



GENDER AND
FEMINIST
MEDITATIONS ON
WOMEN'S POLITICAL
PARTICIPATION

DIKELEDI A. MOKOENA
AND
SHARON A. OMOTOSO
(EDITORS)



Gender and Feminist Meditations on Women's Political Participation

Dikeledi A. Mokoena & Sharon A. Omotoso (Eds)



UJ Press

Gender and Feminist Meditations on Women's Political Participation

Published by UJ Press
University of Johannesburg
Library
Auckland Park Kingsway Campus
PO Box 524
Auckland Park
2006
<https://ujpress.uj.ac.za/>

Compilation © Dikeledi A. Mokoena & Sharon A. Omotoso 2025
Chapters © Author(s) 2025
Published Edition © Dikeledi A. Mokoena & Sharon A. Omotoso 2025
First published 2025

<https://doi.org/10.64449/9780639890142>
978-0-6398901-3-5 (Paperback)
978-0-6398901-4-2 (PDF)
978-0-6398901-5-9 (EPUB)
978-0-6398901-6-6 (XML)

This publication had been submitted to a rigorous double-blind peer-review process prior to publication and all recommendations by the reviewers were considered and implemented before publication.

Proofreading: Apostrophe Academic & Professional Editing Services
Cover design: Hester Roets, UJ Graphic Design Studio
Typeset in 9/13pt Merriweather Light



Contents


Prelude	1
<i>Dikeledi A. Mokoena, Sharon A. Omotoso</i>	
Impact of Social Media on Political Participation among Women in Ile-Ife Community	27
<i>Damilola Taiye Agbalajobi, Matthew Temitope Adewole, Ifeoluwa Emmanuel Odeyemi</i>	
Women’s Participation in the AU’s Peace and Security Architecture: A Look at Gender Relations in Conflict Management in Africa	71
<i>Georgette Arielle Djoufan Fotsing</i>	
Minority within Minorities: A Critique of Cultural Practices which Influence Gender Inequalities among the Nambya in Zimbabwe.	97
<i>Wilson Zivave</i>	
Active Participation and Representation but Lack of Agency: The Role of Political Participation of Women in Rural Areas in Achieving SDG 5, North-West Province, South Africa	127
<i>Tshegofatso Hazel Tomodi</i>	
Systemic Barriers to Women in Politics: A Reflection on Ghana’s 2020 General Elections	145
<i>Emmanuel Graham</i>	

Qualitative Comparative Analysis of Conditions Necessary for Increasing the Percentage of Women in African Parliaments	173
<i>Dikeledi A. Mokoena</i>	
Gendering Leadership, Mediating Feminist Political Futures: Mawugbe and the Decolonial Proposal in ‘In The Chest Of A Woman’ (2008)	209
<i>Christabel Aba Sam</i>	
Stella Nyanzi the Activist-Philosopher	235
<i>Sarah Setlaelo</i>	




Prelude

Dikeledi A. Mokoena 

*Anthropology and Development Studies
University of Johannesburg 
Johannesburg, South Africa*

Sharon A. Omotoso 

*Institute for the Future of Knowledge
University of Johannesburg 
Johannesburg, South Africa
&
Institute of African Studies,
University of Ibadan 
Ibadan, Nigeria*

In the great efforts to reclaim Africa's history of political influence, a surge of educational information has been promulgated to rewrite African women into mainstream political history. Documentaries, films, blogs and books on Africa's ancient and pre-colonial herstories have been published to re-centre African women's agency in political narratives. The common denominator among some of the publications is to educate and remind us that the story of women's subjugation is not the only narrative that represents the realities of African women. The narrative of triumph, leadership and resistance have also all been captured through literary, scholarly articles and publications that highlight African women's roles in national liberation struggles (Tillinghast & McFadden 1991, Frates 1993, Lyons 2004, Magadla 2023, Mignanti 2024), African women's anticolonial resistances (Hiralal 2017, Bouka 2020), women's organization through social movements (Dieng 2023, Omotoso & Faniyi 2024) as well as African women leaders continue to be documented.

Although strides have been made, African women continue to face challenges in the political sphere (Mlotshwa 2021). Almost four decades ago, a historian by the name of Jane Parpart averred



that “despite women’s active and important role in the nationalist struggles, decolonization has been primarily a transfer of power from one group of men to another” (Parpart 1986:1). Despite the normalization of the overrepresentation of men in the political sphere, African women have pursued political office and have implemented various strategies to bolster their participation in politics (Bauer & Brittons, 2006). More recently, some parts of Africa have shown a bifurcation of women’s political participation from political representation. For example, Omotoso & Akanni (2024) call attention to how patriarchal structures in Nigeria have devised a new way of reducing women to cheerleaders in politics as they are relegated when it comes to substantive representation. Although women continue to exercise their agency across political spaces, they still encounter coercive power, as their very existence in the public political sphere can be understood as a form of resistance to patriarchal marginalization in politics.

In the pursuit of political parity, UN Women 2023 data reveals that Africa has shown the highest level of improvement in terms of the deployment of women in parliament. For instance, on the first of January 2024, the global proportion of women in parliament stood at a dismal 26.9% which only indicated a 0.4% increase from the previous year (IPU 2024). Africa’s score above this global average, at 27.3 %, ranks it third following Europe at 31.6% and America at 35.%. Amidst these, there are some milestones that should be acknowledged, for instance Ghanaian legislators have passed a gender quota of 30% for women in national decision-making positions (Reuters 2024) which would aid the country resolve the crisis of underrepresentation (14.5%) of women in parliament as it had been noted in 2020 (IPU 2020). Despite these milestones, there remains challenges in terms of achieving political parity and improving the participation of African women in politics. It is also crucial to be cognizant of Africa’s heterogeneity thus the importance of the distinct contexts in various African countries.

Africa at a glance

There is patriarchal hostility in the electoral landscapes of some African countries. Nyuykongé (2022) revealed how women in the

post-Bashir Sudan, have been underrepresented in the transition administration. Similarly in Burkina Faso, the military Junta's take over has not led to fair gender representation in leadership. The latest data about women in Burkinabe parliament indicates that women constitute 18.31% of parliament (Inter-Parliamentary Union 2022). Another Junta associated state is Chad and its presidential candidates reflected patriarchal status quo in Chadian political leadership. The country's transitional president has elected the president of Chad possibly extending the Deby family dynasty for another 30 years as per tradition. The president did promise a youth and gender inclusive government but gender activists in Chad have criticized the president for allowing a reduction of women ministers from 12 to 8 out of a total of 35 seats in cabinet (Kindzeka 2024). This criticism comes from women leaders and women's non-governmental organizations. The smallest parliament in Africa in terms of the number of members is Comoros, and out of a total of 24 seats, only 4 Comorian women serve as parliamentarians (IPU 2024).

The size of a country has no implication on the deterrence of patriarchal domination in politics. In small countries such as Comoros and populous countries such as South Africa and Nigeria, the dominance of males in the political sphere remains normative. South Africa had an election in May 2024 and the patriarchal views and attitudes again affected women's political agency and leadership. The outcome resulted in the backsliding of women's representation in parliament (Mokoena 2024). Dessie and Boateng (2021:2) have shown that male political leaders have a "less favourable attitude towards the relevance or importance of women's participation on elected and policy-making positions". This attitude is attributed to patriarchal socialization and views about women and leadership. This is a similar situation in Nigeria's 2023 election where only 3.1% of women made it into the Senate (Invicta 2023). Another case of women's underrepresentation in parliament is Guinea Bissau. The elections held in 2023 in Guinea Bissau resulted in the deployment of 9.8% of women in parliament. Galvao and Laranjeiro (2019) remind us of the role women in Guinea Bissau played in the liberation struggle, yet women are excluded

from political office because of socio-political discriminations that the third chapter in this book helps us understand (Lundy, Fernandes and Lartley 2016).

Despite the resurgence of conservative politics and their implication of gender equality, women's activism in the civil society space continues to have a significant impact on women's political participation. This is especially true in Libya where the percentage of women in politics remains 16.5% despite "...450 women campaigning for the 200 available party and individual seats in 2014" for house of representatives (Amer 2023:no page). Alnaas and Pratt (2015:157) argued that the post-Gaddafi Libya has been characterized by gender discourse resulting in women's bodies becoming a battlefield as post-Gaddafi revolution political actors "control women's bodies as part of exercising their authority in the New Libya".

Gender parity is a means to a broader goal of not only engendering just politics in Africa, but it is also aimed at socio-cultural change including economic transformation in African societies through women's policy influence. Violence against women in politics remains a common phenomenon (Phungula 2024), and it can be simply read as a backlash against women's presence in a deeply patriarchal space. Moreover, women in political office have reported cases of gendered discrimination, for instance women parliamentarians in Alnaas and Pratt's (2015) study complained of unfair treatment by the male dominated General National congress. The research in Libya revealed that male politicians would "cut short their [women's] speeches by turning off the microphone whilst they are speaking or ignore their indications to speak during GNC assembly" (Alnaas and Pratt 2015:164). The experiences of Libya's women in parliament reflect the patriarchal and hostile nature of politics and the experiences of women in politics is compounded by heterogenous contexts that yield diversely intersecting oppressions for women in politics.

In cases where there is relative support for women's participation in politics patriarchy continues to prevail. For

instance, writing in the Mauritanian context, Lesourd (2019:14) stated that:

“The 26 women parliamentarians may debate in their respective chambers on behalf of a particular region or village... in the badiyya, men hold the reigns of local power in the eyes of all, and therefore retain their place in the system of power”

Similar patriarchal attitude is noted in South Africa when analysing the critique made by former South African minister who suggested that men in the South African ruling party ‘think the presidency is reserved for them’ (Masuabi 2022:no page). This attitude is evident across many African countries which continue to have men at the helm of political office.

Theoretical Analysis of Patriarchal Political Sphere

As noted above, the political sphere is a site of crude performance of power where different actors seek to advance interests that have negative implications for gender justice. This is evident in corporatized democracies, namely corporatocracies, where elections are a contest of periodic access to state power and economic resources. Politics remain a patriarchal site of privilege that serves the interests of the elite. Patriarchy is a feminist concept which can be conceptualized as a system or systems producing and reproducing gendered and intersectional inequalities, men’s power and women’s subordination (Ortner 2022). It is a system of social, political and economic structures and practices, in which men as a group/category govern, oppress and exploit women as a group/category. Patriarchy is both structural and ideological, a hierarchical organization of social institutions and social relations: “structurally, patriarchy is a hierarchical organization of social institutions and social relationships that allows men to maintain positions of power, privilege, and leadership in society. As an ideology, patriarchy rationalizes itself. This means that it provides ways of creating acceptance of subordination not only by those who benefit from such actions but also by those who are placed in such subordinate

positions by society” (Álvarez del Cuvillo, Macioce and Strid 2003: 67).

Patriarchy is an articulation of power exerted systematically against women in society in favour of men’s privileges. It is a useful instrument for political interlocutors with power grabbing motives and interests. The domineering motive behind patriarchal political participation is the thirst for power and the efforts to sustain it. Power in the political sphere is hardly negotiable, it is appropriated, often ruthlessly captured, and the patriarchal actors involved in politics have created and cemented the ideology of domination over women thus the outcomes witnessed in the examples mentioned earlier. What Africa needs is a politics of transformation that centres the voices of the marginalized with the intention to transform. An instrument that could result in a substantive transformation of Africa is feminist politics, despite feminism being relatively misunderstood as a divisive instrument.

The concept of feminism still conjures up misconceptions, especially in some parts of the African continent where they maintain ideas that feminism destroys families. What is often misunderstood is that feminism destabilizes and challenges the normalization of institutions that are unjust towards women and the society in general. The latter statement indicates to the reader that the dividends of feminism do not only benefit women, but they are also meant to improve the conditions of existence for all of humanity, all living creatures and the environment. Of course, in many instances arguments have been made that feminism is un-African thus the hesitant uptake in countries such as Burkina Faso. This rationale stems from the idea that feminism is an imperial project perceived to destabilize African families hence the reluctance of the label, feminism or the rejection of the concept of feminism by several prominent African women writers and women’s rights activists such as Buchi Emecheta (Amari and Maoui 2021).

The work of Ogundipe-Leslie (1994) identifies the qualms with feminism, particularly Western feminism when she emphasized that there is no intention for African women

Prelude

to seek to westernize themselves in the name of feminism. This means that there remains great love and appreciation for African culture, it is only the aspects of African culture that are oppressive that African women seek to change. This brings us the dimension of cultural imperialism that feminism is believed to import to the African context. What is misunderstood is that cultural imperialism has been rendered the fabric of many African patriarchal societies. Modern coloniality imposed was embraced with its cultural ethic, values, behaviours and institutions. It blended with the African cultural ways of being, reshaped ethics, values and behaviours that ultimately became hostile and marginalizing towards women in Africa. Many scholars have been arguing that gender relations in pre-colonial Africa are distinct from the modern colonial gender order, which is true, nevertheless, many African societies have been influenced by imperial cultures that warranted the existence of feminism as noted in the history of the suffragettes in the West where women were only allowed the right to vote in the 20th century and archives indicate silence and exclusion of highly documented political institutions of Greece and Rome.

Ancient civilisations in Africa reveal a distinct history when it comes to women in power and at a broader societal level, the concepts of *lekgotla* (councils) indicate that women were not excluded from organizing themselves in the public spheres. Martin's (2018) work expounds the role of Nigerian women in the nationalist movement. This work is a reminder of the consequence of epistemic injustice, bias and Eurocentricity. When a writer has a specific perspective and narrow understanding of matters, anything that does not resemble what they know and expect to see is either unseen or degraded. This is evident in the context of political history of Africa. Colonizers upon arrival in Africa, expected to find specific forms of political organization, and in the absence or ignorance of what was different from their modes of organizing, a declaration of absence was reached thus igniting a wave of silences, omissions and epistemic marginalization of political institutions that existed in Africa. Nevertheless, Western cultural imperialism in Africa did not manage to annihilate all African

ethos, cultures, behaviours, institutions and systems. It has tainted them severely and are only at risk of total eradication in hyper urbanized Euro-modernized contexts where liberalism permeates deeply and erodes local cultures. In a context where Africans' ways of being have been tainted (depending on the degrees of impact), feminism as a response, remains crucial.

Beasley (1999) explained that the misunderstanding of feminism can also be attributed to the fact that "feminism's complexity and diversity provide obstacles to those wishing to gain a satisfactory grasp of its meanings." (Beasley 1999: xi). This means there are different variants of feminism. For instance, liberal feminism essentially values individual freedom which can be facilitated by the state, to ensure women enjoy liberties that they deserve. Most liberal feminists "believe that a capitalist democracy with a bill of individual rights can and will produce legislation sufficient for redressing any pattern of unjust treatment falling to women as a group for reasons of gender" (Almender 1994:299). Almender also noted that capitalist democracy is not the only political economic avenue that liberal feminists believe women's individual freedoms can be maximized, "some egalitarian-liberal feminists embrace liberal socialism" (Baehr 2007:no page). To reveal the complexity of feminism as highlighted by Beasley (1999), liberal feminism is sub-divided into egalitarian-liberal feminism which perceives freedom as "personal and political autonomy and classical-liberal feminism which aligns to the doctrine of free market fundamentalism, individualism and limited state intervention (Baehr 2007).

Liberal feminism dominates modern-colonial political discourse about women's participation in politics (and the economy) without significantly addressing the systematic root of women's oppression. Another popular strand is Marxist feminism which highlights the role of class and gender as principles of power that lead to women's subordination. This is followed by socialist feminism, which slightly deviates from Marxist Feminism by rendering gender and capitalism as equal organizing instruments of oppression unlike the analysis that

Prelude

acknowledged gender but privileges class Armstrong (2020). Marxist feminism;

explores how gender ideologies of femininity and masculinity structure production in capitalism. It challenges the primacy of capitalist value to determine social values, both the exchange value in wages and the surplus value of profit by making the use value of reproductive labour visible (Armstrong 2020:no page).

Marxist Feminism has also been subject to critique. For instance, the marriage of Marxism and feminism has been like the marriage of husband and wife depicted in English common law: Marxism and feminism are one, and that one is Marxism. Recent attempts to integrate Marxism and feminism have proven unsatisfactory to some feminists because it includes the feminist struggle into the “larger” struggle against capital. To continue the simile further, either we need a healthier marriage, or we need a divorce” (Hartmann 1981:2). Although Hartmann (1981) speaks about feminism aiding in centralizing sexuality in productive processes that structure society into class, her analysis was critiqued for not factoring sexual orientations (Riddiough 1981). The “conceptual tensions between second wave feminism and traditional lesbian and gay studies has been overcome by queer feminism which offers a paradigm of understanding gender, sex and sexuality...” (Marinucci 2022:no page). Queer feminists help us understand how facets of women’s oppression are constituted when we privilege sexuality which remains an institutionalized facet of oppression and criminalization for queer women.

Another critique is that Hartmann’s analysis of Marxism and feminism were blind to racial organization of capitalist societies (Joseph 1981) because racism is one of the key facets that capitalist production has used to reproduce specific social reproductive processes. Black feminism emerged as a critique against feminism’s “white solipsism which *means to think, imagine and speak as if whiteness described the world*” (Rich cited by Taylor 1998: 234, italics added). It calls for an analysis that draws from radical feminism and looks at the intersections of class, race, gender, sexual orientation, ableism, religion,

including other facets of oppression. This is because “Black feminist thought sees these distinctive systems of oppression as being part of one overarching structure of domination” (Collins 1990:221).

African feminism is enriched by the previous approaches, and it calls for a historical context in which African women find themselves in because of the intersections of colonial legacies, imperialism, class, gender, culture, race, religion, ethnicity, nationhood and rurality. Ossome (2020) reiterated that African feminism is premised on African women’s standpoint and its first conceptual challenge is to understand gender as a socially constructed analytic, geared at explaining the marginalization of women and their relegation to the domestic sphere as well as their exclusion from the public sphere (McFadden 2016). The concept of gender has been subject to discourse and Oyewumi (1998, 2004) offers a compelling perspective on gender from an African epistemic vantage point. Nevertheless, gender was conceptualized as an invention to explain women’s marginalization through roles and duties that created and sustained “practices of exploitation and exclusion from power” (McFadden 2016:2). Drawing from the plethora of intellectual contributions of “politically radical African women concerned with liberating Africa by focusing on women’s liberation.” Mama (2019:1) defines African feminism as “a radical proposition: it refers to the liberatory political philosophies, theories, writings, research and cultural production, as well as the organizing work of the transnational community of feminists from Africa”. She highlights that African feminism has been influenced by diverse ideologies and political movements. Based on incidences that have shaped African women’s movements, Mama’s (2019) work helps us note that Africanism Feminism is also not homogenous.

Some African feminists draw from liberal emancipatory reformist perspectives, others are shaped by communist and socialist theories while others are driven by pan-Africanist or nationalist approaches. The different theories, perspectives and approaches to Feminisms may be understood as epistemic instruments that shape the praxis of change for women’s liberation, emancipation and freedom including the justice for

Prelude

all members of society. African feminisms help us analyse power that is enacted through many African states. During the anti-colonial struggle and later the attainment of independence, African states (colonial and post-colonial) did not address African's women's marginalization. Mama (2019:1) went on to say

“Africa's new states often hesitated or reverted to conservative patriarchal views when it came to extending freedom and equality to African women. It is as citizens of new nations that 20th century African women have formed independent feminist movements that continue to demand freedom, equality and rights, for example, by seeking freedom of movement, political representation, educational and economic equality, and perhaps most commonly of all, freedom from sex and gender-based violence.”

It can also assist in explaining the implication of certain approaches to political economy of development on women and society in general. Mama's (2019) work captures the dynamic African feminist political thought and the myriad ways in which they enacted their political participation. Feminist political thought is characterized by the engendering of a plethora of political theories and ideologies by revealing and challenging the intersections of power and women's marginality including other minority groups. Depending on the foundational theoretical strand, feminist political thought not only seeks to include women, but it also offers tools to re-imagine and rebirth a just world through various dimensions of political participation (Bari 2005). “Political participation may be defined as “those activities of citizens that attempt to influence the structure of government, the selection of government authorities or the policies of government” (Conway 2001:231). This definition is useful as a starting premise, but it is limiting if applied in the African context where political participation is shaped by different avenues of African feminist thought and activism.

As Mama (2019) indicated, African feminist political thought, which has proliferated across the African Union, can be traced to a myriad of social movements that African women

partake in. Social movements play an influential role in the shaping the psychology of political actions and Africa feminist thought can be found through expressions such as “performance art, visual culture, fashion and style, and *other forms of* bodily expression are all shared through education systems” (Mama 2019:2). Given the myriad forms of expressions that embody feminist thought and by consequence political choice and actions, Conway’s (2001) concept of political participation is extended to encapsulate activities (individual or collective through social movements or political parties) and expressions (through thought, text, public speaking, artistic performance, fashion). By extension, a sync is required to address the gap identified as an “unhealthy separation of political representation from political participation, which allows for the patriarchal political players to widen gaps among women consequently sustaining a trend of more women seen but few acting” (Omotoso & Akanni, 2024:133).

Owiso and Sefah (2017) have also reminded us of the persistence of low levels of women’s political representation globally. Writing in the context of Kenya and Ghana, the scholars highlight several structural barriers to women’s political participation such as the lack of affirmative action to ensure women are included in the highest levels of decision making. Nevertheless, the Ghana and Kenya case studies have revealed significant steady growth of women being represented in politics. The 2024 elections in Ghana have culminated into the first female vice president in the history of the country. Prof Naana Jane Opoku-Agyemang, whose presidential journey is discussed thoroughly in chapter three, is from the opposition party which won the elections. Women’s exclusion continues even though their inclusion and equality in the democratic process has been recognized as a precondition for democracy, rather than a consequence of democratic governance.

In an attempt to correct the above wrong, article 9 of the African Women’s Rights Protocol obliges African states to take specific positive action to ensure participation by women in governance and political life. The article provides as follows:

1. States Parties shall take specific positive action to promote

participative governance and the equal participation of women in the political life of their countries through affirmative action, enabling national legislation and other measures to ensure that: (a) women participate without any discrimination in all elections; (b) women are represented equally at all levels with men in all electoral processes; (c) women are equal partners with men at all levels of development and implementation of state policies and development programmes. 2. States Parties shall ensure increased and effective representation and participation of women at all levels of decision-making. The protocol articulates and legislatively anchors women's political participation in Africa. The ratification of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action of 1995 has not led to gender parity in many countries globally let alone the 30% threshold in many countries in Africa (UN Women 2024). Many "states have ratified international conventions and protocols on gender equality and women political participation, the low level of women's representation in government and politics may be considered a violation of women's fundamental democratic rights. African government's public commitments have not been materialized into better protection for women and support victims and this has made women play outside the political ground" (Mlambo and Kapingura 2019:2).

Besides lack of institutional support for women to partake in public office, Conway (2001) explored and articulated legal (i.e.: discriminatory laws etc.), sociological (i.e.: gender roles and low levels of education, disproportionate impoverishment etc.), psychological (sexist attitudes and gender stereotypes etc.), rational choice (resource limitations, violence against women in politics) and political processes have been explanatory approaches to women's persistent low levels of political participation in the context of public leadership. Goetz and Hassim (2003) noted that political parties globally still view women as electoral liabilities thus the hesitancy to add their names to party electoral lists or submit an equal number of female and male candidates. "While parties are the key gatekeepers to elected office, *leftist parties* are more likely to accommodate women's representational claims and to

incorporate concerns about gender equality into their electoral platforms and policy priorities” (Goetz and Hassim 2003:8). It is also crucial to note that the support of women in electoral processes does not result in automatic uptake of feminist policies by parties and governments. Feminist policies are perceived to have high social and financial cost (Goetz and Hassim 2003). “It is now apparent that particular types of parties and party systems combined with particular types of electoral systems, are more amenable to women’s representation (though not necessarily to feminist policies)” (Goetz and Hassim 2003:8).

Iwanaga (2008:101) explained that;

Attempting to increase the numbers of women in public office alone may not solve the issue of gender equality, but arguments in favour of more women in politics are compelling. Increasing the proportion of women holding office in various levels of government may have significant consequences for the distinctive impact they are likely to have on public policy.

Thus, mass participation of women in politics, albeit not feminist in intention, may yield feminist consequences for public policy. Having female presidents is not a sufficient means to achieving gender parity in parliaments. Countries with female presidents have not resulted in equal representation of women in parliament however female presidents such as that of Tanzania have made significant attempts to ensure more than 30% of women are represented in cabinet and parliament. “[W]omen who have successfully entered government have tended to build governance systems that are more stable and transparent, and more often accepted as legitimate by society” (Institute for Inclusive Security 2009:1). Tokenistic representation of women in politics cannot yield gendered influence on public policy this it is crucial to advance women’s agency in political office and to invest in capacitation of women who participate in the political sphere. In the context of puppetry for the purpose of securing once’s position in politics, women ought to work towards strategically forging solidarity with other women in politics to navigate a challenging political realm, where not only their security of political office

is at risk due to political kingpins who reward those who are loyal to them by granting positions, but sexual exploitation is also probable.

Tokenistic representation or not, too many women in politics are faced with a plethora of condescending challenges. A 2008 report by the Inter-parliamentary Union (IPU) reminds us that “ increasing the numbers of women in decision-making bodies is just the first step in ensuring that the political agenda is decided jointly by men and women.” (Inter-Parliamentary Union 2008:15). The notion of tokenism and positions through sex constitute perceptions that women politicians also need to navigate among other stigmas and gender stereotypes. The concept of tokenism needs to be challenged as well because it deprives women of agency and autonomy. The psychological barriers are vast and require multifaceted intervention. “Women’s access is affected by different factors, including attitudes about the role of women in society, lack of support of political parties and bias among the electorate. But electorate arrangements and political will are amongst the most important factors....” (Waring 2010:6). Thus, the fifth chapter helps to understand the necessary conditions needed to maximize women in public leadership, however, it is crucial to reiterate that such is only a fraction of the important interventions that are needed to ensure that all barriers and challenges affecting women’s participation in politics is addressed.

The eight chapters in this book draw from gender and feminist perspectives as deployed in different academic fields. For instance, the first chapter deploys a feminist lens in political sociology, the second applies feminism in peace and security followed by a socio-anthropological account of patriarchy, another one is a feminist literary analysis while the last chapter belongs in the field of feminist philosophy. Although not all the chapters deploy an explicit feminist philosophy, all the chapters contribute to our awareness of the state of public political sphere and how engendered women in the sphere are affected. The chapters also remind us of agentic women who challenge patriarchy in politics, whether actively or by virtue of their presence in the sphere.

The first chapter by Damilola Taiye Agbalajobi, Mathew Temitope Adewole and Ifeoluwa Emmanuel Odeyemi is about role of social media in politics, especially the facilitation of the inclusion of women in the political sphere. The first chapter locates itself within existing discourse of digital media which has revolutionized traditional means of political engagement. This chapter reiterates the crucial role of social media in enhancing women's political participation. The chapter clarifies the factors that hinder women's political participation in the Ife community of Nigeria and offers social media as an instrument to maximize women's political participation. The authors show us that the utility of social media for political participation is shaped by factors such as age, class, gender, education, religion, marital status and employment influence utility of social media. This means that digital access ought to be maximized along with investing in infrastructure that enables women in remote villages of Africa to also participate politically.

The second chapter by Fotsing Georgette Arielle Djoufan is on the AU Peace and Security Council which is the AU's decision-making body on security issues. It has set up a key pillar: the African Peace and Security Architecture. Djoufan argues that given the importance of this architecture for the African continent, women should be involved at all levels. In doing so, the chapter provides readers with an opportunity to question and deconstruct the positivist theories that are prevalent today in peace and security studies. The chapter offers ideas into mechanisms for enhancing women's participation in peacebuilding and security in Africa through exploring social relations and power relations between men and women in the Chad basin. The chapter draws on post-colonial theory and feminism as a framework. She analyses the international and regional mechanisms for women's participation in the African Union's security architecture.

Wilson Zivave's chapter is third and is a contribution towards gender and power discourse where the author reminds us that there remain societies in Africa where women are marginalized. The chapter entails an in-depth articulation of the barriers that continue to affect women's active citizenship.

Prelude

The chapter also unpacks how patriarchy manifests by highlighting cultural practices that are embedded in marriage, ritual practice and family dynamics which are antithetical to women's agency. The author's analysis shows us that some women in Africa remain second class citizens and minorities because of patriarchy. The study utilized a phenomenological approach to understand women in Nambya, it unmask the logic of hegemonic masculinities that disempower women under the pretext of cultural preservation. The chapter's focus on a minority ethnic group will help debunk cultural practices and values which disempower women and create gender inequality among minority ethnic groups. The chapter recommends the debunking of cultural practices that limit women reach their potential and consequently participation in public life.

Tshegofatso Hazel Tomodi's fourth chapter illuminates local government's progress in terms of the 5th goal of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Despite progress in terms of equal representation of women in political leadership in terms of executive counsellors, mayoral posts and other senior roles, rural women's agency in the local government sphere remains a challenge. The fourth chapter reminds us of the improvements over the years in terms of political participation by women in rural areas. She recommends civic education to address continuous political participation through decision making processes. Tomodi's work is crucial as a reminder of the importance of legitimacy of democratic governments with a high concentration of urban populations that tend to dominate the national political agendas with urban issues. Tomodi's work utilizes a Qualitative method approach to assessing the role of political participation in advancing goal 5 of the SDGs in rural municipalities.

The fifth chapter by Emmanuel Graham offers a retrospective analysis of the 2020 Ghana national elections and the systematic barriers that exist to influence women's participation in politics. The author revealed how political parties in Ghana are not geared towards enhancing female political leadership and representation in higher leadership positions. Graham eloquently argues that although the language

of engendering politics is becoming common, discourse alone is not enough to transform the patriarchal institutions and structures that marginalize women in politics. The author zooms into the vice-presidential candidate of Ghana in the 2020 general elections to show how institutional barriers hampered her campaign. The chapter also shows the ways in which gendered verbal violence was deployed as a tool to harm her campaign and cast doubt on her credentials and capacity to lead. Graham brings to our attention the constitutive elements of patriarchal political spaces which thrive on institutionalized and cultural views about women's place in the public sphere.

While Tomodi's chapter shows the benefits of gender reforms that enabled women's representation in rural areas, the sixth chapter by Dikeledi A. Mokoena offers a comparative analysis of the diverse forms of gendered political reforms that enhance women's representation in political leadership. The chapter looks at the factors that lead to such a high performance in countries that have achieved more than 40% of women representation in parliament. The chapter deployed a fuzzy set Qualitative Comparative analysis approach to ascertain conditions that are necessary for African countries to maximize the number of women in parliament. The configuration of factors that lead to high number of women in parliament are constituted by a constellation of factors such as electoral system, type of quotas, quota targets, reduction of gender gaps in significant indicators and the role of political parties.

The exclusion and marginalization of women in politics has historical and cultural backgrounds that ought to be challenged through policy as noted in the work by Zivave. However, there are other means through the reconfiguration of societal cultures to become more inclusive and that is through fuelling progressive imaginations of inclusive societies in Africa. Christabel Aba Sam's decolonial and feminist literary theoretical analysis of the Mawugbe's play titled 'In the Chest of a Woman' not only shows the role of the arts in configuring political cultures but also how gendered leadership and women's sexualities are re-imagined. Sam calls for unorthodox feminist interventions to challenge fossilized patriarchal norms

and cultures that hamper women's political participation in leadership. This seventh chapter successfully shows how the play serves as a form of radical feminist rude awakening of Mawugbe's audience pertaining to evolving genders and the ways in which women could self-inscribe themselves into the political sphere.

Sarah Setlaelo's chapter as the eighth, offers a philosophical reading of Stella Nyanzi's politics and indicates that she embodies the self-inscription that this work calls for in terms of radical changes needed in societies characterized by patriarchal political cultures. Setlaelo locates Stella Nyanzi in the category of exceptional human beings who have played catalytic roles in disrupting patriarchal norms in rigidly patriarchal political contexts. She deploys Kwame Kyekye and Friedrich Nietzsche's philosophical theories to read Stella Nyanzi the beautifully and radically complex political agent. This chapter entails a convergence of African and European epistemic conceptions to help us understand an influential political figure whose existence cannot be contained by binary logics between communitarianism and individualism. Setlaelo shows us how transcendence manifests through the being of a woman who is assertive and a free spirit. In this sense, the eighth chapter provides the reader with a template of how women have self-inscribed themselves into hostile political spheres.

With the many views presented and issues raised by contributors, we present this book as our meditations on feminist political futures. Amidst the variously identified barriers to women's political futures, we are aware of emerging and malignant challenges including the economics of politics and how women continue to be impoverished in the space (Karam & Ballington 2005); the lack of holistic gender mainstreaming electoral process the menace of godfatherism and clientelism (Oseni 2003, Oyekanmi 2004) and the need to scale up women's political communication strategies (Omotoso 2022). These futures transcend narratives characterized by simplistically blaming 'patriarchy' without deeper understanding of existential trajectories and nuances that edge women out of political spaces and continues to

defeat mentorship efforts of women politicians. We invite all stakeholders to embrace this book as a step further in the scholarship of women's political participation.

References

- Almender R. 1994. Liberal feminism and academic feminism. *Public Affairs Quarterly*, 8(4):299-315.
- Alnaas SM & Pratt N. 2015. Women's bodies in post-revolution Libya, control and resistance. In: M El Said, L Meari & N Pratt (eds). *Rethinking gender in revolutions and resistance: Lessons from the Arab world*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Álvarez del Cuvillo A, Macioce F & Strid S. 2023. Feminist political and legal theories. [Retrieved 17 August 2024] https://www.academia.edu/94312204/Feminist_political_and_legal_theories
- Amari IO & Maoui H. 2021. Buchi Emecheta, a feminist with a small 'f' or a motherist with a big 'M'? *Algerian Journal of Manuscripts*, 17:224-243.
- Amer ND. 2023. Women in Libya engage in protest and politics. *Wilson Center Enheduanna: A blog about Middle East Women's Initiative*, 27 April. [Retrieved 15 January 2024] <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/women-libya-engage-protest-and-politics>
- Armstrong E. 2020. Marxist and socialist feminism. *Study of Women and Gender: Faculty Publications*, Smith College, Northampton MA. [Retrieved] https://scholarworks.smith.edu/swg_facpubs/15
- Baehr AR. 2013. Liberal feminism. *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. [Retrieved] <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/feminism-liberal/>
- Bari F. 2005. Women's political participation: Issues and challenges. In: United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women Expert Group Meeting: Enhancing Participation of Women in Development through an Enabling Environment for Achieving Gender Equality and the Advancement of Women. Bangkok, 8-11 November. [Retrieved 15 January 2024] <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/egm/enabling-environment2005/docs/EGM-WPD-EE-2005-EP.12%20%20draft%20F.pdf>
- Bauer G & Britton EH. 2006. *Women in African parliaments*. United States: Kumarian Press.

Prelude

- Beasley C. 1999. What is feminism? An introduction to feminist theory. London: Sage Publications.
- Bouka Y. 2020. Women, colonial resistance, and decolonization. In: The Palgrave handbook of African women's studies. London.
- Collins PH. 1990. Black feminist thought in the matrix of domination. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, 138(1990):221-238.
- Conway MM. 2001. Women and political participation. *PS: Political Science and Politics*, 34(2):231-233.
- Dessie WA & Boateng JK. 2021. Women and Ethiopian politics: Political leaders' attitude and views on women's effectiveness. *Cogent Social Sciences*, 7(1). <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311886.2021.1948653>
- Dieng RS. 2023. From Yewwu Yewwi to #FreeSenegal: Class, gender and generational dynamics of radical feminist activism in Senegal. *Politics and Gender*, 20(2):478-484. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1743923X2200071X>
- Djemai E & Kevane M. 2023. Effects of education on political engagement in rural Burkina Faso. *World Development*, 165:106-184.
- Dutta R. 2023. Rwanda's 30 percent gender quota led to the world's largest share of women in government. 6 June. [Retrieved 30 May 2025] <https://www.sdgi16.plus/policies/rwandas-30-percent-gender-quota-led-to-the-worlds-largest-share-of-women-in-government/>
- European Union. 2020. European Union Election Observation Mission (EU EOM) to Mozambique final report on the General and Provincial Assembly Elections of 15 October 2019. [Retrieved 30 May 2024] https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/eueom_moz2019_final_report_en.pdf
- Fall IM. 2012. Cape Verde. In: Fall M & Hounkpe M (eds). Election Management Bodies in West Africa: A comparative study of the contribution of electoral commissions to the strengthening of democracy. South Africa: Open Society Foundation:49-75.
- Fauvet P. 2024. Constitutional Council accepts four presidential candidates. *Agência de Informação de Moçambique*, 24 June. [Retrieved 25 October 2024] <https://aimnews.org/2024/06/24/constitutional-council-accepts-four-presidential-candidates/>

Gender and Feminist Meditations

- Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. 1995. The constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. [Retrieved 2 October 2023] <http://www.parliament.am/library/sahmanadrutyunner2019/etovpia.pdf>
- Frates LL. 1993. Women in the South African National Liberation Movement, 1948–1960: An historiographical overview. *Leiden University*, 21(1–2):27–40. <https://doi.org/10.5070/F7211-2016742>
- Galvao I, Laranjeiro C & Jeronimo MB. 2019. Gender struggle in Guinea-Bissau: Women's participation on and off the liberation record. In: N Domingos, M Jeronimo & R Roque (eds). *Resistance and colonialism*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-19167-2_4
- Goetz AM & Hassim S. 2003. No shortcuts to power: African women in politics and policy making. Vol 3. London: Zed Books.
- Gottlieb J. 2016. Great expectations: A field experiment to improve accountability in Mali. *American Journal of Political Science*, 60(1):143–157.
- Hartmann HI. 1981. The unhappy marriage of Marxism and feminism: Towards a more progressive union. In: L Sargent (ed). *Women and revolution: A discussion of the unhappy marriage of Marxism and feminism*. No 2. Canada: South End Press. 1–42.
- Hiralal K. 2017. Women in anti-colonial and nationalist movements: A comparative study of India and South Africa. *Journal of Natal and Zulu History*, 24(1):233–254. <https://doi.org/10.29086/2519-5476/2017/v24n1a11>
- Institute for Inclusive Security. 2009. Strategies for policymakers: Bringing women into government. Washington, DC. [Retrieved 18 August 2024] <https://www.inclusivesecurity.org/publication/strategies-for-policymakers-bringing-women-into-government/>
- Inter-Parliamentary Union. 2008. Women in politics: 2008. Geneva: Inter-Parliamentary Union. [Retrieved 20 July 2024] <https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/infographics/2019-07/women-in-politics-2008>
- Inter-Parliamentary Union. 2020. Ghana: Parliament. Data on women. Available at: <https://data.ipu.org/parliament/GH/GH-LC01/data-on-women>

- Inter-Parliamentary Union. 2023. Impact report 2022. Geneva: Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU). [Retrieved 20 August 2024] <https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/about-ipu/2023-03/impact-report-2022>
- Inter-Parliamentary Union. 2024. Comoros: Assembly of the Union – Data on women. [Retrieved 30 May 2025] <https://data.ipu.org/parliament/KM/KM-LC01/data-on-women/>
- Invictus Africa. 2023. Women representation in African parliament. [Retrieved 21 August 2024] <https://invictusafrica.org/women-representation-in-african-parliaments-wraps/>
- Iwanaga K. 2008. Women’s political representation in Japan. In: Iwanaga K (ed). Women’s political participation and representation in Asia. *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 12(2):177–201.
- Karam A & Ballington J. 2005. Women in parliament: Beyond numbers. Stockholm: IDEA Publishing.
- Kindzeka ME. 2024. Chadian women contest underrepresentation, say it undermines national dialogue recommendation. *VoaNews*, 30 June. [Retrieved 18 August 2024] <https://www.voanews.com/a/chadian-women-contest-underrepresentation-say-it-undermines-national-dialogue-recommendation/7640572.html>
- Kubayi M. 2022. Minister Mmamoloko Kubayi: Leadership Summit. *South African Government*, 25 August. [Retrieved 30 May 2025] <https://www.gov.za/news/speeches/minister-mmamoloko-kubayi-leadership-summit-25-aug-2022>
- Kubayi M. 2022. Minister Mmamoloko Kubayi: Leadership Summit. *South African Government*, 25 August. [Retrieved 30 May 2025] <https://www.gov.za/news/speeches/minister-mmamoloko-kubayi-leadership-summit-25-aug-2022>
- Lesourd C. 2019. The lipstick on the edge of the well: Mauritanian women and political power (1960–2014). In: F Sadiqi (ed). Women rights in the aftermath of the Arab Spring. London: Palgrave Macmillan. 77–93.
- Lundy B, Fenandes Jr MR & Lartley K. 2016. The integrity of women in re-making a nation: The case of Guinea-Bissau. *Journal of Global Initiatives: Policy, Pedagogy, Perspective*, 11(1):59–76.
- Lyons AC. 2004. A profile of financially at-risk college students. *The Journal of Consumer Affairs*, 38:56–80.

Gender and Feminist Meditations

- Magadla S. 2023. Guerrillas and combative mothers: Women and the armed struggle in South Africa. *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 51(1-2):86-87. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02589346.2024.2335035>
- Mama A. 2019. African feminist thought. *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of African History*.
- Marinucci M. 2022. Feminism is queer: The intimate connection between queer and feminist theory. London: Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Martin M. 2018. Ojo Nro: An intellectual history of Nigerian women's nationalism in an umbrella organization, 1947-1967. PhD thesis. East Lansing: Michigan State University. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses, 10813698.
- Martin P & Martin Fiesta B. 2022. WBN bolsters Nigerian women's political leadership in the wake of legislative disappointment. *International Republican Institute*. [Retrieved 18 August 2024] <https://www.iri.org/news/wdn-bolsters-nigerian-womens-political-leadership-in-the-wake-of-legislative-disappointment/>
- Mazama A. 1994. An Afrocentric approach to language planning. *Journal of Black Studies*, 25(1):3-19. <https://doi.org/10.1177/002193479402500101>
- McFadden P. 2016. Becoming contemporary African feminists: Herstories, legacies and the new imperatives. Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung.
- Mignanti C. 2024. Gender politics and politics in gender in Iringa District (Tanzania). *International Journal of African and Asiatic Studies*, 28(1):n.p. <https://doi.org/10.13135/1825-263X/9946>
- Mlambo C & Kapingura F. 2019. Factors influencing women political participation: The case of the SADC region. *Cogent Social Sciences*, 5(1):n.p. 10.1080/23311886.2019.1681048
- Mlotshwa NR. 2021. Students' perceptions towards careers in the hospitality industry. Master's thesis. Durban: Durban University of Technology.
- Mokoena DA. 2024. Gender parity set to backslide in the National Assembly post elections. *Sowetan*, 8 June. [Retrieved 18 August 2024] <https://www.sowetanlive.co.za/opinion/columnists/2024-06-01-dikeledi-mokoena-gender-parity-set-to-backslide-in-the-national-assembly-post-elections/>

Prelude

- Nyuykonge C. 2022. Sudan at a crossroads. *Training for Peace Policy Brief*. African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes (ACCORD), Institute for Security Studies (ISS) and Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI). [Retrieved 18 August 2024] https://trainingforpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/TfP_Sudan-at-Crossroads_Policy-Brief.pdf
- Ogundipe-Leslie M. 1994. *Re-creating ourselves: African women & critical transformations*. Trenton, NJ: African World Press Inc.
- Omotoso SA & Faniyi OM. 2024. The End SARS women's coalition: Exploring the persistence of women's movements through feminist generations. *Feminist Africa*, 5(1):125-151. [Retrieved 18 August 2024] <https://feministafrica.net/2024/06/27/the-end-sars-womens-coalition-exploring-the-persistence-of-womens-125-movements-through-feminist-generations/>
- Omotoso S. A. and Akanni B. O. (2024): Tokenism and Women's Political Communication in the Pursuit of Gender Egalitarianism in Nigeria, *Communication, Culture and Critique*, Vol. 17 (2): 127-136. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ccc/tcae018>
- Omotoso SA. 2022. Nina Mba and women's political participation: Filling the political communication gap. In: Adeboye O & Awe B (eds). *Essays in honour of Nina Emma Mba*. Ben and Nina Mba Foundation: 162-184.
- Ortner SB. 2022. Patriarchy. *Feminist Anthropology*, 3(2):307-314.
- Oseni T. 2003. Women and development in Nigeria. *The Hope*, Akure, 23 December.
- Ossome L. 2020. African feminism. In: Rabaka R (ed). *Routledge handbook of Pan-Africanism*. London: Routledge. 159-170.
- Owiso R & Sefah B. 2017. Actualising women's participation in politics and governance in Africa: The case of Kenya and Ghana. *African Human Rights Yearbook*, 1:263.
- Oyekanmi FD. 2004. Socioeconomic dimensions of gender equality in Nigeria. In: Akinboye SO (ed). *Paradox of gender equality in Nigerian politics*. Lagos: Concept Publications Limited.
- Oyewumi O. 1998. De-confounding gender: Feminist theorizing and Western culture, a comment on Hawkesworth's confounding gender. *Signs*, 23(4):1049-1062.


