias has not spared the academy. In research conducted by Silvia Knobloch-Westerwick at Ohio State University, it was discovered that a scientist's gender could have a big effect on how his or her work is rated and perceived by other researchers. The study revealed that higher ratings were given to the exact same abstracts when the authors were identified with male names.[4]

In spite of the many limitations feminist philosophers of language have faced in their attempt to reform language, they have also made progress. One especially successful reform effort, as noted by Saul and Diaz-Leon (2018), has been the increasingly accepted use of the third-person plural gender pronoun 'they', used in place of the supposed neutral 'he'. Whereas this project has become quite successful, so much so that even prescriptive grammarians have come to accept 'they' as a grammatically correct third person singular pronoun, such problems as false gender neutrality, the invisibility of women, and maleness as a norm might not be peculiar to an African working within the purview of the philosophy of language. If we, for example, look into the Yorùbá language of Nigeria, we would find that there are no gendered pronouns,[5] neither can women be said to be invisible since there are no gender-neutral pronouns which bring to fore the picture of the male more readily than the female. Maleness is as well not a norm, at least not in the sense in which the feminist philosophy of

language discusses it, since most occupations have a somewhat gendered prefix already. For example, '*Iya alaro*' (the mother/woman who makes/sells dye), '*Baba eleran*' (the father/man who sells meat), '*Omo alata*' (the child/young person who sells pepper), '*Onireke*' (the person who sells sugarcane). While Anglo-American and perhaps the entire Western feminist philosophy of language can be distinctively described by its aspiration to scrutinise sexist language in the light of the preceding analysis, the focus of an African feminist philosophy of language should be somewhat different.

The fundamental assumption underlying the differences between these thought systems can be attributed not just to the differences in social contexts in which we have come to use language, but also to the bifurcation of the storage faculty of language into written and oral traditions. And so, while Western feminist philosophy of language might focus more on sexist language in its written tradition, an African feminist philosophy of language must as a necessary first step focus on *her* oral traditions.

Feminist Postproverbials and the Idea of an African Feminist Philosophy of Language

The polarisation of language as orality (as a quality of verbal communication in societies perceived as void of literate technologies) and literacy (a quality of nonverbal communication and an intrinsic hallmark of Western civilisation) as mutually exclusive is an extension of the Eurocentric ideology. The ideology divides the world into two contrasting groups. Such grouping includes the literate 'One' and the illiterate 'Other', the civilised over the uncivilised, the coloniser over the colonised, the developed over the developing/underdeveloped and the global North over the global South. The principal aim of this polarisation appears to be purely an act of subjugation rather than an apparent difference between two contrasting groups. Writing on the history of literacy in the ancient past, Jonathan Draper observes that:

> while literacy and the use of texts in one form or another is pervasive throughout the ancient world, only a tiny minority were able to read and write…. The majority had access to texts only through scribes, who could be hired for particular purposes to read and interpret texts and who consequently had considerable power in the community…. Even the imperial elite relied, for the most part, on professional scribes for their access to texts (Draper 2004:2).

While it is important to note that the literates constituted only a minority, the considerable power they wielded in the community is likewise noteworthy. The contention, however, is whether terms like 'illiterate' and 'uncivilised' would have been applicable to the majority, including the imperial elite,

who could only access texts through scribes. It seems then, to paraphrase Ramsey-Kurz (2007), that such formulations as 'without writing', 'illiterate', 'primitive', or 'savage' hindered any scientifically objective treatment of cultural otherness and caused people and peoples without script to be incorrectly represented as inferior, ignorant and deficient. Consequently, 'orality' for Ramsey-Kurz is to be seen as 'facilitating a politically correct, even egalitarian description of the differences between ... Western alphabetic and non-Western non-alphabetic societies, because such a description would give primacy neither to the written nor to the spoken word' (2007:24).

Orality, in the light of Ramsey-Kurz's analysis, grinds to a halt the historical and perhaps political justification for the rejection of African civilisation by the West, as lacking a writing tradition in most parts of the continent at the time of European invasion. Orality and literacy can therefore be viewed as 'different media that are related specifically to particular cultural matrices and that each has its own particular range of possibilities and limitations. Some things can be done only by means of one medium but not by another' (Draper 2004:3). While literacy might be a feature of Western civilisation, orality is a feature of some African civilisations. Literacy should not be superimposed on orality, neither should primacy be accorded to orality over literacy.

Orality and literacy are also both epistemic systems. For us then as Africans, and those who have been culturally 'othered', delinking from this hallmark of Western civilisation requires a form of epistemological decolonisation. Since what we have now as a written tradition emanated from colonisation and ultimately the Christianisation and Islamisation of the African people, delinking from this Eurocentric assumption, which for Quijano is decoloniality, is 'needed to clear the way for new intercultural communication, for an interchange of experiences and meanings, as the basis of another rationality which may legitimately pretend to some universality' (2007:117). This new intercultural communication and interchange of experiences and meanings, when viewed from an African feminist perspective on language, suggests then that an African feminist philosophy of language as an attempt towards decoloniality ought first to begin from an examination of the oral tradition integral to the consciousness of the African people.

The oral tradition in African ontology, 'is characteristically active and interactive, and it is captured by dynamic language expressed in proverbs, myths, riddles, poetry and folklores' (Njoku 2002:110). A starting point for an African feminist philosophy of language as earlier mentioned should be in the oral tradition of the African people and can be expressed in any of the forms above which also include legends, stories, songs and dances, liturgies and rituals, pithy sayings, adages, arts and crafts, ideas, conventions and

customs. Reforming any of these forms of oral tradition for the feminist agenda could and should count as an African feminist philosophy of language. I consider briefly some ongoing work covering two of the many forms of African orality – oral narratives and proverbs – which when mined for philosophical insights should count as work in African feminist philosophy of language.

The Literary Road to Empowerment

The literary road to empowerment is a gender sensitisation programme which aims 'to sensitize creative writers and the readers on gender prejudices and to create new stories either through retelling old narratives or through the creation of new stories following traditional oral narrative' (Muthoni 1994b cited in Arndt 2000:714). Wanjira Muthoni, a Kenyan feminist and purveyor of the gender sensitisation programme, argues that these oral narratives are distinguished by social conformity and that their basic moral tone is shaped by the patriarchal mindset of Kenyan society. This is, among other things, mirrored in the images of women found in this literature and in their underlying connotation. In this vein, oral literatures do not only mirror but reproduce existing gender relations. Retelling these narratives in a new form is a strategic approach to not only sensitise the society, but to change the image and perception of women. In an interview with Susan Arndt, Muthoni, answering to the intended impact these retold narratives would have, reveals that:

> Although we cannot change the present adults, we hope we can change the children – the way the children perceive themselves and one another. If we manage to do this, we shall have changed the future adults. People who will be adults – say, in ten years time – who will have gone through this sensitization, will have very different images of men and women. So, you know, our hope is to change a whole new generation (Arndt 2000:715).

Muthoni's work is remarkable for what we might call an African feminist philosophy of language because, as Arndt notes, 'aside from organizing this project and editing anthologies of revised stories, Muthoni herself rewrote various misogynist folktales and myths. Without removing them from the genre, she changes tiny bits of oral narratives, which gives them, amazingly, a completely different – often African-feminist – significance' (2000:714). What Muthoni is doing is challenging the dominant patriarchal paradigm while working within an oral literary tradition. She is in essence reforming and rewriting some forms of the (Kenyan) African oral tradition – oral narratives, stories, folktales and myths. By changing language in oral

narratives which show dislike, mistrust or prejudice against women, Muthoni and her colleagues attempt not only to change the image and perception of woman as a negative and inferior other to man, but also to emancipate woman from both a physical and mental slavery. Another important form of orality that requires such a feminist reformatory task are proverbs.

Proverbs, Postproverbial and Feminist Postproverbial Reformations

'*Òwe lesin òrò, òrò lesin òwe. Bí òrò bá sonù, òwe lafi ńwa*'

Yorùbá proverb

> 'Nothing defines a culture as distinctly as its language, and the element of language that best encapsulates a society's values and beliefs is its proverbs'
>
> Pema Tsewang, Shastri

Proverbs are fundamentally defined as brief, succinct but convincing sayings popularly used by a people within a cultural context. Proverbs are believed to express a supposed traditional truth, a moral message or a statement of guidance which often has a commonsensical basis or is based on experience. 'Proverbs are terse and telling, poetic and pithy and filled with wit and wisdom' (Shastri 2012:vii). Proverbs have meanings which are concealed; as such they are indirect sayings and even teachings which become submerged into the minds of their hearers with constant use over a period. These concealed messages in proverbial forms continue to resonate in the minds of their hearers and over time form an assemblage of knowledge. Oyekan Owomoyela, ascertaining the distinction between the English word 'proverb' and '*òwe*', its closest equivalent in the Yorùbá language, claims that, 'constant in the definitions of the English proverb that it is pithy, concise, succinct, brief, terse, and so on, is not always true of the Yoruba *òwe*, which is sometimes quite long-winded' (2005:6). For Owomoyela, *òwe* 'is a speech form that likens, or compares, one thing or situation to another, highlighting the essential similarities that the two share. In Yoruba usage it is always at least one complete sentence' (*ibid.*:3).

Sources of proverbs are almost always situated in the past. Proverbs as a form of the oral tradition are a storehouse of cultural history. It is in this sense of being a storehouse of cultural history that proverbs serve as a link or connection with the past. Most African communities attach immense importance to the past and some communities express this in their veneration of their ancestors, hence much of what we have as proverbial wisdom has been stored in the memories of the people and passed down through many generations. Much of the knowledge garnered from proverbs

then is connected to the past. Much as memory as a legitimate source of epistemic justification can be faulted, our connection to the past, if unchecked, too can be detrimental to the development and transformation of our indigenous epistemologies.

