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*Engaging New Analytical Perspectives on  
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# *Alternation*

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**Interdisciplinary Journal for the Study of the  
Arts and Humanities in  
Southern Africa**

## **Engaging New Analytical Perspectives on Gender in the African Context**

Guest Editors

*Mpilo Pearl Sithole*

*Victor Ngonidzashe Muzvidziwa*

*Vivian Besem Ojong*

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# **Editorial: Engaging New Analytical Perspectives on Gender in the African Context**

**Mpilo Pearl Sithole**  
**Victor Ngonidzashe Muzvidziwa**  
**Vivian Besem Ojong**

The field of gender analysis has been marked with two conspicuous dilemmas in the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century: a deep theoretical hype without much progress in resolving theoretical huddles in interpretation; and stagnation in gender advocacy at the political and social level. The former has meant that the main achievements at analytical level are a bit divisive with ‘womanists’ and ‘feminists’ and theorists of masculinity of various traditions of gender studies purporting different views – the divergence school of thought, the difference school of thought and the generic human rights stance. Advocacy that permeates these theoretical divergences influences the social life level and yields less substantive impacts than effort rendered. These dilemmas have, more recently, led to deeper reflection on the progress of gender analysis. Recent conferences are beginning to put the theme on gender at the centre of discussion with the view to reflect on whether the interpretations of the past century have had some constraints. Amongst the key issues under review in current reflections are:

- The one-sided treatment of gender and its domination by advocacy-oriented stance prioritising women and not the ideology that subjugates women (given that the current social era has consensus on recognising the overwhelming subjugation of women in all societies).
- What is meant by patriarchy in different societies and what is the relationship of this concept to discursive and practical issues of different social environments.

- Different methodological approaches to documenting gendered voices.
- The need to revisit culture and the modernisation of gendered roles in society.
- What are African perspectives on gender, and specifically patriarchy, given that there are overlapping forms of practices in socio-historical relations?
- Implications of some theoretical and methodological approaches for gender and development.
- What are specific ways to understand and recognise gender inequality despite the various socio-cultural contexts that analysts feature in their interpretations?
- What is the range of social institutions (especially the family institution) that allow gendered subjects to co-exist in various socio-cultural contexts?
- What are the ways in which activism can be incorporated with scholarship to enhance the struggle to deal with unequal gender power relations?

The manuscripts in this volume can be grouped into four areas. The first four papers focus on theoretical and conceptual issues; this is followed by another four papers that raise methodological issues relating to gender issues in Africa. Papers focusing on patriarchy constitute the third segment of the special issue. In this category are eight papers. The last three papers seek to address issues relating to livelihoods in the light of gender constructions in African communities. In the following pages an overview of papers in the special issue is presented.

The first paper by Mpilo Pearl Sithole examines the fundamental problem of gender inequality as it manifests itself in the sphere of knowledge production. Gender is seen as increasingly concerned with issues of inequality, recognition of equal rights and attempts at gender mainstreaming. Sithole's paper discusses the conceptual entrapment of gender relations within other social hierarchies in order to show how analytical tools have

served these hierarchies rather than challenge them. Gender inequalities are reflected in intellectual voice and knowledge production. The persistence of gender inequality, the privatisation of gender inequality and the manner in which it is adapting with modernity remains an issue of interest irrespective of the subject of study whether it is in the context of migration, gender in the professional spheres, gender and poverty and the issue of subjugation. There is a need to take cognisance of integration in our analysis of theoretical, ideological and practical considerations in our analysis of gender issues. Sithole concludes by redefining conservatism, the tracking of the changing nature of gender inequality and the need to re-conceptualise gender inequality in the light of recent developments.

The second paper by Ufo Okeke Uzodike and Hakeem Onapajo presents a gendered analysis of poverty. Gender analysis has informed different developmental approaches on African women. The paper examines three major theoretical and methodological approaches toward the study of women and development, namely the Women in Development (WID), Gender and Development (GAD) and Women, the Environment and Development (WED) approaches. The authors examine how these approaches can act as a framework to categorize and explain the drive toward pro-female development studies in Africa. The reality on the ground however, shows that not much has been achieved as far as gender equality and women empowerment in Africa is concerned.

The third paper by Langtone Maunganidze observes that African women in general and Zimbabweans in particular, constitute a significant and growing proportion of owners and managers of small enterprises. The discussions on family enterprises focuses on 10 case studies of family businesses selected purposively. Langtone Maunganidze's paper concludes that women, particularly wives' exclusion from both management and succession, is not accidental but an instrumental, calculated and systematic expression of power symmetries that continue to side-line women. Women's invisibility or absence in family businesses is a result of gendered discourses which have produced an ideologically controlled male narrative on family business. The paper argues that women represent a hidden and invisible resource that should be recognized to ensure sustainable family businesses.

The fourth paper by Vivian Besem Ojong privileges notions of representation and power in gender discourses. The paper offers a critique of concepts of submission. This concept is ethnographically grounded and



textually expanded through the ways in which Christian women have been represented in the Bible. Vivian Besem Ojong asks some crucial questions; e.g.: How have women been affected by their inability to exercise their authority as Christians as a result of the concept of submission? What are the consequences? Why have Christian women's voices not been heard despite attempts by some of the women to speak out? Who listens to women? It further problematizes the concept of women's empowerment versus submission and its challenges to women exercising their rights to be human.

The fifth paper by Janet Muthuki addresses the place of feminism/s today by highlighting the incongruities in the lives of both migrant African professional women and men in negotiating gender equality. The migration experience is made complex by the renegotiation of various gender identities as a result of migrants immersing themselves in a different socio-cultural context. The migration experiences for women present them with the challenge of balancing between exercising their autonomy as occasioned by their educational attainments as espoused in liberal feminism on the one hand and the quite often religious-cultural requirement to submit to male domination on the other. On the other hand migrant men are faced with the challenge of maintaining a hegemonic masculinity which accords them patriarchal privileges on the one hand while renegotiating their masculinities in a new gender context where women have been "empowered" through the inroads made by liberal feminism on the other. By examining the appropriateness and/ or inappropriateness of using feminist-based approaches in dealing with issues of gender inequality, the article argues that these dynamics should lead to a profound process of gender re-socialisation for both men and women.

The second paper by Vivian Besem Ojong examines how gender impacts on fieldwork and the writing of ethnographies. A gender lens helps clarify issues related to involvement in fieldwork. It is clear that gender identity of the researcher and the gender relations in the field are an important dynamic in shaping the research process and influence the kind of data obtained and consequently influence how knowledge is constructed. Gender relations have a bearing on knowledge construction as well as the adoption of particular research methodologies researchers use. The paper is followed by Urmilla Bob, Humayrah Bassa and Suveshnee Munien. Land is a resource at the centre of the much talked about new agrarian revolution in which women will increasingly come to dominate the development scenarios. Bob *et al.*

explore how the nature, extent and implications of property rights for women in peri-urban communities impact on the quality of data obtained and the writing of ethnographies. Four focus group discussions (two with men only and two with women only) were held in the community to acquire this data. The study by Bob *et al.* shows the importance of using qualitative approaches in research and highlights the importance of comparing findings between men and women as well as between two groups.

The eighth paper by Maheshvari Naidu uses a theoretical gender lens to examine women and their experiences and pays attention to the female condom. Naidu posits that the exegetics around the female condom should be seen within the context of discursive power relations around the female body and female sexuality. Naidu argues that any understanding of gender and feminism in Africa has to make contextual and situational sense to African women. *Their* local lived experiences and realities are of central concern. She works through the theoretical metaphor of African feminisms being about issues of 'bread, butter and power'. Promoting the use of the female condom in heterosexual relationships is considered a cost-effective intervention that is also supposedly female initiated and female controlled. By drawing on data from related studies, she shows however, that such an intervention ignores the embedded power regimes that lie implicated in particular contexts of male-female relationships, especially sexual.

There are then papers that seek to interrogate issues relating to patriarchy. The ninth paper by Nompumelelo B. Zondi notes that African cultures epitomize patriarchy. Cultural practices are inherently a reflection of the dominant patriarchal ideologies. African cultures contribute to our understanding of the relationship between men and women. Superiority of the male child and the convention of the female being responsible for the domestic space are amongst the issues that require debate. As illustrated in the novels by Jordaan Ngubane (South Africa) and Tsitsi Dangarembga (Zimbabwe) in *Uvalo Lwezinhlonzi* (1975) and *Nervous Conditions* (1988) respectively, gender discrimination and inequality still affect most women within the African continent. However, female disadvantage is not restricted to rural and illiterate women but equally affects urban and educated women as well. Zondi examines intrinsic gender oppressive practices prevalent in Zulu and Shona cultures taking into account the voice of male and female authorship. Language, gender and power dynamics are key aspects leading to a better understanding of Zulu and Shona patriarchal societies. The analysis

of the two novels demands that gender specialists re-think ways of redressing gender iniquity in patriarchal societies, African societies in particular.

The tenth paper by Agnes Malaza and Catherine Addison observe that it is easy to misunderstand African societies if we adopt a Eurocentric approach and judge them by western standards. African women have not been totally disempowered in traditional societies as argued by most western feminists. Generally women's power and authority has tended to increase with a woman's age. The authors note that the older African woman has always been a figure of significant influence, if not power, in traditional societies. There are instances in which older women share more-or-less equal power with older men and older women can acquire reputation for wisdom and status of authority. Hence in some instances in some African groups gender is actually less important than age in assigning power to an individual. Agnes Malaza and Catherine Addison caution against a wholesale acceptance of western notions of patriarchy.

The article by Tshishonga problematizes *Musangwe*, a Venda traditional fist fight involving young and old men. It is argued that *Musangwe* operates as a mechanism to exclude and marginalise women. *Musangwe* fist fighting is one of the traditional mechanisms to assert masculinity among the Venda speaking people of Northern South Africa. While women are excluded from joining in the fist fights it is the women who wash the bloody clothes, nurture, and nurse and feed the participants. Women are not even allowed to come in close vicinity to where *Musangwe* fighting is taking place. The author argues that *Musangwe* excludes and therefore marginalises women from getting themselves to the sport as participants or observers.

The paper by Nompumelelo Zondi and Mpumelelo Ntshangase examines Zulu people's belief system linked to the rite of burning of *impepho* an indigenous African plant. Almost all ritual and/ or traditional ceremonies require ancestral intervention – the summoning of and/ or libation to the ancestors are closely linked to burning of *impepho*. Generally it is males, albeit of particular standing within the family who are charged with responsibility to burn *impepho*. Women are not supposed to burn *impepho*. However, there is a growing power shift which sees women in female headed households perceiving themselves as much as custodians of culture as their male counterparts with equal responsibility to burn *impepho*. Nompumelelo Zondi and Mpumelelo Ntshangase's study notes the minority of women who actually preside over ritual practices requiring the burning of *impepho*

though. The study has gone a long way in deconstruction the myth that women cannot handle *impepho*. A vexing question for participants remains though whether the prayers of such women and their needs go unheard by the ancestors just because they are not said by men.

The thirteenth paper by Irene Muzvidziwa observes that while women are the majority in the teaching field especially in primary schools, they however are under-represented in positions of authority within the education system. Irene Muzvidziwa examines the underlying reasons for this under representation of women through a gendered analytical framework, focusing on empirical research of women deputy heads that was conducted in one of the provinces in Zimbabwe. Despite efforts to increase the representation of women in school leadership positions, their numbers have remained very low. Gender roles, culture and gender relations influence women's rise into leadership positions. The issues that emerged from the study and literature limiting the number of women educational leaders included lack of acceptance of women leaders by both male and female teaching staff, the assumption that leadership is for men, and structural barriers and challenges women face as they aspire to leadership positions. The possible barriers to women's advancement and the strategies that create opportunities for more women in educational leadership were linked to cultural constraints from both the society and organisational institutions.

Ruth Hoskins' paper similarly notes that although the Library and Information Science (LIS) profession has historically been regarded as female dominated, a minority of males have held dominant management positions in LIS organisations however, while females have occupied lower service positions. Drawing on the gender divide in the field Ruth Hoskins' paper draws conclusions from a study that investigated the gender profile of LIS academics in LIS programmes at 10 South African universities where LIS training is provided. The study established that LIS programmes were predominately staffed by female academics that were of a lower rank than their male counterparts and were less likely to hold senior leadership positions in the programmes. The gender divide that exists in the field also occurs amongst LIS academics. Hoskins concludes that to achieve gender equity in appointments and positions of LIS staff, universities should promote more female LIS academics to senior positions.

The fifteenth paper by Sunungurai Dominica Chingarande presents findings from a study focusing on climate change and livelihoods carried out

in Guruve District, Zimbabwe. The study sought to investigate the gender differentiated impacts of climate change on rural livelihoods which are mainly agriculture based and to establish the roles of women and men in local food systems in adapting to a changing climate. The study established that climate change has effects on crops, livestock and human health and well-being. These effects have resulted in an extra burden on women in several ways: where households relied on draught power (because of animal diseases and deaths, most have resorted to conservation agriculture and mulching which are labour intensive); women engage in alternative livelihood strategies due to persistent crop failure; women bear the brunt of caring for the sick (mainly due to malaria); women travel long distances to fetch water and feed for small livestock. Women have however, managed to make ends meet in spite of the limited access and control over resources including lack of information. They have used their individual and collective agency in dealing with climate change. Women's garden and support groups have played a very important role in labour provision in the face of high demands for labour. Sunungurai Dominica Chingarande concludes that climate change, like most aspects of social life has highly gendered effects and widens gaps between men and women. Outside interventions including policy makers therefore need to take cognizance of these gender differences of climate change.

The sixteenth paper by Nompumelelo Thabethe and Ufo Okeke Uzodike presents an overview of feminist discourses – from Women in Development (WID) to Gender and Development (GAD) approaches. African governments tend to adopt a market-driven model in agriculture that emphasises women's participation as a means to achieve both subsistence and income generation. Generally women have not fared well in instituted development programmes. Nompumelelo Thabethe and Ufo Okeke Uzodike's empirical study studies women's empowerment in the agricultural sector. They pose a key question: why do agricultural programmes fail to transform women's material conditions even where there are adequate resources in the form of donor support and female service providers? Despite good intentions agricultural development programmes have a tendency to reinforce the subjugation of poor women. The paper challenges silences in mainstream feminist discourses when it comes to the forces that reinforce gender inequality.

The last paper by Victor Ngonidzashe Muzvidziwa focuses on livelihoods strategies of married women breadwinners in Harare capital city

and Chinhoyi provincial capital in Zimbabwe. Ethnographic studies do indicate that in reality the situation of women breadwinners is more complex, as more women in this category are at pains to reassure society and their 'man' that the husband remains the logical and legitimate head of household. The women even resort to the use of the moral-religious arguments to support their views that a man is the head of the household. Could such statements that appear clearly to be in support of patriarchy be taken at face value as an indication of the failure by women to break through the 'glass ceiling' at the domestic level in terms of redressing the ideology of male domination? Or should we see the women's strategy of deferment as part of the strategies adopted by independent married women to safeguard their newly found liberated space by appearing to be supporting patriarchy when in fact the opposite is happening? Could this be part of what Scott would refer to as 'weapons of the weak'? Is it a way of providing soft landing for the husbands of these women who are undergoing a crisis of masculinity through loss of the breadwinner status. The emergence of independent married women breadwinners is a more complex process which embraces equality notions as well as ideology that spells the continued subordination of women at the domestic and public domain levels. The paper also explores Nuttall's notion of entanglement and how this can explain the socio-cultural and economic specificities of married women breadwinners.

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# **Gender, Research and Knowledge Production: The Struggle Ahead**

**Mpilo Pearl Sithole**

## **Abstract**

This article deals with the fundamental problem of gender inequality as it manifests itself in the sphere of knowledge production. It examines the analytical tools that social scientists especially, have used in order to examine the phenomenon of gender inequality in social life portraying the manner in which these have been entrapped in the difficult dilemmas bedevilling the desired virtue of gender equality in the society at large. The article thus begins with a re-examination of the conceptual entrapment of gender relations within social hierarchies in order to show how our analytical tools have served these hierarchies rather than challenge them. For instance, post-modern orientations are guilty of trivialising gender equality discourse at the service of cultural diversity.

This analysis is done to ultimately pinpoint the concomitant issues of gender inequalities in intellectual voice and knowledge production. The article outlines the specific issues in this conundrum: the privatisation of gender inequality in opposition to the discourses that seek to intervene; the positivist orientation of our conceptual framework together with the intrinsic alienation of morality in social science discourse on the one hand, and yet the integration of ideology and practice in the manner in which gender inequality manifests itself on another hand. The article concludes by proposing a redefinition of conservatism, the need to track the modernisation of gender inequality and the need to re-conceptualise gender inequality.

**Keywords:** gender inequality, gender relations, intellectual voice, alienation, conservatism

## **Introduction**

In this article I venture into the challenging exercise of attempting to unpack the issue of the persistence of gender inequalities. It is an exercise which has been attempted by other social analysts before<sup>1</sup>, but which has not been done to a point of finding convincing and telling explanations that would yield an angle of a solution or a proper advocacy orientation towards gender inequality, rooted in convincing theory. I also do this exercise because I am jealous; I am jealous of the fact that the question of racism and racial inequality, although far from laid to rest, has received unquestionable conviction from analysts and society alike that it is unjustified and must be eliminated. Sexism is identified as a vice in our society, but gender inequality is not entirely rebuked. I suspect that there is still, in certain circles, a fundamental conviction that gender inequality is natural and justified in some sense. Even where people enforce equal human rights they are inclined to window dress the continued inequality with references to ‘harmless hierarchies’, where men and women are necessarily positioned in social ideologies that take their cue from nature or religion.

Racial inequality is seen as unfair both in terms of its practical consequences – as when it is linked to material inequality between different groups – but also in terms of its ideology<sup>2</sup>. Gender inequality on the other hand is seen as unfair when linked to material inequalities but the ideologies that underpin it as a belief system still enjoy some sacred attributions. Howell and Melhuus (1993) articulate quite succinctly the manner in which this sacredness is not only based on religiosity but also embedded in social ideology on kinship. Thus, while we can accuse analysts of ignoring gender in their studies the extent to which the social actors omit engendering the

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<sup>1</sup> From the rather blunt assertions of Evans-Pritchard (1965: 54-55) on the universality of women’s inferiority and men’s superiority to the more sophisticated articulations of possible ideological bases for this (see Henrietta Moore 1988), social scientists have pondered the pervasiveness of gender inequality.

<sup>2</sup> A quick look at classic writings by and biographies of freedom fighters in South Africa would immerse any reader in sufficient detail and qualitative experiences of material and ideological issues surrounding racial discourse and racism (see Biko’s *I Write what I Like*, 1978); see also Mandela’s *Long Walk to Freedom* (1994).



subject matter within the social spaces that are studied begs attention. The ideology of racial inequality is often challenged once access to material capacity and management is achieved by the formerly lower category in the hierarchy (usually Black). However this is not the case when it comes to gender inequality – women’s performance materially or in capabilities does not redeem them of the ideology of inferiority even if they may belong to a category of a ‘highly performing population’<sup>3</sup>. Thus when people talk of BEE brothers in South Africa<sup>4</sup>, they mean exactly that, since the BEE sisters can only mean secondary citizens within that category of the population. This article seeks to explore why this fundamental ideologically-founded inferiority, continue unabated in gender when it seems to have the scope to be alleviated in the same way that it has happened with regard to the racial category.

## **Gender Inequality and Negotiated Rationality: A Theoretical Point of Departure**

Modern social life is fundamentally a rational and moral phenomenon. It is rational because cross-communication between individuals and between groups is possible based on specific constantly sought criteria of common understanding. Such criteria are based on tangible mutual perceptions of values that we deem fit for our communal existence. It is however this latter

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<sup>3</sup> Howell and Melhuus’s (1993: 51) observation that feminist discourses have gone through phases of ‘the “discovery” of male bias; making women visible, and the emergence of gender relations as a basic conceptual premise’ is not simply a descriptive observation, but a deeper reading on conceptual block (i.e. a failure to leap from analysis of fact to changing the moral discourse behind the circumstances).

<sup>4</sup> In South Africa racial economic redress facilitated through policies on Broad Based Black Economic Empowerment has brought about the concept of ‘BEE individuals’ who are seen as individuals that have benefited from these policies and their economic agility is attributed to these policies. However, popular discourse is very gendered when it comes to this concept and reflects men as the primary beneficiaries. Hence there is talk of ‘BEE brothers’.

fact (of mutuality of values) that facilitates a leap from what is an 'objective type of rationality' to a 'subjective rationality' that beckons us to *negotiate* at a rather abstract level what our values are. Thus by the time we speak of 'hospitality', 'respect for human rights', 'human integrity' or 'simply good and bad behaviour', we are operating at a different level of 'rationality' – certainly not the pragmatic empirical rationality based on colour, smell or taste. It is this 'subjective rationality' or 'negotiated rationality' that I call 'morality' – the negotiated values that inform our communal existence<sup>5</sup>. It is important to start at this grand level of generality when one is to talk about gender and research in this century because a lot has happened and not happened when it comes to this subject matter.

In its many guises feminism has appealed for the recognition of the generality of a merger between rationality and morality against forces that want to see women's inferiority and subjugation as natural. The culture-nature debate in the writings on gender (as raised and debated by Evans Pritchard 1965, Moore 1988, and others like Strathern 1987 who introduces the issue of subjectivity in this debate) has in fact been about to what extent do humans wish to pretend that an aspect of their relations is instinctual with no need for the attribution of value. The diversity in which women's subjugation has been manifest in ideologies and praxes in many countries leaves us convinced that indeed there is wide variety of ways in subjugation can take place<sup>6</sup>. We must still ask what is natural about this sphere of human relations that we seek to abandon our habit of 'negotiated rationality' and hope that some 'instinctual prescripts' might guide us in relations between men and women<sup>7</sup>. What other part of our social life do we know to be guided

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<sup>5</sup> I have articulated this more clearly in another article, 'Science versus Indigenous Knowledge: A Conceptual Accident', published in *Ingede: Journal of African Scholarship* (2005) 1,1: 1 - 5. Available at: [www.ingedej.ukzn.ac.za](http://www.ingedej.ukzn.ac.za).

<sup>6</sup> In fact work on masculinities seems to indicate even sharper the relevance of social conditioning in gender, even if the universality of dominance and subjugation between men and women respectively has not been fully explained (see Cleaver 2002).

<sup>7</sup> My own previous work has shown the mix of material association between sex and activities on the one side and the flexible social thresholds ascribed by ideology (Sithole 2000: 106-141).

by such ‘instinctual prescripts’ that we imagine are part of ‘nature’ and what can we learn from those parts of our social life? What other part of our social relations is simply dependent on our *natural instincts that are presumably pre-determined and formulaic*, and yet entrusted with self-management? Should we treat gender relations differently than from those social relations that we *actively engineer*? If there are measures to this what measure of instinct is to be allowed to govern gender relations and what is the threshold at which negotiated reason (by which I mean ‘morality’) should take over? The only other sphere that I know of which has the same challenges is parenting which fortunately enjoys a fair amount of acceptance as being culture-specific and not nature-specific.

Many studies on gender have proven that the incidence of femininity and masculinity (and the concomitant roles such as motherhood and fatherhood) is different in different societies (see the collection by Richter & Morell 2006, for example, on fatherhood). If this historical fact is anything to go by it seems that the sphere of gender relations is proving itself to be under the influence of multiple social influences or social and cultural moralities. As it has already been mentioned here there has been some pondering on the questions related to the universality of women’s subjugation as well. Admittedly, definite answers have not been forth coming. However it would be putting the cart before the horse and it would be downright tautologous to suggest that because subjugation is to some degree universal (even if its character varies) then women are indeed inferior. Nothing is more circular: women are subjugated because they are inferior; they are inferior because they are everywhere subjugated.

This article puts forward the argument that women’s continued subjugation is a historical fact that is sustained by the logistics of failing to deal with the privatisation of subjugation and the private attribution of differentials of status within the life cycle of each woman in different communities and societies (Liebenberg 1997; Sithole 2000 – to cite work on the Xhosa and the Zulu). The making of this argument is rather a snapshot in need of further elaboration. Yet, the point being made, I now move on to demonstrate that this is also embedded in the tools and methods of social analysis which have failed to critically scrutinise and address the structural issues related to gender inequality. I shall also champion appropriate solutions. Much culture-consciousness raising with regard to gender has taken place. The discourse on feminism and the debates about the extent to

which female subjugation are ideological or practical have been useful. However, a stage of stagnation has been reached thanks to the positivism of our approaches to analysis (making us shy away from the very fact of negotiability of our social life) and the sterility of our methods in tracking the modernisation of gender inequality – both ideologically and practically. Howell and Melhuus (1993) hint at this sterility of our analytical tools specifically with regard to gender and kinship; but it is not a new observation as Archie Mafeje (1975) and myself (Sithole 2006) have observed a similar dilemma in scientific studies on religion.

## **The Privatisation of Gender Inequality**

The context painted above is important because it puts forward the fundamental premise of this article – rationality and morality are intertwined and the post-modern block of separation of the two (suggesting sacredness of different cultural moralities) inhibits constructive advocacy on common issues in different societies. This is the fundamental reason why gender inequality is not significantly challenged – it is privatised conceptually and it is privatised practically.

There are two problems in the manner in which we have analysed gender relations over time: The first is that as researchers and theorists we have not broken the positivist glass ceiling on analysis of human relations. They are being researched, engaged and discussed over a wide front. Yet, the private and more relational domains of gendered existence and gender inequality have lack a conceptual and methodological framework of analysis. It has not been engaged. For as long as this is the case issues such as gender inequality will continue to take place in spite of numerous efforts to ‘add women’ in non-traditional women spaces. The dilemma is that we only see subjugation in the numbers of reported cases of domestic violence, in the numbers of underpaid women, in the number of girls and boys going to school and in the number of women and men in parliament. Even though we challenge inequality in ideology we are limited by the fact that part of the ideology gives us status – in a kind of divide and rule fashion. This limits our criticism of the Mr/Miss/Mrs dilemma; it limits what we say about the commercialisation of *ilobolo* because through it we gain status within the community; it limits what we say about what positions women occupy in

parliament and whether they are taken seriously<sup>8</sup>. We do not sufficiently deal with the ideological subjugation of women. Both in academe and advocacy we have tended to conflate the critique of the practical and ideological subjugation of women as a proxy for the more fundamental issues related to the rationalised manipulation of placements and positioning of women.

The second problem is that we love of our 'oppressors'. Unlike the struggle in terms of race we actually cannot afford a co-ordinated programme of action that is directive. If our conceptualisation of the problem has just been shown to be conflating ideology and practice, the argument here is that our strategy seems to subjugate gender relations to personal circumstances. When we fought against racial oppression it was clear that while we identified certain proponents of racism we challenged them by reference to clear principles of non-racism. That is why documents such as the Freedom Charter were so important in South Africa<sup>9</sup>. In that formulation agency was

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<sup>8</sup> The common wisdom is that if women challenge their treatment in parliament, they will be ousted in favour of many other women who will be 'behaved' who would be willing to deal with the 'more serious issues' on the table than critical reflections on internal issues in parliament.

<sup>9</sup> The non-racialism of the Freedom Charter is instructive in this regard: 'We, the people of South Africa, declare for all our country and the world to know:

- That South Africa belongs to all who live in it, black and white, and that no government can justly claim authority unless it is based on the will of all the people;
- That our people have been robbed of their birthright to land, liberty and peace by a form of government founded on injustice and inequality;
- That our country will never be prosperous or free until all our people live in brotherhood, enjoying equal rights and opportunities;
- That only a democratic state, based on the will of all the people, can secure to all their birthright without distinction of colour, race, sex or belief;
- And therefore, we, the people of South Africa, black and white together equals, countrymen and brothers adopt this Freedom Charter;
- And we pledge ourselves to strive together, sparing neither strength nor courage, until the democratic changes here set out have been won.

(Cf. The Freedom Charter as adopted at Kliptown, 26 June 1955: <http://www.anc.org.za/show.php?id=72>.)

clear – ‘black’, ‘white’ ‘our people’; in addition the stakes were also clear – ‘land’, ‘democratic state’, and ‘will of all the people’. With gender inequalities we have international declarations that denounce sexism and gender inequality but we hardly articulate non-sexism within the context of kinship and love relationships. By excluding these critical perspectives from the private domain, we enable the continued existence of gender inequality. It is precisely our lack of contextual stock-taking of these issues in private life that defeats the non-sexist agenda, not the genderism that we have created out of necessity and on which we should be capitalising now.

Both of these problems (the positivist glass-ceiling and the strategy that conflates principle and circumstance) require much more sophisticated methods of dealing with gender inequality than we have employed over the last fifty-odd years in the propagation of gender equality and feminism.

Why am I raising this issue – the privatisation of gender relations? It is because I think that we have reached a point of fundamental stagnation on the issue of gender inequality. I think as women researchers we need to look at both the intellectual tools and methods according to which we deal with gender and the manner in which these have failed to infiltrate and impact our society. The problem is that we have not only been subjected to divide and rule as a consequence of the privatisation of our circumstances, but we have subjected ourselves to division as a consequence of the different conceptual approaches to feminism. Western feminism, African feminism, womanism, and the plain denial of gender inequalities have all helped to confuse, in a post-modernist paradigm, the experience of subjugation of women by both ideology and in practice. Yet inequalities and even violence against women are real and not simply imagined. All the varieties of feminism (see Hendricks & Lewis 1994) add up to a body of knowledge that confirms the existence of a general problem of gender inequality as observable and in ideology. There is therefore a need for dealing with issues in a way that advances the gender struggle strategically within specific contexts. However the conceptual entanglements have been real and have been hindering this by preventing us from engaging the real issues involved.

Feminism has grappled with the way it must conceptualize itself in the face of various other inequalities (see Dietz 2003; Oyewumi 1997; and Todes *et al.* 2010 in the context of development), but there is an urgent need for it to redefine itself in relation to pragmatic issues of gender integrity on a case-by-case and contextual basis. On the other hand we have seen feminism

cling on to unhelpful post-modernist questioning of the experience of inequality. Dietz (2003) gives a detailed account of the various strands of feminism that have emerged in recent times. *Difference feminism* predicates all its arguments on the basic assumption that men and women are different, but that they need to be treated equally. *Diversity feminism* concentrates on investigation of gender experiences within diverse cultural contexts with the view to solve the question of value judgments around imbalances, injustices or subordination between men and women. The question is: do women in various cultures perceive the same practices as oppression and subordination? *Deconstruction feminism* wonders whether the experiences of males and females in various contexts warrant that they be classified into men and women in accordance with sex at all, even within the same cultural context. Men and women are socially constructed, yet, we need to see them as individuals. Can we classify them into categories according to some generic experience of maleness and femaleness?

Feminism has not only studied differences in gender in different cultural settings, but it has gone ahead to suggest that there are societies where gender does not exist, and it being declared a culturally specific construct – a Western construct in Oyeronke Oyewumi's view (1997). Feminism needs to challenge itself to review this question. It is not the question of the specificity of gender inequality that must be reviewed, but it is rather a more fundamental question – when it assumes that some cannot comprehend the cultural predispositions of others because of cultural existential exclusivity that a review is necessary. This, I argue, is where feminism shoots itself in the foot and allows itself to be privatised by other politicised spheres, i.e. the intellectual politics of different regions. The intellectual politics of different regions exists but it is not mutually impermeable. To pretend that it is mutually impermeable is to give in to the privatisation of inequalities.

What we do not realise, and it is because it has taken time for people generally to realise, is that the bigger the social scales of setting public morality the better it is to deal with minimum standards. Human rights are the minimum standards set to guide human relations, but gender has to set basic minimums both in the arena of practice (which the arena of advocacy deals with) and in the more politically contentious arena of ideology (constant negotiability of the latter being a basic minimum) upfront. I say this because I have spent much time looking at how African schools of thought have been

side-lined in mainstream knowledge production (see Sithole 2009) – but it seems as though when one embarks on that, people expect one to automatically agree with everything in them – as if they are homogenous and do not represent a variety of diverse positions.

## **Disguised Conservatism**

This is another issue or strategy of maintenance of gender inequalities that has not sufficiently been challenged – the freezing of ideology. When it comes to the criticism of especially cultural ideology, people want to suggest a fundamental cultural logic that is not changing with circumstances and which must be understood despite the circumstances. Thus when we lament the commercialisation of *ilobolo*, conservatives would like to understand that it was not meant to be like that in its original logic and it should be continued ‘merely because it was not meant to be like that in its original context’. When we challenge some of the contextual issues in the Bible that are making it possible for people to legitimise inferiority we are told of blasphemy and we are prevented to actually audit which issues are holy and which are contextual stories in the Bible. The old generations are the ones that had the right to set cultural standards and we should not be chopping and changing anything. This is at odds with the manner in which societies evolve, develop and change as they become culture-conscious. In this regard we need to redefine conservatism as:

- When people prevent critical reflection on issues in a way that recognises the culture-consciousness of the society;
- When people preserve values and practices in accordance with binary thinking derived from Western thought or binaries that ‘other’ people in a way that gives them legitimacy and superiority;
- When people challenge everything just for the sake of the challenge without putting forward any alternatives – i.e. in a bid to appear radical without committing themselves to the hard work of crafting solutions.

It is the conflation of all of these aspects of conservatism that have created the kind of stalemate that we have now achieved in gender



intellectual discourse and advocacy. It is also the location of gender issues at the crossroads of this stalemate that impacts negatively on gender studies – e.g. the separation of labour out of the domestic environment; the pitting of African paradigms versus Western paradigms; and the sheer need to be systematic, making us unfortunately positivist rather than pragmatic. Thus the conservatism that is described above results in (strange) radical paradoxes and contradictions in intellectual discourse. Instead of regarding African culture(s) as vibrant and dynamic, people assume a certain stagnant and freezing of the African intellect – as something that has always been operated on and affected but which has not produced anything for itself. To mention just a few brief examples:

- Defiance by women (such as was done by *iNgcugce*<sup>10</sup> in KwaZulu-Natal against King Cetshwayo) has not been seen as feminism but merely interesting history;
- *Ilobolo* (bridewealth) has been cast as either commercial or cultural without articulation of how people really feel about it;
- Boundedness to indigenous knowledge can be seen as preventing certain groups from being associated with scholarship; and of course;
- Women's issues are locked into their being mainstreamed without the appropriate attention in depth –we are for instance hesitant to talk about gender change management which would imply the changing of our socialisation of boys, asking male workers about their home responsibilities, and reconceptualising our notions of marriage and family.
- The discourse on HIV and AIDS has shown us that the work environment can be a sphere that concerns itself with one's health (a 'private' matter) without plumbing one's individual choices – with people being encouraged to do HIV tests at work and being made to

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<sup>10</sup> *iNgcugce* was a regiment of young women during the time of King Cetshwayo in KwaZulu. This regiment was instructed by the king to marry a regiment of much older men as reward to the latter, in their post-military service. *iNgcugce* refused to obey the instructions of the king and for that they were killed (see Canonici & Cele 1998).

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contribute to public moral responsibility by being seen to do something, even personal, about HIV and AIDS such as taking a test.

- Much lip-service is given to male equality in the taking on of homework and domestic chores, yet, no programme has asked every male manager, including the president, to change their baby's nappies in public.

It is clear that there are many central concerns with regard to gender inequality which are addressed in scholarship (and in public). Yet, what I have tried to bring to the fore in this section is that it is accompanied by a certain conservatism. This conservatism is an example of bad faith since it always stops short of engaging the real issues in life- and culture-changing ways.

## **Issues of Practice and Ideology**

Issues of ideology and practice have to be seen as related in dealing with gender inequality. However the manner in which they are dealt with has to be sensitive to what I have called the privatisation of gender above. In so far as practice of gender inequalities is concerned the privatisation has to be made an issue in itself (because this is where choice and agency can be targeted), and in so far as the ideology of inequalities debate of generic issues can be posed to societal cultural conscience. The double-day for women continues with different adaptations taking place in different class categories and these can be challenged at the level of practice – the conscience of men and women as persons. However the structural and ideological orientation of society is such that the workplace and the home are theoretically unrelated and have different centres of authority. This has to be challenged at the level of labour policies and advocacy work directed at changing men and women's association of themselves with the domestic sphere and the role of provision.

This means that if we propose that it is possible to negotiate gender values for our polities and within our societies we need to confront the contextual challenges of ideology and practice in which we operate. Thus context should not be reified to a point where it dictates that some contexts cannot be contended with. Dealing with different contexts is about the ability to rationalise and review values and this ability is universal. This however

does not mean dogmatism – we should be able to outline short term and long term options. Ideological options are not something that many societies have been able to consciously negotiate without a certain degree of nostalgia for habit. Thus if patriarchy as seen in inheritance patterns is to some extent embedded in patrilineal ideology (see Sithole 2000: 116-130) one has to be frank about the feasibility of changing patrilineality, where the first steps may be to suggest a will for both boys and a will for girls to inherit equally as an ideal situation.

The gender issue is becoming sterile around recognition of inequality, recognition of equal rights and attempts at gender mainstreaming. But the persistence of gender inequality and the manner in which it is adapting with modernity remains an issue that we are not directly tracking. Whether we are talking about gender in the context of migration, gender in the professional sphere, gender and poverty, the issue of subjugation remains – with different levels of cultural justification of subjugation and even violence. In order for those societal institutions that are supposed to do something about this but that do not do much it might be useful to talk about gender change management in organisations and especially in requesting those in power to set goals for themselves.

## **No Conclusion in Sight: The Struggle Ahead**

In line with the issues discussed above as disguised conservatism there are practical issues related to who our superior philosopher and knowledge generator is – the White male. This is a situation related to our crossroads – the Western-other binary; the labour-domestic sphere binary; and the positivist-cosmology binary. The White male is thus the ultimate philosopher and strategist because he traditionally occupied the first elements of these binaries. This is a situation that is going to take time to transform.

Whilst this is the ideological propaganda stifling academe, the practical challenges manifest themselves as well to support and in the manner supported by this propaganda. The first practical challenge is that we wait for the endorsement and validation of this group (academe exuding the Western, production, positivist values) without taking forward our own issues and validating ourselves. Of course when I say ‘this group’ I mean the institutionalised ideologies that privilege it.

All other categories (of the population) come next and a few years ago, we had statistics to be very coy about as reflected in a report jointly written by the Human Sciences Research Council, The National Research Foundation and the Department of Science and Technology (2005):

Research on the aging of publishing scientists in 2001 pointed to the alarming trend that an increasing number of scientific articles published by South African scholars are being published by authors over the age of 50 years .... Whereas 18% of all articles produced by SA scientists in 1990 were published by authors over the age of 50, this percentage increased to 48% in 2002 ... (p.17).

Further analysis shows that these trends are not identical across scientific fields, but that the situation is worse for the medical and health sciences ... and the humanities and social science (p.17).

... the contribution of female authors to scientific production has increased slightly over the 13-year period from 16% in 1990 to 22% in 2002 (p.17).

... The total contribution of black authors (African, Coloured and Indian) increased from only 4% in 1990 to 11% in 2002 (p.18) (see Report on *Human Resources for Knowledge Production*: 2005).

This shows that transformation towards gender and racial equality in the knowledge production domain has been slow. If this remains the case when positivist measures are used (such as these statistics), the challenge remains insurmountable when qualitative issues such as occasionally documented by affected academics based on experience. (See Vilakazi 1978; Magubane 1971; and Sithole 2009) We need to challenge the official trend setting scholarly bodies with regard to their initiatives in changing this situation as well as the criteria they use to:

- accredit journals;
- to rate researchers;
- recognise innovation;
- to encourage people of various backgrounds to enter the knowledge production scene.

This must be done with clear recognition of the need for change management and not just the mainstreaming of women, especially Black women while the general institutional cultures remain ideologically unchanged. The environment needs to be changed in terms of:

- permeability of the politicised spheres of knowledge production so that there is equality in knowledge generation;
- frank debates on the positivist ceiling and the emergence of scholarship from varieties of indigenous knowledges;
- the equal competitiveness of varieties of scholarship towards advocacy.

The contextually-differentiated privatisation of women's subjugation (the subtle nature of subjugation) – at home, within organisations – requires a multi-pronged and yet decisive approach targeting socialisation, institutional cultures, and domestic environments and contexts.

At the same time we need to take the struggle forward by creating our own forums of discussion, knowledge generation and sustaining academic conversations. This must be called a struggle not just to be polemical but because there are real challenges related to it:

- the current unchanged bureaucratic regimes will continue to give resources in uncritical (and possible gender insensitive) ways to the forums accredited in specific ways and that continues to function in gender exclusive ways – journal regimes and specific forms of defining excellence are additional examples;
- we will not necessarily be rated as excellent producers of knowledge in our lifetime (and perhaps it is a sacrifice that must be made provided that we subject ourselves to the rigor of science in being reviewed by the peers that understand the necessary dynamism); and
- it will be a struggle to organise the those people critical of the system – to be located and to work within the system because we have to deal with being validated by the same system, while we aim at transforming it from within.

The separation of ideological inequalities and pragmatic realities is artificial but problematizing them, can be a starting point in making people strategise on a short term without losing the long term vision of change. Critical analysis and knowledge production must be at the forefront of that struggle.

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# **Women and Development in Africa: Competing Approaches and Contested Achievements**

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## **Abstract**

Women clearly represent the face of poverty and underdevelopment in Africa. Several reports point to the fact that, in quantitative and qualitative terms, African women experience some of the worst conditions of living in the world. Not surprisingly, efforts aimed at addressing this phenomenon and designing a roadmap for development in Africa have not only stimulated interesting scholarly debates but also have informed different developmental approaches on women over the years. It is against this backdrop that this article examines the dominant theoretical and methodological approaches toward the study of women and development. It examines critically the Women in Development (WID), Gender and Development (GAD) and Women, the Environment and Development (WED) approaches. This article employs these approaches as a framework to categorize and explain the drive toward pro-female development studies in Africa. It further surveys the achievements recorded thus far on gender equality and women empowerment in Africa within the context of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals. Given this, it forwards the argument that despite the scholarly debates and empirical researches on the underdevelopment of women – which underscore the need for women empowerment in Africa -- much has not been accomplished in practical terms on addressing the plight of African women and the scourge of underdevelopment on the continent. For data collection, we relied on existing statistics and documents from reputable international institutions as well as previous researches from scholars and experts.



**Keywords:** Women, development, gender equality, women empowerment, African society

## **Introduction**

Africa provides a good case-study for underdevelopment in the contemporary world. For long, the African continent has been characterized by a range of major economic and socio-political challenges and crises such as high infant and adult mortality, mass illiteracy, high rates of unemployment, widespread diseases, and famine. By the measurements of development, most especially the Human Development Index (HDI) of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), African countries consistently maintain some of the lowest rankings in the world. In the 2011 HDI report, for example, several African countries -- Burkina Faso, Burundi, Chad, Democratic Republic of Congo, Liberia, Mozambique, Niger, and Sierra Leone – were listed amongst the least developed states with the worst conditions in the classification of Low Human Development. Unfortunately, the current state of underdevelopment in Africa appears most visible in the living conditions of its women. African women constitute not only the highest population of the unemployed and the poorest, but also often the largest number of victims of diseases and violent conflicts across the continent. Certainly, it is against this backdrop that development experts and observers such as Obi Ezekwesili (World Bank 15 May 2009) and Charlayne Hunter-Gault (8 August 2006) have argued that ‘poverty has a female face’ in Africa.

Given the above, there have been interesting scholarly arguments on the condition of women and development in Africa, and the ideal pathways for improving their condition. In the 1970s, the remarkable emergence of the Women in Development (WID) scholarship in the feminist development discourse provided the impetus for debates on the extent to which women have been subordinated in Africa and the need to promote an agenda for the proper integration of women into the modernization and developmental plans of governments. The sudden shift in the discourse in the 1980s, which informed the Gender and Development (GAD) school of thought, became another defining moment in the debate on the plight of women in Africa. With this, scholars provided the argument that emphasis should be placed on the analysis of the social relations of gender and the construction of gender identity in societies to understand better the disempowerment of women and

push more effectively for their empowerment. In the 1980s, the Women, the Environment and Development (WED) perspective introduced another fresh debate on how environmental degradation poses a major threat to women with particular reference to those engaged in agricultural production in the rural areas. This perspective easily gained popularity in Africa not only because women on the continent deal extensively with the earth for their sustenance, but also due to the fact that they use proceeds from their agricultural activities to support their families. Following this, the WED advocates looked to emphasise the importance of integrating women into the identified processes of environmental rehabilitation and sustainability as they relate to the African society.

While scholars have made tremendous progress on debating and developing approaches for more meaningful understanding of the condition of women in Africa, policymakers have not fared well in implementing agendas for gender equality and women empowerment. There is still much social and institutional neglect of members of the female gender in many parts of Africa with the net effect that they continue to be poorer, work longer hours, receive less effective medical attention, die more during childbirth than their peers elsewhere, and experience less access to education, political power, and employment. Bearing these in mind, this article offers a review of the literature on the major approaches on women and development in Africa. Its major objective is to demonstrate the extent to which the scholarly environment has achieved a bit of success in providing a foundation for the establishment of institutional mechanisms for women empowerment, and how the resultant mechanisms have not been well implemented in Africa as a result of institutional and societal constraints. Given this context, this article is organized into four sections. The first section discusses the present state of underdevelopment in Africa and its visibility in the lives of women. The second section provides a review of the aforementioned approaches. The third section examines the institutional mechanisms advanced so far in line with the positions of these dominant approaches and their shortage in addressing female poverty in Africa. Finally, the fourth section ends with a summary and conclusion.

## **The Socio-economic Condition of Women in Africa**

A cursory examination of World Development Indicators 2010 displays

Africa has a weak development context in many ways: in the 54.2 years life span of sub-Saharan Africans, which is the shortest of any region in the world; in the 76.9 infant mortality rate per 1,000 live births; in the 68.7% literacy rate for female youth aged 15-24 as compared to male literacy rates of nearly 80%; and HIV prevalence rate of 5.5% of the total population aged 15-49. Virtually all of the region's socio-economic indicators demonstrate the poor living conditions of women in Africa. For instance, UNAIDS (2010: 121) reports that the largest population of HIV patients in the world are women living in sub-Saharan Africa. African women constitute 80% of all women living with HIV in the world. Similarly, it was reported that women account for 59% of those living with HIV in sub-Saharan Africa (UNAIDS 2010: 2). Furthermore, it is estimated that young women aged 15-24 years are eight times more likely to be living with HIV than men of the same age range (UNAIDS 2010: 2). In Swaziland, for instance, the infection rate for males between the ages of 15-24 stood at 6.5% in 2009 while the rates for women from the same age bracket was more than double at 16.5% ([www.africa-portal.org/articles/2012/08/21/swaziland-hiv-aids-and-global-fund](http://www.africa-portal.org/articles/2012/08/21/swaziland-hiv-aids-and-global-fund)). Mbirim-Tengerenji (2007: 606) has also shown that the prevalence of 'poverty does seem to be the crucial factor in the spread of HIV/AIDS through sexual trade' among African girls.

Besides the issue of HIV/AIDS, it is also estimated that complications during pregnancy and childbirth cause the death of 250,000 women on a yearly basis in Africa. African countries such as Angola, Burundi, Cameroon, Chad, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Malawi, Niger, Nigeria, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, and Somalia have the highest number of maternal deaths in the world with 1,000 deaths for every 100,000 live births (UNDP/UNICEF 2002; WHO 2010). With approximately 30% of all maternal deaths in the world, an African woman living in West or Central Africa is more exposed to maternal risk than an average woman anywhere else in the world. In fact, UNICEF's State of the World's Children 2009 Report concludes that an expectant woman in Africa is 300 times more likely to die of pregnancy-related complications than counterparts in industrialized nations – double the estimate in 2005 (World Economic Forum 2005: 2).

The issue of female literacy is particularly crucial since it serves as a defining factor in the ability of women to control and structure the socioeconomic opportunities that inform and give definitive shape to their

lives. Unfortunately, illiteracy is most common among the female gender in most parts of Africa. As Verna (2005: 2) underscores, ‘female illiteracy is particularly high in sub-Saharan Africa’. Indeed, in countries such as Niger and Burkina Faso, female illiteracy is extremely high at about 90% in 2005 (Verna 2005: 2). This may not be surprising given that more than 40% of women in Africa do not have access to basic education (UN Millennium Project 2011). Despite significant progress being made in the area of female youth since the turn of the 21st century (with 68.7% literacy rate), females continue to be clearly under-represented at all levels of education in Africa (ADF 2008; UN 2010; World Development Report 2011). For those who receive education, access to employment often pose additional risks due to discriminatory practices.

The discriminatory practices against women is further worsened by a global environment of high and growing unemployment rates in which women in many African countries find themselves excruciatingly burdened with the responsibility to feed and maintain their families. Increasingly, many young women in parts of the continent are forced by their circumstances to engage in sex work to support their families; many others work in extremely harsh conditions as labourers, traders and farmers; and some others work as unpaid home-based workers (Manuh 1998; Hunter-Gault 8 August 2006; Mbirimtengerenji 2007). This, particularly, has been a major problem in Botswana, Burkina Faso and Lesotho since the 1990s given that the increased out-migration of able-bodied men to urban centres for better livelihood has led to a growing number of women embarking on ‘harder work’ on farms throughout the continent. In effect, therefore, the socio-economic challenges facing males and their communities or societies have often had the unintended consequences of imposing special liabilities on women who must labour to keep things together at home in the absence of their male family members (Manuh 1998).

### **Women and Development in Africa: Competing Approaches**

In light of the multifaceted hardships experienced by African women, there has been increasing scholarly debates on the phenomenon of female poverty and underdevelopment in Africa. As previously noted, the arguments are structured around the three major approaches in the women and development literature that are also recognized by notable international developmental

agencies. These are the Women in Development (WID), the Gender and Development (GAD), and the Women, the Environment and Development (WED) approaches. Despite employing different theoretical and methodological standpoints, each of the three approaches champions the cause of gender equality and the incorporation of women into the structure of development in societies. Although it first emerged within intellectual circles, WID was more influenced by the activities of the 1970s American feminist movements (Razavi & Miller 1995: 2-3). It was also significantly influenced by the modernization theory of development in the Third World, which was popular in the 1950s and 1960s (Koczberski 1998: 397). The advocates of this viewpoint saw as fundamental the displacement of African traditional values, which they believed reduced women virtually to the status of domestic workhorses. For the advocates, this displacement must constitute the starting point for the resolution of female poverty in Africa (Hardy 1939: 7, cited in Hafkin and Bay, 1976: 2). Therefore, they argued for the proper integration of women into the West-driven modernization processes highlighted as the pathway for development in the Third World nations.

By far, the work of Ester Boserup (1970) appears most visible and influential from the WID perspective. Paying particular attention to the internal workings of African communities, Boserup takes the position that female subordination in the economic structure of modern societies is a direct consequence of colonialism. According to her, colonialism dislocated the 'female farming systems' that once thrived in Africa. Colonial administrations introduced modern agricultural equipment that incapacitated the strength of women in the traditional agricultural economy in Africa. She insists that along with colonial administrators and their technical advisers, European settlers were primarily responsible for the decline in status previously enjoyed by women in the agricultural sectors of developing countries. She noted pointedly: 'It was they who neglected the female agricultural labour force when they helped to introduce modern commercial agriculture to the overseas world and promoted the productivity of male labour' (Boserup 1970: 53-54).

Boserup (1970: 59-60) further argued that the rapid decline of women's contribution in agricultural production was also caused by land reform policies introduced by the European colonial regimes in Africa. The Europeans employed the instrumentality of religious principles to launch 'a strong propaganda' against a matrilineal society. Given this factor, women lost much of their customary rights to use land for cultivation in African

societies. Post-colonial industrialization and modernization efforts in Africa and elsewhere in the developing countries further exacerbated the scenario. She suggests that the introduction of modernized farming techniques in the post-colonial era discouraged female labour. Accordingly, the economic structure of societies was fundamentally altered in a way that enthroned and ensured male dominance; this, she concludes, explains the contemporary relegation and near invisibility of women in all sectors of the production process (Boserup 1970: 80-81). Given both their historical significance to the economy and the need for development, Boserup (1970: 224-225) argued generally that African women should be re-integrated into the economic processes of their countries. Strategies toward the achievement of this re-integration would include: the elimination of all manners of sex discrimination in admission to agricultural schools; training of women in the use of modern agricultural equipment; and, most importantly, the adoption of birth control programmes in line with the structure of female life in the West.

Although the WID approach was hugely successful in creating or raising awareness of the extent of women's subordination in societies around the world, it was also subjected to robust criticisms from different quarters. It is strongly criticised for overly 'compartmentalising' women in its analysis of the social frameworks of societies. For instance, Koczberski (1998: 404) suggests that women cannot be isolated for analysis to explain their subordination. Rather, the existing linkages between their work roles and kinship relationships including the nuances of the predominant socio-political systems in which they operate must be taken into consideration. Thus, by ignoring those vital linkages, the WID approach 'predisposes simplistic and unrealistic analyses and constructs images far removed from reality' (Koczberski 1998: 404). Furthermore, the WID approach is criticised for neglecting the consequences of the processes and levels of the system of capitalism on women in the developing countries, particularly in Africa (Fernández Kelly 1989: 619). For instance, Pala (1977: 9) argues in her critique that the WID approach has not analysed adequately the condition of women in Africa because their condition is 'at every level of analysis an outcome of structural and conceptual mechanisms by which African societies have continued to respond and resist the global processes of economic exploitation and cultural domination'. In addition, the WID approach is criticised for conceptualizing traditional African practices as 'backward' and the integration of women into an 'advanced' modernized (Western) system as

a necessary step toward development – which underscores the major assumption of the modernization theorists.

Thus, it was the mounting criticisms of the WID approach that informed the emergence of the Gender and Development (GAD) approach in the late 1970s. GAD operates on the premise that the problem of women can only be understood by understanding the pattern of relationships existing between the male and female genders in societies. According to its proponents, these relationships are not biologically factored; rather, they are conditioned by the prevalent socio-cultural and ideological practices of societies (Elson 1991; Østergaard 1992). This suggests that there is a conceptual difference between ‘sex’ and ‘gender’. Sex is the biological composition of a being, which is unchangeable, while gender is a societal (human) construct employed to determine social roles based on sexual difference; the latter is changeable. As such, Ann Whitehead, one of the prominent advocates of GAD perspective, insists that:

No study of women and development can start from the viewpoint that the problem is women, but rather men and women, and more specifically the relations between them. The relations between men and women are socially constituted and not derived from biology .... in this connection sex is the province of biology, i.e. fixed and unchangeable qualities, while gender is the province of social science, i.e. qualities which are shaped through the history of social relations and interactions (cited in Østergaard 1992: 6).

Thus, the GAD central framework was located in ‘gender relations’ or the idea of ‘gender division of labour and the gender division of access to and control over resources’. Indeed, the prevailing gender relations promote social systems with unambiguous ‘male bias’. For Elson (1991: 3), male bias can be defined as a ‘bias that operates in favour of men as a gender, and against women as a gender’. The net effect of such predisposition is that women are subjected to lower status in the economic structure of societies; they are made to engage in demeaning jobs and side-lined in decision-making processes of the state.

In some of the early writings on the GAD, Jacobs (1991: 51-82) employed the framework to study the resettlement programme in north-eastern Zimbabwe to substantiate the gender relations thesis. She forwards the

argument that resettlement policies were structured not only to undermine women but also to keep them perpetually dependent on men. Dennis (1991: 83-104) also observes that Yoruba women in Nigeria are customarily permitted and encouraged to earn income and support their households autonomously. As such, women often have aspirations to pursue independent self-employment in the informal sector. However, emerging societal conditions frustrate this aspiration as a result of the social construction of gender roles and the promotion of male bias.

The GAD framework has remained influential in more recent studies on women and development in Africa (cf. Walker 2002; Kevane 2004; Dunne 2008; Arbache *et al.* 2010). For example, a World Bank study by Arbache *et al.* (2009: 8-19) on gender disparities within the labour markets in 18 African countries<sup>1</sup> identified a wide gender gap against females in various sectors of the African labour markets. The gaps were attributed not only to cultural and social norms but also to general dysfunctions in African states. In addition, they found that the poor state of girl-child education in Africa also plays a significant role in fuelling gender discrimination in work places, and that gender disparities -- especially in terms of employment opportunities -- are more prominent in urban areas.

Given the foregoing, GAD advocates see the need for women to have a change of attitude and develop a sense of their own identity as a major strategy to eliminate male bias (Elson 1991: 192). They also push for the integration of women into the 'mainstream of economic development' (Østergaard 1992: 10). This gave birth to the concept of 'gender mainstreaming', which the United Nations Economic and Social Council argues as: '... the process of assessing the implications for men and women of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all levels' (UN 1997: 28).

Several criticisms have also followed the GAD approach. For instance, Cornwall (1997: 8-13) argues that the approach is too simplistic in its analysis and fails to answer several questions on gender relations. According to her, it fails to offer profound explanation of, and insight into, relationships among women, and among men in communities. It also fails to

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<sup>1</sup> Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cote d'Ivoire, Cameroon, Ethiopia, Gambia, Ghana, Kenya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritania, Mozambique, Nigeria, Sao Tome and Principe, Sierra Leone, Uganda, and Zambia.



explain the intersection of gender with other differences such as age, status, and wealth. Furthermore, the theory over-problematized males; in a bid to push the agenda of the female gender, men are minimally factored into the analysis, which contradicts the fundamental issues of gender equity that forms the crux of GAD framework. In another instance, Razavi and Miller (1995: 16) argue that the GAD framework neglects the 'concrete relations' that exist between men and women. Therefore, it fails to show a meaningful understanding of the system of co-operation and exchange between men and women in different societies.

The increased interest and awareness of the significance of the environment to sustainable development gave birth in the 1980s to the Women, the Environment and Development (WED) approach. By factoring environmental concerns and imperatives – particularly the emphasis on the impact of environmental degradation on the health and livelihood of women -- the WED approach clearly advanced the preceding approaches. Advocates of the approach believe that while its predecessors explain the hardships encountered by women in developing countries, 'the accelerating degradation of the living environment is the latest and[,] in many ways, the most dangerous of the threats they [women] face' (Dankelman & Davidson 1988: 6). They further posit that environmental degradation is a product of modernization and industrialization championed by the West. Modernization, according to them, has not generated any meaningful development in the developing countries. Rather, it has worsened the lives of people, particularly women, who largely depend on the earth for their livelihoods (Braidotti *et al.* 1994: 1). Due to steady increases in the rates of poverty and unemployment among women, they were often forced to place more pressure on natural resources in a bid to seek alternative livelihoods. In this way, environmental resources are further degraded by human survival activities (Dankelman & Davidson 1988: xii).

WED proponents argue further that despite the significance of women to the environment, women are not recognised in the decision-making process for environmental conservation and sustainable development at the international and national levels. Therefore, they insist that women should be duly recognized in the processes of environmental rehabilitation and sustainability given that they deal extensively with the environment and have the capacity to manage it better (Dankelman & Davidson 1988).

Since the 2000s, the discourse on WED changed subtly to 'Gender

and Climate Change’ (UNDP 2009; Dankelman 2010; Kiptot & Franzel 2011). With this, gender analysis became the focal point for understanding the consequences of climate change with questions such as: ‘Do people face climate change in similar conditions? Do they have the same abilities to deal with it? Will the consequences of climate change affect everyone in the same way?’ (UNDP 2009: 24). To answer these questions, its proponents argue that women particularly have ‘socially conditioned vulnerabilities and capacities’ which make them more prone to the dangers of climate change. Worse still, women lack the capacity to have access to information on early warning and safety measures as a result of ‘cultural limitations’ (UNDP 2009: 27).

In essence, experts have demonstrated not only that some societal factors have shaped and effected environmental destruction and climate change, but also that women have been disempowered with respect to sustainable development (cf. Scandorf 1993; Nyamwange 1993; Babugura 2010; Ribeiro & Chauque 2010). In their case study of Mozambique, Ribeiro and Chauque (2010: 1-2) revealed that power relations determine gender disparity with regards to the impacts of climate change. In Mozambique, persistent droughts have caused the migration of men to neighbouring countries such as South Africa with the resultant effect of increasing the productive work of women in environmentally disadvantaged communities. Similarly, Babugura’s (2010) research in uMzinyathi and uMhlathuze municipalities (South Africa) show that despite the fact that women and men are both dependent on agriculture for livelihood and are generally affected by poverty, women seem to be more affected by climate change due to socially constructed roles and responsibilities. Also, Archer (2010: 267-270) concluded in her work on climate information system in Limpopo Province of South Africa, that there are ‘gendered preferences’ (against women) in accessing the devices for climate information and weather forecast.

Among the criticisms levelled at the WED approach is the argument that it fails to take adequate account of the increased amount of time and labour women would require to ‘save’ the environment (Joekes *et al.* 1994, cited in Goebel 2002: 296). It is also argued that besides natural resources, the approach is too limited since it fails to account for the range of endeavours undertaken by women (Goebel 2002: 296).

## **Contested Achievements**

Despite crucial areas of differences and divergence, the WID, GAD and WED

approaches share a common vision in the value they place on the promotion of women empowerment and gender equality. There is no gainsaying the contributions their collective analyses have made not only in stimulating increased awareness of the plight of women but also in strongly informing the establishment of important institutional frameworks and initiatives on gender equality and women empowerment at both national, regional and global levels. The notable international instruments advanced in this direction include the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) signed by 64 states; the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action agreed upon by 189 states; and the 2000 Millennium Declaration that highlighted gender equality as an effective way to end poverty by 2015 in the developing countries. In Africa, the adoption in 2004 of the Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa (SDGEA) under the platform of the African Union (AU) marked a significant drive toward the promotion of gender equality on the continent. Prior to this, there had been in 1999 the African Plan of Action to Accelerate the Implementation of the Dakar and Beijing Platforms for Action and, in 2003, the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (DESA/UNEC 2007:3; ADF 2008:1).

The frameworks, debates, declarations and instruments notwithstanding, there has been little or no progress (but for a handful of notable political successes) on the promotion of gender equality and women empowerment in Africa during the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Gender equality, the third target of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), is measured by the extent of the education, employment and political participation of females in relation to males in individual states. In Africa, wide gaps continue to exist between males and females in regard to each of those three MDG variables. This is despite noteworthy progress on the empowerment of women in parts of the continent. For instance, the region has achieved a number of landmark accomplishments in the political representation of women such as: the emergence of female presidents in Liberia (Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf since 2005) and Malawi (Joyce Banda in 2012); the emergence of a female Prime Minister in Mozambique – Luisa Diogo – in 2004; and the globally leading high female legislative representations in both the Rwandan and South Africa parliaments. However, despite their individual importance, such accomplishments have not been quantitatively significant within the region. The prevailing norm through

much of the continent remains overwhelmingly that women are severely underrepresented in the politics and decision-making activities of their societies and countries in issue-areas such as education, employment, and political participation.