Gender and Feminist Meditations

- Oyewumi O. 2004. Conceptualizing gender: Eurocentric foundations of feminist concepts and the challenge of African epistemologies. In: Amadiume I & An-Na'im A (eds). *African gender scholarship: Concepts, methodologies and paradigms*. Dakar: CODESRIA. 1–8.
- Parpart JL. 1986. *Women and the state in Africa*. East Lansing, Michigan: Michigan State University. Office of Women in International Development. Working Paper No 117.
- Parpart JL. 1986. *Women and the state in Africa*. East Lansing: Michigan State University, Office of Women in International Development. (Working paper). [Retrieved 20 August 2024] <https://data.ipu.org/parliament/KM/KM-LC01/data-on-women/>
- Phungula N. 2024. Political violence directed to female politicians in SADC. *African Journal of Peace and Conflict Studies* (formerly *Ubuntu: Journal of Conflict and Social Transformation*), 13(1):69–87. [Retrieved 19 August 2024] https://hdl.handle.net/10520/ejc-aa_ubuntu1_v13_n1_a4
- Reuters. 2024. Ghana Parliament passes law to quicken women's empowerment. *Reuters*. [Retrieved 18 August 2024] <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/ghana-parliament-passes-law-quicken-womens-empowerment-2024-07-30/>
- Riddiough C. 1981. Socialism, feminism, and gay/lesbian liberation. In: Saxe L (ed). *Women and revolution*. New York: South End Press. 71–91.
- Sweetman PD, McCormick F, Rice G, Baillie MG, Dickson A & Mitchell GF. 1984. Archaeological excavations at Shop Street, Drogheda, Co. Louth. *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy: Archaeology, Culture, History, Literature*, 84C:171–224. [Retrieved 30 May 2025] <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25506116>
- Taylor U. 1998. The historical evolution of Black feminist theory and praxis. *Journal of Black Studies*, 29(2):234–253.
- Tillinghast M & McFadden P. 1991. Women and national liberation movements. *Yale Journal of Law and Liberation*. [Retrieved 18 August 2024] <https://digitalcommons.law.yale.edu/yjll/vol2/iss1/1>
- Waring M. 2010. *Women's political participation*. Auckland: Institute of Public Policy, Auckland University of Technology.




Impact of Social Media on Political Participation among Women in Ile-Ife Community


Damilola Taiye Agbalajobi 

*Department of Political Science
Obafemi Awolowo University 
Ondo, Nigeria*

Matthew Temitope Adewole 

*Department of Political Science
Obafemi Awolowo University 
Ondo, Nigeria*

Ifeoluwa Emmanuel Odeyemi 

*Department of Political Science
Obafemi Awolowo University 
Ondo, Nigeria*

Abstract

Rising as a strong platform for human communication; social media presents new opportunities for participation in socio-political affairs. Empowering ordinary individuals to be heard on a large scale, technological advancement vis-à-vis emergence of social media presents new solution-options to gaps in political communication and civic engagements. Notwithstanding, a deficit in women political participation remains a problem within African communities, particularly in Nigeria. Thus, this study examines issues in women political participation and the use of social media as a tool of political participation among Nigerian women. The study covered Ile-Ife community in the Ife-Central Local Government Area of Osun State. The study examines the factors that hinder and facilitate women political participation in

Ile-Ife. It also investigates the knowledge of and the utilization of social media platforms by the Ile-Ife women, assesses how it impacts their level of political participation as well as appraises their perception about the impacts of this on Nigerian government and politics. A questionnaire was administered on randomly selected 384 women within Ile-Ife; calculated at 95% confidence level with a 5% margin of error. Data gathered were analysed by descriptive and inferential statistics. The study established that social media, can still further be maximized as instruments of civic engagements and political participation by the Nigerian community women.

Keywords: Human Communication, Social Media, Political Participation, Civic Engagements.

Introduction

Social media has no doubt become a global phenomenon which has attracted and connected an extensive population all around the world and many people connect to social network sites daily to participate in different online activities. Before the advent of this new media, older conventional media such as radio, television, newspapers and magazines that ruled the world had directly or indirectly limited popular participation in the civic activities and the electoral process. This is because there were limitations on how the citizens could convey their views about politics, governance, electoral process and the community affairs.

Access to social media and other internet facilities is having democratizing effects for citizens by creating opportunities for more engagements in civic activities and the political process (Okafor 2023; Joinson 2008; Lenhart 2009). The internet, which is the basis of social media, has been embraced as an undeniable force for public good. In this sense Wael Ghonim, (2024) claimed that if you want to liberate a society, just give them the Internet. The Internet has been heralded as an effective weapon, resulting in what Kristof (2009) labelled as the “quintessential 21st- century conflict” in which on one side are government men firing bullets and on the other side are young protesters firing ‘tweets’.

The value of the communication experience has undergone a sea-change; from the need to share it, to the need to share in it (Zamani and Spanaki 2023; Adibe, Odoemelam and Chibuwe 2012). Technology and social media have brought power back to the people, such that currently, any person can communicate from anywhere, to any place, at any time and about anything. Social media is flexible, accessible and affordable thus promoting democratization of media, altering the meaning of geographic distance and allowing an increase in volume and speed of communication. With the advent of social media, activists and advocacy groups have also increased rapidly and formerly under-voiced individuals or the marginalized groups now enjoy new opportunities to be heard.

Scholars avers that the social media has become a veritable tool for interacting and mobilizing citizens towards active participation in Nigeria's political sphere (Abdulyakeen and Yusuf 2022; Jimada 2019; Ifukor 2010; Okoro and Dirim 2009). Internet penetration in Nigeria vis-à-vis social media is increasingly complementing citizens' political participation, changing interrelationships between citizens, organizations and public institutions, and also expanding notions of political behaviour and participation. The emergence and spread of the use of social media via the internet has allowed many underprivileged individuals and groups to participate in civic affairs such as political and community issues and this includes women across various communities.

This study, therefore, examines this phenomenon by considering the use of social media as a tool for political participation among community women in Nigeria. The study focused on Ile-Ife community in the Ife-Central Local Government Area of Osun State. It examined factors that hinder and facilitate political participation among women in Ile-Ife. The study also investigates the knowledge of and the utilization of social media platforms and further appraises Ile-Ife women's perception on the impact of social media on Nigerian government and politics. It also tests if age, education, marital statuses and religion affect the use of social media and political participation of women. Beside this introduction, this

study comprises of an overview of concepts and issues on social media, women political participation and the impacts of social media on government. Methodology is presented next followed by the data presentation as well as analyses. The discussion of findings and conclusion then follows. All these are with a view to identify the importance of the use of the social media as a tool for political participation among women within a Nigerian community.

Social Media and Women Political Participation

This section reviews literature on social media and women political participation. The review focuses on concepts and the rise of social media, issues of women political participation and the impacts of social media on civic participation and government in Nigeria.

The Concept and Rise of Social Media

Social media are interactive web-based media platforms that offer citizens opportunities and places to connect, share opinions, experiences, views, contacts, knowledge, expertise among other things. It is a new genre of media that focuses on social networking, allowing users to express themselves, interact with friends, share information with greater freedom as well as publish their views about issues. The roots of social media stretch far deeper than one might imagine. Although it seems like a new trend, sites like *Facebook*, *Twitter* and *YouTube* are the natural outcome of many centuries of technological advancement and social media development. Ansari and Khan (2020) and ISSAfrica.org (2012) observes that it the interactive or collaborative nature of these tools that makes them social. Barlett-Brag (2006) described social media as a body of applications that augment group interaction, shared spaces for collaboration, social connections and aggregates information exchanges in a web-based environment. Mayfield (2008) sees social media as online platforms that promote participation, openness, conversation and connectedness whilst Nation (2010) sees it as social instruments

of communication, different from the conventional instruments like newspapers or magazines.

Social media are seen as online content, created by people using highly accessible and scalable publishing technologies to disseminate information across geographical boundaries, providing interaction among people. Allen, Ekwugha and Chukwulete (2011) claimed that there are roughly six categories within social media, namely: social news, social network, media sharing, blogs and forums, micro blogging and bookmarking sites. In a related manner, Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) identified six types of social media, namely: collaborative projects (such as wikis and social bookmarking applications), blogs, content communities (sharing of media content between users such as Google docs and YouTube), virtual game worlds, virtual social worlds (such as Second Life) and social networking sites (such as *Facebook*, *LinkedIn*, and *Twitter*).

Social media emerged with the advent of the internet and the World Wide Web. It is usually associated with the term “Web 2.0” which is used to describe websites that provide opportunity for users to interact with the sender of a message. Nwabueze (2012) observes that “Web 2.0” refers to the state of interactive websites which emerged from 2004 as opposed to “Web1.0” period. Web-based communities, social networking sites, video-sharing sites, wikis and blogs, are among examples of web 2.0 sites (Allen *et al.* 2011). Social media continues to expand and change with new applications appearing every day. Social media activities are carried out on Social Media Networks (SMNs) as social media tools are made available by emerging information communication technology (ICTs) facilities.

SMNs are subsets of ICTs defined as online tools and utilities that allow communication of information, participation and collaboration online. Social networking via the World Wide Web has several defining characteristics. Boyd (2007) in Mason and Rennie (2008) expressed that primarily, it involves users generating their own content individually and collaboratively. Social networking is part of a larger group of social media tools that allow for the creation and exchange of user-generated

content. Within Africa, social media practices have materialized in unprecedented capacities. It has led to revolutions; encouraged, demanded and monitored best practices during elections and are also contributing to a larger dynamic of promoting growth on the continent through accountability and conversation (Ekpe 2017).

Across the continents, the most visited websites, the most common and known social network sites containing similar as well as different features include *Facebook*, *MySpace*, *YouTube*, Web-blogs, and *LinkedIn*. Most of these social media sites, which are now commonly known around the world, emerged locally with the purpose of sharing photos, personal information, videos, profiles and related content (Mejias 2005; Ajjan and Hartshorne 2008). Similarly, *Facebook*, launched in 2004, was initially launched as a social networking website exclusively for Harvard students, however, as at December 2022, there were around 28 million *Facebook* users in Nigeria alone, accounting for 12.7 percent of the population (Statista 2023). To interact with others, *Facebook* users update their 'status', write on 'walls', 'like' pages, upload photos and videos, communicate via messages or chat, share news and advertise innovations or products and view notifications. Most importantly, *Facebook* users are able to create and join interest groups, which translate mostly to offline civic activities.

Twitter is another important social media facility; launched in 2006 as a real-time information network that connects users to the latest information about what a user finds interesting. Its users communicate via 'Tweets' which are short posts limited to 140 characters and 'follow' or subscribe to the updates of other users, some of which include conventional media sources, groups or politicians (Twitter 2016). *Twitter* has approximately 450 million monthly active users as at 2022, which is 396 million more users than it had in 2010 and its audience has increased by more than 40% since 2018 (Statista 2023). *Twitter* has shown its political socialization and civic engagement potential such that citizens follow and are made aware of political and civic events through this medium.

Another social media network is *YouTube* which was launched in 2005 as the first SMN dedicated solely to uploading and sharing personal video where users can also leave comments on videos (Cloud 2006; Hopkins 2006; Graham 2005). On *YouTube*, an average of 2,500 new videos are uploaded every minute, amounting to 183 hours of video content, with an average video length of 4.4 minutes (YouTube 2023; Statista 2023). These video contents, which are open to comments, usually include music, plays as well as political comments, opinions and campaigns. Weblogs, mostly referred to as blogs, is another frequently utilized social media platform which was launched in 1994 (Blood 2000). On a 'blog', new content can instantly be added to a site via a web interface and it is accessible for both audience and bloggers. Through these social media, citizens' political consciousness and awareness can be increased and opinions can be formed while videos, comments and news of civic affairs are uploaded, shared and commented on by the citizenry.

Issues of Women Political Participation in Nigeria

Participation refers to the act of taking part in some activities of life including social, economic or political spheres. Political participation refers to involvement in events or activities and influencing the selection of political representatives or the actions of governance. Scholars such as Agbalajobi (2021); Oladapo, Atela and Agbalajobi (2021) and Abubakar (2011) see political participation as the involvement of people (not necessarily active) in any political process before a collective decision has arrived. It entails citizens' engagement in the discourse of socio-political and economic issues which serve as yardsticks for choosing leaders. It may also include assessing the capabilities of the incumbencies and advocating ways of ameliorating societal ills for a country. For this research, political participation refers to engagement in political activities and action. It is the involvement of women in political affairs of the country, including taking active part in all political activities such as civic education, demonstrations, attending rallies, political conferences, voter registration, party campaigns, party elections, national

campaigns, national elections and even their active involvement in the legislative debates.

Nigeria maintains a federal democratic constitution, boasting inclusiveness and equality. It is expected that this will facilitate Nigerian women's involvement in politics and further prompt an admission of women to one-third of positions in governing bodies, to serve as an initial step in the pursuit of gender equity and women's empowerment (UNIFEM 2003). However, the under-representation of Nigerian women in politics is both descriptive and substantive (Agbalajobi 2021; Chaudhuri and Heller 2002; Tremblay and Pelletier 2000). Nussbaum (2002) claimed that Nigerian women's under-representation in the public and social domain has affected Nigerian women's empowerment and social status.

Nigerian women's under-representation is as a result of several impediments which have been identified as limiting civic engagement of Nigerian women and their participation on the social, economic, and political fronts. These barriers have been grouped as cultural, religious, economic, legal and perception factors. The Nigerian culture, social conventions and values had stereotyped and relegated the women to being lesser humans who should not be involved in public affairs (Agbalajobi 2010; Adisa *et al.* 2024). Religion is an accomplice in the stereotyping of Nigerian women and it reinforces the barriers that prevent them from participating politically, economically and socially to the extent that some religious sects do not even allow women to speak out in public, they can only communicate through the men (Para-Mallam 2006; Chitongo & Ojogiwa 2021).

The stark poverty that confronts Nigerian women is another impediment to civic engagement. Under stifling economic conditions, women have less access to education, credit information, skills, loans, and health care which are all crucial to attaining financial independence. Perception of politics is another impediment as politics is perceived as a dirty vocation that is reserved for unrefined people who have little scruples with bending the rules, subverting due process and manipulating popular will. Public political participation

as a woman is often considered 'unladylike' such that female politicians are often perceived to be divorcees and have marital failures (Mohanty 1988). The violent, 'do-or-die' nature of politics in Nigeria is hardly veiled and thus hinders women involvement.

The works of Burns, Schlozman and Verba (2001) and the related analysis by Verba, Burns and Schlozman (1997) as well as Verba, Schlozman and Brady (1995) have demonstrated that gender differences in political participation are always substantial for population at large. Part of their findings are that men score significantly higher on measures of interest in politics, knowledge of politics, consumption of news media and feelings of political efficacy. Burns *et al.* (2001) argued that the potential of civic education and skills development, which is the basis for an active engagement of women in policy processes, has not been fully tapped into in the formal and informal education and learning systems. Discriminatory laws and policies, low levels of education as well as poverty contribute to the widespread exclusion of women from civic and political life thus women remain at the periphery of political processes.

Verba and Nie (1987) as well as Dalton (2008) among others have suggested ways to overcome the impediments and increase women civic engagement as well as their rate of political participation. Self-mindfulness by identifying areas of strengths and weaknesses, leadership training for women, creating personal connections and relationships, sensitization and social awareness about the social issues as well as organizational clarity are identified ways to increase women civic engagement. Other factors that have been identified as influencing civic engagement include education, income level, resources, information, efficacy and incentives. Putnam (2000) argues that education is the strongest predictor of civic engagement, although Verba *et al.* (1995) ranked it after interest in politics, civic skills and information. Rosenstone and Hansen (1993) find education considerably more important for participation in government than for electoral politics. Education seems to shape all forms of civic involvement and specifically needs to be improved for women to increase their

civic engagement level (Kitanova 2020; Uslaner 2023; Dow 2009; Burns, Schlozman and Verba 1997; Kenski and Jamieson 2000). Education is thus very important in the process of civic engagement and it serves as the most important key to social and political engagement.

Verba *et al.* (1995) also emphasized the importance of income level and personal wealth as a factor influencing women civic and political participation. Other scholars have contended that higher income people are more likely to join voluntary associations (Guterbock and Fries 1997). High income is a powerful determinant of political organization affiliation and membership, informal community activity, contact of public officials, campaign work as well signing petitions which are all relatively demanding forms of civic and political involvement (Rosenstone and Hansen 1992; Verba *et al.* 1995). Related to income (financial resource) are the non-financial resources including civic skills and abilities. People with greater organizational and communicational skills are more likely to participate in social and political life. These resources and skills include writing, bringing people together, making presentations, contacting public officials, and making decisions; each of which can translate to political or social activism (Verba *et al.* 1995). These skills are more important for local political and social activity than for national politics (Miller 2001). Civic skills are among the most important determinants of civic engagement in general and far surpasses income and education (Verba *et al.* 1995) and similarly to education and income, are important for the most demanding forms of civic engagement. Information, efficacy, and incentives are factors in enhancing women civic engagement and well informed people and citizens, who feel more powerful, are more likely to participate in all forms of civic and political life. Since education is also a strong determinant of engagement, more highly educated people are thus more likely to be well-informed people.

Impacts of Social Media on Government and Political Participation

The impacts of social media, on politics in general as well as women political participation, cannot be stressed enough. Social media has brought power back to the people such that any person can communicate from anywhere, to any place, at any time about anything (Matisi, 2021). Social media has shaped political communication by deepening the segmentation of audiences, weakening the gate-keeping roles and standard breaking news practice of the traditional media. It is flexible, accessible and affordable thus promoting democratization of media, altering the meaning of geographic distance as well as allowing an increase in volume and the speed of communication. The advent of social media has also led to activists and advocacy groups increasing rapidly with formerly under-voiced individuals or marginalized groups now enjoying new opportunities to be heard.

Many authors have expressed the importance of social networking sites and media like *Twitter*, *Facebook*, *YouTube* and *Blogs* to lead efforts to a more democratic society, by increasing civic and political participation by citizens. Grant *et al.* (2010) claimed that politicians use social media sites to reach out to constituents, with varying success. Burns *et al.* (2009) indicates that Iranian citizens also used *Twitter* as means of expressing their opinions during their 2007 election. Ifukor (2010) claimed that the use of electronic media during the 2007 Nigerian elections revealed that there is a relationship between social media discourse and the process of political empowerment. In essence, the emergence and use of social media influences the process of empowering citizens politically.

Shirky (2011) expatiates that the more promising way to think about social media, is as a long-term tool that can strengthen civil society, the overall public sphere and compensate for the disadvantages of undisciplined groups by reducing the costs of coordination. Social media has increased shared awareness by propagating messages through social networks. Abubakar (2011) explained that the coming of social media in the last few years is rapidly changing the situation

as there are online platforms that now serve as new “political capitals” that people resort to and use to participate in political discourse. Min, (2021); Can and Alatas (2019); Kweon and Kim (2011) maintain that social media have become the main source of personal orientation, anonymous interactivities and social community on a variety of issues that involve politics and political discourse. Mayfield (2010) attributes social media capacity in boosting participation to its connectedness and textual/audio-visual characteristics appeal. Okoro and Nwafor (2013) agree that social media networks including the *Facebook*, *Twitter*, *YouTube*, *2go* and *Blackberry* services have made civic participation much easier, faster and cost effective.

The arrival of social media has greatly enhanced all aspects of human communication and the participatory, interactive and cost-effective nature of this new technology has made everyone who can use it, a mass communicator. This brings to fruition the prediction of Marshall McLuhan in 1964, that the world would someday become a “global village”, where what happens in one part of the world would be known instantly and simultaneously worldwide (Adibe and Okoro 2013). Adibe and Odoemelum (2011) observe that this new communication media has increasingly helped human society to be more aware of each other. This agrees with the submissions of Baran (1998) that as media shrinks the world, people will become more involved in one another’s lives and will thus form new beneficial relationships. Baran’s argument, as supported by Okoro and Nwafor (2013) and One (2017) is relevant to this discourse as in many parts of the world today, individuals, groups, organizations and even nations are taking advantage of the opportunities provided by social media platforms to mobilize millions of people to support and advance their course.

In Nigeria, social media has become a veritable tool for active participation in civic and political activities, specifically during elections and the usage of social media for political participation and communication during elections was employed. Internet penetration in Nigeria vis-à-vis social media is increasingly complementing citizens’ political participation, changing interrelationships between citizens, organizations,

public institutions and also expanding notions of political behaviour and participation (Ifukor 2010; Okoro and Dirim, 2009). The Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre (2012) established that four key stakeholders in the electoral process, namely: the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), politicians and political parties, the electorate as well as Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) made extensive use of social media during Nigeria's April 2011 general elections. For INEC, social media was basically used to share information on elections and receive feedback from the public. Politicians and political parties used social media primarily to reach out to the voters and campaign for support. The voters used social media to report their experiences and receive election-related information. The CSOs used social media tools to mobilize and educate the electorate as well as to cover and report the outcome of their monitoring of the electoral process. The same has been reported during the 2015 general elections (Odeyemi and Mosunmola 2015) and 2023 general elections. With more Nigerians having access to the internet, this has made social media accessible to many more people but has also made political campaigning more difficult to manage (Idowu 2022; Nabiebu 2022).

Social media has also been used to create awareness and mobilize against activities of anti-state groups such as Boko Haram. This was the case with the Boko Haram attack on Chibok in Borno State that resulted in the kidnapping of over 200 secondary school girls on April 14, 2014 (Amnesty, 2023). When word of the mass-kidnapping made international news, people started speaking out on the internet via use of the hashtag *#bringbackourgirls* as well as posting photos of themselves holding protest signs on their social media. The *#bringbackourgirls* campaign was effective in raising awareness about an atrocity that may have otherwise been largely ignored by the Western media. Nigerian women used *Twitter* to participate in this campaign and social media platforms were used by many women, as well as other individuals and organizations to create awareness about the incident and mount pressure on Jonathan to ensure the rescue of the abducted girls.

Social media has kept women more informed, updated and assisted in exposing societal ills.

Social media is also increasingly being used as a means to improve women education and empowerment in community-led projects and has especially facilitated women engagement in urban governance and election monitoring. Through social media, citizens' political consciousness and awareness has also been increased and opinions formed. Africa Practice (2014) claimed that social media has impacted governance in Nigeria in four critical areas, namely: accountability, civic engagement, branding and sourcing information. Modern technology, where social media belongs, is participatory, interactive and cost-effective. NDI's (2014) research on citizen participation and technology showed that more people are using technology around the world and that it has improved the quality of their political participation. The research (NDI 2014) further explains how social media platforms have made it possible to make quality content accessible to mass audiences in Nigeria and by so doing, have amplified the voices of individuals at the 'bottom,' while enhancing responsiveness among those at the 'top.'

Social media has been a game changer in the civic engagement landscape for women. Okoro and Dirim (2009) cited in Okoro and Nwafor (2013), submitted that it is through these media that people are able to participate freely in discussions relevant to public good. Its unprecedented access has shifted the balance of power between women and governmental institutions. Women are craving for new developments and opportunities through social media channels and have used these mediums to serve as a global platform for their issues, generate and disseminate knowledge as well as to create unified social movements. Social media has enabled women to participate in new forms of engagement beyond the traditional, formal avenues available to them including institutional and governmental avenues, civil society, non-governmental organizations, media and communication amongst others. Social media also provides women with the opportunity to be informally free with the public through online engagement and grants women the chance to participate actively and get involved

fully in the political discourse by adding their voices on issues posted on social media sites (Oladipo and Chukwudi 2023).

Interestingly, social media has also been used to mobilize citizens against government policy and actions in Nigeria thus leading to and encouraging protests as well as promoting accountability. It was used to mobilize citizenry against President Goodluck Ebele Azikiwe Jonathan's hike in the fuel price in January 2012, which was tagged as *Occupy Nigeria*. *Occupy Nigeria* marked the significance of social media in Nigerian politics as the removal of the fuel subsidy by President Jonathan in 2012 led to mass protests, which were organized via *Twitter* thus translating cyber conversations to actual mobilization beyond those platforms. With an estimated tweet every second during the protest, the movement highlighted what Nigerians are capable of, as well as their will to mobilize to demand change from the government (Africa Practice 2013). *Occupy Nigeria* cemented the need for the government and politicians to engage with citizens, which is why many are active on Facebook and Twitter to date.

Across Africa, governments are becoming increasingly careful of the power of social media to mobilize opinions that disagree with them and challenges their authority (Bhanye, Shayamunda, & Tavirai 2023). They have thus attempted to control these online narratives which can be of influence, through tools of censorship, propaganda and disinformation campaigns (Bhanye, Shayamunda, & Tavirai 2023). . To restrict access to information and limit online mobilization, governments now utilize digital surveillance technologies to monitor online activity, identify activists and suppress critical voices that could pose a problem (Bhanye, Shayamunda, & Tavirai 2023). According to Hove and Chenzi (2020), Zimbabwe witnessed more than forty civilian-led demonstrations between January and September 2016, which were caused by failure of the government to address socio-economic and political grievances of the citizens. They further theorise that these protests could not have been instigated in the absence of social media platforms. Unfortunately, the government did not just respond to these calls for reform through widespread

arrests, beatings, torture and abductions of people involved in the protest (Tarisayi 2016), but they also used legislative instruments to silence the demonstrations, which included the banning of public demonstrations and encrypted messaging, the introduction of the Computer Crime and Cybercrime Bill (CCCB) of 2016 as well as remote surveillance of private telephone calls and mobile messaging of citizens (Privacy International 2016).

In Nigeria, the Cybercrimes Act officially criminalizes online activities such as cyberstalking, defamation and spreading false information. According to Eboibi (2017), it was a government response to the increasing rate of fraudsters using the internet after the growth in telecommunications usage and internet penetration that Nigeria experienced in the late 1990s which gave Nigeria the infamous reputation of being the global hub for cybercriminal activity. While this Act presents itself as a solution to a menace, however, there is a concern that it could also be weaponized to stifle free speech and target individuals who criticize the government, especially by using vague provisions that can be broadly interpreted to restrict online expression. Women who speak against injustice and challenge patriarchal norms will not be exempted from this. Bada & Eyongndi (2024) outline the various censorship and monitoring tactics which governments use, such as blocking or filtering certain information on the internet, filtering Domain Name System (DNS), blocking Ips including limiting citizen's internet access in times of civil unrest and demonstrations. This is supported by the case study of the 2020 *EndSars* protests, in which social media channels aided the demonstrations against police brutality as the youth was using them to plan events, disseminate information and create awareness around the world. In response, the Nigerian government placed limitations on social media sites, claiming that the protesters used it to spread false information and it is in light of all these that Jost *et al.*(2018), suggests the possibility of social media hindering political participation as a net effect, by making it easier for governments to disrupt oppositional activities.

The Role of Social Media in Promoting Women's Political Participation

Research has shown that social media can be a game-changer for women's political engagement, providing a platform for them to express themselves, mobilize support and challenge patriarchal norms (Bruno *et al.* 2023). In Malawi, for instance, social media has been instrumental in promoting women's political participation, particularly during elections (Bruno *et al.* 2023). Similarly, in Nigeria, social media played a significant role in the 2011 General Elections, with women using platforms like *Twitter* and *Facebook* to mobilize support and engage in political discussions (Madueke *et al.* 2017). Despite these gains, however, women's political participation in Africa remains limited. According to UN Women, women hold only 24% of national parliamentary seats and 21% of local government leadership positions in Africa (Bizjak and Podergajs, 2024). Social media can help bridge this gap by providing women with a platform to amplify their voices, connect with other women, and access information and resources.

Social media can also be used to mobilize support for women's political candidates and causes. Social media platforms are very useful for fundraising and campaigning and can thus help female candidates reach a wider audience and connect with potential donors and volunteers. Grassroot mobilization is also easier through the use of social media as rallies, protests, and online campaigns can be properly utilized by female candidates to advocate for their rights and raise awareness about critical issues. Yarchi and Samuel-Azran (2018), in a case study of the Israeli 2015 campaign, comparatively investigated the ability of male and female politicians to engage social media users during an election campaign and found out that posts by female politicians generated significantly more user engagement in terms of likes and shares compared to the males. This finding indicates that social media presents greater opportunities to female politicians to promote themselves and improve their status in the political power play.

Social media also provides a platform for women to express themselves, share their experiences, and challenge

patriarchal norms. Women can leverage social media to share their personal stories and experiences thus bring political issues to the humane level and connect with electorates on an emotional level. According to Li and Zhuo (2023), women often use social media for cognitive attention, a means to seek more attention and validation, as well as an outlet for emotional expression. According to Sweinstani, (2019), using digital media as one of the marketing methods for female political candidates proved to have a positive impact on the public perceptions of such candidates, especially as it made it easier for people to know them and for them to get closer to the people.

Social media can provide women with access to information and resources on politics, governance, and leadership as well as enable them to stay informed and engaged in current events as they can build networks and connect with other women, organizations and resources. This confirms the theory by Oladipo & Chukwudi (2023), that social media deserves the credit for the apparent improvement in political awareness in Nigeria. As more people are joining social media networks, they are becoming more politically aware and educated thus directly engaging in elections and devoting more time to political discussions.

Solidifying what role social media plays in boosting women political participation, is referred to as the digital democracy theory. According to Dunan (2020), the old era of democracy made use of conventional patterns that made it difficult for people to be well informed and properly express their opinions. Democratic systems were complex and thus only minimal participation of the public was achieved. Technology and ICT advancement, however, has caused people to change practically every aspect of their lives and embrace virtualization and digitalization (Blühdorn and Butzlaff 2020). Democracy calls for new spaces where the community can be fully involved in democratic life, and this is what digital democracy provides, according to Congge *et al.* (2023).

Gilardi (2016) defines digital democracy as the use of digital media and networks for political and government

purposes. Digital technology possesses a huge influence on democratic processes through political mobilization, campaign strategies and polarization of public opinion. Hardiman (2018) outlines easy access to the acquisition and expression of information for community members as a crucial essence of digital democracy. Indianto *et al.* (2021) then argues that virtual space is what strongly influences the development of digital democracy and social media is the embodiment of virtual space. According to Guillamón *et al.* (2016), social media is used by candidates/politicians during political campaigns to keep electorates informed of the programs and ideas that will be implemented by them. Women, candidates and electorates alike, can leverage on this to achieve success and maintain their relevance within the democratic status quo.

In measuring the impact of social media on political participation of women, it is important to admit that there are not just positives. Negative impacts also exist that could hamper people's political participation. The use of social media increases the rate at which women in politics face online harassment, threats and abuse which can further discourage them from participating in online spaces and public life, thereby affecting their chances of success. Social media can also be a breeding ground for false information, propaganda and cause hate speech to become prominent thus causing manipulation of public opinion. Barker & Jurasz (2019) argue that while the rise of online feminist activism has helped to gain attention for women globally, women in these online spaces face various forms of violence which also includes online misogyny. According to Carpenter (2023), online harassment of female elected officials is very prevalent and its aims are usually to diminish the efficacy of these women in government by stifling their voices in public spaces and attempt to belittle, embarrass and abuse them for choosing to be relevant in spaces that are traditionally considered masculine. Women already suffer societal pressures and scrutiny, Okpokwasili and Ekemezie (2023) in their research indicated that media often portrays female politicians in a gendered manner and ends up perpetuating stereotypes and biases that already exist. Coffé *et al.* (2023) also suggest that the

public is more likely to accept or condone negative campaign behaviours from men than from women. The constant pressure for female politicians to present a perfect image online during these attacks can negatively influence their mental health.

Overall, social media has the potential to play a significant role in promoting women's political participation in Africa but it could also be a tool for their suppression. More research, however, is needed to fully understand the impact of social media on women's political engagement and to identify strategies to leverage social media to promote women's political participation (Makatlar and Kumar 2022) as asserted by scholars like Schuster (2013), that online political work presents opportunities for women's participation in politics.

Methodology

This study was empirical and involved descriptive design. It consisted of a survey to investigate the impact of social media on political participation among community women in Nigeria. Ile-Ife community was purposively selected for the survey because it exhibits features of a rural and urban Nigerian community as well as for its strategic importance in Nigerian history. Ile-Ife is an ancient and historical Nigerian town, regarded as the ancestral home of the Yoruba ethnic nationality (Obayemi 1979). It is located in the Ife Central Local Government area of Osun State, in the Southwest geopolitical zone of the country. The study comprised of the female population in the Ile-Ife community and the survey involved women above the age of eighteen who are residents in areas within the community from which a sample was randomly selected. A sample size of 384 was calculated for the survey at 95% level of confidence and 5% margin of error (Krejcie and Morgan 1970; Research Advisor 2006) and the sample size was based on the projected population for female residents of Ile-Ife community estimated at 78,801 from the 2006 population census (NPC 2010).

A structured close-ended questionnaire, self-designed and pretested for reliability and validity, was used to gather data for the survey. The questionnaire was administered on artisans,

market women, civil servants, students and lecturers in different parts of Ile-Ife community including Obafemi Awolowo University Campus, Mayfair, Ife-Central Local Government Secretariat, Obafemi Awolowo University Teaching Hospital Complex, Lagere, Oja-Obalufon, Eleyele, Ibadan Road, Sabo and Ajegunle areas. Surveyed data were analysed by descriptive (measure of central tendency – mean and standard deviation) inferential statistics (estimating population parameters with a margin of error). Responses to the questionnaire were entered with *epi data version 3.1* and exported to and analysed with *SPSS version 20* (Statistical Package for Social Science). Analysis is hereafter presented in tables to reflect frequencies, percentages, mean and standard deviation and mean values, followed by interpretation and discussion in relation to each objective.

Data Analysis and Discussion of Findings

This section involves the presentation, analysis and interpretation of the data gathered from the field through a questionnaire survey and a discussion of the basic findings in relation to each objective. The socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents are presented hereafter.

Table 1.1 above shows the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents. On the age of the respondents, the majority (50.8%) were between 18 to 28 years while the least were those who were not less than 58 years and the others were between 28 to 57 years. The marital status of the respondents as on the table shows that a substantial amount (39.3%) of the respondents were married while most (53.2%) of the respondents were never married and a few (7.3%) of the respondents were either widowed or divorced. For the religious affiliation of the respondents, it is shown that most (74.2%) of the respondents were Christian while less than one quarter (24.2%) were practicing Islam and the remaining six respondents (1.6%) were of traditional beliefs. The table further shows that over two-third (69%) of the respondents were of the Yoruba ethnic nationality while the Igbo (22.4%), Hausa (4.7%) and other ethnic groups accounted for the remaining less than one-third of the respondents. Employment status of the respondents as shown in the table indicates that

Table 1.1: Frequency and percentage distribution of respondents by their socio-demographic characteristics

Items	Options	Frequency	%	Cumulative %	Mean; Std. Dev.
Age Range	18 - 27 years	195	50.8	50.8	1.92; 1.150
	28 - 37 years	86	22.4	73.2	
	38 - 47 years	56	14.6	87.8	
	48 - 57 years	33	8.6	96.4	
	≥58 years	14	3.6	100.0	
Marital Status	Never married	205	53.4	53.4	1.60; 0.804
	Married	151	39.3	92.7	
	Widowed/Divorced	28	7.3	100.0	
Religious Affiliation	Christianity	285	74.2	74.2	1.27; 0.480
	Islam	93	24.2	98.4	
	Traditional	6	1.6	100.0	
	Hausa	18	4.7	4.7	
Ethnic Origin	Igbo	86	22.4	27.1	2.72; 0.611
	Yoruba	265	69.0	96.1	
	Others	15	3.9	100.0	

Items	Options	Frequency	%	Cumulative %	Mean; Std. Dev.
Employment Status	Employed	150	39.1	39.1	1.92; 0.834
	Self Employed	115	29.9	69.0	
	Unemployed	119	31.0	100.0	
Highest Level of Education	Primary	17	4.4	4.4	3.28; 0.944
	Secondary	81	21.1	25.5	
	Tertiary	286	74.5	100	

Source: Authors' Survey, 2023

Table 1.2: Frequency and percentage distribution of respondents by factors that hinder political participation among women in Ile-Ife Community, Osun State

Factors	Responses [N= 384; Freq. (%)]						
	SA	A	PA	D	SD	Sum	Mean; Std. Dev.
Influence of social media	81 (21.1)	91 (23.7)	58 (15.1)	66 (17.2)	88 (22.9)	384 (100)	2.97; 1.474
Cultural belief	185 (48.2)	140 (36.5)	21 (5.5)	27 (7.0)	11 (2.9)	384 (100)	1.8; 1.019

Factors	Responses [N= 384; Freq. (%)]							Mean; Std. Dev.
	SA	A	PA	D	SD	Sum		
Godfatherism	168 (43.8)	126 (32.8)	33 (8.6)	26 (6.8)	31 (8.1)	384 (100)	2.03; 1.235	
Huge financial requirement	194 (50.5)	126 (32.8)	24 (6.3)	30 (7.8)	10 (2.6)	384 (100)	1.79; 1.036	
Religious belief	196 (51.0)	128 (33.3)	36 (9.4)	16 (4.2)	8 (2.1)	384 (100)	1.73; 0.942	
Level of education	173 (45.1)	136 (35.4)	27 (7.0)	28 (7.3)	20 (5.2)	384 (100)	1.92; 1.131	
Marital and other family responsibilities	186 (48.4)	128 (33.3)	25 (6.5)	27 (7.0)	18 (4.7)	384 (100)	1.86; 1.112	
Emotional challenges	133 (34.6)	130 (33.9)	84 (21.9)	29 (7.6)	8 (2.1)	384 (100)	2.09; 1.025	
Electoral rules	118 (30.7)	108 (28.1)	93 (24.2)	49 (12.8)	16 (4.2)	384 (100)	2.32; 1.157	
Negative societal attitude towards women participation	181 (47.1)	132 (34.4)	40 (10.4)	23 (6.0)	8 (2.1)	384 (100)	1.82; 0.985	
Lack of enthusiasm on the part of women	181 (47.1)	115 (29.9)	57 (14.8)	20 (5.2)	11 (2.9)	384 (100)	1.87; 1.035	

Source: Authors' Survey, 2023

approximately one-third of the respondents were employed (39.1%), self-employed (29.9%) and unemployed (31%). The table finally shows the highest level of educational attainment of the respondents with approximately three-quarters (74.5%) having tertiary education while one in every five (21.1%) of the respondents had maximum of a secondary school education and a meagre proportion (4.4%) of the respondents does not have more than a primary school education.

Factors that Hinder and Facilitate Political Participation among Women in Ile-Ife

Table 1.2 shows factors that hinder political participation by women in Ile-Ife community. It shows that of the entire respondents (N=384), 21.1% strongly agrees, 23.7% agrees, 15.8% partially agrees while 17.2% disagrees and 22.9% strongly disagrees that the influence of social media hinders women political participation in Ile-Ife, Nigeria. Considering another factor, 48.2% strongly agrees, 36.5% agrees and 5.5% partially agrees while 7.0% disagrees and 2.9% strongly disagrees that cultural belief hinders women political participation in Ile-Ife, Nigeria. Also, as shown on the table concerning the respondents, 43.8% strongly agrees, 32.8% agrees and 8.6% partially agrees while 6.8% disagrees and 8.1% strongly disagrees that Godfatherism hinders women political participation in Ile-Ife, Nigeria. In addition, of the total respondents, 50.5% strongly agrees, 32.8% agrees and 6.3% partially agrees while 7.8% disagrees and 2.6% strongly disagrees that huge financial requirements hinder women political participation in Ile-Ife, Nigeria. Again, from the respondents, 51.0% strongly agrees, 33.3% agrees and 9.4% partially agrees while 4.2% disagrees and 2.1% strongly disagrees that the level of education hinders women political participation in Ile-Ife, Nigeria.

The table further revealed that of all the respondents, 48.4% strongly agrees, 33.3% agrees and 6.5% partially agrees while 7.0% disagrees and 4.7% strongly disagrees that marital and other family responsibilities hinder women political participation in Ile-Ife, Nigeria. Among the respondents,

34.6% strongly agrees, 33.9% agrees and 21.9% partially agrees while 7.6% disagrees and 2.9% strongly disagrees that emotional challenges hinder women political participation in Ile-Ife, Nigeria. Of all the factors identified by the authors and assessed by the respondents, cultural belief, religious belief, negative societal attitude and perception, marital and other family responsibility, huge financial requirement and lack of enthusiasm posed greater threats to active participation in politics among women in Ile-Ife community. These findings corroborate literature as asserted by Para-Mallam (2006) and Agbalajobi (2010) and thus there is still a lot of work to be done to reduce to the minimum the challenges standing as a threat to the active participation of women in politics.

Table 1.3 shows factors that can improve women political participation in Ile-Ife, Nigeria. Among the total respondents (N=384), 41.1% strongly agrees, 49.5% agrees and 6.3% partially agrees while 3.1% disagrees and no one strongly disagrees that clarification and enlightenment of women on electoral rules will improve women political participation in Ile-Ife, Nigeria. Also, of all the respondents, 38.3% strongly agrees, 39.3% agrees and 12.0% partially agrees while 8.9% disagrees and 1.6% strongly disagrees that the eradication of poverty and an increased income for women will improve women political participation in Ile-Ife, Nigeria. In addition, among all the respondents, 54.9% strongly agrees, 39.1% agrees and 3.9% partially agrees while 2.1% disagrees and none strongly disagree that increases in women awareness about issues that concern them will improve women political participation in Ile-Ife, Nigeria. Furthermore, it is revealed that of the respondents, 50.8% strongly agrees, 41.9% agrees and 5.2% partially agrees while 2.1% disagrees and none strongly disagrees that an increase in the level of political education amongst women will improve women political participation in Ile-Ife, Nigeria. It is finally shown on the table that of all the respondents, 52.1% strongly agrees, 35.9% agrees and 9.6% partially agrees while 1.8% disagrees and 0.5% strongly disagrees that an increase in the rate of young women's active participation in politics will improve women political participation in Ile-Ife, Nigeria.