This becomes especially worrisome when considered in the light of Barry Hallen's critique of African oral tradition:

> What was said to be distinctive about African oral traditions was the relatively uncritical manner in which they were inherited from past, preserved in the present, and passed on to future generations. So regarded, traditions resembled 'rules' governing the 'game of life' that determined in a relatively absolute manner what Africans believed and how they behaved, and that they therefore had no intellectual incentive to articulate, explain, and certainly not to challenge (Hallen 2000:19).

Holding tradition in such an uncritical manner means then that we might find ourselves following blindly the way of those who came before us. We might find ourselves holding as true the old Roman adage which says, 'The beaten path is the safe path,' and find that 'there is a certain comfort and assurance in knowing that the road we travel upon is a familiar one and that it will not lead us astray. The image that emerges, then, is of one generation after another following a trail blazed by revered ancestors – of following and then of passing on a tradition set down in custom as well as in word' (Stone 2005:ix). Hallen further contends that, 'a tradition deserves to remain as a tradition only if it proves effective if it does what it is supposed to do' (2000:19). The question we are simply trying to ask from our analysis is: should language derogatory to woman – as used and found in proverbs as well as other forms of African oral tradition – be left unchallenged just because it is tradition and hence sacrosanct?

We should as well remember that our connection with the past through our oral tradition is not only from past to present, but also from present to future. A people's life, according to Stone, 'continues onward ever mindful of their connection to their forebears, but also of what guideposts or markers they will leave for their descendants' (2005:ix). Understanding then that someday, we will as well become ancestors, 'and the wisdom we have gleaned from our experiences will guide those who follow after us' (*ibid.*), ought to be enough motivation for us, especially as African feminists seeking liberation for the African woman, to critically consider what we put into and leave in our intellectual baskets in the name of culture.

Proverbs, as Sotunde claims, contain the 'folkloric experiences of communities including their prejudices, beliefs, superstitions and myths' (2016:2), and serve as beacons across the sociocultural terrain of human

interactions and as such 'are significant as an adjunct to philosophy' (*ibid.*:3). Barry Hallen points out that 'proverbs have long been treated by anthropological and philosophical researchers as a legitimate source of African philosophy' (2009:140). While proverbs can be held as philosophically sagacious, their sacrosanctity will more than likely capitulate in the light of philosophy as critical analysis of ideas. Unfortunately, available literature suggests that theorists working within the purview of African proverbs in relation to gender have espoused the belief that these proverbs cannot be altered and so they merely analyse the gendered nature of these proverbs, and where literature has shown some attempt at reconstruction, they were not essentially for feminist purposes.

In a journal article titled 'Gender and African proverbs', Kamwendo and Kaya agree that some African proverbs have gendered connotations so much that these proverbs 'articulate the deeply entrenched patriarchal systems of African social and cultural organization. They show the subordination of women in society' (2017:92). They however posit that, '[A]s it is not possible to eradicate the existing gendered proverbs in various societies', their study aimed at just documenting and interrogating the gendered proverbs associated with both negative and positive connotations. Similarly, Diabah and Appiah Amfo in their work 'Representation of women in Akan proverbs' focused on doing a 'linguistic analysis of selected gendered proverbs, specifically those that include the explicit mention of women' (2015:4). They however stated their objective as being 'to achieve an understanding of the traditional norms and thought that necessitated these proverbs via the medium of language. Thus, we attempt an appreciation of the socio-cultural parameters that govern our gendered talk, through an examination of these linguistically witty structures' (*ibid.*). While these ventures are praiseworthy, they however did not consider reforming these proverbs for feminist purposes.

In the 'Proverbial oppression of women in Yoruba culture', Oladele Abiodun Balogun outlines a linguistic understanding of gender that speaks to the ways by which language codifies oppression. He argues that 'there are elements of oppression in some of the Yoruba proverbs that relate to women' (2010:21), and that, the most vital but neglected facet of the discourse on gender can be found in the proverbial resources of a people. Although Balogun attempted a deconstruction and reconstruction of some of these proverbs, it however falls short of proffering a solution for dealing with the predicament that language use has imposed on gender and the woman question. This work intends to move beyond a subtle defence of masculinities, as seen in the work of Balogun, to entrenching a feminist

postproverbial as a rallying point of engaging the linguistic structure of oppression with the aim to infiltrate and subvert it.

Feminist postproverbials are simply a critique of existing proverbs derogatory to woman. As well they are an attempt to reform language found to be oppressive to woman, expressed in proverbs. Postproverbial, as coined by Aderemi Raji-Oyelade, is a newly coined proverb used in response or as opposite to, or as a way of extending, a traditional proverb. For example, the saying that 'a friend in need, is a friend indeed' can be postproverbially reconstructed as 'a friend in need, is a friend to feed.' This reconstruction changes the meaning of the proverb by altering the use of the words 'in need'; similarly, the saying that 'a problem shared is a problem halved' can be postproverbially reconstructed as 'a problem shared, goes viral', where once again the use of the word 'shared' has been altered and used in the modern sense as it applies to internet users. These reconstructions then change not just the meaning of the proverb, but its form and value.

In Raji-Oyelade's informative work, 'Postproverbials in Yoruba culture: a playful blasphemy', postproverbials did by extension 'establish the presence of "new" proverbs with new forms, new meanings, and, perhaps, new values' (1999:75). Feminist postproverbials are however not intended to be playful or profane in any sense. They are, instead, incisive linguistic reinventions. These new proverbs with new meanings and new values when appropriated for feminist purposes are expected to reconstruct the traditional space of woman, placing woman within a new rhetorical tradition as equal to man. In reforming some of these traditional proverbs, the inherent biases against woman, it is believed, will be corrected. The initial location for this experiment is set in the language of the Yorùbá people of southwest Nigeria. We will look briefly at three examples of such proverbs and attempt to deconstruct and reconstruct them as a way of buttressing the ongoing discourse.

> '*Akesán lòpin Oyó; ilé oko nibìsinmi obìnrin.* Akesán is the frontier of Oyo; a spouse's home is a woman's place of rest. (Just as Akesan is Oyo's city limit, so a spouse's home is a woman's final destination.)'[6] (Owomoyela 2005:440)

This proverb is tied around woman and her home. Akesan in this proverb represents a supposedly small district at the extreme end of what one might call the old Oyo town, and it is used metaphorically to indicate a boundary. This boundary for woman is established as her 'husband's house'. The proverb lays emphasis on marriage as perhaps the utmost feat of a woman. Such emphasis can be a source of both mental and physical enslavement for some African women who through the use of such sayings have come to believe their zenith is truly set in marriage. This could have encouraged the view that educating a girl child is a waste of effort since her highest

achievement will be her 'husband's house' which does not require formal education. While it might be difficult to ascertain the number of women who have grown up unconsciously bearing this as a general statement and hence a truth, this proverb could have aided the unconscious limitations which some women have set upon the extent to which they can rise and excel. One might also consider this proverb as the reason why some women have chosen to abandon careers and aspirations in a bid to keep their homes. Furthermore, this proverb (amongst others too) can also be attributed to why some men feel they are at liberty to do as they please in marriage, since the limitation is placed on woman and not on the man. A feminist postproverbial reconstruction of this proverb would probably read thus:

> *B'Akesán ti le j'*òpin *Oyó; koni ki ile oko je opinion obinrin*: Even if Akesán is Òyó's frontier, it should not suggest the husband's house as the zenith of a woman's achievement.[7]
>
> '*Obìnrin ò séé finú hàn*. A woman is not suitable to expose one's secrets to. (Women cannot be relied on.)' (Owomoyela 2005:377)

This second proverb holds the assumption that women cannot be shown deep things, to this extent, it portrays woman as unreliable and inconsiderate. Adegbindin (2016) however contends that, '[s]uch identity is obviously an undue generalization about females and its truth questionable' (2016:240). What led to such hasty generalisations about women would be a viable research area, however our concern at present is more on the implication of this saying and that it tends to exclude women from holding certain positions of trust in the society. A feminist postproverbial reconstruction of this saying would have it as:

> Ènìyàn ò se é *finú hàn:* Humans cannot be trusted with secrets.

This reconstruction – juxtaposing females/woman for humans or people – inhibits the apparent bias and sexist nature of the saying, providing us instead with a balanced view of the nature of humans. Treachery, deceit, fraud or verbosity is not rooted in biological sex or gender.

Another Yorùbá proverb says:

> '*Obìnrin tí yó falágbára, okàn kan ní m mmú*. A woman who would marry a formidable man must have an unwavering mind. (Once one has made a decision on an important matter, one should remain resolute.)' (Owomoyela 2016:223)

This proverb attributes physical strength and bravery to man. Physical attributes like strength have long been a fundamental basis for classifying men (males) as superior to women (females) because to a considerable extent

power equals domination and domination itself entails a 'lord/subject' or 'One/Other' relationship. Hence, if one must exercise power, it must be as an ability to influence and dominate others. Male dominance has long been 'seen as rooted in a universal, male "nature" and sexuality; and manifested in all male/female power relations' (Vickers 2012:130). To this end, 'power equaled male dominance' (*ibid.*). The proverb in question, it seems then, reinforces the essentialism/biological determinism argument. As can be deduced from the proverb, the woman is not seen as aspiring to become formidable, she is conveniently placed as the 'other', the wife to the formidable one. Feminists who have argued against biological determinism, for example Simone de Beauvoir, have argued that these presumed intrinsic differences are social rather than biological causes. This accounts for de Beauvoir's famous claim that 'one is not born, but rather becomes a woman'. Behavioural traits like strength and bravery which are often associated to males as men, as well as docility and emotions commonly attributed to females as women, then, are not caused by their biology or genetic make-up. They are instead learnt through language in culture and reinforced through other cultural norms. A feminist postproverbial reconstruction will likely be:

> *Obìnrin tí yó dalágbára, okàn kan ní mmú*. A woman who would become formidable must have an unwavering mind.