### ***Education***

Theoretically and institutionally, there is broad-based agreement that women education is generally the best strategy for empowering women and making them relevant to development in society. Education represents a cardinal objective of the MDGs agenda on women, which emphasize gender equality at all levels of education in such a way that females can be well represented in educational institutions. Recent reports suggest that there have been noteworthy improvements in the education of women in the last ten years across the globe. However, with the exception of South Africa, the reverse is the case in many African countries (ADF 2008; UN 2010; World Development Report 2011)<sup>2</sup>. Given the cultural conception and perception of the role of women in African societies, women are still clearly discouraged from acquiring formal education, especially at the higher levels. For instance, in 2005, African girls constituted a disproportionate number of the 72 million children that were out of school in the world (Tebon & Fort 2008: 4). Furthermore, a 2010 study shows that Africa added over 32 million to the world's population of illiterates; of those, 72% were women (UN 2010: 44). Thus, Africa is specifically mentioned as the region lagging behind in closing gender gaps in educational terms in the world (World Development Report 2011: 3).

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<sup>2</sup> Reports at local and international levels point to the fact that steady progress is being made in South Africa on the actualization of gender equality in educational institutions. In fact, girls may have an edge over boys in the schools in some respects. In a 2008 survey, it was observed that although male and female children had equal access to education, slightly more boys than girls attended at primary level (GPI of 0.97), while at the secondary level, girls were more likely than boys to attend school (GPI of 1.06) (see De Lannoy *et al.* (July 2010). *Education: Gender Parity Index*. University of Cape Town; also see UN 2010, *The World's Women 2010: Trends and Statistics*).

At the primary education level, Africa recorded the lowest rates of enrolment of girls compared to boys in the world; this is despite an impressive increase of 16% between 1999 and 2007 at the global level. Although an estimated 73% of primary-school-aged girls and 78% of boys attended school globally in 2007, Central Africa and West Africa performed worst as regions with less than 60% of girls of primary school age attending schools (UN 2010: 53). In another instance, it is estimated that the largest gaps between the boys and girls in primary schools are presently experienced in Africa and South Asia. In 2008, there were approximately 91 girls for every 100 boys in the primary schools in sub-Saharan Africa (World Development Report 2011: 3). Another 2011 report, estimated that girls in Africa have less than 50% chance of proceeding to secondary schools and that the average primary education completion rates for girls stood at 46% compared to the 56% for boys in 2010/2011 (United Nations Girls Initiative 2011: 4). This trend is observable at other levels of education. In Africa, it is estimated that on average 21% of women – as compared to 30% of men -- have acquired secondary or tertiary education (UN 2010: 51). In addition, a 2011 report estimated that for every 100 men, only 66 women are found in tertiary institutions in Africa (World Development Report 2011: 3). Thus, despite some progress regionally, a significant gap continues to exist in the educational opportunities availed to males vis-à-vis females around the continent. Not surprisingly, an estimated average of 41% of African women (as compared to 24% of African men) never had any form of formal education<sup>3</sup> (UN 2010: 75).

## ***Employment***

Based on the MDGs, the extent to which women have wage employment in the non-agricultural sector of national economies can be linked to the level of actualization of gender equality and women empowerment. There is evidence that substantial progress is yet to be made in Africa in this direction. For instance, a United Nations publication – *The World's Women 2010* – reported that African women are mostly found in ‘vulnerable employment’ and low wage informal employment due to very high rates of unemployment in many

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<sup>3</sup> For some countries such as the Republic of Benin, the figures are as high as 80% for females as compared to 57% for males (UN, 2010: 75).

African countries. Vulnerable employment, which comes in the forms of ‘own-account’ and ‘contributing family’ work, involves jobs that are prone to insecurity and also lack social benefits. In East and West Africa, 47% of female employment is ‘own-account’ activities while ‘contributing family’ employment constitutes 32% of female employment (UN 2010: 86-89). Rural and small-scale agricultural activities characterize a significant aspect of these economic endeavours as African women still have limited access to decent and formal non-agricultural jobs owing to historical and multi-dimensional societal stereotypes and female illiteracy.

At 22.7%, women have a substantially lower share of formal employment (and pay) all across Africa when compared to the male gender; and despite the MDG objectives and targets, there were no significant changes recorded in that regard between 1997 and 2007 (ADF 2008: 11). Thus, gender parity in this respect is still clearly out of sight. Given a 2004 report, it was observed that none of the 18 African countries whose employment data were available had achieved the 50% MDG target for gender parity in wage employment (ADF 2008: 12). Malawi’s case signifies the worst examples. In Malawi as in many other African countries, women not only suffer high rates of illiteracy but also are predominantly stereotyped as household makers in the society. Malawian and other African women are often subjected to significant and diverse discrimination at interviews and jobs (Budlender *et al.* 2002 cited in ADF 2008: 13; Isike & Okeke Uzodike 2011:233-235). Thus, women are over-represented in informal employment as street vendors, independent home-based workers, industrial outworkers or waste collectors. It is found that an average of 84% of women – as compared to 63% of men -- in sub-Saharan Africa who are non-agricultural workers are involved in a range of informal employment (UN 2010: 88).

Not surprisingly (given the above context), women are often rendered more at risk against national, regional, and global economic emergencies. In conditions of crisis, formal and legitimate income opportunities are less readily available to women. Indeed, one study concludes that sub-Saharan Africa ranks among the regions in the world that recorded increased gender gaps (especially in the area of vulnerable employment) after the 2008/09 global financial crisis (ITUC 2011: 19; see also Rehn & Sirleaf 2002). Beyond inter-gender differences, there are other important dynamics that influence and shape women’s access and representation in formal employment. As Ndinda and Okeke Uzodike (2012) have shown using the

South African experience, race (ethnicity) is a crucial complicating factor in determining the extent and nature of women's representation in senior and top management positions in South African firms.

Therefore, it may not be enough to merely speak or write about women as a group. Basically, 'the question of women's representation in [formal employment and] top management must always be followed by another crucial query: which women' (Ndinda & Okeke Uzodike 2012:138). Although post-apartheid policy frameworks focussed attention firmly on gender representativeness as a necessary precondition for achieving equality and social justice, women not only remain under-represented as a group in top leadership positions of companies but also experience significant prejudicial treatment in terms of both access and promotional opportunities based on racial consideration. Yes, various post-apartheid South African governments have enplaced or affirmed equity policies aimed at addressing the effects of institutionalised discriminatory policies that disempowered African, Coloured and Indian communities while empowering Whites. Nevertheless, apartheid's race-based legacies and gender divides have remained salient features of the South African social and political environment because the implementation gaps associated with the employment equity policies have resulted in the continuing failure of the system to redress the unequal distribution of benefits and outcomes to the designated groups. Not surprisingly, 'Black women appear least impacted by affirmative action enacted through EEA' (Ndinda & Okeke Uzodike 2012: 138-139). This is because they are often the last choice among the equity candidates (Msomi 2006).

### ***Political Participation***

Women's participation in politics is another notable framework for the measurement of female empowerment. It must be underscored that women representation in politics in Africa varies very widely between countries with truly significant gains and achievements in some and extremely poor performances in many others. Overall, although some levels of progress have been recorded with some African countries ranked amongst the best global performers in the area of political participation by women, the overwhelming state of affairs remains that of a region where women continue to be marginal to effective political participation. For instance, Rwanda ranks first and South Africa is eighth in the category of 'Women in Parliament' in the world going

by the July 2012 report of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU). Furthermore, South Africa also has a good ranking in the classification of 'Women in Ministerial Positions' with a 40% female representation in the cabinet (although not at the 50% target stipulated by regional and international organizations where South Africa is a signatory, the country ranks in the world's top 10) (IPU July 2012). It is also noteworthy that many African countries have adopted quota systems in order to ensure adequate representation of women in the decision-making processes of governments (DESA/UNECA 2007: 11; UN 2010: 116).

In spite of these achievements, there are compelling grounds for concern about women's participation in politics in Africa. Quite aside from the paucity of national success stories, the picture in many other parts of Africa is far less encouraging. In an online discussion with a group of women on this subject-matter, the general complaint from many women was that socio-cultural beliefs, economic dependency and financial difficulty still prevent them from playing active roles in politics (DESA/UNECA 2007: 15). Indeed, even the success cases are not exempt from many of the same challenges. For instance, as the experience in KwaZulu-Natal (South Africa) shows, the neo-patriarchal cultural tendencies that provided the ideological foundations for male domination in the region continue to remain salient in the workplace despite seemingly progressive political and institutional frameworks aimed at bridging the gap between male and female genders. It is for this reason that women are expected or even obliged in the formal workplace to assume and perform roles similar to what they do at home. For instance, Devi Rajab, a female journalist is reported to have insisted that: 'women colleagues are expected to pour tea, organise lunch or serve as helpers in a work situation while conversely, men are expected to behave in a stereotypical manner; namely to automatically assume leadership roles in a mixed group, pay for the business lunch, sit in the front seat of the car or handle serious management issues' (Isike & Okeke Uzodike 2011: 233).

Even where successes have been achieved by women, there are often critical areas of concern. For instance, women face a range of difficulties and marginalization in political parties and during electoral processes (DESA/UNECA 2007:12). Perhaps, this is because political parties are typically structured to maximise the control of the membership by the leadership. Such arrangements have the upshot of fostering patronage and godfathersim, which have the net effect of discriminating generally against



those on the margins or outside the mainstream of the political organization. Often, such victims are usually women, low-status patronage clients, and other members of what we will term ‘power minorities’. A crucial factor underpinning the outlier status of women in politics is the persistence of the assumption that women who venture into politics are intruders in an otherwise male domain. Where they are tolerated such as in South Africa, they are often viewed as social deviants who are daring to acquire power in order to exercise control over men. The resulting efforts to resist such perceived aberrant behaviour often serve to impede the ability of women to carry out their tasks optimally. As one female minister in the KwaZulu-Natal (South Africa) provincial government underscored: ‘Innuendoes targeted at undermining our morality and self-confidence are usually used by our male colleagues both in parliament and in the cabinet to reinforce their superiority even though on the outside they all tend to express belief in the political empowerment of women as a panacea for poverty alleviation’ (Isike & Okeke Uzodike 2011: 234).

Quite aside from being under-represented in the leadership structure of political parties in their countries, women are still commonly intimidated by some male politicians through the use of violence during elections. In Sierra Leone, for example, it is reported that female candidates and supporters are often confronted with the ‘all-male secret societies’ that employ all manners of violence to intimidate and scare them off from elections (Kellow 2010: 6). As a result, there has not been any significant increase in the number of women in the Sierra Leonean parliament since its post-conflict election in 2002. It actually dropped from the meagre 15% representation in 2002 to 13% in 2007 (Kellow 2010: 10). Low representation in the parliament is also rampant in many other African countries. Despite the general euphoria about Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf’s presidential victory in Liberia, less than 14% of the seats in the Liberian parliament were won in the same election by women. In the 2012 Women in Politics report, which shows the situation of women in the parliament by January 2012, many sub-Saharan African countries were in the lowest ranks with less than 20% female membership in parliament. These include the following: Burkina Faso (15.3%), Zimbabwe (15.0%), Gabon (14.2%), Cameroon (13.9%), Swaziland (13.6%), Niger (13.3%), Sierra Leone (12.5%); Chad (12.8%); Central African Republic (12.5%), Zambia (11.5%), Togo (11.1%), Cote d’Ivoire (11.0%), Mali (10.2%), Equatorial Guinea and Guinea-Bissau (10.0%), Kenya (9.8%), Liberia (9.6%), Benin (8.4%), Ghana (8.3%), Botswana (7.9%), Gambia (7.5%), Congo (7.3%),

Nigeria and Somalia (6.8%), Sao Tome and Principe (7.3%), and Chad (5.2%) (IPU 2012).

Additionally, African countries have poor representation of women in their cabinets. Going by the IPU 2012 report, women have less than 15% membership in the cabinet of many countries on the continent: Gabon (14.3%), Cameroon (14.0%), Cote d'Ivoire (13.9%), Mali (13.8%), Congo (13.5%), Zimbabwe (13.5%), Guinea (12.9%), Chad (12.1%), Burkina Faso (12.0%), Zambia (11.8%), Sudan (9.1%), Equatorial Guinea (8.8%), Sierra Leone (7.7%), and Somalia (5.6%) (IPU 2012). Clearly, this has the implication of weakening the opportunities available to women to contribute to national decision processes on political, economic and social development.

In essence then, notwithstanding the efforts of feminist groups through new theoretical approaches, insights and debates about how best to address the issue of women marginalization in society, and despite national and institutional commitments and policies to redress the condition of women and facilitate their contributions to development efforts, African women have remained substantially weak as compared to African men with respect to access to employment opportunities and power resources. As a group, African women are less educated with some of the lowest literacy rates in the world, and they experience greater difficulty in securing employment, earn lower wages than men counterparts, have limited access to social services, and are less likely to access decision-making opportunities in business or government. Perhaps, it is for those reasons that Africa remains the region that is furthest removed from achieving the Millennium Development Goals.

## **Conclusion**

There is no doubt that through their evolution WID, GAD and WED have served as the dominant feminist perspectives that have shaped our understanding of the nature and extent of the factors that have combined to impede the effective participation of women in development activities in countries around the world. This article has examined the theories within the context of the continued poor condition and challenges facing women in Africa.

Indeed, despite the inspirational successes of some African women in a broad range of endeavors – whether business, educational, political and

social and leadership – women in many African countries continue to lag behind many of their peers around the world in terms of health, education, earnings, and access to basic food resources. The net effect of poor access to education, employment, and political participation is that African women suffer a more intense level of poverty than males. This situation is despite institutional mechanisms advanced at international and regional levels to promote gender equality and women empowerment in Africa (and the rest of the world). So, while there have been some pockets of women's successes, very little (if anything) has actually been achieved overall with respect to the overarching objective of improving meaningfully -- as outlined in the MDG framework on gender equality and women empowerment -- the living conditions of women in Africa. Clearly, broad-based and sustained development would be extremely difficult or even impossible in societies where women and the transformative role they can play in the developmental processes of society are not duly recognized and harnessed. Institutional and social-cultural subordination or discrimination against women -- in whatever guises – must continue to be discouraged and targeted for outright eradication. The use of legislative instruments, as is the case in countries such as Rwanda and South Africa, are important steps in the right direction. However, as demonstrated by a growing body of evidence in the South African context, care must be taken to ensure not only that policy pronouncements and objectives are targeted instrumentally and actively on obstacles but also that appropriate oversight arrangements for effective institutional and societal compliance are emplaced.

In pushing an agenda for the promotion of gender equality and women empowerment, there is a need for caution with respect to ensuring that as a region, Africa does not engage in the proverbial quagmire of 'throwing away the baby with the bath water'. There is an emerging and growing evidence that, historically, African women were strongly involved in economic activities while still being able to manage their homes effectively (Isike & Okeke Uzodike 2011: 226-230). Women represent the heartbeat of the family in Africa. Thus, the importance of their role in the family must be better understood, appreciated, recognized and anchored as a desirable and differentiating feature of the African family -- rather than abandoned. It is important to underscore that what obtains and even works effectively in other societies, most especially in the West, may not be completely ideal, applicable or even relevant in the African societal context.

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# **‘Invisible’ and ‘Hidden’ Actors: A Gendered Discourse on Participation in Family-controlled Businesses in Zimbabwe**

**Langtone Maunganidze**

## **Abstract**

African women in general and Zimbabweans in particular, constitute a significant and growing proportion of owners and managers of small enterprises but studies have tended to ignore or downplay their powerful contributions. The purpose of this article is to examine the ways in which women's participation in family controlled businesses have remained invisible or hidden. The article is influenced by Fairclough's (1989) Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Bourdieu's (1994) theory of habitus. Applying a qualitative methodology, the findings are based on an exploratory case study of 10 family businesses selected by purposive availability sampling from the following sectors; transport, hairdressing, retail and general dealing, driving school, manufacturing and security. The article concludes that women particularly wives' exclusion from both management and succession was not accidental but an instrumental calculation, systematic expression of power symmetries and reconfiguration of interests by actors during social interaction. Perhaps the particular invisibility or hiddenness of women's role and influence in family businesses can also be explained by the gendered discourses which have produced an ideologically controlled male narrative on family business. Women represented a hidden and invisible resource that should be recognized to ensure sustainable family businesses.

**Keywords:** discourse, gender, habitus, invisible, hidden, family business.

## **Introduction and Background**

In Africa in general and Zimbabwe in particular, female-owned businesses are still fewer than those owned by males despite the fact that women have been involved in entrepreneurship for a relatively long time. The central argument of this article is that there is no lack of female entrepreneurship, but that it is hidden or rendered invisible through representations about entrepreneurship that tends to be pro-patriarchal. Boserup's (1970) and Rani's (1996) works on the contributions of women to economic development show that women have historically been equally productive but male dominated systems and practices have rendered them invisible or excluded. The lack of female entrepreneurship research is therefore part of a much wider problem which has resulted in the social sciences being structured in a manner which favours the male experience (Carter & Jones-Evans 2000). Women do contribute immensely to the success of family businesses, but are rendered invisible. Women represented a hidden resource and their participation often went unrecorded (Colli 2003). Family business success stories have been stories about men's achievements in which women barely feature. Studies (Dumas 1992; Ogbor 2000; Poza 2001; Carter & Jones-Evans 2000; Colli 2003; Mulholland 2003) demonstrate how the entrepreneurship and family business literature constantly reflects and reinforces the relative silence and invisibility of women in the ideological dialogue that creates entrepreneurial discourse. Embedded in that discourse is the assumption that the leadership involved in founding and running a business is most traditionally male. Perhaps that particular invisibility and hiddenness can be explained by the traditional discourses in entrepreneurship which are so often gender and ethnocentrically biased, and ideologically determined and controlled (Ogbor 2000; Hamilton & Smith 2003).

The main focus of this article is to examine the ways in which women's participation in family-controlled businesses have remained unrecognized and hidden. The article also attempts to demonstrate the systematic marginalisation of wives and other female kin from business leadership at both founder and successor stages. Gender shapes the dynamics of the businesses in many subtle ways including the diversity of background of women in small businesses. For example, in Zimbabwe women tended to be more involved in personal service sectors; hairdressing, small commodity retail and cross-border trade (Wild 1997; Hebink & Bourdillon 2001;

Muzvidziwa 2001). Within a particular business, men tended to do more hiring and firing, sourcing new markets and mostly performing tasks connected with budgeting and planning. In her analysis of ‘entrepreneurial masculinities’, Mulholland (1996) argued that patriarchal forces shaped the role of women in businesses. Women’s domestic labor and feminine ideologies play a fundamental part in the construction of particular masculinities supporting particular entrepreneurial activity. Renzulli, Aldrich and Moody (2000) add weight to this debate by stressing that there are also consistent differences between the social networks in which men and women are embedded and this tended to affect the differential family business start-up rates. Similar observations by Meer (1997) and Mitchell (2004) on South African entrepreneurs were that both men and women were primarily motivated by the need for independence, achievement and material incentives.

Although women are beginning to constitute a significant and growing proportion of owners and managers of small enterprises, studies (Mulholland 1996; Meer 1997; Mbiba 1999; Mtika & Doctor 2001; Mtika 2003); have tended to ignore their important role. In particular the role that the female spouses play in the businesses has often been downplayed by both literature and practice and this article attempts to fill this gap by discussing these so-called ‘invisibles’ and ‘hiddens’, in the form of spouses, sisters and daughters. Apart from helping in raising capital and maximizing trust and loyalty their participation brings in a sense of ‘familiness’ which is an important stabilizing business resource (Carter & Jones-Evans 2000).

The importance of gender dynamics in family business survival, growth and continuity needs both scholarly and practical attention. The problem is that even though there is a notable increase in the participation of females including founding of businesses, research on this aspect particularly in Zimbabwe has been scarce. Where such research exists, it concentrates on experiences from stable economies of either Europe or Asia and studies specifically targeting the role of wives, daughters and sisters particularly in the Zimbabwean context have been limited.

## **Theoretical Orientation**

This article applies Fairclough’s (1989) Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

and Bourdieu's (1993; 1994) theory of *habitus* to examine the gendered exclusionary experiences of women in family-controlled businesses. CDA provides a framework for examining the oppressive constraints and contradictions that operate around ideas of femininity which have pushed women into positions of passivity and silence. Bourdieu proffers a socio-cultural explanation for the gendered nature of exclusions and inclusions. However, the same gendered *habitus* has provided women with a base from which to undermine the very system that constricts them (McNay 1994). Women are more than passive victims of domination as they have managed to reposition themselves through revaluation of their experiences as actors in the businesses.

The entrepreneurial identity of male and female emerges through participation and is constructed socially, culturally and in relation to others. Those identities can be legitimized and undermined at the same time (Foucault 2001). For example, the use of a particular business 'name' depicts gender or power discourses that project dominant practices and value systems of a society (Charsley 1996). Names, such as 'Mushi and Sons', 'MM and Sons' and 'G and M' Brothers project exclusionary gendered tendencies by founders. In line with CDA, these identities show how actors experience a variation of invisibility and hiddenness or their combination in line with changes in social interactions and experiences of participants. In line with social constructionism (Burr 1995), the identities are shifting, negotiated and relational showing the subtle deployments of power within both family and business (Kondo 1990). Primogeniture, gendered socialisation practices including male leadership 'apprenticeships' are also all together part of systematic exclusion that effectively deny ownership or control by women (Mulholland 2003).

The logic of such practice can also be explained by Bourdieu's notion of *habitus* when social actors draw on internalised values that stem from their interaction, mediation and interpretation of convention in making sense of the social world (Mulholland 2003). According to Bourdieu (1994), *habitus* is a set of durable, transposable dispositions which regulate and shape individual thoughts and actions. This *habitus* is gendered because 'men and women hold very different worldviews which lead to different social actions or practices' (Elam 2008: 35 cited in Scott 2009). Business ownership is viewed as a form of symbolic capital, which is tied to 'legitimacy', 'status', and 'power' and that entrepreneurship is conceptualised for women as, 'a

practice, or habituated strategy of action that is legitimised and chosen according to social definitions of status appropriate behaviours and competencies' (Elam 2008: 47 cited in Scott 2009). Fields relate to a structured space of forces and struggles, consisting of an ordered system and an identifiable network of relationships that impact upon habitus of individuals. As certain individuals enter the field, they are more aware of the rules of the game and have greater capacity to manipulate these rules through established capital appropriation. Strategies by the players become meaningful when there is a general acceptance of the 'rules of the game'. Playing the game without questioning the rule, is an effect of symbolic violence (Bourdieu 1994).

## **Methodology**

This article is based on findings from an exploratory case study of ten Harare-based family-controlled businesses selected by use of a purposive availability sampling design. The selected businesses were indigenously owned, managed or controlled by either founders or their subsequent successors. Data analysis is based on the findings of a field work design that was initially conducted between 2004 and 2006. Since then some changes have occurred which could impact negatively on the current findings. In dealing with this limitation, recent follow-up visits to some of the businesses together with the documentary research and content analysis of literature that have been carried out since then, show relative consistency with the initial observations though. The research design primarily utilized qualitative description and analysis focusing on participants' constructions of their world (Jorgenson 1991; von Glasersfield 1991; Steier 1995; Grant & Perren 2002). Yin (1994) made earlier observations that this research design allows an investigation to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real life events.

Qualitative tools used included interviews, observations, informants' historical experiences and author's lived experiences in Zimbabwe. Data was analysed using a thematic or domain technique of case study reporting which captures the content in descriptive and exploratory way. The findings are an outcome of an ethically informed research. Access to family business actors required careful staging and negotiation. Case profiles particularly names of people are presented in pseudo or anonymous identities in order to protect

their rights, interests, sensitivities, and privacy (Finnegan 2003). This is because researchers must not only take into consideration the short term consequence of their work (Mosse 2005; Sridhar & Stirrat 2005) but also be prepared for any possible questions that may be raised in future.

## **Case Background**

### ***G & M BROS Panel Beaters***

G & M Panel Beaters was established by two brothers, Gody and Meck. Located in one of the busiest commercial industrial parks of the city the business deals with vehicle spray painting and panel beating. The founders had a combined working experience of 14 years as mechanics and panel beaters. Gody is the Managing Director and also in charge of finance and administrative issues, while Meck deputizes him and responsible for operations. There are 4 managers; their younger brother, Meck's wife and two non-family members. Gody's wife is not actively involved in the business as she is already working as a full-time nurse in Government. None of their children are involved in the business as they are still in college pursuing various career paths. There is a board of directors comprising three non-family members in a non-executive capacity operating as 'advisors' particularly in legal and financial matters. It has a staff complement of more than sixty permanent members but occasionally engage casuals operating on a shift basis. Although both directors considered succession planning as integral to business continuity, there is no explicit succession plan as it was feared that would cause conflict. They believe that the use of professional management systems would facilitate organizational sustainability beyond their time.

### ***T & M Appreciative Pottery***

Located about 1 km East of Harare City Centre, the company is co-owned by two brothers, Ken and Tau and their nephew Tom and his wife, Jesca. The two brothers have majority shares while Tom and his wife own the rest. No one except Tau had background in the business operations. They are all members of the Apostolic Faith Mission (AFM) a Christian sect with strong

entrepreneurial orientation. The systems are highly informal. They operate what they call ‘running orders’ with exclusive city shops in Harare and with some products being exported to South Africa. Contracts are earned through political and religious networking. From an initial staff complement of only 4 it has grown to 15. Ken is the executive director and is supported by Tom as the sales manager. There are operational teams led by Jessica and responsible for specific processes for example the cutting, glazing and polishing. No other family members are involved either as employees in the management or operations. There was no succession plan at the company although Tom acknowledged that any one of the three founders could lead in the absence of others.

### ***K-C Guard Sec***

K-C Guard Security was established as an equal shareholding partnership in 1993 and co-directed by Kama and Chaka bringing their experiences as private and state security operatives respectively. It has branches in major cities with an administrative support staff in excess of twenty and more than 200 security guards with business contracts with very large public and private corporations. Their wives are non-executive directors. It has six departments; Operations, Administration, Finance, Loss Control, Human Resources and Public Relations that are managed by proper structures but without a formally constituted Board of Directors. There were a few relatives from either director’s kinship lines and employed in various capacities with no explicit or tacit intention to transfer the organization to any of them. Political networks in both public and private sector guaranteed the company new business contracts and retention of old clients. There were no explicit succession plans although spouses’ non-executive directorship roles could easily be translated into an active directorship in the event of any leadership vacuum.

### ***K-G Driving School***

This company was established in 1987 by Ked and his late brother, Gin. After Gin’s death in 2000, Ked sold some shares to one of the founding lady instructors, Mrs Gasa who was already solely managing the Marondera branch by 2006. It began operating with 2 cars and by 2006 it had a total fleet

of 12 and instructor complement of 10. Ked's wife was engaged on full-time basis as a director. Of the three sons, only one who is an accountant was interested in the business and has been subtly receiving leadership 'apprentice-ship' for some time. He appeared the most preferred and potential successor and occasionally assisted his mother in managing the finance side of the business. The eldest daughter is a pharmacist and not involved. Her husband was partially involved in the business advising on marketing issues but already out of the succession running because culturally he would not inherit any family assets as an in-law. The youngest daughter aged 21 was studying computing science at a local university and not involved in the business.

### ***'His' Rib Hair Saloon***

The hairdressing shop is owned by 35-year old, Mrs. Nkosi and located at one of Harare's high density suburb's shopping malls. She said she was motivated by the need for self-sustenance after her husband had left to work in Botswana in early 2000. She had two years of experience in similar environment. By 2005 she had seven permanent workers that included three male and four female hair dressers. The daily operations were fully managed by her younger sister with the assistance of one of the founding hairdressers. She put in place this management arrangement to fill the gap when she would be out of the country either on orders or visiting her husband. According to Mrs Nkosi, planning in this type of environment was rendered useless as they were always at the mercy of highly unpredictable circumstances. No other family member was involved in the business. The husband who was based in Botswana though physically absent was still very influential in decision making. Her sons aged five and seven were still too young to be involved. There was no succession plan but the close association she had with her sister effectively placed her sister in strategic position. However, she said that succession needed to always respect the 'rules' of inheritance to avoid conflict. In her case the business still belonged to the family and their children would also automatically succeed.

### ***Mushi and Sons Bus Service***

Mushi and Sons Bus Service was formed by Mr George Mushi in 1950s but



### *Langtone Maunganidze*

was now owned by one of his sons, James. According to James, his father had been raised up in a polygamous family of three wives with many children. No wife or daughter had been involved in the business. At one time in the early 1980s the fleet had risen to forty eight buses but had declined to four in 2005 after his father's death in 2002. The elder brothers, motivated by greed wanted to exclude younger ones in the running of the business despite their lack of expertise and skill. To resolve the dispute the business shares were divided among the sons and James, who was a bank teller got the bus company in 2006 and continued to operate it under the old name. No other family members are directly involved in the operations. Drawing from guidance from the history of Mushi, James indicated that sons and wives could fully contribute to the continuity of business if properly inducted and supported by systems. There was no nominated or selected successor because that would create conflict among family members. However when time comes one should be appointed on merit not by birth rank as has already been painfully experienced in this business.

### ***Freepace Transport***

Freepace Transport was founded by Mr Mate in 1983. It started operating with one bus primarily providing passenger transport services to commuters between the city, Harare and Wedza a rural service centre less than 100 km away. When Mate died in 1992, the fleet had grown to nine. His wife was not involved in either management or operations of the business and also died three years later. They had five children, three boys and two girls. Since the founder's death there has been notable decline with the fleet having been reduced to three. There had been no clear successor except that the eldest son, Kennedy started performing leadership roles when he was only 21 years old, ahead of his two elder sisters who were working as finance persons. The two sisters got married and left. Kennedy also got married but his wife was not participating in the running of the business. According to him there were no plans to involve her in the business as she was pursuing a teaching career at that time.

### ***Pen Family Bazaars***

Pen Family Bazaars is a supermarket located in one of Harare's high density

suburbs and under a family directorship of 3 brothers and 2 sisters. It was founded by their late mother in 1990 using her late husband's pension benefits and her own savings from informal trading. Since all the brothers were in full employment the elder of the two sisters, Mrs Chiwa was appointed overall supervisor in 2000. She was also the only one who had received sufficient orientation from the late mother and as such had more intimate knowledge on the enterprise than any other. There was an emotional relationship between the business and their family making it mandatory for all family members to respect legacy of unity and cooperation left by their mother. The business belonged more to the family than individuals. The family and business visions were quite in tandem with each other and mutually supportive. Family and business life was perceived as intertwined. Neither children nor spouses were involved in the business.

### ***Warren Moonlight Bar***

The bar was formed in 1995 by 35 year-old, Charles who had a strong retail and general dealing background. He was the youngest brother of the three brothers. His father owned supermarkets and bottle stores both in the city and rural home area a few kilometres outside Harare and this became a springboard for his future entrepreneurial ventures. Upon the death of his father, his estate became a centre of conflict between his brothers. Their mother who was never involved in the businesses moved to stay at one of the rural shops after the businesses were sold and proceeds shared among all the children. Charles started his own beer outlet/bar using his previous experience in the family business but still assisted in the running of one of the remaining family shops in the rural area where his mother stayed. His participation was more of a social obligation than for economic benefits. His own business was doing well and has been transformed into a popular sports bar. His wife who worked for a local commercial bank was not involved in the business. Furthermore, his two sons were still too young and in school to be involved.

### ***MM Hardware***

The hardware was established by Mr. Munake in 1993 through bank loans and savings. After about 5 years he became too preoccupied with his full-

time job and transferred operational management to his wife, Hilda as the Managing Director and two sons, Munake and Runyararo as alternate supervisors. All the employees were non-family members. Management style was relatively non-formalized. Meetings were held as and when issues arose. There was no written down succession plan but the sons' active involvement in the management of the business could provide sufficient preparation for the possible takeover in the event that the founder did not return. According to Hilda the involvement of the children was part of 'apprenticeship' in preparation for possible management take over. It was not clear what would happen if the founder finally retired from his full-time job and return to the business.

## **Discussion**

### ***The 'Invisible' and 'Hidden' Participants***

Actors experience a variation of invisibility and hiddenness or their combination in line with changes in social interactions and experiences of participants (Maunganidze 2008). 'Invisibles' do a lot but are not recognized (Poza & Messer 2001) and often put more effort to improve their chances of possible 'inclusion'. For example, the varied participation of wives at K-G Driving, T & M Appreciative and G & M Panel Beaters show women's direct contributions to the businesses. Invisible participation includes wives 'invisible contributions' through tasks that maintain the family and household. The fact that wives, as illustrated by K-C Guard Sec, Mushi and Sons and Warren Moonlight Bar, were pursuing other careers and not directly involved in the businesses did not necessarily reflect no contribution at all. Their participation could be 'invisible' but hidden. The 'hidden' are passive actors who feel not recognized but conscious of the possibility of being marginalized and exploited. They may express resistance by doing the opposite such as taking up a full-time job outside family business. For example, at G&M Bros Panel Beaters, one of the Directors' (Gody's) wife decided to 'remain a full-time nurse'.

'Invisibles' like spouses may be neither employees nor owners but part of the personal contact network of owners although effectively excluded from succession on the basis of primogeniture. The same personal contact network has been regarded as a business resource. Networks assist small

firms in their acquisition of information and advice (Shaw 1997). Networks have assisted women successfully start and manage their own businesses outside the male dominated structures. Mrs Gasa of the K-G Brothers' Driving School and Mrs Nkosi of 'His Rib' Hair saloon are good cases in point.

### ***The Politics of Inclusion and Exclusion***

Different gender stereotypes continue to exist across all sectors and family firms are not immune. In fact women who work in family firms face more gender related issues than those in the corporate world (Martinez-Jimenez 2009). Unlike in the corporate world, women are not just subordinated employees by virtue of gender but are subordinated to men as wives or daughters. Relations between parents and children and between lovers are all power relations. In line with CDA (Van Dijk 1993), various institutions exert their power on groups and individuals and the latter affirm their identity and resistance to the effects of power. Incorporating women into family business governance structures is an instrumental calculation or craft by husbands and fathers to pacify them into loyalty and deflate resistance. As a response women retreat into 'hidden' postures in order to affirm their identity and resistance. Kennedy's wife (Freepace Transport) and Charles' (Warren Moonlight bar) have decided to pursue different careers. Non-participation works as defence or rebellious mechanism against male dominance. Power can be contested and subject to negotiation. Power relations must be permanently renewed and reaffirmed (Foucault 1980; 1989).

The inclusionary and exclusionary mechanisms are reconstructed conveniently for purposes of mobilizing and controlling women's labor (Mulholland 2003). They are sites of strategic and instrumental calculation as well as sites of exploitative exchanges of services, labour, cash, coercion and violence. 'Family label' was double-edged. It was used as a stabilizing mechanism in the event of potential resistance to any suggested changes to either strategy or structure of the business. The involvement of spouses, daughters and sisters and family business ownership and management was not genuinely collective (Johannison 2000; 2002) but was a myth that serves to mobilize members for continuity and loyalty. Even though participation was not always genuine enough regular conversations created perceptions of

shared beliefs which could be an important stimulant of collective family activity. Family cohesion like all other forms of social group dynamics does not occur by accident. The philosophy of ‘familiness’ (Chrisman, Chua & Zahra 2005) which was maintained through the persistent continuity of family names was partly blamed for the marginalization of female participants. ‘Familiness’ was considered a myth and intended to mask inequalities across levels in the organization. It acts as a technique or ‘strategem’ (Bailey 1980) of sustaining the power and domination of a ‘monolithic’ knowledge (Ogbor 2000). It is just a social label and related ideology that masked the unequal nature of actor relationship in the family business.

‘Familiness’ as a form of entrepreneurial identity might be better understood from the concept of self as relational, multiple and contradictory. ‘It is not a fixed “thing”, it is negotiated, open, shifting, ambiguous, the result of culturally available, power-laden enactments of these meanings in everyday situations’ (Kondo 1990: 24). It is not easy to assess the level of ‘familiness’ in a business by way of the number of family members participating or not participating. Using the social constructionist orientation, one discerns some fuzziness or plasticity of family boundaries; since ‘family’ as a gradient term, is applicable to various individuals in varying degrees (Jorgenson 1991). Most family business leaders preferred brothers and sons to daughters to take over their businesses for continuity of family name. Some male founders were even reluctant to pass on the ‘relay’ baton to spouses but rather to their sisters particularly unmarried ones who were believed to be loyal and committed to the family vision and without any risk of losing the family assets to her husband. Sisters are often considered ‘honorary men’ and brothers have tended to co-partner them. For example, Mrs Chiwa of Pen Family Bazaars is co-directing the company with her brothers. This was because a young widow could remarry and have all the assets transferred to another man’s family name. Actors are redefining their positions consistent with new demands of the environment.

### ***Women’s Entrepreneurial Orientations***

Some elements of entrepreneurial behaviour may be weak and others strong. Bourdieu’s *habitus* explains why people of different genders are located in

particular ‘social positions’. Women approach business start-up from very different social positions, characterized by different sets of resources and different rates of returns. Therefore, factors such as age, gender, experience and education, as well as ‘social positions, worldviews and dispositions’, could predict whether someone becomes an entrepreneur or not. The gender interaction model actually reduced women’s prospects of starting a business. The ‘national gender culture’ (i.e. the role of women and men) and the *habitus* worldview then influence women’s entrepreneurial orientation (Scott 2009). For example, of the 10 businesses selected for this study only two are first generation or founded by females. The only females who were both owners and managers were found at ‘His Rib’ hair saloon, a traditionally female oriented career and the other one, a supermarket, Pen Family Bazaars.

The ‘invisibility’ of women (Cole 1997) in family businesses is not only due to the continuing stereotyping and discrimination that are the result of prejudices in society but partly due to women’s own limiting attitudes toward their own potential and attitudes derived largely from the way they have been socialized which Dumas (1992) termed the ‘glass ceiling’ syndrome. Mrs Chiwa tended to believe her role in the business was to provide stability for the benefit of her brothers who were the natural successors. In fact, the case of ‘HIS RIB’ saloon and Mrs Gasa’s sole management of a driving school in which women in their own right have started and managed their own businesses, do not render support to this ‘glass ceiling’ (Dumas 1992). Women particularly wives and daughters do not advance as quickly as men and remain in lower level positions and tended to see themselves as not successful successors. Women remain ‘hidden’ and feel not recognized and appearing quite content with this absence (Poza & Messer 2001). For those who would have died, their contributions would remain ‘hidden heritage’ and systematically obliterated from records.

## **Governance**

All the family businesses in this study were directed and controlled by family members. Given the connection between the family and business, family relationships have to be managed in addition to business issues (Cadbury 2000; Pieper 2003). Families can exercise influence through leading and or

controlling the business by means of such management and or governance participation.

In this study there is no evidence of genuine or effective Boards of company directors. Often lists of company directors included spouses, children, parents and other relatives but most of them were unaware of such arrangements. All the 10 businesses selected for this study were officially registered and had lists of ‘company directors’ whose invisibility was even most pronounced at succession stage. In 5 of the 8 male-owned businesses, wives were officially registered company directors but very inactive and benefits associated with such positions only accruing to them indirectly. They neither attended business meetings nor played any advisory roles. As a discursive construct, the Directors were appointed to act as either symbols of modernity or professionalism and rhetoric of inclusion that provided images and character to ‘familism’ (Shawver, 2004). There were only three businesses where an attempt to introduce ‘genuine’ board members was evident. Examples of such boards are found at K-C Guard Sec, G & M Bros Panel Beaters and T & M Appreciative Pottery. These were unique and relatively uncharacteristic of most indigenous family influenced businesses. They operated on partnership basis and in such cases the role of the Board, which is composed of family and non-family members, would ensure equitable distribution of power and control. They were all in first generation and founded by people who had recently retired from full-time employment and with relatively previous contact with concepts of strategic planning and corporate governance.

Participation of family members particularly spouses is both an ideological and political. The name of the business was one of existing discourses or representations that rendered women invisible. For example out of the ten selected only two, Warren Moonlight Bar and Freespace Transport were not explicitly masculinist. By involving their spouses, the founder or owner-manager creates a sense of ‘collective entrepreneurship’ or ‘involvement’ (Johannisson 2000; 2002) that engenders a sense of cooperation and shared vision necessary for business continuity. This is a kind of impression management. Such machinations by husbands to construct their spouses’ visibility are numerous. KG Driving School, K-C Guard Sec Security and G & M Panel Beaters are cases in point. All these are partnerships and in each of them the spouse of the other core-owner manager was not actively involved in the management of the business. Presumably the

spouses can be visible as long as they do not challenge the power of the 'CEO' (Poza & Messer 2001). Even where they started their own businesses, due to patrifocal influence women 'owners' would seek authority from spouses regarding key business decisions like relocation, expansion, diversification or disposing of the business. These are the experiences and perspectives of the situation in which wives find themselves. Mrs Nkosi's own illustration is a good example; *'My husband may be physically out of the country but involved in the key decisions of this small business. It's as if I report to him about my own business!'*

## **Succession**

This research supports previous literature (Cole 1997; Keating & Little 1997; Stavrou 1999; Vera & Dean 2005; Martinez-Jimenez 2009) that shows women not being chosen as successors into ownership or management positions in the family business. Most successions are based on primogeniture which dictate one gaining access to the helm of a firm based on birth order. Knowledge of family history, birth order and gender were identified as the key successor attributes. Gerontocratic and patriarchal values that are deeply entrenched in the family (Birley 1986; Cheater 1986; Wild 1997) impacted on the character of succession. Institutional constraints in the form of cultural and environmental considerations were identified as a key family business survival variables (Manolova & Yan 2002; Ukaegbu 2003; Mtika 2003). Succession is culturally influenced in that the business was part of the family property and assets and would be owned by everyone and the eldest son would be expected to hold the assets in trust for the benefit of all. In some cases like Pen Family Bazaars, business premises naturally became family residential property rendering any succession plans irrelevant.

Historical patriarchal rules of inheritance and property rights in Zimbabwe have had a significant bearing on the nature and extent of the succession process (Mbiba 1999). Although most business leaders appreciated the need to appoint successors on the basis of knowledge of business and related experience, they still argued that the family name was built by the business and everyone was expected to endeavour to protect that 'identity' as an obligation. Sisters and daughters could be married and that would create an additional problem as their spouses and siblings would also



expect to benefit from any succession arrangement. Passing on the business to a female would sound the death knell of the family name! Succession would equally follow the same principle. It is a relational and even protracted process. Successors, regardless of gender, were expected to be images of founders and with a moral obligation to ensure business continuity. Given the founder's position, his or her values can be continued by the rest of the family, whether or not the founder remains actively involved in the business.

This type of family and business culture and values were characteristic of the company's founder (Gallo 2004), which he practised and succeeded in passing on to the next generations. Therefore, it is not only the characteristic of the founder and incumbent leader which significantly influenced the character of the firm in the next generation but 'gendered habitus'. Very few females would have received the 'basic leadership apprenticeships' (Mulholland 2003) needed to prepare them for succession. Succession alters the processes and outcomes of entrepreneurial development and orientation (Haverman & Khaire 2003). Female successors among indigenous businesses are generally scarce. In this study, all the successors of the businesses in both second and later generations were males; mostly sons and brothers. This was not accidental. Children, particularly sons have rights to their father's wealth under patriliney to the extent that at the death of the father, the eldest takes charge of the father's wealth (Stafford 2000) and even succeeds as head of the family with decision making powers. Property ownership and management transfer would normally follow the Shona (one of the Zimbabwean dominant ethnic groups) cultural rules of inheritance and succession, where successor or heir apparent are 'fixed' by 'gender' or 'birth order' practice of succession. The oldest surviving son, provided he was of age, succeeds to his father's name and assumes control of the estate of his deceased father for the benefit of its members. The situation at Freepace is a case in point where the late founder's eldest son, Kennedy was only twenty-one years old when he assumed leadership functions following the death of his father ahead of his elder sisters.

## **Conclusions**

This article has shown that participation in family businesses is continuously reconstructed as actors negotiate for social space and identity in the light of

the permeating power dynamics of gender. The unequal ownership and management practices are bound by a convention of habitus of cultural practices that have influenced the entrepreneurial orientations. Due to women's social positions, world views, experience and previous orientation most women have engaged in personal service sectors that include hairdressing, small commodity retail, cross-border trade which have traditionally been feminist-oriented. They have also participated in family businesses as either secretarial assistants or 'emotional' caretakers or managers (Mulholland 2003). Such practices have rendered women either invisible or hidden.

One of the key conclusions to emerge from this study was that; not all the 'family' businesses were genuinely collective. Various machinations and taken-for-granted practices have become one of the existing discourses or representations rendering women invisible or hidden in ownership, governance and succession practices. Family involvement as reflected by the composition of Boards of Directors was a rhetoric, myth and ideology meant to ensure sustainable cohesion and cooperation from all actors (Hamilton 2004). 'Familism' was an instrument of social capital accumulation (Jenssen & Kristiansen 2004) often working as a labour mobilization and control strategy. As a result, the immense contribution of women in founding and running businesses has been 'invisible' or 'hidden' (Ogbor 2000; Poza & Messer 2001). The 'collective' nature of participation was a social construction arising out of the interactions whose outcome was influenced by the dominant actors.

Women's invisibility or hiddenness is not accidental but a systematic expression of power symmetries and reconfiguration of interests by actors during social interaction (Mulholland 2003). The invisibility may not necessarily reflect systematic exclusion but women's acts of redefining their identity and restoring their independence albeit the traditionally marginalising and exploitative relations of production. It may be a form of resistance to male dominance (Foucault 2001). The article reflects that women's contribution is still either ignored or presented in stereotypical feminized forms both in literature and practice. It provides new insights into the understanding of the nature and extent of women's invisibility and hiddenness in family-controlled family businesses.

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# **Submission, Experience, Empowerment and Human Rights: The Position of Christian Women**

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## **Abstract**

Feminist research has moved the problems of representation and power in gender discourses from the margins to the centre of methodological/epistemic concerns in understanding humanity. This move is premised on the epistemic angle that stems from the idea that women's experiences should be the starting point for understanding society, by asking women to reveal their experiences in detail and also by critically deconstructing dominant texts, which continues to subjugate women. This article offers a critique, ethnographically grounded and textually expanded to show how patriarchal ideology is inscribed in particular texts and how the Christian churches have decoded such texts. It does so by attempting to show how women's empowerment is being constrained by a narrow and one-sided interpretation of the same tool, the Bible (an instrument of liberation and empowerment), and highlights the ways in which Christian women have been represented in the Bible through the concept of submission. It further problematises the concept of Christian women's empowerment versus submission and the challenges this pose to the women exercising their rights to practice Christianity.

**Key words:** Equality, human rights, submission, gender, Bible

## **1. Introduction**

Feminist research has moved the problems of representation and power in gender discourses from the margins to the centre of methodological and



epistemic concerns in understanding humanity. This move is premised on the epistemic angle that stems from the idea that women's experiences should be the starting point for understanding society. As a researcher and practitioner in the field of religion, I believe that significant dimensions in the battle over women's rights and gender issues in general are still unattended to<sup>1</sup>. As researchers and Christian women, we cannot continue to unwittingly embrace dominant ideologies and their one-sided interpretations that subjugate women and keep them at the margins of society and humanity. Such interpretations (as I will show) are enshrined with heavily encoded texts, which hinder the empowerment of women. According to Gramsci (1971:12), such hegemonic texts are the 'spontaneous consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group' which directly or indirectly steer people to accept and interpret in line with the status quo endorsed by the dominant interests. People have come to accept what Brummett (1991: 72-73) calls 'inherited interpretive traditions' as a result of their membership in interpretive communities (in this case, the Christian church), which is a loosely connected social group, where the members share interpretive codes and strategies (Radway 1984). These interpretive codes provide hegemonic common sense by which people come to read and popularise dominant meanings in a culture (Mailloux 1985).

There is agreement on the fact that the Christian tradition generally is enshrined with practices and ideologies that continue to subjugate women and place them under the authority of men (Ruether & Keller 1986; Schüssler Fiorenza 1983; Doughs 1974; Pagels 1989). Christian women (the methodologically and epistemologically relevant for this research) encounter challenges on a daily basis as they strive to function within these interpretive communities. As a result, women's subordination continues and women carry on living unfulfilled lives. Those who struggle to overcome these challenges and exercise their God-given authority are labelled by some Christian authorities as rebels (as seen in the case of Deborah below). They refer to the book of Genesis 3:16, where God was speaking about the woman, after both Adam and Eve sinned in the garden of Eden: 'your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you'. Unknown to most religious practitioners,

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<sup>1</sup> As academic but also as Christian female pastor in ministry, I am confronted with these issues regularly and I am writing this article from an insider's perspective to bring the challenges we face in this regard to the fore.

scholars and Christian women, texts such as these were produced in patriarchal cultures. Most if not all religious literature came into being in patriarchal societies and scribal communities of men. With regard to the ideological level of the text, many also do not realise that this interpretation of the traditional patriarchal situation was groundbreakingly challenged and changed in the light of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The woman's authority was restored alongside man's ability to approach the throne of God directly and both men and women were reconciled to God. This is clearly captured in this verse: 'For the son of man came to seek and save what was lost' (Luke 19:10). The offer of the gospel's salvation is available to all irrespective of gender. In addition to this gap in research, there has been a lack of attention to the conceptual dimensions of Christian women's rights (Condit 1989; Hunter 1987). We need to go beyond the essential need of every human being to connect with the supernatural to understand how certain biblical texts are hindrances to the advancement of women and their general fulfilment in life. The inability of many Christian women to progress and occupy leadership positions in the churches (and religious organisations and institutions) is a result of the reluctance to confront the most fundamental issues of gender inequality among men and women in their religion. For centuries, Christian women have been subordinated to the authority of hegemonic misogynistic churches, which have been facilitated by the patriarchal world-ordering belief systems, which were produced to uphold male power and authority and favour the subordination of women (Schüssler Fiorenza 1983).

This article offers an ethnographically grounded and textually expanded critique of the ways in which Christian women have been represented in the Bible through the concept of submission. I will use certain biblical examples as well as ethnographic examples as a starting point to interrogate human rights, and the position of women vis-à-vis our own Christian religion. Several questions are crucial here: have women been privileged in texts? Why have Christian women's voices not been heard despite attempts by some women to speak out? How does the subordination of Christian women contradict the Biblical stance on equality? The article further problematizes the concept of women's empowerment versus submission and the challenges faced by women in exercising their right to be human. I shall also draw on some seminal biblical texts and draw on them with regard to the value-orientations that they espouse with regard to gender relations. Granted that the Bible (as is the case with virtually all religious

texts) came into being and were produced in patriarchal societies, favouring male dominance – it nevertheless inherently also contains liberating perspectives. The liberatory perspectives are usually based on the very human assumptions accompanying beliefs about human equality irrespective of race, gender or cultural position in life.

## 2. Privileging Women's Experience

Feminist research places the social construction of gender at the centre of its inquiry (Lather 1988). A feminist standpoint is not the same as a woman's experience, situation, or perspective but rather 'the achievement of an epistemologically informed perspective resulting from struggle by or on behalf of women and men who have been dominated, exploited, or oppressed' (*Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy* 2005). This epistemology involves thinking from the perspective of women's experience, especially women who have been oppressed by specific monotheistic religious beliefs.

Gobo (2008:54) states that feminist ethnographies 'should give emancipatory intent to research, which should aim at the conscientization of women so that they become aware of their inequality, and empower them to free themselves from oppressive social constraints'. Such research should be focused on interrogating and dismantling the ideologies that continue to subjugate women. It should bring to the fore, who the authors of written texts are and the various contexts under which such texts are (or were) written. Research in the early 1970s highlighted concerns about how to represent women's rights as part of research. Privileging experience became paramount in the work of Lees (1996) amongst others, who argued that asking women to reveal their experiences in detail was undertaken on the understanding that the results would be used to try and change the present situation where women are disbelieved and humiliated by the judicial system. Christian feminists also advocate for a radical interpretation of texts and offer 'feminist alternatives' (Finger 1987) and read traditional sources 'in a different key' (Schüssler Fiorenza 1983).

For feminist-based research, both ethics and epistemology are intricately linked. Research must begin with excluded voices and be conducted by women for the representation of women. In other words, the object of research and the subject of research must stay on the same epistemological terrain (Mohanty 1998: 55).

### **3. The Gendered Nature of Religion**

Generally speaking, gender is an underlying principle of human organisation and existence; it determines the way we dress, act and think. Addressing women, on this matter, the male, Paul the apostle states, 'I also want women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or expensive clothes, but with good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship God' (1 Timothy 2:12). *This instruction given to women by Paul on how to dress further demonstrates the unequal nature of gender power relations and the impact of dominant hegemonic interpretive codes in the Christian community on women.* Gender is a crucial and fundamental issue in religion because it shapes the problems and all forms of religious orientation; it defines the concepts, and determines behaviours. My standpoint is that gender from a religious perspective has been biased and has placed the male gender in a privileged position, weakening and devaluing the position of women and their contribution. Gender ideology is instrumental and present in all forms of religion and failure to engage with it is tantamount to denying women their rights to equal religious participation and freedom. Elizabeth Johnson (1993: 67) has likened this gender bias to a buried continent whose subaqueous pull shaped all the visible landmass; androcentric bias has massively distorted every aspect of the terrain and rendered invisible, inconsequential, or non-existent the experience and significance of half the human race.

Religion is one area that needs a careful, critical and feminist analytic eye because it continues to effectively enshrine gender hierarchy and promote the suppression of women, the world over. Under the guise of patriarchy, women are conceptualised as weak and as the sex that needs protection. In exchange, they have given up their rights. Due to male dominance in religion, Christian women cannot engage intellectually in church. They are relegated to their own organisations if they are not kept silent and only allowed to interact with their husbands in religious matter. She is told to keep quiet and ask her husband afterwards at home. The woman is submissive, needs protection from physical and emotional attack, and from spiritual deception, she is to be obedient to male authority and maintain a quiet and tranquil spirit even in the face of a disruptive male presence (Bineham 1993: 520). The problem with the gendered nature of religion is that it is read off from the traditional texts and traditions as used in faith communities and faith

traditions – and these normally privilege the male gender while subordinating women to secondary roles in family life, societies as well as in religious organisations.

#### **4. Are Men and Women Equal Before God?**

The theoretical framework for discussion here is Christian Egalitarianism which holds that all people are equal before God and in Christ, have equal responsibility to use their gifts and obey their calling to the glory of God, and are called to roles and ministries without regard to class, gender, or race. Paul in one of his writings stated that ‘there is neither Jew nor Greek, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus’ (Galatians 3: 28). Jesus himself treated women with dignity and paved the way for both sexes to be treated equally. He treated women as equals with men. In Luke 13:16, Jesus called the woman he healed from the spirit of infirmity which had left her crippled for 18 years, ‘a daughter of Abraham’, according her equal status with all those males and females who have faith in God such as Abraham had. He also corrected the privileging of men in the matters of divorce, which was contrary to the Law of Moses, which allowed a man to divorce his wife at the expense of the resulting hardship for women. In Mark 10:4 we read: ‘They said, Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce and send her away’. In Mark 10:9, he said none of them had the right to separate in divorce because in the beginning God made them male and female. In verses 11 and 12, Jesus made it very explicit: ‘Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her. And if she divorces her husband and marries another man, she commits adultery’. Jesus was very categorical, stating that neither of them had the right to divorce; because God’s plan from the beginning was for them to be together for life. With these statements he was radicalising the Jewish legal requirements for divorce and also did so with regard to humanitarian concerns of women.

In the ancient world, widows or divorced women mostly did not have any social structures that protected them – unless they would marry again and become part of a household, in some cases as a second wife. A woman’s struggle to survive after the death of her husband is exemplified through the life of Ruth in the Christian Bible. Ruth was one of the wives of Naomi’s son who died. After his death, Naomi requested that both Ruth and the other wife,

Orpha return to their native land where there was a possibility of a home and a husband. But Ruth pledged her loyalty to remain with Naomi until her death (Trible 1992: 844). Ruth and Naomi went to Bethlehem at the beginning of the barley season where Naomi initiates a plan to secure Ruth a home and a husband through Boaz. Boaz 'redeems' Ruth after making sure a nearer relative does not want to 'purchase' her and eventually married her and had a child named Obed, 'the restorer of life' (Trible 1992: 845). In Judean society, men were not allowed to talk to women except their wives. Jewish women were not only excluded from leadership roles; they were also excluded from sitting with males in the religious gathering and were forbidden to hold and read sacred scrolls. Accordingly, they were not allowed to testify in court trials, could not go out in public, or talk to strangers. The gospel that Jesus proclaimed changed this law by allowing women to spread the gospel. After the resurrection, he appeared to women. He allowed women the right to meet with other people and commissioned them. In the Christian Scriptures we read:

After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb. There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightening, and his clothes were white as snow. The guards were still afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men. The angel said to the women, 'do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; he is risen, just as he said. Come see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples: 'he has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you to Galilee. There you will see him'. Now I have told you. So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples. Suddenly Jesus met them. 'Greetings', he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him. Then Jesus said to them, 'do not be afraid. Go tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me' (NIV Mathew 28.1-10).

After his resurrection, Jesus appointed the first set of female apostles with the instruction 'go tell my brethren'. An apostle is one who is sent by the Lord. He commissioned the women to spread the good news of the resurrection,

one of the seminal beliefs of Christians. He called his disciples ‘brethren’ and privileged the two women with information, thereby giving them authority.

Jesus also openly stood against the unjust ways in which women were persecuted for sin while their ‘sin partner’ (male) was not held responsible or punished.

The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group and said to Jesus, ‘Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?’ They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him. But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. When they kept questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, ‘if any of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her’. Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground. At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there. Jesus straightened up and asked her, ‘woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?’ ‘No one, sir,’ she said. ‘Then neither do I condemn you’ Jesus declared. ‘Go now and leave your life of sin’ (John 8: 3-11).

Under the Jewish law of the time, women were not allowed to be taught. Rabbi Eliezer wrote in the 1<sup>st</sup> century: ‘Rather should the words of the Torah be burned than entrusted to a woman ... whoever teaches his daughter the Torah is like one who teaches her obscenity’<sup>2</sup>. Through the ministry of Jesus, women were given the equal opportunity to study.

As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman called Martha opened her home to him. She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord’s feet listening to what he said. But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, ‘Lord, don’t you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!’

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<sup>2</sup> Women in the Bible. Available at: [www.bibleufo.com/anomwomen.htm](http://www.bibleufo.com/anomwomen.htm). (Accessed on 18 September 2011.)

‘Martha, Martha’, the Lord answered, ‘you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her’ (Luke 10: 38-42).

In other words, Jesus was teaching about the emancipatory power of education. He called it ‘the better,’ and said that it was something precious that could not be taken away from Mary. Education has been conceptualised as having an empowering and emancipatory effect on women and has the ability to overcome gender inequality. Women’s empowerment is the process by which women collectively come to recognise and address gender inequalities which stand in the way of their advancement in terms of equal access to resources and full participation in power structures and decision-making (Longwe 1998). In agreement with Longwe, Ojong and Muthuki (2010) noted that education is a corner stone to women’s empowerment because it enables them to respond to opportunities, challenge their traditional roles and change their lives.

A detailed examination of some Old Testament as well as some New Testament scriptures and church practices tell a different story of the role and place of women in religion and the church. Rather than continuing to endorse the lifestyles of historical Christian women, our current roles are a regression of over two thousand years.

A case in point is found in the book of Romans 16.7: ‘an account of the work of a female Apostle (Junias); greet Andronicus and Junias, my relatives who have been in prison with me. They are outstanding among the apostles, and they were in Christ before I was’. This scripture stands out as proof that women in the New Testament occupied key positions in the church even before Apostle Paul was called.

An Old Testament account of how women stood up and fought for their rights is found in the book of Numbers 27:1-11:

The daughters of Zelophehad son of Hephher, the son of Gilhead, the son of Makir, the son of Manasseh, belonged to the clans of Manasseh son of Joseph. The names of the daughters were Mahlah, Noah, Hoglath, Milcah and Tirzah. They approached the entrance to the tent of meeting and stood before Moses, Eleazar the priest, the leaders and the whole assembly, and said, ‘Our father died in the



desert. He was not among Korah's followers, who banded together against the Lord, but he died for his own sin and left no sons. Why should our fathers name disappear from his clan because he had no sons? Give us property among our father's relatives'. So Moses brought their case before the Lord and the Lord said to him, 'what Zelophehad's daughters are saying is right. You must certainly give them property as an inheritance among their father's relative and turn their father's inheritance over to them. Say to the Israelites, 'if a man dies and leaves no son, turn his inheritance over to his daughter. If he has no daughter, give his inheritance to his brothers. If he has no brothers, give his inheritance to his father's brothers. If his father has no brothers give his inheritance to his nearest relative in his clan, that he may possess it. This is to be a legal requirement for the Israelites, as the lord commanded Moses'.

The above text portrays how religion in society has disadvantaged women vis-a-vis their male counterparts and how these women were able to rise above the position that society had placed them in by going to those in authority and demanding that laws that favoured men over women be revisited. Although it was not customary for women to speak out in the assembly of believers at the time, Zelophehad's daughters spoke out; it caused Moses to ask God what to do, since the laws of inheritance made no provision for women. God told Moses that they were right to have asked for their inheritance and although women could not still inherit directly, it was the first step towards gender equality and the emancipation of women. One would expect contemporary women to be proactive in fighting for their rights as these women did. Women need to stand up against the disadvantaged position that has been assigned to them based on the Bible and the Christian religion, and advocate for equality not just in theory, but like the daughters of Zelophehad – amongst many other examples in the religious texts – they should stand together and take emancipatory action.

## **5. Questioning the Submission of Christian Women**

Christian biblical traditions of women's submission and the authority of men have been in existence from the time of the Old Testament. In this section, I intend to highlight the fact that Christian women have not always heeded this

ideal of complete submission<sup>3</sup>, both from the standpoint of expectations and their experiences.