Table 1.3: Frequency and percentage distribution of respondents by factors that facilitate political participation among women in Ile-Ife Community, Osun State

Factors	Responses [N= 384; Freq. (%)]							Mean; Std. Dev.
	SA	A	PA	D	SD	Sum		
Clarification and enlightenment of women on electoral rules	158 (41.1)	190 (49.5)	24 (6.3)	12 (3.1)	0 (0)	384 (100)	1.71; 0.720	
Eradication of poverty and increased income for women	147 (38.3)	151 (39.3)	46 (12.0)	34 (8.9)	6 (1.6)	384 (100)	1.96; 0.999	
Increase in women awareness about issues that concern them	211 (54.9)	150 (39.1)	15 (3.9)	8 (2.1)	0 (0)	384 (100)	1.53; 0.673	
Increase in the level of political education amongst women	195 (50.8)	161 (41.9)	20 (5.2)	8 (2.1)	0 (0)	384 (100)	1.59; 0.688	
Increase in rate of young women actively participating in politics	200 (52.1)	138 (35.9)	37 (9.6)	7 (1.8)	2 (0.5)	384 (100)	1.63; 0.775	

Source: Authors' Survey, 2023

Table 1.4: Frequency and percentage distribution of respondents by knowledge of social media

Variables	Responses / Rating (N= 384)			
	High (%)	Low (%)	No (%)	Mean; Std. Dev.
Knowledge of Social Media	353 (91.9)	13 (3.4)	18 (4.7)	6.13; 0.453

Source: Authors’ Survey, 2023

Table 1.4 above shows the level of knowledge and utilization of social media by the respondents. It shows that almost all (91.9%) of the respondents have a high level of knowledge of social media while a meagre proportion (3.4%) of the respondents have low level of knowledge of social media networks and a few (4.7%) of the respondents have no knowledge of social media networks.

Table 1.5: Utilization of social media

Table	YES (%)	NO (%)	Mean; Std. Dev.
Communicate with friends through social media	330 (85.9)	54 (14.1)	7.14; 0.348
Actively use social media networks and understand their usages	322 (83.9)	62 (16.1)	7.16; 0.368
Use Facebook or Twitter to voice out discontentment on political issues	178 (46.4)	206 (53.6)	7.54; 0.499
Internet and social media networks do more harm than good on their users	124 (32.3)	260 (67.7)	7.68; 0.468

Source: Authors’ Survey, 2023

Table 1.5 shows the utilization of social media by the respondents. It shows that the majority (85.9%) of the respondents communicate with friends through the social media while only a few (14.1%) of the respondents do not communicate with friends via social media. It also indicates that a greater proportion (83.9%) of the respondents actively use social media networks and understand their usage while just a few (16.1%) of the respondents

do not actively use social media networks nor understand its usage. It again indicates that more than half (53.6%) of the respondents do not use social media platforms like Facebook or Twitter to voice out their discontentment with political issues whilst close to half (46.4%) of the respondents do. Furthermore, it is shown that more than two-thirds (67.7%) of the respondents were against the assertion that internet and social media networks do more harm than good on their users while less than one-third were supportive of it.

Impacts of social media on women political participation in Ile-Ife community

Table 1.6 shows how social media and its utilization impacts political participation among women in Ile-Ife community, Osun State. It indicates that of the respondents, majority (27.9%) strongly agrees, almost one-fifth (19.8%) agrees and more than one-fifth (20.3%) partially agrees while also close to one-fifth (19.8%) disagrees and a meagre proportion (12.2%) strongly disagrees that they have been informed more and encouraged to participate in politics by social media. Also, it reveals that of the respondents, a few proportion (13.8%) strongly agree, almost one-fifth (19.0%) agrees and one-eighth (12.5%) partially agrees while a majority (27.6%) disagrees and similar proportion (27.1%) strongly disagrees that they get themselves engaged in political activities and discussions on social media platforms. Again, the table indicates that of the respondents, one-fifth (20.1%) strongly agrees, more than one-quarter (29.2%) agrees and below one-fifth (18.0%) partially agrees while less than one-tenth (9.1%) disagrees and a substantial proportion (23.7%) strongly disagrees that they can contest for a political office with access and use of social media for campaigns. Furthermore, the table reveals that of the respondents, the majority (50.8%) strongly disagrees and a substantial proportion (20.6%) disagrees while a combined less than one-third (28.7%) variedly agrees with the belief that politics is for the male folks even with the opportunities presented by the social media.

Table 1.6: Frequency and percentage distribution of respondents by impacts of the utilization of social media on their political participation

Impacts of the utilization of social media on political participation	Responses [N= 384; Freq. (%)]							Mean; Std. Dev.
	SA	A	PA	D	SD	Sum		
Social media has informed me more and encouraged me to participate in politics.	107 (27.9)	76 (19.8)	78 (20.3)	76 (19.8)	47 (12.2)	384 (100)	2.69; 1.381	
I get myself engaged in political activities and discussions on social media platforms.	53 (13.8)	73 (19.0)	48 (12.5)	106 (27.6)	104 (27.1)	384 (100)	3.35; 1.408	
With access and use of social media for campaigns, I can contest for a political office.	77 (20.1)	112 (29.2)	69 (18.0)	35 (9.1)	91 (23.7)	384 (100)	2.87; 1.457	
Even with the social media, I believe politics is for the male and not the female folk.	26 (6.8)	39 (10.2)	45 (11.7)	79 (20.6)	195 (50.8)	384 (100)	3.98; 1.282	

Source: Authors' Survey, 2023

Table 1.7: Frequency and percentage distribution of respondents by their perception about the impacts of social media on Nigerian government and politics

Perceptions on the Impacts	Responses [N = 384; Freq. (%)]							Mean; Std. Dev.
	SA	A	PA	D	SD	Sum		
Social media has encouraged political stability in Nigeria	92 (24.0)	141 (36.7)	86 (22.4)	55 (14.3)	10 (2.6)	384 (100)	2.35; 1.073	
Social media has enhanced the decision - making process in Nigeria	96 (25.0)	167 (43.5)	90 (23.4)	29 (7.6)	2 (0.5)	384 (100)	2.15; 0.901	
It has enhanced effective allocation and distribution of power	98 (25.5)	136 (35.4)	104 (27.1)	42 (10.9)	4 (1.0)	384 (100)	2.27; 0.995	
Social media has enhanced gender balance and reduced inequality in Nigerian politics	103 (26.8)	115 (29.9)	99 (25.8)	51 (13.3)	16 (4.2)	384 (100)	2.38; 1.136	
Social media has enhanced poverty alleviation in Nigeria	79 (20.6)	148 (38.5)	80 (20.8)	69 (18.0)	8 (2.1)	384 (100)	2.42; 1.069	
Social media has enhanced national integration and unity in Nigeria	101 (26.3)	173 (45.1)	67 (17.4)	33 (8.6)	10 (2.6)	384 (100)	2.16; 0.996	

Source: Authors' Survey, 2023

Perception about impacts of social media on Nigerian government and politics

Table 1.7 shows the perception of the respondents about the impacts of social media on Nigerian government and politics. It indicates that of the respondents, majority (83.1%) differently agrees while minority (16.9%) variedly disagrees that social media has encouraged political stability in Nigeria. Also, almost all (91.9%) the respondents supported, while a meagre proportion (8.1%) variedly disagree that social media has enhanced the decision-making process in Nigeria. Again, the majority (88%) of the respondents variably agrees while a poor proportion (12%) of the respondents variedly disagrees that social media has enhanced effective allocation and distribution of power. The table further show that more than three-quarters (82.5%) agrees while a fewer proportion (17.5%) of the respondents variedly disagrees that the social media has enhanced gender balance and reduced inequality in Nigerian politics. It indicates that four-fifths (79.9%) of the respondents agrees while one-fifth (20.1%) variedly disagrees that social media has enhanced poverty alleviation in Nigeria. The last item on the table reveals that almost all (88.8%) of the respondents somewhat agree while only a little above one-tenth of the respondents variedly disagrees that social media has enhanced national integration and unity in Nigeria.

Effect of Selected Socio-demographic Variables on the Use of social media for Political Participation among Women in Ile-Ife community

Table 1.8 above shows the effect of use of social media on the political participation among women in Ile-Ife community, Osun State, Nigeria. The result revealed that age ($t=4.016$; $p=0.000$) and employment status ($t=4.016$; $p=0.000$) has a significant positive influence on how the use of social media informs and encourages women to participation in politics in Ile-Ife. Marital status and religion have an insignificant negative influence while ethnic affiliation and the level of education also have an insignificant but positive influence on how the use of social media informs

Table 1.8: Linear Regression Distribution of the effect of use of social media for political participation by respondents with selected socio-demographic characteristics

VARIABLES		ANALYSIS			
Impacts of social media on political participation	Socio-demographic Variables	Coefficient	Std. Error	T-Statistics	P-Value (Sig.)
Social media has informed me more and encouraged my participation in politics	Age	0.278	0.077	4.016	0.000*
	Marital Status	-0.046	0.109	-0.681	0.497
	Religion Affiliation	-0.077	0.131	-1.560	0.120
	Ethnic Affiliation	0.077	0.104	1.547	0.123
	Employment Status	0.279	0.083	5.169	0.000*
	Level of Education	0.033	0.120	0.648	0.517
Engagement in political activities through the social media	Age	0.170	0.088	2.443	0.015*
	Marital Status	0.174	0.124	2.539	0.012*
	Religion Affiliation	-0.067	0.150	-1.350	0.178
	Ethnic Affiliation	-0.042	0.119	0.852	0.395
	Employment Status	0.075	0.095	1.385	0.167
	Level of Education	-0.032	0.137	-0.617	0.538

VARIABLES		ANALYSIS			
Impacts of social media on political participation	Socio-demographic Variables	Coefficient	Std. Error	T-Statistics	P-Value (Sig.)
Accessibility / usage of social media for campaign and my contest for political office	Age	-0.025	0.074	-0.410	0.682
	Marital Status	-0.109	0.105	-1.792	0.074
	Religion Affiliation	0.030	0.127	0.684	0.494
	Ethnic Affiliation	0.042	0.100	0.944	0.346
	Employment Status	0.411	0.080	8.485	0.000*
	Level of Education	-0.240	0.115	-5.255	0.000*
	Age	0.133	0.087	1.850	0.065
Even with the social media, I believe politics is for the male and not the female folk	Marital Status	0.025	0.123	0.354	0.723
	Religion Affiliation	-0.086	0.148	-1.679	0.094
	Ethnic Affiliation	0.018	0.117	0.356	0.722
	Employment Status	0.089	0.094	1.581	0.115
	Level of Education	0.043	0.135	0.812	0.417

Source: Authors' Survey, 2023

and encourages women to participation in politics in Ile-Ife community, Osun State.

The table further reveals that age ($t=2.443$; $p=0.015$) and marital status ($t=2.539$; $p=0.012$) have positive significant influence on the level of engagement in political activities on social media by the women in Ile-Ife community. While employment status has an insignificant positive influence, other socio-demographic variables have negative but insignificant influence on acts of engagement in political activities on social media by the women in Ile-Ife community.

The result further revealed that employment status has a positive significant influence ($t=8.485$; $p=0.000$) while the level of education has a significant but negative influence ($t=-5.255$; $p=0.000$) on the use of social media for campaign and contest for political office by women within Ile-Ife community. Whereas age and marital status has a negative but insignificant influence, religious and ethnic affiliation has insignificant but positive influence on accessibility or usage of social media for campaign and contest for political office.

Finally, the result reveals that beside religious affiliation with a negative but insignificant relationship, none of the socio-demographic variables has a significant influence on how social media affects the belief that politics is for the male and not the female folks in among women in Ile-Ife community.

Conclusion

The challenges posed to women political participation and general civic engagement has been reduced by the advent of social media. Several impediments have been identified as limiting political participation among women in Ile-Ife community. These barriers in respect to women in Ile-Ife community can be grouped as cultural, religious, economic, legal and perception factors. Also, several ways that have been suggested in overcoming the impediments to women political participation include education and mobilization by identifying areas of strengths, leadership training and education, sensitization and social awareness, increased income level and resources, among others. It has also

been revealed that with the exception of ethnic affiliation, most socio-demographic variables including age, education, marital status, religion and employment status significantly influence knowledge and use of social media for political participation among women in Ile-Ife community. The study established that social media, though utilized, can further be maximized as instruments of civic engagements and political participation by the Nigerian community women.

Reference List

- Abdulrasheed Abdulyakeen and Yusuf Abdu Yusuf (2022). Social Media and Political Participation among Youth in South-Eastern Nigeria: A Case Study of 2015 and 2019 General Elections. *Acta Politica Polonica*, 54(54), pp.147–173. <https://doi.org/10.18276/ap.2022.54-10>.
- Abubakar , A. (2011.). Political participation and discourse in social media during the 2011 Presidential Electioneering. Paper presented at the ACCE, Covenant University, Ota. September 2011.
- Adibe, K. and Okoro, N. (2011). Social media and political participation in Nigeria during the 2011 General Elections: The lapses and the lessons. *Global Journal of Arts Humanities and Social Sciences*, 1(3), pp.29–46.
- Adibe, K.N., Odoemelan, C.C. and Chibuwe, K. (2012). Social media, electioneering and sustenance of democracy in Africa: A SWOT analysis. African Media and Democracy Conference (AMDC), African Practice (2014). *Citizen participation and technology: A look at the social media landscape in Nigeria*. Africa Practice.
- Agbalajobi, D.T. (2010). Women’s participation and the political process in Nigeria: Problems and prospects. *African Journal of Political Science and International Relations*, 4(2), pp.75–82. <https://doi.org/10.5771/9781786615213>
- Agbalajobi, D.T. (2021). *Promoting gender equality in political participation : new perspectives on Nigeria*. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield.

- Ajjan, H. and Hartshorne, R. (2008). Investigating faculty decisions to adopt Web 2.0 technologies: Theory and empirical tests. *The Internet and Higher Education*, 11(2), pp.71–80. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.iheduc.2008.05.002>
- Allen, E.J. and Chukwulete, T. (2013). An assessment of the readership base for Nigerian blog. In: ACCE. ACCE.
- Ansari, J.A.N. and Khan, N.A. (2020). Exploring the role of social media in collaborative learning the new domain of learning. *Smart Learning Environments*, 7(1), pp.1–16. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40561-020-00118-7>
- Bada, A.O. and Eyongindi, D.T. (2024). A legal diagnosis of freedom of speech and digital rights in Nigeria. *African Journal Of Law And Human Rights*, [online] 8(1). Available at: <https://journals.ezenwaohaetorc.org/index.php/AJLHR/article/view/2853/0>.
- Baran, S. (1998). *Introduction to mass communication*. London: Mayfield publishing company.
- Barker, K. and Jurasz, O. (2019). Online misogyny: a challenge for digital feminism? *Journal of International Affairs*, [online] 72(2), pp.95–114. Available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26760834>.
- Bartlett–Bragg, A. (2006). *Reflections on pedagogy: Reframing practice to foster informal learning with social software..*
- Blühdorn, I. and Butzlaff, F. (2020). Democratization beyond the post-democratic turn: towards a research agenda on new conceptions of citizen participation. *Democratization*, 27(3), pp.369–388. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2019.1707808>.
- Boyd, D. (2007). Social network sites: Public, private, or what. *Knowledge Tree*, 13(1), pp.1–7. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1083-6101.2007.00393.x>
- Burns, A. and Eltham, B. (2009). Twitter free Iran: An evaluation of Twitter's role in Iran's 2009 election crisis. *Record of the Communications Policy & Research Forum*.
- Can, U. and Alatas, B. (2019). A new direction in social network analysis: Online social network analysis problems and applications. *Physica A: Statistical Mechanics and its Applications*, 535(12237). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.physa.2019.122372>

Gender and Feminist Meditations

- Carpenter, S.M. (2023). What Happens Online Doesn't Stay Online: Female Elected Officials' Experiences with Online Harassment". [online] Available at: https://repository.lsu.edu/gradschool_dissertations/6221 [Accessed 20 Aug. 2023].
- Chaudhuri, S. and Heller, P. (2002). The plasticity of participation: Evidence from a participatory governance experiment. Paper presented at the Workshop on 'Measuring Empowerment: Cross-Disciplinary Perspectives' held at the World Bank in Washington, DC. Workshop on 'Measuring Empowerment: Cross-Disciplinary Perspectives'.
- Chitongo, L. and Ojogiwa, O.T. (2021). The efficacy of women participation in governance and development: The case of Nigeria. *Gender and Behaviour*, 19(2), pp.17982–17992.
- Cloud, J. (2006). *The gurus of YouTube*. Times Magazine .
- Coffé, H., Helimäki, T. and von Schoultz, Å. (2023). How Gender Affects Negative and Positive Campaigning. *Journal of Women, Politics & Policy*, 44(3), pp.1–17. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1554477x.2023.2180610>.
- Congge, U., Guillamón, M.D., Nurmandi, A., Salahudin and Sihidi, I.T. (2023). Digital democracy: A systematic literature review. *Frontiers in Political Science*, 5. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpos.2023.972802>.
- Dalton, R.J. (2008). Citizenship norms and the expansion of political participation. *Political Studies*, 56(1), pp.76–98. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9248.2007.00718.x>
- Dow, J. (2009). Gender differences in political knowledge: Distinguishing characteristics -based and returns-based differences. *Political Behavior*, 31, pp.117–136. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11109-008-9059-8>
- Dunan, A. (2020). Government Communications in Digital Era: Public Relation and Democracy. *Journal Pekommas*, 5(1), p.71. <https://doi.org/10.30818/jpkm.2020.2050108>.
- Eboibi, F.E. (2017). A review of the legal and regulatory frameworks of Nigerian Cybercrimes Act 2015. *Computer Law & Security Review*, 33(5), pp.700–717. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.clsr.2017.03.020>.

Impact of Social Media on Political Participation

- Ekpe, B. N. (2017). Social Media: Towards the Realisation of A Global Stance for the African Voice. *Journal of Pan African Studies*, 10(10), 273109–285121.
- Gilardi, F. (2016). *DIGITAL DEMOCRACY How Digital Technology Is Changing Democracy and Its Study*. [online] Available at: <https://www.vauz.uzh.ch/dam/jcr:b820674e-ecf6-4e98-8058-a673cc9de1ae/digital-democracy.pdf> [Accessed 3 May 2022].
- Graham, J. (2005). *Video websites pop up, invite postings*. *USA Today*, USA Today. Available at: www.ustoday.com/tech/news.
- Grant, W.J., Moon, B. and Busby, J. (2010). Digital dialogue? Australian politicians' use of the social network tool Twitter. *Australian Journal of Political Science*, 45(4), pp.579–604. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10361146.2010.517176>
- Guterbock, T. and Fries, J. (1997). Maintaining America's Social Fabric: The AARP Survey of Civic Involvement. *Washington: American Association of Retired Persons*. 26–27., pp.26–27.
- Hardiman, F. B. (2018). Manusia dalam prahara revolusi digital. *Diskursus- Jurnal Filsafat Dan Teologi Stf Driyarkara*, 17(2), 177–192. <https://doi.org/10.36383/diskursus.v17i2.252>.
- Hopkins, J. (2006). *Surprise! There's a third YouTube co-founder*. [online] USA Today. Available at: www.ustoday.com/tech/news.
- Hove, M. and Chenzi, V. (2020). Social media, civil unrest and government responses: the Zimbabwean experience. *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, pp.1–17. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02589001.2020.1746750>.
- Idowu, H.A. (2022). Democratic and Electoral Process in Nigeria: A forecast into the 2023 general elections. *Taiwan Journal of Democracy*, 18(2), pp.145–176.
- Ifukor, P. (2010). Elections or selections? Blogging and twittering the Nigerian 2007 General Elections. *Bulletin of Science, Technology & Society*, 30(6), pp.398–414. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0270467610380008>
- Indianto S., D., Nurasih, W. and Witro, D. (2021). Demokrasi Hibrid: Pemikiran Yasraf Amir Piliang tentang Demokrasi Indonesia di Era Digital. *JISPO Jurnal Ilmu Sosial dan Ilmu Politik*, 11(1), pp.175–194. <https://doi.org/10.15575/jispo.v11i1.12253>.

Gender and Feminist Meditations

- ISSAfrica.org (2012). *Encouraging political participation in Africa, the potential of social media platforms - ISS Africa*. [online] ISS Africa. Available at: <https://issafrica.org/research/situation-reports/encouraging-political-participation-in-africa-the-potential-of-social-media-platforms>.
- Jimada, U. (2019). Social media in the public sphere of accountability in Nigeria. *Global Media Journal*, 17(32), pp.1–9.
- Joinson, N.A. (2008). Looking at, Looking up or Keeping up with People? Motives and Uses of Facebook. In: *CHI 2008 Proceedings*. pp.1027–1036. <https://doi.org/10.1145/1357054.1357213>
- Jost, J.T., Barberá, P., Bonneau, R., Langer, M., Metzger, M., Nagler, J., Sterling, J. and Tucker, J.A. (2018). How Social Media Facilitates Political Protest: Information, Motivation, and Social Networks. *Political Psychology*, [online] 39(39), pp.85–118. <https://doi.org/10.1111/pops.12478>.
- Kaplan, A.M. and Haenlein, M. (2010). Users of the world, unite! The challenges and opportunities of social media. *Business Horizons*, 53, pp.59–68. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bushor.2009.09.003>
- Kenski, K. and Jamieson, K. (2000). The Gender Gap in Political Knowledge: Are Women Less Knowledgeable Than Men about Politics? In: *Everything You Think You Know about Politics and Why You're Wrong?* New York: Basic Books, pp.83–89.
- Kitanova, M. (2020). Youth political participation in the EU: evidence from a cross-national analysis. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 23(7), pp.819–836. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2019.1636951>
- Krejcie, C. and Morgan, P. (1970). Determining sample Size for research activities. *Educational and Psychological Measurement*, pp.607–610. <https://doi.org/10.1177/001316447003000308>
- Kristof, N.D. (2009). *Tear down this cyberwall!* [online] The New York Times. Available at: <http://www.nytimes.com/opinion/18kristof.html>.
- Kweon, S. and Kim, K. (2011). Political communication and participation trend in the social media: Focus on the O1-S-O2-R model application. *Journal of Media and Communication Studies*, 2(8).
- Lenhart, M. (2009). *Adults and social network websites. Pew Internet & American Life Project Report*. [online] Available at: <http://www.pewinternet.org/pdfs/>.

Impact of Social Media on Political Participation

- Li, P. and Zhuo, Q. (2023). Emotional straying: Flux and management of women's emotions in social media. *PLoS one*, [online] 18(12), p.e0295835. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0295835>.
- Matisi B. (2021). How Social Media has had a positive influence on community and broadened communication across communities, *Communities and Social Media. How Social Media has had a positive influence on community and broadened communication across communities.* | *Debating Communities and Networks XII*
- Mason, R. and Rennie, F. (2008). *E-learning and social networking handbook: Resources for higher education*. New York: Taylor & Francis.
- Mayfield, M. (2008). Is blogging innovation journalism? <http://www.innovationjournalism.org/archive/INJOBaltaziz.pdf>.
- Mejias, U. (2005). *Nomad's guide to learning and social software*. [online] Available at: http://knowledgetree.flexiblelearning.net.au/edition07/download/la_mejias.pdf.
- Miller, M.K. (2001). Organized groups and political participation: Varieties of social influence. In: *Presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association*, San Francisco, CA.: American Political Science Association.
- Min, S.J. (2021). Who believes in conspiracy theories? Network diversity, political discussion, and conservative conspiracy theories on social media. *American Politics Research*, 49(5), pp.415–427. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1532673X211013526>
- Mohanty, C. (1988). Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses. *Feminist Review*, 30(1), pp.61–88. <https://doi.org/10.1057/fr.1988.42>
- Nabiebu, M. (2022). Nigeria's legal regulatory framework for ensuring a credible 2023 election. *International Journal of Law and Society (IJLS)*, 1(3), pp.221–231. <https://doi.org/10.59683/ijls.v1i3.32>
- NPC (2010). *Priority table Vol. IV: Population distribution by age and sex (State and Local Government)*. Abuja, Nigeria: National Population Commission (NPC)..
- Nations, D. (2010). *What is social media?* webstrend.about.com/od/web2.0/a/entrepreneurship www.nigeriansabroad.com.

Gender and Feminist Meditations

- Nussbaum, M. (2002). Sex, laws and inequality: What India can teach the United States. *Daedalus*, 131(1), pp.95–106.
- Nwabueze, C., Obasi, A. and Obi, P. (2012). Social media, native media and social entrepreneurship development in Nigeria. *EBSU Journal of Mass Communication*, 1(1).
- Obayemi, A. (1979). Ancient Ile-Ife: another cultural historical reinterpretation. *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*, 9(4), pp.151–185.
- Okafor, C. (2023). Deconstructing the civic engagement context, Processes, and outcomes in Nigeria. *African Journal of Politics and Administrative Studies (AJPAS)* , [online] 6(1), pp.74–91. <https://doi.org/10.4314/ajpas.v16i1.5>
- Okoro, N. and Dirim, C. (2009). Public sphere and civic journalism: A fulcrum for effective political communication in Nigeria. *Journal of Political Economy*, 3(1 and 2).
- Okoro, N. and Nwafor, K.A. (2013). Social media and political participation in Nigeria during the 2011 General Elections: The lapses and the lesson. *Global Journal of Arts, Humanities and social sciences*, 1(3), pp.29–46.
- Oladapo, O., Atela, M. and Agbalajobi, D. (2021). Women’s political participation and its predictors in Northern and Southern Nigeria. *IDS Working Paper*, 2021(548). <https://doi.org/10.19088/IDS.2021.023>
- Oladipo, V.O. and Chukwudi, C.E. (2023). *Social media and women’s political participation in Nigeria*. [online] Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/380007647_Social_Media_and_Women.
- Onwe, E.C. (2017). Social media use pattern and political participation in the 2015 presidential election in Nigeria. *Ebonyi State University Journal of Mass Communication*, 5(1), pp.61–74.
- Para-Mallam, O.J. (2006). *The national policy on women and the challenges of mainstreaming gender issues in Nigeria, 1985-2005*. Doctoral dissertation.
- Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre (2012). *Social media and the 2011 Elections in Nigeria*. Abuja, Nigeria.

Impact of Social Media on Political Participation

- Privacy International (2016). *Stakeholder Report Universal Periodic Review 26th Session*, Harvard Law School, and Privacy International.: Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum, the Digital Society of Zimbabwe, the International Human Rights Clinic at .
- Putnam, R.D. (2000). *Bowling alone: the Collapse and Revival of American Community*. New York: Simon & Schuster. <https://doi.org/10.1145/358916.361990>
- Rosenstone, S.J. and Hansen, J.M. (1993). *Mobilization, Participation, and Democracy in America*. Longman Publishing Group.
- Shirky, C. (2011). The political power of social media: Technology, the public sphere, and political change. *Foreign Affairs* , 90(1), pp.28–1.
- Statista 2023. (2023). *Number of Twitter users worldwide from 2019 to 2024* . [online] Available at: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/303681/twitter-users-worldwide/>.
- Sweinstani, M. (2019). *The Use of Social Media as the New Platform for Women’s Campaign in Local Executive election*. [online] Available at: <https://www.dpublication.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/35-7045.pdf>.
- Tarisayi, E. (2016). *Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum: Quarterly Political and Human Rights Violations report, July – September 2016*.
- Toyin A. A, Ogbonnaya, C., Mordi, C., Hakeem A. and Adekoya, O.D. (2024). Seen but not heard: the voice of women at work and the mediating role of culture. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 35(20), pp.3496–3523. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2024.2421345>.
- Tremblay, M. and Pelletier, R. (2000). More Feminists or More Women? Descriptive and Substantive Representations of Women in the 1997 Canadian Federal Election. *International Political Science Review*, 21(4), pp.381–405. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0192512100214004>
- Twitter (2016). *Twitter 2016. Company*. <http://www.about.twitter.com/company>. [online] Available at: <http://www.about.twitter.com/company>.
- UNIFEM (2003). *Progress of the World Report*. [online] Available at: <http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php/>.


Gender and Feminist Meditations

- Uslaner, E. (2002). *The Moral Foundations of Trust*. New York: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.824504>
- Verba, S., Burns, N., and Schlozman, K. 1997. Knowing and Caring About Politics: Gender and Political Engagement. *Journal of Politics*, 59, pp.1051–1072. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2998592>
- Verba, S., Schlozman K. L. and Brady, H.E. (1995). *Voice and equality : civic voluntarism in American politics*. Cambridge, Massachusetts, Etc.: Harvard U.P. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1pnc1k7>
- Verba, S. and Nie, N.H. (1987). *Participation in America: Political democracy and social equality*. University of Chicago Press.
- Wael Ghonim (2024). *Inside the Egyptian revolution*. [online] Ted.com. Available at: https://www.ted.com/talks/wael_ghonim_inside_the_egyptian_revolution?subtitle=en.
- Yarchi, M. and Samuel-Azran, T. (2018). Women politicians are more engaging: male versus female politicians' ability to generate users' engagement on social media during an election campaign. *Information, Communication & Society*, 21(7), pp.978–995. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118x.2018.1439985>.
- You Tube (2023). *Statistics. You Tube*. Available at: <http://www.youtube.com/yt/press/GB/statistics.html>.
- Zamani, E.D. and Spanaki, K. (2023). Affective temporal experiences and new work modalities: The role of Information and Communication Technologies. *Journal of Business Research*, 154, p.113311. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2022.113311>.



Women's Participation in the AU's Peace and Security Architecture: A Look at Gender Relations in Conflict Management in Africa

Georgette Arielle Djoufan Fotsing 

International Relations Institute of Cameroon 
Yaoundé, Cameroon

Abstract

60 years after the march towards unity, Africa is still driven by a multitude of conflicts, yet, the vision of the pan-African organization, which is the African Union (AU), through Agenda 2063, aspires to an “Africa living in peace and security”. The AU Peace and Security Council, which is the AU's decision-making body on security issues, has set up a key pillar: the African Peace and Security Architecture. Given the crucial importance of this architecture for the continent, women should be involved at all levels. This institution is therefore responsible for ensuring the full participation and representation of women in the peace process. The widespread of sexual violence committed against women during armed conflicts reflects a denial of their rights and reinforces their marginal position. The many contemporary misogynistic meanings expressed in social and political usage ignore the matriarchal basis of African societies. In line with the UN's vision, notably Resolution 1325, the AU peace and security architecture is exercising its mandate to involve women in peace and security strategies. From a feminist perspective, cleansed of the dross of what Pierre Bourdieu called “masculine domination”, this topic provides an opportunity to question and even deconstruct the positivist theories that are prevalent today. How can women's leadership contribute to sustainable peace and security in Africa? The ambition of this research is



therefore to explore social and power relations between men and women. In a context where women are the main victims of armed conflict, it would be crucial to get them more involved in peace-building mechanisms.

Drawing on post-positivist approaches, especially post-colonial feminism as the main theory, this research intends to examine the socio-cultural relationships involved in the quest for peace regarding a gender perspective in the pre-colonial African Society and analyse international and regional mechanisms for women's participation in the AU's security architecture.

Keywords: women, African Union, Peace and Security Architecture, social relations, gender.

Introduction

Securing the international scene requires the involvement of women yet the general perception in the international system perpetuates patriarchal norms that glorify 'male domination' (Bourdieu 1998). Fionnuala Aolain argues that the exclusion of women from the security field is not solely explained by the social and cultural norms of post-conflict countries, but by the importation of patriarchal values from international actors (Aolain 2013). The role of women in conflict prevention and even management is either barely visible, or not sufficiently highlighted and thus, women's key role in the political-institutional game in the construction of societies seems to be quickly forgotten. The situation of women should no longer be analysed as a static reality, but as a dynamic that evolves over time and space (Sadiki 2008). The marginalisation of women, generally due to social constructs, has given rise to gender issues. Against a backdrop of masculinization of security-related research topics, mechanisms have been set up to recognise the role of women. Resolution 1325 of the United Nations Security Council, which is a major international legal instrument on the involvement of women in conflict management, is essential for the implication of women in peace process. In fact, the Resolution is a convention that contributes to the protection and promotion of women's

rights and its scope is more precise, as its implementation mandate focuses specifically on the involvement of women in peace and security strategies, making it the cornerstone of women's participation in the peace mechanism.

There is a large number of women who suffer gender-based violence and oppression of many kinds during conflict and the major hotbeds of conflict are also places where violence against women is perpetrated. For instance, in Rwanda, between 250,000 and 500,000 women were raped during the genocide; in Sierra Leone, 53% of women and girls displaced by the war were sexual victims; in Burundi, around 19% of adolescent girls and women are said to have been victims of sexual violence (Amesty International 2004). In the Democratic Republic of Congo, for every one woman in three living in conflict zones, is said to have been a victim of rape and in Darfur, widespread and systematic rape is used as a means of ethnic cleansing (Nduwimana 2008:54). This structural violence, which is explained by the inability of women to access social resources, is the result of multiple social constructs and habits that have emerged over time. It is for this reason that the former Secretary General of the United Nations, Kofi Annan, rightly asserts that: "Efforts to resolve conflicts and tackle their root causes will succeed only if we empower all those who have suffered the damaging effects, including and especially women" Anan (2003). Therefore, the empowerment of women will help to resolve conflicts and promote peace, not only because they are peaceful as we might believe from socio-biological outpourings, but because they know the cost of war (Onyejekwe 2005: 203) given the many atrocities of which they are victims.

Gender is a fundamental concept for understanding systems of asymmetrical relations and hierarchies based on a gendered social order. From a more analytical perspective, understanding the concept of women means "being attentive to the many meanings expressed in the social and political uses of this category of perception and action" (Sindjoun & Owona Nguini 2000). Therefore, it follows that all the elements relating to male domination stem from social constructs and societal habits. In the context of masculinisation of research

subjects, relating to the place of women in conflict resolution mechanisms, it is important to examine the position of women in times of conflict, to explore the implementation of their protection and to examine the dynamics of their inclusion in the peace process. The sex-specific distinction, which refers to the fact that women are discriminated against because of their sex, reinforces their marginalisation in conflict resolution. The patriarchal structure in which men generally hold privileged positions reflects the social reality in Africa. Male domination stems from social perceptions and representations relating to the sexual division of roles within society, which are at the root of men's omnipotence.

From this perspective, social configuration makes it possible to highlight the mechanisms for promoting women in peace management within the peace and security architecture and given the crucial importance of this architecture for the continent, it is important to reconsider the place of women in this mechanism. The under-representation of women in conflict resolution mechanisms raises the question: how can women's participation contribute more to building peace and security in Africa? This study is based on post-positivist approaches, in particular post-colonial feminism. This paradigm offers the possibility to analyse the specific characteristics of African women, while other feminisms such as liberal and radical feminism, see women as members of a homogenous group (Balzacq 2016). There is a hegemonic desire for universalisation (Sow 2011:52) on the part of other Western feminisms, which establish an ethnocentric universalism with the white Western woman as the reference figure. In so doing, these feminisms obliterate the particularity of women belonging to other races, from other less privileged regions of the globe. In the name of cultural difference, the historicity of gender relations and the multiplication of forms of domination, post-colonial feminists have demanded that analyses of their right to define the terms of their own struggle should be put into perspective. That is why they reject the inherent desire for universalization of other feminisms perceived as hegemonic (Sow 2011). This study aims

to analyse the position of women in the architecture of peace and security, considering the African dimension of women.

The interest of such a study lies in its analytical reinvestment in the role of women in conflict resolution by looking at the deconstruction of 'male domination'. The question of peace and security is concerning for "politicians", who traditionally, are the leading players in security issues however, the heuristic contribution of this study requires us to focus on women in order to explain gender dynamics that at first glance, appears discriminatory. By focusing on women as victims of violence during armed conflicts, the main aim of this study is to provide an account of the long-term power relations that exist in the construction of peace in Africa. In order to better support the argument, we will examine the social relations observed in the dynamics of peace in Africa and examine mechanisms for the promotion and participation of women in conflict management.

Social and power relations of gender in peace dynamics in Africa

The universalization of Western specificities does not always seem to fit in with the experience of African societies and thus it is imperative for African women to state and differentiate their theoretical and other positions (Salami 2024). Patriarchy is defined as a culture based on the binarity and hierarchy of the sexes (Brugère 2020). From then on, the universalisation of patriarchy, which is the main motive for male domination, emerged and was accentuated in Africa through contact with other civilizations and religions (Emeka 2023:1). On the basis of these definitions, it is appropriate to examine the organisational structure of matriarchal societies in pre-colonial Africa before considering the transformation of this structure driven by the rise of patriarchy.

Retrospective views on the place of women in African civilization

The observation that Africa has always been modulated by the patriarchal system seems erroneous, however, to better understand how these societies function, it is important to place them in the context of a long history. This study explores gender issues by considering matriarchy as a structural element of African civilisation. Matriarchy etymologically, refers to mater in Latin, meaning mother and arché in Greek, meaning command and the matriarchal system, which is a system where old women have authority over the population, gave women a place of honour and implied gender equality. The matriarchal system is marked by collaboration and harmonious development of both sexes as well as by a certain level of female superiority in society due to socio-economic conditions. Moreover, in the neolithic religions, there were female divinities, including earlier and relative examples such as the mother goddess of the Igbos called Ani or Ana Waresa (Aouaa 2017). In Ancient Egypt, women took part in the running of public affairs through a women's assembly, which sat separately but enjoyed prerogatives similar to those of the men's assembly (Anta Diop 1974:74). This explains the dominant and important role played by women in the management of society's political, military and even religious affairs including traditional Africa.

The history of Africa is punctuated by women's struggles, both individually and collectively. This demonstrates their long-standing commitment to the struggles of society resulting in the emergence of women warriors, rulers of kingdoms and women of great influence in the religious sphere proving that the exercise of political power by women in ancient Africa was a reality. In North Africa, for example, Queen Saba of Ethiopia was one of the most powerful women in Africa (Adamu 2009). Queen Shaba had the qualities that made her a charismatic ruler and an empress of great stature. Descended from the Abyssinian kin of Yemen, the queen ruled a territory whose reign extended as far as Yemen (Nanjira 2010). Also in Ethiopia, Empress Menetewab (1720-1770) assumed the regency in favour of her son on the death of her husband in 1730. Thereafter, the king left the governance of the empire to her even after he reached ruling

age. When her son died, she continued to hold the authority on the basis of family rights but was ousted from power by another bid for the throne. It was during this period that she met a European traveller by the name of James Bruce, who encouraged her to write her memoirs (Vidrovitch 1997).

Moreover, ancient Egypt has the gold medal when it comes to promoting the rights and respect of women. The most relevant explanation for this, relates not only to the matrilineal system in force in their political formation, but also to the strict rules of the Mâat (Nanjira, 2010). One of the most famous figures was Queen Cleopatra who ruled Egypt from 69 to 30 BC, for 39 years and was then succeeded by Pharaoh Meritneith (2952-2932 BC) (Nanjira, 2010). This powerful queen came to power during the period when it had been established in Egypt that women could rule and had inalienable inheritance rights. She succeeded Pharaoh Zoser and became the third ruler of Egypt's first dynasty by first acting as regent for her son and then later exercised power on her own behalf. The same applies to Queen Ni-Maat-Hepi, who, as an Egyptian princess, was regent to her son Pharaoh Djoser (Nanjira, 2010). From the above, it is clear women received political training and they wielded power in North Africa, evidenced through them being empresses and queens.

Central and West Africa also had women with proven political power. In Ghana, the activism of Queen Yaa Asantewaa (1840-1921) was evident in her resistance to British colonisation. With the help of a well-executed strategy, the Asantewaa queen secretly prepared physical and spiritual training through a call to battle and this heroic act enabled her to win the battle against the British in the early 1900s. The Amazons of Dahomey and their warrior army were also valiant women soldiers in pre-colonial Africa. In Angola, they have witnessed the fierce fighting spirit of a woman called Anne Njinga. This woman went down in history for having resisted Portugal's colonisation of Angola in the 17th century for some forty years (Cavazzi de Montecuccolo 2010). From 1624 to 1663, she fought, arms in hand, against the Portuguese conquest of the Ndongo kingdom, which had been ruled for generations by her family. A warrior

queen, she defended her sovereignty until her death at the age of 82. This queen became a symbol of resistance celebrated not only in her own country, but also in the black communities of Brazil and the United States. Since the 17th century, her memory has been perpetuated by documentary and fictional works, websites, music, theatre and various cultural productions (Cavazzi de Montecuccolo 2010).

In Southern Africa, women also played an important political and military role in the Zulu kingdom. It has been recorded that King Shaka, who is considered the great warrior of Africa, had as many men as women in his army by the time the colonisers arrived. The first Zulu princess to play a political role was Princess Mkabayi, the elder sister of King Senzangakhona (Shamase 2014), who was the father of three Zulu chiefs. In 1780, she took over her brother's regency during his childhood and became the confidante of one of his sisters, Nandi (Vidrovitch 1997:37). In East Africa also, precisely in Kenya, many women contributed to the Mau-Mau revolt in the 1950s (Wanjiru 2022).

In southern societies, everything to do with the mother is sacred; her authority is virtually unlimited (Anta Diop 1960) and the hypothesis that matriarchy is a structural element of African civilization contributes to social solidarity and, in turn, to the empowerment of women. Suivant la thèse de Cheick Anta Diop, les sociétés africaines étaient essentiellement matriarcales. C'est l'arrivée des religions monothéistes d'une part et du colonialisme européen d'autre part qui a perturbé une organisation sociale dans laquelle la femme détenait une place centrale sinon plus importante que celle de l'homme (Anta Diop 1960). As a result of the matriarchal system, Africans, prior to any foreign influence, had accorded women a place of choice. This leads us to understand that the sexist ideology is not universal, a fact that tends to challenge the dominant theses of Western-based types of feminism such as radical feminism. While relations between the sexes in Africa used to enjoy a positive complementarity, the changes that have occurred in the political formations of African States, particularly regarding

their contact with the outside world, have changed the perception of women.

Colonisation and the advent of Christianity as factors favouring the rise of the patriarchy in Africa

Cultural differences and the historical nature of gender relations are factors that have led to a multiple forms of domination. Africa's contact with the outside world has led to an upheaval in gender relations that has gradually resulted in the subordination of women. The typical Indo-European history reveals a patriarchal form of family life. The economic role of women was reduced to the strict minimum, as their main function was to procreate (Anta Diop 1960:29) and they were reduced to a burden that the man had to carry.. These considerations, revealed by Anta Diop (1960:29), explain the fate of women in Indo-European society . Women were isolated in a separate part of the house, to keep out of sight of men and, above all, strangers which reflects that their position was similar to that of slaves.

Indeed, the factors that contributed to the rise of patriarchy in Africa had to do with the capitalist system which includes religion. As Eliade (1976) noted, Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity and Islam were themselves developed on soil rich in beliefs, spirituality, mysticism and piety. As an important factor in structuring social life, religion creates norms that tend to redefine masculine and feminine, in response to the need for "normativity, reassurance of identity and certainty of otherness" (Rochefort 2007:29). In this way, religious fundamentalism perpetuates a structuring of power and, as a result, an unequal hierarchy based on gender, keeping women in a subordinate position. The exclusion of women from the labour market also contributes to reducing the place of women in society which is the reason why the capitalist mining industry was dependent on the marginal position of women (Mokoena 2020).

Firstly, Africa's contact with other civilizations has led it to believe in and accommodate religions such as Islam that were not initially its own. Muslim law was modelled on the tribal and patriarchal model that was dominant at the time, based

on the pre-eminence of the agnatic lineage group and on male kinship and the privilege of masculinity. This law originated in Islam for the needs of the nascent community, included? pre-Islamic customs, those of Semitic groups and the Talmudic group (Mbow 2005). Thus, monotheistic religions attribute a minor place to women in their sacred texts and generally in the sacred imagination of these religions as well. As a result, rights and duties are based on a sexual division of roles, giving pre-eminence to fathers, husbands, brothers and sons thus subjecting women to male control. Despite this rigid vision, this model has been preserved and solidified over time. Today, this model still persists in its traditional institutions and values: polygamy, repudiation, matrimonial guardianship, unequal inheritance and the duty to obey the societies in which it is practiced. Despite changes of all kinds, women's issues have remained a reserved domain where no one can enter without authorization (Mbow 2005).

