



Feminist Scholarship, Femocracy and the Glass Ceiling in Zimbabwean Politics

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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

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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 Chipu 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 Benschop 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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