In 1Corinthians 14:34 -35, Paul writes: ‘Women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission as the law says. If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church’. The Weymouth New Testament captures it profoundly: ‘Let married women be silent in the churches for they are not permitted to speak. They must be content with a subordinate place, as the law also says’. In Colossians 3:18, Paul wrote, ‘Wives, submit to your husbands as it is fitting in the Lord’. If we engage these texts critically, the submission of women is supposed to be ‘as to the Lord’. Women according to this scripture cannot be passive recipients and endure abuse from men under the guise of submission. As it is fitting in the Lord could also mean that she has the right to stand up for what she believes is right in the eyes of God and if God approves of it, she should resist a husband’s ways which are hindrances to her rights of being human. One of such rights being; the right to decent treatment and dignity and not abuse. This in principle embedded in the fact that the patriarchal text bases the husband’s authority in the relationship of Jesus with the church – which obviously is one of ultimate service and not abuse. The scripture makes it clear that women do have some recourse and not submit to exploitative and abusive relationships and ways that destroy their lives. Passive submission according to this text is a distortion of the biblical concept of submission. This would mean that a wife is not obligated to obeying the husband if it is contrary to what God expects of her. Acts 5: 29 (we must obey God rather than men) aids our understanding of how women ought to obey their husbands ‘as it is fitting’ in the Lord and show us what to do when a choice has to be made between obeying God and a human being, including men. In matters of teaching and learning, Paul said, ‘A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent’ (1 Timothy 2:2). This statement is highly problematic from an epistemological and conceptual perspective. This is because it stands in sharp contrast to the prophecies recorded in the book of Joel 2:2 and Acts 2: 16-17 which all state that men and women will prophesy

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<sup>3</sup> The verb translated ‘submit’ (Colosians 3:18; Greek, ‘hupotasso) carries the implication of voluntary yieldedness to a recognized authority.

equally. The word prophesy means ‘to teach, instruct, or speak by divine inspiration’. I interpret this to mean that a woman who is prophesying is playing a leading role in the church and is teaching both men and women. The women who understand this have taken up this opportunity as demonstrated in the section below.

## **6. Were Women always Silent?**

Women have rarely completely or unconditionally accepted the patriarchal ideology of femininity that commands total submission of the wife to the husband. 1 Samuel 25 speaks about Abigail who usurped her husband Nabal’s authority and saved her life and that of her children. The Bible describes her as an intelligent and beautiful woman and Nabal her husband as mean and surly. In verses 10 and 11, we are told that Nabal refused to give food and drinks to David’s servants and instead hurled insults at them. Verses 14-19 states:

One of the servants told Nabal’s wife Abigail: ‘David sent messengers from the desert to give our master his greetings, but he hurled insults at them. They did not mistreat us, and the whole time we were out in the fields near them nothing was missing. Night and day they were a wall around us all the time we were herding our sheep near them. Now think it over and see what you can do, because disaster is hanging over our master and his whole household. He is such a wicket man that no one can talk to him’. Abigail lost no time. She took two hundred loaves of bread, two skins of wine, five dressed sheep, five seahs of roasted grain, a hundred cakes of pressed figs, and loaded them on donkeys. Then she told her servants, ‘go on ahead; I will follow you’. But she did not tell her husband Nabal.

She was praised for her actions in verses 32-34:

David said to Abigail, ‘praise be to the lord, the God of Israel, who has sent you today to meet me. May you be blessed for your good judgement and from keeping me from bloodshed this day and from avenging myself with my own hands. Otherwise, as surely as the lord, the God of Israel, lives, who has kept me from harming you, if

you had not come quickly to meet me, not one male belonging to Nabal would have been left alive by daybreak’.

The Bible also gives us a good example of a married woman’s leadership in the book of Judges. Deborah was a judge and a prophetess (Judges 4:4): ‘Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lappidoth, was leading Israel at the time. Men under her dispensation depended heavily on her guidance and leadership’. In verse 8, Barak says to her, ‘if you go with me, I will go; but if you don’t go with me, I won’t go’. Israel depended on her leadership and guidance even though she was a married woman. During the leadership of Moses, there was also a woman leader in the ranks. ‘Then Miriam the prophetess, Aaron’s sister, took a tambourine in her hand, and all the women followed her, with tambourines and dancing’ (Exodus 15: 20). The prophet Joel had predicted that sons and daughters would prophesy, Joel 2:28: ‘And afterward, I will pour out my spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy’.

In the New Testament, we have accounts of women who played leading roles in the church. ‘Leaving the next day, we reached Caesarea and stayed at the house of Philip the evangelist, one of the seven. He had four unmarried daughters who prophesied’ (Acts 21:8-9). In Acts 2:14- 17, Peter stated that prophesy was being fulfilled on the day of Pentecost:

Then Peter stood up with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: ‘fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say. These men are not drunk, as you suppose. Its only nine in the morning. No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: ‘in the last days, God says, I will pour out my spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy’.

In I Timothy 2.12, Paul forbids women from teaching and exercising authority over men. However, within her submission to her respectable and acceptable leader (her husband), women are seen and can teach and question men’s knowledge. This is evident in Acts 18.24-26:

Meanwhile a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was a learned man, with a thorough knowledge of the

scriptures. He had been instructed in the way of the Lord, and he spoke with great fervour and taught about Jesus accurately, though he knew only the baptism of John. He began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Pricilla and Aquila (note Pricilla's name was mentioned first; probably suggesting that she was the one with the teaching grace) heard of him, they invited him to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately.

In all these Biblical texts there are indications of the assertion of women's equality. There is also a wide variety of critical feminist studies on them. See for example Mohanty (1988); Harding (1987); Finger (1987); and Schüssler Fiorenza (1983).

## **7. Examples of contemporary Christian women leadership**

There are other conflicting ideologies related to women occupying leadership positions, which are in congruence with the experience of Deborah (not her real name) who is a Pentecostal pastor and Christian leader in South Africa. She believes she has been called and anointed by God to be a minister of religion. According to her, she approached the pastors of the church she had been attending for seven years and asked to be released or prayed for so that she could start ministering to others outside her church. She was categorically told that this was not possible<sup>4</sup>. The pastors acknowledged that God had anointed and called her – in terms of how these expressions are understood in religious circles – but she could only be ordained and be allowed to minister under the authority of her husband. The pastors invited Deborah's husband to join the church on several occasions without success. She has since left the church and started a ministry which is currently attended by both men and women. Her former pastors continue to question her authority over men; claiming that it is unbiblical. These pastors' interpretations are all indications of literal interpretations of scripture and of leaders who do not engage with their ministry critically. At the time of writing this article, other male pastors had approached her and told her to continue with the calling of God because they say 'God is not a respecter of persons'.

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. Phiri's *Women, Presbyterianism and Patriarchy. Religious Experience of Chewa Women in Central Malawi* (2000:80 - 102).

In our contemporary situation, many women participate in ministry and gain access to public speaking through their husbands. Telecasts hosted by male preachers are sometimes hosted by their wives; for instance Omega Ministries by Apostle Johnson Suleman, Dunamis International Gospel by Dr Paul Enenche, and Kingsway International Christian Centre by Mathew Ashimolowo. However, these women only have access to the airwaves or to publishing in the first place through their husbands and by virtue of the fact that the role of wife and mother in conservative Christian circles is valorised (Rudy 1999). According to Rudy (1999), a woman who is allowed to speak and preach in public, can do so, but only within a complicated web of domestic and cultural dynamics. She is almost completely dependent on her husband for initial public recognition; she can only be seen as a valid public authority in the secondary and submissive role of wife and mother.

This is a clear display of the complexity of gender discourses and the position of women from a religious perspective.

## **Conclusion**

The struggle to achieve the right to equality in religious issues among Christians is one that needs an emancipatory push. Many Christian women are not aware that at the level of the ideology of the text, equality has been granted to them through Jesus Christ and that they need to rise up, fight and claim these rights. Christian women need to claim these rights and to recognise that submission should be mutual; as Paul states in Ephesian 5.21: 'submit to one another out of reverence for Christ'.

One of the conceptual problems that women face is the perpetuation of the continuous patriarchal nature of the concept of women's submission. The continuous struggle for the emancipation of women is not a challenge to men per se but a challenge to Christian ideologies that remain steeped in the traditionalist and foundationalist cultures in which religions became patriarchally conceptualised and intellectualised. These were always be unfriendly to the advancement and upliftment of women and need to be challenged.

As a Christian woman and a scholar, I believe that it is time ordinary Christian women's voices be given scholarly intent in public because religion continues to play significant roles in the lives of women. For decades, women have been given inferior positions in churches under the guise of submission

which hinders them from achieving self-transcendence and spiritual growth and maturity. From a feminist perspective, there needs to be a critical reflection on Christian women's voices in order to achieve a holistic perspective of the role of religion in the lives of human beings. Engaging in this scholarly phenomenon it is important not simply to highlight and document women's experiences and show that they are important as a corrective measure in both scholarship and religion, but also to start engaging in gender issues and to set norms for future engagements. Gender issues need to be dealt with critically and constructively in ways that build society.

In the Christian fold, the success and failure of a Pastor (who in most cases is male) is judged on how supportive his wife is. An anointed Pastor is judged on the prayers of his wife and if he fails it is blamed on his wife. If a pastor commits adultery, it is blamed on the wife's inability to satisfy him sexually. In this context, a woman can only realise her identity through her husband. We need to put a stop to the beliefs and practices of both male and female that hold that women can only achieve self-realisation and fulfilment if done and channelled via and with the support of her husband. Christian women need to rise up in defence of their own rights. This will require an agenda separate from the agenda of men. Power is not held in a vacuum or isolation. If women rise to positions of authority, fewer men will be occupying these positions. The examples used in this article paint two different pictures: one that is liberating and the other that is constraining. What is encouraging and empowering is the manner in which some women occupied empowering positions. The ethnographic example shows that Deborah was able to exercise agency and is fully involved in ministry and playing a key role as a leader. This is done on the margins and not as a central part of the established church. As such, this remains a critical point against the established patriarchal structures of the church. Such representations of women as leaders show emancipatory intent, however and it is in the work of women such as Deborah that we have the paving of the way for future research. Continued research along these lines must give women voice and liberate them from their silence.

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# **The Complexities of a Feminist-based Approach in Addressing Gender Inequality: African Professional Migrants in South Africa**

**Janet Muthoni Muthuki**

## **Abstract**

This article addresses the place of feminism/s today by highlighting the incongruities in the lives of both African professional women and men migrants in negotiating gender equality. The migration experience is made complex by the renegotiation of various gender identities as a result of migrants immersing themselves in a different socio-cultural context. The migration experience for women presents them with the challenge of balancing between exercising their autonomy occasioned by their educational attainments as espoused in liberal feminism on the one hand and the quite often religio- cultural requirement to submit to male domination on the other. Similarly migrant men are faced with the challenge of maintaining a hegemonic masculinity which accords them patriarchal privilege on the one hand while renegotiating their masculinities in a new gender context where women have been ‘empowered’ through the inroads made by liberal feminism on the other. By examining the appropriateness and/or inappropriateness of using a feminist-based approach in dealing with issues of gender inequality, this article argues that the feminist agenda should lead to a profound process of gender re-socialisation for both men and women.

**Key words:** Gender equality, feminism/s, patriarchy, autonomy, African professional migrants

## **Introduction**

With the demise of apartheid in 1994 and the subsequent recognition of South Africa as a democratic state, South Africa has emerged as a major migration destination attracting migrants from other African countries such as asylum seekers, long distance traders, entrepreneurs, professionals and students (Crush & MacDonald 2002). This article critically examines the lives of African professional migrant men and women living in KwaZulu-Natal. While most studies have examined migration from an economic perspective this study focuses on the social lives of the migrants and in particular the gender relations aspect of their lives.

The article is based on an ethnographic research conducted amongst forty professional African migrants (thirty female and ten male). The study was premised on a qualitative research methodology which emphasises on peoples lived experience; the meaning they place on their lives, processes, events and structures, their perceptions, assumptions and ways in which they connect these meanings to the social world around them (see Rossman & Rallis 1998). This is as opposed to quantitative research methodologies which treat research respondents as scientific variables thereby limiting access to their meanings, understandings and interpretations. In depth interviews were used in order to understand how the research participants viewed their world and how they constructed meaning. A non-probability sampling method, namely purposive sampling, was employed in selecting the sample. Purposive sampling allows for the selection of respondents whose qualities or experiences permit an understanding of the phenomena in question and are therefore valuable (Dane 1990).

Drawing on the qualitative research paradigm, the study employed a feminist standpoint epistemology within which knowledge is constructed by privileging the experiences of women. Based on feminist theory, feminist standpoint epistemology as a starting point focuses on validating women's experiences and seeks to see the world from women's point of view as a means of eradicating gender inequalities. Edwards (1990: 489) attests to this by saying that using a feminist methodology gave her the flexibility to relate to women in subjective ways on their terms rather than in objective ways on the researcher's terms. While this epistemology validates women's experiences, Haywood and Mac an Ghaill (2003) however ask what implications it has for men's experiences as a research agenda in terms of

challenging gender inequalities. Using a feminist research methodology therefore, I sought to privilege the subjectivities and experiences of the female participants which is a requirement for a feminist-based research but I also examined men's experiences which are salient in the feminist research agenda on eradicating gender inequalities. This is because the purpose of feminist research is to generate critical insights on gendered social existence and men are gendered beings as well as women.

Gender as a category of social organisation is embedded in migration but has received limited attention in migration studies. Initial studies on migration focused almost exclusively on male migrants while portraying women as passive companions migrating to accompany or to reunite with their breadwinner migrant husbands (see Crush 1991; Breytenbach 1979; Bohning 1981; Berger & Mohr 1975; Handlin 1951; Portes & Bach 1985). This male bias in migration studies was later countered in the 1970s and 1980s by feminist scholarship that sought to highlight the predominance of women in migration processes (see Donato 1992; Morokvasic 1984; Ong 1991; and Pedraza 1991). Feminist scholarship highlighted that women were increasingly migrating as the main economic providers, or 'breadwinners' for their households.

In the African context, the traditional pattern of migration within and from Africa, which has previously been male-dominated, is increasingly becoming feminised. Adepoju (2004) points out that in recent years, there has been a new phenomenon of women migrating and leaving their husbands to cater for their children. Dodson (1998) confirms this by highlighting that one of the trends in the new migration to South Africa has been the increase in the number of women for a broad range of social, productive and reproductive reasons. The 'feminisation of migration' has produced specifically female forms of migration such as the commercialised migration of domestic workers and caregivers, the migration and trafficking of women for the sex industry and the organised migration of women for marriage. Independent women migration has also produced a group of professional women migrating independently to fulfill their own economic needs as opposed to just joining a spouse or other family members (Adepoju 2004). The extent to which the migration of professional African migrant women may be changing gender relations in Africa requires further interrogation as in many cases migration is still largely determined by unequal gender relations.

Further, the process of migration produces gendered encounters for

both men and women because not only do they immerse themselves in a new cultural context but they also immerse themselves in new gender regimes<sup>1</sup> and have to renegotiate their gender relations. Most African cultures have a patriarchal system which governs gender relations between men and women with men having positions of authority over women and this remains the case in varying degrees as women migrate from one place to another especially within the African continent. Gender relations in South Africa are however more complex due to the tensions between South Africa's progressive constitution in terms of women's rights and a patriarchal culture. On paper, women in South Africa have some of the most progressive protections in the world enshrined in a constitution that is said to be one of the most progressive in the world.

The constant negotiations of such differing gender systems by migrants can serve to either change or reinforce their perspectives of gender. From the findings of this study, the migration experience presented women with the challenge of balancing between exercising their autonomy occasioned by their educational attainments as espoused in liberal feminism on the one hand and the religio- cultural requirement to submit to male domination on the other. In this same context, migrant men were faced with the challenge of maintaining a hegemonic masculinity which accorded them patriarchal privileges while renegotiating their masculinities in a new gender regime where women had been 'empowered' through the inroads made by liberal feminism.

## **Negotiating the Practice and Discourse of Gender in the Migration Context**

Longwe (1998) defines women's empowerment as collective action to overcome gender inequality. She observes that women's empowerment is the process by which women collectively come to recognise and address gender inequalities which stand in the way of their equal access to resources and full

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<sup>1</sup> A gender regime is a group of practices, ideological and material, which in a given social context acts to construct various images of masculinity and femininity. The state of operation in gender relations in a given institution is its gender regime (Connell, 1987)

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participation in power structures and decision-making. Ojong (2010) in her examination of the experiences of independent African migrant women in South Africa advances the argument that the migratory process seems to have a generally empowering impact on women's self esteem and economic independence. Zentgraph (2002) in concurrence suggests that women report a sense of empowerment, new found freedom, and self confidence as they negotiate traditional gender roles in a new socio-cultural context.

For most African women who have been restricted to a limited area for most of their lives for social and economic reasons, the opportunity to travel out of their country may be extremely empowering (Crush & MacDonald 1999). This new found sense of empowerment and freedom is expected to lead to change in power relations in the family and hence transform unequal gender relations. This is in tandem with the aims of liberal feminism, which emerged in the nineteenth century in Europe and America and was aimed at achieving equality in all spheres of life such as education, women's right to property, the right to vote and freedom of individual choice. Liberal feminism has embraced empowerment (ideological, political and economic) as a means of transforming the lives of women. Increased participation in the labour market for educated women means increase in social mobility, economic independence and relative autonomy. It is therefore expected that with education women can respond to opportunities, challenge their traditional roles and change their lives.

While liberal feminism advances that restructuring unequal power relations would enable women to make choices and exercise control of their lives, institutions such as culture and religion limit individual expression, autonomy and choice. Daphne (1998) advances that customs, culture, tradition and religion are major impediments to the changing of gender roles. In concurrence, Ojong and Muthuki (2010) attest to the fact that while professional African migrant women may have high educational attainments and are economically empowered, they are unable to exercise the same empowerment in their homes due to socio-cultural and religious regulations.

This can be observed in the case of Jessica a Nigerian who is a part-time lecturer at UKZN who expresses that before she came to South Africa, she did not receive much recognition in the family. She expressed that though she had not remitted much in terms of money she had been able to remit socially in terms of her ideas and opinions which were now much more valued than when she was at home. She admitted that though her level of

education played a major role in the elevation of her social status, she would not have received the same honour if she had studied in her home country. Further, she expressed that the new space in South Africa had given her room to construct herself as an assertive and independent minded woman since she has broken loose from familial and cultural constraints. The same respondent however had to negotiate how and when to display this new found independence as shown below:

I can however be free and assertive in a population that will understand me. Going to a rural environment and showing that you are emancipated, no one will understand you. They will find you culturally unclean. I am an African woman and I will always remain an African woman. I am an emancipated African woman who is very dynamic, who can change time and again depending on who she meets. The way I express myself is different depending on whom I meet. Education has opened me up to have a critical outlook in life but as an African girl I still have cultural values. If it warrants me to stoop low, I will stoop low. If a situation warrants me to stand my grounds then I will stand my grounds. Normally a traditional African woman will be subordinate and a recipient of whatever comes her way. Sometimes, I will play that role of a subservient woman depending on the kind of audience. I am ready to adapt, I will not go to a rural area and display this aura of an emancipated woman since I will find myself like a fish out of water (Jessica, Nigeria).

Jessica though asserting that the migration experience had made her more assertive and confident, said that it would be challenging to exercise her newfound freedom and independence in her rural setting back home. This is because it would be considered culturally unacceptable. In her rural setting where her community subscribed to traditional gender roles<sup>2</sup> she would adopt the role of a subservient woman. She then constructed herself as an 'emancipated African woman' meaning that she would hold onto her

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<sup>2</sup> Gender roles refer to behaviours, expectations and role sets defined by society as masculine or feminine. These behaviours consist of personality aspects such as aggressiveness and gentleness and social roles such as domestic roles, conjugal roles and parenting roles (Pleck 1981).

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newfound independence and display it when the situation warranted it such as in political gatherings.

Mariam from Tanzania highlighted that her coming to South Africa had provided her with an opportunity to inspire other women to fund their own education as opposed to waiting for government support. She asserted that women should pursue tertiary education since they are capable of performing much better than men.

Most of the women in Zanzibar for a long time did not think that it is okay to pay for their own studies. They think the work of educating them belongs to the government but when they saw me going to pay for myself at the university level they asked themselves, 'Why not pay for myself?' They are confident of themselves now and I said before our island is very small and a lot of people know that I am paying for myself. I think for me I can say that women can do as much or much better than men. So women should continue with their studies. What can be helpful for a family woman it can help if they plan together and even apply to go and study together (Mariam, Tanzania).

On negotiating between her educational achievements and traditional gender roles, Mariam maintained that she would still carry out her traditionally prescribed gender roles while at home. Even though she had pursued the highest educational qualification and encouraged other women to do the same, she still carried out her traditionally prescribed gender roles such as cleaning her five-bedroomed flat, doing laundry and cooking for her children and husband as was expected of her.

Jessica and Mariam though exuding confidence concerning their educational qualifications maintained that education would not change them and that they would remain humble by upholding traditional gender roles. Women such as Jessica and Mariam seem unwilling to distance themselves from cultural beliefs that they have been socialised with since childhood despite their level of education. The desire to create the impression that one had not changed despite acquiring an education was held onto by various women migrants.

Ngongo (1993) advances that African women experience a dilemma as a result of the cultural upbringing of an ideal of a 'good' African woman



who is subservient to male authority and a home maker versus being an ambitious, independent career woman as a result of western education. Muthuki (2004) in her examination of changing gender roles amongst Zulu-speaking academics at UKZN concurs by highlighting the dilemma faced by these academics in negotiating between modern gender roles occasioned by their western education and maintaining traditional gender roles as a result of their cultural background.

Does this then mean that the professional migrant women are adopting western liberal feminism which advocates for formal equality in the public space without challenging patriarchal structures or the causes of the deep ideological causes of gender inequalities? The situation faced by these women continues to uphold the dual work role for women which contributes to the promotion of gender inequalities. The challenge before African women therefore is to confront ideological, political as well as the material basis of their subordination to men. Ojong and Muthuki (2010) have advanced that the establishment of women's rights requires not only economic empowerment as advanced by liberal feminism but also socio-cultural empowerment. This kind of empowerment calls for profound transformation of unjust societal systems including religious systems that socialize women into subservient roles.

Further, while one may have expected that the professional African migrant women would invoke the notion of gender equality to give them access to participation and leadership opportunities, some were quick to distance themselves from the notion of gender equality and were willing to hold onto some of their cultural understanding of gender norms. A case in point is Norah a twenty five year old single woman from Cameroon who came to South Africa in pursuit of the empowerment and educational opportunities which she would not have had if she remained in her home county. She is currently a part time lecturer in the department of civil engineering at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN hereafter). Women such as Norah are well positioned to secure permanent employment at the university given the fact that the Employment Equity Act categorises skilled job allocations along racial and gender lines. Norah in an interview asserted that while she was comfortable with the empowerment accorded to her by her level of education and employment opportunities in the South African context, she would not give up traditional gender roles. She appears to associate gender equality with giving up traditional gender roles something

she is not willing to do since it is an integral part of who she is. Her views are captured in the following excerpt:

I am not the gender type. I know that I am a woman, an African woman. Talking about gender equality, I know that it is a concern but there is nothing that I want to do that I will not be able to do because I am a woman. If I want to change the tyre of my car, I can do it. If I want to pursue my PhD I will do so. I cannot be restricted by my family if I want to go higher in my education because I am a woman. A woman is still the homemaker, taking care of the children and the home. You cannot get out of this. It depends on how you were brought up. I will want to do the things my mother did in my house. I will not become modernised and say that I will not cook and I will buy fast food. It is the way I was brought up (Norah, a Cameroon).

Angelina, a single woman from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) working at the department of Human Resource Management at UKZN, in resonance with Norah also distanced herself from the discourse of gender equality by asserting that gender equality should be focused in the areas of work and study opportunities and not at the transformation of gender roles. She expressed her views on gender equality in the following manner:

I have never believed in the gender equality debate as long as women are given the opportunity to work and to study. I think the fight for gender equality should focus on study and employment opportunities and not on matters to do with the kitchen and the bedroom. It should be about liberation in women's minds and not in the household. When people focus more on the housework they forget the essentials. Like me in my house, every time there is something that requires me to go up the house or lift heavy things I do not do it. Even after shopping, I jump out of the car and leave my brother to carry the heavy stuff. If we have to talk about sharing the work like my brother doing the cleaning then we will be missing the point. The point should be whether we have the same opportunities (Angelina, a migrant from the DRC).

Angelina made the assumption that in a family setting a man will

automatically want to share gender roles with his working wife. She seemed to ignore that fact that gender roles are inculcated through a process of socialisation and most African men will be hesitant to share in women's traditional gender roles as illustrated by Muthuki (2004).

Norah's and Angelina's engagement with the notion of gender inequality is illuminating in that it shows the extent to which African women may be willing to engage with this discourse. While ethnocentric perspectives on Black and Asian women give the impression that their cultural values are oppressive to them, these women perceive traditional gender roles as an integral part of their lives. This scenario raises issues on how knowledge is constituted and points towards gender being an epistemological category and not just a category of social organisation. This is because gender epistemologies emerge out of particular histories and social contexts.

On the part of the men professional migrants, they acknowledged women's empowerment while also construing it as disempowering to them. These men were faced with the challenge of maintaining a hegemonic masculinity which accords them patriarchal privilege on the one hand and renegotiating their masculinities in a new gender regime where women have been 'empowered' through the inroads made by liberal feminism.

Jasper a thirty nine year old academic at UKZN while acknowledging that women were as capable as men in terms of educational pursuits also revealed that this was very intimidating to men by saying the following:

You see when women get educated, they get good jobs and they buy big homes and good cars. This intimidates men who say, 'What can I tell the children? She will not listen to me'. You know currently in Botswana this educated women are now saying that they want to surrender so that they can get men to marry them (Jasper, a migrant man from Botswana).

In reflecting on gender relations in his home country, Jasper advanced that educated women posed a threat to men and added to their sense of loss of power by 'usurping' men's roles as providers. Men however reclaimed their power by refusing to marry such women. According to Jasper, the educated women in Botswana were considering capitulating in a bid to make themselves marriageable.

Zebedee a twenty five year old academic from Zimbabwe reiterated

Jaspers sentiments by asserting that the notion of equal rights should apply in the area of education while in the home, traditional gender roles needed to be maintained. Zebedee expressed that rights had to do with availing opportunities to women and dealing with violence against women. According to him these rights should not interfere with traditionally prescribed gender roles in the home. Men should continue being the head and women should be the homemakers. In reference to the situation back home in Zimbabwe, Zebedee said that even though women had risen economically, social relations remained traditional and women are not decision-makers in the home. Zebedee advanced that women should remain nurturers and should respect their husbands even though they may be earning a higher income as highlighted below:

Back home in Zimbabwe, a woman still has to be subordinate to a man and fulfill traditional gender roles. Certain rights are necessary especially when it comes to extreme behaviors. Equal rights however have to be distinguished from traditional duties that have to be performed according to sex. A woman has a certain role to play in the family as a mother. Just because we have equal rights does not mean that my wife has to go and wash her own car. It does not mean that I have to have turns to cook. Rights have to be accompanied by education for women on their role in society. I am also thinking from a biblical perspective, the man has to be a provider. However in modern times, we find women earning more so the man has to treat the woman accordingly. The woman must however understand that she must not take undue advantage of the man (Zebedee, a migrant man from Zimbabwe).

Jasper and Zebedee are clearly opposed to the restructuring of gender roles which they construe as loss of power for men. Men such as Jasper and Zebedee are opposed to gender equality because for them it implies the loss of the patriarchal dividend which Connell (2002) defines as the benefit to men as a group from maintaining an unequal gender order. This benefit includes economic advantage, prestige authority and access to institutional power among others. The patriarchal dividend is universally distributed among men though this distribution is not uniform but is mediated by economic class, social status, race, ethnicity, sexuality and age.

The notion of the patriarchal dividend was clearly elucidated by Peter, a thirty three year old Kenyan programme coordinator with a community based organisation in KwaZulu-Natal. Peter voiced that being in South Africa where women were more empowered in terms of their constitutional rights had made him gain respect for women. He however observed that much as men may acknowledge women's empowerment, it was difficult for men to surrender patriarchal privilege as amplified below

I think that it is difficult for a man to undo a patriarchal mindset than for a woman because for them it is associated with loss of control, loss of power and loss of decision-making and loss of income. Different men would take this differently. I can only speak from a personal point of view (Peter, Kenya).

The notion of gender equality also faces challenges from politicians, cultural leaders, and mainstream scholars who argue against universal human rights by making a case for understanding different cultures and societies on their own terms and relative to their own values and beliefs. Such arguments are invoked to justify female subordination within the family institution. The false dichotomy created by the debate between universality of human rights and cultural diversity is particularly damaging to the rights of African women (see Africa Gender Institute, 2009). Respect for cultural differences should not obscure the fact that in most cultures women are subordinate to men.

## **Conclusion**

The struggle for African women's human rights confronts resilient structures and institutions of patriarchy whose primary role is to maintain the status quo. As a result of inroads made by liberal feminism professional migrant women have experienced economic empowerment and a sense of autonomy in a new cultural context. The migration experience and constant negotiations in different cultural contexts is expected to present migrants with an opportunity for changing their perspectives of gender and hence challenging unequal gender relations. A number of women in this study were however unable to fully exercise the empowerment accorded to them by their level of education and economic advantage due to cultural and religious regulations to conform to traditional gender roles. Other women distanced themselves from

the notion of gender equality highlighting gender as a critical epistemology whose discourses need to be re-examined. This is because gender epistemologies emerge out of particular histories and social contexts.

Men in the same context also grappled with maintaining a hegemonic masculinity which accorded them patriarchal privilege on the one hand and renegotiating their masculinities in a new gender regime where women have been 'empowered' through the inroads made by liberal feminism. While liberal feminism advocates for gender equality without necessarily dismantling existing patriarchal structures, it is incontrovertible that the establishment of women's rights and their consequent empowerment requires transformation of unjust societal institutions. From the interviews with professional women migrants however, it appears that the struggle for the emancipation of the African woman is not a struggle against men per se but a struggle against ideologies that are not friendly to women. The challenge for feminism therefore is to distinguish between the structures of male domination on the one hand and individual men on the other in confronting ideological, political as well as the material basis of African women's subordination to men. The establishment of gender equality requires gender re-socialisation on the part of both men and women. This kind of re-socialisation calls for a profound transformation of unjust societal systems including religious systems that socialise women into subservient roles.

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# **The Gender Dynamics of Conducting Fieldwork and its Implications for the Writing of Ethnographies**

**Vivian Besem Ojong**

## **Abstract**

This article is concerned with the ethnographic process and the knowledge which it may produce and is based on our involvement in fieldwork for the past six years using a gender lens. The findings revealed that the gender identity of the researcher and the gender relations in the field are important dynamics in shaping the research process which can significantly influence the kind of data obtained and consequently influence how knowledge is constructed. Gender relations are also implicated in the structure of particular research methodologies used. During fieldwork the researcher and the respondents are actively involved in the enactment of gender in the field, resulting in the knowledge produced either being influenced by empathy and/or tutelage. These dynamics are crucial to the construction of knowledge. In this article, I illustrate through the ethnography of African migrants in South Africa that anthropological truth is not just located in objectivity and subjectivity but also in the process of collecting data, with empathy being an integral part of the process and is also constrained by it.

**Keywords:** Gender dynamics, fieldwork, tutelage, empathy, knowledge production

## **Introduction and background**

This article is based on an ethnographic study exploring the discursive and social practices through which professional African migrants came to

perceive South African gender norms and how these new gender norms either challenged or supported their already acquired gender norms. The study was positioned within an interpretive framework and qualitative research paradigm. Within an interpretive framework the construction of knowledge is a communal process involving presenting the reality of the research respondents from their own views, the role of the researcher as a co-creator of meaning and the types of knowledge frameworks or discourses informing those particular views. The researcher contributes to the project by bringing in her own values and beliefs. She also shapes the project through her curiosities and worldview. The researcher also creates meanings by analysing texts to look for the ways in which social meanings emerge in discourses (Henning 2004: 20). This paradigm makes it possible for researchers to be sensitive to the role of the context in knowledge production.

My positioning as a researcher is also crucial because the research was inherently structured by my subjectivity. As a professional African migrant woman, I participate in a similar social world with my research participants and hence my choice of the research topic. The research process entailed self-reflexivity my part. Reay (1996: 59-60) describes reflexivity as a continual consideration of the ways in which the researcher's social identity and values affect the data gathered and a picture of the social world produced. Conducting fieldwork as a feminist anthropologist, I had to renegotiate my identity during the research process and in so doing I was able to observe my own role as a researcher in either enabling or constraining the production of gender performances in the data gathering process.

Self-reflexivity also enabled me to highlight how gender relations are embedded in research methods. The research employed semi-structured in-depth interviews and participant observation methods in order to elicit rich qualitative data. In-depth interviews were essential for understanding how the participants viewed their worlds. According to Rossman and Rallis (1998) in-depth interviews lead to a deeper understanding as both the interviewer and interviewee construct meaning. The participant observation method enabled me to observe what the professional migrants did in every day settings. This allowed for an understanding of how gender contributed to the interpretation of meaning in their interactions hence leading to a thick description rich in explanation and argument. A closer examination of these methods however revealed that they are not just data collection tools since they are hardly gender neutral but are layered with gendered meanings. The conflicts,

contradictions and enactments of gender I experienced as a feminist researcher during data collection using these methods were key findings of the study.

In the following sections I illustrate how my subjectivity and my research respondents' subjectivities mediated by my chosen data collections methods interacted leading to gendered encounters. The findings uncovered the researched phenomenon of the role of tutelage and empathy in fieldwork.

### **The Gendered Role of Tutelage in Constructing Knowledge**

William and Heikes (1993) make the observation that there is scarcity of research on gender interacting with qualitative in-depth interviews. Gender relations are an important dynamic in shaping the interview process which can significantly influence the kind of data obtained. The interviewer and the interviewee are actively involved in the co-performance of gender in the interview process. This kind of experience provides a new agenda on fieldwork for feminist researchers and especially how their identity and experiences point to new possibilities for the conducting of fieldwork.

While same gender interviewing may seem preferable supporting evidence is mixed. Some researchers such as Graves and Powell (1996) wonder whether women make better researchers because their feminine communication styles make them better listeners. Others argue that the status of a researcher accords a woman 'honorary male status' (see Fontana & Frey 1994). The adoption of an 'honorary male status' is perceived as requiring that one gives up your identity as a woman in order to adopt some attributes perceived as traditionally masculine. This poses challenges for feminists who see the 'honorary male status' as an extension of male privilege and not extending women's rights. This position may however be regarded as essentialist in attributing certain qualities to men and others to women. As Connell (2002) contends, a great majority of people combine both masculine and feminine characteristics in varying blends rather than being all one or another.

One major observation in this study as a female researcher was that in interviewing men tutelage took precedence as men sought to explain what they felt was significant as opposed to what I was asking them. These men were not as forthcoming with information as women in response to the

questions. Most of them would give general answers to specific questions as opposed to giving reflective answers based on their personal experiences in what Tannen (1990) characterises as ‘report talk’ associated with ‘public’ speech contexts, a masculine communication style. This is in contrast with ‘rapport talk’ which is associated with ‘private’ speech contexts and a feminine communication style. These same men were however comfortable to initiate their own topics for discussion thereby adopting the role of an instructor or a tutor.

For instance, a respondent from Kenya initiated a topic concerning his recent training with a group of educated men from his ethnic *Kikuyu* community while he was on one of his trips to Kenya. The group was involved in an initiative to harmonise their modern education with traditional rites of passage of becoming a man. This respondent went into a lengthy explanation concerning the training and how he had been appointed a junior elder in his ethnic community. This appointment qualified him to have his son go through circumcision; a rite of passage into manhood. He even showed me notes on the several stages one had to undergo before they become a senior elder.

This rich information was in keeping with qualitative research and in particular in-depth interviewing whose strength is that of allowing participants more opportunity for creativity and self-expression leading to additional information. As a researcher when one comes across a respondent who is willing to provide additional information, one should be willing to learn. In this case I was able to gather a lot of information concerning the rite of passage and what it meant for this respondent’s identity as a *Kikuyu* man and how it would affect how he negotiated his life in a new context in South Africa.

I would however like to make the observation that inherent in this opportunity for self-expression was the allowance for the enactment of gender in the in-depth interview. It is instructive to note that this initiative on the *Kikuyu* rites of passage is exclusive to men and there are no women involved. It is possible that the respondent was re-asserting himself in the interview as an educator and enlightener and in so doing reinforcing his masculine gendered identity concerning his expert knowledge which as a woman I was not privy to.

Another instance where the role of tutelage was highlighted was in the case where in some transcripts some men spoke in long blocks of texts. A

second male respondent from Kenya in response to the initial interview began by asking if I had a notebook. He then proceeded to answer the question on how he came to South Africa lengthily as if delivering a lecture. In the process of responding to one question at length, he would end up answering a host of other questions. I only interrupted him on a few occasions to ask some questions or to clarify a point he had made. This respondent was very informative and within the paradigm of qualitative research it was acceptable for me as a researcher to adopt the role of a respectful listener so as to glean as much information as I could. A critical examination of this process revealed the interaction of gender relations in the in-depth interview. Winchester (1996) asserts that a female researcher's interviews with men may reinforce stereotypical gender discourses which suggest that women's role in conversations is to be an empathic listener and facilitator for men's narratives while men assume the role of tutor.

While from the above instances it may appear that only men sought to adopt the role of an educator in seeking to re-assert their masculinities in the interview context, the interaction was much more fluid and power more dispersed and contested since it is not held exclusively by men over women. Despite the assumed rapport between a woman interviewing another woman, women's social, cultural and personal beliefs determine a power relationship within an interview. Among older female respondents I was often relegated to the position of mentee as they used the research interaction to transfer relevant life experiences.

In an interview with a female respondent from Liberia older than me, she adopted an advisory role by telling the following in terms of the future prospects of a life partner, 'Let me advise you as a Christian and one older than you, do not be proud because of your education, remain humble'.

While most African cultures have a patriarchal system which governs gender relations between men and women with men having positions of authority over women, older African women possess greater power than younger ones since they are charged with the responsibility of preserving indigenous cultures and traditions. Within Christian religion older women are also expected to train the younger women on how to be good wives. This kind of discourse became highlighted in the 'private speech' contexts associated with women after having established a rapport and hence more conversational partnerships. In the interview with the respondent, I realised that other social identities such as age would confound attempts to make

claims on gender-based differences in fieldwork. On account of her age, the respondent adopted the role of tutor in advising or enlightening me.

## **The Role of Empathy in Fieldwork**

Focusing on my experience in the field empathy emerged as a source of knowledge rejecting objectivity and to a lesser extent subjectivity as the only valid way to study social life. While in the field, I acted as ally with my respondents and collaborated with them. Instead of stubbornly being attached to my experiences as a researcher and prior knowledge of the phenomenon, I was open-minded in what Hogan (1973: 224) called the ‘equivocal jellyfish’ position. This is a useful yet complex process because we can only try to understand others’ stand-points without necessarily believing everything we are told. Approaching the knowledge production process empathetically is time consuming, needs skills (not all humans are empathetic by nature) and strenuous. It is not simply about ‘putting oneself in other’s shoes’. A researcher is expected to leave behind his/her own context and understanding to imaginatively project themselves into the other’s situation in an attempt to see the world through their eyes (Spielberg 1975). Davidson (2003: 121) explains that there are no short cuts for cultivating empathic, intuitive understanding; it requires practice, skill, talent and grace. Spelman (1988: 181) describes it as ‘strenuousness of knowing other, even people very much like ourselves’. Geertz (1986: 122) writes:

Comprehending that which is, in some manner of form, alien to us and likely to remain so, without either smoothing it over with vacant murmurs of common humanity, disarming it with to-each-his-own indifferentism, or dismissing it as charming, lovely even, but inconsequential, is a skill we have arduously to learn, and having learnt it, work continuously to keep alive; it is not a con-natural capacity, like depth perception or the sense of balance, upon which we can complacently rely.

Placing empathy at the centre of analysis helps theorise how social life is constructed through gender relations and identity that have remained invisible because of research emphasis on objectivity and subjectivity.

Merleau-Ponty (1968: 17) espouses that, for emphatic research to be successful, both the toucher and touched should be of the same material. While in the field, my identity as a woman ‘naturally’ aided me in developing sufficient flexibility that I merged empathetically with my respondents’ situations and was still able retain my sense of being a researcher. I was conscious of my identity as a researcher and throughout the process of fieldwork, I tried to understand the ways in which my respondents thought without thinking like them (Geertz 1986). Understanding

in the sense of comprehension, perception, and insights needs to be distinguished from ‘understanding’ in the sense of agreement of opinion, union of sentiment, or commonality of commitment .... we must learn to grasp what we cannot embrace (Geertz 1986: 122).

This particular aspect of my identity bears special relevance to the extent to which empathy influences fieldwork. Husserl (1959) cited in Zahavi (2001:159) remarked that ‘through experiencing another person’s world through empathy, I see the world from outside my own subjectivity’. This was a deliberate attempt on my part; very different from the epistemological stand-point of subjectivity; which is effortless and less demanding (Davidson 2003, Husserl 1989, Thompson 2001). To be empathetically engaging in fieldwork is not simply to understand a respondent’s subjective reasoning but placing ourselves into their worlds in what can be described as ‘a chameleon’s behaviour’. I had to be non-judgemental in order to empathise with my respondents. Rogers (1980: 152) writes: it is impossible to be accurately perceptive of another’s inner world if you have formed an evaluative opinion of that person.

Being a feminist researcher, I approached the field differently from men. I approach the field with the hypothesis that female respondents have experiences that needed to be show-cased and highlighted and as a result, place them at the centre of knowledge production. Thus as the data is collected, involves a shift from being simply about the data itself but also about the narcissistic extensions of the respondent. According to Burn (2003: 232), a researcher’s own ‘embodied subjectivity interacts with that of the respondent in the process of intercorporeality or intersubjectivity’. She calls for a critical embodied reflexivity that involves construction, deconstruction and reconstruction of embodied subjectivities, thus providing rich material

for analysis. Drawing myself as a researcher into imagining what it would be like to go through the experiences of my respondents, the respondent somehow exerts some kind of control over me and in the process my data becomes an exchange of experiences. The social reality produced under such circumstances becomes a mixture of the experiences of the respondent and how I as a researcher felt at the time of fieldwork. As I juggle between centering on the respondent's experiences and privileging her voice in the text, I often wondered how this would affect the ethnographies I write. In the process I ended up defining myself as I allowed my empathetic tendencies to infiltrate fieldwork. This was inevitable particularly because I share a similar identity with my respondents (we are all African migrants) which does create conditions for empathetic relations.

This was illustrated in the case of Bridget a Ugandan woman who came to South Africa in 1987. While in Uganda, she had obtained a degree in computer sciences at the University of Makerere. She had also married an Anglican priest much to the consternation of her family and friends who felt that she was now consigned to a life of poverty. Her coming to South Africa was so as to escape the stigma associated with marrying a 'poor' man and also to embark on a venture to raise the quality of life of her family. At the time of the interview, the respondent expressed that the status of her life had not improved since coming to South Africa. Her husband who later joined her in South Africa continued with his priestly vocation in one of the Anglican dioceses and did not join her in any entrepreneurial activity to supplement their salaries. They were consequently living in one of the church parish houses and could not afford a house of their own. Bridget felt frustrated by her husband's priestly vocation whose remuneration could not provide the family with the quality of life she desired. On her own, she could not be able to afford a house. This frustration was given voice during the interview and as a researcher I found myself being empathetic towards her and adopting a different role from that of a researcher. I ended up taking the role of a counsellor by empathising with her and frequently urging her to focus on her career and her children in order to build her self esteem

Thus in the field under conditions of empathy, I shifted perspectives many times and my sense of immersion in the lives of my respondents and separation became a continuous process. By so doing both the researcher and the respondent are able to relate to the experiences as though it were one person with whom one might alternatively be merged empathetically or from



whom one might be separated and individuated. As Bondi (2002) advances empathy provides a way of understanding other people's experiences in the context of both similarities and differences between researchers and research subjects. Through this sort of relationship, the data collected is rich and carries a lot of depth. Upon exploring the reasons why women of African origin migrate independently, I was empathetically drawn into representing the women in a more positive light rather than on the reality of their reasons for migration which were located in:- escaping from unsuccessful marriages, running away from controlling boyfriends or concealing a pregnancy gotten out of wed-lock from family and friends. I oscillated between transient empathetic experiences of my informants and defences against them, defining myself sometimes through them in the process. This was in concurrence with Bondi's argument that empathy entails oscillating between participating in processes of identification and remaining aware of (observing) some distinction (however fragile) between one's own and the other person's inner realities.

Empathy was also enacted in my research methods such as participant observation. The participant observation method draws on behavioural skills and already established social skills such as empathy and 'fitting in' among others. This requires that the researcher takes part in the activities that the respondents are engaged in. Social relations are however imbued with gendered meanings with men and women being assigned different tasks. This was exemplified in an instance when I attended a fundraising function of the Cameroonian Association in Durban (CAMCOD) for purposes of participant observation. On the day of the function, I arrived early at two of my female respondents' residence. I found their male cousin lying on the couch while Irene was in the kitchen and Jessica was at the hair salon. Concerning this male cousin, Jessica, one of the Cameroonian respondents in an in-depth interview had said:

My cousin is so traditional and there is no way he can compromise even though he is aware that here in South Africa we have some cultural differences. My cousin wants to be served food and even if I am sleeping, I have to wake up and serve him. He can only serve himself if I am not there.

As a feminist I was incensed by the gender dynamics of my women respon-

dents being in the kitchen and their male cousin lying on the couch. I however joined in the food preparation sessions in the kitchen as a result of empathising with their situation as a fellow woman as well as being obligated to do so by the participant observation method. Fitting in then required me to immerse myself in a gendered context and in so doing I ended up taking up a gendered role. The performance of gender roles was to be repeated in a participant observation session when a Kenyan respondent, had to be accompanied to meet his wife at the airport while on a visit to South Africa from Kenya. On reaching his house the respondent asked that his food be warmed while he called his wife's father making the observation that he had at least taken the trouble to cook.

As a feminist researcher, I would have been able to side-step gender roles in the research process but on a number of occasions I found myself performing traditional gender roles. This was in contradiction with my identity as a feminist but as a researcher, I was constrained by the method which I had chosen. Being a feminist researcher and teasing out the role of empathy in fieldwork provided critical insights concerning the gendered nature of research methodologies.

## **Conclusion**

The relational space between the researcher and the respondents is very important because it impacts on the kinds of knowledge that is produced. This study has shown that research that focuses only on respondents words is very limiting and narrows our scope for research. Thus the article has advanced that the gender identity of the researcher and gender relations in the field are an important dynamic in shaping the kind of data that is obtained. Gender relations are also implicated in data collection methods such as the in-depth interview and participant observation leading to enactment of gender on the part of the researcher and the researched.

This study has shown that interviewing is not just a gathering of information by the researcher but that both the researcher and the researched are engaged in a co-operative act. Part of this act during the data collection process was the performance of gender. In the course of the interviews, this performance led to tutelage with most men adopting the role of an educator and enlightener in the research process and in so doing reinforcing their

masculine gendered identity around expert knowledge while I adopted the feminine role of respective listener in order to glean as much information as I could as required by my research method. Tutelage was however not just the preserve of men as older women also adopted the role of an educator by giving me advice on real life experiences showing that gender relations do not just exist between men and women but are also to be found amongst women, and in this case, with regard to age difference.

While my identity as a woman granted men and older women the opportunity to exercise tutelage over me, the same identity and that of feminist researcher enabled me to empathise with the situations of female respondents. In some of these cases, I ended up taking different roles from those of a researcher such as those of a counsellor and encourager. Thus the subjectivities of the research respondents and my subjectivity intersected to produce knowledge. Empathy was also highlighted in data collection methods such as participant observation due to its emphasis on the use of social skills such as empathy and 'fitting in' with the researched in order to obtain data leading to an enactment of gender on my part as a researcher.

Practicing reflexivity therefore to observe my own role as a researcher in either enabling or constraining the production of gender performances in the data gathering process is crucial to knowledge production.

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# **Qualitative Approaches to Unpack Gendered Land Relations and Power Dynamics in Inanda, KwaZulu-Natal**

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## **Abstract**

Land in rural South Africa is a contested issue. Women are at the heart of the debate, often being denied access to and control over land due to historical as well as traditional and cultural systems. This article explores how the nature, extent and implications of property rights for women in peri-urban communities can be examined by collecting qualitative data using local and indigenous knowledge through the use of participatory rural appraisal techniques in Inanda. Four focus group discussions (two with men only and two with women only) were held in the community to acquire this data. Specific qualitative techniques used during the focus group discussions included gendered resource mapping and ranking exercises. Participatory-Geographic Information Systems (P-GIS) and the thematic constant comparative approach were used to analyse the data. The data collected is used to illustrate the advantages of using qualitative approaches to examine gender issues in relation to land rights in Inanda. A key focus is on the use of P-GIS which extends the technical field of GIS to the qualitative realm. The importance of spatial information that includes perceptions is also underscored. The results reveal that the nature of women's land tenure in Inanda has a range of forms. Furthermore, the extent of women's access to secure land tenure is minimal in the region. Younger women continue to be denied access to, control over and inheritance of land. There are several factors such as the role of the chieftaincy, social norms as well as lack of available technologies which hinder women's access to land and productive use thereof. The study indicates the importance of using qualitative

approaches and highlights the importance of comparing findings between men and women as well as among the two groups.

**Keywords:** Gender, land relations, qualitative methods, Participatory-GIS, ranking exercises, Inanda, Durban

## **Introduction**

The prominence of women's disadvantaged positions in relation to land access, control and ownership emerges as a key concern in the literature on gender and land issues in South Africa (Bjuris & Daniels 2009; Bob 2008; Classens 2007; Cross & Hornby 2002; Jacobs *et al.* 2011; Meer 1997; Walker 2009). In rural contexts, patriarchal and cultural traditional practices of allocating and managing land further reinforce gender inequalities. This is within the context of historical, unresolved unequal distribution of land resources due to the legacy of colonisation and Apartheid. Thus, land in South Africa has and continues to be subjected to high levels of contestation and conflict.

It is important to conceptually and methodologically link land and gender to understand land relations and power dynamics as well as resultant impacts for women. This article specifically asserts that gendered land relations and power dynamics can be better understood in peri-urban communities by collecting qualitative data using local and indigenous knowledge adopting participatory rural appraisal (PRA) techniques. An illustrative case study of Inanda, a peri-urban community in eThekweni Municipality (the largest Municipality in KwaZulu-Natal province and third largest Municipality in South Africa), is used. Qualitative techniques (specifically resource mapping including Participatory-Geographic Information Systems [P-GIS] and ranking exercises) were used during four focus group discussions (two with men only and two with women only) to collect information on land issues in relation to gender dynamics. The main contribution of this article is to show how the use of P-GIS (which is an extension of the technical field of GIS) can be used as a qualitative tool.

## **Land and Gender Issues**

Payne (2004) asserts that access to land and shelter is a precondition for access to other services and livelihood opportunities; thus it is important in

relation to efforts to reduce poverty. Women require land for multiple reasons and hence without formal rights to land, women are vulnerable. While women continue to contribute significantly to the survival of households in sub-Saharan Africa (mainly responsible for reproductive responsibilities, subsistence production and income generation in the informal and/ or low-income sectors), several researchers such as Buregeya *et al.* (2001), Rugege *et al.* (2008) and Toulmin (2009) underscore that women continue to be denied the right to security of tenure to the land on which they support their families. Specifically, the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-HABITAT 2005) illustrate that similar patterns persist in Zambia. Land is a critically important asset to the poor. Access and ownership of land increases security and livelihood options at the household level. Women have had access to land in sub-Saharan Africa for many generations, however, men and women rarely have identical claims and rights to land, predominantly due to traditional and cultural systems (Whitehead & Tsikata 2003). Specifically, Buregeya *et al.* (2001) argue that without formal rights to land, women are vulnerable as they are denied the means to ensure stable and sustainable livelihoods.

In Africa generally, and South Africa is no exception, land has been subject to conflict, conquest and exploitation resulting in discrepancies and inequalities (Rugege *et al.* 2008). Rugege *et al.* (2008) further indicate that this has greatly determined the socio-economic and political positions of women in South Africa. They further argue that the connections between gender and property relations need to consider both the distribution of property in terms of ownership; and also, who controls the land, as studies indicate that gender equality in legal rights to own property does not guarantee actual ownership. As indicated in the next section, qualitative and spatial approaches to research can assist greatly in better understanding these interactions and concerns.

Classens (2007) and Cross and Hornby (2002) state that during the Apartheid era, access and use rights to land were largely confined to male heads of households. They further suggest that women's access to and control over land has largely been mediated through a male relative. There are many additional factors which influence women's access to land and resources. The literature highlights these to be: land use and availability, power relations, household requirements, social status of the women, natural environmental conditions, type of ownership or tenure arrangement, historical processes and



cultural practices (Bob 2008; Classens 2007; Cross & Hornby 2002; Deere & Leon 2003; Hansen *et al.* 2005; Meer 1997; Rao 2006; Rugege *et al.* 2008; UN-HABITAT 2005). All these need to be understood so that women's land needs and concerns may be prioritised. Despite women's disadvantaged position in terms of control and access to land and related resources, Bob (2000) asserts that women remain key environmental managers and consumers, and their vast knowledge of the land is key to achieving sustainable development.

Property rights and not employment is highlighted by Panda and Agarwal (2005) as being the single most critical entry point for women's empowerment. They continue to emphasise that many development programmes in Africa fail to achieve their potential to benefit women due to a lack of understanding of the dynamics of family relationships, landholding customs, household power structures and other social realities in the region. These factors play a role in limiting women's access to resources and land in rural areas. This has a significant impact on sustaining livelihoods as indicated by the Oxford Committee for Famine Relief (OXFAM 2010) in their study on women and land in Malawi, Zimbabwe and Zambia.

Rugege *et al.* (2008) indicate that understanding social differentiation among women (and men) in rural areas is crucial to understanding the different conditions faced by different groups within a community. Together with Jacobs *et al.* (2011), they assert that factors such as age, marital status, motherhood, employment status and access to income, asset ownership, lineage and position in the household all affect women's access to land. However, they stress that the most blatant differentiation occurs between male-dominant and female-dominant households. Deere and Leon (2003) identify four factors which determine women's access to land: male preference in inheritance; male privilege in marriage; male bias in community programmes of land distribution and gender bias in the land market. According to Bob (2008), female-headed landless households are most commonly the poorest of the poor. Hansen *et al.* (2005) indicate that marriage and inheritance patterns (especially male to male inheritance patterns that are dominant in most developing contexts) are essential aspects of tenure which influence how individuals acquire land and resources.

The increasing literature on gender and land issues is informed by different methodological approaches, including qualitative methods. The next section briefly examines the importance of qualitative approaches with

specific reference to spatial techniques, a neglected component in relation in to understanding gender issues in relation to land.

## **The Importance of Qualitative Approaches: P-GIS and Ranking**

Participatory/ qualitative techniques to conducting research challenge traditional assumptions that were entrenched in the positivist paradigm and were thus quantitative in nature (von Maltzahn & van der Riet 2006). The key difference between qualitative and quantitative is that qualitative research is focused on examining meanings, differences and the social construction of knowledge while quantitative research examines trends generally using numerically-based information and hypothesis testing. A central notion is that culture and context play a crucial role in the formation of knowledge. Qualitative approaches also inform participatory research efforts. Duraippah *et al.* (2005) assert that participatory methodologies developed from a desire by decision-makers to incorporate the perspectives and priorities of local people and their knowledge in policy development and decision-making. They further note that the growing adoption of the approach reflects a continuing belief in a bottom-up approach to research in which local people become agents of change.

Qualitative techniques include local knowledge in research. Local knowledge is developed within a particular setting and is also tied to that setting (von Maltzahn & van der Riet 2006). According to von Maltzahn and van der Riet (2006), using local knowledge increases the validity of a study as it permits the inclusion of information considered important by participants into the study. Thus, the focus is on the concerns, experiences and knowledge of local people rather than those of the researcher. The inclusion of local knowledge also permits the identification of problematic issues which would not have been identified otherwise (von Maltzahn & van der Riet 2006). A key contribution of qualitative approaches is their focus on examining differences. This is an important aspect to consider when examining gender dynamics in relation to land relations as discussed in the previous section.

There are many techniques which can be used when conducting qualitative research. However, this research focuses on two - resource mapping including P-GIS and ranking exercises - which are part of the PRA toolkit. PRA, according to Duraippah *et al.* (2005), recognises that

knowledge is power. Furthermore, PRA, especially in gender studies acknowledges that women are not a homogenous entity and thus identifies who is affected and how they are affected. The specific techniques used in this study are part of visualisation and diagramming methods. Thus, they are useful in the geographical and social sciences since they focus on spatial and resource aspects. Land in particular is a key livelihood and contested resource which these techniques are well suited to examine.

However, whilst the benefits of PRA have been emphasised, there are problems associated with this approach. One of the main concerns surrounding PRA is that since it primarily revolves around focus groups (as was used in this research endeavour), it is premised on the possibility of consensus. Furthermore, PRA assumes that the benefits of the research are self-evident to all involved which may not always be the case. A further issue is that of facilitation. In order for PRA to be successful, it is critical that facilitators are familiar with the local language as well as being trained in PRA techniques. Moreover, it is essential to note that not all sections of the community are equally likely to participate due to numerous factors (Duraiappah *et al.* 2005). These could include practical factors such as a lack of time (busy with chores) or distance (too long a distance to travel) as well as social factors such as gender (some women may be prohibited by their husbands to attend such meetings) or political alliances. In gender terms, often women may be unwilling to participate if men are present as women's knowledge is regarded as inferior. Furthermore, men generally dominate discussions. Thus, it is essential that when focus groups are planned, these barriers to participation are understood and avoided.

For the purposes of this research, many of these drawbacks and challenges were avoided through careful planning and consideration. Facilitators were familiar and comfortable with the local isiZulu language and were able to converse with participants in their mother tongue. Furthermore, the facilitators and scribes were trained at a workshop prior to the research being conducted about the various PRA techniques and how they should be conducted. The challenge of ensuring all sections of the community are able to participate by reducing transport costs was overcome by providing participants with compensation for transport costs as well as their time. A further barrier which was overcome was that of the unwillingness of women to participate should men be present. The women's and men's focus groups were separated and so that they were able to comfortably comment on issues.

Additionally, the separation of focus groups into male and female groups ensured that gender differences could be explored. Furthermore, both men and women were explicitly informed that their comments were confidential, creating the cultural ethos which was necessary for participation. The different PRA techniques used in this study are now explained.

### ***Ranking Exercises***

Ranking exercises were conducted in each focus group, using pairwise ranking and scoring. Ranking exercises (matrices), according to von Maltzahn and van der Riet (2006), are mainly used to determine the order in which objects, concepts and/ or resources are deemed to have the greatest importance by participants usually determined by agreement. The technique can identify issues of concern and prioritise these problems. It is a particularly useful technique to understanding the social dynamics and differentiation among women. However, von Maltzahn and van der Riet (2006) stress that ranking exercises require that no single person dominate and a degree of consensus among participants is achieved. While ranking exercises is generally well known and used often in qualitative research, resource mapping integrating P-GIS is a neglected technique which this research adopts. This approach is discussed next.

### ***Resource Mapping Integrating P-GIS***

According to Kesby (2000), participatory mapping is a technique which employs the use of large sketches (maps) of the area which are created by local people and with local materials. These maps are used to gather data on both natural resources as well as social issues. It further permits an opportunity for key stakeholders to air their views as indicated by Hessel *et al.* (2009). According to von Maltzahn and van der Riet (2006), mapping is a graphic participatory technique which provides physical information regarding the study site as well as community perceptions and socio-economic information. Furthermore, Hessel *et al.* (2009) state that these types of maps facilitate discussion among participants in relation to current land use issues and future options. The focus groups in this study were differentiated according to gender and age groups, and this permitted the

differences between groups in terms of knowledge, perceptions and interests to become evident. von Maltzahn and van der Riet (2006:123) emphasise that the value of this technique is not the accuracy of the maps created but the analysis of 'what people draw, in what order, in what detail and with what comments'. However, Brown (2012) argues that it is possible (and useful) to identify processes that increase both participation and spatial accuracy in P-GIS. Furthermore, von Maltzahn and van der Riet (2006) assert that local knowledge is not homogenous and that different people within a community are exposed to different types and levels of knowledge. Hence, mapping exercises indicate these differences and the different requirements different groups of people require. Rocheleau *et al.* (1995) assert that the visualising techniques such as mapping are beneficial as they facilitate a more transparent and reflective discussion among participants and experts. There are various types of maps that can be created such as social mapping, resource mapping and gendered mapping. These depict key aspects of a community. Rocheleau *et al.* (1995) state that gendered resource mapping is crucial as women's spaces frequently occur between and within lands which are controlled by men.

It is stressed by Kesby (2000) that the tactical nature of diagramming permits the contribution of less dominant personalities by allowing their voices to be heard. Furthermore, participants can immediately see the visual results of the research (Kesby 2000). This, according to Kesby (2000), allows the facilitator to encourage discussion amongst participants which enables them to learn from the results and act on the findings. For example, Bernard *et al.*'s (2011) study using P-GIS in Brazilian Amazonia illustrates the social and conservation implications of using this approach.

The mapping exercise used was participatory mapping. This, according to Quan *et al.* (2001), is participants' free drawn maps indicating features of significance to their livelihoods such as natural resources, land, social resources or their village as well as indicating gendered space. They further note that the data may be incorporated into more formal maps through the use of GIS. Quan *et al.* (2001) emphasise that GIS play an important role in ensuring sustainable use of resources in rural areas, especially when encouraging pro-poor development. A GIS has many definitions. However, the most commonly used definition, which is accepted as the norm is used as it incorporates all the characteristics and components of a GIS (Chrisman 2002:12):

A GIS is a system of hardware, software, data, people, organisations and institutional arrangements for collecting, storing, analysing and disseminating information about areas of the earth.

A GIS manages and integrates data to solve real world problems (MacDonald & Peters 2004). Furthermore, it is connected to software programmes which enable one to digitally draw maps (MacDonald & Peters 2004). Quan *et al.* (2001) argue that a GIS may facilitate one's understanding of spatial aspects of social and economic development by providing a tool which relates socio-economic variables to natural resources. Furthermore, according to Quan *et al.* (2001), a GIS can target interventions and monitor impacts over a variety of areas and scales. Thus, it is a very important tool when assessing the sustainable livelihoods of women in peri-urban and rural areas in relation to resource (including land) issues. According to Quan *et al.* (2001), this is done using P-GIS. This is the integration of local and indigenous knowledge as well as stakeholders' perspectives into the GIS (Quan *et al.* 2001).

Tripathi and Bhattarya (2004) assert that P-GIS methods are important as they:

- Encourage the empowerment of weak groups and a move towards an equitable social redistribution through local decision-making, by allowing local community members to be on an equal status as decision-makers; and
- Facilitate external or outside projects by creating links between the two. This is done by using local people to collaborate between external ideologies and internal demands.