Secondly, colonization brought large waves of Christianity to Africa. Although Portuguese Catholic evangelization took its first steps in the Kingdom of Congo at the end of the XV century, the Christianization of Africa really got underway at the end of the XVIII century (Zorn 2014). The rise of patriarchy in Africa was therefore visible during colonization, because this was the social system that prevailed in the West (Resta 2012) which is why the West has never accorded women an enviable status in society. The primacy of men meant that the fate of women was comparable to that of animals, and they were obliged or even restricted to performing only domestic and household tasks. It was this system that was extended to the whole of Europe and the United States and through colonization to the whole world. This is why Marèma Touré considers patriarchy as one of the prominent sources of disadvantage of women on the African continent (Touré 2017).

During the colonial period, the colonizers were administrators who worked to transform the African continent and unfortunately, the enviable place that African women had in society was not adequately appreciated. The position of women in society since ancient times, as political leaders, was

misinterpreted by colonial administrators. Women who ruled during the colonial period, particularly in classical antiquity, were women of strong character, powerful, efficient, competent and highly influential as queens and empresses (Nanjira 2010). Colonial governance mechanisms did more to impose male control over women's sexuality and labour. In this way, colonial power nipped in the bud the few avenues open for women to escape male domination, its concern being to create a public space managed by men (Mouiche 2005). The post-colonial period is grappling with this mixed legacy of both Western misogynies induced by colonization as well as matriarchal practices encouraging or giving women a place of choice in society. Since men are superior to women in Western society, women were demoted to servile positions in Africa (Nanjira 2010). Colonization was fundamentally patriarchal in nature, subverting relations of pre-colonial Africa, which gave women an important place through matriarchy and the matrilineal system of transmission of rights (Mbow 2005).

The complementarity they once enjoyed, enabling them to play a political role, seems to have been destroyed by colonization through a gender division.. Similarly, her role became increasingly marginal in the economic sphere and because of these practices, which gradually became habits, a complex developed concerning the place of women in society. Women thus became nothing more than sex objects for men and domestic workers. In terms of gender relations on the continent, women once had great political power and security, however, the Islamization of Africa, as well as contact with the West and Christianization of Africa, meant that most of the fundamental decisions relating to their security and access to material resources were taken by men (Haeri & Puechguirbal 2010). To understand the changes, continuities and renewals at work in contemporary African societies, it is essential to re-examine women's participation in conflict management mechanisms.

African mechanisms for the promotion and participation of women in conflict management

The general observation that women are not involved in political affairs has led some authors, like Ann Tickner, to argue that the international scene or the international system is a domain reserved for men. It is a world of diplomats, military officers and international civil servants that are all men (Ticker 1992). Ticker's comments were made more than three decades ago and some progress has been made, however, women's involvement in security management is still minimal. Although women are the most affected by conflicts, they often find themselves excluded from decisions relating to peace and security. It was against this backdrop that the United Nations Security Council adopted Resolution 1325 of 31 October 2000 on the participation of women in conflict management and similarly the AU has produced standards for the involvement of women in conflict management. Therefore,, the first aim of this section is to examine the mechanisms for women's participation in conflict management at an international and regional level. Secondly, it aims at analysing the fundamentals of African civilization by drawing on African resources and knowledge to boost the inclusion of women in conflict management.

Institutional and normative frameworks towards the participation of women in peacebuilding process at the international and regional level

The global picture shows that women are regularly under-represented in peace processes. According to UN Women statistics, 28% of peace agreements contained stipulations on the role of women and over the last 25 years, only 2% of mediators and 8% of negotiators have been women. Endowed with the intrinsic values of peace, women are a resource that is insufficiently used. They should not just be at the negotiating table to fill quotas but must effectively represent their communities (UN 2024). It therefore appears that the role of women in conflict management is recognized but rarely visible.

Indeed, the normative frameworks on issues of peace and security can be traced back to 1969, when the Commission on the Status of Women examined the question of protecting women and children in emergency and conflict situations. One of the great moments in the history of women's normative frameworks was the adoption of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1979. It was at the Beijing Conference in 1995, however, that the development of a UN policy on women, peace and security took shape. Five years later, resolution 1325, which was adopted unanimously by the Security Council, formed the cornerstone of what is now known as the "women, peace and security agenda" (Doucy 2022:2). Following Resolution 1325, a myriad of international norms relating to women, peace and security were adopted like the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1820 of June 2008 on sexual violence and international crimes which was followed by the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1888 of September 2009 which aimed to strengthen Resolution 1820 against conflict-related sexual violence. Resolution 1889 of October 2009 was also adopted which focused on strengthening the implementation and monitoring of Resolution 1325. As of 2010, the following resolutions have been adopted; i) United Nations Security Council Resolution 1960 of December 2010 which relates to the creation of an accountability system to end conflict-related sexual violence. The United Nations Security Council Resolution 2106 of June 2013 focused on the accountability of UN bodies in the fight against impunity for sexual crimes and Resolution 2242 of October 2015 focused on the role of women, peace and security issues.

The AU's normative framework for promoting women's rights is part of the general framework of conventions established by the universal organization which is the United Nations organization (UN). As an international organization, the African Union (AU) stands "for equality between men and women and the empowerment of women, and more specifically for the right of women to participate in political and public life" (Nze Bekale 2023:2). As far as the normative and institutional

frameworks relating to women, peace and security are concerned, the continental organization had already begun to normalize the role of women when its fundamental texts were drawn up and has continued to do so since then through the introduction of legal provisions.

Based on the history of social relations between the sexes, normative mechanisms help to highlight the heavy weight of the gender variable in the conduct of conflicts on an international scale. The issue of peace and security in Africa became normative with the advent of the AU. Under the OAU (Organization of African Unity), security arrangements were ad hoc mechanisms. The AU Peace and Security Council which was set up in 2003, is responsible for setting security standards on the continent. Accordingly, the Maputo Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women was adopted in 2003 and is in line with the spirit of Resolution 1325 which is intended to be the "mother resolution" on accountability in peace and security. Nicola Pratt and Sophie Richter-Devroe argue that Resolution 1325 has become the Security Council's main instrument for defending and promoting the status of women (Pratt & Richter-Devroe, 2011) and thus is the cornerstone of the international normative framework on women, peace and security.

In its Constitutive Act, the AU paid particular attention to empowering women in the continent (AU 2000). By proclaiming its commitment to the principle of gender equality and equity, the AU gives women opportunities for greater participation in decision-making at national, sub-regional and regional levels. According to the Constitutive Act, this organization is committed to respect the principle of gender equality in the composition of its organs and institutions. The implementation of this policy orientation also concerns the area of peace and security in relation to women. Thus, conflict prevention inevitably requires greater participation of women (Hill 2003). It is obvious, however, that the articles of the Protocol Relating to the Peace and Security Council (PSC) of the AU, considered by Delphine Lecoutre as 'the keystones of the AU' (Lecoutre, 2004), are presented as 'gender-neutral' bodies. The legal provisions

of this instrument, mark the institutionalization of collective security by the AU and, does not take into account the gender dimension in the composition of the PSC as well as its role in the conflict management process (Nze Bekale, 2023:5). For example, the Protocol establishing the PSC makes no mention of the need for female representation and participation in the performance of the body's duties (Jorge 2013), however, the PSC states that women are not institutionally involved in civil society which limits their leadership role. This text minimizes the status of women and, by extension, makes women's place in this security mechanism incidental. Contrary to the provisions of its Constitutive Act, the AU, through the PSC, is raising ambiguity about its principle of parity between men and women.

Moreover, the Protocol to the African Union Convention on the Prevention of Terrorism also appears to be a gender-insensitive text. No reference is made to women and the ways in which they are affected by violent phenomena (Nze Bekale 2023). Support for women in political processes in post-conflict countries needs to be strengthened so that they can have an influence on conflict prevention, peace-making and reconstruction (UNECA 2022). This has led some analysts to argue that the existence of legal frameworks, policies and institutions, as well as the presence of women in the security sector, are not enough (Hendricks 2020:4).

The institutional framework for the protection of women in Africa is the Protocol on the Rights of Women which was adopted on 11 July 2003 in Maputo. It urges the organization's Member States to take "all appropriate measures to ensure increased participation of women: in peace education programs and in the culture of peace; in mechanisms and processes for the prevention, management and resolution of conflicts " (Maputo Protocol 2003). This act reiterates the desire to make the issue of women and security an essential part of its agenda and this provision rectifies the shortcomings of the PSC protocol in terms of women's participation. The implementation of these texts, however, does not always follow as the voice of women in conflict prevention and peace-making is often barely heard and they hardly participate in the peace process. This is proven by

how, only 4% of parliamentary seats were reserved for women in conflict and post-conflict zones in 2015 (Nze Bekale 2022). Moving towards full and meaningful participation of women is crucial to the adoption of lasting and sustainable solutions in peace processes.

The AU's strategies for the advancement of women can also be seen in the normative and institutional framework known as Agenda 2063. Indeed, the AU emphasizes the fully participatory and collective nature of Agenda 2063 and insists on its full ownership by all actors in society, foremost being the youth and women (Gambotti 2015). Aspiration 6 of this agenda, entitled 'an Africa whose development is centred on its citizens', is based on the potential of its people, in particular its women and young people. The aim is to ensure parity between men and women in the distribution of roles and the elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against women. Reform of the security sector in Africa must be guided towards the inclusion and full participation of men and women by emphasizing gender parity. It is to this end that the Office of the Special Envoy on Women, Peace and Security has formulated a continental results framework to monitor the implementation of African and international instruments on women, peace and security by AU Member States" (AU 2019:2).

With this in mind, the Women, Peace and Security Programme was launched in 2015, with a view to develop effective strategies to advance the Agenda and mainstream gender in Africa's peace and security architecture. In addition, the institutional framework annexed to the AU's peace and security architecture relating to women, peace and security led to the creation of the Pan-African Women's Network for Conflict Prevention and Mediation in 2017 (AU 2018) whose aim is to mainstream gender into the continental peace and security agenda by protecting women in times of conflict and involving women in peace-making negotiations. This ambitious and innovative network, also known as 'FemWise-Africa', is an auxiliary mechanism of the Panel of the Wise and the Pan-African Network of the Wise (PanWise). This is a part of a strategy to promote policies aimed at reducing the gap

in the implementation of commitments to include women in peace processes and proves that the AU is committed to placing women at the forefront of conflict resolution.

From the above, the prevalence of norms and institutional frameworks about women, peace and security is a new configuration of the AU. Gender equality, which is a question of power, reflects a stated desire to involve women in peace processes and increasing their participation in peace is an expression of their growing power. The institutionalization and standardization of promotion frameworks, however, should be based more on endogenous practices. By giving women remarkable political power, as it was the case in ancient Africa, we could capitalize more on women's participation in peacekeeping.

Integration of African knowledge for a more efficient inclusion of women in the quest for peace

The role of women in conflict prevention and resolution in ancient societies was governed by codes of conduct based on well-structured regulatory mechanisms in which women played a key role. In African societies, we find women (queen-mothers) who ascended to high-reigning positions when the king was still too young to rule, when there was no king to rule or ruled by themselves (Ogbomo & Ogbomo 1993). In the current? circumstances, it is important to return to the earlier resources and endogenous conflict resolution mechanisms such as the "Takumbeng" which is a peaceful conflict resolution method used by old women in the North-West region of Cameroon that put women at the centre of any negotiation (ICG 2022:16). This would not only about women reaching the quotas within international bodies, but about them actually participating in decision-making.

Africa has a rich cultural heritage, with texts that already provided for the organization of political life. The Charter of Mandé, adopted in 1236 by Emperor Soundjata Keita of Mandé of Mali, is thought to be one of the oldest constitutional texts in Africa (Fofana & Cissé 2003). It was adopted a few years after the Magna Carta of 1215 and is often presented as the first

declaration of human rights (Fofana & Cissé 2003). This charter which established the rules governing life in the Mandé Empire, has the merit of promoting the values of equality, respect for rights, democracy and women's rights. Articles 14 and 16 of the Mandé Charter clearly set out certain rights for women that make them equal to men in various areas of life. Article 14 stated: "Never offend women, our mothers" and article 16 says: "Women, in addition to their daily occupations, must be associated with all our governments"(Fofana & Cissé 2003). While women face social inequalities in the contemporary world, it is clear from this Charter that Africa had already established structured living conditions that gave women a place of choice.

African civilization, with its wealth of endogenous knowledge and traditions, is a foundation likely to enhance women's values of peace.

Reactivating the African mechanisms and values that were previously in place would enable women to fulfil their mission of peace once again. Perceiving women as mediators is intended to encourage African women to take-on decision-making roles in security matters as the patriarchal perception that relegates women to second place has not always been the case. Women's participation in women's secret societies in Cameroon, for example, bears witness to their exercise of power. In the North-West region, the practice of Takumbeng empowered older women to publicly humiliate male leaders considered responsible for injustices (ICG 2022:16). Additionally, this traditional practice was popularized in the 1990s during the pre-election riots and demonstrations calling for a national conference in 1991 (ICG 2022). The tools of activism specific to women in African traditions thus contribute to the effective mobilization of their communities.

In the Bamiléké society, which is an ethnic group in Cameroon, there are certain specificities and privileges granted to women who exercise political power in traditional spheres. In the Western region, among the Grass Fields in Bamiléké country, the Queen Mothers, who are the mothers of the Chief, are very powerful and respected, as are the mothers of twins

known as 'Magni'. As a result, they have direct access to the status of mother of peace (Toukam 2016) and in times of crisis, the mothers of twins are called upon to act as mediators, using the tree of peace (Toukam 2016). It is certain that in many other societies in Africa, we can find examples of situations and statuses that are favourable to women (Batchom 2019) and thus peace and security are resources that must be sought by all in a society, regardless of gender. The mobilization of women for peace in traditional African societies is rooted in endogenous governance and by enhancing the value of African cultural and ancestral heritage in the institutions of deliberation and decision-making, establishing new gender-based power relations will be possible.

The power of women in pre-colonial Africa has long been a feature of the continent's history, with women being represented in the highest political bodies. Analysis shows that the AU, has made efforts to integrate African knowledge by setting up institutions such as the Panel of Wise within its peace and security mechanism, which are similar to groups of notables found in traditional societies. The creation of this body in the AU's peace architecture stems from the recognition of the importance of traditional conflict resolution mechanisms and their relevance to the prevention and mediation of disputes in contemporary Africa (AU 2015). Gender equality is thus promoted through these Panels as they incorporate women, as it was the case in pre-colonial times. Specifically, for the 2018–2020 mandate, the Panel of the Wise included three women out of the five members of the Council, namely; the former president of Liberia, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, the former vice-president of Uganda, Speciosa Wandira Kazibwe, and a former minister from Gabon, Honorine Nzet Bitéghé (Nze Bekale 2023). It is therefore important to increase the number of ways of transforming institutional frameworks so that these mechanisms correspond to African realities, particularly in view of the new threats to peace and security on the continent.

Conclusion

In short, in the context of this analysis, the tripartite of ‘women, peace and security’ of the AU is part of the long-standing history of Africa. An examination of the gender relations that have prevailed on the continent since the pre-colonial period reveals that Africa has a wealth of endogenous resources and knowledge, particularly regarding the status of women in its society?. Women’s position of power has been gradually eroded with the introduction of new religions and the continent’s contact with the outside world and this is the reason why postcolonial feminism was used in this study, as it makes an analysis based on the specific characteristics of African women. The rise of misogyny and ‘male domination’ over time has considerably diminished the position of women and women are now seen as the first victims of conflict as they are mostly subjected to violence in times of war. In view of this situation, international organisations have established standards that not only protect women in situations of conflict, but above all provide them with the opportunity to be at the centre of conflict resolution. This approach, also taken up by the African Union, has led to the establishment of several normative and institutional frameworks for the participation of women in peace processes. Hence, it is important to refer to endogenous and traditional African mechanisms to maximize the participation of women in conflict prevention and resolution.

References

- Adamu M. 2009. The Legend of Queen Sheba, the Solomonic Dynasty and Ethiopian History: An Analysis. *African Research Review*, (1): 468-483. <https://doi.org/10.4314/afrrrev.v3i1.43592>
- Amesty International. 2004. Burundi: Urgent need to protect women and girls from rape. Available at URL <https://reliefweb.int/report/burundi/burundi-urgent-need-protect-women-and-girls-rape> (Accessed: 10.12.2024).
- Anan K. 2003. Women, peace and security. United Nations Digital library system. Available at URL https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/477163/files/womenpeaceandsecurity.pdf?ln=zh_CN (Accessed: 01.12.2024).

- Anta Diop C. 1960. *L'unité culturelle de l'Afrique noire*. Paris: Presence Africaine.
- Anta Diop C. 1974. *Les fondements économiques et culturels d'un État fédéral d'Afrique Noire*. Paris: Presence Africaine.
- Aolain F. 2013. What Does Postconflict Security Mean for Women. In: Aili Mari Tripp et al. *Gender, Violence and Human Security: Critical Feminist Perspectives*. New York: New York University Press. 33-49. <https://doi.org/10.18574/nyu/9780814770207.003.0002>
- Aouaa A. 2017. Les sociétés matriarcales en Afrique. *Journal d'Esma* n°2 : mouvements féminins et mouvements féministes en Afrique. Available at URL <https://esmaparis1.com/2018/04/01/les-societes-matriarcales-en-afrique/> (Accessed: 10.12.2024).
- AU. 2000. Constitutive act of the AU. Available at URL https://au.int/sites/default/files/pages/34873-file-constitutiveact_en.pdf (Accessed: 03.12.2024).
- AU. 2015. Conflict resolution, peace and security. Available at URL <https://au.int/en/conflict-resolution-peace-security> (Accessed: 04.12.2024)
- AU. 2018. Strengthening African Women's Participation in Conflict Prevention, Mediation Processes and Peace Stabilisation Efforts. Available at URL <https://www.peaceau.org/uploads/final-concept-note-femwise-sept-15-short-version-clean-4-flyer.pdf> (Accessed: 03.12.2024)
- Balzacq T. 2016. *Théories de la sécurité : les approches critiques* : Paris, Science po. <https://doi.org/10.3917/scpo.balza.2016.01>
- Batchom P. 2019. Women, peace and gender equality: The SDG 5 between shy principal acceptance and practical resistances: in Paloma Durand et al. *Sustainable Development Goals, goal 5: gender equality*. Pamplona: Thomson Reuters, 239-272.
- Brugère F. 2020. La persistance du patriarcat. *Multitudes*, (79): 193-198. <https://doi.org/10.3917/mult.079.0193>
- Bourdieu P.1998. *La domination masculine*. Paris: Le Seuil.
- Cavazzi de Montecucolo. 2010. *Njinga, reine d'Angola. La relation d'Antonio Cavazzi de Montecucolo*. London.

Gender and Feminist Meditations

- Doucy E. 2022. Les femmes, la paix et la sécurité en 2020: un bilan des 20 ans de la Résolution 1325 (2000) du CSNU. *Revue Paix et sécurité européenne et internationale*, (17),: 1-17. <https://doi.org/10.61953/psei.2939>
- Eliade M.1976. *Histoire des croyances et des idées religieuses*. Paris:Payot.
- Emeka E. 2023. Matriarchy in traditional Africa and its relevance to contemporary feminism. *Journal of Arts and Humanities*, (4),: 1-21.
- Fofana A & Cissé Y. 2003. *La Charte du Mandé et autres traditions du Mali*. Paris: Albin Michel.
- Gambotti C. 2015. L'Agenda 2063, un cadre collectif et participatif pour une Afrique unie et prospère. *Revue Géoéconomie*, 4(76),:129-140. <https://doi.org/10.3917/geoec.076.0129>
- Gentry C. & Sjoberg L. 2015. *Beyond Mothers, Mosters, Whores: Thinking about Women's Violence in Global Politics*. London: Zed Books. <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781350218628>
- Haeri M. & Puechguirbal N. 2010. De l'impuissance à l'action: la pluralité des expériences des femmes dans les conflits armés. *Revue International de la Croix Rouge*, 92(877),: 103-122.
- Hendricks C. 2020. L'Agenda Femmes, paix et sécurité: 20 ans après. *Série dialogue*: 1- 10.
- Hill F. 2003. La contribution des femmes à la prévention des conflits, à l'alerte rapide et au désarmement. *Forum du désarmement*, 19-28.
- ICG. 2022. Militantes, victimes, œuvrant pour la paix: les femmes dans le conflit anglophone au Cameroun. *Rapport Afrique*, 307: 1-40.
- Jorge M. 2013. Union africaine et médiation où sont les femmes? Note d'analyse politique, 1: 1- 5. <https://doi.org/10.3917/sh.248.0001>
- Lecoutre D. Le Conseil de paix et de sécurité de l'Union africaine, clef d'une nouvelle architecture de stabilité en Afrique?. *Afrique Contemporaine*, 4(212),:131-16. <https://doi.org/10.3917/afco.212.0131>

- Mokoena D.A. 2020. Women of Marikana in the media. Decolonial analysis of gendered representations. In Omotoso S.A (ed.) Women's political communication in Africa: Issues and perspectives, Contributions to political Science https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-42827-3_3
- Mouiche I. 2005. Genre et commandement territorial au Cameroun. In Mbow P (eds). Hommes et femmes dans la sphère publique et privée. Dakar:CODESRIA. 151-178.
- Mbow P. (eds.). 2005. Hommes et femmes dans la sphère publique et privée. Dakar:CODESRIA.
- Nanjira D. 2010. African Foreign Policy and Diplomacy: from Antiquity to the 21st Century, California: Praeger.
- Naves M.C. 2020. Introduction. Le genre, pour penser la complexité du monde. *Revue internationale et stratégique*, 119(3),: 60-69. <https://doi.org/10.3917/ris.119.0060>
- Nduwimana F. 2008. La résolution 1325 du Conseil de sécurité de l'ONU sur les femmes, la paix et la sécurité : comprendre les implications, remplir les obligations. Nations Unies: DAES.
- Nze Bekale L. 2022. Les dimensions participatives et populaires du cadre politique de réforme du secteur de la sécurité de l'Union Africaine (UA). In Batibonak P(eds.). *Gouvernementalité, territorialité et statolité africaines en crise. Visages et mirages de la statolité critique africaine*. Yaoundé: Monange. 231-252.
- Nze Bekale L. The African Union (AU) and the Women, Peace and Security (Wps) Triptych: Normalization and Institutionalization from 2000 to 2023. *Revue Interventions économiques*,70:1-25.
- Ogbomo O & Ogbomo Q. 1993. Women and Society in Pre-Colonial Iyede. *Anthropos* (88),: 431-441.
- Onyejekwe C. 2005. Les femmes, la guerre, la consolidation de la paix et la reconstruction. *Revue Internationale des Sciences Sociales*, 184(2):303-307. <https://doi.org/10.3917/riss.184.0301>
- Pratt N & Richter-Devroe 2011. Critically Examining UNSCR 1325 on Women, Peace and Security. *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 13(4):489-50. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616742.2011.611658>

Gender and Feminist Meditations

- Resta E. 2012. Du matriarcat au patriarcat. Les mythes masculins à l'épreuve de la science. Paris: l'Harmattan.
- Rocheffort F. 2007. Le pouvoir du genre. Laïcités et religions, 1905-2005. Toulouse: Presses Universitaires du Mirail.
- Sadiki J.J. 2008. La femme dans la gestion des conflits en Afrique précoloniale. Traditions, sociétés et pouvoirs dans la gestion des grands lacs. Paris: l'Harmattan.
- Salami M. 2024. A Historical Overview of African Feminist Strands. House for African feminism.
- Sindjoun L 2000 (dir). La biographie sociale du sexe: genre, société et politique au Cameroun. Paris:CODESRIA et Karthala.
- Sow F. 2011. Féminisme: une question politique. *Tumultes*, 2(37),: 51-57. <https://doi.org/10.3917/tumu.037.0051>
- Shamase M. 2014. The royal women of the Zulu monarchy through the keyhole of oral history: Queens Nandi (c. 1764 – c.1827) and Monase (c. 1797 – 1880). *Inkanyiso* 6(1),: 1-14.
- Tickner A. 1992. Gender in International Relations: Feminist Perspectives on Achieving Global Security. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Toukam D. 2016. Histoire et anthropologie du peuple bamiléké. Paris: l'Harmattan.
- Touré M. 2017. La recherche sur le genre en Afrique: quelques aspects épistémologiques, théoriques et culturels. In Sow F et al. (ed.). Genre et dynamique socioéconomiques et politiques en Afrique. Dakar: CODESRIA. 105-125.
- UN. 2024. Facts and figures: women, peace and security. Available at URL <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/peace-and-security/facts-and-figures> (Accessed: 10.12.2024).
- UNECA. 2022. Interlinkages between the development, peace and security, human rights and humanitarian pillars in West and Central Africa. Available at: URL <https://www.uneca.org/sites/default/files/ATPC/interlinking-intra-african-trade-industrialization-infrastructure-development-guns-silent/Interlinkages%20Report%20West%20and%20Central%20Final%202022.pdf> (Accessed: 10.12.2024).

Women's Participation in the AU

UNESCO. 2015. Femmes africaines, panafricanisme et renaissance africaine. Paris.

Vidrovitch C. 1997. African Women: A Modern History. New York: Westview Press.


Wanjiru E. 2022. Women and the Mau Mau Memorial. Available at URL <https://www.historyworkshop.org.uk/public-space/women-and-the-mau-mau-memorial/> (Accessed: 10.12.2024).

Zorn J.F. Le temps long de la christianisation en Afrique. *Afrique Contemporaine*, 4(252),: 132- 134. <https://doi.org/10.3917/afco.252.0132>



Minority within Minorities: A Critique of Cultural Practices which Influence Gender Inequalities among the Nambya in Zimbabwe.

Wilson Zivave 

Religious Studies Department
Mkoba Teachers College 
Gweru, Zimbabwe

Abstract

The chapter is a contribution towards the discourse on gender and power in the context of Nambya women in Hwange district in Zimbabwe, who have suffered from multiple marginalisation due to their cultural practices, ethnicity and gender. Of significance are the cultural practices embedded in marriage, ritual practices and family dynamics which are patriarchal which has resulted in the side-lining of Nambya women to become second-class citizens and minoritised in the wider society. The chapter investigates the roles of Nambya women, their cultural practices and the impact of marginalising women among the Nambya ethnic group. The study will utilise the phenomenological approach to understand women in Nambya and this chapter seeks to unmask hegemonic masculinities that disempower women under the pretext of upholding Nambya cultural practices. It also seeks to contribute to debunking cultural practices and values which disempower women and create gender inequality among minority ethnic groups like the Nambya in Zimbabwe. The chapter recommends the debunking of cultural practices that limit women reaching their potential.

Keywords: Gender, Marginalisation, Ethnicity, Minority, Patriarchy, Cultural Practices



Introduction

The marginalisation of women due to patriarchy and ethnicity continues to be the feminist concern in the gender and power discourse in modern society today because they both breed gender inequalities by making women minorities in domestic and public spheres (David 2000:85). Nambya women, who are from a minority ethnic group in Zimbabwe, have been victims of gender inequality because of their ethnicity and the Nambya hegemonic masculinities need to be interrogated in the gender, religion and cultural discourse. The Nambya ethnic group is a product of the pre-colonial Nambya state of north-western Zimbabwe and although it has been known since early colonial times, (Kearney 1907:59) it has received little scholarly attention. It should be noted that colonialism, traditional structures, backwardness, race ethnicity and patriarchy are critical in gender and power politics as it has been the ground for the marginalisation and minoritisation of women (Amadiume, 2001:47).

Ethnicity and patriarchy emphasize that men have excessive powers over women and affect the status of women thus the discrimination of women because of their ethnic background and gender only serves the interests of men (Makaudze 2015:266). The fact is that ethnicity in the Zimbabwean and Nambyan patriarchal culture are to be blamed for women's minoritisation and the Nambyan women have become invisible, marginal and a minority gender. This indicates that they have become a minority within a minority and it is from this context that the minoritisation of women in a multicultural society has become topical among gender advocates, feminists and scholars.

Minoritisation along with gender and ethnicity has become an impediment to human and social development in many multicultural societies. This is true for the Chibarwe, Kalanga, Koisian, Nambya, Ndau, Shangani, Sotho, Tonga, Tswana, Venda and Xhosa tribes as they are considered minorities in multicultural Zimbabwe where ethnic groups like the Shona and Ndebele dominate in the cultural landscape and spaces. In multicultural societies and patriarchal societies

institutionalised systems advance male ideology (Zivave 2018:12). As a result of male dominance in these multicultural societies, women are objectified, suppressed, have limited access to resources, are forced into marriages and enjoy limited reproductive right. This is the case for Nambya women who face minoritisation stemming from politics of dominance and the Nambya patriarchal tradition.

Nambya is considered a minority patriarchal ethnic group in Zimbabwe because their population is relatively low (Jonhera, 2023:1179). Zimbabwe is characteristically, a multilingual and multicultural nation which comprises several of ethnic-minority groups, including Nambya, Tonga, TjiKalanga, Venda, Doma, Xhosa, Dombe and Ndaou (Ndhlovu, 2006:308). This suggests that Nambya women belong to a minority ethnic group of about 100,000 people, based in Hwange in the north-west of Zimbabwe (Jonhera, 2023:1182). Within the Nambya ethnic group, women are inferior because they are subordinated and their voice is stifled within the broader context of a male-dominated society and are excluded from the public domain (Rawat, 2014:44). This inferiority status of women among the Nambya is caused by patriarchal beliefs and practices which consider female sexuality as cursed, inferior, subjugated, weak and subordinated whilst considering men as superior, strong and ruling (Zivave 2018:1).

Nambya women have been dominated by other ethnic groups as well as men in their own culture and dominance by other ethnic groups is due to Nambya being a minority in Zimbabwe and minorities are often restricted from participating fully or effectively in economic, social and political life (United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioners, 2006:1). Minority women have been imaged as chattels and are subjected to male violence (Zivave, 2018:2) which causes cultural prejudice and discrimination and since the Nambya society is patriarchal, they are guilty of conspiracy because they side with the patriarchal institution and tradition in making Nambya women a minority within a minority (Zivave, 2018:2).

The presentation of Nambya women in their cultural context reflects hegemonic masculinity, which positions men as superior to women, not allowing for any sort of weakness or 'feminine' emotions i.e. nurturing, sadness, sensitivity, and caring/kindness (Uchendu 2007:280). Nambya ethnicity in a broader perspective and Nambya patriarchal culture in a narrower perspective have thus been instruments for advancing the dual-minoritisation of women in Nambya whilst promoting male dominance. The Nambya ethnic group epitomises a typical patriarchal African society in which a system of social stratification and gender variation enable patriarch in all spheres of life.

Patriarchy is defined as a system that is male dominated (Connell, 2005:129). It subordinates women by putting men in positions of influence, lowers the position of women in the social hierarchy and privileges male counterparts. It is a social and ideological construct which considers men as superior to women (Rawat, 2014:45). There is thus a need to offer scholarly attention and a feminist critique of the dominant patriarchal culture of the Nambya which has minoritised women in modern society based on oral evidence from Nambya and observations of the cultural aspects of the Nambya. Nambya society has patriarchal features that are typical of most societies in the Western world. Women are typically viewed and often treated as less than equal to men, with a common saying that the role of women lies in the kitchen (Makama, 2013:101). Patriarchy encourages male leadership, male domination and male power (Shoko, 2022:21) and is a system in which women are subject to economic dependence, violence, domestication and the peripherals of decision-making. It is the thrust of this paper that will bring about scholarly attention to the Nambya ethnic group in Zimbabwe so that gender equality is fully attained in a multicultural society.

Who are the Nambya People?

The BaNambya people are the native inhabitants of the area around Hwange National Park in Zimbabwe (Ncube 2004:2). They are also known as BaNyai, who are Bantu-speaking people found

in the northwest of Zimbabwe in the Hwange chieftaincy. Nambya people are originally Shona people who migrated from Great Zimbabwe after it had collapsed (Nhongo 2015; Sagiya 2019:2). It is argued by recent ethnographers that the development of the Nambya state was contemporaneous with other Zimbabwe cultural states and not the result of a direct migration from the Great Zimbabwe state (Sagiya 2019:2). According to tradition, the Nambya migrated from Great Zimbabwe going northwest of Zimbabwe where they passed Fungautsi (Filabusi) then went to Gwararavaranda (Gwabalanda) and Mopane (Lupane) where they proceeded to Binga where they found that the BaTonga were already there. They embraced some of the BaTonga people's way of life there and proceeded to reach the Zambezi River that they found navigating northwest. They settled in Hwange where they established a capital known as Bambusi and Shangano (Makuvaza 2008:22).

The Nambya culture in North-western Zimbabwe is best known for the stone-built sites of Shangano, Bumbuzi and Mtoa. Nambya oral traditions identify these sites as successive capitals of the Nambya state. Shangano was named the state's first capital; from there, it was moved to Mtoa and subsequently to Bumbuzi (Hayes 1997:385). The capitals that they constructed were similar to that of Great Zimbabwe and it is for this reason, that many scholars believe that the Nambya people came from Great Zimbabwe and conquered the Kalanga, who also influenced their culture (Shenjere-Nyabezim 2020:14). They also interacted with the Ndebeles who also later influenced their culture and thus today. Nambya culture is a hybrid culture composed of Shona background with some Tonga, Ndebele and Kalanga interaction (Sagiya, 2019:3). The Nambya people are under the paramount chief known as Whange who is a man (Nhongo, 2015:1) and they live communally, with men being the heads of the family. The leadership of men in the domestic and public sphere among the Nambya is significant in the gender and power discourse as women do not make decisions and all positions of authority are occupied by men. It is in this context that Sagiya (2019:6) believes that patriarchy therefore is an element of Nambya culture and colonialism cemented patriarchy

among them. Colonialism also brought ethnic demarcation by establishing provinces such as Mashonaland West, Mashonaland Central, Mashonaland East, Manicaland, and Matabeleland North and South respectively which pushed women to the periphery. It brought a lot of cultural discrimination against women by men as it favoured men which implies that settlers brought a dominant colonial ideology that codified the position of Zimbabwean women into minors under the control and guidance of their fathers and husbands (Seidman 1984:421). The colonial system thus had a huge impact on indigenous women's cementing patriarchy into African society through the belief that men are better than women and deserve more power. As a result, men took occupations which allowed them to be assertive and control women and by so doing, the system advantaged men instead of women by making men decision makers, leaders and custodians of the family system. This created a gap between men and women who in traditional African society lived a more complementary life as compared to what was introduced by coloniality (Okome, 2003:68).

The concept of Minoritisation

The concept of minoritisation is mainly used in religious, cultural and ethnic studies to refer to numerically superior people (Atkinson 2000:185; Armstrong 2020:2). However, in this context, it refers to "sexual minorities" which refers to a social category that somehow helps describe and explain how women have been peripherised and subordinated in the social world due to their historical background, ethnicity and gender (Zivave, 2018:5). The objective in this paper is to determine how women have been relegated to the periphery due to historical background, ethnicity and gender. To do so, hegemonic masculinities that are embedded in ethnic politics and patriarchal cultures that would not allow for the promotion of gender equality in society are unpacked. The main contention of this paper is that Nambya women have suffered from varied institutionalised cultural and ethnic practices which have led to minoritisation. The argument, broadly stated, is that hegemonic masculinities harm minority ethnic groups rather than dominant cultural groups and that minority

cultures, nations and ethnic groups also suffer from dominant cultural groups. This has hampered the goal of multiculturalism because the protection of minority cultures is underestimated resulting in gender inequality.

The concept of ‘minority group’ should track what is wrong with the world and should help achieve justice and political equality (Haslanger 2000:31; Haslanger 2012:32 & Armstrong 2020:2). The argument is that; hegemonic masculinities should not be understood as the disbandment of indigenous culture but as debunking cultural practices that dehumanise women as part of the social group because hegemonic masculinities make women oppressed, exploited, dominated or simply marginalized. Overall, the belief is that Nambya women have been culturally and ethnically minoritised resulting in gender inequalities and social injustice in society.

Hegemonic Masculinity theoretical framework

Indigenous culture has a lot of patriarchal influences in social, religious and political spheres. It is a reality that the socio-cultural status of women has been negative in patriarchal societies (Zivave 2018:2). The domination of men in the socio-cultural context of Nambya women as well as the minoritisation of Nambya as an ethnic group has affected women more than men. The study will thus employ a hegemonic masculinity theoretical framework that articulates male dominant roles over females. Fundamentally, hegemonic masculinity is mostly attained through institutions such as marriage and cultural practices, which exclude or oppress females (Connell 2005:130). Since hegemonic masculinity differs by race, class and time, there will certainly be a Nambya dominant hegemonic masculinity which is based on the cultural practices of Nambya. It should be noted that Nambya are found in a “multicultural society with diverse religion, ethnic culture and economic class” (Zivave 2024:89) but they are considered a minority due to their numerical deficiency in the wider Zimbabwean society. In many multicultural societies, women are stereotyped because of their gender because ethnic boundaries and patriarchy in Zimbabwe have erased the complementary nature of men’s and women’s responsibilities (Shoko 2022:47).

In indigenous societies, women have been dispossessed of power and are now dependent upon men for their survival even today (Connell, 2005:132). Hegemonic masculinity adopted among the Nambya ethnic group has largely been influenced by the colonisation of all Zimbabwean ethnic groups by colonialists who imposed a form of a dominant, masculine culture on Zimbabwean men when they minoritised women by relegating them to the periphery and this was also reinforced by the patriarchal culture and a neo-colonisation agenda (Zivave, 2024:82). This hegemonic masculine culture prevents women from being active members of society (Rawat, 2014:48). Masculinity in Zimbabwe is largely formed along ethnicity, but there are dominant masculinity traits common to every man which makes women dominant (Jonhera, 2023:1184). For example, Nambya men are socialised to dominate women in every aspect of life which makes them superior and marginalises women from decision-making and public spheres.

Nambya men “discriminate against and dominate women because they live with the neo-colonized masculine ideologies of the colonizers, treating women as inferior” and minorities (Jaiyeola & Aladegbola 2020:4). Nambya men through the Nambya culture have practices that perpetuate gender inequality like Kuthobela, kutangila “child pledging”, seeking permission from male counterparts to do some activities as well as, exclusion in decision making and legal issues. Consequently, women in minority ethnic groups are driven into poverty and being dependent with a subordinate status (Metcalf & Afanassieva 2005:397). The gist of this discourse on gender marginalisation is that Nambya’s hegemonic masculinity is a product of ethnic minoritisation and patriarchy. Women have become a minority within their ethnic group resulting in gender exclusion as reflected by their marriage practices, land ownership, rites of passage and social organisation of the Nambya. Therefore, it will be appropriate to contextually explore the minoritisation of women in Nambya culture using cultural lenses and the roles society assigns to women as each society acquires peculiar knowledge based on the meaning constructed by their society (Barker 2012:22).

The Minoritisation and Marginalisation of women in Nambya culture

The roles of women in Nambya culture are a representation of the wider gender roles of women in various ethnic groups in the indigenous society. Gender roles in the Nambya culture provide a lens through which gender and power can be reconstructed and deconstructed. It should be noted that most gender roles of the Nambya people are the result of cross-pollination of culture which came through historical interaction with other ethnic groups. Historically, the Nambya culture is better understood from the archaeological findings at ancient capitals like Bambusi, Shongano and Mtoa which were the centres of political power (Shenjere–Nyabezi, & Gronenborn 2021:2). Power at such sites was in the hands of men and not women and it is from this discovery that one may argue that patriarchy flourished at ancient capitals as women were sidelined from the political activities of the Nambya Empire. Men were the heads of family and community affairs, however, some would argue that in ancient indigenous societies, women were complementary to men (Shoko 2022:21). Women assisted the men in looking after the family and creating cohesion in the society and in support of this, Taiwo (2010:1) avers that African women played a key role in the education and the teaching of children social, ethical and moral values which were part of the cultural standards for evaluating proper societal behaviour. Women, like men were valued in traditional African society for their complementarity in contributing to the welfare of the family and society. African women have always been noted for their salient activities such as procreation, childcare and collective preparation of the young ones for communal co-existence (Shoko 2007:12), however, women in traditional Nambya society had various limited roles in social, religious and political spheres.

Marriage practices

Among the Nambya there is a cultural practice known as Kungwina Mumba or wife inheritance which happens upon the death of the groom (Zivave, 2024:84) and the brother of the groom takes over the wife of the deceased. Women are never consulted

and do not have the right to consent. If the widow refuses to be remarried to the brother of her deceased husband; all the dowry 'malobolo' and 'ishasha' the money paid for appreciation of the wife is returned (Sigiya, 2019:6; Zivave, 2023:1). This means that women in Nambya owe their ownership to their male counterparts and are not independent due to cultural practices like wife inheritance which subject women to violence and discrimination. Wife inheritance creates a situation where women are controlled and suffer under sexual subordination thereby exposing them to higher risks of reproductive health challenges like maternal mortality, STIs and HIV/AIDS (Gwatimba, Raselekoane & Nwafor 2020:148). Despite advancements in modernity and human rights, women are still marginalised among the Nambya (Sigiya, 2019). This reflects that marriage practices perpetuate gender injustice and further peripherisation of women.

Furthermore, marriage is understood as a union between men and women who live together as husband and wife or wives. The marriage institution among the Nambya has largely been polygynous which is a form of polygamy that is practised to the disadvantage of women. Polygamy was meant to cater for the excessive number of females (Makaudze 2015:269), however, this has led women to be objectified and dependent upon men because of the bride-prize payment and the view of women as subordinates rather than marriage partners. Among the Nambya, women have been oppressed by those considered affluent in the society such as kings, chiefs, traditional healers, great hunters, farmers and iron smiths who practised this form of marriage among the Nambya

Nambya women are also sacred religious practitioners who can act as healers. As Lagerwerf observed, most African women can be pronounced as diviners, priestesses, healers, rainmakers, or participants in certain rights (Lagerwerf 1995:833). This concurs with the majority of divination studies done in African Traditional Religions that reveals that there are more women diviners than there are men (Olupona 2002:148; Idumwonyi, 2012:3). In alignment to this, Nambya women are also healers who use physical and spiritual methods to heal various ailments such as colds, flu and stomach pain by using remedies such

as boiling leaves of certain trees. Women are repositories of indigenous knowledge systems as far as family and community health matters are concerned (Shenjere-Nyabezi & Gronenborn, 2021:3). Healing, therefore, is not only confined to men but transcends all genders. Most women are diviners and it is even argued that Nambya female (in'angas) healers are better than their male counterparts in both divination and cure, however, due to hegemonic masculinities, healing in indigenous society is imaged in masculine terms even though women are also healers in the Nambya society (Jonhera, 2023:1180). When a woman becomes the host of the spirit, she is addressed in masculine terms and her ordinary status changes because of that. This means that women in the Nambya culture have little power outside their spiritual role. Although women have a lot of roles in domestic spheres and the public sphere in traditional society, their portrayal and status are seen in an ambivalent way.