It can also be rendered as:

> Ènìyàn *tí yó dalágbára, okàn kan ní mmú*. A person who would become formidable must have an unwavering mind.

Neither of these reconstructions change the meaning of the proverb in any way, they only alter the gendered implication and the dominant patriarchal ideology that the proverb might reinforce.

Following the intimation of the nature and tasks of philosophy of language, feminist philosophy of language and why mainstream feminist philosophy of language might not answer to the peculiar needs of the feminist discourse vis-à-vis the language question in African feminist philosophy, we have proposed that African feminist scholarship move towards its own philosophy of language. To this end we suggest that our oral traditions as Africans should become the focus of our critique and every form of oral tradition in which language has been used in ways that disparage, demean and discredit woman, thereby reinforcing the dominant patriarchal ideology, should be reconstructed. Ultimately, the aim is to alter the linguistic state of affairs. The concluding section will consider the role of the university in ensuring that feminist scholarship in Africa achieves its goal of social transformation.

Feminist Scholarship, Universities and Social Transformation in Africa

The development of feminist scholarship within Africa has benefited hugely from organisations such as CODESRIA, the Association of African Women for Research and Development (AAWORD), the Council for the Economic Empowerment of Women in Africa (CEEWA), to mention a few. In the view of Desiree Lewis (2004), this tradition has allowed feminist intellectuals to 'institutionalise their presence, to articulate agendas for African feminism by facilitating research and activism by African women scholars [through organising] workshops on methodology, women and rural development, reproduction, the mass media and development assistance' (Mama 1996 in Lewis 2004:36). These organisations, amidst others, have propelled feminist scholarship within the continent forward.

Feminist scholarship in Africa, in spite of its numerous strains, has in turn made distinctive progress in its bid to interrogate the dominant Western misrepresentations resulting in various false identities of the African woman and of the continent at large. Its consideration to rethink concepts and paradigms found in mainstream feminist scholarship has led to questioning the universal idea that gender is a basic organising principle across all societies. Resulting from these was the need to decolonise feminist scholarship in Africa. As Filomina Chioma Steady asserts:

> [t]he Association of African Women for Research and Development (AAWORD) was among the earliest women's organizations … to adopt a critical approach to research, challenging Eurocentric paradigms from a feminist and postcolonial perspective. As early as the mid 1970s, it called for a de-colonization of research and established a critical gender research agenda (Steady 2004:46).

Decolonising feminist scholarship ought then to necessitate not just a delinking from Western modes of knowledge production but also a call for us to return to *our* neglected sites of knowledge production. It calls that we move beyond the academe which is itself a colonial space and follow Claude Ake's suggestion to build on the indigenous. Building on the indigenous for Ake (1991) is necessary in order to significantly advance the development of Africa and this has to entail taking 'African societies seriously as they are, not as they ought to be or even as they might be' (1991:13). African societies cannot be viewed from any other lens but their own. Ake draws a distinction between the indigenous and the traditional contending that: 'there is no fossilized existence of the African past available for us to fall back on, only new totalities however hybrid which change with each passing day' (*ibid.*). In stating that there is no fossilised existence of the African past for

us to fall back on, it appears that Ake argues here of our lack of a written documented past of Africa, but what about that which has been fossilised in our oral traditions, in the language of proverbs, for example, which we have argued has been regarded as too important to be interfered with?

Obioma Nnaemeka, arguing along the lines of building on the indigenous, opines that 'the work of women in Africa is located at the boundary where the academy meets what lies beyond it, a third space where the immediacy of lived experience gives form to theory' (2004:377). This third space it seems is located outside the academy, in the realm of knowledge produced outside the academy. Abosede Ipadeola holds that, 'decolonization must begin from the academy' (2017:402). Combining both views, we can argue that there ought to be a continuum between the academy and society such that indigenous knowledge gathered from the society is rigorously reflected upon, critically analysed and filtered back into the society. It is this dislocation between the academe where *episteme* is generated and the society, the domain of *doxa*, that is responsible for the disconnection between theory and praxis and why feminist scholarship is yet to fully achieve its aim of transforming the society.

The greatest limitation of feminist scholarship within the continent then is its inability to gather *doxa* from the society, filter it through the academe as *episteme* and then return *episteme* generated in the institutions into *doxa* back into the society. Mignolo (2012:40), identifying the nexus between *episteme* and *doxa*, points out that decolonising Western epistemology is a scholarly proposition that affects both the *episteme* and the *doxa.* We will examine briefly these two concepts as their understanding is crucial to the conclusion we are about to draw.

Episteme, the less controversial of the two concepts, is derived from the Greek epistēmē which translates as knowledge. *Doxa*, on the other hand, is often contrasted with *episteme* and seems to be a more fluid concept. According to Takis Poulakos, Plato 'placed doxa between knowledge and ignorance' (2004:51). Furthermore, Plato assumed that 'doxa could be improved through education' (*ibid.*:53–4). In Ruth Amossy's view, 'doxa appears under various guises, such as public opinion, verisimilitude, commonsense knowledge … all that is considered true, or at least probable, by a majority of people endowed with reason, or by a specific social group, can be called doxic' (Amossy 2002:369). *Doxa*'s force, Amossy continues elsewhere, has nothing to do with Truth. 'Its impact derives from its being accepted' (*ibid.*:317). However, from the nineteenth century on:

> doxa has reappeared under various, mainly pejorative, labels. It has been defined as a lack of thought and of style, as the vulgarity of common opinion

> and the banality of worn-out language. It does not rest on materialist philosophy. It is a rather vague notion referring to what is thought, imagined, said in a given state of society. In this perspective, doxa is equated today with a set of other notions more or less closely related to its original meaning. The most famous of these notions is myth (Amossy 2002:375).

As we dig deeper in our analysis, *doxa* as popular opinion begins to bear resemblance to oral traditions one of which is myth, and so to these notions of *doxa* we add proverbs as well as postproverbials especially in the context of the banality of worn-out language. Postproverbials serve here as a classic example of building on the indigenous. This is because prior to Raji-Oyelade's coinage of the term 'postproverbials', these playful reconstructions existed within Yorùbá society and were common knowledge. Raji-Oyelade it seemed had made a move to build on the indigenous by analysing *doxa* – these playful reconstructions – within the academy and generating knowledge as *episteme*, upon which this work is building from a feminist perspective, hence its name, feminist postproverbials. By our analysis of proverbs as *doxa*, within the academy, we have not only unveiled how language use can reinforce dominant patriarchal paradigms which mirror a colonial relationship, we have also been able to show that gender has both colonial and indigenous roots, and unless we look inwards, feminist scholarship within Africa will continually fight the supposed outside enemy at the expense of the enemy within. A Yorùbá proverb says '*Bí kú ilé ò pani, tòdé ò lè pani*'. If one does not die by the hands of an internal enemy, it is difficult for an external enemy to kill one.

Conclusion

Much as it has become imperative to move away from the gaze of a Westernised feminist ideal, decolonising feminist scholarship in Africa ought to commence with the understanding that decolonising one's thinking has to start by decolonising the very language of thought. Language as a superstructural element has so far given a basis or an ideological justification for the exploitation, oppression and domination of woman. Rather than deal a crumbling blow to this superstructural element, feminist postproverbials set out to modify language derogatory to woman gradually and over time by deconstructing *doxa* as can be found in proverbs and other forms of oral tradition and reconstructing it as *episteme*. This will in turn be disseminated back into society through blogs, short stories, movies, novels, and so on, employing both the mass media and social media as means of disseminating reconstructed *doxa* back to society. Feminist postproverbials aspire to open a channel for social transformation by being a significant theoretical

commencement point for an African feminist philosophy of language. Developing the idea of an African feminist philosophy of language will not only undermine the linguistic oppression of women, but will also by design construct the much needed enabling language of freedom for women.

This article therefore challenges African feminist philosophers to pay more critical attention to the structures of language, especially proverbs, and how they have evolved over time in line with patriarchalism. Feminist postproverbials, however, allow us to challenge these oppressive values and achieve in turn critical reevaluations that affect women and gender discourse positively. For feminist scholarship in Africa to truly transform society, it should begin by transforming the academe. Also, for the AU Agenda 2063 to fulfil its sixth aspiration of an Africa whose advancement will depend on the potential offered by the African people, specifically its women and youth, it is important that policies be put in place in the academe to this effect. An implication for policy that this work identifies is the need to include African feminism and Gender Studies as a module in the various General Studies programmes being taught across all African universities.

Notes

1. I borrow here the European thought of Karl Popper in distinguishing between the three worlds.
2. Although Mignolo makes a distinction between decolonisation and decoloniality, we use both concepts here in the earlier sense of its use by Quijano. See for instance Quijano (2007:117). Mignolo clarifies this conceptual muddle in an interview with Alvina Hoffmann, associate features editor at E-IR. See: https://www.e-ir.info/2017/01/21/interview-walter-mignolopart-2-key-concepts/.
3. See www.brainteaserbay.com. This teaser is a good example of maleness being a norm. Although it does not use gender pronouns, readers often assume that the old grey surgeon is a male person
4. See Knobloch-Westerwick, Glynn and Huge (2013). Also: Ohio State University, 'Gender bias found in how scholars review scientific studies', ScienceDaily, 3 April 2013, www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2013/04/130403122019.htm.
5. See Oyewumi (2005:107).
6. I presented some parts of the analysis of proverbs 1 and 2 at the Toyin Falola @ 65 conference at the University of Ibadan, Nigeria in January 2018. Similar arguments might be found in the conference publication.
7. It is important to mention that this is an ongoing project and some commentators have suggested that a feminist postproverbial mechanics be put in place such that other interested scholars can reconstruct oppressive proverbs following this mechanic. While we ponder on the mechanics of reconstruction, it is important to say that language reformers who choose this method should ensure that the reconstructions promote a feminist agenda.