Furthermore, Tripathi and Bhattarya (2004) emphasise that P-GIS enables gender empowerment. They argue that ownership to land and space is a source of social power and without it, people (most commonly women) are disempowered. In order to include the needs and requirements of women who are disempowered, counter or resource maps (which are created by women) are used (Tripathi & Bhattarya 2004).

Thus, from the literature, it is evident that P-GIS is a useful tool to use as it creates a visual representation of gender relations and problems in rural communities in relation to environmental resources. McCall (2003) and McCall and Dunn (2012) suggest that P-GIS has strong potential to map

indicators of poverty, exclusion and/ or discrimination as well as contribute to good governance and the validation of local knowledge. McCall (2003) argues that disadvantaged groups of the community can be prioritised through the mapping of distinct zones of deficiency. This creates a visual representation of disempowerment and neglect which, according to de Perez (2008), is fundamental in explaining the problem at hand to government agencies as well as community leaders. de Perez (2008) continues to explain that these maps are a tool for planning agencies to identify critical areas of development lags so that these can be targeted for appropriate policies to help upgrade them.

## **Methodology**

The peri-urban community of Inanda is located in eThekweni Municipality (24 km North of Durban) within the KwaZulu-Natal province in South Africa. KwaZulu-Natal is South Africa's most populous province. According to the 2001 census data (Statistics South Africa 2001), 21.03% of South African's reside in KwaZulu-Natal. Despite this, Bob (2000) stresses that the province only occupies some 8% of the country's land mass. The majority (85%) of the province's population is of African descent and 53% consist of females (Statistics South Africa, 2001). Additionally, 46% of households in the province are headed by females. According to Classens (2007), many areas in the region are communal and affected by the chieftaincy. Inanda also has wards that are under traditional leaders.

Statistics South Africa (2001) also reveal that 77% of households have electricity supply, with the remaining households using paraffin, gas, candles and other resources for power. Furthermore, 131 527 males are employed compared to 91 215 females. Significantly more women (43 211) are housewives or homemakers compared to 645 males. Moreover, 44.6 % of households have an average annual income of R9 600 or less per annum indicating that just fewer than half the households in the community survive on minimal incomes. Large discrepancies are evident in Inanda, with the built up section experiencing higher incomes than the 'rural' region.

As indicated earlier, Inanda is used as a case study to illustrate that qualitative data using local and indigenous knowledge through the use of PRA techniques can be used to explore gender and land relations. Four focus group discussions (two with men only and two with women only) were held

in the community. Participants in the four focus groups were as follows: one group each with younger women and men only (between the ages of 18-20 years) and one group each with women and men only of mixed ages (over 20 years of age). Participants were chosen according to a cross-section of ages and were identified using purposive sampling.

During the focus group discussions resource mapping and ranking exercises were included as specific activities completed by the focus group participants. This was in addition to discussions pertaining to land rights in Inanda. In terms of the mapping exercise, a base sketch map of Inanda was provided depicting key features in the community. Topographic maps of the area as well as orthophotos were used to generate a sketch map of key physical (rivers, forests, dam, etc.) and infrastructural (roads, hospitals, schools, etc.) features. This formed the base map and the features depicted were used to orientate participants. Participants drew areas of significance, community buildings, activities and land uses onto the base map. They were also asked to define their perception of the boundary of Inanda. Furthermore, participants mapped out ownership of land in the region. The maps were sketched on different layers of tracing paper which were overlaid onto the base map.

The ranking exercise related to problems participants faced with regard to land. This was done in order to ascertain key barriers to land acquisition and use. The first step was to establish consensus regarding the major problems participants face with regard to accessing and using land. These problems were then entered into a matrix in which each problem was weighted against each other. This permitted the problems to be scored and ranked. P-GIS (a component of gendered resource mapping) and the thematic constant comparative approach were used to analyse the data.

## **Results**

This section presents the findings from the primary research undertaken. It is important to note that because each exercise was undertaken four times in the different focus groups, illustrative Figures and a Table are used to inform the discussions and show the type of information the exercises provided. A critical analysis of the data is undertaken, highlighting key findings and observations.

Households in the community mainly use land for homes, renting, small subsistence garden plots, agricultural production for income such as



sugar cane and chicken production, running businesses and forestry. Land predominantly belongs to the municipality, the tribal chiefs (*amakhosi*), the Shembe Church and to individuals who have either bought or inherited land. At the household level, the individuals who own the land according to the participants are usually the father (male head). The women participants defined the owner of the land as those that hold the title deed, indicating that they are aware of legislation. Moreover, a few of the older women asserted that the law states that what belongs to their husband should be inherited by them - the wife - and the children when he dies. Thus, these women stated that they fight for the right to control their land and abandon old patriarchal notions which prohibit females from inheriting land. This is significant as it illustrates that some of the older women are less accepting of social norms and fight for their rights. The younger women argued that women still do not inherit land from their fathers due to the assumption that they will marry. This is in keeping with inheritance trends in Africa which tend to favour male to male patterns. This is also in accordance with Classens' (2007) arguments that single women are often forced to marry as they cannot acquire land without the support of a male figure.

A further finding is that the women argued that it is important for them to have the right to buy or inherit land (which is currently limited and restrictive) as they could use it to earn an income through renting the land, building a shop, farming, forming a crèche, having a bed and breakfast establishment, planting vegetables, family cemeteries as well as making community facilities such as sport fields, community halls, orphanages, parks, etc. They also noted that men use land for building car washes, spray painting facilities, furniture building, sports grounds and for cattle farming. This indicates that Small, Medium and Micro-Enterprises (SMMEs) are found in Inanda; however, it also suggests that there is a gendered component to the distribution of these SMMEs.

The adult women group further argued that it is good for women to own land as it reduces oppression and vulnerability. They asserted that owning land makes them (women) self-sufficient and independent. Furthermore, they argued that women have a sound understanding and knowledge of the land and hence they use the land in a more appropriate and sustainable manner. They also stressed that women only have one husband as opposed to many men who have multiple wives. Hence, they argued that land ownership for women ensures the land always resides with the same family.

However, they did accept that when women do own land, there continues to be a lack of respect for these women as land owners and that conflicts occur should these women make decisions on behalf of their families. This supports the literature which suggests that ownership of land does not necessarily mean control of the land.

The men participants also realised the importance of women owning land as they noted that most households are headed by females. However, they further argued that women are not accustomed to good land use practice and may destroy the land. The men further insisted that it is disadvantageous for women to own land as they will eventually marry and when they do, they will take the wealth acquired from the land with them. This finding reinforces the old patriarchal notions that unmarried women cannot own or inherit land as they are destined to be married as indicated earlier. The men further indicated that women often build small houses on the land and then sell these houses which results in conflict because often this is done without consulting the family. This statement by the men emphasises that even if women own the land, they are expected to consult men when making decisions and hence do not necessarily have full control of the land. The statement also indicates that men and women have different views regarding sustainable land use practices. Women and men require land for different purposes resulting in conflicts arising over land. The problems faced by the women and men participants with regard to land are scored in relation to the results from the pairwise ranking matrices in Table 1 below.

**Table 1: Results from the Ranking Exercise Focusing on Problems Relating to Land in Inanda**

	Women - >20 years	Women – 18 to 20 years	Men - >20 years	Men – 18 to 20 years
Conflict occurs over the land	6	8	10	-
Difficulty in making paying rates	8	-	7	-
People don't pay women rent	5	-	-	-
Difficult to maintain the land	8	-	-	9
The price of land is too high	1	1	-	7
Tools and equipment are not available	7	-	-	-

Difficult to access sufficient water	3	-	-	-
Poor quality of soil	10	5	6	5
Land is not available to buy	2	-	-	
Crime is a problem due to theft and robberies	3	2	-	1
Land is unsafe due to theft and conflicts	-	6	-	-
Women are weak and vulnerable	-	4	-	-
Insufficient land/ land is not available	-	1	3	-
Difficult for women to access land	-	3	-	-
Difficult to access land	-	-	4	3
Decreasing land size and availability	-	-	4	1
Land inheritance/ who should inherit land	-	-	9	-
Water table is too high	-	-	7	-
Most land is used for housing	-	-	2	-
Lack of facilities and infrastructure	-	-	1	-
Poor location of land	-	-	-	6
Poor access to goods and services	-	-	-	3
Briberies and corruption	-	-	-	7
Difficulty for foreigners to access land	-	-	-	9

The above Table indicates that adult women (over 20 years group) perceive the price of purchasing land to be a major obstacle to land acquisition for them in Inanda. Land is either unavailable or too expensive. Furthermore, if women do manage to acquire land, there is often insufficient access to water and necessary tools and equipment such as ploughs which makes agricultural production and other uses of the land difficult. Moreover, crops are often stolen and owners' equipment and other belongings are prone to theft. This suggests that the absence of adequate agricultural inputs such as water, equipment and financial resources could in fact result in land becoming an

increased responsibility to women. The women also emphasised that as female land owners, tenants do not respect them. This often results in tenants not paying them rent, resulting in them experiencing difficulty in maintaining the land and keeping up with their rate payments. They also suggested that the quality of the soil hindered them from adequately utilising the land. However, this did not emerge as a significant problem in the region. From the ranking of the problems, it is clear that land availability and price as well as water availability are severe problems. From the P-GIS mapping exercise, it was evident that most communal gardens occur away from Inanda dam or the river, resulting in reduced water supplies. Most of the land near the dam and river is owned by the local chief. This suggests that this land is predominantly available to men or already allocated. In order to eradicate some of these problems, more communal gardens should be located closer to a water supply. Communal gardens, as suggested by Walker (1997), are also a preferable option for these women as these gardens require less extensive equipment (a problem identified earlier) and hence could be a more viable option than large areas of arable land. The ranking further suggests that should women be empowered and respected as land owners, tenants will pay rent which may eliminate the problem of the cost of maintenance and rates as they may have a sufficient income to pay these.

The Table also indicates that younger women also felt that land is too expensive or too scarce. The younger women further noted that it is difficult for women in particular to access land. They also suggested that women are perceived to be vulnerable or weak and hence are taken advantage of – a problem emphasised by the adult women's group as well. These women do, however, perceive the quality of the soil to be a more pertinent problem and crime to be less important. It is crucial to note that the younger women stated that conflict amongst family members is a problem with regard to land. This reinforces the statements made earlier that when women own land they do not have the freedom to make the decisions regarding what should be done with the land – often resulting in conflicts.

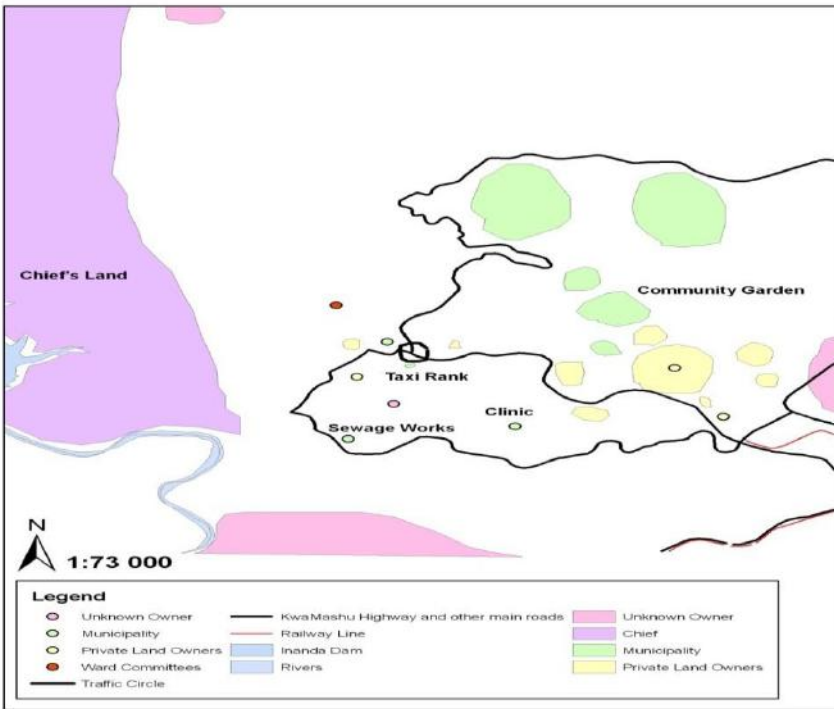
The problems experienced by the male participants are similar in nature as is depicted in Table 1. Once again, the issue of the lack of available land is apparent as, according to the men, most of the available land is used for housing. The quality of the soil in the region is further noted as being an obstacle in Inanda. Further problems suggested by the male participants are the high water table, the burden of rate payments, the issue of maintaining the

land, crime, the issue of where the land is located, the issue of who inherits the land and conflicts between family members over the land – a key concern of the women participants as well. The younger men also suggested that foreigners have greater difficulty in accessing land than local people. This is a very interesting issue raised by the young men, particularly in light of recent xenophobic attacks which have occurred in South Africa. These men also indicated that bribery and corruption was a problem in the region – a point which Bob (2000) highlights as being detrimental to women.

It can be concluded from the ranking exercises that a recurrent problem stressed by both male and female participants was that of the lack of available land. Due to this, communal gardens seem to be the most viable option and are extremely important for women as they encourage resource pooling and sharing within the community which promotes efficiency and equity (Mashinini 2001). The P-GIS map also illustrates that women are in agreement with this suggestion, as they indicated that they would like more communal gardens to occur in the future. Furthermore, it can also be deduced from the Table that declining soil quality is also a significant problem which may be attributed and linked to declining land availability. More people are forced to use a smaller quantity of land resulting in exploitation of the land. This is in accordance with Woodhouse's (2003) findings that resources in rural and peri-urban areas are unable to keep up with growing pressures due to high population densities in these areas which result in large numbers of people sharing resources from a decreasing base.

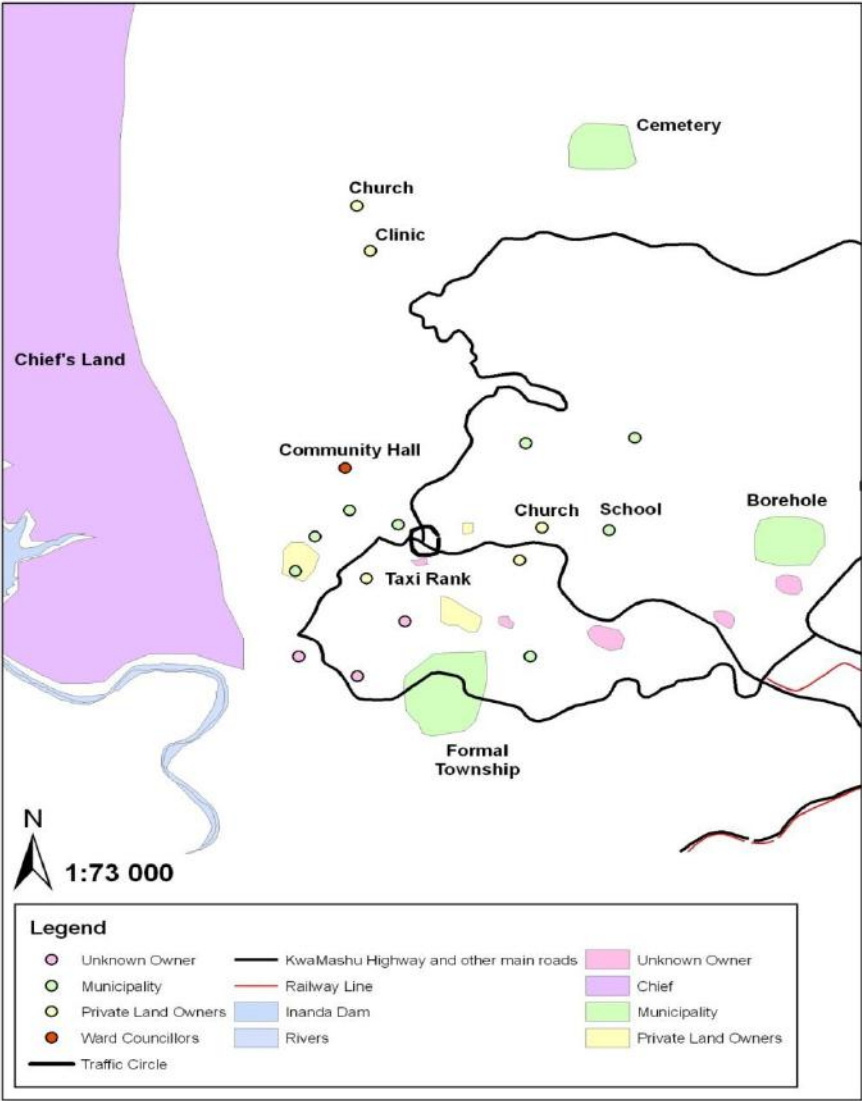
The maps obtained from the P-GIS exercises depicting land ownership for the different groups are illustrated in Figures 1, 2, 3 and 4.

Figures 1 and 2 indicate women's perceptions regarding the owners of the various facilities and land uses depicted. It is clear from the map that the women regard these community gardens to be owned by the municipality and women's non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and not tribal authorities. This suggests that women in the community do not have confidence in the chieftaincy providing land to them. From the map, it can be seen that women perceive the land owned by the chief to be quite extensive and situated in the 'rural' section of Inanda, close to the dam. It also interesting to see that the women perceive the owners of the facilities within the built-up section of Inanda to be the municipality, ward committees or private owners. This suggests that these women have preference for outside institutional control rather than traditional authorities.



**Figure 1: Perceptions of women > 20 years: ownership of land in Inanda (Only the base features are to scale)**

Figure 2 also suggests that the younger women wish to change the traditional custom within the community that land owned by the chief is reserved for men only by indicating that they would like a share of the chief's land in the future through the construction of formal housing on a portion of this land. However, this may not be possible due to the dense land use already being experienced in Inanda. The discussion also revealed that younger women would like to have more facilities such as a hospital, library and sports ground in Inanda in the future. Furthermore, younger women do not perceive community gardens as being important as they failed to illustrate this on their map. This suggests that these women do not value land for its agricultural productive use value – indicating that the younger women possibly have different experiences, responsibilities and aspirations than the older women.



**Figure 2: Perceptions of women participants of ages 18-20: ownership of land in Inanda (Only the base features are to scale)**

Adult women during the focus group discussions are aware of community gardens, shopping complexes, Bridge City, iDube Village, Shembe's religious site, the taxi rank, clinics, schools, the land owned by the chief as well as police stations in the region. They also classify housing settlements according to low cost housing, formal housing or informal settlements. Younger women are aware of iDube Village, Shopping Centres, the Shembe religious site, boreholes as well as churches, clinics and crèches in Inanda. Moreover, the younger women differentiate between formal townships and informal townships. However, it is critical to note that the younger women are less aware of different facilities and structures which exist in the region as compared to the adult women.

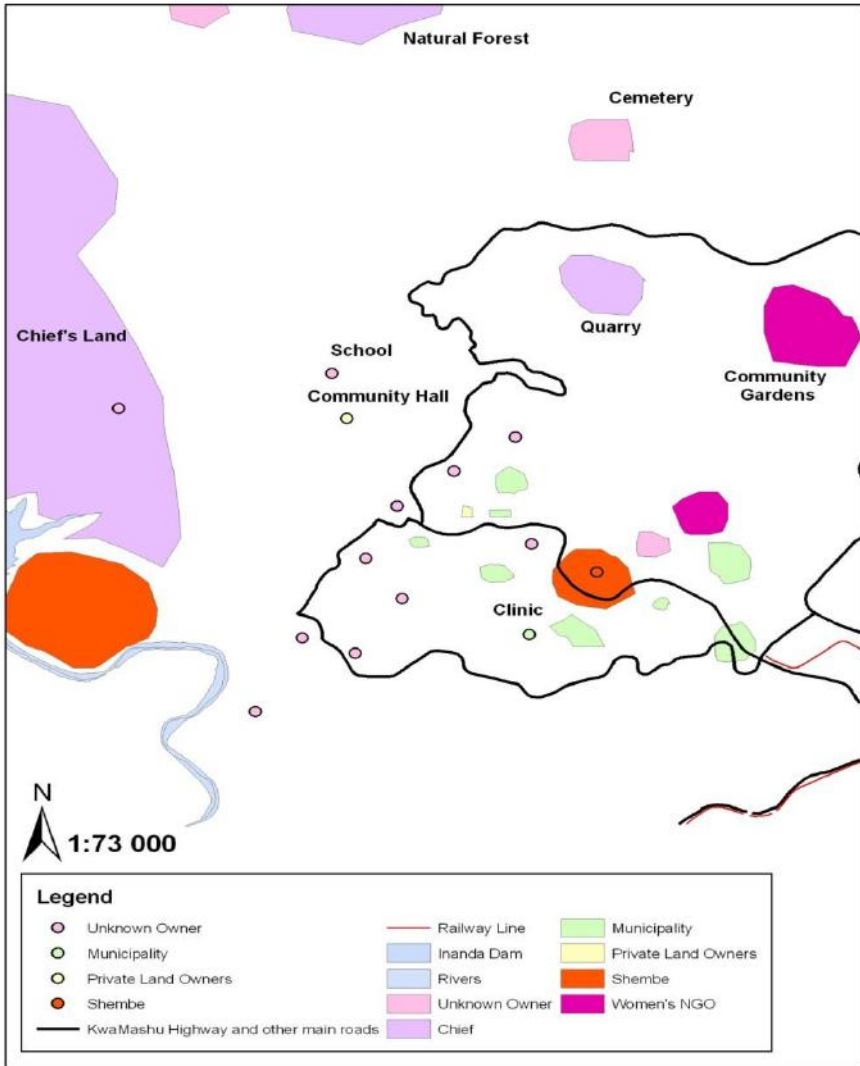
Figure 1 indicates that women view the rural or open portion of Inanda – that which is near the dam as being land which is under the chief's authority and hence, is not available for use by them. Both women's groups also perceive the owners of the facilities within the built-up section of Inanda to be the municipality, ward committees or private owners. The men's maps are illustrated next in Figures 3 and 4.

Figure 3 further indicates that the adult men are aware that community gardens are primarily for the use of women as they indicated that these gardens are run by women's groups. Furthermore, Figure 3 indicates that men perceive the land controlled by the chief as being far less than that depicted by the female participants. They indicate that much of the land which the women perceived to be owned by the chief to be owned by the Shembe Church instead. The map further indicates that municipality as well as private land owners control many of the facilities within Inanda.

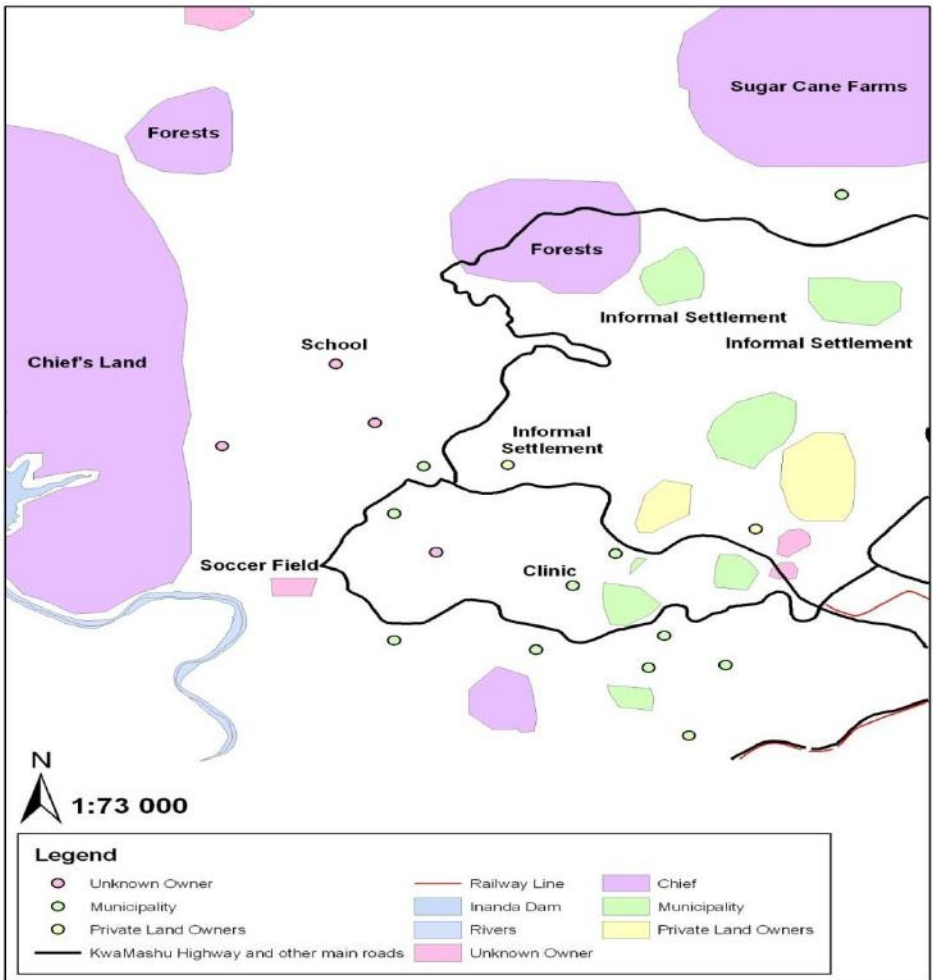
Figure 4 indicates that the young men deem the extent of the land owned by the chief or other tribal authorities to be greater than the other participants. These participants indicated that the chief was not only in charge of land near the dam, but also forests and sugar cane plantations within Inanda. Their differences in perceptions could be due to their lack of knowledge of governmental institutions and structures. However, they do indicate that remaining facilities within Inanda, particularly those situated in the built-up section of the region are owned by the municipality and private owners.

Adult men in Inanda are aware of the presence of cemeteries, soccer fields, clinics, churches, schools, community gardens, forests, quarries, shopping centres as well as iDube Village and eBohleni Village in Inanda.





**Figure 3: Perceptions of men > 20 years: ownership of land in Inanda  
(Only the base features are to scale)**



**Figure 4: Perceptions of men participants of ages 18-20: ownership of land in Inanda (Only the base features are to scale)**

Furthermore, the men are aware of townships, informal settlements and forests in Inanda. The adult male participants are also aware of the community gardens in Inanda and the significance of these. However, the

men's locations of these community gardens on the maps are different to the women's locations on their map. This is an interesting difference. The difference could be due to the men only being aware of these community gardens and not having actual knowledge of the gardens and their locations like the women do. The women's actual knowledge of the gardens and their location could be due to the women's groups having an active member of these community gardens in their group compared to the men's group. The adult men would like more sports fields, hospitals, libraries and municipal offices in the region in the future. These suggestions are in accordance with the suggestions made by the women participants. However, it is evident that the adult men would also like to have the development of key business nodes within Inanda, suggesting that they are more business inclined than the women.

Younger men are aware of the presence of cemeteries, churches, clinics, schools, community halls, libraries, forests, community gardens, heritage sites, shopping complexes, soccer fields, quarries as well as iDube Village and informal settlements within Inanda. It is interesting to note that the younger men are aware of the presence of community gardens within Inanda but the younger women are not. Furthermore, the younger men would like more facilities such as sports fields, schools, shopping complexes, hospitals as well as formal housing to occur in Inanda.

## **Conclusion**

The results reveal that the nature of gendered relationships to land in Inanda is multi-dimensional with several influential factors discernible. Generally, however, it is clear that the extent of women's access to secure land tenure is minimal in Inanda. This is typical of peri-urban and rural communities generally in South Africa. Women continue to be denied access to, control over and inheritance of land which are linked to several factors including the role of the chieftaincy, social norms as well as lack of available technologies which hinder women's access to land and productive use thereof. These are linked to the persistence of patriarchy despite laudable policies in South Africa that promote women's rights, including those pertaining to land. The qualitative research, however, shows that while women in communities such as Inanda remain largely disempowered in terms of land rights, attitudes and

realities are changing. It is imperative that women need to be prioritised through the restructuring of social norms and traditions as well as through the provision of land. This implies that policies and programmes need to incorporate these aspects and simply changing laws to indicate that women are entitled to own land is inadequate. Of importance is developing appropriate mechanisms to challenge discrimination against women and translate policy into practice. Furthermore, there needs to be several support structures and programmes in place to ensure that sustainable livelihoods are generated. Land itself, while a key asset for productive activities, does not guarantee improved quality of life.

Of importance to note is that in the South African context polygamy can also impact on land rights and inheritance patterns which could be contributing to women's vulnerabilities. This was not explored in this study. However, it is recommended that this aspect be considered in future research endeavours.

The ranking and mapping exercises in particular illustrate that there are both differences and commonalities in the way in which women and men perceive and experience land within a community. The study indicates the importance of using qualitative approaches and underscores the significance of comparing findings between men and women as well as among the two groups to unpack key issues and concerns.

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# Revisiting Female Power<sup>1</sup> and the Notion of African Feminisms

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## **Abstract**

This article works from the assertion that African feminism and gender discourse distinguishes itself from its counterpart in the global north by its attention to what are termed the critical indices of ‘bread, butter and power’ issues (Mikell 1997). This article addresses this broad theme through the refractive lens of some of the thematic concerns from a large empirical study of peri-urban African women (see Naidu 2013) and their experiences around the female condom. The article attempts to illustrate that any understanding of gender and feminism in Africa has to make contextual and situational sense to African women, and *their* local lived experiences and realities. By drawing on data from the female condom project (as a situational example), the article acknowledges that the female condom is a female initiated and female controlled intervention, and attempts to contextualise such an intervention within the context of gender and discursive power relations around the female body and female sexuality<sup>2</sup>.

**Keywords:** African feminisms, gender, women, empowerment, tool

## **Introduction**

Notwithstanding the on-going debate around whether there is such a thing as

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<sup>1</sup> The title is a play on the conceptualisation of African Feminism being about ‘bread, butter and *power*’ issues.

<sup>2</sup> The paper entitled ‘Perceptions around Second Generation Female Condoms: Reporting on Women’s Experiences’, focused specifically on describing and reporting back on my Female Condom and Women’s Health project and appears in *Anthropological Notebooks* XIX-1 (2013) 25-34.



African feminism, this article takes the position that African feminism with its own discrete body of scholarship and practitioners, *does exist*. The feminist anthropologist Ifi Amadiume speaks of the context of ‘African women’s presence in international feminisms’ (Amadiume 2001:47), further giving credence to *both* the heterogeneity of feminisms, as well as ‘African feminism’, by positioning African women, not only within African feminism, but within ‘international feminism’. Indeed, her voice is one among others (also Ata Aidoo; Nnaemeka; Oyeronke) who loudly point out the independent development of African feminism that does not mimic its western counterpart in its search to address African specificities. Pointing out what is now patently clear about labelling and (western and imperialist) nomenclature, Amadiume (2001:48) asserted more than a decade ago that African women acted ‘as feminists, even if not quite identifying themselves as such’.

It was Mekgwe (2008:11), writing in the context of feminism in Africa, who reminded us that feminism, ‘both as an activist movement and as a body of ideas’, underscores the necessity for a ‘positive transformation of society’ where women are not marginalised but recognised and respected as ‘full citizens in all spheres of life’. Mekgwe however, also sounds her rather gloomy warning that this, had however, been alarmingly over theorised. Since her announcement (or dire pronouncement) in 2008, not much has changed. We are thus still confronted, amidst the fine hair splitting around whether there is such a thing as an African feminism or not, as *just how* to have sub-Saharan women fully recognised as bearing the cross of a double vulnerability, and being given the passport to full citizenship *out* of the entanglement of some aspects of that vulnerability. For me, an important aspect of this full citizenship, alongside what has been termed the ‘bread and butter and power’ issues (see Mikell 1997; Akin-Aina 2011) of African women, is that of proprietorship or ownership of body and (their) sexuality. This core issue of the right to perform and enact one’s body within personally chosen sexual scripts is fundamental to owning that citizenship passport. In fact, even in the conceptualisation of feminism that makes *contextual and situational sense* to African women, the third element in the triad, after ‘bread’ and ‘butter’, which speaks in very real and literal terms to issues of socio-economic deprivation and food (in)security, as well as to sexuality, is the issue of power.

I consent that many aspects of the emancipatory agenda that holds the attention of gender activists in the global-north is simply foreign in both

grammar (ideas) and speech (actions) to the women in the global-south. This is especially true in Africa, where reproductive rights and gender equality are perhaps differently understood (or differently positioned) by African women. However, I don't agree with Gwendolyn Mikell (1997) that African feminism is not preoccupied (or should *not* be preoccupied) with the female body, with perhaps the same intensity as women in the north. Quite the contrary, in many respects it is the bodies of women in the developing nations and the bodies of African women in the global-south that have been rendered 'docile' (Foucault 1975:149) by a cluster of colonial and postcolonial historical entanglements, as well as by traditional and cultural scripts that hold sway over how body and in this case sexuality should be enacted and enjoyed.

The perpetual reference point (in heterosexual relations) has been against that of the man, the male body and male sexual pleasure. Amadiume claims that women have 'more individual choices and freedoms, but less collective power'. She asks rather pointedly whether this suggests that modernity has in fact made (African) women more vulnerable (Amadiume n.d:2). This speaks directly (and rather loudly in my opinion) to the discursive notion of control and ownership of the female body. The female condom is a case in point. It is a contraceptive tool offered in the face of female empowerment, female individual choice and (female) 'freedom'. However, it is through probing the use and experience of such a 'female initiated' contraceptive artefact that we are able to lay bare some of the vulnerabilities that still lay embedded within certain categories of African women's realities around sex and body, and further radicalise the discourse on sexuality. It also lays bare the specificity of African feminism, where individual choice and freedom in the context of sex and contraception (type and choice) is not as straightforward as might be perceived in the west.

In her essay in a Codesria Bulletin entitled 'Sexuality, African Religio-Cultural Traditions and Modernity: Expanding the Lens', Ifi Amadiume, does exactly that; in other words, she stretches and expands the lens where she looks at both the so called normative 'prescribed sexual practices', as well as the labelled counter normative or so called 'subversive (sexual) alternatives'. She claims that '[T]here has been a lot of meddling with and fighting over women's sexual and reproductive organs' (Amadiume n.d:1).

This article in turn approaches the dialectics of 'body' and 'sexuality' through the refractive lens of issues that surfaced in a large empirical study

probing women's knowledge and perceptions around the female condom. I do not go into the details of the empirical data and ethnographic narratives elicited from that empirical study conducted with approximately 1220 Black African peri-urban women. The details are presented in a research report in the journal *Anthropological Notebooks* (see Naidu 2013) and the reader is referred to that paper. Instead I refer to some of the salient thematic notions that congealed and came up for critical attention through the study. The essay thus proceeds through the lens offered by these empirical points of reference and indexical issues around ideas of body, power and African feminism/s, within the context of the female condom.

### **That Thing Called the Female Condom**

The female condom (FC) was brought into my office, in literal and conceptual terms by a female student who entered and revealed the condom to me physically from her handbag, as well as conceptually, within the research problem of her Masters study. My discipline head had sent along the Masters student in March of 2012, asking me to act as supervisor. The student was a mature, returning student with an activist background and appeared clearly committed to revisiting an incomplete study that she had begun a few years ago on the experiences of women using female condoms. Her interest was related to policy concerns and she was intent on having feedback from women around female condom use with the aim of being able to generate some recommendations that could translate into a grammar for policy. I began supervising the student and confess that quite synchronistically, her study came along at a point in time when my own research gaze was shifting from a landscape of feminist anthropology and gender and female body, to female body and sexuality within a projected wider public health context. The student's study was delimited to collecting and collating feedback from a relatively small cohort of women who had been exposed to female condom programmes and who were using the product. Although small micro studies are important qualitative works that create ethnographic windows into the experiences of the participants, the limited number of women/participants in certain studies, means that questions of a wider nature, including probing that of the critical mass of women *actually using* the female condom, cannot be gauged. Moreover, my own

intellectual leanings and understandings of African feminisms, alerted me to questions around the female condom and issues of taking body ownership and self-intervention in the context of STDs and the alarming statistics and feminised face of HIV/Aids (see Musaba *et al.* 1998; Feldblum 2001). All of this, I felt, demanded a large empirical study to be able to begin to ask questions within a larger and more meaningful sample population.

The point of insertion for my large empirical study (Naidu 2013), and a point that itself lies at the theoretical core of *this* article, was the rather obvious recognition that the female condom is designed to be used *inside* the female body. However, embedded in this simple and obvious assertion were complex corollaries around wider issues of exercising control over the ‘female’ body. The large empirical study (Naidu 2013) was thus cast against the assumption that female condom could potentially be a powerful contraceptive tool whose use the women could also (potentially) initiate and use against sexually transmitted diseases, and in so doing, also allow them to enact their own sexual scripts, and in some way exercise control over their (sexual) bodies, more especially with the high prevalence rates of HIV/Aids in the sub Saharan geo-political and situated context.

Particular thematic issues surfaced within the study with the women. From amongst the smaller group of the sampled women who had actual knowledge and familiarity of use with the female condom (approximately 111 from 1220 women), emerged issues that spoke directly to discursive notions of bodily ownership and control. Feminist writers like bell hooks, Margaret Locke, Judith Butler *et al.* point out that deeply embedded power regimes (that speak directly to the body politic) cohere around how women are represented in both popular discourses, as well as within medical and health interventions that are assembled for women (and women’s bodies). Promoting female condoms is one such intervention, and is positioned within female health discourses. It is also an intervention that one perceives to be female initiated and female controlled. In other words the condom was meant to be something that the woman wore on her body, and something that she, of her own accord, could decide to wear. Both these points made the contraception (intellectually speaking) highly attractive, and allowed a lens to probe the materiality of the female body, in both an empirical as well as a theoretical manner. Lewis, writing over a decade ago in an introduction to an anthology of papers on ‘African Feminism’ in the popular Journal *Agenda*, tells us that citing the reciprocity between theory and experience or

fieldwork, ‘draws attention to African women’s cultural expression as a vibrant yet often neglected or misrepresented form of theoretical and intellectual intervention’. This article is an attempt to show such a reciprocal relationship between theory and data.

The essay is divided into three sections that theoretically trace the contours of the **‘bread’**, **‘butter’** and **‘power’** metaphor that I believe holds powerful discursive sway in sub-Saharan Africa. Such an enterprise also allows us to confront ‘head on’ what the African feminist scholar Obioma Naemeka (2003: 362) refers to as *both* a ‘necessity’ as well the ‘prudence’ of ‘building on the indigenous’ in the construction of African feminist theory, that has in many respects suffered imperial intrusion. My own stance and entry into the intellectual discussion on African feminisms affirms the need for the recognition of African feminist theory by attempting to proceed through and building on the ‘indigenous’ as Naemeka puts it. The ‘indigenous’ in this instance, is my female condom research project that sought to elicit feedback and responses from particular categories of local peri-urban African women. Such responses in turn allow us to draw back the curtain on issues of ‘bread’, ‘butter’ and ‘power’ in the lived contexts of the women, by proceeding through the material artefact of the female condom and the meaning it has on issues of (female) body and sexuality. It is believed that ‘contextually-grounded African theories’ as well as context specific analytical tools have much to offer to ‘context-specific feminist engagements’ (Lewis 2001:5; see also Kolawole 2002). This article thus works to place the female condom (within such a context specific) African feminist discourse.

### **‘Bread’: Body and Sex**

I use ‘bread’ to represent the (everyday) materiality of the female body. Bread is a vital staple that is often taken for granted as a commonplace everyday item in the domestic larder. It is a seemingly invisible article of food. It is nothing overly special as far as the taste and palate is concerned. As a staple food, its everyday (yet powerful) presence as a basic and stock item renders it almost invisible. Bread stands in direct antithesis to the mostly unheard of (in the average African home) European gastronomic luxury of something like truffles or caviar.

*No one misses bread, until there is no bread in the house.*

For a significant number<sup>3</sup> of African heterosexual women (aged 22 to 38) interviewed within the female condom project (see Naidu 2013), their body was also something that they took for granted in their relationships with their partners. For these women, their body was there to facilitate having children and performing their roles as wives or partners. The feminist Judith Butler tells us that materiality of the body is a 'construction that emerges out of a field of power that shapes its contours, marking it with sex and gender' (Butler cited in Sperling *et al.* 2001:1158). *Sex* was something that these women felt they were obliged to perform *for* and *with* their male partners in and through their material bodies. However, not until that body was experienced in the context of overt male physical control or violence, did the women think twice about their embodiment as 'female' and (sexual) women. Narratives (Naidu 2013; Naidu & Ngqila 2013) of peri-urban African women complaining that they were concerned about the fidelity of the partners, alongside their (partners') occasional (or even frequent) demand for non-condomised sex, appeared to signal their awareness that their bodies were not necessarily safe within particular traditional scripts of male sexual behaviour.

The female condom, by placing its use within the hands of the women, in both a literal as well as figurative sense, could have been assumed as providing a powerful visual reminder to the women, of their sexuality, and their potential control over that sexuality. It was after all designed for them to use. The big selling point of the female condoms, as mentioned earlier, is that they are designed to be used on the female body; to be inserted *by* the female, into '*her*' body. All of these allude to the female condom being viewed as potentially empowering to the women. Findings from the Naidu (2013) study reveal however, that far from being empowering, the women that used the

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<sup>3</sup> This is not to say that all the women sampled (n=1200) in the empirical study (Naidu 2013) felt that way. However, the point being made is that a fairly significant number of women, almost a third of the women spoke in a matter of fact way about their bodies. Thus, while a large number voiced ownership and an awareness that their bodies belonged to them, it was nevertheless disconcerting that a significant number still spoke of their bodies in basic terms- as being for motherhood and for the pleasure of their male partners.

female condom grappled with the visual aesthetics of the female condom which are appreciably different from that of the male condom. They commented on how ‘shapeless’, and ‘huge’ the female condom appeared, once taken out of the package. The women bemoaned that such aesthetics appeared to feed, what they saw as ‘male thinking’ about female sexual organs as being big (and ‘loose’) and undesirable. It became obvious that merely making the female condom available for purchase and even free distribution did not alter the already embedded gendered power regimes that were imbricated in male-female bodily and sexual relations. Such embedded regimes undergirded the geometry of power that was skewed in favour of the male (body). For a significant and unfortunate number of African women, the female condom’s large and ill-fitting design served as a discursive reminder that the aesthetics of the shape and size of their bodies was not at the core of informing the actual design of the condom. Notwithstanding some new designs being tentatively marketed now, the bulk of the female condoms being distributed are the ubiquitously designed ‘generic’ one size fits all model. None of this made it any easier for these women to enact sexual scripts that also facilitated sexual pleasure. Their concerns, reinforced by a ‘product’ that was ill at ease with the exegesis of their bodies and their needs, in turn meant that their thoughts remained at the level of merely protecting themselves and their bodies with the female condom, rather than with enjoying themselves *while* being protected. It was Granqvist who pointed out that gender is ‘a social practice that refers to bodies and what bodies do’ (2006: 381). In this instance the gendered female bodies were reduced to protecting the materiality of body, and not much more, in terms of their own pleasure.

### **‘Butter’: Sex and Pleasure**

If ‘bread’ signified the connotative materiality of the physical body, then ‘butter’ is the pleasurable additive to that bread. It is no exaggeration that even a modest sliver of butter on a slice of bread, enhances taste and the (overall experience of the) meal. Sex between partners in heterosexual relations, is meant to be, not only pleasurable for the male, but *also for the female*. This may appear a rather self-evident point. However, narratives from women interviewed, reveal that there are a number of women in

relationships where they are obliged to enact their sexuality within traditional scripts of masculinities (see Naidu 2013; Naidu & Ngqila 2013) and which denied them any active sexual pleasure<sup>4</sup>. To stretch the metaphor of *'butter on bread'*, one can safely add that even the slightest bit of (sexual) pleasure, heightens and enhances the sexual experience. However, many women from the group that had used female condoms complained about the 'fit' of the female contraception being uncomfortable, and they felt that the ill-fitting condom 'could also slip out at any moment'. This in turn further denied them any pleasure, in anticipation of the condom falling out.

Instead, these women voiced that their attention shifted to whether 'it was going to be okay' for the man. Informants (see Naidu 2013) shared that that 'FCs were not 'tight enough', causing an appreciable level of discomfort, and the feeling that they had to 'hold on''. These women were thus also holding on in psychological terms, as during intercourse, their concerns were about the condoms 'slipping off'. This in turn worked to minimise their enjoyment and fulfilment, as they were preoccupied with the condom, which they felt *'just did not fit right'*. They wished *'that there were better fitting versions'*. Yet any visit to the local supermarket or shop around the corner, reveals a mini smorgasbord of range and choice of selection (colours and textures and of course, different sizes!) of male condoms available as opposed to female condoms. Such choice is further entangled and imbricated with notions of sexual pleasure. While colour and texture (of male condoms) may arguably be for the pleasure of either sex, the choice of size is a design element that keeps the bodily exegetics of the male in mind!

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<sup>4</sup> This is not to imply that *none* of the women in the study acknowledged that sex was pleasurable to them. The point being made however, was that there were women who indicated that they were hesitant to openly demonstrate that they found sex pleasurable for fear of being 'negatively' perceived by their partners, as 'loose' and 'fast' women who craved sex. These kinds of responses from the large study precipitated the need for a smaller qualitative bolt-on study where women were selectively sampled. These women were in long standing relationships with their partners and husbands and shared experiences that indicated that they were compelled to enact their sexuality within traditional masculine scripts (see Naidu & Ngqila 2013).



Patricia McFadden, insisted that sexual pleasure was a feminist choice (McFadden 2002, see also the feminist anthropologist Amadiume 2001). While this may appear as a rather obvious statement in the context of western feminism and the global-north, in the context of certain communities of sub-Saharan women, and certainly for some rural and peri-urban Black South African women, it *was and is* an assertion that needs to be vociferously reiterated. Yet in certain (although not all-see Amadiume 2001), African contexts and certain African communities, female pleasure, desire and eroticism are still somewhat tabooed topics. Like the right to condomise, the right to expect full pleasure and communicate desire is a right that is not always able to be asserted. For the women, *asserting the right is not enough to ensure (obtaining) the right*.

The CODESRIA (Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa) 2012 programme and training around what they term as 'African Sexualities' states on their website that:

Patriarchal society, the colonial and post-colonial contexts show that the male body and the female body bear cultural meanings and representations that reflect power relations within society<sup>5</sup>.

Thus amidst the debate of diversity vs. essentialism, and around whether there is in fact an 'African sexuality' that may be different from other types of (western) sexuality or sexualities per se, is the acknowledgement that in the post colony, the female body and male body is differently constructed and bears different cultural meanings and reflections. What is obvious is that this differently constructed cultural meaning is indeed reflective of the power relations in society. Patricia McFadden's (2002: 2) assertion rings loudly true that for a significant number of Black African women, the 'connection between power and pleasure is not often recognised'. She goes on to say what is unfortunately true that, patriarchal power is premised and articulates around the suppression of women's control and power and ownership over their own bodies (McFadden 2002: 2).

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<sup>5</sup> Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA). Available at: <http://www.codesria.org/spip.php/article1563>.

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### **‘Power’**

*‘Bread’, ‘butter’ and ‘power’....* Within the contours of our extended metaphor, power would be power over being able to ‘eat’ and feed oneself, to eat *when, how* and *what* one chose. Power in the context of the empirical study, is understood as the power and ability to initiate sex, to mutually control sex, and most importantly, to be in charge of one’s bodily health in the context of sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS.

Nnaemeka (2003: 363) makes the point that in certain poststructuralist contexts, ‘intellectuals erect discursive walls that insulate them from the social action (engagement) needed to promote social change’. Desiree Lewis (2001: 5) points to the work of the Nigerian-British feminist Amina Mama and the South African feminist anthropologist Elaine Salo, where they claim an intellectual chasm between the kind of theoretical work that comes from ‘deductive generalisation’ and ‘analytical distance’ and the ‘rigorous critique of intersecting power relations that stems from involvement in gendered African processes’. Some of these gendered African processes surfaced in the narratives of the women who claimed that notwithstanding the very real fears around HIV/AIDS for themselves (and their male partners) there were times that they felt powerless to demand its use. Through either subtle coercion, or overt force from the partners; they confessed that there were times they felt compelled ‘to give in’ to the sexual demands of the partners, even in the absence of condoms. Comments such as ‘... *why do men always have privilege in our lives and over our bodies ...*’ reveal this sense of powerlessness (see Naidu & Ngqila 2013).

In the regions of sub-Saharan Africa, three women are infected with HIV for every two men<sup>6</sup>. Barker and Ricardo (2005: viii) assert that ‘men’s use of condoms is still always, or frequently, much lower than desired’, and ‘varies according to the reported nature of the partner or relationship e.g. occasional partner, regular partner, or sex worker’. However, many interventions with African women seem not to fully address critical contextual gender issues. One such intervention is that of the female condom. The female condom thus emerges as a *possible* tool whose use the women could possibly initiate and control against also sexually transmitted diseases. However, as pointed out in an international impact study (Marseille & Kahn 2008) and certainly true within the local context as the empirical study

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<sup>6</sup> UNAIDS ‘AIDS Epidemic Update,’ December 2006.

revealed, the female condom lacks a consistent definition of plausible success and acceptance across the different groups of women surveyed<sup>7</sup>. Within the context of the study (Naidu & Ngqila 2013), there appeared norms related to (particular forms of) masculinity and sexuality, such as multiple partners as evidence of male sexual prowess, which placed women at higher risk of HIV infection. Yet such relatively widely publicised norms did not equate to greater power over bodily health and safety for the women.

While ‘bodily integrity’ (Guy-Sheftall 2003:34) is of course critical in the sub-Saharan context and issues around the seemingly feminised face of HIV/AIDS and the ravages of certain contexts of forced female circumcision, I have to add that for me, this bodily integrity also critically extends to ownership and proprietary rights over one’s body in the context of (what ought to be pleasurable) sexual activity. For many categories of African women, this is perhaps not as patronising as it may sound to the ears of Western feminists. Within the particular situational realities of many African women in rural spaces, or generally speaking women in relationships where the power geometries are angled out of their favour (see Mikell 1997; Dosekun 2007) – the male condom cannot always be easily demanded. These are contexts of gendered power imbalances and hegemonic (Connell 1995) masculinities that further pathologise the female body. Morrell (2001:33) asserts that, in the South African context, men respond differently to changing gender relations, and labels these as being reactive, accommodating or progressive. Notwithstanding the levels of agency increasingly exercised by (African) women, subtly coerced performances within a context of ‘traditional’ masculinized practices such as unprotected sex (meant to offer a more pleasurable experience to the male partner), leave some African women vulnerable and forced to negotiate a clutch of distressing health concerns around sexually transmitted diseases, and of course HIV/AIDS (see Kerrigan *et al.* 2000; Brijnath 2007). It is of course cause for concern that any (version of) masculinity asserted does not emasculate the ‘everyday’ agency and power over their own bodies that women *should* be able to articulate (see Naidu & Ngqila 2013).

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<sup>7</sup> Additionally the female condom is at present still much less cost-effective than the male condom based on analytical modelling and based on inherent design flaws that severely inhabit the success of their use.

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## **Conclusion**

African feminism which shows its own intellectual trajectory, benefits from an 'ongoing process of self-definition and re-definition' (see Akin-Aina 2011: 66) and of course should not capitulate to notions of a global sisterhood that seeks to identify and fix a 'universalising' feminist suffragette experience. Certainly some of the issues that surfaced in the study on female condoms lay bare the difference in women's experiences in the context of the discursive ownership of body and sexuality. It was Obioma Nnaemeka (2003: 358) who reminded us a decade ago that theory has a central and critical role in helping to 'scrutinise, decipher, and name the everyday'; adding that the, 'practice of everyday informs theory making'. Our agenda as scholars and activists working with African women and African feminisms thus becomes less about importing 'theoretical constructs' that do not stimulate local context specific 'critiques of epistemologies, methodologies and practices' (Barriteau 2003: 3 cited in Roach-Baptiste 2011: 1) and more about confronting contextual realities and vernacular discourses that may have been rendered invisible, and potentially silent, even perhaps within the competing and loud dissensions around *what African feminisms is, and whether it actually exists*.

Sinmi Akin-Aina tells us that African feminisms are in 'continuous flux; engaging with the context in which they are wrought'. She points out that African feminism should resist elements of Western feminism which have nothing to say about the African experience (2011:70, see also Gordon 1997). For her African feminism(s) is instead, and ought to be, a pluralism and heterogeneity that 'captures the fluidity and dynamism of the different cultural imperatives, historical forces, and localised realities (Naemeka 1998: 5; Lewis 2001: 5). Data from the earlier study (Naidu 2013) allows us to further theorise that for many African women, it is seldom recognised that sexual pleasure is also their fundamental corporeal and emotional (spiritual even!) entitlement, even though certain so-called cultural (and gendered) practices may well work to exclude women from sites related to power in social and material ways (see McFadden 2003:3) and deny (for women) the relationship between sexual pleasure and power, while simultaneously conflating sexuality with reproduction.

I return to my opening comments and bone of intellectual contention with Gwendolyn Mikell (1997) who suggests that African feminism should

*not* be preoccupied with the female body, with perhaps the same intensity as women in the north. Probing the use of the seemingly empowering female condom amongst certain categories of Black African women has been able to grant a situated example and window into notions of sex and sexuality. It has also offered the discursive space for both empirical data as well as theory for contributing to the continuing discussion on African feminisms and the feminist enterprise and agenda. For me, bodily ownership is fundamental to any feminist agenda that works to dis-entangle women from traditional and cultural scripts that seek to control how body and sexuality ought to be circumscribed and enacted against the perpetual reference point of the man, the male body and male sexual pleasure.

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# **The Position of Women in Zulu and Shona Societies: The Case of *Uvalo Lwezinhlonzi* and *Nervous Conditions***

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## **Abstract**

African cultures epitomize patriarchy in which cultural practices are inherent and in that way translated through certain practices. Some of the patriarchal ideologies, while present in African cultures in general, do sometimes focus specifically on the relationship between men and women. Superiority of the male child and the convention of the female being responsible for the domestic space are amongst sensitive issues that critical debate on any discourse on patriarchy and gender may be perceived to be mitigating. While gender issues are a universal concern some societies are far deeply affected by them than others as this article will demonstrate.

Tackling issues of gender discrimination and in their distinctive contexts, Jordan Ngubane and Tsitsi Dangarembga in *Uvalo Lwezinhlonzi* (1975) and *Nervous Conditions* (1988) respectively, address issues that still affect most women within the African continent even in the twenty first century. This situation is not restricted to rural and illiterate women but extends to urban and educated women just as this will be revealed through selected novels. This article examines intrinsic gender oppressive practices prevalent in Zulu and Shona cultures taking into account the voice of male and female authorship. Some of the most critical key issues to be investigated centres around language, gender and power as reflected in the literary works of these authors. An analysis of key characters in the two novels will be juxtaposed with an objective of re-thinking new ways of redressing gender iniquity in African societies in particular. Using as my framework feminist approach to gender as a social construct, I will challenge the traditionally held notion of women as inferior and in the process offer some perspectives on the subject in question.

**Keywords:** literature, patriarchal discourse, gender, Tsitsi Dangarembga, Jordan Ngubane

## **Introduction**

Within a family structure optimum psychological well-being need to be maintained at all times. As such, diverse gender roles regulate individual and general social behavior, sanctioning only specific behaviors for each gender. Mbiti (1969: xi) argues that traditional concepts still form the essential background of many African people though obviously this differs from family to family and from place to place. Given that disagreement is inevitable in any human society, specific forms are but one of the explicit means through which verbalization of these conflicts amongst women and men echo the value systems of various societies. Furthermore, it is known that literature is highly influenced by the society and cultural contexts in which it is produced or read. Needless to say it is a reflection of how a particular society, through family, has been socialized; and socialization plays an important role in society since it welcomes and incorporates new members into a particular society. In this way values, beliefs and norms are transferred from one generation to another. In patriarchal societies people are socialised to believe that masculine gender is superior to feminine gender. However, as argued by Murray (1999:72) 'there is no factual inherent reason why the male should be valued more than the female'. Taking the argument further Memela (2005: 96) argues that it then becomes a problem when male and female differential socio-cultural evaluative categories are used negatively or used to benefit only one group of society over another.

It is necessary to caution that feminist approach is not a monolithic process but rather one that incorporates various argumentative schools of thought. Bearing in mind that a common characteristic of literary texts is that they never quite fit the critical –analytical grids that readers try to place over them in that they always mean more than we can grasp and explain, I will nevertheless present my own response to the reading of these texts as far as feminist approach to gender as a social construct is concerned. The article attempts to challenge the notion within patriarchal societies; of women being considered inferior. In this regard the assertion of Anderson and Zinsser (1988: xiv) holds true when they claim that in as much as there are many

factors which have limited women's lives, negative cultural traditions have proved the most powerful and the most resistant to change.

The focus as far as this article is concerned, is the common commitment to the cause of objection against conventional male and female role designation in society. Because the discussion revolves around patriarchal power and gender, the article legitimately draws from post structural feminist theory as put forward by Weedon (1987) who perceives patriarchal power as structural and existing in institutions and social practices rather than merely being individual intentions; thus reinforcing that engendering is a social construct. The theory further speculates that power rests on the societal meaning validated by biological and sexual distinguishing features. Women are thus defined in relation to the male norm with the result that women's welfare is subordinated to that of men. However, women in their own right are complete members of the species to which both sexes belong and as women they are also capable of participating in the full range of human activities. Through analysis of the two novels these 'entrenched' ways of thinking about gender roles will be debated with an objective of finding alternative ways of addressing the matter. Furthermore, in the twenty first century, and within the context of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, this deep rooted issue should not even be a constant subject of debate.

## **Background**

To facilitate understanding and appreciation of the article it is crucial that the contextual background and highlights of the texts are offered. Writers of extended fictional prose often use particular devices to give shape to their ideas; to give them structure or form. These include setting, character, protagonist, narrator and narrative technique (Murray 1999). Similarly, and within a feminist perspective proposed in the introduction above, the main argument throughout this article, and as depicted in the two novels, is the gender inequalities which mirror the gender relations found in a patriarchal society and which defy geographic location as seen in the setting of the two novels – one set in South Africa and the other in Zimbabwe.

The fundamental question that the article aims to address through a critical and comparative analysis of the two selected fictional literary works *Uvalo Lwezinhlonzi* (1975) and *Nervous Conditions* (1988) is why the status

of women within patriarchal societies seems to be still predetermined by the class which women hold in society and which categorises them into lower ranks than men. Class by virtue of this article defines the position certain group of people hold in the westernised educational context – the so called educated versus the uneducated societies. The critical analysis of the subservient position of women in the Zulu and Shona societies will attempt to explore this question with an aim of addressing the fundamental dilemma within the patriarchal order as well as recommending future approach to the problem. In essence – the notion that the experiences of women around the world and perhaps throughout time and irrespective of position they themselves hold as women in society, have been shaped by beliefs in men's superior authority – is being questioned in this article.

In order to appreciate what is happening in the selected texts, a summary of the stories will be presented. The précis of texts accompanied by underlying personal remarks will be presented separately and then a comparative analysis will be drawn.

### **Synopsis of Plot in *Uvalo Lwezinhlonzi***

Set in 1975, in South Africa, the novel reveals a period of continued migrant labor system where men would leave rural areas in search of better opportunities in urban areas. A brief outline of *Uvalo Lwezinhlonzi* explores key issues that highlight the focus of the article. Literally and contextually translated the title means 'Fear of the frowns', immediately alluding to a sense of anxiety and nervousness which conjure images of emotional oppression generally typical of subjugation. The main character, Zulumacansi who comes from a rural village of Buthunqe goes to the city of Durban, in search of work. The same problem of subjugation of women was already an issue even as seen in this context through Zulumacansi leaving his village to go and look for work in order to pay *ilobolo* (bride price) for a potential wife. He returns to his village after having saved what he considers to be substantial for him to secure a wife. Even though, he is not popular with girls –and is what could be called in those days '*isishimane*' - as a result of his newly acquired wealth, and in line with the traditional belief that a man is the provider of a home, he suddenly finds himself an eligible bachelor - a target with families which want him to marry their daughters. Amongst these families is a man by the name of Manamuza who has earmarked Zulumacansi for his daughter, Bajwayele.

Bajwayele is portrayed as an uneducated woman who has been raised to observe all duties and roles befitting of a rural woman, whose fate is to merely get a husband. She has been trained from her family about what she has to do and how she is supposed to behave as a woman. While she has feelings for another young man, Potolozi, she cannot convince her father that she does not want to marry Zulumacansi. After all, lacking in material possessions, Potolozi, according to her father, is not in the league he would want to associate with. Because Bajwayele's mother succumbs to the authority of her husband all the time, Bajwayele has nothing else to compare her status as a woman to, so she cannot question any of these issues except to simply comply. Hence at some point we hear her uttering short I affirmative responses to her father's coercion to marry Zulumacansi. These include:

‘Ngiyezwa baba’ page 36.  
(hear, father)

‘Ngiyakuzwa loku okushiwo ngubaba’ page 37.  
(I hear that which father is saying)

Zulumacansi proposes marriage to Bajwayele, but the young woman rejects his advances because she does not have feelings for him. This makes her father, Manamuza furious and after beating her up for trying to present her case, Bajwayele finds herself with no choice but to marry the man even against her will. In fact, she is also coerced into the marriage by the very woman who is supposed to be on her side, KaMemunce, her mother. She says to her girl-child,

‘Kulungile Bajwayele, sale usuhamba mntanami. Umhlaba lona ubuswa ngamadoda’ page 60.  
(It's fine Bajwayele. Just go my child. This earth is controlled by men).

It is important to note that Bajwayele's mother refers to the fact that the world is ruled by men- she does not qualify the type of men who rule, that is as defined by class. She, even as an uneducated woman, seems to know that men in general rule the world, and hence that makes women powerless to

make their own decisions. At the same time, the same uttering by Bajwayele's mother can be viewed as yet another justification that when one is not educated one does not tend to have the same world view and power to realise that she or he has choices in life. This is a contradiction posed by the article – that is, where does one draw the line where women oppression is concerned!

Here one can point out elements of woman oppression since as a girl-child, Bajwayele is under the authority of her father, and as a young woman she cannot go against the rules imposed on her by tradition – to listen to her father even on matters of the heart. She finds herself in a compromised position where her feelings, as a woman are disregarded in favour of the two men; her father and the man she is expected to marry. Her father saw an opportunity of replenishing his cattle byres by offering his daughter to the highest bidder regardless of the fact that Bajwayele wanted Potolozi to be her future husband. Her father used her to add more cattle into his byres while Zulumacansi as her husband, used *ilobolo* to 'own' her. It is therefore clear that Bajwayele is perceived as a commodity by her patriarchal system.