Mediatory role

Nambya people believe in the existence of the human world and the spirit world. For this reason, women in Nambya act as spirit mediums between the two worlds. During libation which is known as Kutebula where ancestor veneration is done, women play a role as spirit mediums called Mande. Ancestral veneration is the heartbeat of religious life in Africa (Shoko 2007:25; Mbiti, 1969:2). Furthermore, ancestorhood is not only male fraternity as the existence of female ancestors is believed among Nambya. There are also female ancestors whose influence is to protect the living in most cases (Zivave, 2023:2). As indicated, women are spirit mediums 'Mande' who preside over religious ceremonies, for example, rainmaking (kupindula imvula) at Chingehali near Kamativi and Chilanga (Shenjere-Nyabezi & Gronenborn 2021:2; Zivave, 2023:4). They had the authority to officiate in any religio-cultural function of the Nambya people although women who acted as spirit mediums were restricted from marrying. This is because marriage is considered profane. For, Cheater (1986:67) the medium's life is 'sacralised'. It is this sacralisation which restricted women from being spirit mediums and as such, this is an expression of gender injustice. Cheater (1986:67) further

argues that women who became spirit mediums after they were already married would effectively terminate sexual activity and move into separate living quarters in order to meet the needs of the spirit. Reproduction rights are infringed as women are denied the chance to have children when they become spirit mediums (Neusu, 1983:2). The authority of the spirit overrides the gender identity, role and obligation of the medium and thus mediumship in this context, limited restricted women's fundamental rights.

Women and their sexuality

Among the Nambya, adultery committed by women is largely frowned upon. Many indigenous cultures express leniency on male sexual behaviour but are very proscriptive when it comes to female sexual behaviour (Dube 2018:3). Similar ideas are also observed within the Nambya culture, where male promiscuity is seen as tolerable, whereas female promiscuity is defined in terms of taboo. Seen in this light, women have often been depicted as willing accomplices, initiators of deadly sexual acts and dangerous temptresses (Gwekwerere, Magosvongwe, & Mazuru, 2012:13). In this regard, the women in Nambya culture are blamed for the sexual crimes that they commit with men while men are glorified. This is seen by the prevalence of adulterous affairs among Nambya which makes female sexuality a minority as compared to male sexuality.

Lobola/dowry

The coming of colonialists worsened the position of women among the Nambya. Dowry was done as a form of appreciation of women in the Nambya culture, however, colonialism commercialised dowry thus resulting in the objectification of women. This means that dowry as a cultural practice of the Nambya with livestock changed to cash and it is the dowry in cash that inflated the bride's wealth and these commodified women. Therefore, dowry cemented patriarchy as men controlled and exchanged women from father to husband whereas before the coming of the white colonialists, dowry was considered a symbolic exchange of gifts between the bride and groom's families to

show mutual respect and to prove that the groom could provide for the daughter (Zivave 2018:15). Heavy, colonialist-imposed taxes caused men to suffer financial constraints, causing them to exert control over the dowry as a source of income (Jaiyeola & Aladegbola 2020:6) and this made Nambya women a minority within the wide public sphere as well as their ethnic tribe. The development of legal colonialist systems established customary laws on issues of marriage and divorce, based on the testimony given by men, which led to many discriminatory customary laws in post-colonial Africa (Makaudze 2015:268).

The chapter is premised in decoloniality theory, which “challenges and reformulates the communicational scientific discourse by criticising the mediating power of Anglo-American hegemonic thinking, to obtain a native cultural paradigm” (Huerfano, Caballero and Rojas, 2016: 68). This reformulation of scientific discourse is important for embracing African knowledge and belief system in the preservation of the natural environment. As such, decoloniality is vital for “remaking the world such that enslaved, colonised and exploited peoples can regain their ontological density, voice, land, history, knowledge and power” (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2014: 183). It is a theory that re-configures itself within a biased global dictatorship and policemen where western countries dictate and monitor environmental preservation and conservation strategies of developing countries within the context of rapid environmental degradation. This results in liberation and democratisation of epistemological spaces for all so that environmental sovereignty is attained. The crisis is mainly manifesting itself in biased policing epistemologies where African knowledge and belief system is condemned at the expense of western conservation strategies and foreign beliefs (Shizha 2006). Through decoloniality, Africans engage in dealing with the environmental challenges in Africa in a way that is in sync with African belief systems and cultural practices. Coloniality is seen when western strategies are imposed on Africans to deal with environmental challenges. It is evident in the organisation of power, identity or humanity and humanism, and in the structures of knowledge; hence, the idea of coloniality of power, identity and knowledge

(Zondi, 2015: 20). Coloniality emerges when African ways of preserving the natural environment are dismissed on the basis of lacking scientific grounds and efficacy. Decoloniality, then, engages in a struggle to unmask coloniality wherever it is hidden or overt in preservation of the natural environment. As such, decoloniality exposes the double standards of westerners in their response to the environmental challenges affecting Africa in the 21st century. It disempowers coloniality in its quest to glorify western epistemologies while downplaying African epistemologies which restores “African humanity, social transformation and economic development” (Kaunda, 2015:76–77). To be precise, decoloniality theory, in this chapter, enables African scholars to advocate for the democratisation of environmental strategies and environmental sovereignty in eradicating global warming, climate change, land degradation, eutrophication and siltation of rivers. This would result in decentering global epistemological gendarmes within a context of the environmental crisis in Zimbabwe.

Socialisation

Nambya women are the primary agents of socialisation as they are the teachers of Nambya beliefs and practices who instil knowledge and traditional values in children through exemplary life, storytelling and ritual practices. Women, especially grandmothers taught children through children’s games and songs and other oral art forms like taboos, riddles and even folktales. Women are, therefore, great teachers who could even study children’s behaviour and give advice based on their life experience and wisdom (Makaudze 2017:12). Old women trained the young to display Unhu/Ubuntu which are moral principles among Africans and promoted African culture through dance, music, art and clothing. Women were therefore endowed with power and reason to nurture and cultivate the cultural beliefs and language adoption in the kids (Shoko 2022:16). The moral fabric as well as enterprise skills of the Nambya community were based on women, as they had a broad knowledge of moral issues, how to fend for families as well as healthy life skills. This shows that women among the Nambya though accorded an inferior status in society, were

sources of the indigenous knowledge system and good agents of socialisation.

Virginity tests

Virginity is widely celebrated and respected among the Nambya and upon marriage, the Nambya would celebrate the virginity of the bride. Tradition has it that the groom would carry a calabash full of traditional beer to the in-laws known as BaTetzwele which symbolised that the bride was a virgin and was also done to thank the family of the woman for socialising with the bride according to the norms and values of the Nambya. If the bride, however, is found not to be a virgin, the woman becomes a disgrace to her family. Women are considered morally inferior to men and cannot trust their judgment (Phiri 2001:88) and it is from this cultural practice that women are branded morally bankrupt which affects them psychologically. Although virginity tests are done as part of the Nambya culture, the practice is harmful and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women or the Convention against Torture is against virginity tests and female genital mutilation (FGM) (Msuya 2017:30). This is why the Beijing Platform for Action refers to “harmful traditional practices” (e.g.: paras. 114 (a), 119, 225, 232 (g), 274 (c) (UNESCO 2020:1). Virginity tests are a harmful cultural practice that “negatively affect the fundamental rights of women and girls, such as their right to life, health, dignity, education, and physical integrity.” (Maathai 2009:3).

Land ownership

Women in Nambya have also been side-lined in terms of land ownership. During the pre- colonial period, women were complementary to men, and they owned small pieces of land where they could till, sow seeds, and harvest. The land was communally owned, and everyone had a responsibility towards land, but colonialists interrupted this as asymmetrical land ownership was created. Land defined women and their role in African societies, but colonialists alienated it (Ramsay 2011:16). When colonialists took land from indigenous people, men took

the remaining land and women depended on men. Land now belonged to white men, followed by white women and black men respectively. Colonialism, therefore, resulted in the gradual displacement of women in production activities, resulting in men controlling the cultivation of cash crops (Jaiyeola & Aladegbola 2020:6). The Land Apportionment Act, which was introduced by colonialists gave white people the right to land ownership and black men were pushed to marginal areas (Gudhlanga 2005:55) and this affected women who, in past, had the right to own a piece of land among the Nambya. Women were stripped of everything they owned and this affected their status in society. There was clear land alienation which impacted women as minorities in ethnic groups considered as minorities thus, they became more dependent on men resulting them being marginalised to the periphery. Colonial authorities exclusively considered men when establishing local political offices, disregarding women's pre-colonial political activity (Shoko 2022:7), thus, the land grabbing by the colonialists created male supremacy socially, physically and emotionally causing the loss of female identity and the creation of social hierarchies. Colonial authorities exclusively considered men when establishing local political offices and disregarded women.

Leadership position

Leadership positions and decision-making in the Nambya culture are largely a preserve of men. As minority and indigenous women, Nambya women are under-represented and misrepresented in communal as well as national decision-making processes or leadership structures. Chiefs and village heads are offices which belong to men which restricts women and because of the current minority status of the Nambya women, difficulties or restrictions in exercising their political rights are experienced as they cannot fully participate in the political process which mainly uses the languages of dominant cultures. They are required by cultural norms within their communities or their family to accept male leadership and challenging men in positions is widely considered as overstepping the boundaries of acceptable gender roles by trying to enter the 'male' world of politics, or scepticism at

their ability to take on such roles (Atkinson 2000:187). It is these cultural beliefs that strengthen hegemonic masculinities by perpetuating gender-based discrimination against Nambya women.

The impact of minoritisation of the Nambya ethnic group on women

The coming of the colonialists in Africa brought about many changes to the lives of the Africans as it created politics of dominance, ethnicity and gender binaries (Zivave, 2023:2). The indigenous people who celebrated their cultural diversity as Bantu people were subjected to ethnic division by colonialists and provinces within ethnic divisions were created which affected Nambya women whose ethnicity was unrecognizable by the colonialists. The way Nambya women have been double minoritised is because of colonial demarcations, ethnic grading and the cementing of patriarchal culture and they were reduced to subordinates and minorities due to colonial policies which made women equal with children and so were taken as minors. Patriarchy and culture, however, should not be blamed for women's subordinate positions that they hold today but rather to colonialism as being the main cause of female subordination today (Makaudze 2017:12) It is the Victorian principles during colonialism that made women confined to the home, with the kitchen being her point of call.

The coming of colonialists in the 1890s brought so much socio-cultural and religious transformation to the Nambya (Siedman, 1984:421). Nambya traditions and practices in terms of religion, society, education, and gender relations changed resulting in the change of power dynamics between genders. Shenjere-Nyabezi and Gronenborn (2021) believe that Nambya women have been stripped of their roles and power through hegemonic masculinities brought by the colonial powers who created gender binaries. The creation of social classes and gender demarcation, which is part of the Victorian culture, isolated women from their regular roles in domestic and public spheres leading to the minoritisation of women

(Shoko, 2022:14). This is the reason why Nehanda among the Shona ethnic group is considered a model of women in fighting hegemonic masculinities introduced by the colonialists (Chakona 2012:11). One can therefore argue that Nehanda formed the basis of fighting hegemonic masculinities as she fought against the marginalization and male dominance in politics and religious activities brought by whites. The coming of colonial power pushed women to the periphery as all public and political domains preferred men (Shoko, 2022:15) and this action further reduced the status of women whose position was far much better if not equal to that of men before the coming of colonialists. The so-called African civilisation and industrialisation by colonialists brought great disruption to precolonial socio-economic and political systems among native people (Okome, 2003:69). Men became leaders in both domestic and public spheres as well as in other social and religious circles.

In 1980, the colonial rule ended and it left an indelible mark of cultural extermination and dilution (Zivave, 2023:2). Africans were left with no culture as colonisation had already passed on their cultural practices to indigenous people through Christianity, education and political institutions (Okome, 2003:70; Zivave, 2023:2). This is also true for the Nambya people who forfeited their unique and valuable culture in preference for the colonial culture and Christianity. Furthermore, the demarcation of Zimbabwe into provinces promoted ethnicity, exclusivism and hegemonic masculinities. The Nambya were categorised under the Ndebeles after their location was named Matabeleland North which made women more inferior than their male counterparts. In both its colonial and post-colonial forms, the African State has discriminated consistently against women (Okome 2003:69) and the ethnicised provinces together with the cultural factors resulted in the peripheralisation of women. This adoption of colonial provinces which advanced Western culture created new ethnic elites and male elite structures which disfranchised women through gender stereotypes. Some stereotyping was created entrenching patriarchy and gender inequality, resulting in women being a minority within a minority because Nambya

became a minority ethnic group with a lower ethnic rank than other ethnic groups. As such, Nambya women were affected and a gendered social order was then created resulting in permanent consequences on the psychosocial dynamics of gender (Muwati & Gambahaya 2012:100). Nambya men were elevated to a higher social class because of colonialism and this led Nambya men to perceive themselves as superior to women as they were the providers and women became the providers. As a result, a Nambya dichotomous type of social order was then created with Nambya women occupying the inferior position even in the economic sector.

The minoritisation of women in the Nambya culture in Zimbabwe takes intricate forms grounded in patriarchal tradition and culture. The situation is worse in many African societies where colonial legacies and patriarchal culture assign superior roles to men and subordinate roles to women (Jaiyeola & Aladegbola, 2020:4). Nambya women are minoritised because of their ethnicity and their gender from birth to marriage, are objectified and have no rights due to many factors including “traditional practices that prefer a boy child above a girl child, early and forced marriages for girls, and domestic and sexual violence” (Olawoye, Omolulu, Oderinto, Adeyemo & Ositimehin 2004:13). Like other women in Zimbabwe, they are portrayed as “unfulfilled, voiceless, dependent and gullible” (Mguni, Furusa & Magosvongwe 2006:8) which is caused by patriarchy, a social system where men appropriate roles and keep women in subordinate positions (Fiorenza 1995:25).

Patriarchy results in the minoritisation of women as it makes men dominate society and defines the socio-cultural roles of women. Patriarchy ultimately is a “gendered power system: a network of social, political and economic relationships through which men dominate and control female labour, reproduction and sexuality as well as define women’s status, privileges and rights in a society” (Chakona 2012:11) and is the foundation of the hegemonic masculinities. Patriarchy promotes a negative attitude towards female sexuality, which leads to negative portrayals of women thereby cementing gender imbalance (Zivave 2018:4) and is therefore the basis for

women's relegation to the periphery (Zivave 2018:4). This is evident in the Nambya society where women are domesticated and have a marginalized lifestyle with women being expected to be subservient and women are limited and given patriarchal parameters due to cultural norms and taboos. Therefore, Nambya women, many of whom are affected by culture, are minoritised, discriminated and subordinated due to societal and cultural expectations of the Nambya culture. Throughout history, women have faced serious challenges as patriarchal ideologies have left many women at the bottom of the heap and the history of women in Zimbabwe shows the multiple struggles that women have endured. Society should reflect critically on the silent and undeclared war between women and men and review its negative attitude towards women (Chitando 2007:212). This observation is valid in light of how women in Nambya are portrayed, treated and side-lined. They suffer from patriarchy as well as their ethnicity, which has compounded a lot of challenges for Nambya women in contemporary society.

The implication of Minoritisation and Marginalisation of Nambya Women for political participation and feminist leadership

The collusion between patriarchy and ethnicity has created many challenges among the Nambya ethnic group in Zimbabwe thus making it impossible for women to compete for political power and actively engage in politics. Nambya women are socialized to accept the private sphere as their domain and this is because the Nambya culture expects women to be subservient and any venture into politics results in women getting pejorative labels such as loose and immoral resulting in their political lives and leadership roles being restricted.

Marriage practices, socialisation, female sexuality, lobola payment, virginity tests and restricted land ownership are major factors which push away Nambya women from political participation. This is because these factors are entrenched in patriarchy and feminist leadership is seen as uncultured and thus the political and cultural environment has not been

conducive for Nambya women to venture into the public sphere. Nambya women are also objectified and seen as sex objects, making them a gender that satisfies men at home while the political space is for men. This suggests that there is gender inequality within the Nambya ethnic group, marginalisation of women within Nambya culture, and cultural stereotypes about women's participation in governance issues and Nambya women are subjugated and limited in their representation in political life. Nambya women who want to venture into politics face gender stigma from their male counterparts as giving women peripheral positions within the family and feminist leadership is considered a socio-cultural taboo. Cultural and ethnic practices have acted as catalysts in the marginalisation of Nambya resulting in the limitation of women in political activities and women are confined to home and are limited from taking political offices in both the traditional leadership and contemporary governance.

The restrictive nature of the Nambya culture has created some feminist leadership gaps. Batliwala (2022:15) asserts that in most organisational structures the top man characterises the dominant leadership paradigm. This reflects that the marginalisation of Nambya women lies in the dominance and individualism of men as the Nambya society reflects the masculine leadership model. Men dominate at home and in the public sphere while equally complementary women occupy lower positions in both the private and public spheres. Within this overall power structure lies multiple forms of hierarchy caused by the lack of education, resources and cultural support that makes women ineffective leaders than men which means that Nambya women face many barriers like gender stereotyping, political and cultural socialisation as well as a lot of family obligations that may deter them from political participation. Chigudu (2014:21) believes that women face similar barriers like the glass ceiling, lower pay, "old boys" networks, nepotism and cronyism, racism, casteism, homophobia, ableism, class as well as ethnic and religious biases in many organisations. The Nambya society closely resembled a hierarchical society with gender binaries and the masculinity and minority status

excludes Nambya women people from leadership roles. Gender biases favour men because of their experience, education, and social and intellectual capital (Batliwala, 2022:6) and thus minority ethnic women, like the Nambya are far away from leadership positions because of the male leader prototype that characterises their society. The ladder to leadership for Nambya women has some systematic challenges which include patriarchy, ethnicity and confined stereotypes resulting in them being considered inappropriate for leadership roles.

It is undeniable that Nambya women have witnessed serial prejudice in cultural settings in Hwange district in Zimbabwe, however, they seemed to exhibit complementarity with the patriarchal culture, particularly through participation in various family and religious activities. Succinctly put, women in the Nambya community are not fully considered inconsequential in matters relating to politics and leadership positions and through feminist leadership, Nambya women can ensure social cohesion and the overall development of the society. Nambya women's political participation and feminist leadership are critical for enhancing sustainable development, however, religion embeds patriarchy that has a significant influence on people's lives through the promotion of gender equity.

One may argue that mitigation measures which limit the minoritisation and marginalisation of Nambya women lie in empowerment and debunking of socio-cultural myths to achieve gender parity. Feminist leadership calls for women's political empowerment and equal access to leadership positions and calls for the use of power and privilege to create a more just and equal world regardless of being a minority ethnic group or not (Batliwala, 2022:7). This means that the Nambya people need to transform themselves and dismantle discriminatory power structures that exist within their culture which is critical in attaining Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and a more equitable world. The limited growth in Nambya women's political participation due to minoritisation and marginalisation threatens feminist leadership and the success of the SDGs is jeopardized.

Recommendations

The prevalence of hegemonic masculinity in public institutions and Nambya cultural practices has made women become double minorities and the study recommends the following:

- Colonial legacies that continue to affect women in contemporary society should be outlawed.
- Nambya women should reject harmful cultural practices which relegate them to the periphery.
- Nambya women need to be educated that gender equality does not mean the destruction of their community identity. Any cultural practice that demotes women to the periphery should be foregone.
- Provide quotas related directly to minority women like the Nambya which enables them to participate in local and national governance issues.

Conclusion

The Nambya people have certain practices reflecting their beliefs and values which promote gender imbalance. Such practices like virginity tests and marriage practices have distorted social cohesion and unity by creating gender binaries and most of the cultural practices have cemented hegemonic masculinities leaving most women at the mercy of men. These women are in many cases confined to domesticity and are restricted to procreation and household chores which has created difficulties for Nambya women to attain economic and socio-cultural independence. Ethnicity encumbrances steeped in patriarchy put women in a position of disadvantage and patriarchies define the constructs of masculinity and femininity, and as a practice, they foster hegemonic masculinities. It is for this reason that this paper calls for the removal of hegemonic masculinities embedded in cultural practices from a feminist point of view. Any cultural practice that limits women from reaching their potential in politics, economic and social spheres based on minority ethnic status is considered a caricature and needs to be disbanded so that human and social development can be achieved. This chapter has demonstrated

that the minority status of Nambya women has resulted in their marginalisation and the Nambya community has key elements of gender prejudice and gender imbalance in a patriarchal space. It is practically evidenced in Zimbabwe's political activities and leadership positions that Nambya women have been silenced to become voiceless and this has called for feminist leadership discourse where Nambya women ought to be visible in governance issues rather than be confined at home. Feminist leadership is therefore critical in addressing and dismantling structures of inequality and promoting equality and justice for minority women including the Nambya.

References

- Amadiume I. 2001. African Women: Voicing Feminisms and Democratic Futures. *Macalester International*, 10 (9), 47-68.
- Armstrong F. 2020. Multicultural Vulnerability in the 21st Century. Reviewing recent debates and way forward. *Philosophy Compass* 15 (7),1-12 <https://doi.org/10.1111/phc3.12693>
- Atkinson D. 2000. Minoritisation, Identity and Ethnolinguistic Vitality in Catalonia. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 21 (3), 185-97. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01434630008666400>
- Awolalu J. O. 1996. Yoruba beliefs and sacrificial rites. New York: Athelia Henrietta Press.
- Barker C. 2012. *Cultural Studies, Theory and Practice* (4th Ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage
- Batliwala S. 2022. Transformative Feminist Leadership: What It Is and Why It Matters, Gender and Health Hub: United Nations University. <https://doi.org/10.37941/RR/2022/2>
- Chakona L. 2012. The Impact of the Fast Track Land Reform Programme on Women in Goromonzi District, Zimbabwe. MA thesis. Rhodes: Rhodes University, 213-229. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351273244-14>
- Cheater A.P. 1986. The Role and Position of Women in Pre-Colonial and Colonial Zimbabwe, *Zambezia*, XIII (II), 65-79.

- Chigudu H. 2014. *Riding the Waves of Activist Leadership*. African Women's Development Fund. International Institute for Global Health: United Nations University.
- Chitando E. 2007. 'A New Man for a New Era? Zimbabwean Pentecostalism, Masculinities and the HIV Epidemic'. *Missionalia*, 35 (3), 112-127.
- Connell R. 2005. Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept. *Gender and Society*, 19(6), 129-85. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243205278639>
- David M. 2000. *Race and Ethnicity in Modern Britain*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Dube M.W. 2003. Culture, Gender and HIV/Aids: Understanding and acting on the issues, pp.84-100 in Musa W Dube (ed) *HIV/Aids and the Curriculum Methods of Integrating HIV/Aids in Theological Curriculum*, World Council of Churches, Geneva.
- Dube Z. 2018. Patriarchy Reinvented? 'Spiritual Parenting' within African Pentecostalism in Zimbabwe. *Verbum et Ecclesia*, 39 (1), 1-6. <https://doi.org/10.4102/ve.v39i1.1777>
- Fiorenza E.S. 1995. *Bread Not Stone: The Challenge of Feminist Biblical Interpretation*. London: SCM Press.
- Gudhlanga E.S. 2005. Promoting the Use and Teaching of African Languages in Zimbabwe. *Zimbabwe Journal of Educational Research* 17 (1), 54-68. <https://doi.org/10.4314/zjer.v17i1.26056>
- Gwatimba L., Raselekoane N.R and Nwafor O.A 2020. Obstacles to the realization of women's reproductive health rights in Zimbabwe, *African Journal of Reproductive Health* (3), 146-153.
- Gwekwerere, T., Magosvongwe, R. & Mazuru, M. (2012). An analysis of the Africana womanist emphasis on self-naming and self-definition. In: Muwati I, Mguni Z, Gwekwerere T, Magosvongwe R (eds), *Rediscoursing African womanhood in the search for sustainable renaissance: Africana womanism in multi-disciplinary approaches*: Harare: College Press. pp. 93-102
- Haslanger S. 2000. "Gender and Race: (What) Are They? (What) Do We Want Them to Be?" *Noûs* 34 (1), 31-55. <https://doi.org/10.1111/0029-4624.00201>

Gender and Feminist Meditations

- Haslanger S. 2012. *Resisting Reality: Social Construction and Social Critique*. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199892631.001.0001>
- Hayes M.E.1997. The Nambya people of Wange. *NADA* 11(4), 385–393.
- Idumwonyi I. 2012. Rites and power: Conceptualizing menstruation and ancestral veneration as a symbolic tool for the exclusion and legitimization of power in the Benin (Nigerian) religious tradition. *Culture: The Graduate Journal of Harvard Divinity School*.
- Jaiyeola E.O. and Aladegbola I. 2020. Patriarchy and Colonization: The “Brooder House” for Gender Inequality in Nigeria. *Journal of Research on Women and Gender*, 10(1)3–22.
- Jonhera T. 2023. Can the Nambya speak? Media inclusion, identity and the politics of belonging among ethnic minorities in Zimbabwe: A case study of the Nambya ethnic group, *Zimbabwe International Journal of Culture and Heritage*, 1(1): 82–95.
- Kearney J.M. 1907. The ruins at Bumbusi. *Proceedings and Transactions of the Rhodesian Scientific Association* 9 (1), 59 – 62.
- Lagerwerf L. 1995. African Women Doing Theology. A Survey. *Journal for Contemporary Christianities in Context*, 16 (45), 833–51.
- Maathai W. 2009. *The Challenge for Africa*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Makama G.A. 2013. “Patriarchy and gender inequality in Nigeria: The way forward”, *European Scientific Journal*, 9 (17), 115–144.
- Makaudze G. 2015. The Power of a Mother in the Shona Milieu. *Journal of Studies in Humanities and Social Sciences*, 4(2), 266–276.
- Makaudze G. 2017. Motherhood in Children’s Drama: Selected Cases from Collections on Shona Children’s Literature. *UNISA Press*. 35(2), 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.25159/0027-2639/2894>
- Makuvaza S. 2008. Revisiting Bumbusi, a Khami type site located in Hwange National Park, North-western Zimbabwe. *Zimbabwean Prehistory* 28 (2), 21 – 40.
- Mbiti J.S. 1969. *African Religions and Philosophy*. Oxford: Heinemann Educational Publishers.
- Metcalf B. and Afanassieva M. 2005. Gender, work, and equal opportunities in Central and Eastern Europe. *Women in Management Review*, 20(6), 397–41. <https://doi.org/10.1108/09649420510616791>

- Mguni Z., Furusa M. and Magosvongwe R. 2006. *The Muse of History and Politics of Gender Representation in Zimbabwe Women's Literature* in Mguni, Z., Furusa, M, And Magosvongwe RA. (eds) *African Womanhood in Zimbabwean Literature: New Critical Perspectives on Women's Literature in African Literature*. Harare: College Press.
- Msuya N.H. 2017. *Harmful Cultural and Traditional Practices: A Roadblock in the Implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and the Maputo Protocol on Women's Rights in Tanzania*. PhD thesis. KwaZulu Natal: University of KwaZulu-Natal
- Muwati I and Gambahaya Z. 2012. "The Private/Public Space Dichotomy: An Africana Womanist Analysis of the Gendering of Space and Power". *The Western Journal of Black Studies*. 36(2), 100-107.
- Ncube G.T. 2004. *A History of North Western Zimbabwe 1850-1960*. Kadoma: Mond Books.
- Neusu K. 1983. *Nehanda: The History of the Mhondoro and Svikiros, BA HONS Dissertation: University of Zimbabwe*.
- Nhongo R. 2015. *Tracing the Historical Experiences of the Nambya People through Their Toponyms and Antroponyms*. Paper presented at NSA 22-26 September 2014. Victoria Falls. Zimbabwe.
- Okome M.O. 2003. *What Women, Whose Development? A Critical Analysis of Western Feminist Evangelism on African Women*. In: O. Oyeronke (ed). *African women & feminism: Reflecting on the politics of sisterhood*. Trenton, Africa World Press. 66-98.
- Olupona J. 2002. *Imaging the power of the goddess: Gender in Yoruba religious traditions and modernity*, Princeton: Lecture, Princeton University. Olawoye JE, Omolulu FO, Oderinto Y, Adeyemo D and Ositimehin B. 2004. *Social Construction of Manhood in Nigeria: Implications for Male Responsibility in Reproductive Health*. Social Sciences and Reproductive Health Research Network Sciences. Ibadan: University College Hospital.
- Phiri A.I. 2001. *Domestic Violence in Christian Homes*. *Journal for the Study of Religion*, 14 (2), 87-100. <https://doi.org/10.4314/jsr.v14i2.6147>


- Ramsay K. 2011. Why Focus on Minority and Indigenous Women? State of the World's Minorities and Indigenous Peoples. [Retrieved 13 January 2024]. <https://www.justice.gov/file/268126/dl?inline>
- Rawat P.S. 2014. "Patriarchal beliefs, women's empowerment, and general well-being", *Vikalpa*, 39 (2); 43–55. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0256090920140206>
- Sagiya M.E. 2019. Heritage on the Periphery: Administration of Archaeological Heritage in Hwange District, North-western Zimbabwe. *Journal of African Cultural Heritage Studies*, 39 (2), 1–24. [Retrieved 13 January 2024]. <http://doi.org/10.22599/jachs>
- Seidman G.W. 1984. Women in Zimbabwe: Post-Independence Struggles. *Feminist Studies*, 10 (3), 421–429. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3178033>
- Shenjere-Nyabezi P and Gronenborn D. 2021. The Zimbabwean Culture and the Development of Nambya State in North Western Zimbabwe. *Antiquity* 95 (384), 1–8. [Retrieved 25 January 2023] <https://doi.org/10.15184/aqy.2021.159>
- Shoko A.B. 2022. Images of Women Characters in Selected Post-2000 Shona Novels and Songs. PhD thesis. Pretoria: University of South Africa.
- Shoko T. 2007. *Karanga Indigenous Religion in Zimbabwe: Health and Well-Being*. London: Ashgate Publishers.
- Taiwo A.O. 2010. Power and Womanhood in Africa: An Introductory Evaluation, *The Journal of Pan African Studies*, 3(6), 229–238.
- Uchendu E. 2007. Masculinity, and Nigerian Youths. *Nordic Journal of African Studies*, 16(2), 279–297.
- UNESCO. 2020. Promoting Gender Equality in the Integration of Minority Communities into Creative Processes. [Retrieved 13 January 2024] www.en.unesco.org
- Zivave W. 2018. Gender and Power: A Feminist Critique of Hosea's Sexual Imaging in Hosea1- 3 and Its Implications for Contemporary Shona Women. M.A thesis. Pretoria: UNISA.
- Zivave, W. 2023 De-Coloniality and De-Minoritization of Indigenous Cultural Heritage in Africa: An Exploration of Nambya Religion. [Retrieved 14 February 2024] IntechOpen. <https://doi.org/10.5772/intechopen.105727>

Zivave, W. 2024. Politics of Language, Ethnicity and Marginalization: De-Minoritisation of Nambya Language in the Quest for Cultural Identity, in Collen Sabao & Esther Mavengano (ed). *The Politics of Language and the Linguistic Imperative to Language Matters in Zimbabwe*, Palgrave: London



Active Participation and Representation but Lack of Agency: The Role of Political Participation of Women in Rural Areas in Achieving SDG 5, North-West Province, South Africa

Tshegofatso Hazel Tomodi 

*Department of Political Studies
University of the Witwatersrand 
Johannesburg, South Africa*

Abstract

Political participation is integral to a healthy democracy, as it legitimizes governance and fosters inclusivity. Despite global commitments such as SDG 5, which aims to ensure gender equality and empower women, the representation and participation of women, particularly in rural areas, remain limited. This study investigates the political participation of rural women in South Africa's North-West Province, focusing on progress towards SDG 5.5.1. Employing qualitative research methods, the study explores how historical, cultural and systemic barriers, including patriarchy, illiteracy and stereotypical perception further curtail women's political agency in rural areas. The findings highlight that while South Africa has made strides in achieving numerical and formal gender parity in local governance, substantive gender equality remains elusive because women in rural areas face significant challenges, such as restricted decision-making roles, political violence and structural barriers within political parties. Moreover, the intersection of race, gender and rurality exacerbates these challenges, leaving many women unable to



fully exercise political agency. Drawing on African feminism and social constructivism, the study emphasizes the need for grassroots interventions, including civic education, mentorship programs, and policy reforms, to dismantle patriarchal systems and empower rural women. Strengthening political will and engaging men as allies in promoting gender equality are critical to achieving SDG 5 and advancing women's socio-economic rights. The study concludes that a bottom-up approach, prioritizing rural women's participation, is essential for transformative change in South Africa's commitment to achieving Sustainable Development Goal 5.

Keywords: political participation, SDG5, women in rural areas, South Africa, local government, representation.

Introduction

Political participation, as argued by Campbell (2011), forms the cornerstone of a healthy representative democracy. Increased participation legitimises the political system and shows that individuals' normative commitments to democracy are strong. On the contrary, declining participation puts democracy in existential danger as it risks being replaced by authoritarian rule. Although this statement is generally true, Campbell (2011) does not address issues around gender and whether less female participation and representation have an impact on the legitimacy of political systems. Vrbensky, writing in the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) report (2016) on strengthening women participation, took the debate further and asserted that gender equality is essential to receptive and responsible democratic societies. Vrbensky (2016) noted that the key to the credibility of national institutions like parliament, national assemblies and local government is equal representation of the genders. The same UNDP report further stated that globally, women representation in local governance structures remains low. In instances where women get elected to these offices, they are confronted with gender stereotypes in connection to their roles and capabilities and are normally subjected to discriminatory legislation and culture.

Many studies, however, tend to generalize women's experiences, overlooking the nuanced challenges faced by different groups such as rural, young or economically disadvantaged women (Nnaemeka, 2004). For example, young women have different needs and face challenges quite differently from older women and similarly, women in rural areas and urban areas face different challenges and choices in life. Therefore, when brought into the South African context, political participation of women in rural areas (who are the focus of the study) is often curtailed by several factors which include patriarchy, illiteracy, tradition and culture, media influence and general stereotypical perspectives. Additionally, there is a tendency to perceive women as a homogeneous group, however, like all groups, women are permeated by differences and varied interests (Bari, 2005).

South Africa is one of the many countries across the globe struggling to achieve the global gender parity goal of 50/50 representation at local and national levels, despite gender parity policies recommended by international and regional organizations to which South Africa is a signatory (Hicks and Morna., 2016). The lack of gender equality is both historical and systemic. For example, during apartheid, life roles were shaped at birth by the colour of one's skin as well as biological sex and consequently, education, achievements in anything such as sports, status, jobs and economic status were pre-programmed (Cleancy, 2014). This disproportionately affected disadvantaged black women, who were systematically denied access to education and the tools necessary for political awareness, leaving them excluded from socio-political structures (Gasa, 2007). Political consciousness refers to an awareness of one's political rights, the ability to mobilize for collective action, and understanding the broader socio-political structures that shape one's life. During apartheid, this awareness was deliberately suppressed through systemic denial of education, restricted access to political platforms and reinforcement of traditional roles that kept women, particularly black women, excluded from the public sphere.

Kurebwa (2013) is of the view that women have historically participated in political activities such as speaking at public meetings and contributing to candidates at a lower rate than men. One of the many explanations for this phenomenon is women's under-representation in political institutions, which compromises their sense of political efficacy. This has been attributed to the patriarchal systems permeating numerous political systems of different states, thereby curtailing women's political participation. Manyevere-Matambo (2025) agrees with Kurebwa's claim that the constructed system of patriarchy took away women's human rights, such as their right to political participation and life autonomy.

Despite the implementation of the 50%-50% gender quotas to formalize women's representation in local governance (CGE, 2003), questions remain about their practical influence in public decision-making, particularly in rural settings (Tamale, 2020). For instance, while women may occupy 50% of council seats, studies indicate that their involvement in key decision-making roles is limited, with many being assigned to less influential positions such as secretarial or welfare committees (Reddy and Maharaj, 2008). Furthermore, data from the North West Province reveals that despite meeting representation quotas, rural women often lack access to resources or support systems to effectively exercise political agency. In 2008, through the Southern African Development Community (SADC), South Africa committed itself to the Gender and Development Protocol, obligating targets to drive women's development and attainment of socio-economic rights, including the attainment of 50% women's representation in all leadership positions (Southern African Development Community, 2008). To this end, South Africa adopted the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015, an extension of the Millennium Development Goals aimed at sustainably advancing human development. To emphasise its commitment to sustainable growth, South Africa premised its National Development Plan on the SDGs and the aspirations and targets of the Southern African Development Community and African Union Agenda 2063.

Methodology

The study employed a qualitative research design to explore the political participation of rural women in the North-West Province and measure progress towards SDG 5, specifically indicator 5.5.1. This exploratory case study method allowed for an in-depth investigation of women's representation, participation and agency at the local governance level. The qualitative approach was selected for its ability to capture the nuanced and rich lived experiences of rural women, often overlooked in traditional quantitative evaluations. This design aligns with methodologies that prioritize marginalized voices and contextual complexities (Creswell, 2013; Nnaemeka, 2004).

The North-West Province, a predominantly rural region in South Africa, was selected due to its historical marginalization during apartheid and its unique socio-political dynamics. As a former homeland under apartheid, the region faced systemic exclusion and oppression that shaped its current socio-political landscape. These factors make it an ideal case for exploring how intersections of race, gender, and governance impact progress towards achieving SDG 5 (Statistics South Africa, 2019; Gasa, 2007).

Participants were purposively sampled to include key stakeholders such as female councillors, municipal managers and community leaders, ensuring diverse perspectives on women's participation. These participants were drawn from four district municipalities: Bojanala Platinum, Ngaka Modiri Molema, Dr. Ruth Segomotsi Mompati and Dr. Kenneth Kaunda. The purposive sampling approach was critical for capturing the varied socio-political dynamics and lived experiences of rural women across different local governance structures.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews conducted in Setswana and English, ensuring both linguistic inclusivity and cultural sensitivity. The interviews were designed to capture participants' nuanced experiences and focused on three primary areas: their perceptions of political agency, the barriers they face in achieving effective participation and their assessments of the implementation and impact of gender

quotas in local governance. The process also included follow-up questions to explore contextual dynamics specific to the North-West Province.

The study employed thematic analysis, guided by the principles of African feminism and social constructivism. This dual framework enabled the deconstruction of entrenched patriarchal narratives, focusing on how cultural and social norms limit women's agency. At the same time, it emphasized the resilience and adaptive strategies employed by rural women to navigate and challenge these constraints. By drawing on African feminism, the analysis centred on contextualized, intersectional perspectives that recognize the unique experiences of African rural women (Nnaemeka, 2004; Tamale, 2020).

Social constructivism and traditional feminism perspectives in relations to the political participation of women in rural areas

Jackson and Penrose (1994) define social constructivism as concerned with the way human beings think and structure the world to categorize or to create a class. Daddow (2017) agrees with Penrose and Jackson, stating that constructivism is a theory that sees the world as socially constructed and explains the way human beings structure their experiences and analysis of the world. Wendt (1999) endorses the scholars, explaining that social constructs or social constructions define meanings, notions or connotations that are assigned to objects and events in the environment and people's notions of their relationships to and interactions with these objects.

In the field of social constructionist thought, a social construct is an idea or notion that appears to be natural and obvious to people who accept it, but which may or may not represent reality, so it remains largely an invention or artifice of a given society (Berger and Luckmann, 1966, p. 13). Gender roles and identities are constructs and as Lorber (1994) argues 'gender is constantly created and recreated out of human interactions, out of social life and is the texture and order of that social life.' Thus, social constructivism will help us to

deconstruct the gendered political spaces and the challenges emanating from attempts to allow more women participation and representation.

Additionally, the study used traditional feminist perspective, which notes that representative democracy should and must be inclusive of all genders, particularly women in all aspects of life; from political, economic and social settings (Lovenduski and Norris, 1993) and further expresses that democracy should be accountable and gender responsive. Feminism emphasizes women's agency as performers, who day-by-day make tremendous commitments to society and the difficulties that the man-centric institutional systems, structures, procedures, standards and qualities oblige women to make compelling usage of their abilities for effecting transformative change (Freedman, 2006). Thus, on top of reinforcing the social constructivist perspective on political participation and representation, the traditional feminist perspective will help us unpack issues around agency.

Women in the struggle for political participation

During the Apartheid era, African women were not permitted to live in towns and were forced to live in rural and informal settlements unless they had permission to be employed in urban areas. Extending the Pass Laws to them made it more difficult for women without an occupation to take their children and join their spouses in urban areas where their spouses worked. Across the country, many challenges against the Pass Laws for African women occurred before the Federation of South African Women and the African National Congress Women's League mobilised a massive protest in Pretoria. These events are some of the first instances of African women's political participation (Landsberg and Mackay, 2003).

In these instances, African women displayed their political participation through demonstrations, which later contributed to women's enfranchisement. In contrast, this was an achievement only for white women in South Africa. Although demonstrations by women in urban areas were planned through

various women's movements, in the rural areas, demonstrations were unstructured and spontaneous. According to Healy-Clancy (2017), the government attributed rural women's political participation as the work of external influences. This assumption has bled into the contemporary political landscape; rural women are thought of as incapable of sound decision making skills, however political parties continue to exploit their illiteracy and economic status by encouraging political participation in the form of voting and canvassing. Nonetheless, (Malinga, 2016) disputes this claim by Healy-Clancy, asserting that women were acting on their initiative and according to their understanding of how the extension of the pass laws would affect their lives. Maling (2016), further emphasises that while women who worked in urban areas brought home new tactics, insights, and information when they returned to the homelands, they were simply contributing to a momentum that had gathered on its own there. The women in rural Zeerust joined the resistance; their demonstrations started peacefully but eventually spiralled into violence. The women revolted for their reasons also: for the rights of the family; against the traditional authorities and for their husbands, as the administration had made decisions regarding the women without asking their husbands' opinions.

Post-apartheid, the African National Congress (ANC), which was the governing party, did not prioritise gender responsiveness, similar to many post-conflict societies; the government prioritized state reconstruction and peacebuilding in South Africa (Gouws, 2005). Hicks, Morna and Fonnah (2017) concur with (Gouws, 2005) by asserting that in the initial stages of post-apartheid South Africa, gender was not considered as it took a backseat in the intricacies of discussions around restricting and transforming local government to include women in electoral processes. Although the South African government pushed back on the gender agenda, the governing party, the ANC, adopted a gender quota of 50/50 representation in all levels of government. According to the Parliamentary Research Unit, women in rural areas' representation in local government is necessary for gendered development and women are likely to be affected by inadequate service delivery

and therefore their participation and representation in local government is an exceptional factor in measuring the progress of gendered developmental legislated equality.

Malinga (2016) argues that Post-Apartheid South Africa has not made any significant progress since the dawn of democracy, particularly in rural areas where there is abject poverty, a high rate of illiteracy and evident patriarchal inequalities rooted in cultural and traditional social systems. He further adds that the challenges that South Africa face are gendered, thus agreeing with Healy-Clancy (2011)'s assertion, that Apartheid was a gendered political system, which had the agenda to suppress native women's social, economic and political freedom to benefit from the labour of men who had to fend for their families. As such, the legacies of apartheid are present in South African society post-apartheid. These can be traced in rural areas where households are women-led whilst men lead the public and contribute largely to productive labour whereas women are tasked with reproductive labour.

In South African politics, women in rural areas are the largest marginalized group; women in urban and semi-urban areas enjoy post-apartheid South Africa's women empowerment initiatives more than women in rural areas. Moreover, women's progress in representation at the national and provincial level is progressing much faster than that at the local level. The 6th democratic national elections in post-apartheid South Africa, led to 45% of national parliamentary seats held by women, 50% of the seats occupied by women in provincial government and 41% at local government (Parliament of South Africa, 2014). Contrary to Malinga (2016)'s assertion that women's political representation in government has somewhat remained stagnant, Gender Links (2016) reports that 'the role of South African women in politics has increased since the end of apartheid through policy changes and organisations set up to enable women's rights.'

Progressive national rates of women's political participation and representation act as a disguise, masking the scant representation and participation of women in local

government. This notion is similar to Malinga (2016), as the scholar argues that women's political participation is not satisfactory, particularly in post-apartheid South Africa, where equality, as championed by democracy, must accommodate every individual. Todes *et al.* (2007), continue to emphasise that there is lack of concentrated effort on women in rural areas representation in local government and women are often endorsed as 'councillors and within the management of local government as a whole, rather than on informing and transforming the work of municipalities including analysing challenges faced by women as leaders.'