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Genre, handicap et santé sexuelle et reproductive au Cameroun : implication des acteurs sociaux et rapports aux politiques publiques

Estelle Kouokam Magne*, Irène Flore Chiewouo Kuetche** and Félicité Djoukouo***

Résumé

À partir d'entretiens menés auprès des responsables des organisations de la société civile œuvrant pour la protection des personnes en situation de handicap moteur et visuel, cet article questionne l'implication des acteurs sociopolitiques dans la promotion de la santé sexuelle et reproductive des personnes en situation de handicap, ainsi que la participation des organisations de la société civile (OSC) à l'action publique en matière de santé sexuelle et reproductive (SSR). Cette étude admet que les personnes en situation de handicap sont des personnes sexuellement actives, qui ont une vie conjugale, et des besoins réellement spécifiques en matière de santé sexuelle et reproductive. Ces besoins sont superficiellement pris en compte aussi bien par les acteurs associatifs que par les politiques publiques de santé. Une faible implication qui pérennise le sentiment de stigmatisation et d'exclusion vis-à-vis des personnes en situation de handicap (PSH) des différentes parties prenantes du processus de mise en oeuvre des politiques publiques en matière de santé au Cameroun.

Abstract

Based on interviews with leaders of civil society organisations working for the protection of people with physical and visual disabilities, this article examines the involvement of socio-political actors in promoting the sexual and reproductive health of people with disabilities, as well as

* Université Catholique d'Afrique Centrale. Email: esthelka@yahoo.com
** Université de Yaoundé I. Email: kuetcheireneflore@yahoo.fr
*** Université de Yaoundé I. Email: felicite.djoukouo@gmail.com

the participation of civil society organisations (CSOs) in public action on sexual and reproductive health (SRH). This study admits that people with disabilities are sexually active, have a marital life, and have very specific sexual and reproductive health needs. These needs are superficially taken into account both by the associations and public health policies. A low level of involvement which perpetuates the feeling of stigmatisation and exclusion of people with disabilities (PWDs) among the various stakeholders in the process of implementing public health policies in Cameroon.

Introduction

Le début de la décennie 90 marque un tournant important pour la démocratie au Cameroun. Les reconnaissances publiques des droits et des libertés individuelles se manifestent également par l'adoption, le 19 décembre 1990, de la loi portant liberté d'association. Ce nouvel élan politique a vu se multiplier des organisations œuvrant dans divers domaines de la vie sociale, en l'occurrence la protection de l'enfance, l'autonomisation de la femme et particulièrement la promotion et la protection de la personne en situation de handicap. Ce domaine précis a connu, pour des raisons diverses, un foisonnement des structures associatives (Abega 1999, 2007). Cet engagement du système onusien est concrétisé à travers la tenue de multiples conférences qui vont aboutir, au fil des années, à des conventions sous lesquelles le Cameroun va asseoir nombre de politiques et plans sociaux.

Le regroupement des personnes en situation de handicap (PSH) en réseaux et en organisations constitue de ce fait une volonté sociopolitique de créer un espace pour parvenir à un changement des représentations et surtout à une meilleure considération de la personne en situation de handicap. Cette forte émulation des acteurs sociaux autour de la question du handicap se développe dans un système politique en quête de légitimité et de reconstruction. La « marginalisation sociale » et la forte stigmatisation des PSH entraînent le souci prioritaire explicite d'inclusion sociale des politiques publiques liées au handicap. Dès lors, cet article qui met en corrélation le handicap, la santé sexuelle et reproductive et les acteurs sociopolitiques sous une perspective genre a pour objectif, non seulement de remettre en cause la question des représentations sociales liées à une (non-)absence de sexualité chez les personnes handicapées physiques, mais aussi celle de la (dé)construction sociale et politique des exclusions et de la vulnérabilité de la PSH. La question centrale de cette étude est celle de savoir dans quelle mesure les organisations de la société civile camerounaises sont impliquées dans le processus de production des politiques publiques de santé reproductive au Cameroun.

Au moment où les OSC foisonnent, un constat paradoxal montre que les PSH, en tant que catégorie sociale spécifique, par leur minorité sociopsychologique, sont généralement oubliées lors de l'élaboration des politiques publiques au Cameroun. Tandis que le droit à la santé en général et particulièrement à la santé sexuelle et reprductive (SSR) constitue un droit fondamental de toute personne, très peu d'organisations associatives s'intéressent à cette dimension de la santé chez les personnes en situation de handicap. Lorsqu'elles y accordent un intérêt, aucune attention n'est accordée aux spécificités liées au genre et au type de handicap. Cette analyse permet de saisir les opportunités et les contraintes qui influencent les interactions dans le processus décisionnel en matière de santé sexuelle et reproductive au Cameroun (Mimche 2020).

À partir d'une revue documentaire diversifiée et d'entretiens réalisés auprès des responsables d'organisations de la société civile œuvrant pour les personnes en situation de handicap, cette étude s'organise autour de deux thématiques principales. Les cadres théorique et méthodologique qui fondent cette étude, et le rapport des OSC camerounaises au handicap, au genre et à la SSR d'une part. Et d'analyser leur implication dans le processus d'élaboration, de mise en œuvre et d'évaluation des politiques publiques en matière de santé au Cameroun d'autre part.

Revue théorique et méthodologique d'analyse

Pour mieux cerner la pertinence du développement des analyses faites des données primaires collectées, la construction préalable de l'ancrage scientifique de cette étude s'est faite à partir d'un positionnement théorique et méthodologique. La section qui suit porte sur quelques orientations de la revue de la littérature, les techniques d'expérimentation et celles d'analyse.

Éléments de littérature scientifique sur le genre, le handicap et les politiques publiques

Les recherches sur la condition sociale de la personne handicapée sont rares au Cameroun et en Afrique subsaharienne en général ; et celles qui existent s'appesantissent davantage sur la dimension individuelle du handicap, orientée vers la psychologie et l'éducation. Très peu mettent en exergue l'intérêt structurel et politique ou encore la sexualité des PSH. Bremer, Cockburn et Ruth (2010), ayant analysé la santé reproductive des femmes vivant avec un handicap physique dans la région du Nord-Ouest du Cameroun, reviennent principalement sur la question éducative dans leurs résultats. Ils montrent que la plupart des femmes handicapées ne reçoivent

pas une éducation de base à la santé reproductive et sont confrontées à des grossesses non planifiées. Des faits qui remettent en cause la situation sanitaire de la personne handicapée au sein de la société camerounaise et spécifiquement celle de la femme. Cependant, la santé reproductive et particulièrement la sexualité des personnes en situation de handicap ont été mises en exergue de façon générale. De nombreux auteurs (Heraud 2004 ; Giami *et al.* 1993 ; Ravaud *et al.* 2002) soutiennent la thèse selon laquelle les femmes handicapées feraient face à une double discrimination et ne seraient très souvent pas prises en compte dans les politiques liées à la santé de la reproduction, car elles sont considérées comme asexuelles et ne sont pas concernées par ces politiques sanitaires. Ils montrent que l'analyse de la sexualité en termes de construction sociale exige de prendre en compte l'hétérogénéité des dimensions d'organisation sociale, politique et économique en présence. Mac-Seing et Zarowsky ont entrepris d'examiner comment les intersections entre le genre et le handicap en matière de santé reproductive en Afrique subsaharienne sont discutées. Elles montrent que « les rôles genrés des personnes handicapées sont programmés par la normativité socioculturelle, exacerbés par l'hégémonie du capacitisme et modulés par le type de problème de santé reproductive concerné ». De même, leurs études témoignent surtout que « les expériences du handicap, en interaction avec un enjeu de santé reproductive, sont exacerbées par le type de handicap, modulées par le type de barrières, et perçues de différentes manières selon les acteurs impliqués. » (Mac-Seing & Zarowsky 2017:909)

L'analyse sociologique du handicap, oscillant entre le biologique et le social, met en exergue à la fois les constructions sociales et les structures au sein desquelles ces interactions se construisent. Le caractère universel (Stiker 1997) et multidimensionnel (Olivier 1996) de la déficience fait de ce dernier une contrainte inhérente à l'expérience humaine. Dotées d'une visibilité évidente, les personnes vivant avec un handicap physique sont socialement stigmatisées (Goffman 1963) et même considérées comme déviantes (Becker 1963). Ce clivage social entre une catégorie de personne jugée « normale » et une autre jugée « anormale » (Boucher 2003) entraîne au sein de cette classe sociale, un sentiment d'exclusion (Barnes & Olivier 1993). Toutefois, pour Boucher (2003:151), la difficulté des pouvoirs publics à transformer ces représentations sociales constitue un facteur d'amplification de ces stigmates, car, souligne-t-il, « ce n'est pas le fait que la personne ait une déficience quelconque qui fait d'elle une personne handicapée, mais plutôt l'échec de la société capitaliste à répondre à ses besoins ».

Les productions scientifiques sont orientées vers une logique fonctionnelle de négation de l'inclusion de la SSR des handicapés dans l'élaboration des politiques publiques. Une situation qui nourrit une représentation de la

personne handicapée comme dépendante et surtout vulnérable, impactant ainsi son intégration globale au sein de la communauté. On arrive dès lors à conclure avec Foucault (1997) que ce n'est pas tant la déficience ou l'incapacité qui « pose problème à la politique » que la personne frappée par elle. La personne, souligne cet auteur, « n'existe pas sans un rapport à des structures, des exigences, des lois, des réglementations politiques qui ont pour elle une importance capitale » (Foucault 1994:594).

Nkwenkeu (2014), dans son étude sur l'évaluation des politiques publiques de santé au Cameroun, constatait déjà une aggravation des inégalités de santé du fait des choix politiques portés sur l'efficacité des services sans prise en compte des facteurs qui soutiennent la demande, et des formes d'organisation de la santé qui découlent d'une traduction imparfaite des grands principes internationaux.