At this point it is important to offer an essence of the concept of traditional marriage which societies later changed to suit their belief systems. Ancient Zulu society saw marriage as essential for the continuation of a man's lineage so that he could achieve the status of 'ancestor', revered and remembered by his descendants for generations. A woman was 'brought in' as a kind of 'borrowing' to 'do the job' of producing children for the man and his clan. The idea of 'borrowing' soon became one of 'buying the services of' due to the greed of the 'lending' family (Zondi 2007:21). In this sense it is evident that originally there was no clause, written or unwritten that sought to perpetually oppress women. It is societies that have distorted what was initially a worthwhile practice; leading to the current situation which sees objectification of women. This abuse of culture is seen in Manamuza's rigid and daunting statement to Bajwayele. He says:

'Ngiyakuthuma wemntanami, ngithi ngilandele izinkomo kwaBhekokwakhe' page 57.

(I send you my child, I say go and fetch the cows for me from Bhekokwakhe)

This refers to Zulumacansi's ancestors. Masovenyeza, another main character

in the story, has several wives; one of them being Zulumacansi's sister, Qimbile. There exists a conflict between the two men; Zulumacansi demands the balance of the *lobolo* cattle paid towards his sister, Qimbile, and Masovenyeza does not succumb to his demands since he is not yet in a position to pay the remaining cows. After all according to tradition a man was not bound to pay all the *lobolo* cows at once. The irony is that Zulumacansi himself acknowledges that he does not have sufficient cattle to entirely meet his *lobolo* obligation towards Bajwayele; which is why he is demanding outstanding cows from Masovenyeza. He wants to sort out his own 'outstanding debt'. In all these dialogues women in question or their mothers have little or nothing to contribute in the discussion about the affairs that concern them. They are discussed and referred to as if they are not part of the problem when, in fact they are the centre of the debate. Does this have anything to do with being uneducated in an African society and in this case a Zulu society?

Most of the women in a discourse are not given much value. For instance, Zulumacansi's sister is a crucial character for him to finalise his *lobolo* requirements yet she does not have a say. Nobody cares about the possible consequences the demands made on her husband are going to have on her. Perhaps that is one of the devices, however, subtle, that the author uses to further comment on the marginalisation of women even on issues that touch specifically on them. In this context, John et.al (2006:28) depicts the scenario discussed above fittingly when he argues that in patriarchal societies a woman is rarely consulted and defers only to her husband.

Traditionally a woman is never married to her husband only but to his whole family or clan. A newlywed woman has to show her competence by doing chores that will demonstrate that she is the 'right' woman that will 'build' the family. Under her husband's authority, Bajwayele, is subjugated to all kinds of servitude; her husband's and his family. Despite this she is not appreciated. Due to her continued unhappiness, Bajwayele finally runs away leaving her husband even though it is culturally unacceptable for a woman to resort to abandoning her husband after *lobolo* has been paid out for her. Under such circumstances it is customary that the girl's family has to return *ilobolo* to the husband if she leaves him on her own initiative or if the husband chases her away on infidelity grounds; misconstrued or confirmed. According to Delius and Glaser in Mkhize (2011) married women were expected to remain loyal to their husbands regardless of whether they had extra marital relationships.

For fear of losing his *lobolo* and on Zulumacansi's insistence, Bajwayele's father, Manamuza, goes in search of his daughter. The reason for finding his daughter is crucial in this argument. It is not because Bajwayele's action has awoken a sense of guilt in him for marrying her to a man she does not love but he goes to Benoni (where he has learned the daughter fled to) in search of her for his self-serving interests. He wants to turn her in to her husband in order to maintain his dignity and status as *umnumzane*, head of the household with a herd of cattle. There is no change of heart at all. This situation echoes similar views held by women in the recent study which I conducted and where women shared their intimate attitudes about the men in their lives. One such reaction was that in the eyes of their men they are like trash; something that is of no use to anyone; 'we are doormats for the men. Yes, they paid *ilobolo* for us but we do not want to be treated like doormats' (Zondi 2007:26).

When Bajwayele's father gets to Benoni, he is confronted by a different way of thinking, where male dominance and the oppressive nature of patriarchy is perceived to be outdated, unwelcome and discouraged. This could be perhaps from yet again a migrant labour and resultant lifestyle perspective. In the novel, we therefore see that women in Benoni rebuke Manamuza and this upsets him immensely as he thinks that cultural values are being eroded. In turn, and ironically Manamuza rekindles male consciousness in the men he finds in the city. As if they have been in a slumber, the eyes of the men from the city, are open and they listen to Manamuza with renewed faith thus ushering in the cycle of women oppression and while bringing them face to face with their fate; if women had thought male domination was a thing of the homesteads they were wrong because patriarchy does not belong to a particular space; it is what informs the belief system and is thus taken everywhere people go. As long as there is no transformation and acknowledgement that culture evolves, whatever is suggested will seem far-fetched. Bajwayele is brought back home and to her husband but she flees again. The fact that even after being brought back to her husband, Bajwayele escapes again, could be interpreted that she is symbolically challenging the status quo, a topic that could be a debate on its own. However, in the context of her absconding yet again to where nobody finds her this time, one can conclude that Bajwayele may have run away from one man, but she is still trapped by all other men even away from her geographic place of birth.



## Gender Roles Played by Male and Female Characters

The unfolding of the story reveals different roles played by male and female characters. Women equal private space while men equal adventure. Zulumacansi as a male is free to leave his home and go to the city to find work. Even if he is not educated, his value is still equally held with high esteem as he is able to still integrate with the urbanized world and earn money that will profile him as an important man in his community. What defines his power in this context is his role as a man in a male dominated society. He is going to put a mark by doing what society expects of every man; to have a wife and children despite his contrary personality. He does not treat his hard won wife any differently. In fact he marries her with an intention of entrenching and perpetuating this oppressive system. He does not try to find himself a wife in the city. Instead he returns to his village; a place which epitomizes control and domination, and where he knows chances of a woman, escaping male domination are very rare. This is the place where women are fit to be wives who are provided for by the husbands who work away from home while as women they have to stay at home and in their men's absence, maintain the dignity of the men as heads of the homestead.

The other relevant factor to bring forth is that of authority. Zulumacansi's father is no longer alive but his mother is. By virtue of being the only grown son, Zulumacansi becomes the provider for the whole family. Regardless of the presence of his mother he is still the head of the family. Just because she is a female she cannot be entrusted with authority. This means that even the family cattle which once belonged to his father, now belong to him. His mother is nowhere in the picture as far as these possessions are concerned. This is a reason Zulumacansi demands the outstanding *lobolo* cows from his brother-in-law, Masovenyeza, without even consulting with his mother. One would be inclined to think that even if only for respect Zulumacansi would at least inform his mother of his intention. This is not so as even the *hlonipha* (respect) culture is biased against women.

Correspondingly, Bajwayele and her mother submit to Manamuza's orders; that of marrying Bajwayele to the man she does not love. Her mother is silent on the matter that concerns another woman; her daughter. In fact she is so unspoken that the little she says is not firmly stated. She sees her daughter as a sacrificial lamb going for 'slaughter' but does not come to her rescue; even by just mere futile exercise of attempting to stop her daughter's

imminent marriage to a man she does not love. The same goes for Qimbile, Masovenyeza's wife. She is a bone of contention with regards her *lobolo* cows which are outstanding. She is being discussed by the two men as if she does not exist. She cannot even put in a word that she disapproves of being excluded in the argument around her marriage. This is a true reflection of women's situation in patriarchal societies.

### **Synopsis of Plot in *Nervous Conditions***

*Nervous Conditions* can be situated in the socio-historical and geographical period of the 1960's and 70's Rhodesia in which black people lived in the context of a white ruled country in the mid twentieth century. The novel draws on the life of Dangarembga whose invented characters resemble actual events and situations from the life of the novelist.

The story centres on the Sigawuke family. It is told by Tambudzai (or Tambu), daughter of Jeremiah and Ma'Shingayi, a girl who had a great yearning for education but was unable to afford it in the beginning due to her family's dire poverty. After all under male domination it was not important for a girl to receive education. To beat the odds Tambu kept a small maize garden which she cultivated and sold to get the little education she had. Even then when the cobs were ready for eating they would begin to disappear. As things turned out it was his own brother, Nhamo who stole them and distributed them to his friends. He ridiculed his sister for being a girl with remarks such as these:

'it's the same everywhere ... what did you expect .... because you are a girl ... you can't study... did you really think you could send yourself to school ...' page 21.

In patriarchal communities such as these and as argued by Talbot (1998:3) 'being born male or female has far-reaching consequences for an individual'. The above scenario could not be truer for Tambu. She had been unconsciously 'schooled' in matters of the superiority of male child, the convention of a female being responsible for the domestic space and the prioritization of a higher education for male children amongst others (Murray 1999:50).

Written in a first person narrative, the story presents firsthand experience of oppression under male domination. In this sense it is more

powerful as it situates the position of women under male authority in a forceful manner. Tambu thus becomes a voice of other voiceless women in the story. The very opening sentence 'I was not sorry when my brother died' (Dangarembga 1988:1) is pregnant with meaning. It relates the circumstances which lead to Tambu receiving good education which was only by chance.

After a tragic death of her brother, Nhamo whose mission education was sponsored by their rich and educated uncle, Babamukuru, the offer was extended to her. This on its own is a living proof that the state of a girl child is precarious. Babamukuru only extends the offer to Tambu because the male child meant for it has died and there is no other son to 'inherit' this offer. Thus Tambu becomes the channel for this action rather than the agent. In fact Tambu's mother, Ma'Shingayi and Jeremiah, her father are not consulted about the recommendation to send their daughter to school. Babamukuru makes a ruling which gets implemented. Because of his state of poverty, Jeremiah's manhood is also undermined in this context. His wealthy brother, Babamukuru, oversees his younger brother's family affairs. Ma'Shingayi is not particularly excited about the news because she fears that her daughter might take after Nhamo and imitate the 'Englishness' that she considers as a curse that caused her dear son's death. Her son had changed drastically since attending the mission school and Ma'Shingayi felt she had been robbed of him. Education had changed Nhamo into some kind of a monster; bullying everyone in her family when he came to the homestead for holidays; hence Tambu's contention: 'I was not sorry when my brother died' (page 1) and further on 'I became confident that I would not go the same way as my brother' (page 71).

Babamukuru and his wife, Maiguru and children, Chido and Nyasha left for Britain when the kids were still young. On their return to Rhodesia they continued to provide their children with good mission education where Babamukuru was a headmaster. When Tambu was given the opportunity previously meant for Nhamo she joined her Babamukuru's family at the mission house.

On arrival at the mission house Tambu makes friends with her cousin, Nyasha. In principle, Babamukuru does not approve of their association because Nyasha is very rude and uncontrollable. She cannot adapt to life as expected of young Shona girls. She rebels any kind of authority to such an extent that she gets into a physical fight with her father when he asks her about coming home late one night. This episode leaves Tambu perplexed.

Babamukuru fears that Nyasha would be a bad influence to Tambu with her unbecoming manners.

Maiguru, Babamukuru's wife is a highly educated woman who is also trapped in her husband's spell. This is confirmed by her answer to Tambu when she wants to know if it is true that Maiguru, like Babamukuru, is also highly educated. She responds in these words '...we both studied, your uncle and I, in South Africa for our Bachelor's Degree and in England for our Master's' (page 101). Tambu feels sorry for Maiguru because in her view, she should be more independent and assertive. However, 'she could not use the money she earned for her own purposes and had been prevented by marriage from doing things she wanted to do' (page 102). In this context, the role of family as an institution where the transmission of culture and, the process whereby men learn the rules and practices of social groups cannot be overemphasized (Worsely 1970:2). Taking the argument forward, George (2005:20) maintains that patriarchy includes but is not restricted to 'various discourses and practices that allow men to set the terms and limits for women in different areas of society'.

This further suggests that patriarchal power should be understood beyond day to day women oppression due to males being providers. Maiguru, I might add, was in a worse situation than her female counterparts; education was not equivalent to liberation-a phenomenon that must have killed her inside as she broke down one time and voiced her internal discontentment. In terms of postmodern thought, social construction strives to comprehend the processes by which people describe and come to terms with themselves as well as the world in which they find themselves (Freeman & Couchonnal 2006). According to this hypothesis, individuals' past experiences, backgrounds, historical contexts and social relations impact on their ability to grasp meaning and to interpret the world around them. By extension and drawing on some feminist discourse Khau (2007) observes that central to feminism is the assumption that realities are socially created and that there is a close relationship between oppression and practices of the individual and society in general. Educated as Babamukuru's family was, everybody failed to meaningfully work towards changing the mentality which was entrenched in their society that male superiority could be effectively challenged.

The mission house was very different to what Tambu had been used to. The description of the homestead in which Tambu grew up with Nyamarira River where she would fetch water as one of the features, makes a

clear case for her desire to escape the constraints thereof. It is also a motivation for her to pursue her education. On the contrary the mission house was a symbol of status. The following selected phrases attest to that:

‘a fitted carpet of deep green pile, tastefully mottled’ page 68.

the dining room with ‘shiny new linoleum covering every inch of the floor’ page 68.

‘sleek bookcases full of leather-bound and hard-covered volumes of erudition’ page 68.

a display cabinet ‘displayed on its greenish glass shelves the daintiest, most delicate china’ page 69

Despite the splashy lifestyle of the mission house which Tambu perceives as the place of heavenly plenty she feels alienated from her childhood home. Having gone to the mission house Tambu went to the mission in order to attend school, Tambu also recounts substantial experiences that did not take place in the school room but in an extremely domestic setting; the home of her relatives. A considerable part of her education as a female character in other words occurred in ways other than formal education. Engendering had thus been something she had been exposed to long before she became conscious of what was happening around her. As maintained by Talbot (1998:7) ‘[p]eople are ‘gendered’ and actively involved in the process of their own gendering’. In addition communities learn to cope with their day to day experiences, making sense out of them and negotiating power relationships, both within and outside their families (Sheafor & Horejsi 2006).

## **Central Themes in the Two Novels**

The fundamental perception overriding the story line in the first narrative is the abuse of women in the system of patriarchy by traditional and uneducated men within a Zulu society. On the other hand, there are two central themes to Dangarembga’s novel within the focus of this article: the oppression of the Shona women in general as a result of the patriarchal authority forced on them by the practices and beliefs of this group as well as the oppression of

women irrespective of and despite their assumed educational status in the same society. The premise adopted by the two authors situated in two different countries, therefore offers the influence of patriarchal authority to both the educated and uneducated women in society. The first argument by Ngubane presents patriarchal authority as it relates to uneducated Zulu society while Dangarembga addresses both scenarios: the uneducated as well as educated Shona society. It is Dangarembga's conscious distinction that I find significant since it is representative of most African societies including Zulu people. In this sense Dangarembga's comprehensive approach enlightens on issues that are sometimes taken for granted; in this case that patriarchal oppression is not restricted to uneducated traditional African cultures but rather that at one time or other African women are prone to patriarchal domination regardless of their educational status- a notion that will be explored as the article unfolds.

### **Comparative Analysis of the Two Novels**

In harmonising the two novels under examination I find a statement by Anderson and Zinnser (1990:xiii) appropriate even though it relates to a different context. Recounting European patriarchy and what it means to be a woman in such society they maintain:

[A]ll European women, whether queens or nuns, aristocrats or peasants, craftswomen or artists, were subject to yet another constraining factor; ... culture's largely negative views on women. Considered innately flawed, less valuable and thus inferior to men, all women were supposed to be subordinate to men. This subordination seemed part of the natural order.

In the following section I present some characters in the two novels with a view to establishing what is common in them and the manner in which they respond to their different environments.

Response to patriarchal domination by girl children in the two novels  
The key girl-children in the novels show similar oppressive mentalities. The novel about Zulu society presents **Bajwayele** being forced into a marriage that she doesn't want. Thereafter she rebels against the marriage but is still trapped within the same patriarchal society that she is trying to escape. On the

other hand in the novel about the Shona society, **Tambu** thought that the death of a male figure would liberate her. However, as it turns out it is the continuation of her entrapment albeit in other ways that awakens in her a need to uphold her newly acquired beliefs; that of fighting domination irrespective of the consequences. Prior to that by virtue of being a female she had been trapped. After the death of her brother education opens her mind and she realises that the death of her brother has not made things any easier for her. As the English saying goes; ignorance is bliss-she was not fully aware that she was being ‘robbed’ of so much as a woman but education opened her eyes to a lot more than she had been aware of. Tambu words: ‘I was not sorry when my brother died’ is the first step of admitting her entrapment. Her vocalising and endorsing of something that is not heard of culturally- that you should rejoice over someone’s death, let alone your family’ is an indication of a feeling of severe entrapment. But even though she tries to rebel the entire novel traces this tension between her rebellion and entrapment. Tambu’s most conspicuous rebellion pertains to her parents’ marriage. She rebels against being a bridesmaid to the Christian marriage of her own parents which her uncle forces upon them. The turmoil in her soul suggests that if she participates in her parents’ coerced marriage she must be admitting that she was a product of sin; a notion that she did not embrace. Maiguru’s daughter, **Nyasha** rebels against her father’s authority. She refuses to and rebels against seeing the world through his eyes. To this effect she gets into a physical confrontation with her father. Does it really need to get to this bitter end before men recognize that enough is enough? Are there even lessons learned from experiences such as these?

## **Response to Patriarchal Domination by Married Women in the Two Novels**

As married women and mothers to the girl children above, the following women also have their own compounded challenges. **KaMemunce**, **Bajwayele’s mother** has not been consulted about the handing over of her daughter to a man she doesn’t want. Furthermore she has no power to contradict what the father wants irrespective of her feeling about the matter. She actually finds herself an accomplice in the deed as she is helpless within the system. Moreover her status as an uneducated woman – despite the fact

that education does not free any woman in this context anyway-disempowers her from fighting for her daughter.

The same can be said of **Ma'Shingayi, Tambu's mother**. She is not consulted about her daughter, Tambu's imminent educational prospects. Hence she looks on powerlessly as her Tambu is 'dragged' into the same situation that she claims 'robbed' her of her son, Nhamo. As an uneducated woman within the homestead her plight is even worse since in her context she cannot challenge men, let alone educated men. While she displays her discontentment openly no one pays attention to her tantrums.

**Maiguru** is quite an interesting character in the context of this discussion. As a woman she epitomises the emancipation of women. Yet her depiction in the novel undermines the very essence and value that is placed on education globally. Maiguru is a highly educated and well travelled woman. Just by virtue of that, one would expect that the world view that she has been exposed to –both through education and travel, would put her in a very unique position when compared to all the other women in her midst. Instead she has no control over her finances yet she works hard to earn whatever she gets. Despite her high level of education her fundamental role as a woman does not seem to have changed in terms of societal and patriarchal expectation. That is why she breaks down at some point and tells Babamukuru off. 'I am tired of my house being a hotel for your family. I am tired of being a house keeper for them. I am tired of being nothing in a home I am working myself sick to support...Let me tell you I have had enough' (page 172).

## **Women's Escapist Forms**

When you lack the language which is the main tool of communication you know that your powers are limited. At such times your last resort could then be an outlet through violence. The language or lack thereof binds and confines all the women portrayed in the novel together in their subservient roles. Uttering a word against such an oppressive regime can at most instances be a futile exercise. As a sign of the lack of expression women sometimes resort to different escapist forms. And for this reason certain behaviours that they opt for become their statement of protest. Some of these actions are highly visible while others are passive. The girl children in the



selected texts resort to various means to demonstrate their frustrations with the system of male domination.

Bajwayele **runs** away from the husband his father has chosen for her against her will. Nyasha **punches** her father after a fight about being out late at night when her brother Chido could be outdoors as long as he wished. Tambu **boycots** her parents' wedding ceremony against an instruction from her Babamukuru to be a bridesmaid at their wedding which she disapproves of.

The mothers to the girl children above also supplement their 'unheard' supplications by adopting alternative routes. KaMemunce, **gives up** on her husband and **sees** her daughter being married off to a man she does not love. Ma'Shingai **watches** helplessly as her daughter's educational likelihood is negotiated. Maiguru temporarily **leaves** Babamukuru when she feels she cannot take his authoritative ways any longer.

Curbed in their individual ordeals, daughters and mothers in the novels selected represent day to day afflictions experienced by women in patriarchal societies. As it was revealed earlier on, while gender matters are a universal concern some societies, in this context African societies, are far deeply affected by them than others.

## **Conclusion**

Patriarchy seems to have had a similar effect the world over; that of the subjugation of women where male and female are seen as evaluative categories, even though there is no factual or inherent reason why the male should be valued more than the female. In both novels the inferiority of women, their subordination and the authority of males over women's lives run through almost all the chapters of the novels. In the novels investigated all women irrespective of their status have not been charged with power. From the analysis presented it is apparent that academics as researchers have not taken a conscious effort to critically analyse this thin line of oppression between the educated and the uneducated as far as women are concerned. What exactly are we doing as educated women to emancipate ourselves first so that we can remove those uneducated fellow women from the web of double oppression?

Having indicated that literature mirrors societies it has been illustrated through this article that women oppression still has no boundaries

be it class, place or time. Even though the literary texts in question were written in the 70's and 80's respectively in the twenty first century, as a study I conducted a year ago also illustrates, not much has been achieved in terms of correcting gender parity (Zondi 2010). The critical analysis of the subservient position of women in the Zulu and Shona societies investigated in this article challenges veteran and emerging authors to embark on literature, both in indigenous and English languages to address long term focus on gender equity matters with specific reference to African societies. Correspondingly, one of the goals of institutions of learning, both at lower and higher ranks, should be promotion of literature that advocates gender equity so that gender as a social construct inculcated through the years, may be replaced by power shifts of women as equally empowered sectors of society.

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# The Figure of the Older Woman in African Fiction

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(In loving memory of Agnes, who will never know first-hand what it is to be an older woman.)

## Abstract

This article observes a discrepancy between the importance that older women are accorded by African societies and their relative absence from African fictional works. When older female characters do appear in African novels, these characters are often depicted very negatively. The article examines a selection of narrative texts which do feature older women, mostly in the roles of mother-in-law, aunt or grandmother: Mariama Bâ's *So Long a Letter* and *Scarlet Song*, Ousmane Sembene's *Xala*, Loretta Ngcobo's *And They Didn't Die*, Bessie Head's *When Rain Clouds Gather*, Ezekiel Mphahlele's *Down Second Avenue* and Peter Abrahams's *Mine Boy*. Although most of the older female characters discussed exercise a malign influence over the course of events and the other characters, there are exceptions, such as the simple, wise and benevolent Mma-Millipede in *When Rain Clouds Gather*.

**Keywords:** Woman, gender relations, power, African family

In Africa, gender relations do not exactly conform to the same patterns as those of the West. They may consequently be misunderstood if they are judged too simplistically by Western criteria. For example, African women have not been nearly as disempowered in traditional societies as some

Western feminists would claim (Oyewumi 2002; Nwoye n.d.; Okome 2000; Nnaemeka, 'Urban spaces' 1997:167; Nfah-Abbenyi 1997:31). Women's influence in these societies has mainly been limited to specific spheres (Kuper 1982:33-36; 59-63), but it has not been inconsiderable and it has tended to increase with a woman's age.

In fact, the general consensus is that the older African woman has always been a figure of significant influence, if not power, in traditional societies. According to Mojúbàolú Olúfúnké Okome (2001), in some African groups gender is actually less important than age in assigning power to an individual. In these groups, older women share more-or-less equally with older men the reputation for wisdom and the status of authority.

In other groups the correlation of age and power is a little more complex. Okome points out that an African woman's influence and importance tend to vary according to the context under consideration. As paternal aunt, for example, a woman may enjoy as much power over her nieces and nephews as their father (her brother). Even from the beginning, as daughter of a house, a girl possesses certain privileges—and she is also valued in youth for her potential to bring in bride-price—but her power really accrues in maturity, after her brother's marriage and the birth of his children. The role of wife seems, in contrast, to be significantly constrained—particularly the role of junior wife or of wife without children, or without male children. But all wives, even the most junior, may greatly enhance their status by assuming the role of mother, for a woman 'has real power over her children, regardless of age' (Okome 2000). Phaniel Akubueze Egejuru claims that 'A woman ... accepts the temporary hardships and humiliation of marriage to ensure the more ennobling and permanent state of motherhood' (1997:16). Obviously, this desirable maternal role is not static, but increases in prestige with the age and relative importance of her children—particularly her male children. And when a woman's children are old enough to marry, her status may increase still further, for she can hope for the role of grandmother, the 'woman [who] is respected by all that are junior to her' (Okome 2000; Hill-Lubin 1986:258). But even before she achieves this venerable position of grandmother she will assume the role of mother-in-law, in which 'she has enormous power vis-à-vis her daughter in law' (Okome 2000) and even, in some cases, over her son-in-law as well. Thus, age correlates very positively with power in African women's lives, especially in the lives of those who have gone through the demeaning phase of being a

young bride in a husband's household and who have produced legitimate offspring.

Interestingly, despite the significant power and influence that older women exert in reality, they do not feature importantly as characters in many African novels. Mildred A Hill-Lubin, writing about the grandmother figure in African-American fiction, notes the rarity of this figure in literature from the African continent:

Though the grandmother has been important in most African societies, she has not found a prominent place in the creative works of the major African writers (1986:258).

Obioma Nnaemeka, deliberately echoing Trinh T Minh-ha, suggests that this is because the grandmother's most important function in African society has been to impart wisdom through story-telling and her stories do not always follow the norms expected of her by the ruling patriarchy (Nnaemeka Introduction 1997:8-10; Minh-ha 1997:28-29). Thus, she is ultimately marginalized in society and in art. The mother-in-law may be slightly better represented than the grandmother in African fiction, but she, too, is surprisingly scarce. This scarcity is of course not unique to African literature. Older women have not been of great interest in the Western canon either, though female authors such as Doris Lessing have recently been recuperating interest in them as subjects of fiction (Brennan 2004:3; Pezzulich 2004:10; Leonard 2004:14). Zoe Brennan, in her 2004 book entitled *The Older Woman in Recent Fiction*, notes a tendency in Western literature and criticism for 'older women ... to be misrepresented or ignored' (2004:159), and this is largely true in the African context as well (*pace* Brennan's own unexplored exoneration of 'traditional African images of older women' [2004:5]).

And, indeed, when older women do feature in African texts, they are all too often 'misrepresented' or stereotyped, their 'images ... largely pejorative in nature', just as Brennan claims of Western fiction (2004:159, 1-2). Most African novels include no important older women characters; in those that do portray them these figures are usually evil and destructive. Only the exception has a good, loving, and fostering grandmother or mother-in-law. This essay will look at how a handful of African novels (among the few that include older women characters) characterize them.

We will start our discussion with a survey of two influential older women from Mariama Bâ's *Une si longue lettre* (translated by Modupé Bodé-Thomas as *So Long a Letter*), Aunt Nabou and Lady Mother-in-Law. Both of these characters assume the role of interfering mother-in-law in relation to their adult children. We will go on to consider the power that Yay Bineta from *Xala*, by Sembene Ousmane, assumes over N'Gone (her niece) and El Hadji (a successful businessman). This will be followed by an account of the relationships between Yaye Khady and Ousmane (her son) and his two wives, Mireille and Ouleymatou in Bâ's *Un chant écarlate* (translated by D Blair as *Scarlet Song*). Next we will look at the control that another mother-in-law, MaBiyela, exercises over Jezile (her daughter-in-law) in Loretta Ngcobo's *And They Didn't Die*. Then we will look at the portrayal of two very contrasting older women in Bessie Head's *When Rain Clouds Gather*, an unnamed grandmother and Mma-Millipede. We will end with a brief consideration of some older women in the township narratives, *Down Second Avenue*, by Ezekiel Mphahlele and *Mine Boy*, by Peter Abrahams.

In *So Long a Letter*, Aunt Nabou comes from a royal family. Back home in the Sine in her younger brother's kingly residence, she is of great importance as 'the elder sister of the master of the house.... Nobody addresse[s] her without kneeling down' (1982:28). Even in town Aunt Nabou tries to maintain that prestige. Unfortunately for her, her son Mawdo falls in love and marries Aissatou, a goldsmith's daughter. Aunt Nabou disapproves of intermarriage between the different social classes and makes it her mission to save her family's status. She is firm with her credence, as Ramatoulaye, Aissatou's friend states: 'She swore that your existence, Aissatou, would never tarnish her noble descent' (1982:28). She wants the goldsmith's daughter out of her family. Without telling anyone her motive, she acquires young Nabou, one of her brother's daughters, as a protégé and takes her back to town to mould her into an obedient wife for her son. Ramatoulaye, the narrator, tells us: 'Her aunt never missed an opportunity to remind her of her royal origin, and taught her that the first quality in a woman is docility' (1982:29). Young Nabou yields to Aunt Nabou's authority and Aunt Nabou's plans become successful. The older woman then puts pressure on her son to marry a second wife, pointing her finger at young Nabou. Aunt Nabou knows that Mawdo truly loves Aissatou but she does not care. She petrifies him and says that she will die of shame if he does not marry young Nabou. Mawdo conforms to his mother's wish; agrees to marry

young Nabou and loses the love of his life. 'Stripping [her]self of [Mawdo's] love', Aissatou takes her sons and leaves the marriage forever—retaining her 'dignity' at the expense of her heart (1982:32). Aunt Nabou becomes very happy that she has succeeded in maintaining the family status. She does not care about her son's happiness and clearly triumphs in the pain and discomfort inflicted on Aissatou..

In the same novel, Lady Mother-in-Law is another mother who does not care about her child's happiness. She is not concerned about the child's education, either: 'Her parents want to withdraw her from school, with only a few months to go before the *bac*. to marry her off to the sugar-daddy' (1982:35). Lady Mother-in-Law comes from a very poor and low background. When she realizes that her daughter Binetou has found a 'sugar-daddy', who can afford anything, she grabs the opportunity of living a better life. She cannot let go regardless of what Binetou says. Ramatoulaye's eldest daughter Daba, who is Binetou's best friend, observes:

Binetou is heartbroken. She is going to marry her sugar-daddy. Her mother cried so much. She begged her daughter to give her life a happy end, in a proper house, and the man has promised them (1982:36).

Lady Mother-in-Law refuses to allow her daughter to continue with her education and enjoy her young life. She pressures her to marry the older man (who happens to be Ramatoulaye's husband Modou) for the sake of money and shelter. Binetou has to sacrifice her chances of education and real love in order for her mother to be happy. Modou also has to sacrifice his first family to be able to satisfy all the demands that Lady Mother-in-Law has laid down for him to fulfil. He has to forget the thirty years of married life with Ramatoulaye and make sure that Lady Mother-in-Law is satisfied. He never looks back; he stands Lady Mother-in-Law and her husband a trip to Mecca, gives Binetou a large monthly allowance for getting married to him and pays for the house and the flat he has built for them. Binetou follows her mother's orders but when Modou dies, they are left with almost nothing. And for Binetou the loss is more than financial; she appears quite indifferent, for 'she is already dead inside', having lost her youth to pay for her mother's avarice (1982:71). Like Aunt Nabou, Lady Mother-in-Law has simply used her



offspring to satisfy her personal goals. Both are—at least temporarily—successful but their children suffer the consequences.

*Xala*, by Sembene Ousmane, includes a character whose situation is similar to Binetou's. N'Gone is a young girl who comes from a poor family. She does not do well at school, so she has no choice but to get married. Yay Bineta, her paternal aunt (known as the Badyen), organizes a marriage for N'Gone in order to achieve a better life for the family. N'Gone is obliged to obey Yay Bineta because she is a paternal aunt and, 'according to traditional law the brother's child is also his sister's daughter' (1976:5). In the household of her brother Babacar, Yay Bineta is a very powerful person, and she makes it her duty to find a suitably wealthy husband for N'Gone, in order to restore the fortunes of the family, which are at a low ebb. After retiring, Babacar is 'finding it impossible to keep his large brood of seven children on his tiny quarterly pension' (1979:6). Yay Bineta manages to trick El Hadji, a successful middle-aged businessman, into believing that he needs to marry N'Gone as his third wife: 'The man slowly succumbed. A change in his feelings began to take place' (1976:8). Yay Bineta becomes excited about the marriage and organizes everything. She also controls N'Gone, telling her what to do and how to behave. She acts as if she has the right to know everything that is happening to El Hadji. She does not care about the feelings of either El Hadji or N'Gone – or of those of El Hadji's other wives and his numerous children. To her, things must happen her way. Unfortunately, the marriage is a disaster, never consummated due to the '*xala*' or curse of impotence that assails the bridegroom from the wedding night. The reader surmises that this *xala* is at least partly Yay Bineta's fault, for she attempts to keep tight control over El Hadji and N'Gone. They have no privacy as a married couple. But when it turns out that El Hadji's business has failed, Yay Bineta is quick to make him divorce her niece. The marriage had been proposed entirely for the money and influence that it would bring her family, and when these seem to be unlikely, she withdraws at once, again without concern for the people whom she hurts. She makes nothing of referring to El Hadji as 'not a man' in front of several people, emphasizing his humiliation (1979:104). When Yay Bineta aims for a goal, she makes sure that she achieves it, regardless of the obstacles. That this ruthlessness is not uncommon among older women in her position is suggested by El Hadji's chauffeur, Modu, who, in listening to this Badyen, is reminded of his own

aunt, 'nicknamed 'The Termite' because she eroded people from the inside, only leaving the shell' (1979:104).

In African fiction, potential mothers-in-law usually think that they have the right to choose a wife for their sons or a suitable husband for their daughters. Sometimes the wife is not good enough for the son so they have to do something about it. This may occur in real life too. Older African women have the power to decide who fits within their families and who does not. And this power and influence is recognized by the younger generation, especially by sons, who may not value women of their own generation at all. According to Egejuru, when an Igbo man is asked: 'If your wife and your mother are drowning, whom do you save?' he would unhesitatingly answer: 'My mother'. As Egejuru explains, 'They rationalize that they can dispose of their wives and remarry, but there is only one mother and she must be saved' (1977:15).

The mother in Bâ's *Scarlet Song* is Yaye Khady, whose son is Ousmane. She is not happy with the fact that her son has married a white woman. She would prefer a black daughter-in-law who would treat her mother-in-law like a queen. She states:

A Toubab [white person] can't be a proper daughter-in-law. She'll only have eyes for her man. We'll mean nothing to her. And I who dreamt of a daughter-in-law who'd live here and relieve me of the domestic work by taking over the management of the house, and now I'm faced with a woman who is going to take my son away from me (1986:66).

Yaye Khady becomes very hostile towards Mireille, her French daughter-in-law. She enters Mireille's bedroom unannounced and provides unimportant reasons to be there. Mireille has no privacy at all in Yaye Khady's house. Yaye Khady also checks every move that Mireille makes and offers negative comments on it. Mireille decides that she needs her privacy and finds a flat for herself and Ousmane. Unfortunately for Mireille, Ousmane has to go and see his mother every day. If he does not come, Yaye Khady goes to the flat to remind him of her presence. She 'burst[s] into their bedroom', taking away the enjoyment of privacy. Yaye Khady makes sure that, during her visits, she behaves in a manner that will raise an argument between the couple. She knows that Ousmane loves her and will stand by her

no matter what his wife says. The narrator states that: 'Ousmane stood up for his mother' (1986:81). She successfully ignores Mireille's presence in Ousmane's life. She takes care of him when he becomes ill. She even lies about Mireille, claiming that Mireille has thrown her out of her [Mireille's] house. All these incidents have a negative impact on the love between Mireille and her husband.

Yaye Khady believes that Mireille does not deserve to be her in-law as she does not comply with the idea of treating her in-laws as if she is in their debt morally. Yaye Khady wants her son to find an African wife who will bow to all her mother-in-law's demands. She points out that:

A black woman knows and accepts the mother-in-law's rights. She enters the home with the intention of relieving the older woman. The daughter-in-law cocoons her husband's mother in a nest of respect and repose. Acting according to unspoken and undisputed principles, the mother-in-law gives her orders, supervises and makes her demands (1986:72).

Yaye Khady finds that the community of local women supports her plan to destroy the interracial union. Mother Fatim and Ouleymatou's mother encourage Ouleymatou to seduce Ousmane and have a love affair with him. These older women agree to the idea of a secret marriage and, at the baptism of Ouleymatou's child, they celebrate their victory. After this, Yaye Khady finally occupies the centre of attention as she wishes. She bestows numerous gifts on Ouleymatou's family, who for the sake of dignity will return their value to Yaye Khady doubled. Her dreams of having an African daughter-in-law are now fulfilled. She does not care about the feelings of Mireille, who becomes mad with grief and despair and stabs her son to death. Yaye Khady, as an older woman, has the power to manipulate her son's and her daughter-in-law's lives. The breakdown of many African marriages can be ascribed to interference by the in-laws. But older women also exert benevolent power over the young; it would be refreshing to encounter a kind and relationship-affirming mother-in-law in a novel sometimes.

Perhaps the closest that we come to such a figure is in Loretta Ngcobo's *And They Didn't Die*. In this novel, MaBiyela is an example of a mother-in-law made even stronger than usual by the absence of older men in the community. At the beginning she is very harsh on her daughter-in-law,

Jezile—though never as malign as Yaye Khady. MaBiyela is portrayed as a woman who is permanently vigilant and armed with authority and custom: ‘Conscious of her power, not only within the family, but in the community as well, she had to set an example—her daughter-in-law simply had to toe the line’ (Ngcobo 1999:17). She not only has authority in her own household but also outside her dwelling. She makes sure that her daughter-in-law Jezile knows her position, and at times makes Jezile’s life a misery. MaBiyela complains that she wants a grandchild soon, but when Siyalo (her son) comes home, she makes a point of disturbing the young couple’s privacy so that conceiving a child becomes impossible. It is as if asserting her primacy in the household is more important than any intimacy between the husband and wife. In fact, making the wife’s life difficult is seen as something of a duty on her part. MaBiyela seems determined not to allow Jezile to achieve the desirable status of motherhood; her efforts appear to be aimed at keeping Jezile stuck as long as possible in the unenviable role of young wife without offspring (1999:4). Eventually, Jezile solves her problem by visiting Siyalo in the city where he works and becoming pregnant far away from the homestead presided over by MaBiyela (1999:21-37). But when MaBiyela discovers that Jezile has delivered her baby at a hospital instead of at home and that the traditional rituals have not been followed, there is more trouble; she is outraged, scolds Jezile and upsets her by suggesting that the baby will be unlucky and ‘vulnerable’ (1999:73-75).

Later, however, MaBiyela becomes quite protective of her daughter-in-law. She looks after Jezile’s firstborn, S’naye, when Jezile is in jail (1999:105-108); she allows Jezile to sleep at her house when soldiers are around the village (1999:187); she confronts the police with loud outrage when they conduct a pass raid in the middle of the night, saving Jezile from being arrested (1999:79-80); she takes the decision that Jezile should go and work for Mr Potgieter while she (MaBiyela) looks after Jezile’s children, whom she loves and looks after as if she were their mother. She makes sure that they go to school and that they eat proper food. When Jezile returns from Bloemfontein with a child fathered by Mr Potgieter, her white employer, she accepts excommunication from her church for supporting Jezile and the new baby (1999:216).

MaBiyela is thus a complex character, who grows and changes as her narrative progresses, and as her role of mother-in-law expands to include grandmotherhood. Since we can identify both good and evil in her, she is an

exception to the manner in which older women are usually portrayed in African novels.

Though the normally neglected role of grandmother is not usually as maligned as that of mother-in-law, it is sometimes portrayed in the same way. Bessie Head's *When Rain Clouds Gather* includes an example of a wholly evil grandmother. She is very impatient and rude towards Makhaya, the main character. She stares into Makhaya's eyes, shouts at him and demands money for providing shelter for him for one night. She is also exposed as a woman who encourages her granddaughter (about ten years of age) to sell her body. The child says: 'My grandmother won't mind as long as you pay me' (1995:9). This statement shows the importance of money to this woman. She has no morality and no sense of humanity. This makes her destroy the child's morality as well. This child grows up with the idea that she has to use her body sexually in order to gain possession of money. If there are no men to buy her body, then she will starve to death as there are no other plans for survival taught to her. This kind of nurturing destroys the community as it promotes prostitution and reliance on men.

However, the same novel also includes a character who breaks the mould of the typical older woman of African fiction. Mma-Millipede is a completely unselfish, benevolent, humble and wise character. Though she has suffered in her own long life from disappointment and rejection, she believes fervently in the brotherhood of mankind and in the obligation of humans to help one another. She is the one to whom younger women such as Paulina and Maria turn for help and counsel concerning matters of the heart. When she talks to them she does not pontificate but asks questions that make them more aware of their own feelings. An example of this is evident when she interrogates Maria about her feelings when Maria has quite unexpectedly agreed to marry Gilbert the next day. Mma-Millipede's gentle probing suddenly makes Maria say 'I don't care about myself, but nothing must harm Gilbert' (1995:85). At this moment both women become fully conscious of the rightness of the marriage, despite its haste and unconventionality. Mma-Millipede then goes on to take charge of the practical matters of the wedding, calling of course on the help of the other women in the village.

But Mma-Millipede features in *When Rain Clouds Gather* not just as a guide and advisor to other women—nor simply as an example, in her earlier life, of stoic female acceptance. She is a companion and inspiration to men, too. She is the respected friend of Dinorego, the old man whose

unconventional prescience allows him to welcome the agricultural changes devised by Gilbert, and she is also the beloved advisor and foster-mother of Gilbert, the British socialist-agriculturist himself. And, more importantly, she becomes the spiritual mentor of Makhaya, the novel's most central focalizer, the refugee who brings the bitterness of South African apartheid into peaceful Botswana. Only to her is Makhaya able to unburden himself of this bitterness, focused on his imaginary identity as 'Black Dog', who 'sat on the chair and shivered with fear while they lashed out with the whip' (1995:125). She is horrified by the 'torrent of hatred' of which he is capable when he speaks, however allegorically, about his experiences in South Africa. Nevertheless, by talking tentatively about her own faith, which she has derived both from her reading of the Tswana Bible and from her personal observations of life, she succeeds in mitigating his rage and confusion. He is amazed that 'an old woman in the Botswana bush' is able to move him so much, not only emotionally but intellectually, for he is an educated man. But her quiet talk of human helplessness in the face of 'life' and of her own inability to 'put anyone away from [her] as not being [her] brother' awakes in him his own humanistic belief in 'generosity' and allows him, in a dark hour, to be warmed by the 'fire inside her that radiate[s] outward' (1995:126 - 128).

Mma-Millipede – the ideal grandmother – is not in fact a real grandmother to any of the characters whom she nurtures and advises. Her power is in the end due to her specific personality and the unusual circumstances of Golema Mmidi, which is not a traditional village in the true sense, despite the fact that many of its inhabitants are traditionalists. Golema Mmidi is a new village, focused, unusually for Botswana, on the growing of crops, and all of its people have been displaced from elsewhere within the previous fourteen years. Relationships in the village are thus more fluid and creative than tradition would have made them and Mma-Millipede, like Makhaya, Gilbert and others, is able to assert her individuality over traditional roles.

In a less benign manner, the unusual circumstances brought about by apartheid as depicted in some South African novels also create opportunities for older women characters to assert their individuality. Men and women were often separated during the apartheid years, usually because men would go to the cities or mines to work and their womenfolk would not be allowed to live with them there. As we have observed in *And They Didn't Die*, the absence of older men in their families or communities tended to make older

women more influential. A few township novels such as Ezekiel Mphahlele's *Down Second Avenue* and Peter Abrahams's *Mine Boy* portray strong women, mainly for this reason. In *Down Second Avenue*, Ezekiel's two grandmothers and a number of other older female relatives are very dominant in his childhood (1959:11-21), but become much less so when he grows up. Thus, the earlier parts of the memoir include vignettes of these older women, but they tend to disappear from the narrative and their influence on the main character does not seem profound. In contrast, Leah in *Mine Boy*, a middle-aged woman thrown on her own resources by her husband's imprisonment, is one of the central characters – and she is certainly the strongest personality depicted in the novel. Ma Plank, an even older woman, is also an important character. However, the main point of *Mine Boy* is to show how a racist capitalist system corrupts and changes social roles. Leah claims the relation of 'mother' to the innocent rural Xuma, despite the fact that he is more-or-less of her own age, and she justifies this by telling him that 'the city makes you strange to the ways of your people' (Mphahlele 1946: 10). Hence, we must conclude that the power that Leah enjoys is not specific to African society – or any society, for that matter. It is a result of the perverted social situation brought about by the wrenching apart of traditional communities and her own individual resourcefulness.

Thus we see that older women, when they appear in African fiction, tend either to be depicted as malign characters, selfishly bent on pursuing their own ends at the expense of the happiness of the young or, if they wield any positive social influence, to be presented as anomalies, created by adverse circumstances which have reduced male hegemonic power unnaturally. Even more often, they are absent altogether. As Hill-Lubin states of all women characters in African and African-American literature:

Too often we have overlooked female characters, perhaps in an effort to counter the accusations that to describe strong women would help to support the matriarchal theory which says that black females castrate their men (1986:268).

This is especially true of older women, who are more important in African societies than younger women. As we know, older women in Africa play a far more significant nurturing, supportive, and advisory role than men in the family context. Older women typically spend most of their time with their

families, play a major part in educating the young and also serve as pillars of support for the younger generation. This has to be acknowledged and appreciated. In fiction as well as in reality, older women should be given the opportunity to show their power for good. We should have more older women as main characters in novels as they are crucial to our communities. Let us focus on them as important people within African societies.

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# ***Musangwe* - A No Go Space for Women: Implications for Gender (In)equality**

**Ndwakhulu Tshishonga**

## **Abstract**

This article discusses how both men and women can achieve gender equality among the Venda speaking Africans of Northern Limpopo. From time immemorial, both young and old men would often gather to fight as part of testing each other's strengths and displaying fighting artistic skills and knowledge. The *Musangwe* fist fighting it is argued in this article is one of the traditional mechanisms to assert masculinity among the Venda speaking people of Northern South Africa. *Musangwe* is Venda for bare-knuckle combat with the combatants mainly young and matured men. It is a no-go space for women. Men (young and old) volunteer to participate. Fighting skills are displayed and their strength is tested, either by being challenged or challenging opponents. Despite *Musangwe* being a male only protected sport, it is the women who wash the bloody clothes, nurture, and nurse and feed the participants yet culture restricts them from active participation. Women are barred from partaking in *Musangwe* hence it is Venda cultural taboo for them to even come in close vicinity to where *Musangwe* is fought. The author argues that *Musangwe* excludes and therefore marginalises women from getting themselves to the sport and not that women want to fight but only to watch. The article uses qualitative research approach by employing interviews and observation of *Musangwe*. In addition, the article uses the masculinity and radical feminism as theoretical and analytical frameworks

**Keywords:** Feminism, inequality, marginalisation, violence, space

## **1. Introduction**

Issues relating to gender inequality and equality, gender based violence, rape

and women exclusion and marginalisation are topical in the contemporary society. In South Africa, the subjugation of women and children under brutal actions in the form of physical abuse, rape, socio-economic exclusion coupled with escalating effect of 'triple evils' such as poverty, unemployment and inequality is prevalent (Taylor 1997: 50). Consequently these actions do not only undermine the gains of democracy since the new dispensation but also perpetuate gender inequality and therefore militate against women emancipation. Central to some of these violent deeds attributed to some elements of culture that are patriarchal which often perpetuate oppression against women (Hassim 2000: 43), excluding women from active participation in socio-economic and political mainstreams including both verbal and physical violence and abuse against women. In relation to socio-economic and political marginalisation and exclusion, Lewis and Kanji (2009: 79) argue that 'equality for women is impossible within the existing economic, political and cultural processes that reserve resources, power and control for small groups of people who happen to be men. According to Giddens (2004: 121) problem relating to gender inequality could be resolved through masculinity transformation including the change of attitude especially among men who are often perpetrators of crime against women and humanity.

*Musangwe* is literally a Masculine game of men at a Cattle Dip and which started when people were watching Bulls Fighting. The involvement of women is not justified at all. The game was meant for men from the onset that is why it is staged at the Cattle Dip. People even questioned the presence of a White Female Journalist who once came to film the event. The participants involved especially men argued that women start getting involved in *Musange* could change the stature of the game hence the level of participation may drop and the behavior of participants may also change. Imagine how it would be like to find matured men fighting for nothing in front of their wives and kids. Over the years, it has been and it remains as the Gentlemen's playground so that it can remain lively as it is. The involvement of women will change the game just the same way as when men are participating in women's League or community women's club activities. The advantage of this game on one hand is can only be understood by men. One earns respect for his fighting capabilities (It is man's nature to respect the strong fellow). Another advantage is that men express their strength and masculinity in a sporting activity and not by engaging antagonistic/conflictual fights.

On the other hand, the disadvantages are serious injurious that can be incurred during these less regulated fights. Currently, some critics are also raising the issue of contracting HIV due to direct contact with the opponent's blood. The article is divided into sections. The first section theorises African masculinity and the radical feminism as the analytical frameworks. The second section sheds light on the background of *Musangwe* followed by the research methods used. The fourth section presents the findings of the article.

## **2. Theorising African Masculinity and Radical Feminism**

### **2.1. Colonial/ White View of African Masculinities**

Although people like Lord Baden Powell<sup>1</sup> had racist views on the African masculinity and viewed it as 'sluggish' and 'lifeless'. Missionaries and colonisers alike McFarlan (1946 in Unhand 2008) argues disseminated information on the African man as morally bankrupt, inept, barbaric, backward and doomed. Cornwall and Lindisfarne (1994:39) state that European societies became the standard against which Africans were judged and were found lacking. African men were seen as intellectually weak. Many colonial writers, missionaries and anthropologists had the same view about African masculinity hence Baden Powell's racist reports of the nineteenth century. With this in mind, it was easy for Europeans to group African masculinities from a European social construction which did not include diverse masculinities across societies and across continents (Unhand 2008). However what the colonialist writers, reporters, anthropologists and missionaries failed to realise was that African masculinities were society specific. Unhand (2008) argues that masculinity in any given society accepts features associated with the male gender and expressions of maleness rather than the European descriptions and expectations of masculinity.

Regardless of racist attitudes towards the African male Baden Powell and Binns (1975) were impressed by the Zulu men. The Zulu masculinity was constructed under military regiments. Although Binns did not care much about any male from sub-Sahara Africa, he praised the Zulu masculine

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<sup>1</sup> Lord Baden Powell was a lieutenant general in the British army and founded the Scout Movement which trained young men discipline and survival skills.

subjects for their ‘unremitting discipline’ through honesty, wisdom, bravery and respect for authority. Binns described how the Zulu youth was brought up under strict rules from his mother and father thus instilling discipline in the Zulu man. With regards to the Shona in the modern day Zimbabwe, unlike other tribes in Africa who asserted their manhood through the rites of passage, the Shona according to Shire (in Lindisfarne 1994) asserted theirs through intellectual debate were thus declared as real men while those that were old and could not hold a debate were relegated to the position of boys. What is interesting among the Shona is that they had the attributes (intellectual prowess) of Baden Powell’s view of a real man. However the colonialists had negative views about African men thus as discussed earlier did not take into account the diverse masculine attributes of an African. The Shona masculinity was undermined by the English settlers through the introduction of the tax, which saw many men leaving the rural areas to cities in search of jobs. Men found themselves working in the settlers’ kitchens cooking and washing, a job that was specifically designed to women in their culture. The colonialists managed to emasculate the African man through a systematic racist hegemonic structure (see Gramsci 1971) where a white person regardless of age became more superior to the African man let alone the women who played a vital role in the African societies. Similarly to Lord Baden Powell, *Musangwe* teaches discipline and self-control.

## **2.2. Feminist Critique of *Musangwe* as a Male Dominated Sport**

Oakley (1972) and de Beavouir (1949) among other feminists argue that for a long time women were perceived as mothers, daughters, wives and sisters only. Women were and in some cases perceived in relation to others especially family relationships and as a consequence feminists perceive the family as a central site for gender struggles. Looking at *Musangwe* from a radical feminist approach it is evident that the sort continuously keeps women in the private sphere. Firestone (1971) for example states that the origin of male domination can be found in the unequal roles of men and women in biological reproduction.

Out of this unequal power relationship stems the sexual division of labour and the accompanying sex-class system in which men dominate

women. This approach best describes women's position in the *Musangwe* sport. They are not allowed to even watch 'real men's sport' as their little hearts cannot stomach the bloody sport yet they are the ones left to wash the bloody clothes and nurse the broken limbs, split mouths, faces and swollen bodies among other bloody body parts. Interestingly women's role is in nurturing in this case nursing the sportsmen while men's role is to assert their masculinity among other men in the ring as well as in the home.

### **3. Background Information on *Musangwe* as a Sport**

#### **3.1. Background Information**

Musangwe is a Venda for bare-knuckle combat and the combatants are mainly young and matured men. Men (young and older) volunteer to participate. Fighting skills are displayed and strength is tested, either by being challenged or challenging opponents. The history of *Musangwe* is said to have originated in the late 1800s and has always included villages such as Gaba, Tshifudi, Tshaulu, Halambani and Tshifudi. Unlike professional boxing where the contestants compete for championship and financial gains, there is no prices awarded to the champions or winners. Through *Musangwe*, fighters fight for personal pride and bragging rights for their villages (Ndevana 2012).

Since the 1800s, *Musangwe* has grown to be one of Northern Limpopo's most watched cultural events and is often held annually everyday between 16<sup>th</sup> December and 1<sup>st</sup> January. Popularly, *Musangwe* tournaments are held at Tshifudi village which is approximately 20km from Thohoyandou. According to the elders, the ground where *Musangwe* is fought is prepared with charms and herbs obtained from Maine (traditional healer) while the preparation is done by the president of *Musangwe*. The cleansing process is traditionally considered as one way of informing the ancestors about the official opening of *Musangwe* tournament. It is said that only one fighter died in 1929 and his spirit is summoned at the commencement of each tournament to protect all participants (Tshikhudo 2009). Wende (2011) acknowledges that there are three rules to *Musangwe* boxing and the fight continues until blood is shed, or someone is knocked out, or one of the fighters raises his hand to signal surrender. *Musangwe* has been fought in Gaba and Tshifudi valleys for centuries. Originally *Musangwe* was a way of teaching men to be

warriors and selecting the bravest to fight for the tribe including their families. Since then the custom has never died. Tracing the history of *Musangwe*, there is a trend of fighters and champions within families and Ndevana, the current president of *Musangwe* Association and once-invincible champion said:

This is a sacred place. The blood of our forefathers and their teeth has all fallen here. My grandfather was a fighter here in 1939 and then my father, and then I started in the 1970s (in Wende 2011).

In defending the sustenance of *Musangwe*, Ndevana (2011) also known by his fighting name, 'Poison' argues that even though 'some people see it as barbaric' it is our culture and for us it is like Karate for the Japanese'. *Musangwe*'s champion/winner in return earns respect and often times emerge as community leaders since their victory and their strength is proof of one that is able to protect one's family and community. *Musangwe* also engenders masculinity which Laack (1995: 54) defines as roles that men play by saying that they are:

... largely bound up with what men do and what jobs they have. Under the patriarchy one role has been predominant in defining man's position-being the head of the family.

Unlike other sports, *Musangwe* does not have strict rules, anything goes, fighters can head butt or knee-jerk an opponent. There are also implications embedded in bare-knuckle combat of *Musangwe*. One such implication is regarding health since during *Musangwe*, combatants are exposed to blood which can have HIV/AIDs related ramifications especially without the presence of health professionals. The second implication has to do with entrenching violent behaviours and culture especially among the young combatants who upon their victory of mere participation tend to extend their bravery to others in the general community members.

*Musangwe*, or bare-knuckle fighting, has become part of the lives of the rural communities mostly in the Vhembe region. One such community where the sport has manifested itself is Tshifudi-Gaba outside Thohoyandou. During the festive holidays, men as well as a few young boys spend much of their time at a secluded spot where men take turns in challenging others for a

fistfight. The sport is now the in-thing in the area and has become so popular that it has become a big crowd puller of even prominent people in the community (Mavhungu 2009).

The president of *Musangwe*, Mr. Tshilidzi 'Poison' Ndevana, vowed that the sport is here to stay, saying no one will stop them from practicing what he terms Venda culture. 'Bare-knuckle fighting has been part of our lives since the 18th century and we are not prepared to trade it for anything', he said. He feels the sport builds men to be responsible beings who know how to take care of their families. 'This is a sport that teaches us respect and all the aspects of manhood and we will continue doing this as part of our culture like other nationalities do' (Ndevana 2011). Below are two pictures depicting *Musangwe* tournaments in a fight.



The above picture depict *Musangwe* fighting tournaments hosted by two communities at Tshifudi and Vhufulwi. According to Ndevana (2012), there are six categories of fighters: Vho-Mammibide (9-13 years old), Roverside (14-17), Pre-Ngwenya (18-25), Ngwenya (26-35), Mature Ngwenya (36-45) and the Legends (45 and older). The first tournament scene reflects a category known as Ngwenya which constitutes young men between the age of 26 years old and 35 years old. From the picture on the left hand side, the boys were busy picking on each other by exchanging blows, preparing the ground for the older fighters. The second picture on the right above features



the mature-ngwenya (Champion) whose ages range from 36 years old and 45 years old. The man in the circle is a challenger inviting for anyone who can come forth as it is said that:

If you feel like fighting, all you need to do is storm into the centre of the circle, stretch your arm and point one fist at potential opponents.



Source: BBC - [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/programmes/from\\_our\\_own\\_correspondent/9387520.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/programmes/from_our_own_correspondent/9387520.stm) 2012/01/24.

Those willing to take you head-on will declare their intentions by pointing a fist back in retaliation. If they are not in the mood to fight or fear you, they can simply ignore your provocation or raise their hands in surrender. If one wants out of the fight, one simply raises one's hands.

### **3.2 Masculinity through *Musangwe* Sport**

This article also aims to dispel the widely held beliefs and lies about African masculinities. Morrell (2001) and other African scholars argue that African masculinities are varied and can be expressed in diverse ways. Their view is that African masculinities have evolved since colonial interferences. Unlike the narrow colonialist and racist views of the African man many authors concur that there is no one particular expression of masculinity; all men

regardless of colour express their masculinity according to societal expectation or according to gender alignments – e.g. homosexual masculinities and female masculinities.

Connell's work is highly renowned for demystifying masculinities. The author discusses the different types of masculinities found in different societies. His theory is the opposite of the single, unitary emphasis on one instrumental role discussed by Baden Powell (1896) and Parsons (1954) (in Uchendu 2008). Connell (1995) argues that masculinity is a place in gender relations, where men and women practice and engage that place in gender, and the effects of these practices in bodily experience, personality and culture. He further describes multiple masculinities that are hierarchically organised; different masculinities due to cultures and how masculinities change over different periods in history. More importantly he points out that masculinity is not simple as there are no set patterns as colonial views dictated. Thus masculinities are actively constructed and continually tested and contested. Masculinity is thus not formed nor caused by social context or at birth but rather shaped and constructed through interaction.

*Musangwe*, fist fight is both a sport and an expression of masculinity. Similarly to any other sport is one of the key multifaceted components in the complex construction of masculinities in most societies. Early studies on sport were concerned simply with the physical aspect – the human body. MacClancy (1996) argues that sport is central in societies and that it embodies social values. Thus sport is a major vehicle of identity. Similarly to colonial views on African masculinities, sport in Africa particularly South Africa racial divisions in sport were promoted. Football was relegated to African men while rugby was seen as epitomising fair play, manliness and Britishness (Alegi 2004). Alegi argues that the English speaking public schools epitomised 'white sport' with masculinity. Many sportsmen who play rugby are brawny and well-built compared to African football players who are mostly thin and athletic. The *Musangwe* fighters compared to what is perceived as sport are nowhere near to being brawny and well built, some of them are scrawny and some have pot bellies but it is the skills and discipline that makes them real men in the eyes of the Venda societies. Thus sport can not only be seen as body beautiful and brawny but also in many other body attributes.

*Musangwe* is a test of courage and machismo. Families and communities are proud of their best fighters. The fighters draw pride and

respect from their own and other communities for their prowess. Traditionally the sport is a domain of both boys and men testing each other's strength.

#### **4. Research Methodology**

The article uses a qualitative interpretive research approach to solicit data relevant towards understanding *Musangwe* and how *Musangwe* as an indigenous sport can be used to socialise and educate both men and women towards achieving gender equality or gender inequality. The strengths of the qualitative (interpretive) method, Neuman (2006: 89) argues is that apart from seeing 'human social life as an accomplishment' it further holds that 'social life is based on social interaction and socially constructed meaning'. For the purpose of this article, twenty people comprising of 10 men and 10 women were sampled. Their ages ranged from 25 to 50 years old. The participants were drawn from two villages namely Tshifudi and Vhufulwi, the two places famous for hosting big *Musangwe* tournaments. The author used the following questions to elicit information:

- How does *Musangwe* socialise men with the exclusion of women?
- What is *Musangwe*?
- Does *Musangwe* socialise across gender?
- To what extent does *Musangwe* engender either gender equality or gender inequality?
- What are taboos embedded within *Musangwe* sport?

In order to answer these questions the article utilised research techniques such as participant observation, individual in-depth interviews and secondary document analysis including information obtained from the internet websites (Mouton 1996: 169). Through the use of participant observation the author was afforded an opportunity to have first-hand information on how *Musangwe* spectators, challengers as well as how current and former champions interact and behaviour during the tournaments. While standing there among a cheering crowd of more than 1 000 people, it is quite obvious -

*Musangwe* not only occupies a special place in the hearts of locals, but that it is a crucial part of their being and culture. Apart from observing the Melange's tournaments, data was also collected through random sampling (Mouton 1996) in which key informants as well as ordinary men (spectators) and women in the two selected villages were engaged in exploring the extent to which *Musangwe* sport contribute towards gender equality or gender inequality. From the interviews it was apparent that senior women would adhere to traditional protocols and therefore never bothered to challenge their exclusion to participate in *Musangwe* indigenous boxing. On the contrary, the middle and younger women were more curious and vocal, and ready to advocate for their inclusion especially in watching *Musangwe* tournaments without being ridiculed, humiliated and prejudiced against by their male counterparts.

## **5. Findings and Discussions**

### **5.1. The Assertion of Masculinity through Cultural Goals and Achievements**

From time immemorial societies had varied ways of expressing and asserting masculinities. The primary purpose of asserting masculinities was to consolidate manhood from boys to men and gender differentiation. From the Western perspective on one hand, sport plays a central role in enhancing manhood. The sport oriented masculinities are visible through displayed strength. On the other hand, from an African perspective various stages are considered for asserting masculinity especially through the rites of passage from boyhood to manhood. For example, African young men are taken through circumcision as a rite of passage in order to graduate to manhood (Van Gennep 2004).