Patriarchal features are dominant in local government, consequently contributing to the challenges women in rural areas experience at the level of local politics. The former statement is supported by Reddy and Maharaj (2008), as they are of the view that women in local government are given 'soft tasks' such as secretary and welfare offices; they further explain that senior management offices are occupied by men.

Findings

The North-West Province has four district municipalities and eighteen local municipalities. Chapter 7 of the Constitution, object 152.1. (e), outlines the objective of local government, which is to 'encourage the involvement of communities and community organizations in the matters of local government' (South African Constitution, 1997). Therefore, these findings were analysed using SDG 5.1.1 indicator and the South African Constitution Chapter 7 on local government. Over the years, research has suggested that women remain marginalized, which has been proven to be a lived reality of many women, however, women have progressed in local government and such a shift in development should be a feature in feminist discourses. In so doing, more efforts will be geared towards addressing women's challenges around agency and efficacy. According to the data collected from all four district municipalities in the North-West Province, the conclusion is that women in rural areas are represented in local government as they made up 50% or more of representatives in local government

structures in 2016, although this regressed in the 2021 local government elections.

Women's Political Participation in Rural Areas

Elections provide opportunities for citizens to express their levels of satisfaction regarding how effectively the government has been able to meet their socio-economic and other needs. Such an opportunity is also important for citizens, particularly those able to exercise the right to vote, to pass judgment on those in positions of power responsible for government decisions that affect their lives. Women's political participation in rural areas has increased since the 2011 local government elections nationwide. In the 2016 local government elections, women were the majority of registered voters (58%) compared to men (42%). Women's representation in local government increased from 38% to 41% between 2011 and 2016. While steady progress has been made since 1995 (with a slight dip of 2% in 2011), the 2021 figures show that total women's representation in local councils has further fallen by 4.1% since the 2016 elections. Women's PR seats decreased significantly in the 2021 local government elections, from 48% in 2016 to 24.2% in 2021, while representation in ward seats fell from 33% in 2016 to 12.7% in 2021 (Gender Links, 2022; IEC 2021).

South Africa's goal is to achieve a balanced representation and participation of women in decision-making processes as per SDG Goal 5 and the African Union Agenda 2063, Goal 17. The North-West Province has displayed inconsistent growth results in women's political participation and representation, with a 48% PR (Proportional Representation) representation in 2016 decreasing slightly to 45% in 2021. This decline can partly be attributed to COVID-19's socio-psychological effects. Although women in rural areas have made impressive strides in local government in the North-West Province, they still encounter stereotypically gendered challenges, rendering their political participation almost inadequate. Women face various challenges, including political parties that remain patriarchal in nature, limiting the space for expressive political leadership.

Barriers and Violence Against Women

Source A, a municipal manager interviewed on 21 April 2019, elaborated on this issue, explaining that while the African National Congress (ANC), as the governing party, allows women to participate fully in local politics, other political parties such as the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF), Democratic Alliance (DA), and Freedom Front Plus (FF+) curtail women's participation in rural areas. For example, the ANC has more women in leadership positions compared to the EFF or DA. During the 2016 local government elections, political parties promoted fewer female ward candidates. Evans (2017) suggests that this gendered selection reflects voter preferences for male candidates in directly elected roles.

Prior to any election, men typically comprise the majority of candidates contesting seats, even though women make up more than 50% of registered voters nationally. Despite this, in 2016, women surpassed the 50/50 representation target for mayors in the North-West Province: three out of four district mayors were female. Source B, a female ward councillor interviewed on 30 April 2019 and 20 April 2024, highlighted the aggressiveness of political practices in the province. She described experiencing violence and threats, ranging from coercion to vote in a given way to threats against family members. The International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) argues that violence against women in elections (VAWE) undermines the electoral process and democracy by eliminating female voices (International Foundation for Electoral Systems, 2020). UN Women (2018) concurs, noting that violence against women in politics impedes their participation and full contribution to political life.

Challenges to Agency

The findings reveal that while women in rural areas may be represented in local government, their agency is not guaranteed. The proportional representation (PR) party system allows political parties to select candidates, often placing women lower on the list. This undermines gender equity goals. Political parties'

prioritization of their agendas over women's issues further limits progress. Source C, a female ward councillor, explained that political parties support gender representation to appear progressive but rarely allow women to fully exercise decision-making power. Goetz (1998) supports this view, arguing that state capacity and political will are key to achieving gender equity policies. Despite reserved seats and gender parity measures, sheer numbers are insufficient. Effective participation requires political will, resources, and the dismantling of patriarchal systems and the study concludes that while progress has been made in numerical representation, achieving substantive gender equality requires addressing the structural and cultural barriers that limit women's agency.

The intersection of race, gender, and rurality in the North-West Province presents unique challenges that must be tackled through a combination of policy reforms, grassroots advocacy and sustained political will. Strengthening these areas will not only advance SDG 5 but also contribute to broader social and economic development in rural communities. The study concludes that while progress has been made in numerical representation, achieving substantive gender equality requires addressing the structural and cultural barriers that limit women's agency. The intersection of race, gender, and rurality in the North-West Province presents unique challenges that must be tackled through a combination of policy reforms, grassroots advocacy, and sustained political will.

Conclusion

Therefore, to fully achieve the requirements of SDG5 in rural areas, there is a need for sustained political participation of women in the voting process and decision making. A civic education campaign is necessary to reconstruct the perspective of the masses on the role of women as voters but also as decision-makers.

The political parties that do not meet their quotas of female representatives need to be fined with funding cuts for the next elections. But above all the women need to be empowered

through education and mentorship to take up positions of leadership. Not to forget, the provincial and national leadership of different political parties needs to avail key positions for women which will help establish new norms in the society about the ability of women to lead not only in the household but also on the political platform and play a crucial role in changing the attitudes and perceptions of men towards women. More women in leadership, will help drive the SDG5 and combat issues around domestic violence, femicide and non-empowerment of women for example with education.

The bottom-up approach is far more necessary and efficient than that of the top-down approach. According to the progress on the goal, it merely discusses women's political participation and leadership in local government. This then presents a need to explicitly talk about women in rural areas and draw the debate from grassroots, subsequently embracing overall women's participation at all levels of government. Moreover, South Africa is a developing country, and the majority of women reside in rural areas, therefore for a country-specific UN SDG 5, South Africa needs to highlight its country-specific issues around SDG 5.5.1 and focus on rural areas, eventually moving up to urban areas. This will also minimize the work at national and provincial levels and have effective and progressive programmes aimed at contributing to SDGs and the NDP.

Overall, the overriding factor is the presence of a political will to address the imbalances and also address the structural violence against women. The presence of a political will means that it is not only women who are pushing the gender equality agenda but also men which will remove the existing perception that women are trying to sidestep their traditional roles and venture into spaces they should not.

References

- Bari, F., 2005. *Women's political participation: Issues and challenges*. United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW). Available at: <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/> [Accessed 16 May 2025].
- Berger, P.L. and Luckmann, T., 1966. *The social construction of reality: A treatise in the sociology of knowledge*. New York: Anchor Books.
- Campbell, D.E., 2011. *Why we vote: How schools and communities shape our civic life*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781400837618>
- Commission for Gender Equality (CGE), 2003. *Gender policy framework for local government*. Pretoria: CGE.
- Creswell, J.W., 2013. *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*. 3rd ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Daddow, O., 2017. *International relations theory*. London: SAGE Publications.
- Delys, S., 2014. *Women and political representation: A handbook on increasing women's political participation in Georgia*. Georgia: Human Rights Education and Monitoring Centre (EMC).
- Freedman, L., 2006. Networks, culture and narratives. *Adelphi Papers*, 45(379), pp.11–26. <https://doi.org/10.1080/05679320600661640>
- Gasa, N. ed., 2007. *Women in South African history: They remove boulders and cross rivers*. Cape Town: HSRC Press.
- Gender Links, 2016. *South Africa: Gender and elections*. Available at: <https://genderlinks.org.za/what-we-do/sadc-gender-protocol/advocacy-50-50/south-africa-gender-and-elections/> [Accessed 16 May 2025].
- Gender Links, 2022. *The South African Local Government Elections Barometer 2021: Gender in politics*. Johannesburg: Gender Links. Available at: <https://genderlinks.org.za/what-we-do/sadc-gender-protocol/advocacy-50-50/south-african-local-government-elections-barometer-2021-gender-in-politics/> [Accessed 16 May 2025].
- Goetz, A.M., 1998. Women in politics and gender equity in policy: South Africa and Uganda. *Review of African Political Economy*, 25(76), pp.241–262. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03056249808704313>

- Gouws, A., 2005. Political responsibility for gender equality: The case of South Africa. *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 7(1), pp.88–107.
- Harrison, P., Todes, A. and Watson, V., 2007. *Planning and transformation: Learning from the post-apartheid experience*. London: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203007983>
- Healy-Clancy, M., 2017. *A world of their own: A history of South African women's education*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press.
- Hicks, J. and Lowe Morna, C., 2016. Gender equality in elections cannot be left to the whims of political parties. *Mail & Guardian*, 29 July. Available at: <https://mg.co.za/article/2016-07-29-00-gender-equality-in-elections-cannot-be-left-to-the-whims-of-political-parties/> [Accessed 16 May 2025].
- Hicks, J., Morna, C.L. and Fonnah, D., 2017. *The Southern African Gender Protocol 2017 Barometer*. Johannesburg: Gender Links.
- Independent Electoral Commission (IEC), 2011. *Local government election results 2011*. Pretoria: IEC. Available at: <https://www.elections.org.za/> [Accessed 16 May 2025].
- Independent Electoral Commission (IEC), 2016. *Local government election results 2016*. Pretoria: IEC. Available at: <https://www.elections.org.za/> [Accessed 16 May 2025].
- Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2021. *Women in national parliaments: Situation as of 1 January 2021*. Geneva: Inter-Parliamentary Union. Available at: <https://www.ipu.org/> [Accessed 16 May 2025].
- Jackson, P. and Penrose, J. eds., 1994. *Constructions of race, place, and nation*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Kurebwa, J., 2013. *Women's participation in local governance*. [Place of publication not available]: [Publisher not available].
- Landsberg, C. and Mackay, S., 2003. The African Union: Political will and commitment needed for new doctrine. *Centre for Policy Studies, Synopsis*, 7(1), April.
- Lorber, J., 1994. "Night to his day": The social construction of gender. In: *Paradoxes of gender*. New Haven: Yale University Press, pp.1–8.
- Lovenduski, J. and Norris, P., 1993. *Gender and party politics*. London: Sage.

- Malinga, V., 2016. Rural women's political participation in post-apartheid South Africa. *Journal of African Studies*, 42(3), pp.98–115. <https://doi.org/10.1086/378553>
- Manyevere-Matambo, S., 2025. The rise of African women's political agency and the nibbling of patriarchal structures. *African Journal of Gender, Society and Development*, 14(1), Article 10. <https://doi.org/10.31920/2634-3622/2025/v14n1a10>
- National Policy Framework for Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality, 2000. *Section 4.1.2*. Pretoria: Office on the Status of Women in the Presidency.
- Nnaemeka, O., 2004. Nego-feminism: Theorizing, practicing, and pruning Africa's way. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 29(2), pp.357–385. <https://doi.org/10.1086/378553>
- Oomen, B., 1999. Group rights in post-apartheid South Africa: The case of the traditional leaders. *The Journal of Legal Pluralism and Unofficial Law*, 44, pp.73–103. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07329113.1999.10756538>
- Parliament of South Africa, 2014. *Current composition of the newly sworn-in 6th Parliament*. Available at: <https://www.parliament.gov.za/press-releases/current-composition-newly-sworn-6th-parliament> [Accessed 16 May 2025].
- Pycroft, C., 1996. Local government in the new South Africa. *Public Administration and Development*, 16(3), pp.233–245. [https://doi.org/10.1002/\(SICI\)1099-162X\(199608\)16:3<233::AID-PAD878>3.0.CO;2-E](https://doi.org/10.1002/(SICI)1099-162X(199608)16:3<233::AID-PAD878>3.0.CO;2-E)
- Reddy, P.S. and Maharaj, B., 2008. Democratic decentralization in post-apartheid South Africa: Quo vadis? *Local Government Studies*, 34(5), pp.633–653.
- Report on South Africa's 5th Local Government Elections held on 3 August 2016: Independent Electoral Commission.
- South African Constitution, 1997. *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996 (Act No. 108 of 1996)*. Pretoria: Government Printer.
- Statistics South Africa, 2019. *Gender statistics in South Africa, 2019*. Pretoria: Statistics South Africa.
- Tamale, S., 2020. *Decolonization and Afro-feminism*. Montreal: Daraja Press.

Gender and Feminist Meditations

- UN Women, 2018. *Violence against women in politics: Expert group meeting report and recommendations*. New York: UN Women.
- Vrbensky, R., 2016. *Strengthening women's participation in democracy: UNDP report*. New York: United Nations Development Programme.
- Walker, C., 1995. Women, tradition and reconstruction. *Review of African Political Economy*, 21(61), pp.347–358. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03056249408704064>
- Wells, J., 1993. *We now demand! The history of women's resistance to pass laws in South Africa*. Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press.
- Wendt, A., 1999. *Social theory of international politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511612183>



Systemic Barriers to Women in Politics: A Reflection on Ghana's 2020 General Elections

Emmanuel Graham 

Department of Politics
York University 
Toronto, Canada

Abstract

In preparation for the 2020 general elections in Ghana, the leader of Ghana's National Democratic Congress (NDC) and former President John D. Mahama picked the former vice- chancellor of the University of Cape Coast and former education minister under his administration Professor Jane Nana Opoku Agyeman as his vice-presidential candidate. This choice was met with criticism from the rank and file of the New Patriotic Party (NPP) with most of the attacks centred on her gender, rather than her meritocratic qualifications. Although Ghana has a higher population of women, they are underrepresented in parliament and political leadership. While there is sufficiently reasonable evidence supporting the assertion that women have potential that can be tapped to meaningfully enhance social, economic and political development of nations, yet very little is done in Ghana to ensure that majority of women are involved in decision-making. This chapter is a post-mortem of Ghana's 2020 general elections, pointing to the pre-election rhetoric against the NDC's vice presidential candidate and post-election reality. It argues that the various institutional arrangement in the numerous political parties in Ghana does not support higher female representation and the enshrined cultural perception is that the woman's role is in the home and not politics. Gender politics can therefore help secure electoral votes but might not transform the male-dominated political-institutional structures and cultural perceptions in Ghana. The



paper concludes with some recommendations on how to increase female representation in Ghana's politics.

Keywords: Ghana, National Democratic Congress (NDC), New Patriotic Party (NPP), Feminist Theory and Gender Inequality

Introduction

There is ample evidence that supports the assertion that the competencies of women can be tapped into for socio-economic development and political development of nations (Allah-Mensah, 2005; United Nations Population Fund, 1994). There have been efforts by non-state actors such as non-governmental organisations (NGOs), multilateral institutions and civil society organizations (CSOs), amongst others, to harness the potential of women for the development of nations. These efforts in some instances have yielded positive results, however, there is much room for improvement especially through women in leadership and politics. Indeed, both globally and locally, the representation of women in leadership and politics is limited as they are underrepresented in elections, in leadership positions, in civil service, in private sector and academia, despite the proven abilities of women and girls as leaders and agents of transformations (UN Women, 2021c). Women and girls face several obstacles in political participation such as structural barriers like discriminatory laws and institutional limitations in political participation. The General Assembly of the UN in 2011's resolution on women's political participation state emphatically "that women in every part of the world continue to be largely marginalized from the political sphere, often as a result of discriminatory laws, practices, attitudes and gender stereotypes, low levels of education, lack of access to health care and the disproportionate effect of poverty on women" (UN.org, 2011: 2). More importantly, the resolution also states, "the importance of empowering all women through education and training in government, public policy, economics, civics, information technology and science to ensure that they develop the knowledge and skills needed to make full contributions to society and the political process" (ibid).

Women's involvement and equal participation in politics, public life and leadership across the world is critical for attaining the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030, however, reports and research show a lower representation of women in politics in Africa and other parts of the world. Data reveals that women are poorly represented at all levels of decision making across the globe making the achievement of gender parity in political leadership quite difficult (UN Women, 2021b, 2021c). A map of "Women in Politics: 2021" produced by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and UN Women showed that despite an increase in the general representation of women in political offices - from 21.3% in 2020 to 21.9% in 2021 - significant gender disparities persist especially women's advancement to senior ministerial roles (UN Women, 2021d). Notably, the number of countries with no women holding governmental positions increased during this period. As of 2021, women occupied only 25.5% of national parliaments globally (ibid). According to UN Women (2021a), as of June 2021 women served as President or Heads of States in 22 countries whilst 119 countries have never had a female Head of State (including Ghana). It is therefore projected that gender equality in the top position of power might never be reached until the next 130 years (UN Women, 2021a).

Ghana for example has a higher population of women and yet they are underrepresented in political leadership and over the years, very little has been done to ensure that these women are involved in decision-making at the highest level of the state. For Ghana's 2020 general elections the flagbearer of the National Democratic Congress (NDC) and the former President John D. Mahama, selected Professor Jane Nana Opoku Agyeman, a distinguished academic and former education minister under his administration as his vice-presidential candidate. This move was criticised by the New Patriotic Party's (NPP) communicators, with criticism being more on her gender, rather than her qualifications. It is from this background that this chapter offers a post-mortem of Ghana's 2020 general elections and the gender dimensions thereof. Although Ghana in 2025, had its first female vice-president—marking a historic milestone—the underlying institutional and structural barriers

to women's political representation remain largely unchanged. The research question guiding this chapter is: *Why does Ghana continue to struggle with embracing female political leadership and achieving higher representation of women in parliament?* The chapter argues that while gender-based nominations can be strategically useful for vote mobilisation, they often fail to challenge or transform the deeply entrenched male-dominated political institutions. By examining the 2020 elections as a case study, this chapter seeks to address the persistent gap in the literature concerning low female representation in African politics and to offer fresh insights into pathways for improving gender inclusivity, drawing lessons from Ghana's experience.

The chapter also seeks to build on earlier research on the topic such as Allah-Mensah (2005) who examined the participation of women in Ghana's politics at the local, party as well as national level. Similarly, Apusigah (2004) investigates the gender effect of vulnerability in terms of decision making and politics in the Upper East Region; she argues that the inhabitants of the Upper East Regions are vulnerable, however, women are much more vulnerable. Other studies such as Manuh (2011) has argued for higher women representation in national governance through proportional representation and quota schemes as a strategy for Ghana to achieve the millennium development goals (MDGs). Moreover, Musah and Gariba (2013) studied women's participation in Ghana's parliament from 1992 to 2008 and argue that socio-cultural and political impediments hinder the successful participation of women in parliament. Recent studies by Asekere (2020), focusing on Ghana's two dominant political parties NPP and NDC found that women's underrepresentation in the party's leadership at the national level is a result of their underrepresentation at the subnational level among other factors. Building on these studies this paper seeks to explain why Ghana continues to struggle with embracing female political leadership and achieving higher representation of women in parliament. This chapter utilizes feminist theoretical paradigms relating to gender, sexuality and identity to analyse the involvement of women in the political sphere of Ghana since the country attained its independence.

As posited by Hooper (2001), feminist theory offers pivotal insights into the manner in which gendered social dynamics and institutional frameworks constrain the agency of women. Such analytical tools facilitate an understanding of the contributions made by women, including their involvement in the Convention People's Party (CPP), alongside the enduring obstacles they encounter within a profoundly patriarchal political landscape. Ghana's political milieu epitomises extensive global trends wherein female leadership frequently encounters systemic and cultural impediments. Despite the attainment of notable milestones—from women's pivotal roles during the quest for independence to the historic nomination of Professor Jane Naana Opoku-Agyemang as a candidate for the vice-presidency, the political arena remains predominantly male-centric. This chapter scrutinises these occurrences, critically analysing the nexus between feminist theory and empirical evidence to investigate how women's agency disrupts patriarchal norms and reshapes the political discourse in Ghana.

After the introduction, the rest of the paper is organised as follows; gender inequality and women politics section discuss the issues of gender and inequality, the subsequent section, gives a brief history of women in Ghana's politics since independence. The next section discusses the possibilities of having a female president in Ghana. The following section focuses on the 2020 general elections and its gender dimensions. The penultimate section discusses the issues of women representation in parliament trying to examine if it is increasing over the years and the last section is the concluding remarks and recommendations.

Feminist Theory, Gender Inequality and Women in Politics

The paper is anchored on feminist thinking on gender, sex and identities with regards to women in politics. It is important to state that most gender theories revolve all around:

“(1) physical embodiment, including the body and the role of reproductive biology; (2) institutions and the gendered

social processes that they encompass, including the family, the economy, the state; and (3) the discursive dimension of the gendered construction of language and its constitutive role in the gender order (Hooper, 2001: 20)".

Feminist theory tries to understand gender and inequality, women and men's social relations and experience in politics, at home, at work and many more.

Some of the issues that feminist theorist focusses on are gender inequalities, its forms and manifestations. It also explores various themes such as objectification (mostly sexual), discrimination, oppression, stereotyping and others. Feminist theorisation emerged as early as the 18th century (Wallstonecraft, 1792) but it garnered more attention from the late 1960's (Betty Friedan 1963; Audrey Laude 1984). It advanced that women were under oppression due to the direct patriarchal system and pervasive sexism.

Broadly, scholars have discussed four main approaches to feminist theory although there are more approaches. These four feminist theories are Liberal, Marxist, Social and Radical Feminisms (Jaggar and Rothenberg, 1993). Liberal feminism stresses the notion of equality of opportunity for women who have been subjugated for years in their family, work and society (Jaggar and Rothenberg, 1993). Marxist feminism points out to the origins of women operations and private property whereby women and children became the property of men. Socialist feminism brings out the class aspect of cultural and dominant institutions such as patriarchy family system (ibid). According to Rhodes (2005), Marxist feminism and socialist feminism have the following in common; critique of patriarchy, transformative orientation and focus on economic structures, however, whilst Marxist feminism's focuses on capitalism as the root cause of women's oppressions, socialist feminism examines a more interconnection approach by addressing the connections of capitalism and patriarchy. Rhodes (2005) also mentions that socialist feminism examines the class dimension of women's exploitation in the workplace and investigates women and women of colour and their working condition (ibid). Finally,

radical feminism is a woman centred view or approach, which challenges the male dominated order (Rhodes, 2005). Radical feminism also argues that the subordination and oppression of women is rife in social orders and economic systems which cannot be removed by change and is of the view that the gender system needs to be aborted.

An important aspect of feminist theory is that gender inequality is a human right issue and it remains an important global issue with huge consequences, not only for the lives and livelihoods of women and girls, but also is important for human growth and development, particularly to address the challenges of inclusive growth. The McKinsey and Company (2021) report on their website states that “gender inequality is not only a pressing moral and social issue but also a critical economic challenge. If women—who account for half the world’s working-age population—do not achieve their full economic potential, the global economy will suffer” (2021: np). Feminist and other scholars interested in gender studies have emphasised the essence of women representation in political and public offices and how women’s involvement in democracy can facilitate greater transformation, which has been an important discourse over the years. It has been argued that gender equity is critical for any state to achieve “economic growth and genuine democracy” (Goetz, 1998: 242). Gender equity can also be said to be a “welfare issue”

[that is] “it is about enhancing the quality of human and social reproduction through women’s improved education or health. But more than that, it is a matter of social justice and social transformation aimed at redistributing resources and social value more equally between women and men, a process which includes undermining the gendered public/private segregations which marginalise women in the worlds of politics and economic production” (ibid).

Gender equity is also considered as a prerequisite for sustainable development and advocacy across the globe continues in its bid to promote women participation in politics. In Africa, women began to make their presence known in electoral politics from the

early 90s, for instance women contested for presidency in Kenya and Liberia, some sought for party nomination for presidential candidacy in Nigeria, Angola, Burkina Faso, the Central African Republic, Guinea-Bissau, Kenya, Tanzania and São Tomé and Príncipe (Tripp, 2001). The involvement of women in politics, especially the legislature, has been argued to have several benefits beyond women. For example, Thomas and Welch (1991) in their research on women in the United States of America's legislature noted that women were most successful in passing laws that focused on family, children and women. Additionally, women or female politicians add a different impetus to the notion of women representation as Flammang (1985) argues that women politicians have been seen to have a different approach to their public service giving them more credibility. These women have been more receptive to their constituent, they have been more approachable and are having better human relations serving their constituent (ibid).

Women participation in politics and political decisions has been an important discussion in Ghana over the years (Allah-Mensah, 2005; Apusigah, 2004). Allah-Mensah (2005) posits that there is a growing awareness that women have massive potential that can be tapped into for socio-economic development. It has also been argued that since Ghana has a higher population of women, their presence in politics and parliament would improve the nature of debates and policy making processes (ibid). Despite these potentials, Ghanaian women, and the general participation of women in local, national and international politics have been limited for several reasons. These include some like; women mostly lacking resources, lacking political experience, lacking the needed education and connections to run for office and the cultural perception that women's role is in the home rather in politics remains (Tripp, 2001). It is within this framework that this chapter seeks to examine the role of gender in Ghana's 2020 general elections.

Women in Ghana's Politics Since Independence

The contributions of women during Ghana's struggle for independence align with socialist feminist frameworks, which emphasise the interplay of gender and institutional structures. There are several instances that show the important contribution of women in Ghana's politics in the struggle for independence as well as after independence. For instance, in their support for the CPP, it has been recorded that several women such as traders supported the CPP financially and provided other services that contributed to the election of Kwame Nkrumah as Ghana's prime minister and president (Allah-Mensah, 2005). Some instrumental women who contributed to the struggle for Ghana's independence were Sophia Doku, Hanna Cudjoe, Leticia Quaye and Ama Nkrumah and they were appointed as the propaganda secretariats of the CPP with the responsibilities organising the women's League of the CPP (Tenu, 2019). The women's section or wing was responsible for women and youth development. . These women were efficient organisers who managed to assemble several people at rallies within a short notice (Manuh, 1991) and their efforts led the to the first affirmative action bill which was drafted in 1960s thus giving way for the unopposed election of ten women as members of parliament in Ghana (Allah-Mensah, 2005). This was the first time an African state had introduced and implemented the quota system (ibid). This accomplishment refutes the presumption that gender equality is a contemporary phenomenon and illustrates that Ghanaian women played a pivotal role in advocating for political reform well prior to its global acknowledgment. While these efforts were pioneering, they also reveal the challenges of sustaining institutional reforms that advance gender equity. Radical feminism critiques the limitations of such reforms, arguing that patriarchal systems often resist meaningful change (Rhodes, 2005) and this is evident in the post-independence era, where the lack of structured policies for women's political participation led to their marginalisation during military regimes. Indeed, one must critically assess the longevity of initiatives such as affirmative action and the sustainability of their repercussions. While the affirmative action legislation represented a progressive advancement, the lack of

enduring institutionalisation of women's political participation in subsequent decades raises concerns regarding the institutional barriers that persist. By contemplating this historical backdrop, it becomes clear that contemporary efforts to augment women's political representation may obtain significant insights from the approaches utilised by these pioneering women, particularly concerning their tactics for mobilisation and coalition-building. Additionally, the significant contributions of women like Sophia Doku and Hanna Cudjoe to Ghana's independence, reflect the principles of socialist feminism, which examines how gender and class intersect in systems of oppression (Jaggar and Rothenberg, 1993). By organising rallies and mobilising resources for the CPP, these women defied societal norms, demonstrating that gender equality in political participation was achievable even in male-dominated spaces.

In the post-independence era, the Nkrumah administration formed the Women's Movement in 1960 to support the government's post independent agenda and policies. After the coup of 1966 until 1992, there was no specific system in place to offer higher women representation in Ghana's politics and parliament. Although few women were elected into parliament such as in 1969, she was only one woman from 140 members of parliament, two women were elected in 1970 and only five were elected in 1979 (Prah, 2004: 5). The military era was not conducive for women to participate in politics, it was characterised by abuse of women in several ways with several women being flagged at market places for not conforming to the military dictates (Prah, 2004). Prah (2004:6) mentions that "the military did not have any agenda for women". The military era, characterised by systemic abuse and exclusion of women, aligns with radical feminist critiques of patriarchy as an entrenched social order that marginalises women (Rhodes, 2005). The absence of a structured agenda for women under military regimes further underscores the need for radical systemic reform to ensure women's political inclusion. This neglect reflects a broader pattern in authoritarian regimes where women's issues are deprioritised or ignored altogether in several African countries and this not only curtails women's

political involvement but also exacerbates their marginalisation in societal decision-making.

In 1982, the Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC), a military government headed by Chairman Flt Jerry John Rawlings, who was the head of state and head of government, created the avenue for the formation of the Federation of Ghanaian Women (FEGAWO). Subsequently, due to the economic crises that plagued Ghana in 1983, the Rawlings administration was forced to adopt several economic policies of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (WB) in the name of Ergonomic Recovery Programme (ERP) (Prah, 2004). These programmes supported the rights of women which were propagated by the UN as “Women in Development” (ibid). It has been argued that the Rawlings administration was literally forced to comply with these measures as demanded by the international community (Amoah-Boampong, 2018; Prah, 2004). Indeed, the PNDC leadership

“used gender politics for its own ends. In this regard, the 31st December Women’s Movement was formed in 1982 and Nana Konadu Agyeman Rawlings, wife of the PNDC chairman, Flight Lieutenant Jerry John Rawlings, became president of the organisation.

The ostensive purpose of the 31st December Women’s Movement (31st DWM) was to encourage women to become involved in the affairs of the Ghanaian state; however, it acted as an apparatus to mobilise women under the PNDC’s patronage networks expanding its female constituencies” (Amoah-Boampong, 2018: 36).

The 31st DWM was supposed to be a neutral entity with the goal of advocating for women empowerment but many studies have revealed that it had strong political connections to the PNDC and subsequently led to the formation of the NDC, a metamorphose version of the PNDC which was a military government (Allah-Mensah, 2005; Amoah-Boampong, 2018; Prah, 2004). Several women who had contested the district elections in 1988 and later in 1992 general elections had strong connections to the 31st DWM and many NDC women

parliamentarians at that time, were all connected to the 31st DWM (Allah-Mensah, 2005). Women representation and participation remains low at the parliamentary level due to the increasing number of seats over the years and the amount of women representation keeps diminishing when compared with their male counterparts. The two major political parties, the NDC and the NPP have made some effort to facilitate the increase of women participation in electoral politics. For instance, during the 2012 general elections (Madsen, 2019), eight women were elected from the Greater Accra Region, four women from the Ashanti Region which is an NPP strong-hold and four from the Volta Region which is NDC's stronghold, five from the Central Region, two women from NDC in the Upper East and Upper West (Madsen, 2019). Similarly in the 2016 elections two women were elected from the Northern regions and upper East Regions (ibid). Several efforts have been made to increase women's participation in politics and leadership in Ghana as a whole, such as, the appointment of Her Ladyship Georgina Theodora Wood as the first female Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Ghana in 2007, Madam Joyce Adeline Bamford-Addo appointment as the first female Speaker of Parliament in 2009, the first female electoral commissioner Mrs Charlotte Osei in 2015 as well as Mrs Jean Mensa in 2017 (Madsen, 2019). Although the two major political parties have campaigned and tried to expand women's involvement and participation in Ghana's politics and democratic governance, the ratio of women compared to men is marginal. Therefore this chapter discusses in many details in the subsequent sections factors which have led to the marginalisation of women in Ghana's politics.

Ghana's First Female Vice President/President

For the first time in the history of Ghanaian politics, a major political party, the NDC selected a woman, Prof. Jane Opoku-Agyeman, as the running mate for their flagbearer, J.D Mahama. There have been other female presidential candidates from smaller political parties in 2016 like Brigitte Dzobgebuku, who was the vice-presidential candidate for the Progressive People's Party (PPP) and Nana Konadu Agyeman-Rawling was the presidential

candidate for the National Democratic Party (NDP). Their electoral performance, however, was abysmal as the PPP only obtained 1.0% and the NDP 0.2% of the total valid votes (EC-Ghana, 2016). The news of Prof. Jane Opoku-Agyeman's nomination was met with diverse opinions by the populace and the question that lingered in people's minds was: is Ghana ready for a female vice president and a possible female president? In answering this question, this research will point out the competence and experience of Prof. Jane, most of which was outside of politics which comparatively exceeds several leaders Ghana has had, be it civilian or military since Ghana attained its independence in 1957. Some of such leaders are Lt. Gen. Joseph Arthur Ankrah (1966-1969), Brigadier Akwasi Afrifa (April 1969-September 1969), Gen Ignatius Kutu Acheampong (1972-1979) and Flt. Lt Jerry John Rawling (June 1979-September 1979 as a military leader, and 1993-2001 as civilian leader). The point needs to be emphasised that it appears that when it comes to male politicians, competence is one thing and competence becomes another concern when dealing with female politicians. It is not the same standard and yardstick when debating this issue rather it becomes gender-based arguments which lack merits.

Before the discussion of the competency and qualification of Prof. Jane Naana Opoku-Agyeman for vice presidency, we need to outline what the constitution of Ghana says about the qualification for presidency. Chapter 8, article 62 of the 1992 Constitution of Ghana, a person shall not be qualified for election as the president of Ghana unless:

- he/she is a citizen of Ghana by birth
- he/she has attained the age of forty years; and
- he/she is a person who is otherwise qualified to be elected a Member of Parliament, except that the disqualifications set out in paragraphs (c), (d), and (e) of clause (2) of article 94 of this Constitution shall not be removed, in respect of any such person, by a presidential pardon or by the lapse of time as provided for in clause (5) of that article (Government of Ghana, 1992).

Similarly, the provisions of article 62 of the 1992 Constitution apply to a candidate for election as Vice-President:

- he/she is a citizen of Ghana by birth
- he/she has attained the age of thirty-five years; and
- he/she is a person who is otherwise qualified to be elected a Member of Parliament, except that the disqualifications set out in paragraphs (c), (d), and (e) of clause (2) of article 94 of this Constitution shall not be removed, in respect of any such person, by a presidential pardon or by the lapse of time as provided for in clause (5) of that article (Government of Ghana, 1992).

During the announcement of the selection of Prof. Jane Naana Opoku-Agyemany, former president, John Mahama described her as a “God-fearing, a distinguished scholar, a conscientious public servant and a role model” (Mahama, 2020). He further mentioned that the NDC has demonstrated over the years their commitment to appoint females into various public offices such as Ghana’s first female Speaker of Parliament, the first female Foreign Minister, the first female Attorney General, the first female Chairperson of the Electoral Commission, the first female Chairperson of the National Commission for Civic Education and the first female Chairperson of the Council of State (ibid).

The Professor has several experiences and qualifications which are available online for all to see. Her 53-page curriculum vitae speaks volumes for this distinguished professor and her achievements (Graphic Online, 2020). She was born on November 22nd 1951, in the Cape Coast in Gold Coast (Ghana) and she holds Master and Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) degrees from the York University in Canada attained in 1980 and 1986 respectively. She has served on many boards, committees and councils including UNESCO in 2009. Prof. Opoku-Agyeman also has four honorary doctoral degrees and over 17 recognition/awards such as being the Fulbright Senior Scholar in 1993/1994, the Global Leadership award from the University of South Florida in 2012 as well as the Leading Woman Achiever Award in 2018, amongst others (ibid). She was the first female Vice Chancellor of a public university in Ghana, the University of Cape Coast and

prior to that, she had held several academic positions such as being the Director for the School of International Training in the History and Cultures of African Diaspora. She also moderated Ghana's 2012 presidential debate with Kojo Opong organised by the Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA).

She was later appointed as the minister of education by President Mahama from February 2013 to January 2017 and it was during her term of office that teacher absenteeism was reduced drastically from 27% to 7%. She also helped abolish the quota system in the colleges of education, which helped increase enrolments to 15 400 students from 9 000 in these colleges. She also helped increase the amount of mathematics and science teachers at senior high schools to improve science and mathematics results (Bondzie, 2020). She made several contributions in the health care industry by establishing the West African Centre for Cell Biology and Infectious Pathogens (WACCBIP) and as educational minister, she led consultations to secure funds from the World Bank to establish (WACCBIP). The WACCBIP in 2020 reported to have been successful in sequencing the genomes of the COVID 19 (SAR-COV- 2), which was critical information in the development of COVID-19 vaccine (ibid). She also became the vice chancellor of the Women's University in Africa, based in Zimbabwe (Graphic Online, 2020). Scholars such as Tamale (2020) have argued that women in high-ranking political positions can inspire systemic change and serve as role models for younger generations. Professor Opoku-Agyemang's academic achievements, public service and global recognition position her as a trailblazer whose leadership could reshape Ghana's political landscape, however, despite having all these qualifications and experience in public service, the NPP and its commentators argued and criticised her for not being fit for the job. Below are some of the commentaries and gender related issues raised with little being based on her performance as a minister of education and other public service rendered by her.

Ghana's 2020 General Elections and Gender Issues

The 2020 general elections were keenly contested by the incumbent government of the NPP, led by President Nana Akufo-

Addo and the opposition, the NDC, led by the former President John D. Mahama. This was Ghana's 8th general election since the return to a multiparty democracy in 1992 which ushered in the fourth republic. The 2020 general elections were unique in several aspects; firstly, it was a competition between an incumbent president and a former president who had lost the 2016 elections after serving for one term (Gyampo and Graham, 2022). Secondly, both the incumbent President Nana Akufo-Addo and the former President John D. Mahama had all served one term as president and so it was a contest for a second term which was big for both presidential candidates. Thirdly, President Akuffo had appointed a new electoral commissioner, Mrs Jean Mensa with two new deputies, after the Chief Justices' report recommended that the former commissioner, Mrs Charlotte Osei and her two assistants be dismissed for breaches to procurement laws. Fourthly, the world was plagued by the coronavirus, known as COVID -19, which led to several people being infected and some dying and as a result, many countries implemented restrictions on movements with major lockdowns (Gyampo and Graham, 2022). Finally, John Mahama had picked a female vice-presidential candidate which was met with several criticisms by the opposition NPP and the gender manifestation was rife as discussed below.

A major gender issue, which has a strong cultural underpinning, was the sex or femininity of the vice-presidential candidate of the NDC which was a huge concern for many commentators especially those in the ruling NPP. There were videos circulating on social media in which Benard Antwi-Boashiako, the Ashanti Regional Chairman of the NPP, made some abhorrent statement about Prof. Jane Opoku-Agyemang (Ghana Page, 2020). He accused her of being a witch, wicked person and a thief and stated that she was part of the forces supporting the cancellation of the Free Maternal Healthcare programme which was implemented under the Kufuor administration. In his accusation of Prof. Jane Opoku Agyemang he said, "She will pay for all the pregnant women who died due to financial issues after the free maternal healthcare programme was scrapped" (Ghana Page, 2020). The majority leader of parliament and member of the NPP as well as other members

of parliament, downplayed the importance of the NDC's vice presidential selection stating:

“You ask yourself, what value is this woman going to add to that ticket? And that is where I find it extremely difficult. I mean the woman, a calm woman, a woman of poise and balance. She speaks good English, yes but is it good enough to satisfy the ticket to ensure quality improvement in the governance?...let's assume that John [Dramani Mahama] becomes the President, let me emphasize the point, perish that thought, and the next day, he is no longer, is this woman capable of being described as the President of this country?”(ghananewsonline.com, 2020).

Subsequently, Bernard continued to critique Prof. Jane's appearance and looks, saying that “when you look at her face and hair closely, she looks like a witch. Jane Naana Opoku Agyemang is a very wicked woman and an accomplice to theft” (GhanaPage, 2020). Other party officials described her as old and for being in her menopause years, for example, an NPP commentator, who is popularly known as Abronye DC on a Kumasi-based Wontumi FM radio programme stated that:

“Maame Jane is in her late 60s...and this woman cannot even help reason with John Mahama if he becomes president. This I know is not possible for John Mahama to win another election but do you think the NDC lacks the men to that extent of appointing a female vice who is a due to menopause may not be able to reason well with Mahama?” – he said (Bantie, 2020).

Similarly, another NPP communicator, Mr Francis Ebo Mensah, who was the Greater Accra Regional director, during a radio discussion on NEAT FM also questioned whether she was married. He argued that he had studied her, he had investigated her and there are issues which are hidden and personal and further asserts that he has gone in search of her husband and has seen pictures of her family and children, nonetheless he quizzed rhetorically if she still is married (Peacefmonline.com, 2020b).

Furthermore, the achievements of the vice-presidential candidate were questioned and touted as insignificant. The general secretary of the NPP, Mr John Boadu, in an interview on

Peace FM argued that she was not a match for the vice president in terms of politics and governance and in his view the NPP are better managers of the economy with more pragmatic measures than the NDC. He queried rhetorically “What track record can the NDC’s appointed running mate boast off? With all her years as an academician, what major achievement can you credit to her all these years?” (Peacefmonline.com, 2020a). The NPP’s director of communication, Mr Yaw Buaben Asamoah, in a press statement concluded that, Prof. Opoku Agyeman’s performance as an education minister was “nothing to write home about... the choice of Prof. Jane Naana Opoku-Agyeman by John Dramani Mahama is a clear indication that he does not take the Ghanaian electorate seriously” (GhanaWeb, 2020).

The various criticism of the selection of Prof. Jane Naana Opoku-Agyeman as discussed above was centred around her gender such as her femininity, her appearance/looks, her age and had little to do with her achievements. This corroborates earlier studies that showed how politics is seen as a man’s game (Celis et al., 2013) and that political life is designed to suit men and not women whose roles are based on their reproductive ability and physical appearance amongst others. Similarly, Hooper (2001: 20) states that gendered issues revolve around “first, physical embodiment, including the body and the role of reproductive biology; second, institutions and the gendered social processes that they encompass, including the family, the economy, the state”. This gender-based criticism also re-emphasises the central argument of this chapter that although gender-based nominations may mobilise votes, it does not succeed in disrupting the deeply entrenched male-dominated structures of political institutions.

Increasing Women in Parliament

Table 4.1: Women in Ghana’s Parliament Since 1960

Years	1960	1965	1969	1979	1992	1996	2000	2004	2008	2012	2016	2020
No. of seats	114	198	140	140	200	200	200	230	230	275	275	275
Men	104	179	139	135	184	181	181	205	210	244	239	235
%	91.20%	90.40%	99.30%	96.50%	92%	90.50%	90.50%	89%	91.30%	88.70%	86.90%	85.40%
Women	10	19	1	5	16	19	19	25	20	31	36	40
%	8.80%	9.60%	0.70%	3.50%	8%	9.50%	9.50%	11%	8.70%	11.30%	13.10%	14.50%

Source: Author’s creation with data from electoral commission of Ghana and Parliament of Ghana

Liberal feminist views advocating for egalitarian opportunity for women underscore the necessity for affirmative action to rectify the ongoing underrepresentation of women within the Ghanaian Parliament. Table 4.1 above shows a marginal increase in women in parliament from 1960 to 2020, yet there were significant drops in 1969, 1979, and 2004. It also shows that the increase is marginal compared to the percentage of women in the country and women voters as Ghana has a higher female population than male. It is important to mention that 2020 saw the highest number of women elected as members of parliament, which is 40 (see Table 4.2), whilst the lowest was when there was only one in 1969. Forty (40) women MP, twenty (20) from the NPP and twenty (20) from the NDC though commendable, is nevertheless low compared with 235 men despite the Ghana’s adaptation of Convention of the Elimination of All Kind of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the African Charter on human and People’s Right, Beijing Platform for Action (BFA) and the Maputo Protocol.