Positionnement théorique : construction des politiques publiques de santé et de handicap à partir de l'action stratégique des mouvements sociaux

Cette recherche s'appuie sur les courants théoriques issus de la sociologie des mouvements sociaux telle que développée Brasseur et Nayak (2018), ainsi que l'analyse stratégique de Crozier et Friedberg (1977). En effet l'approche des mouvements sociaux permet ici d'une part de voir comment les organisations de la société civile camerounaise se sont emparées des questions du handicap, de distinguer sa place dans le militantisme féministe (Brasseur & Nayak 2018:4) et surtout la place de la sexualité de la personne handicapée. D'autre part, elle amène à comprendre le rôle des mouvements associatifs en tant que partie prenante (Freeman 2010 ; 1984) au processus décisionnel des politiques de santé sexuelle et reproductive à l'intention des personnes en situation de handicap au Cameroun. D'emblée, depuis son avènement aux États-Unis à la fin de la Seconde Guerre mondiale, les analyses sur les politiques publiques se sont multipliées et transformées (Nguelieutou 2008), tout en se diversifiant en fonction des contextes sociogéographiques et des champs d'approche. Des pionniers tels que Lasswell (1951) ou Dye (1972), aux contemporains à l'instar de Muller (2005), Zittoun (2015), en passant par des nationaux (Sindjoun 2002), Enguéléguélé (2005) ou encore Nkwenkeu (2014), un consensus sur la définition du concept de politique publique, comme dans le cas du handicap, demeure problématique au regard des angles d'analyse (Zittoun 2017). Ces auteurs partagent relativement l'avis selon lequel la politique publique décrit l'action de l'État ou d'une autorité publique. Elle est constituée de textes et de personnes et vise un objectif précis. Mais surtout, elle prend place au bout d'un long processus impliquant divers acteurs.

Toutefois, de sa mise à l'ordre du jour jusqu'à la mise en œuvre, la coopération entre les différents acteurs dans un champ de lutte pour des intérêts singuliers (Crozier & Friedberg 1977) demeure compliquée. L'implication de chaque partie prenante (Pesqueux 2017) au processus reste influencée par le degré de pouvoir – au sens de Dahl (1971) – dont dispose chaque acteur. L'interconnexion entre les acteurs associatifs et les pouvoirs politiques dans le processus de production des politiques en matière de SSR pour la classe sociale des PSH constitue un enjeu capital (Mercier 1999). Cela aussi bien pour les associations qui se battent pour une cause définie, que pour les pouvoirs publics, pour qui les questions de santé et de handicap constituent des enjeux avant tout politiques. Des intérêts convergents ou divergents influencent considérablement la « proximité » ou la « distance » (Pesqueux 2017:4) entre les parties impliquées à l'élaboration des politiques publiques. Toutefois, ces intérêts étant « irréconciliables par nature » (Rocher 1966:112) du fait des ambitions des uns et des autres, il se développe dans le champ de l'élaboration de politiques sociales, des stratégies de la part de chaque partie, lesquelles influencent les considérations du politique au handicap ainsi qu'à sa vie sexuelle et reproductive. Chaque acteur (Crozier & Friedberg 1977) y joue un rôle sur la base de ses représentations et de ses intérêts. Dès lors, la capacité des organisations de la société civile camerounaise à négocier leur implication dans le processus de construction des politiques publiques dépend incontestablement des objectifs, des ressources, des opportunités et des compétences dont font preuve les leaders associatifs pour maintenir ou transformer la situation.

Ainsi, l'analyse sociologique des mouvements sociaux au travers des OSC a permis de comprendre leur niveau de mobilisation, le militantisme politisant qui les caractérise en rapport avec la (re)construction identitaire et les autres formes de construction des capitaux symboliques. L'analyse stratégique a permis de saisir les marges d'incertitude et les stratégies qui président aux logiques de réfraction par rapport aux objectifs d'accompagnement ou de prise en charge des PSH.

Le terrain et ses vérités : cible, techniques d'investigation et d'analyse

Les rapports de genre, tout comme les questions de handicap, constituent des constructions sociales complexes et la description des faits qui en découlent implique la prise en compte d'un certain nombre de procédés méthodologiques. Cette étude se focalise sur le handicap physique, c'est-à-dire le handicap moteur et le handicap visuel. L'étude a été réalisée dans la ville de Yaoundé. Le choix de la ville de Yaoundé (capitale politique du Cameroun, à démographie cosmopolite) comme zone de l'étude a permis

de rencontrer diverses organisations œuvrant pour les populations des différentes régions du Cameroun. Ce choix a aussi facilité la prise en compte et la représentativité géographique et socioreligieuse dans la sélection des organisations-témoins. Les données issues de la revue documentaire, de l'observation directe et des entretiens semi-directifs ont permis d'étudier le phénomène thématisé. Les organisations de la société civile ont été choisies à partir de deux bases de données obtenues auprès des responsables du Centre national de réhabilitation des personnes handicapées de Yaoundé et du Centre d'accueil Promhandicam. Les répondants ont été choisis à partir d'un échantillonnage dit à choix raisonné (Thiétart *et al*. 1999) et les entretiens se sont déroulés en fonction de leur disponibilité et de leur consentement à participer à l'étude. Au final, dix-neuf (19) responsables d'organisation ont effectivement pris part à l'étude, dont huit (8) femmes et onze (11) hommes. Parmi ces organisations, seize (16) sont celles des PSH, tandis que trois (3) sont des associations œuvrant pour la personne handicapée. Dans cet échantillon, neuf (9) organisations traitent essentiellement du handicap visuel, tandis que sept (7) regroupent les personnes en situation de handicap moteur. Nous avons eu recours à la méthode d'échantillonnage dite « boule de neige » pour mobiliser les répondants. Après la phase de collecte des données, les entretiens enregistrés sur des dictaphones ont été transcrits dans un fichier Excel et interprétés à partir d'une analyse thématique et manuelle.

D'un point de vue collectif et politique, une multiplication exponentielle des structures associatives de promotion et de protection de la personne handicapée s'observe au Cameroun et précisément à Yaoundé. Les deux sections qui suivent rendent compte objectivement du rapport entre les organisations et la SSR des personnes en situation de handicap, en liaison avec les politiques publiques.

Le rapport au genre, au handicap et à la santé sexuelle et reproductive au sein de quelques organisations de la société civile au Cameroun

Au Cameroun comme ailleurs, les développements autour des PSH, les itinéraires de l'imaginaire (Vanbremeersch 1999), quoique diversement illustrés, ont une unicité sémantique : les PSH ne seraient pas sexuellement actives, et par conséquent ne sont pas concernées par les problèmes de SSR. À cet effet, la pratique sexuelle et la santé reproductive des hommes et des femmes en situation de handicap sont devenues un objet de curiosité. Cette perception de la PSH et de sa sexualité influence dès lors le rapport des acteurs sociaux et principalement celui des politiques à la SSR de cette catégorie sociale. Une « sexualité des handicapés » (Giami & Colomby 2008:5) très spécifique,

construite à partir d'une représentation générale bien ancrée dans un modèle de blessure psychique, somatique et fonctionnelle (Ciprut 2007) aussi bien par les individus que par les organisations sociopolitiques. Cette section est structurée autour des trois objectifs suivants : identifier et caractériser les OSC dont la raison d'action est orientée vers le champ thématique du handicap ; expliquer les pratiques ou la perception de l'inclusion du handicap dans l'approche genre des associations spécialisées et analyser la capacité réelle de ces associations à défendre des projets relatifs à la SSR des PSH.

Le handicap au sein des OSCs camerounaises : profils des acteurs et logiques planificatrices

Actuellement, au Cameroun, la prolifération des structures associatives de promotion et de protection de la PSH est de mise. Les profils identitaires et hiérarchiques, les modes de fonctionnement, principalement centrés sur la « capture des fenêtres d'opportunités » (Ngueulieu 2016), tout comme les missions de ces organisations, concourent à comprendre leur rapport non seulement à la santé sexuelle et reproductive, mais surtout à la politique publique. La constitution des personnes en situation de handicap en association faisant de la question même du handicap un enjeu politique, cet aspect politique aux allures multiples se manifeste à travers les mobilisations associatives (Baudot, Borelle & Revillard 2013:1), la construction de l'ensemble des dispositifs de l'action associative, ou encore dans les relations entre ces organisations, les populations handicapées, et leurs besoins spécifiques en matière de santé sexuelle et reproductive.

De prime abord, le bien-être de la PSH et son autonomisation sociale constituent les principales raisons d'être des organisations œuvrant pour la PSH au Cameroun. À l'exception de quelques-unes, dont la mission est définie autour d'une thématique précise, telle que l'accès aux TIC, l'agriculture ou les pratiques médicales, la promotion de l'insertion sociale de la PSH constitue une priorité pour les OSC camerounaises concernées. C'est ce qui se dégage du propos de l'une des leaders :

> Elle a été créée sur la base d'un constat : le premier constat est que les personnes handicapées n'arrivaient pas à exprimer leur besoin. Des décisions étaient prises à leur place, des décisions qui parfois n'étaient pas adaptées à leurs besoins. (Adé, leader d'association, PSH moteur et artisane, Yaoundé, novembre 2019)

À l'analyse, il est constaté que les priorités de regroupement des personnes en situation de handicap physique en OSC concernent la lutte contre la mendicité et l'oisiveté, l'intégration politique, économique, sociale et

culturelle de la personne handicapée, la formation et l'encadrement, l'insertion « professionnelle », la promotion de la solidarité, l'entraide, l'autonomie.