Both boys and men are subjected to several aspects of masculinity roles and activities as part of assisting them to ensure hardships and adversaries in life. Either explicitly or implicitly, the decision to partake in *Musangwe* is by itself an act of bravery which from the preparation to the actual fight subject contestants to challenges embedded in life. In northern South Africa, men of the Venda tribe continue the centuries-old tradition of *Musangwe*, a form of bare-knuckle boxing that helps young men cope with present-day challenges.

## 5.2. Exclusion and Non-recognition of Women' Role

Unlike other sports where people partake for commercial purposes such as boxing, wrestling, rugby and football to name just a few, *Musangwe* is free and the contestants fight without any expectation to get paid. As revealed from the interviews, it has become clear that some feel duty bound to fight - because their families have a history of producing *Musangwe* champions and thus have the need to maintain the legacy. Ndevana adds that most contestants descend on Tshifudi village to fight as part and parcel of honouring and representing their families, clan and villages. On the other hand families feel honoured for producing champions while on the other hand the community's pride is restored and maintained.

Within the sport fraternity, both family and village representation engender healthy competition which is often displayed through teasing and joking with the opponents. Similarly to a race where only one person wins, *Musangwe* is instrumental in building and institutionalising a sense of social inter and intra community cohesion among the spectators and contestants. Even though communities are not a homogenous entity, *Musangwe* fights tend to bring unity among disputing families. Most importantly, the sport does not only unify villagers but also assist in creating a social capital which both bridges and bonds them. In the recent past, one of the respondents indicated that:

*Musangwe* has sparked a fierce debate in recent years between those who believe it should be regulated and those who argue the sport should be left in its current format (Respondent No. 1, 2012)

The manifestation of bonding and bridging social capital is seen through the camaraderie where people as individuals and collectives defend their cultural and indigenous sport. On the positive note, *Musangwe* has been credited with producing professional boxers like Phillip 'Time Bomb' Ndou, who hails from the area. Women exclusion was also exacerbated by the fact that men tend to hide their weaknesses, one female shared that:

More often men are afraid that women would laugh at them when beaten to the pulp and exposure to their failure could make them to be undermined by women (Respondent No. 2, 2012)

Such a tendency not only obscured men's weakness as fellow human being but also further underlies Giddens (2004)' 'hegemonic masculinity' which in turn expand masculinity prone to torment and exclude women and therefore failed to recognise women's role. The reason given for the absence of women in *Musangwe* is their lack of self-control, which may be viewed as sexist. Women are also accused of giggling and less encouraging through the way they tease an aspect which discourages the fighters and men in general. In addition women are alleged to be weak and faint hearted particularly where there is 'violence' and spilling of blood.

### **5.3. Socio-cultural Socialisation of Women Outside Men's Sphere**

Sociologically, socialisation according to Togni (1996: 115) is the process whereby a human individual is taught to conform to norms and values of society, thereby becoming a 'social' being able to function within the parameters of that society. Giddens (2004; 22) in a wider sense associates the notion of culture comprising both intangible aspects (beliefs, ideas and values which form the content of culture) and tangible aspects (objects, symbols or technology which represent that content). He further argues that in reality culture is often concerned more about those aspects of human societies which are learned rather than inherited. The socio-cultural socialisation through sport such as *Musangwe* made people especially men to believe that sport meant for men can not even be watched by women let alone their participation. As one male teacher said:

We grew up knowing that *Musangwe* similarly to male circumcision was and is still a male domain and as such only men could exclusively watch or participate in the tournaments (Respondent No. 3, 2012)

Socialisation is therefore regarded as the primary channel aimed at transmitting cultural values and norms over time and generations. Such process of socialising people includes categorising roles and functions to be performed by both men and women. In order to radically challenge gender prejudice and gender inequality, Togni (1996: 124) is of the opinion that

gender role socialisation will have to take a different form based on the principle of equality of opportunity for both sexes, men and women. *Musangwe* similarly to other masculine sports or activities culturally socialise society in general and men in particular as a female respondent said:

society especially men are culturally socialised and made to believe that not only that women are naturally weak and inferior but also their weaknesses warrant men to exploit, marginalise, disrespect and abuse them without being questioned (Respondent No. 4, 2012).

The above statement reflects what Giddens (2004: 119) call ‘hegemonic masculinity’ which is defined as the social dominance more often through a cultural dynamic and as a result extends to both private lives as well as into social realms. In this case, Connell (1987) associates ‘hegemonic masculinity’ to inter alia, strengths and physical toughness which fit explicitly to masculinity promoted through *Musangwe* sport.

#### **5.4. The Marginalisation of Women**

*Musangwe* can be categorised as an indigenous sport which historically managed to attract men who volunteer to display their fighting skills and art. Women were not and are still not allowed anywhere near the venue ‘because it is traditional’ for men to be on their own. The marginalisation of women in this sport does not only manifest itself through their absence at the grounds (either young or old) and from partaking in the sport but it also culturally exclude them through a mere casting of an eye. In essence, the marginalisation of women in most male dominated sport hide behind culture hence its failure to transform society from gender inequality and discriminatory tendencies to gender equality and justice. Bonde (1995: 55) argues that either ancient or modern competitive sports could be an explicit justification for sport as the learning of the masculine code. Within the sport fraternity such as *Musangwe*, the marginalisation and exclusion of women is further deepened through ‘muscle-building’ or body strengths oriented sport which often treats women as weak species. In the contemporary world, women have made successful inroads in term of registering their interest and capabilities in what used to be male-dominated sports such as soccer, rugby,

cricket, marathon, mountain climbing including the extreme type of wrestling. Women in this context are disadvantaged, sidelined, excluded and marginalised in the name of culture. Through culture and cultural practices, either inclusionary or exclusionary undertones envisaged people especially the discriminated groupings such as women according to Garuba and Raditlhalo (2008:36) being marginalised on the basis of race, religion, cultural practices, gender or sexual orientation. On one hand, culture became a site of contestation and struggle not only against colonialism and apartheid, while on the other hand it was also used against oppression, domination and marginalisation. At the broader level, culture as Garuba and Raditlhalo (2008: 43) posit could be an instrument of anti-colonial resistance. In the South African context, culture was used as an instrument for forging identities towards the rebirth of a new democratic, non-racist and non-sexist society (Constitution 1996). However among the Venda similarly to other African ethnic groups, culture is used to reinforce male dominance in society.

The interviewed women in this article reported that they would like to watch *Musangwe* rather than participate in the sport as it was too brutal.

### **5.5. *Musangwe* Taboos: A No Go Space for Women?**

*Musangwe* is anchored on testing each other's capacity and physical strength. In its heyday when there was traditional stability, at sunset, young men heading the cattle home would exchange nasty words in jest and then a human circle is created by other boys and two boys volunteer to fight each. The sport continues to attract not only young people but also seniors who serve as coaches and mentors hence *Musangwe* is no-go space for women. Historically, *Musangwe* is a socialised sport around male-dominated role such as cattle herding which in the African culture is done by boys and senior men.

On Saturdays after the cattle have been dipped, young men from various villages assemble to fight and the winner's victory is spread across the valleys and villages. Based on the fighters' capacity, a champion (ngwená) earns respect and is elevated by villagers as a community leader and defender of the village. Over the years, *Musangwe* has been sustained as a taboo for women to partake hence culturally they are and still prevented from even coming near *Musangwe* grounds. One of the taboos as revealed by a senior male respondent pointed out that:



Vhafumakadzi vho iledwa u dzhenelela Musangwe ngauri kaleni vho vha vha tshi ambara misisi, ho vha hut shi shavhiwa uri musi vha tshi lwa vha do wa vha penguwa, vhanna vha do vha vhonele (women were not allowed to participate because there was fear that when they would be fighting since they used to wear short skin/leather dresses would obviously uncover themselves especially when they fall and men and boys would see their private parts-then an embarrassment) (Respondent No. 5, 2012).

For those women who are not interested to actively fight in *Musangwe* they argue that it was then that women used to be almost half-naked but that argument does not hold water since both men and women in the contemporary society can even wear trousers. Those who want to partake in the sport, argue for women's freedom to be involved in sports such as football, rugby, wrestling, cricket, etc, which used to only male dominated sports. Another taboo associated to women being barred from participating in *Musangwe* according to Mr. Ndevana is that:

*Musangwe* ground is considered sacred and has to be cleansed by a traditional healer from pollution prior to the fights. The mere presence of women stepping on cleansed ground is alleged would induce them to have perpetual periods (hune ha tambelwa hone *Musangwe*, hu a handululwa nga Maine, ngau ralo vhasadzi a von go tendelwa ngauri hupfi vha ima luvhandzeni musi vha tshiya maduvhani a vha nga do ima) (Male respondent No. 6, 2012).

The circulated myth that women are naturally weak is strong in isolating women from participating in the *Musangwe* sport. This justification is explicit as reflected from a female who commented that:

Women are strictly not allowed to be part of the sport because 'ngauri vhasadza vhana madamu- a vhana matzhende' translated to mean women have 'breast' and do not have 'balls' (Female Respondent No. 7, 2012)..

These taboos have in one or the other contributed to the stiflement of debates on *Musangwe*.

## 6. *Musangwe* and its Implications for Gender (In)Equality

*Musangwe* like any other male dominated sport socialise society and its people into sports, roles including public or private spheres which can be entered by men or women. Such gender categorisation does not only give rise to the ‘process of gender socialisation’ (Moffett 2008: 106) but also consolidate gender stereotypes that perpetuate ‘gender inequality’ (Giddens 2004: 112) which are often embedded within a patriarchal society. In addition, Chowdhury & Patnaik (2010: 455) view gender equality to imply:

... a society in which women and men enjoy the same opportunities, outcomes, rights and obligations in all spheres of life.

In essence, deliberations on gender, gender differences including gender socialisation form part of the gamut of discourse that embrace gender equality or inequality. On the positive, gender equality considers both men and women as equal deserving a fair and humane treatment, thus including access to resources and socio-economic and political opportunities especially for disadvantaged groupings such as women to pursue a decent living. On the contrary, gender inequality according to Giddens (2004: 113) has to do with difference in terms of status, power and prestige women and men have in groups, collectivities and societies.

World-wide, women have managed to make their mark especially in sports which traditionally used to belong and dominated by their male counterparts, yet *Musangwe* is strictly a male sport among the Venda speaking people. *Musangwe* is portrayed as a disciplined sport, as Ndevana pointed out that:

*Musangwe* builds men to be responsible beings who know how to take care of their families. ‘This is a sport that teaches us respect and all the aspects of manhood and we will continue doing this as part of our culture like other nationalities do’ (Respondent No. 8, 2012).

Contrary to the positive sentiment and assertion in favour of *Musangwe* above, some of the interviewees revealed the opposite of this assertion as one family member said:

Since my son got involved in *Musangwe*, he is bossy and at times he does not want to listen to his senior siblings including myself as his mother (Respondent No. 9, 2012).

The above mentioned quotation has gender inequality since it socialise young men to perceive women as weak sexes who due their 'perceived lack of physical strengths' could be bullied over. In addition, such mind-set entrenches violent behaviours and culture especially among the young combatants who upon their victory of mere participation tend to extend their bravery to others in the general community members especially at home. Thus *Musangwe* as Giddens (2004: 112) argues widens gender gaps and differences which in turn continue to serve as the basis for both gender and social inequalities. In Sport such as *Musangwe*, gender inequality coupled with abuse against females is socially accepted and within unequal power relations such behaviours and tendencies led to domination and discrimination against women and girls by men and boys (Chowdhury & Patnaik 2010: 458). In an attempt to deal with gender inequalities and all ills committed against women, Menon Sen & Shiv Kumar (2001) assert that gender equality should not be treated as just a woman's issue... but it is a people's issue and as such both men and women should work together in order to ensure rights and freedoms for all citizens-thus the movement for women's equality to become a people's movement.

## **7. Concluding Remarks**

From time immemorial societies had varied ways of expressing and asserting masculinities. The primary purpose of asserting masculinities was to consolidate manhood from boys to men and gender differentiation. From the Western perspective on one hand, sport plays a central role in enhancing manhood. The sport oriented masculinities are visible through displayed strength. On the other hand, from an African perspective various stages are considered for asserting masculinity especially through the rites of passage from boyhood to manhood. For example, African young men are taken through circumcision as a rite of passage in order to graduate to manhood.

In this article, *Musangwe* has been deliberated as one of the mechanisms to consolidate and deepen masculinity within the context of

capacity to either enhances or inhibits gender equality. The author acknowledges some of the positive changes brought through men and boys partaking in the sport similarly to other forms of asserting and affirming African masculinity (circumcision, hunting and the accumulation of wealth). *Musangwe* is still the domain of men irregardless of age. Women are not allowed anywhere near the venue 'because it is traditional' for men to be on their own. Despite being a sport, Ndevana pointed out that:

*Musangwe* builds men to be responsible beings who know how to take care of their families. This is a sport that teaches us respect and all the aspects of manhood and we will continue doing this as part of our culture like other nationalities do (Respondent No. 10, 2012).

In addition, either explicitly or implicitly, the decision to partake in *Musangwe* is by itself an act of bravery (asserting manhood) which from the preparation to the actual fight subject contestants to challenges embedded in life. In northern South Africa, men of the Venda continue the centuries-old tradition of *Musangwe*, a form of bare-knuckle boxing that helps young men cope with present-day challenges. Apart from these positive attributes, *Musangwe*'s participants have at times displayed ill-discipline which instead of uniting and building community, people especially women have been terrorised and bullied. The repercussions of such behaviours could be translated into undermining attempts already made towards gender equality thereby entrenching and consolidating gender stereotypes, inequalities and violence.

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**Personal interviews with:**

- *Musangwe* Organisers,
- President of *Musangwe* Association (Mr Ndevana)
- Men and women from Tshifudi and Vhufulwi Villages

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# Shifting Boundaries in Respect of Perceptions Governing Women and the Burning of *Impepho*

Nompumelelo Zondi  
Mpumelelo Ntshangase

## Abstract

Within the Zulu people's belief system almost all ritual and or traditional ceremonies require ancestral intervention if the occasion is to be accorded a status befitting it. The summoning of and or libation to the ancestors are closely linked to burning of *impepho*, a type of an indigenous African plant which is well-known to the majority of Sub-Saharan Africans. Depending on the nature of the rite in question or affordability by the family wanting to offer a sacrifice, chickens, goats or cows are presented as food for the ancestors. Males, albeit of particular standing within the family are charged with presiding powers at such ceremonies. Ordinarily, women have no place in these matters. However, there is a growing power shift which sees women in female headed households perceiving themselves as much of custodians of culture as their male counterparts. The article reports on the recently completed study whose aim was to find out why women were not allowed to preside in undertakings necessitating the burning of *impepho*. Furthermore the study is ground breaking in that the responses of women, who actually preside over ritual practices requiring the burning of *impepho*, deconstruct the myth that women should not handle *impepho* on such occasions. One of the key questions answered in this article is whether the prayers of such women and their needs go unheard by the ancestors.

**Keywords:** Ceremonies, indigenisation, gender, *impepho*, ancestors

## **Introduction**

This study attempts to redress certain discriminatory practices within the Zulu culture with specific reference to the burning of *impepho*, a type of an indigenous African plant that, once dried, is burnt in order to communicate with one's ancestors. This herb is well-known to the majority of Sub Saharan Africans as it is used by various sectors of society to communicate with ancestors in a number of ritual ceremonies and traditional feasts, where, depending on the nature of the ceremony and the circumstance of the family, a particular animal is slaughtered as an offering to the ancestors. Amongst the ceremonies and traditional feasts in which *impepho* is used are *umemulo* (the ceremony to celebrate girls' puberty rights), *isifo* (death), *ukubuyisa* (the bringing back home of a dead relative's spirit), and occasions of thanksgiving. Nyawose (2000: 41) provides a worthwhile explanation of the use of *impepho* during each of these ceremonies.

From the onset it is worth remarking that the subject of *impepho* under review is more known as far as it relates to its use at ritual ceremonies. Moreover, whatever literature there is on this topic it does not go beyond family rites to question women exclusion in the practise. In this sense, therefore, there is lack of feminist literature in the development of the argument since whatever literature exists is written by men; as it will be evident as the study progresses. Furthermore most of the male fraternity who have written on the issue are against women inclusion in the handling of *impepho* at ceremonies requiring its usage as the article will demonstrate (Ntshangase 2011). Zulu literature written as recently as in the 2000s reflect a mentality of maintaining a status quo as far as women exclusion in the *impepho* activities is concerned. Hence the scarcity of up to date debates in the area under investigation.

We, the authors of this article, are of the opinion that the subject of our research is a thought-provoking one and a valuable area of research as it will help clarify guidelines surrounding the use of this plant specifically with regard to women. Nearly all Zulu people have burned *impepho* at some point in their lives in order to communicate with their ancestors. Even amongst those who claim that they do not burn it, this research discovered that most of them do adhere to the practice even though they request the diviners not to divulge that information. According to the interview we held with one diviner, for example, some of the people who say that due to their religious



orientation do not burn it, have sought diviners' intervention when tradition calls and they have asked not to be revealed that they subscribe to it (Interview held on 10 February 2011). The secrecy might lie in the conventionally held notion that ordinary women ought not to be allowed to use *impepho* nor to be permitted to go to *umsamo* (the sacred sanctuary in the home reserved for ritual activities and which involve the burning of *impepho*) to speak to the ancestors. Due to changes in society which see women increasingly heading families, we are beginning to question the notion of women not being allowed to handle *impepho* on their own. Since women constitute a significant proportion of those who take part in this practice (whether openly or secretly) the study hoped that women's concerns will be addressed through this study. These anxieties are to do with why women are restricted in terms of burning *impepho* and how their needs in this regard can be accommodated. The research was guided by the following questions:

- What is the symbolic meaning of the practice of burning *impepho*?
- Do prayers go unheard by the ancestors if an ordinary woman burns *impepho*?
- What is it that actually makes a woman's sacrificial prayers unacceptable?
- Why do men put their foot down about women lighting *impepho*?
- How can this tradition be amended so as to accommodate women in general and those in female-headed families in particular? (see Ntshangase 2011).

## **Background and Rationale of the Study**

The authors of this article come from families which have been, for more than three decades, headed by their mothers- both their fathers having died when the authors were still young. One author comes from a semi-urban area while the other is from a rural area. They found common grounds in locating the study in areas similar to their backgrounds; hence a semi-rural and a rural area. The authors shared stories of how their mothers always found themselves in a dilemma when rituals calling for burning of *impepho* had to be performed. In the absence of a male head of the household their mothers

had to invite an uncle or a neighbouring man bearing the same family name to preside over a required ritual. At times this created a problem especially when the mothers preferred to burn *impepho* privately and without an ‘outsider’s knowledge. Another concern was that the families experienced difficulties if these men were not readily available at the time requiring the ritual; and this happened quite regularly. There would be long delays before the ritual could be performed. What if the circumstances were life threatening? Rather than go through all that emotional anxiety our mothers felt that as part of the family they were better suited to enter the *umsamo*, the sacred space and preside in the ceremony lest the worse happens. Consequently when they got frustrated from waiting for a ‘saviour’ or a total stranger to perform the rite on their behalf they went ahead and performed the rite on their own. Amongst other concerns it is this ground-breaking practice that lead to the conception of this study. In addition, the study went beyond accepting that women had as much right as men to perform official rituals in their households but collected sufficient data to prove that such beliefs were social constructions rather than taboo. This article reports on the overall impression of the study, presents results emanating from it as well as offer recommendations for what further research could be conducted in this area.

## **Context of the Study and Setting**

The data for this study was collected from two places, namely KwaNyuswa, which is a rural area and KwaNdengezi, a semi-urban area. Both places are in the province of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. Participants consisted of married Zulu women over the age of fifty and who, due to absence of their husbands, be it through death or other circumstances, are viewed as heads of their families. This is an age when women could be considered mature enough to understand issues on the use of *impepho*. Some of the women were diviners and as such there were two sets of questions. The interviews took a form of five focus groups in each area with each group having a number of between six and ten women. These were followed up by ten one-on-one interviews in each location. All communication was in isiZulu, our mother tongue as well as the language of the respondents.

## **Research Methodology and Methods**

Methodology refers to the general principles by which we investigate the

social world and also how we demonstrate validity of knowledge. On the other hand a research method refers to the more practical issue of choosing an appropriate research design (Henning 2004: 4). In the social sciences there is a distinction between method and methodology. Methodology is a combination of the choice of which aspects of the social world to research, the choice of which method to use for collecting the data, and the chosen way to then interpret that data. All these aspects are informed by the broad theoretical framework within which one's research is carried out.

The present study employed the qualitative research method. Silverman (1997:8) argues that the qualitative method of research is well suited to the collecting of data when it comes to finding out about the lives, views, values, culture and traditions of a people. The inquiry was about finding out the real reason(s) behind women being restricted from the practice of burning *impepho*. Data was collected by way of interviews, focus groups and/or participant observation. These methods of data collection enabled us as researchers to take into account the feelings of the participants, which involved paying attention to their body language. In that way we were able to consider the feelings of the participants and gain accurate information on a sensitive topic such as the burning of *impepho*. During the interviews and focus group discussions a tape recorder was used to record the conversations. The recorded discussions were then transcribed at a later stage for analysis purposes. Handwritten notes were also used in order to facilitate the writing up of the dissertation. All communication was in isiZulu, our mother tongue as well as the first language of the respondents.

The study was also ethnographic in nature. Johnson (2000:111) defines *ethnography* as 'a descriptive account of social life and culture in a particular social system based on detailed observations of what people actually do'. This study examined the Zulu people and their culture and considered how this culture discriminates against and marginalises women. It investigated Zulu people's culture, practices and beliefs whilst also comparing such aspects with those of other groups living either in South Africa or beyond its borders.

## **Theoretical Framework**

Gender oppression being one of the problems faced by women the world over, the study adopted feminism and social construction theories as its

theoretical underpinnings. This was because the research wanted to find a way to accommodate women into the cultural practices that have been historically reserved for men. Hannam (2007: 3) defines feminism as a set of ideas that recognises, in an explicit way, that women are currently in a subordinate position to men and its adherents therefore seek to address this imbalance of power between the two sexes. Furthermore feminism aims to find a balance between men and women so that the latter can enjoy equal rights and have access to the same activities as men in both the public and private spheres. Central to feminism is the view that the position of women is socially constructed and is therefore open to change. Feminism has various branches, such as radical, Marxist, African feminism and liberal feminism. While all of these branches deal with empowering women, they differ in the thrust they put on how to achieve these objectives. For the purposes of this study liberal feminism, which advocates that women be given equal rights to men in the home, in the workplace, and in politics was adopted.

According to liberal feminist theorists the rights that women deserve include the right to have equal access to cultural practices, of which the use of *impepho* is an example in this, our current study. The use of *impepho* in traditional or cultural practices, we argue, should accommodate women of befitting status without trying to change the norms of our Zulu culture and tradition. By extension, social construction states that society constructs the different gender roles and makes them seem natural, whereas they can in reality be changed according to race, place and need. In the past, women and men have been subjected to certain norms and standards, but lately many people have become aware that these norms and standards were created by society to give men an upper hand in societal matters while disadvantaging women.

As has been shown by Buikema (1995:15), women of all races and cultures have historically been denied certain rights, have been excluded from certain occupations and roles, and have been marginalised. Magezi (1996:13) aptly calls for equal treatment of women by society. If feminists of the 1960s and 1970s were opposed to the unequal division of roles between men and women, should not feminists of the twenty first century be even more vociferous on these concerns? Should societies still be upholding views that claim that when the head (meaning male) of the family dies all is lost? What with contradictions in male perceptions on the issue of *impepho* in the twenty first century? The problem is that, within the Zulu culture, powers for the use of

*impepho* are generally vested with the *umnumzane* (head of the family) and then with close male relatives. In many homes women are deprived of this authority. This restriction constitutes one of the major forms of discrimination against women, as women are also part of the family and should be treated as equal members. Ntuli (2010: 19) writes in uncompromising terms:

*Abantu besifazane abakaze babe nelungelo lokushisa impepho. Ngisho nasemandulo ngokwesiko lwesiZulu noma ngabe ilapho agcagcela khona noma ngabe uyisalukwazi sakhona. Kodwa akanalo ilungelo lokushisa impepho.*

(Women have never had a right to burn *impepho*, even if a woman is married into that family, or even if she is an old woman within that family. But she still has no right to burn *impepho*).

On the contrary Mkhize (2009: 19) is of the opinion that a man and his wife be both allowed to go into the sacred shrine, *umsamo* and speak to the ancestors by burning *impepho*. He also states that both the father and the mother are needed to communicate with the ancestors and that the female is known to the ancestors, whether she is a wife or a daughter. On the issue of *umsamo*, which is closely linked to the use of *impepho*, Mkhize (2009: 19) writes:

*Le ndawo ubaba nomama wasekhaya beya khona befike khona bakhulume nabadala abangasekho .... Ngakhoke ukuthetha emsamo kudinga usokhaya ubaba, kudinga umama ikakhulu kuyiwa nokudla kuyiwe notshwala kubekwe*

(The father and mother go to this sacred place and they speak to the elders who have passed on. Therefore to communicate with one's ancestors you need both the father and the mother, as she is mostly needed to supply the food and Zulu beer).

Mkhize (2009: 45) also remarks that the wife will be known to the ancestors as the wife, as well as the one who makes *umqombothi* (Zulu beer) for them. She is also known as the caretaker and the mother who can communicate with them, because when a woman marries, *impepho* is lit for her, she is introduced to the ancestors, and she then forms part of the family. Mkhize

argues, and we concur, that it would therefore be better to allow those females who are known to the ancestors as family members to burn *impepho* rather than insist on that some other male – who may well be a stranger to them and their ancestors – do it on their behalf simply because he has the same surname and there is no other male in the family to do it for them.

## **Data Analysis**

In this section we discuss the concept and nature of data analysis as well as the different methods that can be used to analyse information. We then describe thematic analysis which is the method we chose to analyse our data. The themes are first listed followed by a discussion section where the literature and the study's findings are compared.

Data analysis is the most important part of a person's research as it is where the information collected from the participants is reconciled with the key questions of the research. Mouton (2001:108) explains that the aim of analysis is to understand the various constitutive elements of one's data through an inspection of the relationships between concepts, constructs and variables to see if there are any patterns or trends that can be identified or isolated, and/or to establish themes concerning the data. Levine (2002: 1) further describes data analysis as a body of methods that helps to describe facts, detect patterns, develop explanations, and test hypotheses. In our study all interviews and focus group discussions were recorded and the data was then transcribed into notes so that it could be easily analysed. We listened attentively when conducting the interviews so that we could not only hear the interviewees' responses first hand but also take note of how they responded in terms of the tone of their voices, their gestures and body language.

## **Methods Selected**

Doing data analysis is the most important and exciting part of the research as this is when one finds answers to one's problem and can see oneself coming closer to attaining one's goals. There are different kinds of methods that can be used to analyse data, but due to limited space, we only discuss thematic analysis; a method we opted for in this study after several considerations. Often used in conjunction with other methods, it is a widely used method in qualitative research. Rubin and Rubin (2004: 225) point out that thematic

analysis is exciting because ‘you discover themes and concepts embedded throughout your interviews’. Taking the point forward, Rice and Ezzy, in Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2006) view thematic analysis as a method that identifies, analyses and reports patterns (or themes) within data. This means that the researcher looks at the responses received, tries to find the common ideas in them and then divides those into more specific themes. In this sense thematic analysis is a search for themes contained within the collected data. Proponents of thematic analysis argue that its flexibility allows for better handling of massive data. Nevertheless, it is imperative to acknowledge that one must not be misled into thinking that anything goes. Furthermore, the researcher should focus on details that are relevant to the research’s aims and objectives. This is what we endeavoured to do in our analysis through applying caution where our discretion was concerned. We were still able to establish what was more important and valuable in the findings we arrived at. For instance, something could be mentioned by all the participants yet not be relevant to the research. Such an opinion should thus not count as a theme.

### **Themes Identified in the Study**

The topic researched has not been adequately researched from the female point of view and we thought our study would be ground breaking in this regard. The broader themes that emerged from the data are listed in bold capital letters below. Verbatim statements are offered so as to demonstrate why we felt identified themes were legitimate. These speech marks are given in IsiZulu first, the language of the respondents as well as the language in which the data was gathered. Each quotation is then translated into English for convenience. Our translation and transcription approach is in line with descriptive translation theorists, Toury (1980) and Lefevere (1982) in Zondi (2008) who suggest that the socio-cultural context in which translation take place should be considered when translating. According to these scholars, translations are never produced in a vacuum but they are part of a larger system and therefore should be described in that context. We now list the themes as they emerged from the data.

## **Many Women do Burn *Impepho* to Communicate with Ancestors**

Nearly all the women that were interviewed stated that they burn *impepho* in their homes because they feel that the ancestors should accept them since they legitimately belong to the family. The fact that they are old merits them the right to do things for themselves. What follows are verbatim extracts from some of the participants that justify this theme.

- *Kwami ngiyazishisela impepho angibizi muntu, hawu, ngingaze ngibize umuntu ngingazo izandla.*  
(In my house, I burn *impepho* myself. I don't call anyone. Wow, why do I need to call someone else when I have my own hands?).
- *Ngiyayishisa uma sisodwa ekhaya kodwa uma kunemicimbi ishiswa umfowabo womenyi wami.*  
(I burn it if we are alone [i.e. she is alone with her children], but when there is a ceremony my brother-in-law burns it).
- *Abantu besifazane sebeyazishisela impepho manje, phela izikhathi sezashintsha.*  
(Women do burn *impepho* on their own now that times have changed).

## **Women are Allowed to Burn *Impepho***

Times have changed and due to circumstances (such as relatives living far away and male family members having died) women are now allowed to burn *impepho* so as to call upon their ancestors in order to ask for help or to honour them. The participants stated that they do in fact burn *impepho* in their homes, and that whatever they ask for does come true, even though they are females. Some quotes that justify this theme are as follows:

- *Mina la kwami ngiyazishisela impepho futhi engikucelayo kuyenzeka.*  
(Here in my house I do burn *impepho*, and whatever I request I get).
- *Unamezala wami wathi angizishisele impepho ngoba yena nobabezala bahlala kude kunami kodwa uma kunomsebenzi omkhulu bayayishisa bona.*



(My mother-in-law told me that I could burn it because she and my father-in-law stay far away from us. But if there is an important ritual ceremony they burn it).

- *Kwashona umyeni wami ngazishisela mina impepho, izihlobo zikhona eduze angithembi umuntu. Indodana yami isencane.*

(When my husband passed away I started burning *impepho* on my own. My relatives live close by but I don't trust anyone. My son is still too young to assume this role).

- *Ngiyayishisa impepho ngicele emadlozoni engikufisayo noma uma kuhlatshiwe.*

(I burn *impepho* and ask the ancestors to grant my wishes or when we slaughter animals as offerings).

### **There are Conditions that Forbid Women to Burn *Impepho***

Although women are allowed to burn *impepho*, there are certain conditions that forbid them from burning *impepho*. These conditions are as follows.

- A. If there is a male figure in the family such as a father or a brother.

These are the quotes that led to this statement:

- *Ngeke umuntu wesifazane ayishise impepho uma esekhona ubaba wekhaya noma indodana endala, kodwa uma sebengasekho kumele azishisele.*

(A woman cannot burn *impepho* if the husband is still alive or if there is an old son, but if they have passed on she must burn it).

- *Uma indoda yomuži isekhona kumele kube yiyona eshisa impepho ikhulume emadlozini, umama aguqe ngemuva kwakhe alalele.*

(If the man as the head of the house is still alive, it is his duty to burn *impepho* and speak to the ancestors. The woman kneels behind him and listens).

- *Umuntu wesifazane angayishisa impepho kodwa uma umuntu wesilisa esaphila kuba nguyena oyishisayo noma acele isihlobo simshisele.*

## *Perceptions Governing Women and the Burning of Impepho*

(A woman can burn *impepho* but if there is an older male in the family, he can burn it too. She can also ask a male relative to assist her).

**B.** If the woman has had intercourse. One needs to be pure to burn *impepho*.

These are the quotes that led to this statement:

- *Uma kade uselawini awukwazi ukushisa impepho noma ungowesilisa noma owesifazane.*  
(If a person, be it male or female, has indulged in sexual act just prior to the activity that requires burning of *impepho*, he or she may not burn *impepho*).
- *Uma kade wenza ucansi awukwazi ukushisa impepho, phela emsamo kunabantu abadala esibahloniphayo, indawo engcwele esiyihloniphayo.*  
(If you had sex, you cannot burn *impepho* at the sacred corner where our ancestors reside and we need to respect them).
- *Umama angayishisa impepho kodwa hhayi uma kade eselawini noma esendaweni yakhe. Lokhu kufana nokusebenzisa imithi. Ngeke imithi isebenze uma uzoyixuba nocansi.*  
(A mother can burn *impepho* but not when she has been having sexual intercourse or when she is menstruating. This is similar to using traditional medicine. It will not work if you use it simultaneously with sex).

**C.** If she is menstruating.

These are the quotes that led to this statement:

- *Umuntu wesifazane angayishisa noma yinini impepho kodwa hhayi uma esezinsukwini zakhe, phela umsamo ufana nendawo engcwele.*  
(A female can burn *impepho* anytime but not when she is having her period. *Umsamo* is like a sacred/holy place).

- *Angayishisa kodwa hhayi uma esezinsukwini zakhe, akangeni nasemsamo uma kunjalo.*  
(She can burn *impepho* but not when she is having her period. She cannot enter umsamo like that).
- *Umntu wesifazane angayishisa impepho kodwa hhayi uma elapha.*  
(A woman can burn *impepho* but not when she is there [said while touching her private part]).
- *Ngiyayishisa impepho ekhaya kodwa angiyishisi uma ngisezinsukwini zami.*  
(I do burn *impepho* at my home but not when it is my days [i.e. when I am menstruating]).

### **It is not Safe to Call a Relative (Third Person) to Burn *Impepho* on Your Behalf**

The interviewed women said that they feel it is better for them to burn *impepho* on their own rather than call a relative to help them, as there is a great deal of witchcraft that goes on, albeit from jealousy or some other ulterior motive. These women were of the opinion that it is best to connect to your ancestors personally rather than have a stranger do it for you.

To this effect here are some of the verbatim responses:

- *Khona abantu besifazane kuthiwa bangayishisi kodwa ngathi kungcono ukuzishisela wena kunokucela omunye umuntu ozofika akuphambanisele izinto. Bakuthakathe bakuqede.*  
(They say women must not burn *impepho* but it is better that way than having a stranger who could in the process bewitch you).
- *Kungcono nje umuntu azishisele impepho phela sekukuningi ukuthakathana nomona ezihlobeni. Umuntu uthi akazokusiza kanti yena usekuvalile emsamo wakhe.*  
(It is best to burn *impepho* yourself since people are jealous and they will bewitch you).
- *We ukubiza umuntu wangaphandle kwekhaya azokushisela impepho akulungile ngoba abantu bayaphambaniselana futhi izinto zakho zingalungi. Kungcono nje ukuzenzela.*

(It is not good to ask an outsider [i.e. a non-family member] to burn *impepho* for you as they can mess things up for you and your plans will fail. It's better to do it for yourself).

### **Ancestors Cannot be Separated, they are Seen as One**

Ancestors cannot be separated. In other words, the ancestors are seen as being one person. Women cannot therefore call upon only female ancestors, thereby leaving out male ancestors. A person can only call upon all the ancestors of a family.

The quotes that led to this theme are as follows:

- *Idlozi lilodwa ngeke ukwazi ukulihlukanisa.*  
(The ancestors are one. You cannot separate them).
- *Ngeke ukwazi ukulihlukanisa idlozi, ubabiza bonke kanye kanye.*  
(You cannot separate ancestors; you have to call all of them together).
- *Uma usushisa impepho ubabiza bonke abakini abangasekho abayidlozi elihle, abangalungile awubabizi.*  
(When burning *impepho*, you call upon all your ancestors but you do not call upon evil/bad ancestors).

This last participant raised the issue of calling upon only the good ancestors within one's family. The point here is that one needs to be aware that there are both good and bad ancestors. Another participant also made mention of a bad/evil ancestor (*idlozi elibi*). This issue will be further discussed in the discussion section below.

### **Diviners (*Izangoma*) have Ancestors who Possess them Therefore they are Allowed to Burn *Impepho* so as to be able to assist their Patients**

The quotes that led to this theme are as follows:

- *Uma uzoba yisangoma ungenwa yidlozi, ilona elikusizayo uma usulapha ngakho- ke impepho uvumelekile ukuyishisa noma ungakanani uma nje usuphothulile.*  
(When you are going to become a diviner, an ancestor enters you, it is the one that helps you when you are healing, therefore you are allowed to burn *impepho*. It doesn't matter how old you are when you have completed your training, you may burn it).
- *Phela isangoma sihlukile kwabanye abantu besifazane ngoba singenwa abantu abadala. Uma sisebenza silekelelwa abantu abadala.*  
(Diviners are different from other women because we have supernatural powers within us. When we are healing, they help us).
- *Mina ngangenwa abantu abadala ngisemncane, ngakho-ke ngasheshe ngazishisela impepho. Uma nje usuqede ukuthwasa usungashisa impepho ubize amadlozi akho ukuthi akukhanyisele uma usulapha.*  
(I got my calling when I was very young, so I burnt *impepho* at an early age. Once you finish your training, you call upon your ancestors to help you in your healing).

## **Diviners Suggest that you Get an Older Male who Shares your Surname if you do not have Relatives**

Diviners always advise women or young people who need to be introduced to the ancestors (or need to undergo a name-changing process) to bring along at least one male relative or a man with a similar surname to them when they want to burn *impepho*.

The quotes that led to this theme are as follows:

- *Uma ushintsha isibongo sakho, sithi abantu abafike nomuntu omdala wesilisa ozomshisela impepho ambike emadlozini. Kudingeke*

*umuntu onesibongo esifana nesakhe ukuthi ambike emadlozini.*

(When a person changes his/her surname, we tell them to come back with an old male who will introduce them to the ancestors. We need a person with the same surname as theirs to introduce his/her to the ancestors).

- *Kungcono ukuthi umuntu eze nomuntu wesilisa omdala ozomsiza uma ezongeniswa esibongweni sakubo.*

(It is better if a person comes here with an older male person who will introduce him/her to his/her surname).

- *Ngeke umuntu wesifazane azishisele impepho, udinga owesilisa ikakhulukazi uma engeniswa esibongweni sakhe.*

(A female cannot burn *impepho* for herself, she needs a man, especially if she needs to be introduced to her surname).

- *Umuntu wesifazane angazishisela impepho kwakhe kodwa uma esemncane noma edinga ukushintsha isibongo sakhe kudingeka umuntu wesilisa ozomsiza.*

(A female can burn *impepho* at her home but if she is young or needs to change surnames, she will need a male to help her).

There were many other comments that were similar to these and nearly all the participants were of the same view about women being able to burn *impepho*, but it was not possible to quote every participant's view due to space limitations. The results and a comparison of these results are provided below.

## **Conclusion**

The article has demonstrated that the role of women is socially constructed and that society or tribes have to accommodate the changing times. From the discussion above it would seem that nobody knows for sure why women have been discriminated against in the practice of burning *impepho*. If there is no consensus as to whether it is legitimate or not for women to burn *impepho* then drawing from the responses provided above and those that have been, for brevity, left out in this article, we are of the opinion that women be allowed to occupy roles traditionally set aside for men. From the responses above it is evident that each of the women interviewed consider the practice of burning *impepho* as 'sacred', and as such would not handle it if they were

not in good standing-as per rudiments for burning *impepho*. Therefore the authors recommend that more women embark on a similar study so as to avoid this secrecy on the question of *impepho* and in that way contribute to women emancipation. In ending the discussion the words of Einstein (1983: XIV) are apt:

I think that culture and tradition can change to accommodate women and I believe that women, like men, are socially produced beings and can change.

In other words woman's role in society, that is, what she can and cannot do—is simply what men or the male leaders of her society say is the case. There is a need for women to be able to light and use *impepho* and they should be given the opportunity to do so. This is what liberal feminism tries to achieve: equal opportunities for both men and women. As we can see, there is a need to change the rules with regard to this cultural practice as there are now many more female-headed homes in Zulu society as a result of a high rate of male deaths or absence.

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# Gender, Culture and Exclusion of Women in Educational Leadership

Irene Muzvidziwa

## Abstract

Generally women are the majority in the teaching field especially in primary schools, yet they constitute the least number in positions of authority within the education system. This article examines, the underlying reasons for this under representation of women through a gendered analytical framework, focusing on an empirical research of women deputy heads that was conducted in one of the provinces in Zimbabwe using qualitative interviews. Despite efforts to increase the representation of women in school leadership positions, their numbers have remained very low. Research that I have conducted in the last ten years do show that gender roles, culture and gender relations influence women's rise into leadership positions. Arising from these observations are questions such as: why do women's numbers in managerial and leadership positions continue to be low? What messages do women aspiring for leadership positions get from their female counterparts who act as their role models? The issues that emerged from the study and literature included lack of acceptance of women leaders by both male and female teaching staff, the assumption that leadership is for men was supposedly linked to women's lack of aspiration. The possible barriers to women's advancement and the strategies that create opportunities for more women in educational leadership was linked to cultural constraints from both the society and organisational institutions thus including the challenges women face as educational leaders.

**Keywords:** Gender, leadership, socialisation, under-representation, organisation

## **Introduction**

Socialisation allows for the transmission of culture from one generation to another. Schools and teachers play a major role in transmitting societal values to a nation. For instance children ‘mirror themselves in the characters and roles that they see or read about and learn’ and at times inspire to be like those people portrayed (Mutare Teacher’s College 2009:35). Certain adjustments with regards to division of labour in society have to be made if women are to receive equal employment opportunities. While the underlying reasons for the under representation of women in educational leadership are diverse and contested, research shows that gender roles, cultural norms and gender relations influence women’s advancement into leadership positions (Rogers 2009). This is done and made possible through socialisation, since it is a society’s culture and the way people are socialised that women are often steered away from leadership positions. For instance, it cannot be argued that leadership and managerial role requires appropriate behaviour, however, what can be contested is who defines what is considered appropriate. Mutare Teacher’s College (2009:35) argued that ‘school curricula’ and the ‘values’ associated with it ... ‘have a role to play in raising awareness of gender sensitivity’ particularly within patriarchal societies. Teachers as agents of change are the key instruments in reshaping attitudes and perceptions of young pupils towards the issue of gender role socialisation. It is important to use a similar process to prepare individuals for the roles they are to play, and to provide them with necessary skills, ‘repertoire of habits, beliefs and values’ (Mutare Teacher’s College 2009). Sharing gender roles in both domestic and private spheres and consciousness-raising within the community for people to appreciate the work of women is critical, if the problem of women’s disadvantage and under-representation is to be improved or overcome (Mumba 1997). One of the most important stages in this socialisation is the early childhood developmental stage. According to McFadden (1997), men are socialised not only to be public holders of power, but to own and control the major resources of society in which women are taken to be a critical part of those resources. Literature also shows that women are not expected to aspire to the same high professional and occupational status as men (Gaidzanwa 1993; Addi-Racciah 2002; Shakeshaft, Brown, Irby, Grogan & Ballenger 2007) and as such lack support and encouragement even when they assume the leadership positions.

The study from which this article drew was carried out in Marondera district, about seventy kilometres away from the eastern side of Harare in Zimbabwe. Out of the eight schools two women heads of school were from urban primaries, two from peri urban, two from rural and the other two were from farm schools. Like other developing countries, Zimbabwe has a rich diversity of cultures with political, social and economic features rooted in tradition and patriarchal values (Jayaweera 1997). Schools in Zimbabwe are classified as:

Government schools or non-Government schools and in such other categories as the Minister may determine, taking into account the social and economic standards of the communities in which the schools concerned are situated (Education Act 1996:619).

In the field of education in Zimbabwe, there is the School Development Committee (SDC) for non-government school and School Development Association (SDA) for government schools. These committees mobilise parents in the building of schools, the paying of levies and they see to it that the school fulfils its function. The SDC is a committee that provides and assists the operation and development of the school within a non-governmental school. It promotes the welfare of the school for the benefit of its present and future pupils and their parents and teachers. It is charged with control of the financial affairs of the school for which it has established. In the exercise of its functions a School Development Committee has the power to employ, hire or fire the staff in order to serve the needs of the school, and this power is exercised with the approval of the Minister.

The School Development Association provides the same services as that for the SDC committee with only small differences since the SDA represents Government schools. SDA members are elected parents of the pupils enrolled at the school and the teachers employed at those schools. This body serves to promote and encourage the development and maintenance of the school, and assists in the advancement of moral, cultural and intellectual welfare of pupils at the school.

The exclusion of women can be traced back from the past to the present factors at both the individual and societal levels where the teaching starts at home, with the mother trying to interact with her infant, who in-turn responds with certain movements and some form of smiles and cries. It is

through this initial stage that the child learns to follow simple instructions and commands through the process of interaction and this forms part of the very primary socialisation (Mutare Teacher's College 2009). Even through observation, the child is able to distinguish between acceptable and unacceptable behaviour. An infant's social relation starts with his/her mother and those norms and values are extended to other members of the family and society at large. Although this may sound primitive and issues of the past, what is clear is that women still experiences challenges emanating from both cultural forces and human practices.

The debate is about gender, culture and the exclusion of women in Educational leadership. In Zimbabwe boys and girls perform different duties and are always reminded to behave like a human, suggesting that some unacceptable behaviour outside the norm has been observed. The school then serves as agents of the society by transmitting the values of society to pupils and thus bringing in Bourdieu's (1997) concept of cultural capital and cultural reproduction. For Bourdieu, cultural capital can be identified in three forms which are: 'the embodied state' (mind and body) 'the objectified state' (cultural goods such as books, pictures and others) and the 'institutionalised state' which can be viewed as the final product which is the educational qualification(Bourdieu's 1997:47).The writer in this article points to this form of capital which is acquired through agents of society such as the family and the school, and argue that the type of socialisation can thus be revisited and transformed.

This article focuses on gender and the influence of culture on women and leadership within the field of education. To pursue on this issue, the article discusses the family as the initial institution where much of the social construction of gender takes place. The purpose is to reflect on how cultural norms emphasise gender differences which result in strengthening men's dominance in educational leadership. By presenting a brief review of literature on gender and education, I provide the backdrop to the study that will help us understand the mechanism that serves as exclusionary measures for more women to be in leadership positions. In addition, the mainstream leadership theory will be examined. Literature shows that the dominating leadership and management theory has shaped the assumptions, beliefs and values that have become the underpinning of organisational theory Addi-Racciah 2002; Ford, 2005; Shakeshaft, Brown, Irby, Grogan and Ballenger 2007).

## **Social Construction of Gender**

Much of the construction of gender takes place within the family particularly in the area of parenting. Raditloaneng (2011: 202) defined gender as ‘a socio-culturally constructed notion of the roles of men and women in any society’. It is the psychological, social and cultural differences in access to vocational education between man and women. Muthivhi, 2010 investigating South Africa children’s acquisition and development of thinking and concepts, highlighted the impact of a child’s participation in social roles and activities with regards to his/her cognitive development. The findings confirmed that the social and cultural context have direct impact on a child performance which in turn determines career opportunities. The issue of opportunities relating to girls and women has been well articulated by Okin (1989) who had a strong feeling that the family to a large extent determines children’s life opportunities of what they can become of. Her belief was that almost every person in society starts life in a family of some sort and while the family varies it is where socialisation takes place. On the other hand, Rawls (2003) sees the family as the foundation for building and/or developing children’s capacities and opportunities for their future roles and careers. It should not be taken for granted that child development does not only happen through socialisation of verbal interaction, but by observation and imitation.

Traditionally in Zimbabwe, like any other African countries, girls were mostly prepared for marriage, and hence their education was restricted to lower levels of learning till after the 1980 when issues of inequalities were being observed. Mutare Teachers’ College (2009), Challenged the family as agents of socialisation for the young child, suggesting that parents and guardian’s beliefs and value are influential to the child’s career path and at times their life-style. What was the trend in developing countries was to value sons more than daughters. Parents saw their sons’ education as an investment; they were not just educating their children. Parents expected to receive greater returns from educating sons. This seems why for instance King and Hill (1993:27) pointed out that ‘unless daughters transfer part of their future income to their parent, who must bear some of the costs of their education, parents may not have sufficient incentive to send them to school’. While this is not true to every family, it confirms Okin’s (1989:16) observation that ‘the opportunities of girls and women are centrally affected by the structure and practices of family life’. It can be acknowledged that

people are beginning to realise the importance of every child. However, what parents value in relation to their children's futures partly, determines the level of education the child gets and the kind of individual (socially and morally) that child will be as an adult person. Eagly and Carli (2007) commented on how women become leaders, noted that gender stereotyping and attributes such as assertiveness, control and confidence more often ascribed to men than women, emanate from cultural beliefs and have an impact on how both of them are perceived. In-fact such stereotype thinking generate feelings and attitudes within a society that excludes more than include women. Although for some people, the valuing of sons' education more than that of daughter' seems to be a thing of the past, the issue still exists and is a global phenomenon.

In the United States and other developed countries, schooling for girls was also designed to prepare them to be better wives and mothers and for a better life in their private spheres, which was the home (Schmuck 1996; Sperandio 2010; Bissessar 2011). Thus women's oppression was and is still reinforced by the way in which 'we are positioned by our own parents' and the society as a whole. Parents in developing countries such as Zimbabwe believe that girls would eventually marry and leave their natal homes hence the women's disadvantage is perpetuated through the traditional culture and the certain values of society. Although there are shifting norms and standards, gender blindness in policy analysis concerning women and education reveals itself as not much has been done through curriculum modification, to sensitise learners and the communities. Mapolisa and Madziyire (2012) acknowledge that the progress of women has been impacted negatively by tradition and the way women are socialised. It is through schooling that specific definitions of gender are constructed, modified and transmitted to each new generation. Gender awareness in schools is therefore important since it is a stage when people are informed and come to know of the existence of gender differences in the roles of men and women. Raditloaneng (2011:207) acknowledged that 'gender sensitivity entails not only awareness but taking requisite steps to bridge the gender gaps'. This statement challenges the curriculum development designers that promote skills, knowledge and attitudes towards employment. Attitude can be negative or positive hence, the importance of curriculum designers to portray images that create in both girls and boys, positive attitudes towards taking different responsibilities, including leadership and management in schools.

## **Gender, Education and the Exclusion of Women**

Educational institutions tend to reproduce the gender order in different forms. The school as one of the key institutions for the construction of gender is seen as the prime site for socialisation (Mutare Teacher' College 2009). In examining further how schooling reproduces gender and social order, (MacDonald 1980; Riddell 1992) it is important to reflect on gender codes and the teachers' construction of masculinity and femininity. As mentioned before, gender identity and gender roles are constructed under the classification of the school system. Moreover such classifications tend to set boundaries of what is termed appropriate activities for the different sexes. A prevailing culture can privilege some above others. In Zimbabwean textbooks women and men are portrayed according to culturally accepted gender roles: that is women as mothers and housewives, and men performing outdoors activities. Commenting on such portrayals, Rutherford (2001:371-372) noted that 'cultures exclude as well as include'. These are some of the taken for granted, and even today some people tend to believe that, since gender policies have been designed issues of inequality or exclusion of women no longer exist.

Even though there are policies that should be addressing subtle practices, discrimination and exclusion of women in the work place, Moorosi (2010) commenting on the South African context, observed that there is little change that has happened. This has been acknowledged by Lumby and Azaola (2011) when they pointed out how in South Africa, the women educational leaders were persistently prejudiced. Teachers tend to reinforce the notion of masculinity and femininity in the classroom by making use of comments that are evaluative of and places boundaries between future work and what is seen as appropriate. Such comments become part of the hidden curriculum which in the process of interaction, act as exclusionary measures to other carrier avenues leading to positions such as school leadership.

The issue of the curriculum has been noted by Colley (1998) who indicated that the choice of educational routes and achievement in different subject areas are influenced by many factors including stereotypes of male and female abilities, social roles, family backgrounds and teacher beliefs which forms part of the hidden curriculum. Taking further the above argument, Riddell (1992) focusing on pupils' understanding of school subjects and their perception of the gender appropriateness of particular

subjects, found out that girls perceived technical subjects as bearing no future for them as they believed that these subjects belonged to masculine areas of the curriculum. On a similar note Mthethwa (2011) referring to Swaziland observed that schools are one of the agents of socialisation that contribute to the social construction of gender inequalities through the curriculum which is also gender biased. Ramaili, (2011) also referring to teacher beliefs and approaches to curriculum implementation, argued that the hidden curriculum plays a crucial role in the development of students from their primary, through to secondary, tertiary and as adults and professionals. The hidden curriculum is the unstated norms, values and beliefs that pupils learn consciously or unconsciously. The reasons why there are few women in educational leadership vary.

In Zimbabwe Gordon 1994 found that girls were channelled into traditionally feminine curriculum areas such as typing, cookery and needlework, in preparation for adult domestic and occupational roles. This resulted in most women being involved in less skilled and less intensive activities such as food and vegetable vending and hence their under-representation in professional and administrative positions. There were numerous obstacles that women faced that contributed to their lack of rise and occupation of top management positions. However the elimination of gender stereotype in textbook and the production of gender sensitive material is not easy. This was acknowledged by Kobia (2009) who examined the portrayal of gender images in primary school English textbooks in Kenya, and found that males were depicted as superior in all spheres of life while females were attributed as inferior. Similar studies were in Hungarian textbooks, Kereszty (2009), Philippine textbooks Tan (2009) and Panday (2006) confirmed that socio-cultural values are reproduced and reinforce, influence and shape the behaviour and attitudes of boys and girls in the society.

The above information coincided with what was echoed by one of the retired teachers interviewed by the Zimbabwe Herald (1998:13) who acknowledged an incident of the past, that 'teaching conditions were difficult for early women teachers. They were paid less even when they had the same qualifications'. Thus a reflection of social injustice revealed itself and was being exercised in a patriarchal society. Although this situation disappeared after Zimbabwe's independence, a similar incident developed in which women were heavily taxed based on their husbands' salaries. The more the



husbands earned the more the wife was taxed. This move disempowered women and contributed to strained marriage relationships. This was a reflection of a typical patriarchal society with a culture of exclusionary mechanisms that predominantly positioned women as subordinates and marginal to their counterparts, creating even bigger gaps between male and female educational leaders. The cultural norm was that men were perceived as breadwinners hence this strategy to preserve their status became a source of oppression and disadvantage for the women.

### **Promotional Chances for Female Leadership**

Studies in New Zealand (Court 1993; 1994), Australia, and Canada (Blackmore 1992) show that women's promotional chances were diminished by breaks in services such as maternity leave as their previous work experience was not taken into account. On their return to teaching they were not recognised as experienced employees who were previously in the service before the break. This type of exclusionary measures was also echoed by Sperandio (2010) highlighting the problem of promotional practices which are gender neutral. On the other hand women, for instance in the United States, had to have at least twenty years of teaching experience to qualify for appointment to educational administrative positions (Shakeshaft 1987). In some countries, it was the state policies, that female teachers were required to resign from permanent employment as soon as they got married or were raising children (Patrickson, Hartmann & McCarron 1994). These conditions meant that women had less opportunity for leadership in schools (Edson 1988; Jones 1990). Similar situations affected women in educational employment in Zimbabwe.

The devaluing of women by men and other members of society, and the negative attitudes towards women by those who are involved in recruitment, contribute to the under-representation of women in school leadership positions (Alkhalifa 1989; Hackney 2010; Shakeshaft 1987). Sometimes women are excluded from decision-making positions due to the recruitment strategies that make advertising a formality when in-fact, a person has already been identified to fill the position (Mumba 1997). On another note, the masculine image of management explains the reluctance of some women teachers to take up leadership positions. The negative attitudes towards women leadership also become discriminatory actions and barriers to

women aspiring for administrative posts as many of those already in positions receive little or no support from the communities. This is due to the lack of recognition of women leadership which is possibly influenced by a traditional culture which tends to devalue women, and view male leadership as the norm (Shakeshaft 1987; Shakeshaft *et al.*).

## **Theoretical/ Conceptual Framework**

The framework for this study is based on the recognition that women and men are different and acknowledges the role of socialisation in determining leadership. Within this framework, the argument raised in this article is that the theories that privilege the heroic behaviours, and considers leadership as innate to the male species alone, are promoting patriarchal mechanisms and exclusionary practices that have since marginalised and excluded women from leadership opportunities (Rutherford 2001; Applebaum, Audet & Miller 2002). Concurrent with this thinking is McGregor's (2010) concern about frameworks, suggesting that the choice be based on an understanding of women's status in senior management and in all forms of employment. The framework that includes and caters for both male and female is the one opted for in this study.

For instance, 'The Great man' leadership model excluded the female experience in that the development of theory was limited to males who dominated the area of study in the early years. The earliest work in leadership research examined leadership traits, the approach to leadership that emphasised the innate rather than learned psychological differences. Researchers using this approach 'attempt to isolate specific traits that endow leaders with unique qualities that differentiate them from their followers' (Hoy & Miskel 1987:271) and such traits include physical characteristics (height, weight), a host of personality factors, values, charisma and energy. Hoy and Miskel (1996:376) argued that 'many individuals still believe, as Aristotle did centuries ago, that from the hour of birth some are marked for subjection, others for rule' suggesting that the trait approach is by no means dead and gone. Aristotle thought that individuals were born with characteristics that would make them leaders and leaders according to Hoy and Miskel were generally regarded as superior individuals who, because of their fortune inheritance or social circumstances (for instance the males), possessed qualities and abilities that differentiated them from people in

general (in this case the females). This theory dominated the field of leadership until the 1950s.

Even the language mostly defined leadership in male terms. Irby, Brown, Duffy and Trautman (2002:306) noted how ‘theories were generalised to both males and female even though they did not take into account the female experience or significantly include females in the sample population for development’. Gender divergence and gender subordination cannot be explored using a seemingly rigid and universal approach. The need to provide a way of understanding cultural and historical deference is reflected in research findings such as those by Irby *et al.* (2002) and Bissessar (2011) which show how the mechanisms of excluding women perpetuated the under-representation of women in management positions.

The concept of management is seen to be rooted in Taylor’s background and experience as a labourer, clerk machinist and chief engineer whose belief was that, individuals could be programmed to be efficient machines (Hoy & Miskel 1987:8); hence management of schooling can be seen to be directed toward the achievement of certain educational objectives. While leadership is a process of influencing colleagues in setting and achieving goals of an organisation or a school, the above mentioned approach to management does not reflect gender awareness component of women’s approaches and experience. Current literature however, shows that empowering employees is a key factor in managerial and organisational effectiveness (Moye, Henkin & Eagley 2005), a recent understanding that moves the concept to what may accommodate the different genders. One of the feminists writers regard trait thinking as by nature ‘gender stereotypic’ since the approach assumes innate differences and the construct of leadership tend to exhibit the desired traits (Blackmore 1998:102).

Leach (2003) observed that Gender Analysis Frameworks, while they have been designed for different purposes, they are a guide and give room for thinking about for instance the context that shapes the relationships and dynamics of both males and females. Women use interactive approaches to leadership and thus facilitate communication between and among followers. Women’ tendency to use power that comes through sharing ideas and information, though perceived as feminine characteristics, reflect the qualities of transformational leaders and even goes beyond. Transformational leaders inspire others to perform beyond expectation (Hau Siu Chow 2005). This approach to leadership empowers others and therefore assumes the qualities

that would facilitate for more women to aspire for leadership positions. By adopting skills that provide individuals with self-interest in doing good and, by showing empathy and being good listeners, female leaders show respect for human dignity and hence display qualities of empowering in leadership. Although transformational leadership is challenged for not being gender sensitive in some areas, communication as one of the gender analysis tool help us understand that one can share information, train people even to further steps and sensitise them to gender issues. I therefore content that these two augur well and are useful lenses.

## **Design and Methodology**

The chosen design for this study was qualitative within the interpretivist paradigm. 8 women deputy heads of schools were identified using snowball sampling. The first person was purposively chosen who then identified the next member for inclusion in the sample and like a ball rolling the sample grew (Patton 2002). Snowball sampling is an approach for locating 'information-rich key informants' and the criteria for selection was based on experience, understanding of the phenomenon and willingness to be involved. In-depth interviews were used as a means of generating data. This approach allows for free interaction between the researcher and the interviewer. Qualitative approach is concerned with detailed descriptions of situations and events (Patton 2002), hence the importance of this methodology in finding out people's experiences of the world. The research examined how women deputy heads in primary schools in Zimbabwe perceived their role as women educational leaders in relation to: the demands of their role, the promotional chances for more women to be in leadership, the support systems and the attitudes of school community, their personal aspirations and barriers. Gender analysis is adopted for this study.

## **Findings and Discussion**

### ***The Women's Backgrounds***

Of the eight women deputy heads only one was in a school which had a woman as a head. Six of the women were located in rural schools (two worked in communal areas and four in farms schools). The other two deputy

school heads were located in a peri-urban and urban areas. The women's ages ranged from thirty-six to fifty-five years. All except one were married and had children ranging from primary to University. Six of the women did their teacher training after their O-level examination. The other two trained after standard six and junior certificate respectively. One of the women deputies did a secretarial course before joining teacher training, while the other started as untrained teacher for at least a year. At the time of research, three of the participant had just completed the Bachelor of Education degree (BEd) programme in administration through part-time studies. Two were still working to complete their degrees and the other three were still deciding about future study. These participants were given pseudonyms with title 'Mrs' which is culturally appropriate for representing a married woman in Zimbabwe. Some of the names were Ivy, Enita, Lonkina, Linda, Bute, Gomo, Muza.

### ***Ambition for Headship and Expectations***

When the women became teachers, only one had the ambition of becoming a head-teacher. One of the women thought that she had no leadership qualities. Other women had different reasons for their lack of ambition such as feeling of rejection, that teachers and children might not respect them, another one thought, that since she had a tiny body people might also not respect her as their leader. Initially, the other women who did not have the ambition to become heads and deputy heads perceived leadership to be for men and it was natural in their sight. This was one of the reasons given for their lack of motivation to apply for a deputy head-ship post. The fact that the schools in which they were to be deployed were mostly in rural areas made some to be reluctant to apply. Of all the women interviewed, only one was encouraged by her husband to apply. In fact Mrs Gomo and her husband contested at the same time for the posts of school deputy and were both appointed to different schools. Interestingly, they were treated differently. Mrs Gomo spent eight years as a deputy, while her husband got promoted to the post of head within five years of being a deputy.