The limitations of women participation in Ghana politics are multifaceted. The socialist feminist theory suggests that structural inequities are particularly pertinent in elucidating the socio-economic and cultural barriers confronting women in Ghana politics. Restricted access to resources, patriarchal party dynamics and informal gender biases persist in obstructing women’s capacity to compete effectively during elections. Evidence from the 2020 general elections support the argument of this chapter that Ghana is not ready for an increase in the

number of women in parliament for the following reasons. Firstly, the gendered institutional structures of political parties remain and many of these women struggle to access funding for campaigns with weak support and commitment from their party leadership. Both the NPP and the NDC have, over the years, set aside the Affirmative Action Bill and it has gone through many rigid to-ing and fro-ing (Madsen et al., 2020). President Nana Akufo-Addo in 2019 at the Women's Deliver conference claimed that part of the delays in the passage of the Affirmative Action Bill is due to the lack of dynamism and activism from women.

Recent debate that has led to the delay in the Bill has been on issues of raising the number of parliamentary seats and for political parties to reserve safe seats for women in their various strongholds (ibid). Sadly, the party manifestos of both the NPP and the NDC had little to say about women empowerment and representation in parliament. In the NPP's 216-page 2020 Manifesto, the word count for women was eleven (11) which was mainly about supporting women in business, protecting women, women in sports amongst other things with nothing on women in parliament. The manifesto also mentioned that the party will pass the Affirmative Action Bill twice, on page 161 and page 190 respectively (NPP's-Manifesto, 2020). Moreover, commitment for the Affirmative Action Bill was absent in the NPP's 2016 manifesto. Comparatively, the NDC's 2020 manifesto mentioned women thirty-three times (33) which mostly focused on market women, assemblywomen, business women, women farmers etc. On the issue of the Affirmative Action Bill, the NDC's manifesto 2020 stated that the NPP has failed in passing the bill, so the NDC was going to strengthen several legal and policy framework by enacting the Affirmative Action Bill, the Property Rights of Spouses Bill, amend the Intestate Succession Bill and Domestic Workers Law (NDC-Manifesto, 2020), nonetheless the manifesto was silent on women in parliament.

Secondly, the informal gendered and cultural bias in parliament and the verbal abuse of women in parliament still remains. There is also a stereotyping of women in politics making it difficult for women to be successful in parliament. This was confirmed in a recent interview of Mavis Hawa

Koomson, a member of parliament of Awutu Senya East Constituency and Minister of Special Development Initiatives conducted by journalist Paul Adom-Otchere (Adom-Otchere, 2021). When Mr Adom-Otchere asked Mrs Koomson if the appreciation of women as key actors in Ghanaian politics was getting better, she said “the role of women in politics generally is not getting better and that it is rather becoming worse” (Adom-Otchere, 2021). She explained that female politicians go through a lot of “embarrassment” and stressed that “they think if you are a female and a politician you are a prostitute” (ibid). Despite these challenges, she affirmed her belief that soon Ghana would have a female president or vice-president. It is important to mention that earlier studies have pointed out that women are afraid to get into politics because of false sexual-related accusations leveled against successful female politicians (Asekere, 2020). In these instances, these women fear to be tagged wrongly since many people believe that politics is for men and this has affected some of the confidence in women to get involved in politics (ibid). Earlier works by scholars such as Allah-Mensah (2005) cite many instances of this happening such that it discourages women to take part in Ghanaian politics.

Table 4.2:List of All Women Members of Ghana's Eighth Parliament

	Name	Constituency	Party	Regions
1	Tina Gifty Naa Ayeley Mensah	Weija Gbawe	NPP	Greater Accra
2	Sarah Adwoa Sarfo	Dome Kwabenya	NPP	Greater Accra
3	Lydia Seyram Alhassan	Ayawaso West Wuogon	NPP	Greater Accra
4	Sheila Bartels	Ablekuma North	NPP	Greater Accra
5	Ursula Owusu	Ablekuma West	NPP	Greater Accra
6	Dakoa Newman	Okaikoi South	NPP	Greater Accra
7	Sophia Karen Adukuaku	Domeabra/Obom	NDC	Greater Accra
8	Rita Naa Odoley Sowah	La Dadekotopon	NDC	Greater Accra
9	Theresa Lardi Awuni	Okaikwei North	NDC	Greater Accra
10	Zanetor Agyeman Rawlings	Klottey Korle	NDC	Greater Accra
11	Agnes Naa Momo Larley	Krowor	NDC	Greater Accra
12	Linda Obenewaa Akweley Ocloo	Shai Osudoku	NDC	Greater Accra
13	Cudjoe Comfort Doyoe	Ada	NDC	Greater Accra
14	Nana Dokua Asiamah Adjei	Akropong	NPP	Eastern Region
15	Gifty Twum-Ampofo	Akim Abuakwa North	NPP	Eastern Region
16	Abena Osei-Asare	Atiwa East	NPP	Eastern Region
17	Mensah Betty Nana Efua Krosby	Afram Plains North	NDC	Eastern Region
18	Gizella Tetteh	Awutu Senya West	NDC	Central Region
19	Queenstar Pokuah Sawyerr	Agona East	NDC	Central Region
20	Naana Eyiah Quansah	Gomoa Central	NPP	Central Region
21	Mavis Hawa Koomson	Awutu Senya East	NPP	Central Region
22	Cynthia Mamle Morrison	Agona West	NPP	Central Region
23	Ophelia Hayford	Mfantseman	NPP	Central Region
24	Joycelyn Tetteh	North Dayi	NDC	Volta Region
25	Della Sowah	Kpando	NDC	Volta Region
26	Dzifa Abla Gomashie	Ketu South	NDC	Volta Region
27	Angela Oforiwa Alorwu-Tay	Afadzato South	NDC	Volta Region
28	Helen Adjoa Ntoso	Krachi West	NDC	Oti Region
29	Dorcas Affo-Toffey	Jomoro	NPP	Western Region
30	Adelaide Ntim	Nsuta Kwamang Beposo	NPP	Ashanti Region
31	Mavis Nkansah Boadu	Afigya Sekyere East	NPP	Ashanti Region
32	Patricia Appiagyei	Asokwa	NPP	Ashanti Region
33	Francisca Oteng Mensah	Kwabre East	NPP	Ashanti Region
34	Ama Poma Boateng	Juaben	NPP	Ashanti Region
35	Freda Prempeh	Tano North	NPP	Ahafo Region
36	Elizabeth Ofosu Agyare	Techiman North	NDC	Bono East Region
37	Akanvariva Lydia Lamisi	Tempane	NDC	Upper East Region
38	Akuka Albert Alalzuuga	Garu	NDC	Upper East Region
39	Zuweru Mohammed Ibrahimah	Salaga South	NDC	Savannah region
40	Lariba Abudu	Walewale	NPP	North East Region

Source: MyJoyOnline.com (2020)

Concluding Remarks and Recommendations

In summary, while the political culture of Ghana is still a patriarchal one, the strength and agency of female leaders indicate how gender equity in politics can change all this. Through

feminist theory, this chapter has shown how the structural and cultural constraints to women's participation obscured their important contribution. The journey of gender equity in Ghanaian politics is not over and must be continued to overcome institutional disadvantages and make political life inclusive. One cannot overemphasize the role of women in politics and although Ghana does not have a female president and higher women representation in parliament. the following recommendations can foster this process; firstly, political parties must show zero tolerance for verbal abuse of women politicians. Secondly, women empowerment organizations must intensify their lobby for an inclusive government and thirdly, political parties need to institutionalise and enforce gender safe seats for their women leaders to contest for primaries. More research should focus on the potentials of women in politics in Ghana and make appropriate policy recommendations for the government

References

- Adom-Otchere, P. (2021). *The role of women in politics is not getting any better, it's becoming worse - Hon. Hawa Koomson*. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wIE9ITzoG38>
- Allah-Mensah, B. (2005). *Women in politics and public life in Ghana*. Accra: Friedrich Ebert Foundation (FES).
- Amoah-Boampong, C. (2018). Historicising the Women's Manifesto for Ghana: A culmination of women's activism in Ghana. *Legon Journal of the Humanities*, 29(2), 26–45. <https://doi.org/10.4314/ljh.v29i2.2>
- Apusigah, A. A. (2004). Gender, vulnerability, and the politics of decision-making in Ghana: The case of the Upper East Region. *Ghana Journal of Development Studies*, 1(2), 6–26. <https://doi.org/10.4314/gjds.v1i2.35004>
- Asekere, G. (2020). Women participation in sub-national level politics in Ghana's Fourth Republic. *Asian Research Journal of Arts & Social Sciences*, 12(3), 44–58. <https://doi.org/10.9734/arjass/2020/v12i330192>

Gender and Feminist Meditations

- Bantie, R. (2020). 'Menopause will not allow 68-year-old Jane Naana to give Mahama any good advice' – Abronye DC. *BBC Ghana Reports*. Retrieved from <https://thebbcghana.com/menopause-will-not-allow-68-year-old-jane-naana-to-give-mahama-any-good-advice-abronye-dc/>
- Bondzie, A. S. (2020). A woman's place is in politics – The case for Ghana's first female vice president. *Centre for Development Studies*. Retrieved from <https://blogs.bath.ac.uk/cds/2020/09/08/a-womans-place-is-in-politics-the-case-for-ghanas-first-female-vice-president/>
- Celis, K., Kantola, J., Waylen, G., & Weldon, S. L. (2013). Introduction: Gender and politics: A gendered world, a gendered discipline. In *The Oxford handbook of gender and politics*. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199751457.013.0034>
- Flammang, J. A. (1985). Female officials in the feminist capital: The case of Santa Clara County. *Western Political Quarterly*, 38(1), 94–118. <https://doi.org/10.1177/106591298503800108>
- Friedan, B. (1963). *The Feminine Mystique*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company
- Ghana Page. (2020). Video: Jane Naana-Opoku Agyemang is a witch, mallam and very wicked – Chairman Wontumi. In *GhPage*. Retrieved from <https://www.ghpage.com/jane-opoku-agyemang-witch-mallam-very-wicked-wontumi/137910/>
- GhanaWeb. (2020). NPP gives a list of why Mahama's running mate has nothing good to offer. Retrieved from <https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/NPP-gives-a-list-of-why-Mahama-s-running-mate-has-nothing-good-to-offer-1000585>
- GhanaNewsOnline.com. (2020). Mahama's running mate not fit for president – Kyei-Mensah-Bonsu. Retrieved from <https://ghananewsonline.com.gh/mahamas-running-mate-not-fit-for-president-kyei-mensah-bonsu/>
- Goetz, A. M. (1998). Women in politics & gender equity in policy: South Africa & Uganda. *Review of African Political Economy*, 25(76), 241–262. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03056249808704312>

- Government of Ghana. (1992). *Constitution of the Republic of Ghana*. Ghana Publishing Corporation. Retrieved from http://www.ghana.gov.gh/images/documents/constitution_ghana.pdf
- Graphic Online. (2020). Who is Prof Naana Jane Opoku-Agyemang? Retrieved from <https://www.graphic.com.gh/news/politics/who-is-prof-naana-jane-opoku-agyemang.html>
- Gyampo, R. E. V., & Graham, E. (2022). Ghana's 2020 General Elections: An assessment of the journey and processes. *The African Review*, 49(1), 1–24. <https://doi.org/10.1163/1821889x-20224913>
- Hooper, C. (2001). *Manly states: Masculinities, international relations, and gender politics*. Columbia University Press. <https://doi.org/10.7312/hoop12074>
- Jaggar, A., & Rothenberg, P. (1993). *Feminist frameworks: Alternative theoretical accounts of the relations between women and men* (3rd ed.). McGraw-Hill Book Company.
- Madsen, D. H. (2019). Gender, power, and institutional change – The role of formal and informal institutions in promoting women's political representation in Ghana. *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, 54(1), 70–87. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0021909618787851>
- Madsen, D. H., Aning, K., & Hallberg, A. K. (2020). A step forward but no guarantee of gender-friendly policies: Female candidates spark hope in the 2020 Ghanaian elections. Retrieved from <https://nai.uu.se/news-and-events/news/2020-12-03-a-step-forward-but-no-guarantee-of-gender-friendly-policies-female-candidates-spark-hope-in-the-2020-ghanaian-elections.html>
- Mahama, J. (2020). John Mahama's address – Outdoor of the 2020 running mate. Retrieved from <https://www.johnmahama.org/news/john-mahama-s-address-outdoor-of-the-2020-running-mate>
- Manuh, T. (1991). Women and their organizations during the Convention Peoples' Party period. In K. Arhin (Ed.), *The life and work of Kwame Nkrumah* (pp. 156–176). Accra: Sedco.
- Manuh, T. (2011). Towards greater representation of women in national governance. *Governance Newsletter-IEA Ghana*, 17(6), 4–6.

Gender and Feminist Meditations

- McKinsey & Company. (2021). How advancing women's equality can add \$12 trillion to global growth. Retrieved from <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/employment-and-growth/how-advancing-womens-equality-can-add-12-trillion-to-global-growth>
- Musah, B. I., & Gariba, I. (2013). Women and political decision-making: Perspectives from Ghana's parliament. *Journal of Alternative Perspectives in the Social Sciences*, 5(3), 443–476.
- MyJoyOnline.com. (2020). Meet the 40 female MPs-elect of the 8th Parliament. Retrieved from <https://www.myjoyonline.com/meet-the-40-female-mps-elect-of-8th-parliament/>
- NDC. (2020). *2020 manifesto*. Retrieved from <https://www.ndc.org.gh/images/2020manifesto.pdf>
- NPP. (2020). *NPP 2020 manifesto*. Retrieved from <https://citinewsroom.com/2020/08/npp-2020-manifesto-full-document/>
- Peacefmonline.com (2020a) A Big Mistake To Appoint Prof Naana Opoku-Agyemang As Running Mate - John Boadu To NDC. Retrieved from <https://www.peacefmonline.com/pages/politics/politics/202007/417980.php> (accessed 7 September 2021).
- Peacefmonline.com (2020b) Are You Still Married? NPP Communicator Asks NDC Running Mate, Jane Naana. Retrieved from <https://www.peacefmonline.com/pages/videos/202007/27899.php> (accessed 7 September 2021)
- Prah, M. (2004). Chasing illusions and realizing visions: Reflections on Ghana's feminist experience. *Gender Activism and Studies in Africa*, 3, 27–40.
- Rhodes, J. (2005). *Radical feminism, writing, and critical agency: From manifesto to modern*. State University of New York Press. <https://doi.org/10.1353/book4874>
- Tamale, S. (2020). *Decolonization and Afro-feminism*. Daraja Press.
- Thomas, S., & Welch, S. (1991). The impact of gender on activities and priorities of state legislators. *Western Political Quarterly*, 44(2), 445–456. <https://doi.org/10.1177/106591299104400212>

Systemic Barriers to Women in Politics

- Tenu, C. (2019). Obstacles to gender parity in political representation: The case of the Ghanaian Parliament. *Memorial University of Newfoundland*. Retrieved from <https://research.library.mun.ca/14094/1/thesis.pdf>
- Tripp, A. M. (2001). Women and democracy: The new political activism in Africa. *Journal of Democracy*, 12(3), 141–155. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2001.0060>
- UN Women. (2021a). Facts and figures: Women’s leadership and political participation. Retrieved from <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/leadership-and-political-participation/facts-and-figures>
- UN Women. (2021b). In focus: Women and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Retrieved from <https://www.unwomen.org/news/in-focus/women-and-the-sdgs>
- UN Women. (2021c). What we do: Leadership and political participation. Retrieved from <https://www.unwomen.org/what-we-do/leadership-and-political-participation>
- UN Women. (2021d). Women in politics: 2021. *Digital Library: Publications*. Retrieved from <https://www.unwomen.org/digital-library/publications/2021/03/women-in-politics-map-2021>
- United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). (1994). Issue 7: Women empowerment. Retrieved from <https://www.unfpa.org/resources/issue-7-women-empowerment>
- UN.org. (2011). Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 19 December 2011. Retrieved from <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N11/466/62/PDF/N1146662.pdf>



Qualitative Comparative Analysis of Conditions Necessary for Increasing the Percentage of Women in African Parliaments

Dikeledi A. Mokoena 

*Anthropology and Development Studies
University of Johannesburg 
Johannesburg, South Africa*

Abstract

Many African countries have committed to supporting quests to include women in decision making platforms and many African national assemblies have women representation, however, the number of women representatives in parliament remain far from gender parity in many countries. There are, however, several notable cases where the number of women in parliament is relatively high, for instance, the leading country in the world in terms of women's representation in parliament, is in Africa. The factors that led to such a high performance are analysed in this chapter along with other countries that have achieved more than 40% of women representation in parliament. The chapter deployed a fuzzy set Qualitative Comparative Analysis approach to ascertain conditions that are necessary for African countries to maximize the number of women in parliament. The configuration of factors that lead to a high number of women in parliament are constituted by a constellation of factors such as electoral system, type of quotas, quota targets, reduction of gender gaps in significant indicators and the role of political parties.

Keywords: Gender Quota, Qualitative Comparative Analysis, Women in Parliament, Configurations



Introduction

Without gender quotas, African countries would struggle to effectively address gender parity in parliament. There are different forms of gender quota systems and the highest performing African countries in terms of gender parity in parliament do not have a homogenous gender quota system. It is in this light that this chapter embarks on a qualitative comparative analysis of African countries that have scored above 40% of women's representation in parliament so as to understand the conditions that have led to their achievement despite the differences in contexts. The chapter focuses on Rwanda, Senegal, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Carbo Verde and Ethiopia. All these countries have different gender quota systems, yet they have managed to perform well in terms of quotas for women in Parliament thus the presentation of a systematic cross comparative analysis to ascertain the conditions necessary for high gender parity performance in Africa.

The 2023 United Nations Women report states that the global gender parity will only be achieved in 130 years and unfortunately the world is still lagging in terms of parity in the political sphere (Folke & Rickne 2016, Sharma, Chawla & Karam 2021). This unequal proportion of female leadership at the political apex results from several factors including the patriarchal culture of the political sphere and access to finance for political activities. As a response to the existing gender inequality in the political sphere, many countries have implemented various affirmative action policies to ensure that the societies these countries represent reflect the central tenets of democracy, which is inclusivity.

Democratic countries are often viewed as nations that are proponents of equality regardless of race, religion, or gender, however, there is still a significant lag in gender parity in most spheres of democratic societies. For instance, according to the 2023 UN Women report on women in politics, the United States of America (USA) scored 33.3% representation of women in political decision making compared to Angola which stood at 37.9% although Angola scored significantly below the USA economically, in terms of gross domestic product (GDP) and

also scored poorly on the democratic principles of freedom (see Freedom House 2023). It is understood that the inclusion of women in parliamentary and ministerial roles gives legitimacy to democratic governments that have been dominated by men historically (Bush 2011). To make sense of the positive performance by countries that do not adhere to democratic principles, research shows that some electoral autocratic countries have implemented gender quotas so as to attract foreign aid (Bush & Zetterberg 2021). Regardless of the reasons for gendered affirmative action policies, the implementation of gender quotas has not been without challenges.

Research shows evidence of increased oppression or sabotage of women who benefited from gender quotas (Leibbrandt, Wang & Foo 2017; Berry, Bouka & Kamuru 2021). Gender quotas are affirmative action strategies designed to ensure that women have reserved and designated seats in national assemblies (Krook, Lovenduski & Squires 2009) and despite the challenges with implementation, they have been proven to elevate women's political representation (Rosen 2017). Clayton (2015) averred that more than 110 countries worldwide have restructured their constitutions to include quota-mandated gender policies to include women in parliamentary and ministerial seats. Despite the reforms for women's inclusion in political decision making, only 5 countries have reached gender parity in politics, namely; Rwanda, Cuba, Nicaragua, Mexico and New Zealand. Nicaragua (51.7%), Cuba (53.4%) and Rwanda (61.3%) exceed the UN gender quota target of 50% (UN Women 2023) whilst Mexico, New Zealand and the United Arab Emirates have all scored 50% (UN Women 2023). What is notable is that not all of the countries that have reached the 50% gender parity have legislated gender quota systems as only Rwanda, Nicaragua and Mexico have gender quota laws while Cuba and the UAE do not have official gender quota systems, but they have affirmative action policies and strategies to encourage women into decision making platforms (Luciak 2005).

It is evident that narrowing the gender gap requires intervention as opposed to relying solely on market principles to achieve gender equilibrium in the political and economic

sphere. Majority of the countries that have between 40% and 49.9% of women in parliament are in Europe and some of them do not have legislated gender quotas, for instance Andorra (UN Women 2023). The other countries that have performed well in terms of achieving over 40% of women parliamentarians are in Africa and Latin America and Africa has performed impressively because of Rwanda which sits on the number one spot. Although most of the countries that have scored above 40% are from Europe, all those European countries are smaller geospatially and in terms of population size with the exception being Mexico, South Africa, Argentina, Ethiopia, Namibia and Mozambique (UN Women 2023). These latter countries have all achieved above 40% women's representation in parliament.

Many governments in sub-Saharan Africa, Western Europe, the Middle East, Asia and America have implemented various kinds of quota systems such as voluntary quotas, legislative quotas and/or soft/informal quotas to ensure that women are adequately represented (Krook *et al.* 2009). According to the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (2004) there is growing support worldwide for the use of gender quotas as a measure to boost women's access to political bodies (Krook *et al.* 2009; Besley, Folke, Persson & Rickne 2017; Hughes, Paxton & Krook 2017). Most countries, as is the case with Rwanda, have a legislated or non-legislated quota of 30% for women in politics. In Africa, there are nine other countries that have scored between 30% and 39,9% in comparison to 16 other countries from various continents in the world ranking in the same range. (UN Women 2023) The rest continue to perform dismally in terms of women's representation thus, the importance of the call made at the 40th anniversary of CEDAW for increasing the gender parity target to 50% by 2030 because in order for countries to achieve gender parity, gender quotas are crucial.

Dahlerup (2007) relayed that “quota advocates see gender quotas as a compensation for direct or structural discrimination against women and as an effective instrument for achieving gender balance in political institutions, which is considered essential for democratic development”. There are “three main

types of gender quota legislation currently in use across the world, the reserved seat, electoral candidate, and political party quotas, each of which intervenes at different point in the electoral process... some gender quotas are accompanied by mechanisms such as placement mandates and sanctions for non-compliance, which greatly strengthen the legislation” (Rosen 2017:83). Moreover, the “electoral candidate quotas like reserved seats quotas, electoral (or “legislative”) candidate quotas are also codified in national law” (Rosen 2017:85). Legislated candidate quotas regulate the gender composition of the candidate lists and are binding by law for all political parties in the election and they are mandated either through national constitutions or by electoral legislation. Reserved seats quotas involve legislated reservation of a certain number or percentage of seats for women members, implemented through special electoral procedures and they are mandated either through national constitutions or by electoral legislation (Dahlerup, Hilal, Kalandadze & Kandawasvika-Nhundu 2013). In the context of legislated gender quotas, there may be conditions on the position of women on the electoral list, for example, the zebra list method may be used which requires the candidates on the electoral list to alternate by sex. Chen (2009) differentiated between legislated quotas mentioned above and non-legislated which is popularly known as voluntary party quota. Voluntary party quotas are adopted by political parties and are set by the parties themselves to guarantee the nomination of a certain number or proportion of women and they are the most common form of gender quota usually borne out of strong advocacy by women within the parties.

Rosen (2017) reiterated that electoral candidate quotas target candidate lists submitted by political parties and that they require the nomination of a minimum proportion of female candidates by all political parties. This differs from the reserved seats approach because it intervenes at an earlier stage of the electoral process (Rosen 2017:85). Electoral candidate quotas “are most popular in proportional representation (PR) electoral systems where political parties elect multiple candidates to national legislatures” (Rosen 2017:85). Reserved seats, similar

to electoral candidate quotas, legally bind political parties to have a proportion of seats reserved for women (Rosen 2017). The difference is that electoral candidate and political party quotas, “regulate earlier stages of the electoral process that ultimately leaves the decision to elect women to voters or political party leadership” (Rosen 2017:90). In the context of the absence of gender quota systems, Wang and Muriaas (2020) have shown that centralized decision making of electoral candidates in political parties has implications on women's representation in candidate lists. The final nomination lists of electoral candidates is affected by the composition of nominating committees as well as bargaining power female aspirants have and in many instances, financial resources often play a role in influencing who ends up in the electoral candidate list (Wang & Muriaas 2020).

Gender quotas are only as successful as the policies and the electoral laws that are implemented (Dahlerup *et al.* 2013) and thus, if the laws and policies that enforce these gender quotas are not respected by political leaders, the effectiveness of the gender quotas to promote female political leaders may be thwarted. Caul (1999), Rosen (2016) and Dahlerup *et al.* (2013) reiterated that the electoral systems of a country have implications on the success of gender quotas. The three main electoral systems used worldwide are the proportional representation system, the plurality/majority system and the mixed system (Dahlerup *et al.* 2013). The proportional representation system is based on the premise that the overall votes that a political party obtains, translates into the seats the party represents in parliament and it is also the system that is most conducive to the effectiveness of voluntary gender quotas (Dahlerup *et al.* 2013).

The plurality/majority system is based on the notion that the political party that receives the most votes during an electoral period is the winner while the mixed system electoral system uses those two kinds of electoral systems, and the elected representatives are based on the voter's choice. There are two types of mixed systems; the parallel system as well as the mixed-member proportional system (Dahlerup *et al.*

2013). The countries analysed in this research have a similar electoral system, the proportional representation system except Senegal which has a mixed electoral system. According to the International Foundation for Electoral System (2001), gender quotas are shaped by formal and informal institutions to be successful as emphasised “Informal rules play a role in either fortifying gender quotas or weakening them” (Krook 2009). As an instance, Brazil has been struggling to increase women's representation in politics despite having gender quotas (Krook 2009) and this indicates that there are other factors involved which differ across the countries that influences the achievement of gender quota targets despite differences in terms of conditions that led to that outcome. The complexity of different causal factors leading to a similar outcome from many cases requires the use of Qualitative Comparative Analysis.

Methodology

A Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) of seven countries with more than 40% of women representation in parliament have been purposively sampled using a multi-stage purposive sampling technique. Cragun *et al.* (2016) shared that the QCA was initially developed by Dr. Charles Ragin for use in small or medium sample case study research. QCA is designed for small to intermediate number of cases (around 5 to 50 or even 100) that are too small for statistical analysis but too big for qualitative case research (Sehring, Korhonen-Kurki & Brockhaus 2013). The countries sampled differ in several characteristics, for instance, their electoral systems and gender quota systems. Although their characteristics differ, their different contexts yielded high gender parity performance in parliament thus the quest to understand which configurations have led to such outcomes. George and Bennet (2005) argued, “it is difficult to perform a controlled comparison” for the purpose of yielding reliable statistical results, thus the importance of deploying other methods to arrive at an explanation of the variations in the cases. QCA studies are configuration oriented since they perceive cases as a configuration of attributes” (Rihoux 2013 cited by Thomann and Maggetti (2020:362).

Secondly, the aim of QCA is enabling systematic cross case comparison (Sehring, Korhonen- Kurki & Brockhaus 2013:2). Cases have internal complexities which QCA helps us acknowledge and those internal complexities allow complex causations and counterfactual analysis. Ragin (2000) argues that the QCA, “on each case is understood as a specific combination of factors, which are called conditions and therefore, Ragin speaks not of ‘cases’ but of ‘configurations’” (Ragin 2000:64).

A configuration is “a specific combination of factors (or stimuli, causal variables, ingredients, determinants, etc. On the other hand, the main premise of QCA is that of multiple conjunctural causation, which means that (1) most often not one factor but a combination of factors will lead to the outcome; (2) different combinations of factors can produce the same outcome; and (3) one condition can have different impacts on the outcome, depending on its combination with other factors and the context” (Rihoux 2007:367).

QCA is used to analyse the conditions that lead to high performance of efforts for gender parity in the political sphere. The heterogeneity of the countries that are being analysed is acknowledged thus the deployment of the qualitative comparative analysis of countries that have met the gender quota target. The study is characterized by comparative design which deploys intra and cross comparison of 7 non-randomly selected cases. “We can define a comparative study as a study of a limited number of cases with the purpose of studying variation by use of non-statistical designs and methods” (Bukve 2019:162). The selection of cases/configurations is determined by gender representation in terms of women in parliament. This project began with the widely accepted argument that gender quotas increase women’s representation in historically male dominated political spheres which led to seeking data on countries with the highest number of women in parliament. This was followed by an analysis of the countries that have reached the UN target of 50% women’s representation in parliament which was non-statistical. The focus involved geo-locating the countries with 50% of women in parliament and it was evident

that they were all in the global South except for New Zealand (UN Women 2023).

QCA is designed to cope with complexity and the influence of context. It is based on two assumptions: combinations of factors, rather than on any one individual factor and secondly that different combinations of factors can produce similar changes (Ragin 1984 cited by INTRAC 2017:1). Comparative case study design involves more than one case therefore more cases were sought and this led to the second category of countries that have performed above 40% and that is when the study yielded 29 cases. Bukve (2019) explained that to make a “thorough analysis of each case, a comparative analysis may probably handle a data set of 20–50 cases” (Bukve 2019:163). Although the cases focused on do not range within the 20–50 cases mark, Bukve (2019) argued that a comparison can still be made with fewer cases. There are 29 countries that have performed above the 40% and only 7 are from Africa thus the sampled configurations. The 29 countries that have achieved more than 40% of women in parliament are found in Europe (15), Africa (7), Latin America (4), Middle East (1), Oceania (1) and Asia (1) (UN Women 2023).

The elimination of non-African cases was partly shaped by the fact that all of the European countries that scored high in women's representation in parliament were all very small countries compared to the majority of African countries that scored above 40%. This analysis constituted the second level of reduction of cases to arrive at the sample of cases one is interested in. This process of elimination and primary analysis of cases constitutes a multi-stage purposive sampling strategy which aided in the justification of case selection. The first and obvious case/configuration is Rwanda because it ranks first in terms of gender parity in parliament. Rwanda is followed by South Africa, then Senegal, Namibia, Mozambique, Carbo Verde and Ethiopia. All of these configurations are heterogenous in terms of electoral systems and gender quota systems and the section that follows entails an overview of each configurations' electoral system, gender quota systems and electoral performance in terms of gender parity.

Results

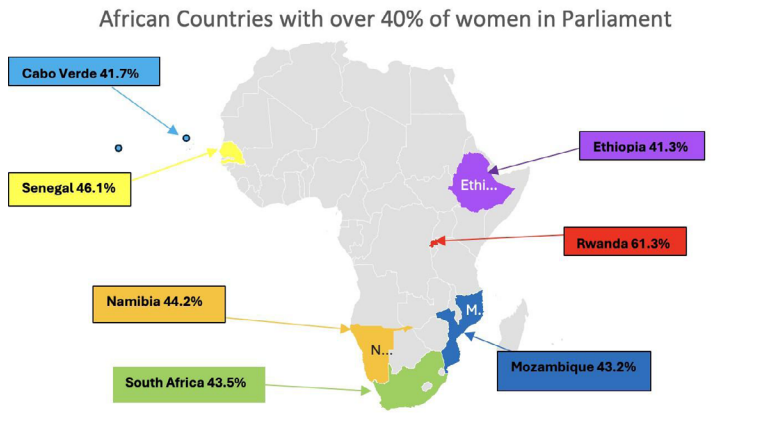


Figure 5.1: African Countries with over 40% of women in Parliament. Source: Author

Rwanda

The republic of Rwanda has a bicameral parliamentary system which consists of two chambers, namely the 80 seats chamber of deputies and the senate which is made up of 26 seats. Out of the 80 seats, women occupy 49 seats and the 2023 data shows that there are 9 women who are members of the senate (UN Women 2023). The chamber of deputies consists of elected members and 24 seats are reserved for women who have been elected by councils. The seat reservation system is also extended to the youth and a representative of the federation of the association of the disabled. Two seats go to the youth and one to the federation. It is worth noting that the current speaker of parliament is a woman (Republic of Rwanda n.d).

The ruling party in Rwanda is the Rwandan Patriotic Front and in 2003 the party introduced gender quota in its constitution, dictating that 30% of the National Executive Committee must be made up of women and they recently elected a woman to become its deputy chairperson (Xinhua 2023). The current female majority in parliament is not a first phenomenon

for Rwanda because in 2008 the chamber of deputies also had a female majority (Burnet 2019). The senate is, however dominated by men who constitute 65% of Senate. The powers of the Senate extend to the approval of appointments of state officials and the supervision of the legislative power of the president as well as the national assembly (Republic of Rwanda n.d).

The main opposition party, the Social Democratic Party/ Parti Social Democrate (PSD), which occupies 6 seats in the current electoral cycle has 2 women who are representing the party as members of parliament consequently reaching the 33% mark of women's representation. All political parties in Rwanda are mandated by law to advance 30% of women leaders in their parties (Dutta 2023) and the 2024 electoral candidate list submitted to Rwandese electoral body showed that the lists submitted had more than 40% of women candidates which is higher than the legislated quota target. In the context of this project, Rwanda ranks first in terms of the Global Gender Gap Index (GGGI) report of 2020 and it also ranked first for the sub-index of political empowerment of women with 0.563 followed by SA, Ethiopia, Namibia, Mozambique, Senegal and Cape Verde.

South Africa

The Republic of South Africa follows a bicameral system consisting of parliament and the National Council of Provinces (NCOP). Parliament ordinarily has 400 seats and the NCOP which is equivalent to the upper house, consists of 54 seats, however, in 2019, parliament announced that it had a total of 446 members of parliament, 53 from the NCOP and 393 from the National Assembly. There were 7 vacancies which included the seats of women who were listed for MPs as three female MPs had resigned that year and in 2023 two more women who were cabinet ministers also resigned from being MPs. Despite the resignations, the ruling party, the African National Congress (ANC), still met its voluntary quota of 50% of women who are deployed as MPs (Ellen Johnson Sirleaf Presidential Center for Women and Development 2024).

The ANC has a clear stance on gender parity and this has also reflected in the number of ministers the president of the country and the ruling party has appointed to cabinet. Prior to the 2024 elections, there were 14 women who are ministers out of a total of 29 ministries. This composition is 2% short of the 50% mark but the member of the Eastern Cape provincial legislature called for the legislation of the gender quota system across all members of the commonwealth (Ellen Johnson Sirleaf Presidential Center for Women and Development 2024). South Africa's voluntary quota approach makes way for non-compliance with the 50% gender quota system. The main opposition party, the Democratic Alliance (DA) does not have a gender quota policy and it only managed to send 31 women to serve as MPs compared to the 46 men serving as MPs. The DA also deployed 4 out of 13 members to represent the party at the upper house National Council of Provinces (NCOP) (Ellen Johnson Sirleaf Presidential Center for Women and Development 2024). There remains a gap between men and women when it comes to political empowerment. The sub-index shows that South Africa stands at 0.497 on the matter but does relatively better with 0.649 for economic participation and opportunities (World Economic Forum 2020). The country has also managed to close the gender gap when it comes to educational attainment for men and women.

Senegal

Once a bicameral parliamentary system, the Republic of Senegal's national legislature became unicameral after the 2012 dissolution of Senate demanded by the populace. The national assembly is made of 165 seats, some of which are designated from election outcomes from the proportional representation system as well as the plurality system's block party vote (Brayan & Baer 2005), however, Senegal is still experimenting with a suitable electoral system for the country. In the 2022 elections, the electoral body of the Republic of Senegal received a list of candidates from different political parties, coalitions and individuals. The party lists had to have 97 names for the regions and 68 names for the national list which in total made up 165 candidates for the National assembly.

The list of candidates from the parties needed to be supported by the voters before submission to the electoral body which meant that each potential candidate needed 0.8% of the registered voters to sign their candidature in order to qualify to be on a list of candidates for the national assembly (Brayan & Baer 2005). The names on the list from each political party or coalition list needed to have a 'one-female, one-male' sequence as a way of implementing the 50% gender quota and on the voting day, the voters were given several lists with candidate names and their professions. The voters directly voted for each candidate, unlike in the South African case, where the voter elects a political party then the party chooses whom to send to parliament based on its list chosen by the party and not endorsed directly by the general electorate (Brayan & Baer 2005).

The Senegalese model gives the voter an opportunity to vote based on the list of candidates that might make it to parliament, however, there are debates concerning reforming the countries' electoral system. The country initially had a pure proportional representation system, but in 1978, the electoral system changed to a parallel system and the changes have transpired two times thus affecting the plurality system implemented. It is worth noting that the candidature for the presidential election does not conform to the gender quota law and the constitutional council in 2024 published a list of 19 candidates with only one being a woman who ended up pulling out of the race which was eventually won by Ousmane Sanko. Upon assuming presidential office on the 5th of April 2024, the young president appointed a cabinet of about twenty-five ministers and five state secretaries of which only four were women. This can be attributed to his party not having firm and enforceable laws that require gender balance on public representatives (Scialoja 2024).

It should be noted that Senegal has a legislated gender quota of 50% which was achieved through the Senegalese women's movement that pushed for gender Parity Law in the National Assembly (Bojang 2024). Despite the legislated gender quota of 50% as well as the rejection of party lists that do not have 50% of female electoral candidates, the country is still

3.9% short of achieving the 50% target. This can be attributed to rules about the order of candidates on the lists which means although a party can meet the legislated gender quota target, but having the names of women candidates does not guarantee equal representation of incumbents thus the importance of the Zebra placement rule. Political empowerment is crucial for Senegal to succeed in achieving its gender parity goals. As per the data released under the 2020 Global Gender Gap Index (GGGI) report, Senegal is still far from closing the gender gap in political empowerment as well as economic opportunities and participation. The country ranks the last in this study when it comes to GGGI.

Namibia

The Republic of Namibia has a bicameral system for its legislative functions. The parliamentary system is made up of the national assembly (lower house) and the national council (upper house). Namibia's electoral system and local government legislated 30% quota for local level elections. The Local Authorities Act of 1992 and the Regional Councils Act 1992, state that Namibia has a minimum 30% requirement for women in local government. The Local Authorities Act 1992 states that

“the members of a local authority council shall be elected on party lists at a general election and each party list shall contain as candidates for such election:

a) In the case of a municipal or town council consisting of 10 or fewer members or a village council the names of at least three female persons; b) In the case of a municipal council or town council consisting of 11 or more members the names of at least five female persons” (Morna, Tolmay & Makaya 2021:57).

The inclusion of female candidates solely depends on the party's voluntary will to include more women. The country's national assembly achieved 50/50 gender equality through different political parties' voluntary and mandatory policies to include more women in leadership positions without any sanctions from

the government forcing these political parties' hand to include women (New Era 2024).

The national assembly is made up of 96 elected members, 46 of whom are women. The president appointed an additional eight non-voting members, five of whom are women. The 6th national council is however severely imbalanced, it has six women who serve as council members out of the 42 seats indirectly elected by regional councils. Similar to the South African case, Namibia does not have a legislated gender quota system but the governing party, Southwest Africa People's Organisation, (SWAPO) has its own gender quota policy introduced in 2013. The main opposition, the Popular Democratic Movement (PDM), acknowledges that to address the injustices of the past women need to be included in leadership structures, however there are no specific policies or acts that force the party to include more women in national structures. Bauer (2004) argued that the country's closed list proportional representation system coupled with voluntary gender quota has yielded increased number of women's representation in parliament.

Although there is no legislated gender quota policy in Namibia, all political parties in 2019 submitted candidate lists that had over 40% of women's representation except for two parties. One of the two parties had 35% of women on its candidate list and SWAPO's list had 51% of women candidates which can be attributed to the fact that SWAPO has a voluntary gender quota of 50% (Nyaungwa 2004). In 2023, the then president, Geingob declared a woman by the name of Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah as his successor yet after his death in 2024, a male incumbent became president. Mrs Nandi-Ndaitwah will, however, however remained the ruling party's candidate that appeared on the ballot box of the 2024 elections and won (Nyaungwa 2024). The official opposition party, the Popular Democratic Movement does not seem to have a voluntary gender quota policy in place as it only had 6 women out of its 21 members deployed to parliament as members of the National Assembly (Parliament of the Republic of Namibia n.d). Similar to the previous countries, Namibia needs to increase

its efforts to empower women politically, 0.369 achievement of the closure of the gender gap is not desirable. The country's satisfactory performance in terms of economic participation and opportunities as well as education attainment does not correlate with the dismal performance of 0.369 when it comes to political education (Parliament of the Republic of Namibia n.d).

Mozambique

The Republic of Mozambique has a unicameral legislative body consisting of 250 seats. The incumbents are elected by the electorate through the proportional representation system. Mozambique does not have a legislated gender quota system, but the Frente de Libertação de Moçambique/Mozambican Liberation Front (FRELIMO) has a 40% gender quota and by its standard, it has surpassed its target by 3.2% (GenderLinks 2019). "None of the other parties have any form of quotas in place" (GenderLinks 2019:no page). FRELIMO is the only party with a voluntary quota list and because of that, it managed to secure 73.5% of the votes in 2019. FRELIMO deployed 79 women to serve as MPs at the assembly, making women's representation 42.9%. Resistência Nacional Moçambicana/Mozambican National Resistance (RENAMO) received 24% of the national vote and it managed to only deploy 25% of its candidates to the parliament (GenderLinks 2019). If Mozambique had a legislated gender quota system with a target of 50%, the combined number of votes FRELIMO, RENAMO and the Democratic Movement of Mozambique (MDM) received in the 2019 elections would have achieved gender parity in parliament. Although the constitution requires that men and women should have equal participation in all spheres of the country, there is no formal regulated quota system.

Moreover, had Mozambique's Constitutional Council approved all the presidential aspirants to run, Mozambique would have had its first woman presidential candidate but unfortunately she and two others did not meet the Constitutional Council's criteria of 10 000 signatures from supporters to qualify to run for elections (Fauvet 2024). According to the European Union Observation Mission Mozambique (2019), the national elections resulted in women occupying 41.2% in parliament and

the number grew to 43.2% in 2023. The figure is far from the 50 percent that was committed in the 2008 SADC Protocol on Gender and Development, however, the ruling party, FRELIMO, as well as the leading opposition, RENAMO, are committed to their voluntary gender quota targets of 40% and 30% respectively (Gender Links 2020). Other political parties have no official policy on women leadership or women participation in their structures, these include Mozambique as a country not having any electoral gender quota law and consequently there are no sanctions for political parties that fail to include women in their structures. The poor performance in terms of closing the gender gap for political empowerment needs intervention (World Economic Forum 2020).

Cabo Verde

The republic of Cabo Verde is an archipelago off the coast of Senegal in West Africa. Similar to Mozambique, it's legislative system follows a unicameral national system whereby the national assembly has a total of 72 seats (International Foundation for Electoral Systems 2001). Cabo Verde has a legislated gender quota target of 40% for women in political leadership and elections are held every 5 years and facilitated through the proportional representation list. The “party lists [are] presented at the municipal level. Each municipality must have at least two seats” (Fall 2012:56). Each political party contesting the elections must submit a list of candidates and the first two candidates must be of the opposite sex thereafter one in three candidates on the list must be of a different sex. Cabo Verde’s political system is a semi-presidential one where the president is directly elected by the citizens. “Cape Verde organises presidential and legislative elections simultaneously... the current electoral system favours a bipartisan system dominated by two parties...” (Fall 2012:49). During the 2021 elections, Partido Africano da independencia de Cabo Verde/the African Party for the Independence of Cape Verde (PAICV) came on top as the ruling party dominating parliament with 40 seats closely followed by the Movimento para Democracia/Movement for Democracy (MPD) which obtained 30 seats (Lansford 2023).

“Efforts are made to reflect gender balance in the devolution of duties of political governance in general and in the electoral system in particular. At all levels, women are integrated into decision-making bodies. In this regard, the constitution and electoral law provide that for legislative and municipal elections, the lists must be balanced” (Fall 2012:61).

