

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

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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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