The other women indicated that their husbands had negative feelings about their wives seeking promotion to school headship positions. Mrs Bute noted, 'When I was appointed to this post, my husband thought that I would head the home as well. He assumed there might be a change in the way we live'. A single woman deputy-head was encouraged to apply for the position

by her mother, who wished her to be a teacher, when she was initially doing secretarial course. Another participant, Mrs Muza still on ambition commented, ‘ I was just trying luck; I thought I had no leadership qualities’. Mrs Muza expressed shock at her first appointment day when she discovered that every member had been given the same time for the interview appointment. While she was waiting to be interviewed she found herself and everyone else who was there being allocated schools. Among the eight women, six were appointed to the job after having been interviewed. The other two were among the group that was not interviewed, but were all allocated schools. The normal trend in Zimbabwe however was that the posts would be advertised and people apply, get short listed and if called, they are all interviewed, which was not the case in the findings of this study.

The women expected a change in their salaries, however three of the women indicated that the increments they got were meaningless given the fact that they were already at the top end of their senior teacher grade.

### ***Advancement of Women into Leadership Positions***

The findings showed that promotions within the Ministry of Education did not reflect the female character or any sensitivity of women status. Considering that promotion in Zimbabwe is determined by seniority and given that the career breaks by women taking maternity leave required them to resign first, their return was nothing more than just a new teacher. This meant that women teachers remained at a junior level until they are over the age of child-bearing, resulting in fewer opportunities for leadership in schools. This seems why for instance Sperandio (2010:720) argued that ‘gender neutral promotion practice appears to favour men. Women ... during a career for childrearing will rank much lower than male counterparts on the seniority scale and thus get offered a leadership position much later in her career’

Quite often this meant that junior male colleagues were promoted ahead of their senior female counterparts and that was a good example of how different mechanisms of gender and exclusion worked.

This kind of scenarios is now changing. The added requirement that those who seek promotion must first be appointed in rural settings also eliminated many eligible females who are tied down by family responsibilities. The requirement for going to a rural school first was one of

the key barriers that discouraged many women from aspiring to be heads of deputy heads. Many urban based women teachers, especially those with families, found it difficult to leave their families behind. While there is the assumption that advancement opportunities for women are now open, gender stereotyping remains another key barrier. Some of the policies did not take into consideration Bulani's (1996) observation that women start on a 'deficit balance of opportunity'. In Zimbabwe, caring for children is a woman's duty which sometimes makes it difficult for women to set it aside in order to go for a promotion or handle the two at the same time – especially if it involves major transfers. In the past men benefited through policies that discriminated women as far as promotion were concerned and today they continue to benefit by setting conditions which are not gender sensitive, that have the effect of shutting many women out of the competition.

Despite the existence of the promotional policy that sought to increase the number of women in administrative positions, the women considered that their promotional chances were still limited. Certainly, as the experience of women shows, balancing a family and career can challenge even the best leader (Manning & Haddock 1989). Before applying for the post, the women had to think twice, calculate the benefits and compare whether it was worth going for the post. The salary difference in itself was de-motivating given the costs of shifting and setting up a new home, many potential women leaders were steered away. An understanding of the constraints limiting the number of women to be in leadership positions is thus essential if the situation is to be rectified.

### ***Attitudes of Community***

The women noted that it was the general perception of many people in school settings to regard as problematic, women who aspired for positions of authority. My findings show that the women school heads were victimised or oppressed by some individual school leaders who took advantage of those normative elements to pursue their own agenda or will in the name of culture. Rutherford (2001:372) noted that 'cultures embody systems of meaning' and at times 'people form attachments to their cultures which explains why there is always a lot of resistance to culture change'. One of the participants Enita was 'by-passed' and 'over-ruled' when she first became a deputy. The head of her school had strong feelings of resentment, reflected in his behaviour.

The extent to which this behaviour affected Enita's self-esteem is noticed in how she described her feelings when she said: 'I was more of a rubber stamp' and her indication that she was not given the opportunity nor was she involved in decision making of school activities.

From my findings it is clear that women experienced resistance when they first entered the field of leadership. The participants' descriptions show that their initial entry in schools as women school leaders was a challenge and change of culture, resulting in what they called 'culture shock'. However, Enita believes in working with the community towards a common goal. She feels that progress can only be achieved if everyone is actively involved. She describes how she managed to address the problem of children's indiscipline:

I held meetings with the teachers ... (A10) Dialogue continued and I interacted with ... until everyone was actively involved. (A11) ... these meetings were particularly targeted for improving discipline problems and in the process student performance.

An alternative paradigm shift brought about by women in their efforts to deal with challenging situations was creativity. For instance, in the case of an acting head who refused to surrender the keys, Ivy designed a strategy that could be seen as less hierarchical, less authoritative, that's creating what Jamali *et al.* (2006) would call a post-bureaucratic school or organisation. Ivy acknowledged that 'moving around, passing on good comments and sharing information on how the acting head did some of his work must have enhanced the acting head's perception of himself'. Ivy believes that the man felt encouraged and honoured since he finally relocated himself, without anyone's command or order (authority). In this case, culture could indeed be said, 'is built through the every-day interactions' of members of the organisation (Saphier & King 1985:72). What Ivy did could be perceived as creating a positive atmosphere within the school, and this can be perceived as part of a given school culture. Just like Enita's belief in the creation of conducive atmosphere for the children at her school was being creative. The culture of her school could be seen as changed from one where bullying was tolerated to one where children show respect for others.

## ***Learning***

In Linda's approach, Jamali's (2006:1) view of schools as organisations also



features with people continually expanding their capacity and where 'new patterns of thinking are nurtured'. This can also be perceived as re-shaping the culture of a school from dominating ideas to sharing ideas. However, the women's descriptions tended to reflect a holistic approach – a phenomenological view which links the organisation with its people and respects the values of others. Linda believed in both leading and learning. She believed that by accepting 'criticism' one is able to learn

Linda's decision comes as a result of shared ideas. She enjoys working collectively sharing knowledge. Linda has become so used to 'working as a team' that she does not see herself as separate from others (B4). She feels she cannot work alone (B36). 'I plan together with ...deputy and senior teacher all activities' (B27).

## **Conclusion**

Through socialisation, a society's culture and the way people perceive one another as human beings can be improved. The article argued that despite efforts to increase the representation of women in school leadership positions, their numbers have remained very low. Research shows that one's culture, gender roles, and society's values tend to influence women's choice of career advancement and leadership opportunities. Certain adjustments with regards to division of labour in society need to be made if women are to receive equal employment opportunities. Although a few talked about affirmative action programmes as seeking to promote more women into school leadership positions, other women leaders perceived it as a male conspiracy to keep women in subordinate positions. Despite the limited number of research participants which makes it difficult to generalise the findings, it is hoped that the women's descriptive accounts offer valuable insights into challenges women face in their struggle for better career opportunities and senior leadership positions.

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# **The Gender Profile of Library and Information Science (LIS) Academics in South African Universities**

**Ruth Hoskins**

## **Abstract**

Although the Library and Information Science (LIS) profession has historically been regarded as female dominated a minority of males have however held dominant management positions in LIS organisations while females have occupied lower service positions. The training of LIS professionals is offered at various higher education institutions in South Africa. Drawing on the gender divide in the field this article reports on a study that investigated the gender profile of LIS programmes at 10 South African universities where LIS training is provided. The purpose of the study was to establish if LIS programmes were predominately staffed by female academics that were of a lower rank than their male counterparts and were less likely to hold senior leadership positions in the programmes. The study used the survey method to gather statistical data of LIS academics through drawing out the participants, gender, rank and their qualifications from the websites of the LIS programmes at South African universities. To supplement the data obtained from the websites follow-up interviews were conducted with the heads of LIS programmes at the universities. In terms of the gender profile more than half of the academic staff of the LIS programmes at the South African universities consisted of females. However, unlike the professional LIS sector, female academics did not dominate the LIS academic sector. Thus the gender divide that exists in the field also occurs amongst LIS academics. Based on these findings it is recommended that universities should be employing more female LIS academics to more senior positions or should be ensuring that female academics are promoted to these senior ranked positions given that they hold the necessary qualifications to occupy such positions.

**Keywords:** gender divide, South Africa LIS education, LIS academics, South African universities

## **Introduction**

Women have consistently made up a large majority of librarians, and librarianship is widely considered to be a female-dominated profession. The LIS profession has also seen the emergence of a minority-dominated male management force, despite the overwhelming majority of female librarians. Golub (2009) argues that this gender divide between female librarians as the majority occupying lower positions and the minority of male librarians assuming higher-level and higher-paying management positions has greatly impacted on the status of librarianship as a profession throughout the last century. Given the divide that exists in the profession the aim of this study was to establish a gender profile to determine if such a gender divide exists between academics in South African universities that train LIS professionals. Recent studies relating to the training of LIS professionals such as the study by Dillon and Norris (2005) were conducted as a result of the criticism levelled at LIS training institutions programmes which are male-dominated and do not meet the needs of practitioners. This study will only consider the criticism relating to the gender profile of LIS academics in South Africa.

Many scholars have investigated the historical development of LIS education in Africa and have highlighted the importance and role of LIS programmes and academics for the continent. Such scholars have included Onyancha and Minishi-Majanja (2009); Ocholla and Bothma (2007); Raju (2005); Minishi-Majanja and Ocholla (2004); Kigongo-Bukenya (2003); Ocholla (2003 and 2000); Le Roux (2002) and Kaniki (1997). However, these studies have not commented on the gender profile of LIS academics at African or South African LIS higher education institutions. Although there is no universal definition of the LIS field or sector the definition adopted for the purpose of this study is that the field includes both the library, archival and records and document management sectors. The objective of the current study was to establish if LIS programmes are predominantly occupied by female academics that were of a lower rank than their male counterparts and were less likely to hold senior leadership positions in the programmes. The study was thus guided by the following research questions:

## *Gender Profile of Library and Information Science (LIS) Academics*

- What is the gender profile of LIS academic at South African universities?
- What is the rank of LIS academics at South African universities?
- What are the qualifications of LIS academics at South African universities?
- Does a gender divide exist between LIS academics at South African universities?

The focus of the study was limited to South African traditional and comprehensive universities<sup>1</sup> and did not include universities of technology who are required in terms of the South African Higher Education Qualification Framework to train paraprofessionals in the LIS field. According to the study carried out by Imenda (2005) in the South African context, traditional universities focuses on 'high-level scientific research, with the spirit of pursuing knowledge for its own sake' while the university of technology emphasises 'the applied value of knowledge and cultivation of job-related skills' (Imenda 2005: 1413). Also, the study did not examine LIS curricula offered at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels rather focusing on the gender, qualifications and ranks of academic staff members at the LIS schools. Furthermore, the study was limited to permanent LIS academic staff and therefore excluded honorary and extraordinary professors (these are professors who usually do not hold a chair and are at a subordinate level to that of a professor who holds a chair), research fellows, and part-time LIS staff. The Transformation Charter of the University of KwaZulu-Natal (University of KwaZulu-Natal 2012) provides the conceptual framework for the study. One of the aspirations of the Charter is to reflect race and gender representation in its management structures, personnel profile, and student population and the University is committed to non-racialism and non-sexism. According to the Charter race and gender should be reflected across all structures in the following ways:

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<sup>1</sup> In South Africa traditional universities offer theoretically-orientated university degrees while comprehensive universities offer both theoretically-orientated university degrees and vocational orientated diplomas and degrees (SAUVCA 2006).

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- The staff profile of the University at all occupational levels should reflect the demographics of our province and country;
- Gender equity within the management levels of the University will be ensured, and women should be adequately represented in all management structures;
- The implementation of employment equity and the advancement of designated groups within the University structures should be part of the performance management requirements of all line managers;
- Mentorship programmes that develop, support and nurture black and female academic staff members should be provided; and
- Mentorship and professional development programmes that attract and retain staff of the highest calibre, develop all staff to their full potential, and meet equity objectives should be developed (University of KwaZulu-Natal 2012: 2).

## **Literature Review**

### ***The LIS Profession and the Gender Divide***

Evidence for the gender divide that exists in the LIS profession is found in the works of authors such as Golub (2009) and Hildenbrand (1992). Golub (2009) commenting on the historical overview of the gender divide in the LIS profession in the United States describes this gender divide as one that exists between a majority of female librarians occupying lower positions in the LIS profession and the minority of male librarians assuming higher-level and higher-paying management positions. The gender divide and the association of librarianship with a lower status due to its female-dominated work have greatly impacted on the status of librarianship as a profession. This lack of status has caused many problems for the profession, including the continuing challenges of recruitment, persistent low salaries, and the poor image of librarianship. Although professional changes in the early twentieth century North American work force caused male librarians to become the minority in librarianship as an emerging profession, they still dominated in terms of position and salary. Commenting on a 1904 report entitled, 'Women in American Libraries', Fairchild as cited in Hildenbrand (1992) found that male librarians were more likely to be in better-paying and managerial

positions than female librarians, and that men received higher pay for the same work.

Golub (2009) notes that during the 1990s, women began to make progress bridging the gender divide and entered management positions in greater numbers. Fisher cited in Record and Green (2008) conducted a study on gender and management trends in librarianship in 1997 in North American academic, public and special libraries. Fisher found that there were three times the number of women in management positions than men and that only 19% of men occupied top managerial positions. However, Fisher also found that men occupied the majority of director positions in large and medium size academic libraries and in large public libraries, and that men were still disproportionately represented in many other categories of the profession, despite being the minority (Fisher as cited in Record and Green 2008). In a study on the status of women in librarianship and the motivation to manage, Murgai (2004) discussed the significant advances women had made in the United States. Since the 1980s, more women than men earned their master's and doctoral degrees, and women occupied 51 out of 111 Association of Research Libraries (ARL) director positions (Deiss as cited in Murgai 2004). Similarly, Greer, Stephens and Coleman (2001) found that North American libraries began to see an increase in the proportion of top management positions held by women around the turn of the twenty-first century (from 1990 to 2001), the percentage of female directors of the ARL increased from 37% to 47%.

However, less than 8% of women held top positions in administration (Murgai 2004), and women still earned 23.5% less to the dollar compared to their male counterparts (Deissas cited in Murgai 2004). This reveals that even though more women were occupying management positions in the LIS field, they were earning less than their male counterparts.

The Department of Arts and Culture (DAC) report (2010) has provided the most recent statistical data on the South African LIS field (sector). The DAC report was based on a survey of the LIS sector which involved library services, archival services, and records management. The DAC survey investigated 13 academic institutions which included universities of technology. The study found that in 2009, a majority of the employees in the sector were females (71.4%) while males (28.6%) made up the rest of the sector. This reveals that the LIS sector is dominated by females in South Africa. The report also emphasised that females occupied 72.5% of

the management positions, 81.9% of the librarian positions and 74% of the library assistant positions. Contrary to Golub's (2009) findings, more females in South Africa were occupying management positions, which is similar to the findings of Fischer's study. However, a similar percentage of females were occupying low positions at the library assistants' level. However, there were less women (38.7%) than men (61.3%) working as archivists in South Africa.

In terms of highest educational qualifications, the DAC report highlights that most of the LIS professionals held National Qualifications Framework (NQF) Level 6 or Level 7 qualifications and 12.8% had Level 6 diplomas and 31.3% had first degrees. Therefore, 35.1% held Level 7 qualifications (postgraduate diploma or an honours degree) and only 4.2% held masters' or doctoral degrees. Thus less than half the practitioners had a postgraduate qualification.

### ***LIS Academics and the Gender Divide***

A study by Wilson, Kennan, Willard and Boell (2010) investigated the academic status of LIS educators in Australia from 1959 to 2008. The study documented the distribution of LIS academics in Australian higher education institutions over fifty years: beginning in the 1960s, up to and including the 1990s. The results of the study covered other characteristics of Australian LIS educators over the fifty-year period including: previous positions held before entering academia, what and where academic qualifications were obtained and academic position or rank by gender. Wilson, Kennan, Willard and Boell (2010:9) found that of the 693 Australian LIS academics surveyed, the gender of 661 could be determined: 416 (63%) were females and 245 were (37%) males. Although fewer in numbers, male academics on average remained in academia longer than females: nearly eight years for male and 6.5 years for female LIS academics.

In terms of females holding top positions in their programmes, Wilson, Kennan, Willard and Boell (2010) found that there were 239 (51%) females in top positions. On the other hand, there were fewer males overall (245 for 37%) in top positions. However, proportionally these males served more staff-years in top positions (226 for 49%) than their female counter parts.

To address a growing gender divide between information-science

oriented male educators versus library-science oriented female academics Gorman (2004) and Dillon and Norris (2005) used the Association for Library and Information Science Education (ALISE) *Library and Information Science Education Statistical Report 2006* statistical data for faculty gender ratios from 1975 to 2003 in the United States. Although there was a near 60:40 male to female ratio from 1975 to 1976 until about 1985 to 1986, it has been near parity since 1993 to 1994 with slightly more (52%) females in 2004 to 2005 and 2005 to 2006 (Saye & Wallace 2009). Further analysis of the ALISE statistical data for gender ratios by positions or rank resulted in 'near parity' ratios in 2002 to 2003 for assistant or associate professors with numbers favouring females and a 60:40 male to female ratio for deans or directors and full professors.

Commenting on the North American context Wilson, Kennan, Willard and Boell (2010:4) refer to information on 56 LIS schools in the United States and Canada offering accredited degree programmes in 2005 to 2006 from the same ALISE report above (Saye and Wallace 2009). They listed 828 academics with nearly equal numbers of males and females; a mean of nearly 15 academics per LIS school, with a range of five to 41 academics of which nearly 91% had PhDs (from 60% in three schools to 100% in 26 schools).

To establish if a gender divided exists amongst the academics that train the professionals an examination of LIS schools or programmes and their historical development on the African continent is essential. Generally the LIS schools had started early on the African continent. South Africa initiated LIS training at higher education institutions from 1933 following the 1928 recommendations of the Carnegie Corporation commissioners S. A. Pitt and M. J. Ferguson (Musiker 1986:91). However, Ocholla (2000:35) opines that LIS training and education in South Africa really began in 1938 and other African countries have commonly promoted LIS schools after 1960. The author further noted that in the 1980s there were five well known LIS academics based in Uganda, Nigeria, Ghana and Senegal (Ocholla 2000:35) and South Africa had counted 18 higher education institutions who offered LIS programmes. However, these LIS programmes had declined within a period of seven years from 2000 to 2006 from eighteen to eleven (Ocholla and Bothma 2007).

South Africa has specifically experienced a decrease of LIS schools in the last decade as described above. Raju and Jacobs (2009:34) argue that

the main reason for this decrease is a result of the transformation of the higher education sector in South Africa. This has resulted in some South African universities merging and the re-orientation of academic departments. The core focus of LIS academics was originally librarianship but currently some LIS education institutions in South Africa do not merely target the training and education of librarians, for instance LIS schools at the University of Johannesburg and Stellenbosch have re-oriented their programmes and their curricula cover only information and knowledge management while librarianship is excluded (Ocholla & Bothma 2007:151).

Raju and Jacobs (2009:33) argue that professional education continues to develop to accommodate the new role functions of librarians. Such functions include the teaching of information literacy skills and facilitating access to research. In addition, LIS professionals work at the professional level engaging in high-level planning, development, design and evaluation (Tin and Al-Hawamdeh 2002:334). In this regard, LIS academics have to be well educated, efficiently supported and motivated by their universities (employers) in order to be able to teach in safety and friendly working environments to produce LIS professionals. A survey of over 55 LIS schools in Africa by Onyancha and Minishi-Majanja (2009) found that LIS educators in Africa generally have PhDs and are suitably qualified for appointments in academia; however, uncompetitive remuneration within the academic sector has resulted in a scarcity of qualified candidates. In terms of the size of the teaching units the authors found that most LIS teaching units are small averaging about six and ranging from three to 24 academics. Commenting on the rank of the LIS academics Onyancha and Minishi-Majanja (2009) noted that since senior positions such as full professors are not readily available in small teaching units, LIS academics wishing to advance their careers either leave academia or join university administrative units.

## **Methodology**

Research methodologies revolve around two major approaches, namely quantitative and qualitative (Creswell 1994: 1). Both quantitative and qualitative approaches were applied in this study. The combination of two or more methodologies in a single study is described by Babbie and Mouton (2001: 257) as methodological triangulation which may lead to more valid

and reliable findings. Similarly, Sarantakos (1998: 168) describes the main reasons for using triangulation. These include: to obtain a variety of information on the same issues; to use the strengths of each method to overcome the deficiencies of the other; and to achieve a higher degree of validity and reliability.

Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999: 45) point out that 'data is basic material with which researchers work'. Neuman (2009: 144) argues that 'surveys are the most widely used data-gathering technique in the social sciences and other fields'. The 10 South African universities that offer LIS programmes were surveyed. These were, University of South Africa (UNISA), University of Johannesburg (UJ), University of Pretoria (UP), University of Limpopo (UL), University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN), University of Zululand (UNIZUL), University of Fort Hare (UFH), University of Cape Town (UCT), University of Western Cape (UWC), and University of Stellenbosch (SU). The article used the survey method to gather statistical data of LIS academics through drawing out the participants, gender, rank and their qualifications from their websites. The website of the Library and Information Association of South Africa (LIASA) which contained the website addresses and contact details of the LIS programmes provided the sample framework for the study. Of the 10 South African universities that were surveyed all but one, the University of Limpopo, did not have a dedicated LIS website and could not be contacted via the e-mail address or telephone numbers supplied by the LIASA website. The survey yielded a good response rate of 90%. To supplement the data obtained from the websites follow-up interviews were conducted with the heads of LIS programmes at the universities. The semi-structured interview schedule was pre-test on two part-time LIS academics at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. This was necessary given the temporal nature of information found on websites since the information can be removed without notice or may be lost due to broken links on webpages. The interviews with the heads of LIS programmes were conducted telephonically since they are geographically dispersed throughout the provinces of South Africa. In terms of ethical considerations the heads consented to participate in the study and were informed telephonically of the aim and purpose of the study, that anonymity and confidentiality were assured and they could withdraw from the study at any time without prejudice to themselves or their programmes. Many of the websites had information that was dated and inaccurate therefore the

interviews with the heads provided more accurate data on the staff profiles. The data was collected during the months of June and July 2012 and was analyzed using frequency and descriptive counts and represented in the form of tables.

## Results and Discussion

The presentation and discussion of the results follows the research questions of the study.

### *Gender Profile of LIS Academic at South African Universities*

Table 1 reveals the gender profile of the nine LIS programmes at South African universities who responded to the survey.

**Table 1: Gender Profile of LIS Academics**

Institution	N=96		
	Females	Males	Total
UP	18 (33.3%)	8 (19%)	26 (27.1%)
UNISA	13 (20.1%)	6 (14.3%)	19 (19.8%)
SU	1 (1.9%)	9 (21.4%)	10 (10.4%)
UJ	5 (9.3%)	4 (9.5%)	9 (9.4%)
UCT	4 (7.4%)	1 (2.4%)	5 (5.2%)
UKZN	3 (5.5%)	2 (4.8%)	5 (5.2%)
UFH	1 (1.9%)	3 (7.1%)	4 (4.2%)
UNIZUL	5 (9.3%)	7 (16.7%)	12 (12.5%)
UWC	4 (7.4%)	2 (4.8%)	6 (6.3%)
Total	54 (56.3%)	42 (43.4%)	96 (100%)
Mean			10.7

Table 1 shows that UP had the largest staff complement of LIS academics of 26 (27.1%) followed by UNISA with 19 (19.8%) and SU with 10 (10.4%) LIS academics. This finding would suggest that historically advantaged institutions such as UP and SU had larger LIS staff complements or programmes. Of the nine LIS programmes UP had the most female LIS academics with 18 (33.3%) followed by UNISA with 13 (20.1%) and UJ and

UNIZUL with five each. Of the nine LIS programmes SU had the most male academics with nine (21.4%) followed by UP with eight (19%) and UNIZUL with seven (16.7%). This reveals that even at a historically disadvantaged institution the LIS programme was staffed by more males. On average there are 10.7 academics across each of the nine LIS programmes that responded to the survey. This is in keeping with Onyancha and Minishi-Majanja (2009) who found that most LIS teaching units are small averaging about six and ranging from three to 24 academics.

Female LIS academics made up more than half, 56.3% (54), of the staff members in the LIS programmes while males accounted for 43.4% (42) of the LIS academics. This is in keeping with the studies of Wilson, Kennan, Willard and Boell (2010:9) who found that of the 693 Australian LIS academics surveyed 416 (63%) were females and 245 were (37%) males. In North America, Saye and Wallace (2009) listed 828 LIS academics in the ALISE report with nearly equal numbers of males and females with a mean of nearly 15 academics per LIS school and a range of five to 41 academics.

### ***Rank of LIS Academics at South African Universities***

Table 2 reveals the rank of the LIS academics at the South African universities.

**Table 2: Rank of LIS Academics**

<b>Institution</b>	<b>N=96</b>						
	<b>Jnr</b>	<b>Assist Lect</b>	<b>Lect</b>	<b>Snr Lect</b>	<b>Assoc Prof</b>	<b>Prof</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>UCT</b>	0	0	0	1 (9.1%)	3 (33.3%)	1 (6.7%)	5 (5.2%)
<b>UFH</b>	0	0	2 (4.9%)	1 (9.1%)	1 (11.1%)	0	4 (4.2%)
<b>UKZN</b>	0	0	2 (4.9%)	1 (9.1%)	0	2 (13.3%)	5 (5.2%)
<b>UP</b>	5 (50%)	10 (100%)	4 (9.7%)	3 (27.3%)	1 (11.1%)	3 (20%)	26 (27.1%)
<b>SU</b>	0	0	7 (17.1%)	0	0	3 (20%)	10 (10.4%)
<b>UWC</b>	0	0	3 (7.3%)	1 (9.1%)	1 (11.1%)	1 (6.7%)	6 (6.2%)



UJ	0	0	5 (12.2%)	2 (18.2%)	0	2 (13.3%)	9 (9.4%)
UNISA	5 (50%)	0	10 (24.4%)	0	2 (22.2%)	2 (13.3%)	19 (19.8%)
UNIZUL	0	0	8 (19.5%)	2 (18.2%)	1 (11.1%)	1 (6.7%)	12 (12.5%)
Total	10 (10.4%)	10 (10.4%)	41 (42.7%)	11 (11.5%)	9 (9.4%)	15 (15.6%)	96 (100%)
	61 (63.5%)			35 (36.5%)			

Most of the academics in the nine LIS programmes, 41 (42.7%), held the rank of lecturer. This was followed by 15 (15.6%) academics who were professors and 11 (11.5%) of the LIS academics were senior lecturers. The percentage of senior staff from the ranks of senior lecturer, associate professor and professor, 36.5% (35), was less than that for the ranks of junior lecturer, assistant lecture and lecturer which constituted a majority of 63.5% (61) of the academic staff in the nine LIS programmes in South African universities. This result does lend support to Onyancha and Minishi-Majanja (2009) findings that since senior positions such as full professors are not readily available in small teaching units, LIS academics leave academia or join university administrative units to advance their careers.

### ***Qualifications of LIS Academics at South African Universities***

Table 3 shows the highest qualifications of the LIS academics at the nine South African universities.

**Table 3: Qualifications of LIS Academics**

<b>Institution</b>	<b>N=96</b>			
	<b>Degree</b>	<b>Honours</b>	<b>Masters</b>	<b>PhD</b>
<b>UP</b>	9 (90%)	4 (50%)	5 (12.8%)	8 (20.5%)
<b>UNISA</b>	1 (10%)	3 (37.5%)	8 (20.5%)	7 (18%)
<b>UCT</b>	0	0	0	5 (12.8%)
<b>UWC</b>	0	0	2 (5.1%)	4 (10.2%)
<b>UJ</b>	0	0	5 (12.8%)	4 (10.2%)
<b>UNIZUL</b>	0	0	8 (20.5%)	4 (10.2%)
<b>SU</b>	0	0	7 (18%)	3 (7.7%)
<b>UKZN</b>	0	0	2 (5.1%)	3 (7.7%)

## *Gender Profile of Library and Information Science (LIS) Academics*

<b>UFH</b>	0	1 (12.5%)	2 (5.1%)	1 (2.6%)
<b>Total</b>	10 (10.4%)	8 (8.3%)	39 (40.6%)	39 (40.6%)
	18 (18.7%)		78 (81.2%)	

Table 3 shows that an equal number of LIS academics, 39 (40.6%), at the nine South African universities held a masters and PhD qualification given that academics are required to have a minimum of a masters qualification to teach and a PhD to supervise student work. Thus a majority of the LIS academics, 81.2% (78) held a higher qualification with only 10 (10.4%) holding an undergraduate degree followed by eight (8.3%) who held an honours degree. This result is in keeping with the survey of Onyancha and Minishi-Majanja (2009) of over 55 LIS schools in Africa which found that LIS educators in Africa generally have PhDs and are suitably qualified for appointments in academia. However, when compared with the North American LIS academics of whom 91% held a PhD qualification (Saye & Wallace 2009), South African LIS academics lagged behind with less than half the percentage of their North American counterparts, 40.6%, holding a PhD. When compared with the practitioners the DAC report found that most of the LIS professionals held National Qualifications Framework (NQF) Level 6 or Level 7 qualifications whereas the academics mostly held NQF Level 8 Masters and Level 9 PhD qualifications.

### ***Gender Divide between LIS Academics at South African Universities***

Table 4 cross tabulates gender with the qualifications of the LIS academics in an attempt to establish whether female LIS academics were holding higher qualifications than their male counterparts.

**Table 4: Cross Tabulation of Gender and Qualifications of LIS Academics**

Institution	N=96								Total
	Females				Males				
	PhD	Master	Hons	Degree	PhD	Master	Hons	Degree	
UCT	4 (16.7%)	0	0	0	1 (6.7%)	0	0	0	5 (5.2%)
UFH	0	0	1 (20%)	0	1 (6.7%)	2 (10.5%)	0	0	4 (4.2%)

<b>UKZN</b>	2 (8.3%)	1 (5%)	0	0	1 (6.7%)	1 (5.3%)	0	0	5 (5.2%)
<b>UP</b>	6 (25%)	5 (25%)	2 (40%)	5 (100%)	2 (13.3%)	0	2 (66.7%)	4(80%)	26 (27.1%)
<b>SU</b>	0	1 (5%)	0	0	3 (20%)	6 (31.6%)	0	0	10 (10.4%)
<b>UWC</b>	2 (8.3%)	2 (10%)	0	0	2 (13.3%)	0	0	0	6 (6.2%)
<b>UJ</b>	3 (12.5)	2 (10%)	0	0	1 (6.7%)	3 (15.8%)	0	0	9 (9.4%)
<b>UNISA</b>	5 (20.8%)	6 (30%)	2 (40%)	0	2 (13.3%)	2 (10.5%)	1 (33.3%)	1(20%)	19 (19.8%)
<b>UNIZUL</b>	2 (8.3%)	3 (15%)	0	0	2 (13.3%)	5 (26.3%)	0	0	12 (12.5)
<b>Total</b>	<b>24</b> <b>(25%)</b>	<b>20</b> <b>(20.8%)</b>	<b>5</b> <b>(5.2%)</b>	<b>5</b> <b>(5.2%)</b>	<b>15</b> <b>(15.6%)</b>	<b>19</b> <b>(19.8%)</b>	<b>3</b> <b>(3.1%)</b>	<b>5</b> <b>(5.2%)</b>	<b>96</b> <b>(100%)</b>

Table 4 shows that more female LIS academics, 25%, held PhDs when compared with the 15.5% of males who held a PhD. Thus 9% of the female LIS academics held a higher qualification when compared with the male academics. However, an almost equal number of female and male LIS academics held masters and honours degrees with an equal number holding undergraduate degrees as their highest qualification.

Table 5 cross tabulates gender with the rank of the LIS academics in an attempt to respond to whether male LIS academics were holding higher ranks than their female counterparts.

Even though Table 4 revealed that more female LIS academics held a PhD than their Male counterparts, Table 5 shows that only four (4.2%) of the female academics were full professors compared to the 11 (11.4%) males who were professors. Thus there was more than double the number of male LIS professors than female professors at the nine South African universities. Given that many senior management positions require the rank of professor one can assume that many male LIS academics are more likely to occupy such positions given their rank. However, the opposite applied for the associate professorship rank where twice the number of female LIS academics, six (6.2%), held the rank of associate professorship compared with the three (3.1%) male LIS academics who held the rank. Also, more female LIS academics, nine (9.4%) held the rank of senior lecturer compared to the one male LIS academic who held the same rank.

**Table 5: Cross Tabulation of Gender and Rank of LIS Academics**

Institution	N=96											
	Females						Males					
	Prof	Assoc Prof	Snr Lect	Lect	Assist Lect	Jnr Lect	Prof	Assoc Prof	Snr Lect	Lect	Assist Lect	Jnr Lect
UCT	0	3(50%)	1 (11.1%)	0	0	0	1 (9.1%)	0	0	0	0	0
UFH	0	0	0	1 (4.2%)	0	0	0	1 (33.3%)	0	2 (11.1%)	0	0
UKZN	1 (25%)		1 (11.1%)	1 (4.2%)	0	0	1 (9.1%)	0	0	1 (5.5%)	0	0
UP	1 (25%)	1 (16.7%)	3 (33.3%)	4 (16.7%)	7 (100%)	2 (50%)	2 (18.2%)	0	0	0	3 (100%)	3 (50%)
SU	0	0	0	1 (4.2%)	0	0	3 (27.3%)	0	0	6 (33.3%)	0	0
UWC	0	1 (16.7%)	0	3 (12.5%)	0	0	1 (9.1%)	0	1 (100%)	0	0	0
UJ	1 (25%)	0	2 (22.2%)	2 (8.3%)	0	0	1 (9.1%)	0	0	3 (16.7%)	0	0
UNISA	1 (25%)	1 (16.7)	0	9 (37.5%)	0	2 (50%)	1 (9.1%)	1 (33.3%)	0	1 (5.5%)	0	3 (50%)
UNIZ UL	0	0	2 (22.2%)	3 (12.5%)	0	0	1 (9.1%)	1 (33.3%)	0	5 (27.8%)	0	0
Total	4 (4.2%)	6 (6.2%)	9 (9.4%)	24 (25%)	7 (7.3%)	4 (4.2%)	11 (11.4%)	3 (3.1%)	1 (1%)	18 (18.8%)	3 (3.1%)	6 (6.2%)

More female LIS academics 24 (25%) held the rank of lecturer followed closely by 18 (18.8%) of their male counterparts who held the lecturers rank. These results are in keeping with the ALISE statistical data for gender ratios by positions or rank which resulted in ‘near parity’ ratios in 2002 to 2003 for assistant or associate professors with numbers favouring females and a 60:40 male to female ratio for full professors (Saye & Wallace 2009).

## Conclusions

In terms of the gender profile more than half of the academic staff of the nine LIS programmes at the South African universities consisted of females. However, unlike the professional LIS sector, female academics did not dominate the LIS academic sector. Most LIS academics held the position of lecturer. Proportionally more female LIS academics held a PhD qualification than their male counterparts at the nine South African universities surveyed.

However, in terms of rank less than half the number of female LIS academics, when compared with their male counterparts, held the rank of full professor. Thus, even though twice as many females were qualified to hold such senior ranks, very few of them are full professors. This suggest that there is a similarity in the gender divide that exists in the profession and amongst the LIS academics with fewer males occupying more senior positions as a result of their status or rank in the field. In terms of transformation gender equity within the management levels of the LIS programmes and the universities in general should be ensured, and women should be adequately represented in all management structures.

However, based on the findings presented above it would be difficult to conclude overall that a gender divide does exist amongst female and male LIS academics in South Africa universities. To this effect a more detailed analyses of the length of service and the gender profile of senior management positions in the LIS programmes should be undertaken.

Areas for further research should include a more detailed survey of all Southern African (South Africa, Botswana, Zimbabwe) as well as East African (Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda) LIS educators by way of a self-administered questionnaire to develop and overall understanding of existence of the gender divide amongst LIS educators on the continent. A study which examines the broader historical overview of the gender divide between LIS academics in South Africa and the countries listed above should be undertaken. Based on these findings it is recommended that South Africa universities should be employing more female LIS academics to more senior positions or should be ensuring that females are promoted to these senior ranked positions given that they hold the necessary qualifications to occupy such positions. The practical implications for the study are that universities should be giving effect to their transformation charters by ensuring that more female staff occupy senior management positions not only in the LIS programmes but also throughout the university academic structures.

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# Climate Change and Rural Livelihoods in Guruve District: A Gender Analysis

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## **Abstract**

Studies on climate change have treated men and women with a similar eye. As a result, the widening gaps between men and women due to climate change have not been empirically studied. This is despite the fact that at the household level, the ability to adapt to changes in the climate depends on control over land, money, information, credit and tools, low dependency ratios, good health and personal mobility, household entitlements and food security, secure housing in safe locations, and freedom from violence which are not readily accessible to women (Lambrou & Piana 2006; UNFPA 2009). As such, women are often deemed as less able to adapt to climate change than men since they lack most of the above listed items. Furthermore, they generally have less education than men and are thus less likely to be reached by extension agents. This article presents findings from a study carried out in Guruve district to answer two objectives, that is, to investigate the gender differentiated impacts of climate change on rural livelihoods which are mainly agriculture based and to establish the roles of women and men in local food systems in adapting to a changing climate. The study was carried out over a period of a month using observation, key informant interviews, and focus group discussions. The study established that climate change has effects on crops, livestock and human health due to long dry spells and water shortages. These effects have resulted in an extra burden on women in several ways: where households relied on draught power (because of animal diseases and deaths, most have resorted to conservation agriculture and mulching which are labour intensive); women engage in alternative livelihood strategies due to persistent crop failure; women bear the brunt of caring for the sick (mainly due to malaria); women travel long distances to fetch water

and feed for small livestock. Women have however, managed to make ends meet in spite of the limited access and control over resources including lack of information. They have used their individual and collective agency in dealing with climate change. Women's support groups have played a very important role in labour provision in the face of high demands for labour. Support has also come from various agencies in the area of crop and livestock production and this has somehow eased the burden on women. This article concludes that climate change, like all aspects of social life is gendered and widens gaps between men and women. Outside interventions therefore need to take cognizance of these gender differences.

**Keywords:** climate change, livelihoods, gender

## **Introduction**

Climate change is predicted to reduce crop yields and food production in some regions, particularly the tropics (European Commission 2009). Developing countries have suffered most from the direct effects of climate change. Zimbabwe is listed amongst the range of countries that have experienced production declines as a result of climate change. The other countries listed are Morocco, Australia, Venezuela, Chile, Greece and India (European Commission 2009). Rain-fed agriculture, which covers 96% of all cultivated land in sub-Saharan Africa, has been particularly hard hit. It is projected that by the 2020s, yield from rain-fed agriculture in some African countries could be reduced by as much as 50%. Agriculture is linked to climate change in close and complex ways. Agriculture is affected by climate change; but as the world's largest industry agriculture itself contributes significantly to greenhouse gas emissions (estimated by the IPCC at about 60% of anthropogenic methane and about 50% of nitrous oxide). Little has been done in terms of research in Zimbabwe to establish the gendered nature of climate change impacts and adaptation strategies. The objectives of the study from which this article is derived were therefore to investigate the gender differentiated impacts of climate change on rural livelihoods which are mainly agriculture based and to establish the roles of women and men in local food systems in adapting to a changing climate. The article considers gender and access to resources in the context of the Sustainable Livelihoods

Framework (SLF) in order to contextualize the various climate change adaptation strategies. This is in view of the fact that adapting to climate change depends on control over resources such as land, credit, information and education linked to the various forms of capital identified by the SLF that women more often than not do not have due to patriarchy and associated gender roles and relations.

## **Statement of the Problem**

There has been lack of empirical evidence on how climate change has impacted on agriculture especially for people that rely heavily on it for livelihoods such as women. Women are responsible for 70 – 80 percent of household food production in sub-Saharan Africa, 65 percent in Asia, and 45 percent in Latin America and the Caribbean (IPCC 2007). They achieve this despite unequal access to land, information, and inputs such as improved seeds and fertilizer. This study therefore offers empirical evidence on gender and climate change effects on livelihoods with particular reference to agriculture-based livelihoods. It also considers the gendered nature of adaptation strategies using the case of Guruve, one of the districts in Zimbabwe.

## **Study Methodology**

The study was carried out in ward twenty-two of Guruve district, in Zimbabwe. The study was informed by and relied on a qualitative methodology in order to get a comprehensive picture of gender relations as they relate to climate change adaptation strategies. The study made use of direct observation, in-depth interviews with key informants as well as focus group discussions with male and female farmers to gather the required data. Observation provided rich information on the rural people's adaptation strategies by gender. The people were observed as they were engaged in their daily activities. In depth interviews were conducted with officers from the veterinary department, the department of livestock production, the Grain Marketing Board, the District Administrator and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOS) including the Lower Guruve Development Association and the Sustainable Agriculture Technology (SAT) supporting

farmers in adapting to climate change. Qualitative data was analysed using the common themes approach and the accounts are interspersed with quotes from the people studied.

## **Conceptual Framework**

Using the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework, it is clear that when people lack assets, they are vulnerable to shocks of various natures. A livelihood comprises the capabilities, assets (including both material and social resources) and activities required for a means of living: a livelihood is sustainable when it can cope with and recover from stress and shocks and maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets ... both now and in the future (Carney 1998:4), or ... while not undermining the natural base (Scoones 1998:5), or including both these last statements (Farrington *et al.* 1999:1). Ellis (2000) in his definition of a 'livelihood' has placed more emphasis on the *access* to assets and activities that is influenced by social relations (gender, class, kin, belief systems) and institutions. He has excluded any reference to capabilities or sustainability. A person or family's livelihood is sustainable when they can cope with and recover from stresses and shocks and maintain or enhance their capabilities and assets both now and in the future, without undermining environmental resources (Neefjes 2000).

The livelihoods approach is based on the premise that the asset status of the poor is fundamental to understanding the options open to them, the strategies they adopt to attain livelihoods, the outcomes they aspire to and the vulnerability context under which they operate (Ellis 2000). DFID distinguishes five categories of assets (or capital) – natural, social, human, physical and financial (Carney 1998). Human capital includes health, nutrition, education, knowledge, skills, capacity to work and capacity to adapt. The labour capacity is in most cases there but the skills and education is limited. Natural capital includes land and produce, water resources, forest products and environmental services. Social capital includes networks and connections (patronage, neighbourhoods, kinship), relations of trust and mutual support, formal and informal groups, common rules and sanctions, collective representation, mechanisms for participation in decision-making and leadership. Physical capital includes infrastructure (transport-roads, vehicles, shelter and buildings, water supply and sanitation, energy, communications), tools and technology (tools and equipment for production,

seed, fertilizer and pesticides, traditional technology). Financial capital includes savings, credit/debt (formal, informal, NGOs), remittances, pensions and wages. Political capital involves the political will by those wielding political power to allow certain activities as people adapt to climate change. The argument presented in this article is that adaptation to climate change especially by women is affected by a diversity of assets, amount of assets and a balance between the assets.

The Sustainable Livelihoods Framework also considers the vulnerability context, which discusses the shocks, seasonality and trends and changes (population, environmental changes, technological changes, markets and trade). Policies (of government, of city council and local authorities) institutions (political, legislative and representative bodies, civil society and membership organisations, NGOs) and processes (decision-making processes, social norms and customs, gender) also affecting the way men and women adapt to climate change. Access, control and use of assets are influenced by the institutional structures and processes. An understanding of structures and processes provides the link between the micro (individual, household and community) and the macro (regional, government, powerful private enterprise) (Scoones 1998; Carney 1998; Ellis 2000). Such an understanding helps to identify areas where restrictions, barriers or constraints occur and explain social process that could impact on livelihood sustainability (Scoones 1998).

The Sustainable Livelihoods Framework is particularly useful because it assists in conceptualising the interrelationships between the different dimensions of people's lives and helps to reveal the complexity of livelihoods in the context of climate change. The basic argument is that the quality and sustainability of livelihoods depend on the strategies people develop to manage their 'capital assets', which are by and large under their control, within an environmental and institutional context, over which they may have little control.

## **Research Findings**

### **Characterisation of Climate Change**

Both men and women observed that there has been a change in climate. They made reference to the fact that seasons are no longer predictable (this is mainly a factor of rainfall unpredictability). Unpredictability of rainfall was

the most consequential change, both in terms of time (arriving early or late) and quantity (when present either insufficient or too abundant). Secondly, windy conditions, droughts and long dry spells were observed as frequent in the area. Both men and women had observed these changes in the past ten years. Changes in temperature and therefore seasons had a detrimental effect as rainfall and temperatures no longer coincided for appropriate planting conditions. Men and women interviewed concurred that they could no longer use the traditional calendar of seasons they were accustomed to. Respondents during a focus group discussion concurred with one female respondent who argued,

the planting season starts late and it quickly stops, which never used to be. In the past, the first rains would come in October, which is when Zimbabwe Junior Certificate (ZJC) students were writing their examinations. The ZJC students would finish examinations and come to help their parents with planting because the first rains were experienced during the time of their examinations in October. *Kana dai form 2 yainyorwa nhasi uno vana ava hapana chavanenge vachiita nekuti mvura yava kunonoka kunaya mazuva ano* (If the ZJC examinations were to be re-introduced the candidates will be idle after the examinations because the rains are coming very late).

In the study area, more men than women had better access to climate change information because of three reasons:

- a) they had platforms to discuss climate change issues;
- b) they had time to listen to news at shopping centres
- c) they had access to newspapers

As one male respondent in a focus group argued, *'vanamai vashoma vanomwa, kuhwahwa ndiko kunowanikwa ruzivo rwacho'* (few women take beer, the issues are discussed when people meet for beer).

This same situation was observed in Bangladesh in 1991 following the cyclone and flood. It is stated that warning information was transmitted by men to men in public spaces but rarely communicated to the rest of the

family, as a result, the death rate was five times as high for women as for men (Brody *et al.* 2008). Information is therefore an asset/capital that is critical in coping with climate change for which attempts should be made to ensure women and other categories of people have access.

## **Impacts of Climate Change**

Climate change has impacted negatively on livelihoods. Due to the fact that these livelihoods are gendered, the effects have been felt differently by men and women. Odingo (1990) noted that the poorest members of society which tend to be the most dependent on agriculture for jobs and income are worse affected by the seasonal shifts in precipitation patterns and increase in temperatures. Climate change has impacted on human and animal health as well as crops, thereby directly affecting women due to their gender roles. Unpredictable changes in disease vectors and pests significantly impacts human and animal health (EAA-press release 2008). In the study area, respondents pointed to the increased cases of human diseases especially malaria. As a result, the burden of caring for the sick by women has been increased. This comes on top of caring for People Living with HIV considering that the HIV statistics are high in areas with growth points such as Guruve (Human Development Report 2003). Care work eats into women's productive time.

Climate change has been associated with increased animal diseases and deaths as well as reduced cattle herds in Guruve. Due to low rainfall, rivers dry up early and women and children have to walk long distances with animals to find water. This affects both animal and human health. Low rainfall also means that there is not enough pasture for animals that include cattle, goats and pigs which are kept in the area. Lack of pasture affects animal health. Furthermore, respondents noted that cattle were not reproducing as fast as they used to do due to changes in the rainfall patterns that have affected the drinking and feeding systems of the livestock. When cattle do not get enough grass and water their health is affected and this affects their reproduction as well as the products they produce for human consumption. Calves also die from diseases and so the herds remain very small. The health of the calves is also affected when the cows do not eat the right fodder and also if they lack adequate water. This implies low production of milk because the health of the cows is compromised.

*Mukaka unodzivirira kuzvirwere zvakasiyana siyana, kana mhuru ikashaya mukaka utano hwayo hunenge hwava panjodzi.* (Milk contains antibodies which help the calf fight diseases, if a calf does not get enough milk it is at a high risk of contracting diseases).

The common diseases in cattle that respondents named are red water, three day sickness, black leg, lump skin and foot-and-mouth. In interviews, most respondents reported reduced cattle herd due to 'strange' diseases. As one male small scale farmer pointed out,

I used to have fifteen cattle, now I have four. I lost the rest to a disease called red water.

As a result, where there is reduction in cattle herd, this affects people's livelihoods especially those dependant on agriculture. Because people rely on cattle as draught power for agriculture, where the herd is reduced, women labour is the alternative. This is because women comprise the bulk of the rural populace and farmers in Zimbabwe. They constitute 53% of agricultural labor in Zimbabwe (FAO 2006).

Furthermore, traditionally cattle belong to men and these are assets that people fall back on in times of crisis. The reduction in cattle herd has affected the male asset and power base. This results in stress for men who are socialized to believe that cattle are for them and that manhood is defined by ownership of a cattle herd.

Climate change has also affected livelihoods diversification as it presents limited livelihoods options mainly due to shortage of water. This implies reduced income as the income sources shrink. As a result food security is compromised as it is estimated that food costs account for approximately 60% of household income expenditures in Zimbabwe. Most women in the area used to rely on all year round gardening but with shortage of water, gardening has become a seasonal activity. Furthermore, women, largely responsible for water collection in the community, are more sensitive to the changes in seasons and climatic conditions that affect water quantity and accessibility that make its collection even more time-consuming.

Small scale farmers noticed decline in crop production and yields due to climate change since 2000. Countrywide, the main crops produced by smallholder farmers - maize, small grains, groundnuts, and cotton, among



others have also shown reduced output. In communal areas such as Guruve, maize yields halved from approximately 1.3 million tonnes p.h. in 1986 to approximately 0.8 tonnes p.h. in 2004 (FAO 2007). From a surplus producer of maize, Zimbabwe has become a net food importer during the 2000s.

Climate change has hit agricultural productivity in Guruve directly through drought, pests, diseases as well as by temperature changes that affect plant productivity. While drivers of plant pest change include increases in temperature, variability in rainfall intensity and distribution, change in seasonality, drought, intrinsic pest characteristics (e.g. diapause, number of generations, minimum, maximum and optimum growth temperature of fungi, interaction with the host) and intrinsic ecosystem characteristics (e.g. monoculture, biodiversity) also affect change (European Commission 2009). Emerging pests are often plant pests of related species known as new encounter pests, which come into contact with new hosts that do not necessarily have an appropriate level of resistance, or are plant pests introduced without their biological control agents, in particular, insect pests, nematodes and weeds (FAO 2008e).

Respondents noted an increase in pests and crop diseases, which affects yields. This is worsened by the fact that the farmers who are mainly women do not have the financial resources to procure chemicals, which prevent the spread of pest and diseases. Financial capital is therefore a key dimension in adaptation to climate change. As the European Commission (2009) observed, a number of important natural resources for agricultural and food systems, such as soil, water, and biodiversity have been deteriorating over many years, slowly but steadily undermining ecosystem services and the resilience of agro-ecosystems. A number of examples are given which point to the unsustainability of conventional farming and food systems due to their high energy dependence, high water demand or their adverse environmental footprint. Food security is therefore endangered by constraints such as shrinking water and land resources, increasing biodiversity losses and soil degradation. Gains in crop production were realized after the introduction of conservation farming in 2007.

Due to the unpredictable weather conditions, there has been poor timing in terms of when to plant. In focus group discussions, all respondents pointed out that they receive first rains in December and highest rainfall in the late summer, which was not the case before. Late rains impact on livelihoods mainly due to lack of information on risk prediction, which affect

preparedness. The meteorological department focuses more on weather than risk prediction. Community members however said in the absence of risk predictions by the meteorological office, they make use of indigenous knowledge systems using behaviors of certain animals, birds, tree and plants. One female respondent observed,

*kushayikwa kwemvura yakakwana inogutsa zvirimwa kurikutishayisa zano hatichanyatsozivi kuti todii nokuti kare taiziva kuti kana kukapisa zvakanyanga mvura inenge yave pedyo. Asi zvemazuva ano hatichaziva nekuti kukapisa kunobva kwauya chando apo isu tinenge tave kutarisira mvura.mamiriro aita kunze ari kukonzera nzara. (We used to predict that if the temperatures increase it means the rains would be coming soon but the situation is quite different now. After we experience high temperature we suddenly experience very low temperatures whilst we will be expecting rains to come. Shortage of rainfall is resulting in famines).*

## **Climate Change Adaptation**

The term adaptation generally refers to actions taken to adjust to the consequences of climate change either before or after impact is experienced. An adaptation to climate change takes place through adjustments to reduce vulnerability in response to observed or expected change in climate and associated extreme weather events of people who rely on climate dependent resources for their livelihoods (Khadhka 2011). Adaptation occurs in physical, ecological and human systems. Adger *et al.* (2008) noted that adaptation involves changes in social and environmental processes, perceptions of climate risk, practices and functions to reduce potential damages or to realize new opportunities. Adaptation strategies range from technological options to behavior change at an individual level. Adapting to climate change depends on the various forms of capital/assets that the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework makes reference to. These are financial, natural, social, physical and human. It is clear that when people lack assets, they are vulnerable to shocks of various natures including climate change. Men and women have responded differently to climate change due to the differential roles and access to assets critical for livelihoods. Adaptation has

also been supported by various agencies in the communities as will be discussed in this article.

## **Coping with Animal Diseases and Shortage of Pasture**

As a result of shortage of pasture due to dry conditions, men in the majority of cases gather maize stover and grass soon after harvesting which will then be used as feed in the dry season.

*‘Kana takohwa tinochengeta mashanga echibage tozopa mombe muchirimo apo sora rinenge rava shoma’* (After harvesting, the maize stover is gathered and stored as fodder, it is given to cattle in the dry season when there will be insufficient grass for feed).

During the dry season the grass does not shoot and natural fodder becomes very necessary as it supplements the animal nutrient requirements. Giving cattle maize stover is also a way of controlling their movement and the movement of people tending them who happen to be men and boys although women also play a role. During the dry season cattle travel long distances in search of grass and water. If a farmer gives cattle stover they will always come back home expecting more. Stover is given with salt to make it more nutritious and this improves the health of the animals.

*‘Utano hwemombe dzinopiwa mashanga hurinani pane dzisingapiwi mashanga.’* (Cattle which are given fodder appear healthier than those which are not given supplementary feeds).

Maize stover is the commonest type of natural fodder the farmers can use. Forage is sold in shops but very few communal farmers afford it hence it is necessary to gather maize stover which is readily available. Due to climate change and related animal diseases and the increased costs of veterinary medicine, people have resorted to ethno-veterinary practices. The use of aloe vera and soot is common in small livestock.

*‘Ruzivo rwemishonga yekurapa huku nembudzi rwakawandira kunana mai asi vana baba ndivo vane ruzivo rwakawanda*

*rwemombe, mushonga yekurapa mombe vana baba ndivo vanotsvaka'* (Women have more knowledge about traditional medicines to treat diseases in poultry and goats but men have knowledge on medicines for cattle).

However, the Veterinary Services Department does not encourage the use of traditional veterinary medicines because of lack of clear standardized dosage instructions. The withdrawal period of such drugs is not clear. Drugs take various periods to leave the animal's blood stream. Furthermore, side effects of such medicines are not known, the overdose or under dose are not known also. In case of overdose there is no remedy to reverse the side effects and these medicines are discouraged. If there is overdose the animal may die and if there is under dose the bacteria or infection will not die and this may build resistance to the disease. The Veterinary Services Department therefore recommends prescribed medicines that are approved by their department.

There has been an increased shift from cattle production to small livestock production due to their resistance to diseases. Most people have shifted to goat and pig production. Small livestock production is also supported by non-governmental organizations in the area such as the Lower Gureve Development Association and the Sustainable Agriculture Technology (S.A.T.). These livestock are given to women and children. Goats and pigs are not hard to tend and fend for. Respondents pointed out that there are very few diseases in goats and pigs compared to cattle. The care of goats is also easy as they can be tied around trees and they feed around the confined area when the farmer is busy. They also multiply easily than cattle because a goat can have two or more kids at the same time. They do not require a lot of water hence one can provide them with water from a bucket; this is an advantage where climate change has resulted in low rainfall. There are very few diseases that affect goats besides tapeworms and some stomach infections, which cause diarrhea. Goats browse some trees, which are not browsed by cattle. This naturally improves their immunity,

*'kana nyoka ikaruma mbudzi inogona kurarama asi nyoka iyoyo ikaruma mombe inogona kufa'* (if a snake bites a goat it can survive but if that same snake bites cattle it may die).

The aloe vera plant and soot are used to treat the stomach disorders in goats,

the leaves are crushed and mixed with soot and the goat is made to drink the mixture. This makes goats and pigs easy to look after considering the nature and amount of women's work. Women and children have to find pasture and water for goats and bring it home to the goats at the same time walking through people's homes and fields asking for rotten pumpkins for pigs.

Traditionally women own small livestock (goats, pigs and chickens and rabbits) but due to the increase in diseases in cattle, men are taking an interest in small livestock production (FAO 2003).

*Zvinonzi huku, mbudzi nenguruve ndedzanamai kashoma kunzwa kuti baba vane huku dzavowo* ' (it is said chicken, goats and pigs belong to women, it is very rare to hear that men have chicken).

Small stock belongs to women and large stock belongs to men hence women know about small stock more than men and men know more about large stock. However, with climate change this distinction has been blurred, it can be argued that defining animal ownership as male or female is not static but fluid as men are claiming co-ownership of the small livestock.

Small livestock production has helped women to meet their household needs because they can be easily disposed of. It is easy for people to sell a goat to meet the immediate needs of the household like food, while it is more of a taboo to dispose large stock because of their cultural significance.

**Figure 1: A 64 year old woman's pig project**



**Figure 2: Goats feeding on pasture sourced and brought home**



**Figure 3: Pumpkin gathered for pigs**



## **Drought Resistant and Plant Genetic Diversity**

With reference to crop production, adaptation has taken into consideration the need to increase land productivity, nutrient and water efficiency, stress-tolerance, disease resistance, and to maintain/improve soil fertility. It is advised that in the short-term changing varieties and planting times can help to reduce negative impacts in annual cropping systems (e.g. alternative crops, drought- or heat-tolerant varieties, altered timing of cropping activities). With perennial crops adaptation strategies have to take a much longer perspective (introduction or development of suitable varieties or changes in land-use patterns; new breeding goals to utilise the entire vegetation period or multi-cropping options (Ritter 2008). In Gurube, both men and women have resorted to drought resistant varieties that include millet, sorghum and rapoko. Plant genetic diversity is crucial in sustaining long-term productivity, with genetically uniform systems being extremely vulnerable not only to pests and diseases but also to external shocks under extreme weather conditions.

Intercropping and crop rotation are other methods that have been employed by both men and women to deal with pests and plant diseases. Mitchell *et al.* (2007) also reported that women who are the small scale crop producers in Bangladesh in India, Nepal are also growing drought resistant crops, diversifying crops and at the same time adjusting to the seasonal variations.

## **Conservation Agriculture**

Both men and women have resorted to organic farming techniques such as shallow ploughing, recycling of livestock manure onto arable cropland, composting techniques as well as diversified crop sequences to reduce soil erosion and increase formation of soil humus. This often results in considerable annual carbon gains (between 40 kg and 2000 kg of C per hectare).

The practice of conservation agriculture has become common in Gurube. It is commonly known by the local community as ‘dhiga udye’ (dig and eat) from the basin tillage that is associated with it. One component of conservation agriculture is mulching. One key informant pointed out that mulching burdens women because it is labour intensive. There is division of labour that accompanies mulching. Men cut the grass and collect leaves from

the forest whilst women usually do the digging and spreading of the mulching materials. Due to the labour demands of conservation agriculture and its shortage in the area, women have resorted to labour cooperatives through support groups. This is because women tend to be more closely tied to social networks than men, their social capital proves an important asset in coping with climate change.

### **Support for Adaptation Strategies**

There are a number of players supporting adaptation to climate change. These are the department of agriculture and extension services (AGRITEX), the department of veterinary services, S.A.T, the Lower Gurube Development Association and the Department of Livestock production. It is important to point out that these organizations have avoided gender biases often reproducing assumptions that it is men who are farmers (Gurung *et al.* 2006 in Mitchel *et al.* 2007). As a result, the interventions in the majority of cases are targeting women as beneficiaries.

### **Conclusion**

Climate change has affected men and women in various ways. Despite the fact that the communities know about climate change, there is lack of information dissemination on climate change. This information gap affects women more than men as a result of division of labour. However, by relying on indigenous knowledge for rain prediction, women and men have managed to cope with the impacts of climate change on their livelihoods. Climate change tends to demand more from women in terms of labour, thereby calling for interventions that reduce the demands on women's labour such as the mechanization of conservation agriculture as well as supply of irrigation equipment. Women's capacity to adapt to climate change is affected by lack of access to resources. An improvement in access and control over resources by women strengthens their capacity to cope with climate change.



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*Climate Change and Rural Livelihoods*

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# Participation of Women in Agriculture: Reality or Rhetoric?

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**Ufo Okeke Uzodike**

## **Abstract**

Feminist discourses - from Women in Development (WID) to Gender and Development (GAD) approaches - have not fundamentally engaged with the structural inequalities that perpetuate women's subordination. Governments on the African continent tend to adopt a market-driven model in agriculture that emphasises women's participation as a means to achieve both subsistence and income generation. Women have not fared well under such programmes, begging the question: what assumptions and biases underpin this approach to development? This empirical study interrogates women's empowerment in the agricultural sector by posing questions around one key issue: why do agricultural programmes fail to transform women's material conditions even where there are adequate resources in the form of donor support and female service providers? Data collection methods comprised of observations, interviews and documentary analysis. The findings reveal that the factors that arise out of the Western modernisation project are multidimensional and intertwined, with consequences that reinforce the subjugation of poor women in particular. This article challenges these silences in mainstream feminist discourses to open up discursive spaces for further engagement.