Plus d'une dizaine d'organisations ont des objectifs identiques ou conciliables. Bien que se clamant tout inclusives, c'est-à-dire ouvertes aux personnes ne vivant aucune situation de handicap, elles sont majoritairement dirigées par des PSH elles-mêmes. La liberté d'association laisse ainsi la latitude à chaque personne de créer sa petite organisation, de recruter autant qu'il peut des membres, de fixer ses objectifs à partir de ses intérêts propres et d'agir en fonction de ses aspirations. Les entretiens menés auprès des membres et des partenaires nous ont permis de confirmer ces observations relatives à la volonté inclusive. Comme l'affirme une source :

> L'association est ouverte à tout le monde. Même s'il y a toujours ce questionnement de savoir s'ils sont concernés. (Rapha, leader d'association des PSH et écrivain, Yaoundé, novembre 2019 ; v. aussi Kiba, directeur administratif et financier d'une ONG de PSH, Yaoundé, octobre 2019)

Cette fixation permet de comprendre les logiques qui orientent et déterminent les activités des OSC à travers leur capacité d'autolégitimation préalable, à travers la circonscription du domaine de compétence, et en développant ses propres logiques, pouvant d'ailleurs n'être qu'occasionnellement convergentes avec celles des pouvoirs publics (Commaille 2009:145), mais avec des objectifs en faveur d'une prise en compte des spécificités liées au handicap.

La question de genre dans le mouvement associatif des PSH au Cameroun

De nombreuses recherches se sont attelées à présenter des disparités entre hommes et femmes en situation de handicap en général et particulièrement en matière de SSR. A. Sow (2006) a fait remarquer que dans un contexte de précarité avancée et de désir d'accéder à une vie sexuelle et maritale du fait d'une certaine pression sociale symbolique, les femmes ayant des incapacités sont davantage exposées aux chantages sexuels et à la prostitution clandestine. De même, à l'issue d'une étude réalisée auprès des femmes en situation de handicap moteur et visuel, il ressort que les femmes en situation de handicap sont majoritairement convoitées pour un but sexuel et « pour des raisons d'ordre surnaturel » (Yemtim, Soubeiga & Rossier 2005:67). Par ailleurs, comme le font remarquer Dowse *et al.* (2016) dans le cadre d'une étude en Australie, aux caractéristiques transposables au Cameroun, « les filles et les jeunes femmes handicapées courent un plus grand risque face à la violence que leurs pairs masculins handicapés ou que les filles et jeunes femmes n'étant pas en situation de handicap ».

Dans le contexte associatif camerounais, parler de genre revient à parler des femmes, bien que l'approche soit de plus en plus élargie à la prise en compte des minorités sociologiques, par l'intégration des catégories sociales défavorisées comme les PSH et les enfants de la rue, les autochtones minorisées comme les Pygmées, les hommes violentés (Ndjah Etolo & Batibonak 2019). Et en ce qui concerne les PSH, elles sont généralement considérées comme une entité uniforme. Au regard de la cible qui intéresse les organisations qui œuvrent pour cette catégorie, d'après les membres, aucune distinction n'est généralement faite dans l'élaboration des besoins des hommes ou des femmes en situation de handicap. La question du handicap est abordée dans ces organisations de façon globale ; ni en fonction du genre ni même en fonction du type de handicap. Pourtant, dans leurs discussions quotidiennes en dehors du cadre associatif, certains membres soulignent que les situations et les besoins des PSH ne sont pas identiques. Ce qui rejoint, dans une considération de rapport social de sexe, cette affirmation de Heraud (2004) : « on ne vit pas de la même manière son handicap, selon qu'on est une femme ou un homme ».

Le rapport de l'enquête démographique et de santé et à indicateurs multiples (EDS-MICS 2011) au Cameroun montre que plus de 5 pour cent de la population du Cameroun souffre d'au moins un handicap : les déficiences sensorielles (visuelles et auditives, 3,5 %) sont les plus fréquentes, suivies des déficiences motrices (1,6 %), 0,5 pour cent des personnes ayant des troubles du comportement et 0,4 pour cent une perte de certaines extrémités du corps. Globalement, la maladie est la principale cause des handicaps. Au regard des trajectoires causales, Harrati (2013) propose une diversification des trajectoires thérapeutiques en fonction du vécu des porteurs relatif à leurs contextes spécifiques – au rapport à leur propre déficience et aux spécificités des fonctions bio-sexuelles et socio-sexuelles, précisent Deschamps *et al.* (2013).

Dès lors, dans un contexte démocratique camerounais, complexe et limité, où la vie quotidienne (Javeau 2011), au-delà des discours politiques, présente sans cesse un système de santé aux ressources insuffisantes ou inadéquates (Saillant 2003:2), questionner le niveau d'implication des organisations dans la question sexuelle et reproductive de ce groupe social pourrait constituer le point de départ de sa prise en compte par les pouvoirs publics et de la déconcentration du processus d'élaboration des politiques sociales en matière de santé. Il s'avère donc important pour les organisations de la société, pour cette catégorie comme pour celle de la population générale, de tenir compte non seulement du type de handicap, mais surtout du sexe et des rapports sociaux y relatifs (Traoré 2019).

La santé sexuelle et reproductive des PSH au Cameroun : une préoccupation des OSC?

Bien qu'elles soient toutes d'accord sur le fait que la personne en situation de handicap ait évidemment des besoins spécifiques en termes de santé sexuelle et reproductive, comme c'est d'ailleurs le cas pour plusieurs autres besoins chez cette catégorie sociale, l'observation des missions des OSC laisse entrevoir que celles-ci accordent un intérêt moindre à la question de la SSR. Lorsqu'elles s'y intéressent, cette problématique reste abordée de façon superficielle. Un responsable s'exprime à ce sujet :

> De la santé sexuelle et reproductive, on en parle. Mais le problème est que dans notre société, le sexe demeure un sujet tabou. Beaucoup ne sont pas à l'aise lorsqu'il s'agit de parler du sexe en public. Ce qui fait qu'il y a des astuces qu'on utilise. S'il y a des productions sur la sexualité, au lieu d'en parler, on préfère les distribuer. Nous faisons des campagnes, et chaque année, nous participons à la campagne Vacances sans Sida avec les Synergies africaines. (membre d'une association des PSH, Yaoundé, novembre 2019)

Cette insuffisante prise en main de la SSR des PSH au sein des organisations dont elles sont principalement membres est justifiée par l'appropriation des jugements sociaux, de la culture ambiante centrée sur les représentations sociales des sexes et des agir sexués à partir des stéréotypes sexo-spécifiques tabouisant (Schaeffer 2015). C'est ce qu'explique une PSH en ce sens :

> Les personnes handicapées sont reléguées au dernier plan en ce qui concerne l'éducation sexuelle. Elles sont oubliées, ne sont pas considérées comme des personnes ayant une vie sexuelle. On pense qu'elles ne peuvent pas assumer la vie sexuelle avec tout ce que ça comporte comme désir, et acte, comportements, attitudes, positions et responsabilités sexuels. (PSH visuel, enseignante, Yaoundé, octobre 2019)

En fait, pour cette association ayant pour centre d'intérêt la promotion des droits des PSH, les débats sur la santé sexuelle et reproductive sont des situations inopinées de divertissement. Comme le souligne cette responsable d'une association

> il n'y a pas un volet spécifique sur la santé sexuelle et reproductive. La question de la SSR est parfois abordée au niveau de la cellule d'écoute avec le psychologue qui encadre les enfants et les familles. (PSH visuel et enseignante, Yaoundé, octobre 2019)

Les causeries éducatives, bien que faisant partie de la plupart des plans stratégiques de ces organisations, sont aussi des occasions de partage d'informations et d'expérience sur la vie sexuelle ou surtout conjugale,

notamment sur les sujets relatifs à l'éducation sexuelle, l'hygiène menstruelle, l'éducation des jeunes filles contre les abus et pour la promotion de l'abstinence.

De ce fait, il est induit que les OSC ne sont davantage sollicitées ou concernées que dans la seule action de sensibilisation. Cette faible communication intraorganisationnelle affaiblit le niveau de « dévulnérabilité » escompté, avec pour conséquences majeures l'augmentation de l'occurrence des grossesses non désirées.

La faible efficacité des activités sensibilisatrices qu'organisent les associations est liée, au-delà de l'insuffisance considérable de compétence, à des difficultés d'accès, voire à l'inexistence de ressources logistiques et techniques importantes relatives aux stratégies adoptées en fonction des objectifs visés, notamment l'autonomie de contrôle de la SSR-PSH.

Comme le relève un autre leader d'association :

> Il n'y a pas de traduction en langue des signes pour les déficients auditifs. Il y avait un magazine nommé 100 % Jeunes qui abordait beaucoup la question de santé de la reproduction, mais il n'y a jamais eu une copie en braille. C'est ce qui fait que les personnes handicapées soient moins informées, moins éduquées en santé sexuelle et reproductive, parce qu'elles n'ont pas toujours ces informations. (PSH visuel, journaliste, Yaoundé, novembre 2019)

Le problème est encore plus important chez les femmes en situation de handicap, qui comme le font remarquer certains responsables, sont plus vulnérables que les hommes, mais surtout n'ont généralement aucune emprise sur leur santé sexuelle et reproductive. Malgré le fait qu'elles soient fortement exposées aux risques liés à l'activité sexuelle, en raison de leur vulnérabilité physiologique, de leur comportement sexuel à risque, de leur faible accès à l'information et aux services de planification familiale, de leur précarité socio-économique, elles ne constituent pas une priorité pour les organisations de développement. La société et surtout la famille semblent négliger les besoins en santé sexuelle et reproductive des personnes en situation de handicap. Une leader d'association l'exprime en ces termes :

> Une fille handicapée, à partir de 27 ans, pense surtout à faire un enfant parce qu'elle se questionne « et si la ménopause se pointe à ma porte ! » Il y a aussi la pression de la famille qui lui dit nous ne serons pas toujours là pour t'aider, accouche un enfant qui sera ton guide. Elle se dit bon ! J'accouche avec quelqu'un, même s'il ne m'épouse pas, ce n'est pas grave ! Elle est prête à prendre tous les risques. (Une responsable d'association, PSH moteur, artisane, Yaoundé, novembre 2019)

Les femmes en situation de handicap, malgré les abus dont elles font l'objet, se voient dès lors privées de leur droit de prendre des décisions

pour elles-mêmes en ce qui concerne leur santé sexuelle et reproductive, ce qui augmente leur degré de vulnérabilité, d'exclusion, mais surtout leur susceptibilité dans les interactions sociales (Begum 1992:72-73) dans un contexte favorisé par l'absence d'une mesure coercitive efficace de suivi en faveur de la prise en charge de la santé sexuelle et reproductive de la femme handicapée, pour réduire cette vulnérabilité. C'est dans ce sens qu'une autre handicapée fait savoir que ses camarades se sentent généralement dans un état de faiblesse et de dévalorisation qui fait qu'elles sont amenées à accepter n'importe qui pour un peu de tendresse, d'affection. Certaines, dit-elle, se laissent facilement approcher juste parce qu'on leur a accordé un peu d'attention qui peut ne pas être vraie, car la proximité est parfois motivée par la curiosité.