**Keywords:** Feminist discourses, agricultural development, socio-cultural construction of gender, modernisation

## **Introduction**

It has long been established that women are more adversely affected by

poverty than men (Scanlan 2004; Cornwall 2003). As a result, a variety of approaches have been advocated, from Women in Development (WID) to Gender and Development (GAD). However, the introduction of these perspectives has not transformed or led to fundamental shifts in women's daily realities (Cornwall 2003). In many communities in Africa, for example, food security remains the responsibility of women (Gladwin *et al.* 2001). Common trends point to the fact that men shy away from roles that have no monetary value (The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) 2011), but also to the reality that many 'male breadwinners are unable or unwilling to provide' due to a complex set of factors (Isike & Uzodike 2011:225). Despite this reality, women's significant contributions in both the private and public spheres have not been given monetary value in many societies. Whilst women are at the forefront of food security in Africa (Bob 2008), comprising 60% of the agricultural labour force in some countries (FAO 2011) and producing 90% of the food, they only receive 5% of agricultural training and 10% of rural credit (United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) – United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) 2010). Moreover, they generally work longer hours than men (FAO 2011), 'yet most of their labours remain unpaid, unrecognized, and undervalued' (Scanlan 2004: 1809). However, policy-makers have increasingly taken formal cognisance of the important role women play in fostering development. It is against this backdrop that the South African government's land reform policy recognises women's significant contribution to development and, as such, promotes gender equity in agriculture. This goal is explicitly described in the Land Redistribution for Agricultural Development (LRAD) programme (Department of Agriculture 2001), which aims to improve nutrition and incomes by making land available for agricultural purposes to foster rural development. As one of its key priorities in achieving this goal, the government recognises the need to target and empower women and the youth. By empowering women, the government, in turn, will meet its international commitments as reflected in declarations such as the Beijing Platform for Action (United Nations 1995) and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (United Nations 1996). The government's commitment to rural development through agrarian reform is further articulated in the Comprehensive Rural Development Programme (CDRP) (Department of Rural Development and Land Reform 2011). The main thrust of this

programme, among other things, is to move beyond land redistribution to ensure sustainable agriculture which, according to Pilgeram (2011), is different from industrial agriculture not only in terms of its non-use of pesticides and herbicides but also with respect to its labour-intensiveness. In line with its mandate, the CDRP targets poor women in rural communities who, it is envisaged, will be empowered socially and economically through their participation in sustainable agriculture. While these developments are applauded, their overall impact on women remains weak given their continued social and economic marginalisation due to other exigent factors. For instance, Isike and Uzodike (2011) argue that deep-seated patriarchy in the province of KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) tends to hinder the effective empowerment of women by limiting or shaping their participation in political spaces.

Reflecting on barriers to women empowerment in the agricultural sector, Bob (2008) cites the lack of access to land ownership as the main reason for women's oppression whilst Mokgope (2000) and Cornwall (2003) point to women's lack of control, voice and choice in decision-making. In addition, radical feminists deem patriarchy as central to the problems experienced by women (Kandiyoti 1997). Mohanty (1997:83) considers the latter discourse, which is dominant in mainstream feminist theory, too simplistic and unhelpful as it tends to 'reinforce binary divisions between men and women'. In line with this assertion, Oyewumi (2002) reiterates that feminist theory that focuses on gender oppression while failing to engage with racial and class oppression is deceptive and problematic as it presupposes that women are a homogenous group confronted with common problems. Rather, an alternative model of development is required 'where gender equality goes hand in hand with equality between classes, races and nations' (Jahan 1995:27). Unless this happens, hegemonic assumptions will be left unquestioned, thus reproducing oppressive power (Oyewumi 2002). Based on this premise, hooks'<sup>1</sup> (2000a; 2000b) notion of the interlocking forms of domination is relevant to this study because it can be used instrumentally to demonstrate how gender intersects with race, social class and ethnicity, leaving some women more vulnerable than others. In the same vein, African scholars have argued persuasively for the interrogation of the notion of modernity embedded in capitalism and industrialization to unmask

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<sup>1</sup> The author prefers her pen name to be written in lower case.

oppressive power that is often left unchallenged in mainstream Western and European feminist discourse (Oyewumi 2002).

It is against this backdrop that this article reflects on the case of women farmers who participated in an agricultural programme that failed to transform their material conditions in the midst of abundance. Despite securing communal land and gaining access to finance for agricultural tools and agricultural knowledge and skills, the economic spin-offs still eluded the women farmers in a programme that was managed by other women. Based on this premise, the article takes a pragmatic approach to development as it examines the underlying factors that led to the project's limited degree of success. Central to this argument, the article assesses the extent to which the developmental needs of women (particularly poor women) are impacted negatively by targeted intervention schemes, which at face value are sympathetic to the empowerment of women.

The discussion begins by briefly exploring shifts and continuities in gender dynamics from WID to GAD in order to locate the key debates that inform this research endeavour. The case of Umkhambathini is then presented to illustrate the context in which local women farmers operate and the methodology that was adopted in the study. The next sections present the findings and analysis to highlight opportunities and obstacles to women empowerment in the agricultural project. The article concludes with recommendations for transforming women's material conditions for genuine women participation in, and for, development.

## **From WID to GAD: Shifts and Continuities in Gender Dynamics**

Reflecting on shifts and continuities in gender dynamics from WID to GAD, McIlwaine and Datta (2003:369) regard the evolution as a continuum 'from a feminisation of development to an engendering of development'. However, scholars such as Cornwall (2003) argue that while the terminology has changed, there are no significant shifts in practice. WID to GAD are not neutral approaches. On the contrary, these conceptions are deeply embedded in Western feminism, which objectifies women in the South and undermine 'autonomous, geographically, historically and culturally grounded feminist concerns and strategies' (Mohanty 1997:79). These perspectives are top-down and form a major part of the modernisation project (Cornwall 2003;

Oyewumi 2002). Chua *et al.* (2000) perceive their failure to engage with women's lived experiences in totality as a fundamental flaw.

Ultimately, WID's objective was not women empowerment per se; rather, it was keen on the effective integration of women into existing economic systems. Boserup (1970) coined WID to highlight that women's oppression mainly stems from the fact that they engage in labour-intensive agricultural tasks, whilst men benefit from the utilisation of new technologies. Such programmes are mostly interested in women's productive roles whilst overlooking the structural inequalities that often leave some women more vulnerable than others. For instance, Pilgeram (2011) observed that successful farmers in sustainable agriculture possessed wealth, educational qualifications and high paying jobs as a result of their work as farmers. However, WID ignores classism and its impact on women farmers. Based on cross-cultural and universal validity, WID adopts a one-size-fits-all approach that fails to appreciate that development is relational and multi-dimensional because of the interrelationships inherent in each context (Chua *et al.* 2000). For instance, people in marginalized rural contexts are often viewed as illiterate when in actual fact they possess literacies that are relevant and useful in their own socio-cultural contexts (Street 2005). Therefore, in this context, it is apt to work with the notions of 'multiple literacies'. It is advocated with recognition that it has epistemological implications on what constitutes knowledge (2003: 77).

It is in this context of multiple realities that Mohanty (1997:80) eloquently critiques the hegemonic assumptions of Western feminism that not only reproduce 'the image of an average Third World woman', but also distort Asian and African scholarship from Third World middle-class women who end up writing about rural or working class women as the 'other'. Moreover, there is no recognition in such contexts that African patriarchies evolve; instead, 'afro-pessimism about African patriarchies is bought and resold by many Africans, with the result that men have become resistant, and women themselves indifferent, to gender mainstreaming based on a Eurocentric historical view of African gender relations' (Isike & Uzodike 2011:228). This analysis partly accounts for the slow transformation in gender and women development. Therefore, scholars such as hooks (2000a; 2000b) and Oyewumi (2002) illustrate the need to deconstruct the notion of a monolithic homogenous women's identity in order to unveil class and race privileges.

Simply put, the rhetoric in mainstream feminist discourse fails to acknowledge that Black African women are more vulnerable than women of other racial groups (hooks 2000a). A large population of these women labour in food gardens where the notion of empowerment remains elusive. For example, the findings of Pilgeram's (2011:378) study show unequivocally that sustainable agriculture has a racial, class and gender face and further indicate that 'despite the growing body of literature on sustainable agriculture, research examining the ways that class impacts sustainable farms is relatively limited'. Guthman 2008 & Slocum (2007 cited in Pilgeram 2011:377) argue pointedly:

...who owns and farms sustainably managed land affects who consumes the food produced. This issue is particularly salient given that farmers' markets are most often spaces of whiteness, both demographically and culturally.

Reflecting on these assertions, it is evident that small-scale farmers remain invisible in the value chain processes. Consequently, at the height of Western modernisation in the mid-1970s, the neo-Marxist feminists brought about fundamental shifts that gave rise to Women and Development (WAD) in order to critically address structural imbalances. Theoretically, the approach was progressive in that it recognised the heterogeneity of women's lived experiences, but it failed to pragmatically address the issue of power (Cornwall 2003). Based on this premise, GAD emerged in the 1980s as an alternative approach.

Embedded in socialist feminism, GAD takes particular interest in how gender has been socially constructed. It values heterogeneity and all aspects of women's lives and aims to give women space to reclaim their voice so that their knowledge and experiences are fully utilised. It goes a step further to call for reforms to the legal systems that favour male ownership in order for women to benefit as well. Despite GAD's progressive outlook, a mismatch between theory and practice still exists. Cornwall (2003) perceives GAD as another top-down approach that is too thin on tools for action. As a result, the WID approach still influences development planning in contemporary feminist discourse (Brown 2006). This is particularly evident in the available literature that is either silent or too thin on issues related specifically to the politics of difference *vis-à-vis* poor women's experiences



of oppression (hooks 2000b). In this way, contemporary feminist discourse fails to examine women's oppression critically and comprehensively. Therefore, it follows that from WID to GAD, structural inequalities related to gender, race and class have been left intact. The emphasis is on projecting a simplifying worldview that portrays 'essentialized images of 'woman-as-victim' and 'man-as-problem' or ignores the lot of marginal men' (Chant 2000; Cornwall & White 2000 cited in Cornwall 2003: 1326).

What remains implicit in all three approaches to development is an overemphasis on the productive role of women since the ultimate objective of neo-liberal development policies is to benefit the market. It is in this context that Oyewumi (2002) argues against Western capitalism, which continues to reproduce oppressive gender relations. Moreover, although the rhetoric on giving women a voice is rife, it rarely happens in practice. As Cornwall (2003) observes, both gender and participation are relative concepts with multiple meanings. Unless mainstream feminist theories engage with the concept of gender – fully recognising that it is a socio-cultural construct that cannot be conceptualised outside the social context of colonization, Western imperialism and other forms of oppression - genuine women empowerment in development processes is unlikely to be realised in practice (Oyewumi 2002). Based on this premise, Chua *et al.* (2000) rejected the WID and GAD perspectives. Instead, they advocated for a new paradigm, namely, Women, Culture and Development (WCD). The authors argue that this intended approach to development engages with culture as lived experience and considers the heterogeneity of Third World women. The utilization of participatory rural appraisal (PRA) tools is one way of enabling local people to articulate that which resonates with their own lived experiences (Chambers 2000).

Essentially, development policies, approaches and strategies - from WID to GAD - have failed to advance women's marginalised agenda (Cornwall 2003). It can therefore be concluded in this section that the major shortcoming of mainstream feminist theories is their failure to engage with unequal socio-economic and socio-political relations between nations (Oyewumi 2002).

## **The Study Context and Setting**

### ***Study Site and Project Description***

The study was conducted in Umkhambathini Local Municipality under

uMgungundlovu District in the province of KZN. The area is mainly rural with a population of 46 570 (Statistics SA 2007) out of a total population of 10.45 million in KZN (Statistics SA 2009). One of the poorest provinces in South Africa (SA), KZN faces huge socio-economic challenges, characterised by high levels of the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV), poverty and unemployment. Available literature demonstrates that poverty and unemployment are two of the main factors that exacerbate the spread of HIV within the province, with the HIV prevalence rate currently at 39.5% - the highest provincial rate in the country (Department of Health 2011). However, the rate of unemployment in the province, which stood at 41.5% in 2001 (Statistics SA 2001) substantially decreased to 20.3% in 2011 (Statistics SA 2011). According to the last census, the agricultural sector is a key driver of the economy within Umkhambathini Local Municipality, with 6 546 agricultural-related projects followed by 1 565 community services projects (Statistics SA 2001).

To alleviate poverty in the rural community of Umkhambathini, a local development agency<sup>2</sup>, operating in the non-governmental (NGO) sector, developed a plan to assist female and male farmers in a food security programme. The organisation, with female agricultural extension officers and female project managers, had financial resources earmarked for the development of two distinct projects. The first is a communal vegetable garden that covers 6 8640 m<sup>2</sup> of land and targets 15 women, and one man. The second project focuses on maize and cattle farming, with a total of 23 farmers, who work individually and operate from their private homes. The study was specifically interested in the communal vegetable garden with female farmers who pursue socio-economic objectives collectively in the rural village. Funds were made available to the women farmers to begin using the available land productively. They received agricultural tools and seedlings from the development agency including hoes, spades, an irrigation machine, watering cans, wheelbarrows, wildes (sickles), garden forks and hand forks. In addition, they received limited training in agriculture.

As stated in the funding agreement, the key objective in the food gardens was to improve the quality and quantity of crops. It also aimed to

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<sup>2</sup> A local development agency that was responsible for the empowerment of community members. The name of the organisation is not disclosed to ensure confidentiality and anonymity.

provide business training and marketing skills to enable women, most of who were subjected to poverty, to sustain livelihoods through food security; and to provide them with a possible means of income to improve their living conditions. Ultimately, the desired outcomes were to be achieved by assisting the women farmers to establish a cooperative association for income generation.

It should be noted that the NGO responsible for the empowerment of women farmers succeeded in securing significant funding because it had generated a well-crafted proposal. While donors are often blamed for imposing top-down approaches wherein they advance their own agendas (Willis 2005), on the contrary, the donor for this particular project recognised and supported women's agency for economic emancipation. The local development agency was afforded space to independently formulate their own focal areas and performance indicators. They aptly argued the need to develop women and unambiguously conceptualised empowerment as comprising community ownership of the project. To ensure a shift from rhetoric to practice, this project objective was to be achieved through a constitutionally established community structure to create space for women's voices in issues pertaining to their socio- economic well-being. As discussed in subsequent sections, this vital goal was not achieved.

## **Methodology**

The study employed a qualitative design using a triangulation of data collection methods, which comprised interviews, documentary review, and direct observation. The documentary review included an examination of the funding agreement, operational plans, a memorandum of agreement between the development agency and the farming community members, the inventory of the projects' assets, and monthly and annual reports. The funding agreement provided a clear framework with indicators to analyse, monitor and evaluate performance measures in conjunction with the organisation's operational plan, which outlined project activities, expected outcomes, and indicators of development as informed by qualitative and quantitative objectives.

A total number of 21 participants (12 female farmers, 3 independent community members and 6 staff members from the development agency)

took part in in-depth interviews, having been selected through purposive sampling. In line with participatory methodology, the design created space for project members to share their knowledge and experiences, actively participating in the analysis of what happens in practice. Data interpretation and content analysis focused on emerging themes. The next section presents the findings of the study under those different themes.

## **Findings and Discussion**

### ***The Context in which Women Operate***

The profiles of 12 women farmers who were interviewed demonstrate that they are mainly older women, above the age of 40, who live in dire poverty. Six women farmers above the age of 50 declared that they had lost their children to chronic illnesses; however, the cause of death remains unknown. As noted earlier, the province of KZN has the highest HIV prevalence rate in SA, which increased from 38.7% in 2008 to 39.5% in 2010 (Department of Health 2011). Therefore, anecdotal evidence seems to suggest that the AIDS pandemic has an impact on the mortality rate in the local rural community. Furthermore, the women alluded to the challenges of caring for grandchildren in the midst of dire poverty, elucidating the argument that women are more vulnerable to poverty than men (Scanlan 2004; Cornwall 2003).

Reflecting on the socio-cultural nature of gender and vulnerability as Oyewumi (2002) asserts, the findings demonstrate that the problems that Umkhambathini women farmers face are multidimensional and intertwined. They are engaged in agricultural activities that have not really secured their livelihoods. Moreover, they face problems in their personal lives related to hunger, unemployment, losing their loved ones, dealing with grandchildren who are orphans and so forth. They also expressed their frustration with the fact that their children, who have completed secondary school education under desperate circumstances, remain unemployed. Six out of the 12 women farmers interviewed had a household income of less than R1 000 per month while managing families of about 12 members per household – a figure that includes grandchildren whose parents have died. Some of the women farmers reported that social grants were the main source of income in many households in the community, and they deem those who receive social grants to be in a better position financially.

### ***Economic Development for Women as a Relational Process***

Emerging data indicate that despite the fact that women's contribution to the family and community at large remains 'unpaid, unrecognized, and undervalued' (Scanlan 2004, 1809), optimism about the future exists. They highlighted that social capital that is generated as a result of their involvement in the vegetable garden project helped them to cope better with daily hardships. Furthermore, the women commented that the communal spirit that exists in their project has brought hope in their lives. One woman remarked: *'When I have problems at home, I cannot wait for a day in the garden where I could talk, laugh, sing and forget about my problems'*. Clearly, such assertions point to the existence and value of social capital in the midst of dire poverty. This glimmer of hope in the midst of hopelessness reiterates the relevance of 'historically and culturally grounded feminist concerns and strategies' (Mohanty 1997:79). Moreover, it was established that the relationships that the women have developed go beyond the communal gardening project. They reported that, as neighbours, they support one another through the barter system. This is evident in the following assertion: *'You cannot really die of hunger when you have your neighbours because we all barter goods and services. It is not a shame in our community to go to your neighbour to request a slice of bread'*. Similarly, another woman farmer from the vegetable garden reported how the other women cultivated her garden while she was ill. The planners in this project are challenged to not only focus on women's productive roles but to also engage with their social and cultural experiences, recognising that development is about interrelationships inherent in each context (Chua *et al.* 2000).

### ***Bridging the Gender Gap: Women's Participation in Politics and the Economy***

The conceptualisation of the Umkhambathini community agricultural project demonstrates that a lot of strategic thinking went into it. Conceptually, the developmental approach evident on paper puts farmers at the centre of their own development, thus promoting people-centred development. However, this has not translated into practice. There were no data to suggest that the women farmers influence decisions in the project. As Mokgope (2000) and Cornwall (2003) observe that women still lack autonomy in decision-making.

Emerging data resonate with this claim as women farmers had no power and control to influence decisions that affect their lives. The staff members argue that the vegetable project empowers women because they are involved in project planning and implementation. When asked about the degree of women participation in the vegetable garden project, one staff member reported that women were consulted regarding the purchase of agricultural tools (such as hoes and spades) and the storage thereof. Closer examination revealed that farmers have no decision-making powers and lack access to financial control. While the local development agency and farmers signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), which outlined a platform for members to determine their own agenda, the community's role in decision-making remains undefined and non-existent. Community consultations in this context could be viewed as tokenism, since the farmers are not aware of their own options in decision-making. Such observations are consistent with Isike and Uzodike's (2011:227) assertion that due to poor women's lack of power in the province of KZN, they are still perceived as 'subhuman, commodified and subordinated'. Therefore, from WID to GAD, the context in which female farmers operate has not changed (Cornwall 2003); rather it has been observed that programmes have included women as a way of garnering financial support from donors. Observations further reveal that the status quo is sustained due to the development agency's dominant approaches that mainly focus on service delivery within the modernisation project; whilst overlooking the actual process of development.

### ***Planning for Social and Economic Development: Whose Knowledge Counts?***

The development agency staff expressed their frustration at working with 'illiterate' adults who can neither read nor write. One member of staff alluded to the fact that due to this challenge the farmers are unable to grasp basic agricultural concepts, making it difficult to impart knowledge. These sentiments are demonstrated in the following remark: *'You teach them one thing in the morning, you return in the afternoon to discover that they have forgotten it'* (Staff member 2010). This statement points to one aspect of the challenges associated with development interventions that are presented in terms that assume universal orthodoxy (Street 2005). The findings further

illustrated that the women farmers have also come to internalise such hegemonic assumptions related to the racialization of knowledge (Oyewumi 2002) with staff members in the project being represented as knowers. This is a common, worrying trend in development discourse, which generally alienates poor people from their experiences, silencing them and causing them to doubt their own capabilities (Chambers 2000). A challenge for contemporary feminist discourse is to genuinely develop women's voices, and channel them through collaborative ways of knowing to assist women to gain some level of empowerment through their own voices. To achieve this objective, Chambers (2000) argues that the focus should be on PRA methodologies using participatory demonstrations and visual aids. This methodology encourages 'illiterate' farmers to reflect and learn from their own experiences – a critical factor in promoting capacity building for self-reliance. This would facilitate an environment of mutual exchange of knowledge and skills, and transform constructions of 'Third World women as a homogenous powerless group' (Mohanty 1997:81).

It was further established that the development agency has not viewed illiteracy as a systemic problem that requires a totally different mindset on the part of development practitioners. The embedded assumption in the frustrated views of the staff is basically that they are working with ignorant people or, at best, the social equivalent of children. This is underpinned by the sense of hopelessness in what has been painted as a context of 'illiterate' adults. It is in such contexts that Street (2005; 2003) argues for the recognition that development is embedded in multiple contexts. Essentially, this results in a totally different epistemological framework that values knowledge gained in daily life experiences, thus making subjugated knowledge visible. The mere failure to understand ideas and concepts that were proffered in a foreign language is used to conclude that the target community or population group were in fact incapable of grasping multifarious or semi-complex ideas. In effect, this sort of reductive thinking process often complicates intervention schemes by shaping the attitudes of development practitioners in a way that not only ignores people's lived experiences by superimposing extraneous solutions, but also blaming programme failure on the community. In so doing, the inability of Western modernisation projects to engage with structural inequalities is left unquestioned and furthermore, the tendency to treat the problems that women face as universal is espoused (Oyewumi, 2002).

Seen in this way, the challenge for development managers is to engage the women in a dialogue using context-specific literacies that are appropriate for their local realities. Emerging data revealed that the workshops organised for the women farmers were not contextualised. To illustrate this challenge, it was established that in some instances the agricultural training focused on abstract concepts such as different types of soil. In working with 'illiterate' adults, Chambers (2000) contends that such conceptual knowledge is not beneficial if the intention is not to utilise and/or apply that knowledge immediately. This requires a learning activity that is practice-oriented and should rely on using local languages. Essentially, the dominant use of English concepts in the training of the women farmers only served to marginalise them further.

Clearly, it is fundamental to appreciate local people's social and cultural context as espoused in grassroot development (Willis 2005). The women in the vegetable project planted and cultivated their own crops long before the development agency existed, prompting the seminal question: 'How did they survive all these years?'

### ***The Political Economy of Rural Development***

The policy implementation in relation to LRAD and CDRP indicates that rural development is often slow and complex and, as such, a major challenge for government in the best of circumstances. In addition to the multifaceted challenges that this article has alluded to, the Umkhambathini women's project was also faced with a number of complications that are often associated with the limitations of rural development such as:

***Lack of Access to Markets:*** The objectives of the agricultural project, as highlighted in the development plans, included the formation of cooperatives to generate income. The ultimate goal was to establish a local market for the farmers. However, this goal was never achieved. It emerged that finding markets in the nearest town would be a formidable task, particularly because travelling costs are exorbitant at R24 per return trip to the Pietermaritzburg city centre. There is a mini shopping centre, approximately 5 km from the location of the vegetable garden, but the area is oversaturated with farmers from elsewhere who sell similar agricultural produce.



The difficulties regarding the market also serve to reveal a design flaw in the project. It is evident that in situations where markets have not been identified, organisations should not promote commercial farming as this tends to frustrate farmers in poor rural contexts. Given that the lack of a viable market has serious implications for both the Umkhambathini women as well as the development project, the development agency would need to revisit its plans with a view to finding markets for the farmers. As Pilgeram (2011) argues, agricultural markets are not easily accessible to those from poor environments due to issues of race and class. Markets are therefore not neutral. The political economy of markets needs to be appreciated so that those who have the means, power and strong social capital can consciously assist marginalised communities to access them. Expecting farmers who are excluded from the mainstream economy to find their own markets will unintentionally disempower them by exposing them to systematic exploitation. As mentioned earlier, the Umkhambathini community is accustomed to the barter system. Hence, available data suggest that this community is comfortable to limit their agricultural activities to subsistence farming. However, neo-liberal capitalism is market-driven, an approach to development which according to Willis (2005), has a tendency to undermine social and cultural practices inherent in local communities. As one participant from the maize project mentioned:

*Ungawudayisela bani umbila lana ngoba bonke abantu bawutshalile? Umbila futhi ulinywa kanye ngonyaka, angeke uphile ngawo*

(Where would you find markets for maize here because every family in the community has a maize garden? Again, maize is a seasonal crop, it is only harvested once a year; therefore, it cannot secure livelihoods.)

This assertion serves to illustrate that the project was not based on asset-mapping and needs assessment. It further demonstrates that local people often have workable solutions to their own problems. In essence, the findings underscore not only the need for anchoring development interventions on constructive and mutually respectful partnerships between development agencies and local communities, but also the continued efficacy or value of local knowledge and cultural experience.

***Unpredictable weather patterns:*** Beyond the non-existent market, there were also a number of other challenges that might have been anticipated and addressed through better planning. For instance, flooding in the local river prevented access to the gardens after rains in the area or in other upstream communities drained by the river. As such, necessary activities at the gardening projects come to a halt until such time that the water levels recede. The women farmers reported that they are compelled to wade across the river every morning during the rainy season. They further indicated that they usually arrive in the garden at 11am because the water is too cold in the early hours of the morning. This predicament presents another element in the political economy of rural development. Erecting a bridge for easy access is nobody's priority in this rural community because the women's livelihood strategy does not generate any profits for the markets.

***Water and electricity shortages:*** While heavy rains make it difficult to get to the communal garden on the one hand, long periods of drought remain a huge challenge on the other. Due to the shortage of water, it was reported that vegetable gardens were not perceived as an option in the community as the priority is to access water for household consumption.

In light of the above, the political economy of rural development cannot be ignored. Local people have skills and knowledge that the markets do not necessarily value (Willis 2005). The livelihood strategies that are promoted are not particularly favoured since scarce resources such as water can be used to address other priorities. It is in such contexts that Chambers (2000) recognises that progress in rural development has been slow because development practitioners continuously fail to address the priorities and plans of the poor.

### ***Discourse on Women Oppression Revisited***

The notion of empowerment and participation tends to suggest that if women were to participate in decision-making at all levels of the project cycle then development would be a logical consequence. This study illustrates that such unrealistic assumptions are inaccurate as far as women empowerment is concerned. This study raises a complex set of issues that engenders interrogation about the nature of structural inequalities, particularly the notion

that middle-class women can effectively represent the interests of rural women. As we have shown earlier, a development agency led by privileged women formulated a concept on how they were going to involve a group of poor women farmers from the Umkhambathini community in decision-making at every phase of the project cycle. The funding proposal outlined a clear strategy to ensure the participation of women farmers in the project from conceptualisation to implementation, monitoring, and evaluation as well as participation in sharing the benefits of development. However, this ambitious objective was not realised in practice. In response to the funding proposal that prioritised women empowering other women, the donor made the necessary financial and human resources available. However, women at the local level did not benefit. Thus, the key question that faces researchers and other observers is why? What issues should be factored into the structuring of empowerment programmes such as the Umkhambathini women's agricultural project? To what extent are women's lived realities to be linked to appropriate funding methods? Clearly, the rhetoric in mainstream feminist discourse has not seriously engaged with such questions.

These observations reiterate that viewing gender oppression as the sole problem in women development is an assumption that has become obsolete. Whilst studies by scholars such as Bob (2008), Mokgope (2000) and others have pointed to the oppression of women by men in agriculture, the case of the Umkhambathini community shows that we cannot be quick to conclude that, in the absence of male oppressors, all is well. This is a project for women by women with access to land, finances and agricultural skills and knowledge; yet, the objectives of social and economic integration eluded the women farmers. This is not always intentional; rather, it is the net result of the wider international and national gender policies and perspectives that are not often understood by programme officers responsible for policy implementation at the micro-level (Jahan 1995). This mismatch between theory and practice remains the greatest limitation in GAD approaches, which are progressive on the surface, but often fall short in practice (Brown 2006; Cornwall 2003). Therefore, this points to the interrogation of underlying factors that hinder women empowerment. For instance, whilst most writers are still limited to conventional definitions of patriarchy, Oyewumi (2002) and hooks (2000b) recognise that if patriarchy is a system of domination, even women can have access to it. Therefore, to blame gender oppression for all women's woes is easy; to engage with the intersectionality of race, class,

gender and ethnicity – is a long and difficult process, but it is more likely to lead to transformation for the benefit of marginalized women in particular.

This critical analysis assists us to recognise that the struggles of poor African women are different from those of women in other social contexts. Furthermore, there are marginalized men who are often ignored (Cornwall 2003), such as those in the case of Umkhambathini, who are more oppressed than women in other contexts by virtue of being poor and black in the South African historical context. This line of argument is unpopular in mainstream feminist theory due to what Oyewumi (2002) perceives as the insistence on gender and women's oppression as universal, so that structural disadvantages related to class and race are left unexamined. The obsession with vertical oppression, with men oppressing women, whilst overlooking horizontal oppression wherein women oppress other women, is inappropriate in the absence of men in cases similar to that of Umkhambathini. One is therefore compelled to question the spirit of sisterhood that puts emphasis on common oppression while ignoring or hiding the fact that there are women who oppress other women (hooks 2000a). While in GAD literature the focus is on lived experiences and women's voices (Cornwall 2003), middle-class women continue to speak for, and on behalf of, the working class. As a result, they continue to dominate and define the feminist agenda for the oppressed (Oyewumi 2002).

## **Looking Forward: Conclusion and Recommendations**

This article has shown that whilst the South African government has developed progressive policies to address the needs of rural women, pragmatic challenges hinder the implementation of such policies. The government approach, which adopts positive discrimination to benefit poor women, appreciates that black, poor, rural women are more susceptible to gender oppression due to financial dependence on men. The government, having collaborated with local and international donors, ensured that access to land, equipment, financial and human resources were made available to assist the rural women farmers of Umkhambathini; however, the benefits eluded them. The development agency's funding proposal was well-crafted with a clear transformative agenda; however, the operational reality has proven more reactionary than developmental. In the absence of robust

monitoring and evaluation tools, the development agency missed the target, resulting in a mismatch between rhetoric and practice.

A number of conclusions can be drawn from the study. The findings reveal that patriarchy is systemic within the structures of development organisations, which manipulate not only men, but also women at various levels in development planning. Whilst the development agency staff were mostly women, the findings suggest that they are also not immune from sexism within the institution of patriarchy. If patriarchy is a system of domination, anyone can practise it, including women (Oyewumi 2002). It was evident in the case of Umkhambathini that the service providers were conscious of the urgent need to empower women as this was well articulated in the funding proposal; however, the outcome failed to match the rhetoric. The findings illustrate that this is partially due to the tendency within feminist discourse to de-emphasise class struggle. Based on that premise, progression from WID to GAD approaches is happening at a theoretical level; however, empirical evidence suggests that this has not been fully realised on the ground. In undertaking a project that seeks to empower women in the agricultural sector, it is vital that due care is taken to ensure that women's experiences – whether cultural, social, economic or political – are factored into the decision-making processes informing the conceptualisation of the project. In addition, such community projects should primarily focus on validating and legitimising women's knowledge and experiences for genuine development to take place and refrain from adopting approaches simply because they have worked, or are likely to work, in other contexts. Moreover, the need for a robust debate on socio-economic and socio-political factors that leaves some women more susceptible to poverty than others cannot be over-emphasised.

To improve future practice, the following lessons and recommendations can be deduced from the findings of the study:

- Projects should not promote commercial agriculture when markets have not been identified. It should be the role of development agencies as facilitators of development to identify and find markets for farmers through their networks with local suppliers;
- Development agencies have to dispel both the myth that people in rural areas are 'happy poor', and the assumption that poor people can

survive without financial resources. In the context of the current global economic challenges, a project that fails to put money in people's pockets ultimately fails to foster development, which is about qualitative and quantitative changes in people's well-being;

- Development agencies should adopt a learning approach in their interventions in order to unlearn some of the mistaken perceptions related to the goal of development. This will not only lead to authentic partnerships but also to the effective empowerment of communities. To achieve this purpose, development agencies would need to assist the women farmers to constitute structures that they can use to channel their own voices and collectively engage with project managers;
- It is essential to monitor projects closely to ascertain whether they deliver on their developmental mandate or tend to become reactive.

As illustrated in this article, the assumption that development will naturally follow once social, human, physical, natural and financial assets have been put in place needs to be challenged since it overlooks pertinent underlying factors that leave poor women vulnerable to exploitation. In essence, the case of Umkhambathini illustrates the need for a complex stakeholder response to the multidimensional development challenges that the women farmers face. Any appropriate model of development should compel service providers to collaborate with other stakeholders doing similar work such as local communities, government and the private sector for a multi-pronged and holistic intervention response.

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# Married Women Breadwinners: A Myth or Reality?

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## Abstract

There are many studies that show that in the face of collapsing and declining economies of the Third World the war against poverty has seen the emergent of married women breadwinners. Married women breadwinners are an economically active group that show signs of possibilities of translating gender equality policies and strategies into something meaningful. This group of women who are economically independent is referred to in the Shona language in Zimbabwe as *varume pachavo* (*They are real men themselves*). We need to ask how and why economically independent women are constructed in the idiom of honorary men. Ethnographic studies do indicate that in reality the situation of women breadwinners is more complex, as more women in this category are at pains to reassure society and their 'man' that the husband remains the logical and legitimate head of household. The women even resort to the use of the moral-religious arguments to support their views that a man is the head of the household. Could such statements that appear clearly to be in support of patriarchy be taken at face value as an indication of the failure by married women breadwinners to break through the 'glass ceiling' at the domestic level in terms of redressing the ideology of male domination? Or should we see the women's strategy of deferment as part of the strategies adopted by independent married women to safeguard their newly found liberated space by appearing to be supporting patriarchy when in fact the opposite is happening? Could this be part of what Scott (1985) would refer to as 'weapons of the weak'? Is it a way of providing soft landing for the husbands of these women who are undergoing a crisis of masculinity through loss of the breadwinner status? We need to see the emergent of independent married women breadwinners as a more complex process which embraces equality notions as well as the continued

subordination of women at the domestic and public domains. The article also explores Nuttall's notion of entanglement and how this can explain the socio-cultural and economic specificities of married women breadwinners.

**Keywords:** married women, breadwinners, household, subordination, gender violence

## **Introduction**

This article examines the experiences of married women breadwinners in Zimbabwe in the light of economic forces that contributed to more women becoming increasingly economically active. All the women in the study were cross-border traders. The increase of married women breadwinners became more pronounced in the post economic structural adjustment programme (ESAP) by the Zimbabwean Government in 1991 and in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century following the much publicised farm invasions. The article seeks to interrogate the notion of breadwinner status of married women and its impact on households and women's lives. When called upon to adapt to changing circumstances such as the effects of retrenchment which mostly affected men given the preponderance of men in the formal labour market and women's dominance in the informal markets of the economy it meant women were generally better positioned to respond to unfavourable markets compared to men.

This article draws its data from an ethnographic study spanning over a period of 12 months from December 2001 to November 2002 involving a selected group of cross-border women traders who lived in Harare, Zimbabwe's capital and Chinhoyi a provincial capital of Mashonaland West Province some 115 km to the north of Harare. The organisation of Social Science Research in Eastern and Southern Africa (OSSREA) funded the research. While multiple research methods were adopted during the data gathering phase data for this article mainly draws from the in-depth and length intensive interviews. Twenty women 10 from Harare and 10 from Chinhoyi were selected through snowball sampling techniques. In contrast to the 1994/95 study in the provincial town of Masvingo in Southern Zimbabwe when married breadwinners constituted a smaller percentage of women heads of households in the 2001/2002 study married women breadwinners half of the selected women's population of 20. It is important to note that a lot of

data using interviews as well as observations was collected from many other people including officials. To date its worth noting that the study has resulted in a book, three refereed journal articles as well as several conference papers and yet a lot of the data remains unexplored. This article seeks to explore issues related to breadwinner status of the purposively chosen four cases out of ten married women cross-border traders. It is useful as a starting point to examine the concept of household headship before explaining the meaning of breadwinner status and the complexities surrounding this concept.

In the light of changes in household responsibilities and increased income earning power by married women it is useful to briefly look at the notion of household headship. Muzvidziwa's (2002:163) observation that 'despite shifts in terms household responsibilities and the burden of household survival increasingly being shouldered by married women, household power structures that vested authority in men have remained intact', appears to be replicated in the study reported here. Casimir and Tobi (2011) noted that the term household is largely left undefined in the literature. In a selection and review of selected literature an operational definition of household is attempted in only three out of 58 papers. Despite difficulties in defining precisely what constitute a household Casimir and Tobi (2011:504) concluded that 'a household is a single person or group of persons who share resources, activities and expenditures on a regular basis for a specified period of time'. This definition resonates well with Muzvidziwa's (2002:166) observation that a household 'refers to shared or co-operative resource allocation between individuals who may or may not be permanently co-resident'. On the other hand Youssef and Hetler (1983:232) identified five broad categories of *de jure* and *de factor* woman-headed households:

- a) Households with no male spouse or partner at any time. These include households headed by single mothers, divorced, widowed or separated women, deserted wives; and dissolved non-legalised unions.
- b) Households with transient male partners.
- c) Households in which the male spouse or partner is temporarily absent for example married women whose husbands are away for unspecified periods.
- d) Households where the woman earns or contributes more than the male partner towards the maintenance of the household.

- e) Households with one or more adult males in residence but no male spouse or partner.

While data on married women breadwinners in my study do not conform to Youssef and Hetler's definition of headship, their definition nevertheless remains useful in discussions of women household headship. For the married women breadwinners in Harare and Chinhoyi study criteria c and d above do not necessarily result in female headship. Husbands may earn less or might even be temporarily absent that does not automatically translate into female headship. In fact there is all the evidence that in situations like this the married woman will go to great length to reassure the man that despite the circumstances he s still the head of household.

This article excluding the introduction and conclusion consists of four sections. The first section presents a descriptive account of five married women breadwinners selected from the 20 women who participated in the in-depth interviews. The five cases will help readers to situate and understand the study. The second section discusses lessons derived from the five cases examples of married women breadwinners. The third section examines issues focusing on power and gender relations within married women breadwinner households. The last section explores the notion of entanglement as presented by Nuttall and how this reflects on the everyday lived experiences of married women breadwinners under discussion.

## Case Studies of Married Women Breadwinners

In this section I present a descriptive account of four married breadwinners from the sample of 20 cases. These married breadwinners are purposively selected to include recently married and those married for more than 30 years.

### *Case 1: Amai<sup>1</sup> Tendai*

Amai Tendai, a 25-year-old married woman and mother to a five-year old son began her cross-border operations in March 2002. She lived in Chinhoyi. She

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<sup>1</sup> *Amai* means mother but can also be used as a mark of respect, calling a mature woman *amai* irrespective of whether one has a child or not is a mark of respect.

stayed with her husband, son, 19-year-old sister-in-law and domestic worker. She was initiated into cross-border trade by her mother but raised cross-border start up capital from savings from her saloon. She completed O levels in 1993 but from 1994 until March 2002 operated a hair dressing salon in Chinhoyi town. She employed a saloon assistant. Both her salon and cross-border trade were viable though proceeds from cross-border trading operations exceeded those of the salon. In 2002 Amai Tendai visited Tanzania on a monthly basis as a cross-border trader. The combined income from the hair dressing salon and cross-border operations was much more than her accountant husband's income. Besides sourcing items for household use and resale she bought chemicals needed in her saloon. She had a separate bank account from her husband but made joint decisions when it comes to investments. They had managed to invest in a stand and were planning to build their house in the coming year after the rain season. The couple had also managed to access a five-hectare piece of land through the fast track programmes on which they planned to grow crops for food and sale. Amai Tendai was in the climbing<sup>2</sup> out of poverty category.

Membership cards issued by the Zimbabwe Cross-border Association assisted them in doing business in Tanzania. The women were accommodated in lodges during their business trips to Tanzania. Amai Tendai was practising a Catholic. She was also a member of a 15-person credit and savings club which allowed members to borrow money, which was repaid with interest. Despite her success as a business woman Amai Tendai felt that her husband's job was more important for the family. Hers was a supplementary role. She was still responsible for housework and household management.

### ***Case 2: Amai Tafara***

Amai Tafara a 42-year-old married mother of four a married 21-year-old daughter, an 18-year-old son doing A' levels, a 10-year-old son in grade four, and a pre-school four-year-old daughter. She completed two years of secondary education. She lived with her mother-in-law and four other dependents, two sisters-in-law, a brother-in-law and a nephew all still at

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<sup>2</sup> Used as per Muzvidziwa 1998. Climbing out of poverty referred to those who had relatively healthy domestic budget, savings and investments.

school. She started cross-border trade in 1992. Her start-up capital consisted of her personal savings and a grant from her mother-in-law. Her mother-in-law had to prevail over her husband's refusal to permit her to engage in cross-border trade. Initially she conducted her cross-border business in Zambia. A friend who has since died initiated her into cross-border trade. Typical trade items taken to Zambia were foodstuffs, drinks (beer and minerals), tobacco, and sewn clothes. From Zambia the women purchased second-hand clothes, fish and bags for resale. Amai Tafara stopped going to Zambia in 1994 and has been going to Lesotho ever since. She travelled to Lesotho monthly and spent at least two weeks selling her wares. She pooled resources with two other cross-border women traders to rent a room at SAR100 monthly in a Maline block with 14 rooms. Amai Tafara is in the poverty<sup>3</sup> coping category. Her husband was retrenched sometime in 2002 but because of her cross-border operations the family's welfare was not compromised. She is able to raise at least SAR4000 as profit from each trip she makes to Lesotho. While she acknowledges that the trip to Lesotho is very tiresome, she points out that there are not many restrictions placed on traders in Lesotho thereby making this a safe and encouraging destination. She mostly carries with her tie & dye materials, doilies and clothing items. No goods are purchased for resale in Zimbabwe in Lesotho. Amai Tafara makes a stopover in Johannesburg to enable her to source for grocery items.

Amai Tafara had just finished extending the family house where they lived. Her husband was quite happy despite the fact that he had been retrenched and was not working as she gave him money for personal use. Amai Tafara made every effort to involve her husband in decision making and to make him feel useful despite contributing nothing to the household budget. She was planning to purchase at least two more stands.

### ***Case 3: Amai Shingi***

Amai Shingi, a 53-year-old married woman and mother of seven (aged 34, 31, 29, 26, 25, 19, and 15). She had five sons and two daughters aged 25 and 26. All her children are married except the youngest two. The 19-year-old and 15-year-old were in form five and form three respectively. Amai Shingi

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<sup>3</sup> Used as per classification by Muzvidziwa 1998. Coping referred to those who could balance the household budget.

was in the poverty coping category. She had lived in Harare early in her married in 1971. She was a homeowner and over the years had managed to extend the four-roomed house into a seven-roomed house. They had also managed to build a small three-roomed flat adjacent to the main house. The flat brings in rental income. Part of the building materials was sourced from South Africa. Amai Shingi represented the early pioneers into cross-border trade who had made it a career. Her husband has always supported her in her cross-border trade and had advanced her with part of the start-up cross-border capital. Her first cross-border trip was in 1979 to South Africa, Johannesburg. At that time in 1979 women formed clubs and applied for foreign currency allocations from the banks, they also carried some doilies with them for resale in South Africa. In the late 1980s she used to make trips to Botswana. She took for resale to Botswana goods such as doilies and clothing, as well as jackets. From Botswana she sourced car parts and electronic goods. In the early 1990s Amai Shingi moved to a new destination Mozambique to boost her cross-border chances. Then the trade from Mozambique was dominated by second hand clothes something that came to be known as *mazitye*. She sourced second hand clothes mainly from operations in Beira. Mazitye found their way into the several second hand shops *mupedzanhamo*. Later in the mid to late 1990s she went to Zambia as well as South Africa. They sold tinned beef in Zambia, as well as jackets sourced from South Africa. Other foodstuffs sold in Zambia included sugar and flour. Unlike in South Africa where the women carried a lot of goods for resale back in Zimbabwe, the women returned with little for resale in Zimbabwe from Zambia.

Due to low profit margins in Zambia Amai Shingi settled for South Africa as her preferred destination. She went to *Vryheid* and KwaZulu Natal on a monthly basis. Generally because of the fixed unfavourable foreign currency rates in the official markets something like SAR1 to Z\$140 many informal cross-border traders like Amai Shingi changed their money in the foreign currency parallel markets rates where a SAR1 could fetch as much as Z\$1000. Amai Shingi felt that Zimbabwean custom officials were generally too strict and sometimes conducted body searches. She thought officers should avoid becoming overzealous in their dealings with informal cross-border traders.

Amai Shingi was a devout Christian who belonged to the Salvation Army. She took care of her sick mother and father. She cared for some of her sisters' and brothers' children. She was a member of at least two credit and



savings associations. Members could borrow money but made a 10% interest on repayment of funds at the end of each month. Amai Shingi had a lot of cross-border trade experience and knew how to overcome trade obstacles. She had spent nearly half of her life working as a cross-border trader and had been the main income earner in her household yet she acknowledged that biblically the man is the head of the house she respected this religious ruling.

#### ***Case 4: Amai Tsitsi***

Amai Tsitsi a 32-year-old married woman has four children three sons and a daughter, sons aged 14 were in form one, the 12 year-old in grade six, the 9-year-old in grade four and lastly a six-year-old daughter in grade one. She left schooling in form three her parents could no longer afford to pay for her education. She came to Harare from her rural home in 1987 and married the following year in 1988. Amai Tsitsi lives in rented accommodation. Her urban household consists of herself, her husband, her four children, plus a sister-in-law in grade one, a cousin aged 20, a niece aged 21 and a domestic worker aged 22. Amai Tsitsi is in the poverty coping socio-economic category. She also looked after her mother who stayed in Chiredzi and sent her goods on a regular basis. Amai Tsitsi rarely bought goods for her mother-in-law.

She started cross-border trade in 1996. At that time she was a regular visitor to South Africa. A friend initiated her into cross-border trade. For sometime Amai Tsitsi specialised in doilies only. She has since diversified her product portfolio. She started going to Zambia in 1998. Then from 1999 to 2002 she was going to Botswana. She specialised in clothing items. From 2002 she started going to Sango-Chicualacuala border post with Mozambique. Visas are not required for Sango. Many people do travel for the sake of business. The kinds of goods traded at Sango included vegetables, maize, sugar, clothing items, banana, and oranges. She generally travelled to Sango border post on Tuesdays. She brought back from Sango household and grocery items for domestic consumption. These items included grocery items, like rice, tinned foods. She was saving money to purchase a stand, which she accorded a high priority. She however, had a housing property in her name in Beitbridge from which she got rental income of Z\$10 000.

Amai Tsitsi was an active Anglican Church member. She also belonged to two rotating and credit groups. In one of these groups the

members contributed Z\$400 per month. Money could be borrowed at 15% interest rate in return. This group had a membership of 14. The second group is composed of four members. They contribute Z\$10 000 monthly which is given to one of the members. They took turns to get the money.

Amai Tsitsi confessed that her marriage was strained and her husband did not approve of her cross-border trade activities even though he brought in little in terms of household maintenance. He had no regular income. She gave her husband additional income as an allowance. However between herself and her husband each one of them did his/her own things. For her this is what had made her achieve progress and financial stability.

## **Lessons from Case Studies**

The four cases include those who were recently married with five plus years and those who have been married for more than 30 years. Most women tend to defer to husbands or would want to act in ways that give credence to acts of deference. There is always however a minority of married women who tend to defy the old age tradition of deference as is the case of Amai Tsitsi. Crompton and Geran's (1995:26) observation of an increase in the proportion of families in which both husband and wife are income earners and 'the growing proportion of working couples in which the wife earns more than her husband' is rising in North America the process seems to be replicating itself in Third World countries such as Zimbabwe too. Glynn (2010) noted the increase in wives supporting their families something that has been on the increase in recent years both in developed and developing countries. However in Zimbabwe the rise of married women breadwinners is not necessarily a reflection of women's upward mobility and an increase in female wage earning power it might have happened by default mostly due to the negative impact of ESAP on men's jobs and the disastrous land resettlement programme embarked upon by the Government in the post 2000 era. Most of the people who were retrenched and found themselves out of employment were men. Consequently some of the married women had to strategise and find other means to raise an income for household survival.

Breadwinner role is emerging as a major survival and coping strategy of married women called upon to deal with situations of increasing economic disadvantage and impoverishment. Mutopo (2010:465) observed that 'a recent growth of female entrepreneurship in the sale of agricultural food

products from Zimbabwean smallholdings, across the border in South Africa ... has been motivated by the deepening economic, social and political problems in the country'. Cross-border trade in food by women some of them are married is seen as a strategy to deal with economic disadvantage and impoverishment. In three of the four cases noted above the married women are in the poverty coping category. Cross-border activities had allowed them to stay afloat in the midst of the economic meltdown in Zimbabwe.

The four cases presented in this article do show how in the context of economic challenges married women had moved from the traditional setup of the dominance of domestic wifely household roles to that of economic success, entrepreneurship and breadwinner status. All the women appear to be of humble beginnings uninitiated in the world of business entrepreneurship yet the picture that emerges as they began to engage in survival economic modes through cross-border trading activities is that of well school shrewd entrepreneurs who are able to adjust and take advantage of business opportunities in the environment. The above cases reflect on the experiences of women on the move. The story being told of Zimbabwean cross-border married women breadwinners is replicated in the case of narratives of three Chinese women cited by Newendorp (2010) in a special issue of *International Migration*. Just like in the Zimbabwean cases three Chinese married women who had migrated from mainland China to Hong Kong and decided to engage in wage labour reveal a story of challenges, family tensions, coping with split families, hard work, sacrifice, success and salvation. Newendorp (2010:88) citing Siufung one of the three married women in the study noted that 'Siufung's discussion of her work life was animated; she spoke about her long working hours, the difficulties she had undergone to get to her present position of responsibility, and the sense of accomplishment'. For a married woman being a breadwinner is no easy walk and yet it is a highly potentially rewarding and fulfilling experience. This is to a large extent the same experience of the four women in this article. They were happy to be doing what they had done and were determined to succeed and appeared to be succeeding. Newendorp (2010:96) concluded by noting that the narratives of the three Chinese women immigrants in Hong Kong 'seem to support well-documented ethnographic accounts of the advantages that women may experience in power relationships ... through processes of migration that introduce women to new value systems, wage-earning possibilities and so on'.

One key area of interest that has strong implications in terms of shared burdens is related to women's housework workload as they find themselves increasingly engaged in activities outside the home in order to put food on the table for their households. None of the four married women breadwinners expected their men to take up housework. As one of the women noted '*hazviiti kuti baba vaite basa remumba*' (it's unheard of for a husband to do household work). Being a bread winner did not bring relief in terms of housework. It is possible that some husbands do a great deal of housework but their wives would not acknowledge this in public as this would make them appear to be the bad wife. Thebauld (2010:334) observed that 'across diverse national contexts the role of a man, as a breadwinner in the family is a central aspect of hegemonic masculinity'. Thebauld (2010:349) further noted that 'the hegemonic gender expectation that men should be breadwinners provides a fruitful way of understanding how gender expectations play themselves out in implicit spousal exchanges between housework and income'. Thebauld (2010:330) pointed out from the outset that there is an abundance of literature 'that demonstrates that bargaining over the division of labour in the household is not typically characterised by a one-to-one exchange between income and household work'. In fact she noted that in some instances in a few cases where men are dependent on wives they did far much less housework than they would normal do. All the women in my sample acknowledged that *baba ndivo musoro wemba* (the man/husband is the head of the household). A husband doing housework would be a contradiction hence the attempt by the married women breadwinners to resolve this by not demanding or expecting their husbands to do housework. In the process the women end up carrying a multiplicity of burdens.

Household headship is closely linked to issues related to decision making. Breadwinner status did not necessarily confirm headship on the women. This is something noted by Calvalho (1998:190) who observed that 'in many cases women's growing centrality in contributing to and managing the household budget did not mean an improvement in social status'. Women are caught up in a double bind. As good wives they must be seen to defer to their financially dependent husbands. Amai Tendai, Amai Tafara and Amai Shingi involved their husbands in decisions concerning investment, cross-border trade and other family and social related aspects of their lives. Amai Tsitsi is an interesting case she did not invest nor make joint decisions with her husband. Reasons for this were not pursued though she stressed that it

was this independent pursuit of goals that had let her to success. Increasingly more women might opt for this type of independence in household management. This might be an indication of weakening of traditional holds on wives.

Amai Tendai, Amai Tafara and Amai Shingi presented a traditionalist outlook of life where a wife is expected to be subservient to her husband. They even go to great pains to try to shield their husbands from the pain of lack of financial resources by giving them a financial allowance to spend as they like. The married women in the study shielded their husbands from public scrutiny. They did not fault their husbands for failing to support the family financially. For them what was important was that a family/household had *baba* (father). This brought about respectability and stability on the part of children. The women's behaviour in my study is similar to that observed by Mundy (2012). Mundy (2012:5) observed that 'married women ... go to great lengths to praise their stay-at-home husbands for what they do, to suggest that identity can attach to resources other than salary'.

While the study did not explore in detail issues related to gender violence there are glimpses of possibilities in this direction as reflected in the reported tensions in Amai Tsitsi's household. While Amai Tsitsi did not hint on spousal violence this is an area where some men when they feel inadequate and jealous about their wives' successes in business and personal life end up resorting to violence to assert their manhood. However while living with a retrenched, pensioned and non-working husband is potentially stressful all the women valued their marriages. They were determined to save their marriages firstly by investing their energies in productive work that put food on the table and secondly by privileging the husband's household headship status. It appears that outside the traditional formal sector jobs men found the going tough and men were not innovative enough to succeed financially compared to their wives.

## **Power and the Gendered Nature of Social Relations**

The married woman breadwinner status did not result in apparent shifts in marital power relations for the women in the study. None of the women in the study talked about gender equality. Despite all the evidence that the four women cases were highly successful economically this did not translate into gender equality in the home. It looked like shifts in power relations taking

place in the rest of society did not reach out to influence the domestic sphere. While the husband's status increasingly became shake women are at pains to present an image of subservience. They place less demands on their househusbands, unemployed and/or husbands earning less income. As noted in Muzvidziwa (2001:174) 'rather than producing autonomy among married women, the breadwinner status could be seen as representing an intensification of the condition of powerless and the state of female subordination'. However this is no longer a universal condition as there are women like Amai Tsitsi who are beginning to challenge patriarchy albeit with limited success. The increase in married women breadwinners points to a bright future as exemplified by studies by Terregrosa (2011) where the reverse gender is taking shape in countries like the United States where women are beginning to outshine men in a number of areas such as education and in the economy. While shifts in power relations might appear slow and rather insignificant Mutopo (2010) observed that there was clear evidence of real change in husband-wife relations within households where women brought in an income settling for joint decisions.

Kulik's (2011:427) observation that 'the question of gender equality in the household remains complex' is true for the married women bread winners in my study. Kulik (2011:427) further notes that 'although women's participation in the economic domain has increased men's involvement in caring for children and in maintaining the household has not increased to the same extent'. None of the women in the study acknowledged the husband's contribution in terms of childcare and housework roles. Drago, Black and Wooden (2004) note that the rise of the married woman breadwinner is there for all to see but in some instances it is temporary though in other situations the breadwinner status is much more enduring. This has had varying impacts on relations between couples. While improved gender equity in the home and market is not that noticeable there is evidence that in some instances married women breadwinner status has produced positive results by promoting gender equity at the domestic level (Drago, Black & Wooden). However, there is the observation that gender role reversal is rare and that men's commitment to an ideology of equity /equality does not imply taking over traditional female roles like housework. This is also a trend observed in the study reported in this article.

The rise of married women breadwinners as reflected by the cases in this article has a bearing on household power dynamics. It cannot continue

forever being business as usual. Amai Tsitsi is a case indicating possible future trends. As Mundy (2012:4/5) note in the face of women's rising power and changing expectations, many men experience an existential crisis. When a woman takes on the role of primary breadwinner, it takes away an essential part of many men's identity: that of provider ....So when you take that away, men have nowhere to turn for guidance. There is no map through the wilderness.

A process of renegotiation of gender roles including the male provider identity seems to be taking place for the married women breadwinners in my study.

Scott *et al.* (2012) noted the successes of Avon in South Africa which promotes entrepreneurship in order to assist women to escape from poverty. The Avon study calls upon the adoption of pragmatic feminism that puts emphasis on what works in redressing gender inequities and that in some instances the capitalist condition through entrepreneurship can be mobilised to bring about gender equality. Improving the financial status of women like the case of women breadwinners reported in this article can be a liberating influence contributing to improved gender relations. Among the Avon beneficiary married women 46% were primary breadwinners yet only 10% of them considered themselves to be heads of households. In the light of structural violence women's deference and seeming obedience might be another strategy to survive. Issues raised in the Avon study by Scott *et al.* (2012) reflect closely on what the cases in the study reported in this article concerning married women breadwinners.

Hamber (2010) drawing on examples from South Africa observed that structural changes and the struggle for gender justice must continue. While gender inequalities persist there is all the indication that the system has been disrupted and this could lead to positive outcomes in the long run. The situation of married women breadwinners presents us with an opportunity to see what works and areas that need improvement. As Hamber (2012:86) observed there is a need to harness 'all opportunities for further change and in so doing encourage a sustainable positive peace that allows both men and women to reach their full social, economic and political potential'. There should be less focus on negative and violent masculinities but more on what leads to greater participation in the economy by women especially married women.

## **The Notion of Entanglement, Empowered Women or Disempowered Women**

Entanglement is a quantum physics concept that describes the way particles of matter interact with each other. They exhibit a high degree of interconnectedness. Particles are entangled with each other in pairs and retain some degree of connectedness or correlation. Entanglement retains elements of unpredictability of phenomenon. Objects are always described with reference to each other. Another key notion in entanglement is the notion of multiple viewpoints as a result of differing interpretations. There is always what one might call a simultaneous presence. Entanglement also refers to a complicated, compromising, confused relationship or situation. It is about involvement and interaction. This concept is very useful in our quest to understand the complex nature of the lives of married breadwinners. Breadwinner status as exemplified by the lives of the four married women presented in this article represents in a way Sarah Nuttall's (2009) notion of entanglement. Nuttall explores the notion of entanglement in her book through readings of literature, new media and forms of paintings. She examines issues relating to sameness and difference in ways that illuminate on post-apartheid life worlds in South Africa. Nuttall seeks to explore the contradictory mixture of issues like innovation and inertia, loss, violence and xenophobia and the rise of the new South Africa premised on a new set of democratic progressive values. Nuttall's approach is very useful in our quest to understand the lived experiences of the married women breadwinners.

Rao (2012:28) points out that 'togetherness, more than autonomy or independence, is central to conjugal relations. Men and women exercise agency in shaping mutual relationships involving personal feelings and emotions'. Entanglement should enable us to view marital relations as far much more than simple issues of domination and subordination. It therefore makes sense when the four women privilege togetherness as opposed to equity issues in marriage. Deeply embedded in the psyche of married women is the desirability of marriage. This is why married women breadwinners in the study tried hard to ensure that their breadwinner status did not challenge the perceived headship of husbands. In discussing issues of power and autonomy it might be useful to go beyond tangibles such as income and breadwinner status to focus on intangibles such as mutuality, love and companionship.

The notion of entanglement is also seen in the way the women re-



acted to patriarchal forces. The married women breadwinners were highly religious. They tended to back up their deference to their husbands by citing biblical exhortations that recognize the man as the head of the household. They observed though that while St Paul taught that wives must obey their husbands by the same token husbands were to love their wives. Generally the women seem to be going along with church teaching that put an emphasis on male headship. By appearing to be colluding in their own oppression the women were much more effective in undermining the traditional set up of male headship. By appearing to be going along with patriarchy the women were much more effective in negotiating a stake in decisions affecting the household. The position of none or minimally contributing husbands would become increasingly untenable and was likely to result in multiple possibilities like the case of Amai Tsitsi's or other compromises and possibilities were likely to emerge.

The idea of entanglement with confusing contradicting tendencies co-existing best describes the lives of the four married women breadwinners described in this article. Breadwinner status is both empowering and disempowering. This is something noted by Drago Black and Wooden (2004) who noted the lack of role reversal despite the rise of married women as breadwinners but at the same time note the occurrence of profound changes in families which include gender equity. A similar situation is observed by Mutopo (2010) who noted that while things might appear the same real changes are happening in households in terms of shared decision making and the centrality of women traders' contributions to the household budget. Thebaud, (2010) also observed that bargaining of roles at the domestic levels has resulted in minimal shifts despite of the rise of married women as breadwinners. The notion of entanglement helps us to understand the situation of married women breadwinners in the context of the socio-cultural and economic specificities of women. Married woman breadwinner status can lead to a sense of loss, confusion and uncomfortable feelings in the wife. This is what Chesley (2011) observed in the USA. Chesley (2011:655) noted that 'Melissa whose husband Richard stayed at home for a year after a layoff, describes how she was eventually uncomfortable having her husband at home, despite being enthusiastic initially, because of her growing feeling that he should be working'. In other words married breadwinner status can be both a source of empowerment as well as a source of disempowerment for wives.

## **Conclusion**

The issues raised in this article help to clarify notions of the breadwinner status of married women. The rise of married women who are primary or sole income earners for their households following the adoption of ESAP as official policy in 1991 and the economic meltdown following the 2000 land invasions in Zimbabwe is a reality. Married women breadwinners do exist they are there and signs are that they are on the increase and in some sectors like cross-border trade are dominant and are able to contribute meaningfully to household maintenance. The breadwinner status has added to the triple roles of women instead of diminishing their household responsibilities. What is clear from the reported case studies is that shifts that have resulted in an increasing number of married women taking up the breadwinner role have not produced similar shifts in terms of shared responsibilities at the domestic household level. All the married women in the study continue to perform the role of housework as their primary role despite assuming breadwinner status. The paradox is that the married women breadwinners continue to justify the gendered household level division of labour on the basis of both tradition and religion. The renegotiation of roles at the domestic level is yet to occur though one can hypothesise that it is only a matter of time before this begins to happen. In the meantime there is evidence that shows that gender relations are deeply rooted in patriarchy and are supported by an ideology that continue to privilege men as compared to their wives.

The emergent of independent married women breadwinners is a far much more complex process which embraces equality notions as well as the continued subordination of women at the domestic and public domains. Nuttall's notion of entanglement characterised by paradox and embracing both sameness and difference, order and confusion helps to explain the situation of married women breadwinners. An area that is likely to take centre stage in future discussions of married women breadwinners is in relation of issues of power and control at the household level. The impression one gets from the discussions in the article is that this remains an uncontested area. There is evidence that some women are beginning to publicly subvert male authority albeit with some success. For the majority of women they continue to subvert the patriarchal forces by pretending to be going along with the system when their actions point otherwise. More studies need to be done in the area of women breadwinners. This will contribute to a better

understanding of the impact in the long term of breadwinner wives and secondary breadwinner or house husbands.

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### *Contributors*

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