Aux facteurs ci-dessus mentionnés s'ajoute l'appropriation ou tout au moins l'intégration psychique de la marginalité sociale des PSH et l'existence de représentations figuratives internes, du fait de leur déficience physique, qui constitue un énorme « poids » pour leur épanouissement sexuel et reproductif. Afin d'éviter de contribuer à entretenir des stéréotypes (Ravaud & Ville 2003:594) et si l'on admet le principe induit dans le discours des agences internationales, selon lequel « l'amélioration de la santé de la reproduction en Afrique subsaharienne passe par un meilleur équilibrage du pouvoir entre hommes et femmes » (Adjamagbo & Guillaume:12-13), il importe pour les parties prenant part au processus de valorisation de la santé sexuelle et reproductive des PSH de mettre, aussi bien dans les expériences collectives de recherche qu'au niveau des modalités politiques d'intégration des personnes handicapées, l'accent sur une approche genre véritablement intersectionnelle. Étant donné que « femmes et hommes ne sont pas égaux face au handicap » (Cambois, Desesquelles & Ravaud 2004:3). Étant donné qu'aussi bien en matière de procréation, de contraception ou de fécondité, d'accès à l'information ou au service, les besoins varient chez cette catégorie sociale en fonction du sexe et du type de handicap. Ce qui n'est pas toujours pris en compte, aussi bien par les organisations que par les plans politiques. Comme le démontrent Brasseur et Nayak (2018), en matière de sexualité ou de reproduction, on pourrait difficilement imaginer une « culture sexuelle » commune à l'ensemble des personnes en situation de handicap. Ainsi, la santé sexuelle et reproductive des personnes en situation de handicap comme enjeu public suppose en effet de poser la spécificité de ce champ par rapport à d'autres espaces connexes d'action publique, en l'occurrence l'éducation, l'autonomisation ou alors l'insertion socioprofessionnelle, tels qu'ils sont implémentés aussi bien par les acteurs associatifs que les plans d'actions publiques existants.

Les analyses précédentes ont permis de constater les limites très profondes dénotant une inefficacité réelle des faibles actions entreprises. L'implication effective de ces acteurs dans les politiques publiques concernant ce domaine de la santé reste à débattre.

Les OSC dans les politiques publiques de la SSR des PSH : entre démission, fabrique politique et engagement réel

Le Cameroun, dans sa volonté d'impulser un développement inclusif et durable, a défini un certain nombre d'instruments réglementaires et juridiques qui encadrent les actions des associations et structures d'accompagnement des PSH. Nous avons notamment le décret de 1977 relatif aux conditions d'ouverture et de construction des centres spécialisés et œuvres sociales privées, la loi n° 90/053 du 19 décembre 1990 sur la liberté d'association, la loi n° 2010/002 du 13 avril 2010 portant protection et promotion des personnes handicapées et son décret n° 2018/6233 du 26 juillet 2018 fixant les modalités d'application de ladite loi. La présente section examine l'implication des OSC de promotion des personnes en situation de handicap dans le processus de cette politique publique.

Cadre juridico-institutionnel international et national de légitimation de l'apport des OSC à la promotion des droits des catégories sociales vulnérables en matière de SSR

Cet axe argumentatif a pour ambition de mettre en exergue la place légitime, institutionnalisée, des OSC dans la promotion de l'intégration et l'accompagnement des citoyens, principalement les couches vulnérables. Cela constitue un préalable important à l'évaluation de leur implication dans les politiques publiques. En effet, Abega (2007:83-84) souligne que :

La légitimité politique est une stratégie qui devrait permettre de « libérer » la société civile, de rendre le pouvoir à la population, afin de mettre en œuvre des programmes de développement grâce au renforcement d'organismes à la base et notamment ceux capables de promouvoir l'esprit d'entreprise à la base.

Cette décision est au centre de l'accord de Cotonou et du consensus de Washington (Commission Européenne 2000, 2005, 2010, 2014). Il est à noter que cette réorientation stratégique intervient surtout à la fin de la guerre froide et vise à intégrer les associations de développement dans l'agenda libéral que promeuvent ces institutions. S'il faut dès lors reconnaître que « l'émergence repose sur une société civile forte indépendante » (Mengue 2004:13), c'est par rapport à ce cadre et aux attentes sociales qu'il convient de mesurer la performance réelle de ces organisations à but non lucratif.

Dans ce sillage, la Conférence internationale sur la population et le développement tenue au Caire en 1994 considère d'une part le « droit à la contraception et à l'avortement, et d'autre part […] l'accès à des services de santé de qualité et le refus des stérilisations forcées » (Adjamagbo et Guillaume 2001:147). La quatrième Conférence mondiale sur les femmes de 1995 à Pékin, quant à elle, s'intéresse particulièrement aux droits en matière de santé reproductive et admet ceux-ci comme des droits de l'Homme déjà reconnus dans les législations nationales. Tous ces instruments internationaux ont contraint les pays à mettre sur pied et améliorer les documents stratégiques de santé. Toujours dans ce sillage du social et surtout dans la prise en compte des groupes « vulnérables » et « stigmatisés », la convention relative aux droits des personnes handicapées sera adoptée par l'Assemblée générale des Nations unies en 2006. Cette convention stipule d'ailleurs dans son préambule que « les personnes handicapées devraient avoir la possibilité de participer activement aux processus de prise de décisions concernant les politiques et programmes, en particulier ceux qui les concernent directement » (ONU 2008:2). Elle met également l'accent sur le fait qu'elles devraient toutes pouvoir accéder à une meilleure santé (Article 25:19), y compris des services de santé sexuelle et génésique, ainsi que des programmes de santé publique communautaires. L'État devra consulter étroitement et faire activement participer les PSH, y compris les enfants handicapés, par l'intermédiaire des organisations qui les représentent (Article 25a:19).

Cette convention a ainsi influencé l'adoption, par l'État du Cameroun, de la loi nº 2010/002 du 13 avril 2010 portant protection et promotion des personnes handicapées au Cameroun, et plus tard son document de politique nationale et son plan d'action 2017-2021.

La prise en compte des OSC lors de l'élaboration des politiques publiques en matière de santé sexuelle et reproductive, lorsqu'il s'agit des personnes en situation de handicap, revient à mettre les parties « dominantes » (Mitchell, Agle & Wood 1997) à l'intersection des critères de pouvoir et de légitimité. Il s'agit aussi de mettre les autorités à l'intersection des expériences et des résistances de sujets politiques marginalisés (Hooks 2000) et également des rapports de pouvoir à l'intersection des rapports liés au genre et au type de handicap. Il est dès lors question de « décrire la position de groupes et d'individus en décalage par rapport à un système de cadrage politique ou juridique » (Chauvin & Jaunait 2015:55), de relever les « dilemmes stratégiques et identitaires » que rencontrent spécifiquement les organisations de défense des hommes et des femmes en situation de handicap physique en matière de gestion, par les pouvoirs publics, de la santé sexuelle et reproductive de cette catégorie sociale. Cela du fait de leurs besoins spécifiques, parfois rendus invisibles (Purdie-

Vaughns & Eibach 2008) par le système de représentation qui domine leur environnement et les effets liés à leur cooptation et leur politisation.

Implication des OSC dans le cycle de gestion de la politique publique en matière de santé de la reproduction au Cameroun

Suite à la crise économique des années 1980, l'État a réduit ses engagements sociaux. Ce qui a accru la paupérisation des populations et a élargi la collaboration entre les pouvoirs publics et les organisations de la société civile (Abega 1999). C'est dans ce sens que s'observe avec Damon (2008:49), que la « prise en charge des exclus – de toute nature – se déploie à partir de l'imbrication du secteur public et du secteur privé » : « Cette imbrication est devenue si poussée qu'il semble plus opportun de parler d'un appariement (l'un ne va plus sans l'autre) ; et même d'une agrégation (les deux sont assemblés dans un tout) des deux logiques d'intervention ». La production d'une politique publique repose sur un cycle non linéaire. Le cycle des politiques publiques renvoie aux différents moments qui marquent leur développement, de leurs origines à leur évaluation en passant par leur mise en œuvre (Boussaguet, Jacquot & Ravinet 2006). Cette implication est évaluée aux phases principales et globales de ce cycle de gestion.

Les OSC des PSH dans la phase d'élaboration de la politique de SSR

L'analyse des entretiens avec les PSH a permis de constater que les pouvoirs publics, dans leur effort de développement participatif et inclusif, impliquent les OSC dans l'élaboration des politiques afférentes à la SSR. Cependant, ces organisations de promotion et de protection des personnes vivant une situation de handicap restent faiblement intégrées. L'extrait de verbatim de l'un des responsables d'association interviewés (PSH moteur et sculpteur, Yaoundé, novembre 2019) en est révélateur :

> J'ai participé à certaines rencontres qui étaient destinées à donner notre avis sur l'élaboration des politiques publiques. Nous avons donné notre avis sur la convention qui est devenue la convention internationale des personnes handicapées en 2008. Nous avons aussi donné notre avis sur la loi camerounaise portant promotion et protection des personnes handicapées de 2010 et son décret d'application de 2018. Toutefois, notre point de vue n'est pas toujours pris en compte.

Cependant, comme le fait remarquer une autre responsable d'association des PSH,

> lorsque le ministère de la Santé veut travailler, et c'est le cas pour tous les ministères, il se rapproche plutôt du ministère des Affaires sociales. Les

> associations des personnes handicapées dans le domaine de la santé de la reproduction comme dans bien d'autres domaines sont très peu consultées. » (PSH visuel et journaliste, Yaoundé, novembre 2019).

Dès lors, la volonté des pouvoirs publics à impliquer les OSC de personnes en situation de handicap dans la phase d'élaboration de la politique publique en leur faveur reste insuffisante. Les OSCs interrogées décrient le fait que, bien qu'elles soient parfois impliquées de façon non objective, leurs observations ne sont pas prises en compte. Plus précisément, explique un autre responsable d'association :

> Nous avons pris part à une consultation sur l'élaboration d'une carte pour personnes handicapées. Une carte à présenter à l'hôpital pour des consultations, à la pharmacie, etc., afin de bénéficier d'un certain nombre de facilités. Mais, depuis que nous avons fini, c'est dans les tiroirs.

Les OSC des PSH dans les phases de mise en œuvre et de suivi-évaluation des programmes, projets et activités de la politique de SSR

La phase de mise en œuvre représente l'étape opérationnelle, exécutoire de la politique publique. C'est l'étape d'implémentation des actions adoptées et consignées dans le plan programmatique. À ce niveau, les pouvoirs publics ont besoin de s'appuyer sur des partenaires tels que les OSC, pour des activités spécifiques. Les actions prioritaires constatées lors de nos investigations concernant la mise en œuvre de la politique publique en matière de SSR au Cameroun sont la sensibilisation, la prise en soin et d'autres formes de prise en charge socioaffective. Pour les acteurs institutionnels interrogés, seules les activités liées à la communication sont prioritairement confiées aux organisations de la société civile, parce que la prise en soin est assurée par le plateau technique médical, dont l'implication est régie par les normes et la déontologie du secteur de la santé publique. Pourtant, d'autres aspects portant sur les divers conseils liés aux trajectoires et itinéraires thérapeutiques pourraient également être gérés par les groupes de pairs et les familles des PSH. Pour celles-ci, et comme le montrent Mimche et Djouda (2018), les acteurs familiaux et les pairs sont porteurs de savoirs, de logiques sociales et d'expériences dans la prise en charge de pathologies, et participent à la production et à la régulation du système des soins. Actrices du système de soins, la famille et les organisations de proximité en sont aussi productrices et consommatrices. Elles interagissent et déterminent les divers modes de production des soins.

La phase de suivi-évaluation est un méta-processus (Lemieux 1995) pouvant se dérouler à chaque instant d'une politique publique (Ridde, Beland & Lacouture 2016). L'évaluation des politiques existantes est

également une source possible de leçons et d'arguments entourant la formulation de solutions potentielles aux problèmes de l'heure, sans parler de leur adoption et de leur mise en œuvre future. Malgré l'importance de l'évaluation dans le processus de développement des politiques publiques, les pouvoirs publics n'impliquent ni ne prennent en compte les observations et les besoins spécifiques formulés par les OSC de promotion et de protection des PSH. En ce sens, un d'association déclare que

> les pouvoirs publics ne prennent pas en compte nos observations. Ce sont les organismes et structures privés qui viennent vers les personnes handicapées afin de relever leurs besoins. Même les assistants sociaux refoulent les personnes handicapées, au Cameroun. (leader d'association, PSH moteur, Yaoundé, novembre 2019)

Il découle de ce parcours du cycle de développement des politiques publiques en matière de SSR que les OSC, qui constituent la voix des PSH, sont moins sollicitées, moins écoutées et moins valorisées. Nonobstant, il convient d'analyser l'impact de cette insuffisante implication des OSC dans le processus de construction de la politique publique relative à la santé sexuelle et reproductive des PSH.

Impact de la faible implication des OSC dans le cycle de gestion des politiques de SSR, sur la santé des PSH

Ne pas impliquer et prendre en compte suffisamment les OSC de promotion et de protection des PSH dans l'élaboration, l'exécution et le suivi-évaluation de la politique publique sur la santé de la reproduction n'est pas sans conséquence sur les comportements et pratiques sexuels des PSH. Deux aspects fondamentaux des résultats des évaluations faites méritent d'être mis en exergue : l'impact au niveau de l'amélioration du cadre programmatique de la politique et l'impact sur la prise en charge effective des PSH et le niveau d'acuité des pathologies sexuelles et reproductives.

En ce qui concerne l'aspect programmatique, les recherches documentaires montrent que la stratégie sectorielle de la santé, qui est un document programmatique, ne consacre pas un espace spécifique à la santé de la reproduction des PSH au Cameroun. Cela s'observe également dans les documents opérationnels sur la santé de la reproduction. Cet état de fait s'explique par le fait que les OSC de promotion et de protection des PSH ne sont pas suffisamment impliquées et prises en compte dans le développement de la politique publique. L'absence ou l'insuffisante prise en compte des représentants des PSH (présence et propositions) lors de l'élaboration du cadre programmatique des politiques publiques et des

activités sectorielles en matière de SSR a pour principale conséquence la présence des biais, des omissions, des négligences, somme toute volontaires ou non, qui n'améliorent pas la qualité des documents programmatiques finaux et marginalisent à cet effet cette couche minoritaire.

Cette « situation victimogène » constitue selon Ciprut (2007) le pôle fécondant de maintien des blessures psychosomatiques qui amenuisent la capacité de dépathologisation en vue de la réappropriation du corps et le recouvrement sanitaire de l'individu. Autrement dit, l'inconfort psychique qu'imposent les tendances marginales avouées ou inavouées des pouvoirs publics renforce les représentations des PSH quant à leur « abandon » et à l'indifférence par rapport à leurs conditions précaires de santé. D'où l'exigence d'une « justice restaurative », car, pour les PSH, il n'est pas question d'une mutualité de vulnérabilité ou d'une réciprocité vulnéraire, pour parler comme Harrati reprenant Genuit (2013:45), mais bien d'une complicité marginale, d'une vaine promotion de la diversité inclusive qui montre la faillite de l'intégration (Fraihi 2004).

Conclusion

Cette étude s'est attelée à analyser et à comprendre les centres d'intérêt du mouvement associatif œuvrant pour les PSH au Cameroun, son rapport à la SSR ainsi qu'aux politiques publiques. À son terme, il ressort des analyses que la santé sexuelle et reproductive, bien qu'étant un besoin social fondamental, demeure le parent pauvre à la fois des organisations de promotion et de protection des PSH et des pouvoirs publics. L'intérêt de ces organisations est davantage orienté vers la lutte contre la mendicité et l'autonomisation des personnes en situation de handicap. Les pouvoirs publics, quant à eux, lors de la construction des politiques publiques en matière de SSR, continuent d'entretenir l'oubli de la prise en compte des PSH. Ce qui renforce la stigmatisation et l'exclusion de cette catégorie sociale. Les perceptions sociales du handicap et de la femme participent à la mise en marge des PSH lorsqu'il s'agit de politique publique en matière de SSR. Ces perceptions contribuent à créer un clivage dans le rapport de la personne handicapée à la société et avec elle-même. Les stratégies d'émancipation menées aussi bien par les femmes que par les hommes ont une base et une finalité identiques, les situant dans un rapport d'égalité en mesure de reconstruire les rapports sociaux de pouvoir entre les femmes et les hommes.

De même, la prise en charge de la SSR des PSH est d'autant plus complexe qu'il est important, pour la comprendre, de tenir compte des différences individuelles aussi bien dans les expériences collectives de recherche qu'au niveau des modalités politiques d'intégration des personnes handicapées. En

effet, comme le faisaient déjà remarquer Nosek *et al.* (2001) : « les femmes avec une déficience physique, particulièrement celles avec des dysfonctions graves, ne reçoivent pas la même qualité de soin gynécologique que leurs homologues valides. […] Elles sont aussi plus susceptibles d'être soumises à des ablations de l'utérus, pour des raisons non médicales ». En matière de santé sexuelle et reproductive, lorsque les besoins variés de cette catégorie sociale ne sont pas pris en compte de façon spécifique, en termes de genre et de type de handicap, par les organisations qui les représentent, cette dimension de leur bien-être demeure incontestablement mise à l'écart par les instances décisionnelles. Il est dès lors important d'envisager « la mise en place de politiques publiques "genrées" » (Jenson & Lepinard 2009:2) dont une meilleure implication des organisations à la question sexuelle et reproductive de ce groupe social pourrait constituer le point de départ. Toutefois, il convient de souligner avec Dauphin (2010:14) que l'analyse de leur efficience reste encore à approfondir, afin de pouvoir mieux repérer les phénomènes de résistances, que ces dernières proviennent du système, des hommes, ou des femmes elles-mêmes. La question n'est-elle pas de savoir si on doit les considérer comme des politiques symboliques, « dont l'essentiel ne consiste pas à agir, mais dire, à faire savoir et croire que l'on agit ou que l'on se préoccupe d'agir ? » (Jobert & Muller 1987:152) Les actions des pouvoirs publics laissent transparaître des non-dits, laissant croire que la société exige des personnes en situation de handicap l'option de la débrouillardise.

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