The political parties in Cape Verde must comply with the Electoral code of 1999 which dictates 25% of women ought to be elected however this was not adhered to (Wang, Muriaas & Bauer 2021). The lack of punitive measure for lack of adherence is a problem that requires intervention because no party actively introduced measures to ensure that the code was implemented so it could qualify for a reward. However, “[w]omen activists at the time pushed for a gender quota with sanctions for non-compliance, whereas other stakeholders, predominantly male politicians, argued against quotas” (Wang *et al.* 2020:85). This demand is crucial especially in contexts where resistance to change, despite legislative measures are present. This dilemma should also serve as a lesson for advocates of gender quotas in other countries to propose sanctions for non-compliance and the strengthening of electoral institutions to enforce compliance.

Interestingly, in 2019, with just 23 percent of the women in the national assembly, the country adopted the Law on Gender Equality, that aimed at ensuring a 40 percent quota for women in the electoral lists (United Nations 2019). In 2021 the national assembly had 41.7% of women parliamentarians despite the country scoring very poorly on the 2020 Global Gender Gap Index’s gender parity in political empowerment with a sub-index of 0.163. The country is 0.275 points away to closing the gender gap according to the Global Gender Gap Index and it is doing relatively well in terms of closing the gender gap for economic participation (0.790) and education attainment (0.972) (World Economic Forum 2020).

Ethiopia

The Federal Republic of Ethiopia’s parliamentary system is called the Federal Parliamentary Assembly and in Amharic,

the national language of Ethiopia, it is የፌዴራል ፓርላማ ምክር ቤት, romanized: Ye-Fēdēralawī Parilama Mikir Bēt. Ethiopia's legislative system consists of two chambers, the House of Federation and House of People's Representative. "The House of Peoples' Representatives is the highest authority of the federal government. Members of the House of peoples' Representatives shall be elected from candidates in each electoral district by a plurality of the votes cast by the people" (House of People Representatives of the FDRE n.d). Ethiopia also follows a bicameral system made up of the House of People's Representatives (HoPR) and the House of Federation (HoR) with a total number of 547 seats (House of People Representatives of the FDRE n.d). The house of people's representatives has 195 as the number of women (Inter-parliamentary Union n.d (IPU) n.d). In the 2021 elections, there were 289 women who contested the elections out of a total of 1817 candidates which means women candidates constituted 15.91% of the candidates (Interparliamentary Union n.d). In the end Ethiopia's national assembly had 195 women who have been elected out of 470 making the current composition of women in the Federal parliament a total of 41.5% (Inter-parliamentary Union n.d).

This number can be attributed to the quota policies of the ruling party which won the 2021 elections with a majority of 448 seats. The Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Front, popularly known as the Prosperity Party, is the ruling party and it introduced the voluntary quota for its party in 2004. The party reserves 30% of the candidacies for women (Muhammed & Ayenalem 2023:4). The country exceeded its gender quota target and deployed 41.3% of women to parliament. The main opposition party, the Ethiopian Citizens for Social Justice (Ezema), formed in 2009 after a coalition of a number of political parties, has 4 seats in the House of Representatives and all of the members are men. According to the constitution, "Members of the House of the Federation shall be elected by the State Councils. The State Councils may themselves elect representatives to the House of the Federation, or they may hold elections to have the representatives elected by the people directly" (Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia 1995:n.p).

The former president of the Democratic Republic of Ethiopia is a woman, she was elected by the house.

Although Ethiopia has an electoral system and law that force political parties to be inclusive of women in their structures, the electoral laws lack comprehensive, clear norms, standards and strategies to ensure that women participate inclusively in all key institutions. Women participation in the national assembly is encouraged and is above the regional average of 24.1 percent, sitting at 38.8 percent, which is motivated by voluntary party gender quota. Moreover, “there are no legislated gender quotas for any level of government, and gender quotas for women’s participation and leadership in political parties are voluntary” (CEEPS 2021:5). There are no sanctions or actions taken against any political party for not introducing or having laws that are gender inclusive.

To achieve greater women’s representation in parliaments, there are other factors that are crucial, namely economic and political empowerment of women (Le & Nguyen 2021). These two factors are shaped by other interlocking factors such as education, financial resources, networks, legal barriers et cetera (Conway 2001). Education has been found to have a correlational relationship with women’s political engagement, evident in the case of Burkina Faso in the studies by Djemai and Kevane (2023). Education does not only shape women’s political behaviour, but it also increases women’s interest in running for office (Le & Nguyen 2021). Empirical data shows that the role of education in women’s political consciousness and political education specifically helps shape women’s political behavior (Fox & Lawless 2014). Fox and Lawless (2014) also noted other factors contributing to women’s lack of political ambition namely exposure to politics at a young age and parental influence. They concluded that political socialization is crucial for increasing women’s political ambitions (Fox & Lawless 2014). Compared to the earlier discussed countries, Ethiopia scored 0.427 on the political empowerment sub-index and 0.568 for women’s economic participation and opportunities. However, the country scores significantly better on reducing the gap between men and women in terms of attaining education. Compared to other

countries in this study, Ethiopia performs the least in terms of gender parity in education attainment which consequently plays a role in influencing women's political participation (World Economic Forum 2020).

QCA Analysis

In short, the above data on Rwanda, South Africa, Senegal, Namibia, Cape Verde, Ethiopia and Mozambique shows us that Rwanda has the highest number of women parliamentarians. It ranks first globally while South Africa ranks 11th globally but second in Africa followed by Senegal at 46.3% of women in parliament. Women in Namibia's parliament occupy 46 seats out of a total of 104 seats. Women in Mozambique's national assembly is over double the size of the Namibian parliament with 108 women parliamentarians ranking Mozambique fifth in the African continent and 19th globally. Carbo Verde, which is a small island country off the coast of West Africa near Senegal, ranks 6th in Africa boasting of 41.7% of women in parliament while Ethiopia has 195 women parliamentarians out of 472 parliamentarians making it rank 7th in the African continent and 25th in the world. Each of the countries that have more than 40% of women in parliament have an existing quota system but the types are different. Rwanda, Senegal and Carbo Verde have a legislated quota system and two of the countries met their target. Rwanda's performance was over double the target set out legislatively while Carbo Verde went beyond the target with just 1.7%. Mozambique and Ethiopia are also over achievers even though their quota system is different from that of Rwanda and Carbo Verde as they employ a voluntary gender quota system. Rwanda overachieved by 31.3% followed by Ethiopia which surpassed its voluntary target by 11.3% while Mozambique scored beyond its 40% target by 3.2% and Carbo Verde went beyond its target by 1.7%.

Namibia, Senegal and South Africa are the least performing in terms of reaching their targets. Namibia and South Africa do not have legislated gender quotas but their political parties, especially the ruling parties employ voluntary quotas through their ruling political parties that have 50% target. Senegal on the other hand has a legislated gender quota

policy, yet the January 2023 data shows that the country's national assembly has 76 women parliamentarians which is 46.1% of all the parliamentary seats. In the 2022 elections, Senegal needed 7 women to meet its legislated gender quota target. The difference between the countries that met their targets versus the ones that under-achieved is the target of the various countries. South Africa, Namibia and Senegal have a target of 50% women's representation in parliament while the highest performing country's target is 30% yet it over performed by 31.3%. If Ethiopia had a legislated 40%, it would still have performed over its target by 1.3%. Senegal underperformed despite having sanctions in place for non-compliance with the 50% gender quota compliance. This shows that the existence of sanctions does not deter failure to meet targets. Despite the shortfall of the Senegalese legislature to reach the 50% legislated quota target, a qualitative comparative analysis of the configuration of high gender parity performance is useful. The table below provides us with a presentation of conditions necessary for countries to achieve gender quota targets they gender parity or at least perform relatively well.

Fuzzy Set, the large dot constitutes indicates a perfect score of 1 which signifies a strong or great presence of the factor. Factors that were equated with 1 are legislated quotas, 50% quota targets in each case, ruling parties with voluntary quotas of 50%, official opposition parties with 50% gender quota targets, the presence of laws that sanction non-compliance, an electoral system characterized by proportional representation and a score of between 1 and 0.750 for economic participation, education attainment and political education have also been equated with a big dot ●.

○ The following factors were equated with a donut symbol because they were not perfect conditions but remain significantly influential hence the scoring of 0.66. The factors that were calibrated to equate 0.66, symbolized by a donut, are as follows: the existence of reserved seats for women in parliament, a ruling party with 40% gender quota target and for the official opposition, 40% gender quota target attained the same weight. Other factors that were equated with the

donut/0.66 are countries which scored between 0.749 and 0.500 for the global gender parity index's sub-indexes, namely the political empowerment sub-index, economic participation and opportunity sub-index and education attainment sub-index. The smallest dot indicates the presence of a condition, but it is not as strong compared to the factors that scored 1. The factors in this category that scored 0.33 were voluntary quota, quota targets of 30% for the ruling parties and the official opposition. In terms of the sub-indexes, a score between 0.499 and 0.250 are also represented by a small dot .

The absence of quotas, targets, sanctions, any other electoral system as well as poor performance of below 0.250 when it comes to political empowerment, educational attainment and economic participation and opportunities were scored 0 which is represented with \emptyset .

Below is a table that captures the fuzzy set qualitative comparative analysis. The LQ (Legislated Quota), LQT (Legislated Quota Target), RPQT (Ruling Party Quota Target of), OOQT (Opposition Party Quota Target), S (Sanctions), PRES (Proportional Representation), EcoP (Economic Participation), EduA (Education Attainment), PoIE (Political Empowerment) represent conditions and the AT (Achievement of Target) represents the outcome.

Case	LQ	LQT	RPQT	OOQT	S	PRES	EcoP	EduA	PoIE	AT
RW	●	·	·	·	\emptyset	●	⊙	●	⊙	●
MZ	·	\emptyset	⊙	·	\emptyset	●	⊙	●	·	●
CV	●	⊙	⊙	⊙	●	●	●	●	\emptyset	●
ET	·	\emptyset	·	\emptyset	\emptyset	●	⊙	●	·	●
SN	●	●	●	●	●	●	⊙	●	·	\emptyset
NA	·	\emptyset	●	\emptyset	\emptyset	●	●	●	·	\emptyset
ZA	·	\emptyset	●	\emptyset	\emptyset	●	⊙	●	·	\emptyset

Figure 5.2: The fuzzy set qualitative comparative analysis.
Source: Author

There are seven African countries that have achieved more than 40% of women's representation in parliament, out of that number, only four countries have reached their quota targets, namely Rwanda (RW), Mozambique (MZ), Cabo Verde (CV) and Ethiopia (ET). These countries have different gender quotas, two of them are legislated and the targets differ, namely 30% for RW and 40% for CV and the other two have voluntary quotas of 30% but managed to deploy 40% women to parliament. Although Rwanda has 30% legislated quota, the political party candidate lists has more than 40% of women electoral candidates. Thus the 40% threshold is critical for maximizing the chances of the deployment of women to parliament. The cross comparison of the four countries that achieved their targets shows that a proportional representative electoral system (PRES) and Education attainment (EduA) are factors that are crucial for the achievement of the target but are not sufficient to achieve gender quota targets. This is corroborated by the presence of the same PRES and EduA conditions in Senegal (SN), Namibia (NA) and South Africa (ZA) which fell short of meeting their own gender quota targets.

It is useful to note though that the latter three countries have a 50% gender quota targets unlike the other four countries mentioned earlier, nevertheless, Rwanda with its 30% gender quota, managed to deploy more than 60% of women in parliament thus the importance of analysing the conditions that lead to achievement of set targets. In Rwanda, the configuration of Legislated Quotas (LQ) + Proportional Representation Electoral System (PRES), Educational Attainment (EduA) coupled with reduction of gender gaps for political empowerment and economic participation and opportunities, albeit not strong factors, constitute a crucial configuration to achieve gender parity and more. Studies have consistently shown that gender quotas have a positive impact on engendering national legislatures. Matlosa (2008) averred that electoral reform is crucial in ensuring gender equality in the electoral sphere and found that the proportional representation electoral system does a play a role in increasing the number of women in

public leadership. The role of education in enhancing women's participation in decision making remains significant.

Based on Rwanda's performance, it is evident that a configuration of a proportional representative electoral system (PRES), education (EduA), a ruling party that nominates 40% of women electoral candidates (RPQT40) including a 40% quota target (QT40), whether legislated, soft or voluntary serve as a strong combination of factors that create favourable conditions for gender parity in the political sphere. However, two cases (MZ and ET) in the data table shows us that a proportional representation electoral system as well as relative closure of the gender educational opportunity gap are the most influential conditions for the achievement of set quota targets as these conditions exist in all the countries that have attained their gender parity target for women in parliament. A combination of PRES and EduA alone, however, are insufficient thus they need to be anchored by the presence of a voluntary quota target of at least 30% for ruling parties and women's economic participation and opportunities.

The reason for the argument of insufficiency for exclusive PRES + EduA is due to the fact that all of the cases in the study have PRES and have scored well in terms of the reduction of the gender gap in educational attainment and opportunities, yet those countries did not reach their own country targets. Senegal is a good example that the presence of all necessary conditions for a country to achieve its gender quota target do not guarantee achievement of set targets. Senegal has legislated gender quota of 50% which applies to all political parties. The electoral body of Senegal has sanctions in place for political parties that fail to submit electoral candidate lists with 50% of female candidates and similar to all the other cases, Senegal is also doing relatively well in terms of women's education attainment but Senegal still failed to meet its 50% legislated gender quota target. The reason for this lies in the order of the candidates on the lists submitted to the country's electoral body. This means that the electoral lists have 50% of women candidates but because the country's electoral body does not have a zebra gender rule pertaining to

candidate listing, male candidates tend to dominate the top tier of electoral lists.

A configuration of a quota system, PRES + EduA + RPQT₄₀ + EcoP serve as the most effective configuration for the achievement of at least 40% women's representation in parliament. It is however crucial to aim for gender parity and efforts to achieve parity can also be influenced by the role of the official opposition parties. For instance, South Africa has PRES+ EduA+ RPQT of 50% + voluntary quota target of 50% and EcoP* but it backtracked on its gender parity performance during its 2024 elections instead of increasing. The country did achieve gender parity in the 2019 elections, but the ranking dropped after a number of its female MPs resigned. The country's latest gender quota performance can be attributed to the fact that the ruling party, the African National Congress ceased being the majority party in the 2024 electoral cycle and the second largest party in South Africa, the Democratic Alliance with 55 seats in parliament, does not have a gender quota policy. The ANC deployed 78 women making its female MPs account 53% of ANC parliamentarians versus the 37% of female MPs from the DA.

Despite the ANC having more women to parliament, the lack of gender quotas for the major opposition parties has affected the country's gender parity performance. This highlights the importance and impact of a legislated gender quota system. Countries such as South Africa should consider legislating gender quotas to ensure that political parties have a certain proportion of women candidates on their electoral lists which should be coupled with clear rules regarding the gendered order of candidates on electoral lists. Although other factors have been calibrated in a way that suggests inadequate condition compared to ideal conditions described earlier and symbolized as a big dot, all factors are crucial in attaining gender parity. This means that even though Ethiopia managed to overachieve its 30% gender quota target by having over 40% of women representatives in parliament, for the country to achieve gender parity of 50%, it must work to improve on all the factors that constitute a configuration that leads to gender parity in politics. Of course, QCA "is a non-additive and non-linear method that

emphasizes diversity, acknowledging that different paths can lead to the same outcome” (Tian, Liu & Zhang 2023:5). This is evidenced by the results in the data thus whatever factors are combined, the achievement of 50% of women in parliament will require strong configurations mentioned earlier.

Another consideration that could fast track the achievement of gender parity in politics is the suggestion of gender quotas for men. This involves curbing the overrepresentation of men in leadership. Weeks (2018) averred that male elites have, in most cases, been the ones who ratify the adoption of gender quotas thus, it should not be too difficult for men to adopt gender quotas for men aimed at capping the number of men in the helm of the political sphere.

Conclusion

This chapter sought to provide an analysis of conditions that are necessary for the achievement of gender parity in politics. The chapter analysed seven African countries that managed to deploy over 40% of women politicians to parliament. The analytical approach used was a fuzzy set Qualitative Comparative Analysis to assess complex cases that could not be simplistically explained with a single causation factor. The chapter compared cases which achieved its set target vs the cases that did not regardless of all having reached a target of over forty percent. The analysis revealed that a combination of a gender quota system, proportional representative electoral system, a quota target of over 40% for women candidates, educational attainment and economic empowerment increases the chances of achieving gender parity in politics. Although education has proven to have correlational relationship with political participation, lack of formal higher education has not been a barrier to the deployment of parliamentarians or even the cabinet in South Africa. In 2018, the Mail & Guardian reported that the official opposition party's chief whip, the then minister of energy and the minister of human settlements only had high school education. The chapter has also shown that countries can achieve their own gender quota targets, whether they are 30% or 40%, through different combinations. For instance, education and an electoral

system constitute a configuration that can yield positive results. A combination of an electoral system that is characterized by proportional representation, ruling party quota targets of 40% and the same for the official opposition, closing the gender gap for education, economic participation and economic empowerment are necessary conditions to achieve 50% for women in parliament. Electoral systems also have an influential role in enhancing women's political participation, but this chapter has discussed the cluster of characteristics that shape women's representation in parliament. The factors discussed in this chapter do not specifically focus on the magnitude of the constituencies and districts women candidates come from, it also falls short in focusing on the magnitude of the political parties as these have also been found to have a determining factor by Hinojosa, Kittilson and Williams (2021).

References

- Adcock R. & Collier D. 2001. Measurement Validity: A Shared Standard for Qualitative and Quantitative Research. *American Political Science Review*, 95(3), pp. 529 – 546. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055401003100>
- Baker B. 2006. Cape Verde: The Most Democratic Nation in Africa?. *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 44(4), pp. 493 – 511. <https://10.1017/S0022278X06002060>
- Bauer P. 2004. Determinants of Capital Structure: Empirical Evidence from the Czech Republic. *Czech Journal of Economic and Finance (Finance a uver)*. Charles University Prague Faculty of Social Sciences, 54(1-2), pp. 2 -21.
- Berry M.E. & Bouka Y. & Kamuru M.M. 2021. Implementing Inclusion: Gender Quotas Inequality, and Backlash in Kenya. *Politics & Gender*, 17(4), pp. 640 – 664. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1743923X19000886>
- Besley T.B. & Folke O. & Persson T. & Rickne J. 2017. Gender Quotas and the Crisis of the Mediocre Man: Theory and Evidence from Sweden. *The American Economic Review*, 107(8), pp. 2204 – 2242. <https://doi.org/10.1257/aer.20160080>

- Bojang S. 2024. Senegal: Anger and concern over low proportion of women in new government. The Africa Report. Available at: <https://www.theafricareport.com/343490/senegal-anger-and-concern-over-low-proportion-of-women-in-new-government/>, [Accessed on 26 June 2024].
- Bukve O. 2019. Designing Social Science Research. Palgrave Macmillan. Switzerland.
- Bush S.S. & Zetterberg P. 2021. Gender Quotas and International Reputation. *American Journal of Political Science*, 65 (2), pp. 326 – 341. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ajps.12557>
- Bush T. 2011. *Theories of Educational Leadership and Management* (4th ed.). SAGE Publishers. London.
- Burnet, J.E., 2019. 'Rwanda: Women's political representation and its consequences'. In Franceschet, S., Krook, M.L. & Tan, N, *The Palgrave handbook of women's political rights*, London: Palgrave MacMillan, pp.563-576. https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-59074-9_38
- Caul M. 1999. Women Representation in Parliament: The Role of Political Parties. *Party Politics*, 5(1), pp. 79 - 98. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354068899005001005>
- CEPPS. 2021. Ethiopia Gender Assessment Report [Online]. The Consortium for Elections and Political Process Strengthening. Available at <https://www.cepps.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Gender-Assessment-Report-EEPPP.pdf>
- Chen, L.J., 2009. Do gender quotas influence women's representation and policies? *The European Journal of Comparative Economics*, 7(1), pp.13-60.
- Clayton, A. 2015. Women's Political Engagement under Quota-Mandated Female Representation: Evidence from a Randomized Policy Experiment. *Comparative Political Studies* 48 (3): 333-69. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414014548104>
- Cook T.D. & Campbell D.T. 1979. *Quasi-Experimentation: Design and Analysis Issues for Field Settings*. Houghton Mifflin, Boston.
- Cragun D. & Pal T. & Vadaparampil S.T. & Baldwin J. & Hampel H. & DeBate R.D. 2015. Qualitative Comparative Analysis: A Hybrid Method for Identifying Factors Associated with Program Effectiveness. *J Mix Methods Res*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1558689815572023>

- Dahlerup D. & Hilal Z. & Kalandadze N. & Kanawasvika – Nhundu R. 2013. Atlas of Electoral Gender Quotas. International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance. Stockholm.
- Dahlerup D. 2007. Electoral Gender Quotas: Between Equality of Opportunity and Equality of Result. *Representation*, 43(2), pp. 73–92. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00344890701363227>
- Djemaï, E. and Kevane, M., 2023. Effects of education on political engagement in rural Burkina Faso. *World Development*, 165, pp.106–184. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2023.106184>
- Dutta, R 2023. 'Rwanda's 30 percent gender quota led to the world's largest share of women in government'. Inequality Solutions. Available at: <https://www.sdg16.plus/policies/rwandas-30-percent-gender-quota-led-to-the-worlds-largest-share-of-women-in-government/> [Accessed 16 June 2024].
- European Union 2020. European Union Election Observation Mission (EU EOM) to Mozambique final report on the General and Provincial Assembly Elections of 15 October 2019 [online]. Available at: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/eueom_moz2019_final_report_en.pdf
- Fall, I. M, 2012 . 'Cape Verde.' In Fall, M. & Hounkpe, M. (eds.) *Election Management Bodies in West Africa: A comparative study of the contribution of electoral commissions to the strengthening of Democracy*. South Africa: Open Society Foundation, pp. 49–75
- Fauvet, P, 2024. Constitutional Council accepts four presidential candidates. Agência de Informação de Moçambique, 24 June.. Available at: <https://aimnews.org/2024/06/24/constitutional-council-accepts-four-presidential-candidates/> [Accessed on 25 October 2024]
- Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia 1995. Constitution of the Federal Democratic Ethiopia (English translation from Amharic original). Available at: <http://www.parliament.am/library/sahmanadrutyunner2019/etovpia.pdf> [Accessed on 2 October 2023]
- Folke O. & Rickne J. 2016. Electoral Competition and Gender Differences in Political Careers. *Quarterly Journal of Political Sciences*, 11(1), pp. 59–102. <https://doi.org/10.1561/100.00014161>

- Fox, R.L. and Lawless, J.L. 2014. Uncovering the Origins of the Gender Gap in Political Ambition. *American Political Science Review*. 2014;108(3):499-519. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055414000227>
- Freedom House. 2023. Freedom in the World 2023 Report: Angola. Freedom House [Online]. Available at: <https://freedomhouse.org/country/angola/freedom-world/2023>, [Accessed on 15 June 2024].
- Gender Links. 2019. Gender Parity in Mozambique Parliament Elusive [Online]. Available at: <https://genderlinks.org.za/news/gender-parity-in-mozambique-parliament-remains-elusive/>, [Accessed on 26 June 2024].
- Gender Links. 2019. Namibia: Women MPs set to increase in elections underway. Gender Links for Equality and Justice [Online]. Available at: <https://genderlinks.org.za/news/namibia-women-in-parliament-set-to-increase-in-elections-underway/>, [Accessed on 26 June 2024].
- Gender Links. 2020. 50/50 Policy Brief Mozambique: March 2020. Gender Links Mozambique, Maputo.
- George A. & Bennett A. 2005. Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences. MIT Press. Cambridge, MA.
- Geset M. & Moges T.G. 2021. Women's and Youth Participation in Political Parties in Ethiopia. Kristelig Folkeparti (KrF). Norway.
- Hanckel B. & Petticrew M. & Thomas J. The use of Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) to address causality in complex systems: a systematic review of research on public health interventions. *BMC Public Health*, 21, 877. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-021-10926-2>
- Hinojosa, M. and Kittilson, M.C., 2021. 'Gender Quotas and Beyond: Policy Solutions to Women's Under-Representation in Politics'. In de Geus, R., Tolley, E., Goodyear-Grant, E. and Loewen, P.J. (eds.). *Women, power, and political representation: Canadian and comparative perspectives*. University of Toronto Press. Canada, pp. 101-107. <https://doi.org/10.3138/9781487536459-012>

Gender and Feminist Meditations

- Hughes M.M. & Paxton P. & Krook M.L. 2017. Gender Quotas for Legislatures and Corporate Boards. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 43, pp. 331 –352. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-soc-060116-053324>
- Human Rights Watch. 2023. Senegal Events of 2023: People protest against the possibility of President Macky Sall running for a third term in the 2024 elections, in Dakar. Available at: <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2024/country-chapters/senegal>, [Accessed on 26 June 2024].
- Inter-parliamentary Union nd, “Global data on National Parliaments. Ethiopia: House of People’s Representatives”, InterParliamentary Union, No Date, <https://data.ipu.org/parliament/ET/ET-LC01/data-on-women/> [Accessed 13 June 2023].
- International Foundation for Electoral System. 2001. Election Guide Democracy Assistance and Election News. International Foundation for Electoral Systems. Available at: <https://www.electionguide.org/elections/id/1305/> [Accessed on 16 June 2024].
- Inter-Parliamentary Union. n.d. Ethiopia House of People’s Representatives. Inter-Parliamentary Union. Geneva. Available at: <https://data.ipu.org/parliament/ET/ET-LC01/election/ET-LC01-E20210621/> [Accessed on 15 June 2024].
- King G. & Keohane R.O. & Verba S. 1994. *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research*. Princeton University Press. New Jersey. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781400821211>
- Krook L.M. 2009. *Quotas for Women in Politics: Gender and Candidate Selection Reform Worldwide*. Oxford University Press. Available at: <https://academic.oup.com/book/8767>, [Accessed on 10 June 2024].
- Krook L.M. & Lovenduski J. & Squires J. 2009. Gender Quotas and Models of Political Citizenship. *Cambridge University Press*, 39(4), pp. 781 – 803. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123409990123>
- Lansford, T. 2023. Cape Verde. In *Political Handbook of the World 2022-2023* (Vol. 2, pp. –). CQPress, <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781071853085>

- Le, K. and Nguyen, M., 2021. Education and political engagement. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 85, p.102441. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2021.102441>
- Leibbrandt A. & Wang L.C. & Foo C. 2017. Gender Quotas, Competitions, and Peer Review: Experimental Evidence on the Backlash Against Women. *Institute for Operations Research and the Management Sciences*, 64(8), pp. 3501–3516. <https://doi.org/10.1287/mnsc.2017.2772>
- Luciak I.A. 2005. Party and State in Cuba: Gender Equality in Political Decision Making. Cambridge University Press, 1(2), pp. 241 –263. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1743923X05050063>
- Mail & Guardian 2018. ‘Off to parliament, Educated or Not’, *Mail & Guardian*, 30 November. Available at: <https://mg.co.za/article/2018-11-30-00-off-to-parliament-educated-or-not/> [Accessed on 27 October 2024]
- Matlosa K. 2008. The state, democracy and poverty eradication in Africa. Electoral Institute of Southern Africa (EISA). Johannesburg.
- Morna L. & Tolmay S. & Makaya M. 2021. Women’s Political Participation: Africa Barometer. International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance. Stockholm.
- Muhammed M.H. & Ayenalem A.Y. 2023. Women’s political participation at the local level in Ethiopia: Does number really matter?. *Cogent Social Sciences*,9(1). <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311886.2023.2218720>
- New Era. 2024. ‘Namibia nears gender equality... 50/50 achieved in National Assembly’. *New Era*. 28 March 2024. Available at: https://neweralive.na/posts/namibia-nears-gender-equality#google_vignette, [Accessed on 26 June 2024].
- Nyaungwa N. 2024. ‘Namibia interim president says no plan to run in this year’s election’. *Reuters*. 25 February. Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/namibia-interim-president-says-no-plan-run-this-years-election-2024-02-04/> [Accessed on 15 June 2024].
- Republic of Rwanda. n.d. The parliament of Rwanda. Available at: <https://www.gov.rw/government/legislature/chamber-of-deputies> [Accessed on 15 June 2024].


- Rihoux B. 2007. Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) and related techniques: Recent advances and challenges. In Pickel S. & Pickel G. & Lauth HJ. & Jahn D eds. *Methoden der Vergleichenden Politik – und Sozialwissenschaft. Neue Entwicklungen and Anwendungen*. Wiesbaden: VS Verlag. 365 –85. Burnett N. 2019. Invited Essay: It's past time to fix the broken international architecture for education. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 68, pp. 15 –19.
- Rihoux B. 2013. Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA), Anno 2013: Reframing the Comparative Method's Seminal Statements. *Swiss Political Science Review*, 19(2), pp. 233 –245. <https://doi.org/10.1111/spsr.12031>
- Rosen, J., 2017. Gender quotas for women in national politics: A comparative analysis across development thresholds. *Social Science Research*, 66, pp.82–101. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssresearch.2017.01.008>
- Scialoja S. 2024. 2024 Senegal elections: a dilemma between winners and losers. *Security praxis*. Available at: <https://www.securitypraxis.eu/senegalelections/>, [Accessed on 26 June 2024].
- Sehring J. & Korhonen-Kurki K. & Brockhaus M. 2013. Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) An application to compare national REDD+ policy processes. Center for International Forestry Research. Bogor.
- Sehring J. & Korhonen-Kurki K. & Brockhaus M. 2013. Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) An application to compare national REDD+ policy processes. (Working Paper 121). Center for International Forestry Research. Indonesia.
- Shaffo C.A. 2010. Gender and Ethiopian Politics: The Case of Birtukan Midekesa. Masters thesis. Hungary. Central European University.
- Sharma R.R. & Chawla S. & Karam C.M. 2021. Global gender gap index: World economic forum perspective. In: *Handbook on Diversity and Inclusion Indices*. Edward Elgar Publishing Ltd, pp. 150–163. <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781788975728.00017>
- Shejavali N. 2020. X Perspectives on Parliament: Election and Gender, (Issue No.13 January 2020). Institute for Public Policy Research. Windhoek.

- Thomann E. & Maggetti M. 2020. Designing Research with Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA): Approaches, Challenges and Tools. *Sociological Methods & Research*, 49(2), pp. 356 –386. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0049124117729700>
- United Nations Women. 2019. Committee on the elimination of Discrimination against Women reviews the situation of women in Cabo Verde. United Nations Office of High Commissioner. Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2019/07/committee-elimination-discrimination-against-women-reviews-situation-women-0>, [Accessed on 26 June 2024].
- United Nations Women. 2023. Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals: The gender snapshot 2023. (United Nations Women Report 2023). United Nations. United States.
- Wang V. & Muriaas R.L. 2020. Candidate Selection and Informal Soft Quotas for Women: Insights from Zambia. CHR Michelsen Institute. (CMI Brief). Norway.
- Wang V. & Muriaas R.L. & Bauer G. 2021. Funding Demands and Gender in Political Recruitment: What Parties do in Cabo Verde and Ghana. *SAGE Journals*, 44(1), pp. 77 – 90. <https://doi.org/10.1177/01925121211049096>
- Weeks A.C. 2018. Why are gender quota laws adopted by men? The role of inter- and intra- party competition. Harvard University. Massachusetts. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414018758762>
- World Economic Forum.2020. Insight Report: Global Gender Gap Report 2020. World Economic Forum. Switzerland. Available at: https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2020.pdf
- Xinhua 2023, 'Kagame re-elected as Rwanda's ruling party leader', Xinhua [online], 03 April 2023, Available at: <https://english.news.cn/africa/20230403/7746d4f487674e928ee556f060bcbf64/c.html> Accessed on 27 October 2024.



Gendering Leadership, Mediating Feminist Political Futures: Mawugbe and the Decolonial Proposal in ‘In The Chest Of A Woman’ (2008)

Christabel Aba Sam 

Department of English
University of Cape Coast 
Cape Coast, Ghana

Abstract

A careful reading of Efo Kodjo Mawugbe’s *In the Chest of a Woman* reveals two predominant issues in relation to the style and ideology of the text: female sexuality and politics. This notwithstanding, the burgeoning literature on Mawugbe’s play has overlooked the radical ways in which the playwright reframes the discourse on the participation of women in politics by the intimate metaphorical connections he makes regarding Ghana’s uneasiness with evolving genders. This paper is thus guided by two pivotal questions; how can the African woman fully participate in politics and inscribe her claims within a male-dominated domain? What proposals does Mawugbe offer amidst the call for empowerment and structural change? Situating the discussion within the context of decolonial thought and feminist literary theory, this paper demonstrates how Nana Yaa becomes Mawugbe’s articulation of mediated relations towards women’s inclusion and recognition in political leadership. The paper concludes that the play summons a new feminist politics by interrogating the historical precedence of the pre-colonial tradition and initiation, through radical imaginations, a new locus for rethinking gendered politics and women in leadership, particularly within the Ghanaian geopolitical space. The paper is significant for policy formulation and feminist pedagogy.



Keywords: decolonial, gender, leadership, Mawugbe, politics, women

Introduction

The African theatre is known as a productive space for articulating universal human concerns, following the example of the ancient Greek and Elizabethan traditions. The Ghanaian theatre in particular has been phenomenal in dealing with socio-cultural and political contradictions within the Ghanaian context (Yankah, 2012; Balm and Hakib, 2023; Ismaila and Akakpo, 2024). While its entertainment commitment is not superseded, the Ghanaian theatre engages with and comments on the total experience of being human in an inhuman age. Moving from an indigenised, focused orientation to today's realities of the colonial impact on cultures, the Ghanaian theatre has been impactful and forceful in ensuring community cohesion through its radical re-telling of traditional and historical tales (Agovi, 1990). This quality of Ghanaian theatre brings us close to reality to a point where the infinite quest for newness becomes striking.

Efo Kodjo Mawugbe is an important Ghanaian dramatist whose theatrical practices have assumed canonical stature due to the seriousness and the revolutionary artistry he adopts. Mawugbe's craft has been hugely influenced by age-long inequalities beginning from intimate spaces to historical and public spaces. This motivation propels the robust and radical imagination in his works. While the critical standpoints in his plays appear unfavourable to the status quo, they appear to depersonalise systemic inequalities in ways that indicate the possibility of alternative frameworks with a crucial emphasis on women's political freedom. The subject of politics is one of the fields that have been generally misconstrued as a 'man's world'. Globally, the participation of women is overwhelmingly low compared to their male counterparts. Despite major efforts by countries to ensure a balance in the representation of the genders in politics, there seems to be a lot yet to be done and Ghana's case is critical. Bauer and Darkwah (2020) have shown that the representation of women in Ghana's legislative, executive and judicial domains from the local to the national

level is insignificant. Such political imbalances are what Mawugbe's *In the Chest of a Woman* tackles.

Efo Kodjo Mawugbe's 'In the Chest of a Woman' is a tale of three generations of women from the same lineage who are called upon by circumstance to play 'male roles' (Asiedu, 2010). The play opens in the palace of Nana Yaa Kyeretwie. Nana Yaa Kyeretwie is the queen and ruler of Brengo, Kyeremfaso and Anobeng. She is the mother of Owusu and the sister of the paramount chief of Ebusa Kingdom, Nana Kwaku Duah. She covets the Ebusa throne and cunningly plots to have her daughter, Owusu succeed Nana Kwaku Duah upon his demise. As the dominant and pivotal dramatist persona, she sets in motion events that are central to the development of the plot and emerges as an arena for contesting, subverting as well as (re)thinking societal rules, norms and conventions which are deeply entrenched and rooted within patriarchal ideology and practice. Her daring act and bravery to question existing ideological practices that subjugate women is encapsulated in her being renamed as Kyeretwie, the 'leopard tamer' by the dying queen mother of Ebusa.

As the play opens, Nana Yaa Kyeretwie is seen playing ludo with her 'son', Owusu. It is interesting to envisage what she saw as the hidden lessons in the game; the game serves as a lesson for warriors having to encounter an opposition and the dynamics for success therein embedded. Although Nana Yaa was trying to train Owusu to get abreast of the dynamics in wars since 'he' was eventually going to be king, the playwright subtly exposes us to the strategies women have put in place to subvert their subordinate status. It is not surprising, therefore, the steps that Nana Yaa takes to protect the real identity of her daughter. For a woman who is capable of killing her husband and also killing the midwife who delivered her baby in order to shelve the 'actual' sex of her child to protect her interest, Nana Yaa was indeed not ready for any truce! (Asiedu, 2010; Akaenyi, 2023).

Mawugbe topples issues by suggesting that the cultural set-up in traditional Africa is no longer masculine in nature (Kuumba, 2006); male dominance is gradually giving way

to not just female dominance but a rather gender-neutral space which provides equal opportunities for both actors. The provoking challenge Nana Yaa throws to the men in Kyeremfaso – contesting the fact that kinship is not male preserve – is an indication of the degree of boldness and defiant mechanisms put together to correct certain skewed notions associated with gender roles. The purpose of this paper is to explore how the African woman can fully participate in politics and inscribe her claims within a male-dominated domain and the proposals Mawugbe offers amidst the call for empowerment and structural change. The paper is structured into three parts. The first part looks at the theoretical foundations of the study. In the second section of this paper, the focus is on Mawugbe's radical agenda for system change by illustrating the practical proposals he makes for mediating the future of feminist politics. In the final section of this paper, the paper argues that Ghana's nervousness with the call to legalize evolving genders functions as an extended metaphor for gendering leadership in Ghana.

Theoretical Base

Thinking decoloniality is to envisage “struggles to bring into intervening existence another interpretation that brings forward, on the one hand, a silenced view of the event and, on the other, shows the limits of imperial ideology disguised as the true (total) interpretation of the events” in the making of the modern world (Mignolo, 2007). In other words, the concept ‘decoloniality’ is an ideological practice committed to raising black consciousness about the realities of ‘coloniality’ and colonial domination (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015) thus the texture of decoloniality is revolutionary and one that discontinues oppressive epistemes and opens up routes to liberation. Maldonado-Torres and Cavouris's (2017) seminal essay, *The Decolonial Turn* has formed the basis for most Afro-academic debates in recent times. The commitment in the decolonial thought; to undo, unmask, reframe and reproduce new ways of thinking about Africa and its related epistemes is resourceful to the call for mediating feminist politics in contemporary times. This is because the decolonial approach is a counterpoint that is not merely accusatory, rather, it resists

and transgresses notions of marginality in ways that support renaissance in being and knowing (Lugones, 2010). On this score, the tenet of decoloniality resonates with Mawugbe's intention in *In the Chest of a Woman*, especially in the ways in which the play makes an urgent intervention for women's political participation using Ghana's context as a frame. Feminist literary theory, on the other hand, has broadly been concerned with the exploitation and marginalisation of women by a phallogentric or patriarchal society. Irigaray (2004) has argued that the phallogentric order views women as commodities and mediums of exchange in a male-dominated economy:

“Women are marked phallogentrically by their fathers, husbands, and procurers. And this branding determines their value in sexual commerce. Woman is never anything but the locus of more or less competitive exchange between two men” (Irigaray, 2004: 35).

The implication of this recognition has resulted in two dominant approaches in feminist literary discourse. Firstly, some feminist critics like Prah (2007) and Chrappah (2012) have focused on the 'deconstruction' of texts in order to expose textual complicity in the marginalisation of women. This is based on the argument that narrative is not a neutral space; it participates in the reproduction of dominant values. Secondly, some pro-feminist writers like Ama Ata Aidoo, Efua Sutherland, Amma Darko, Peggy Opong and others have deployed counter-discursive strategies in their writings to combat the erasure of women in order to accentuate the experiences, voice and subjectivities of women. Mawugbe's *In the Chest of a Woman* (2008) must be viewed in this category and it is in the light of this second concern that Irigaray poses the poignant question “How can women analyse their exploitation, [and] inscribe their claims within an order prescribed by the masculine?” Spivak (1988) in a provocative essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?” concludes that a woman as a subaltern cannot speak. Spivak (1988) contends that “the ideological construction of gender keeps the male dominant. If in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow”. Caught in

this liminal space, the critical question for Spivak becomes “With what voice consciousness can the subaltern speak?” Cixous, Cohen and Cohen (1976) also argue that women’s writings “create spaces that can serve as springboard for subversive thought, the precursory movement of a transformation of social and cultural structure”. This paper contends that a woman as a subaltern, can speak, with the ultimate aim of re-inscribing her voice and subjectivity into the larger discourse.

Patriarchy is a key concept in feminist literary theory. Although there is no consensus on the definition of this term, Hartmann (1981) and Walby (1986) have put forward precise formulations of the concept that can be considered as working definitions. According to Hartmann, patriarchy is:

“a set of social relationships between men which have a material base, and which, though hierarchical, establish or create interdependence or solidarity among men that enable them to dominate women. ...The material base upon which patriarchy rests lies most fundamentally in men’s control over women’s labour power” (Hartmann, 1981).

Hartmann (1981)’s definition draws attention to the domestic sphere and the workplace as sites where men profit from women. This paper argues later that Efo Kodjo Mawugbe places greater emphasis on the domestic and the public sphere as ignoble spaces for women’s marginalisation. Drawing on Marxist and radical feminist theory which foregrounds personal relationships, sexuality and power, Walby on the other hand defines patriarchy as: “a system of interrelated structures through which men exploit women. The key set of patriarchal relations is to be found in domestic work, paid work, states, male violence and sexuality” (Walby, 1986).

It is clear from the Hartmann (1981) and Walby (1986) definitions, that patriarchy is a crucial conceptual tool for analysing gender and power relations. Pro-feminist writers like Mawugbe have demonstrated their awareness of the dominating power of patriarchy over women and have written narratives that present women characters who subvert patriarchal systems.

The concept of political participation

Political participation is an evolving concept and as such, attempts to define it usually fall short of capturing the entirety of the concept, however, it is an important indicator of how citizens are involved in governance and the role they play in impacting policy. In their influential work, *Voice and Equality*, Verba, Scholzman and Brady (1995) define political participation as an ‘activity that has the intent or effect of influencing government action – either by directly affecting the making or implementation of public policy or indirectly by influencing the selection of people who make those policies’. In other words, political participation goes beyond conventional and legally accepted activities and it is intended to influence government policies (Boateng, 2015; Huntington and Nelson, 1976, van Deth, 2014). The context of women’s political participation according to Akiyode-Afolabi (2018) is one that goes beyond ‘women asking for seats at the tables where public policies are being discussed’. In other words, it is not a question of presence, it is a matter of both inclusion and fairness such that all the voices at the decision-making table would be heard, regardless of age, sex, ethnicity, sexual orientation, nationality among others and also that the decisions made at the table would sit well with all the voices present. Within the Ghanaian context, Darkwa (2015), Ocran (2014) and Sossou (2011), have indicated the progress in the demographics of political participation despite the minimal impact as far as the gendered dynamics is concerned. They confirm that despite Ghana’s commitment in ratifying treaties such as Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Affirmative action (Gender Equity) (Act, 2024) and the provisions of the country’s 1992 constitution, which are geared towards reducing or eradicating gender disparities in both the public and private sector, these frameworks simply create “a false sense of equality” (Darkwa, 2015). Thus while conventional modes like voting in elections, contacting a public official or taking party membership is on the increase, the core of women’s political participation is still bedevilled by systemic patriarchal injunctions. In line with the general thesis of this chapter, this paper argues that Mawugbe’s *In the Chest of a Woman* makes two important

contributions to our understanding of political participation; that political participation is not simply inclusion - finding space in 'baby' democracies that do not, in principle recognize the female's contribution and that political participation is a deliberate attempt to challenge the hegemonic texture of governance and a commitment to redefine such democratic spaces. The play proposes a blueprint by creatively calling for a shift from conventional modes of political participation and seemingly suggests that attempts of inclusion by the systems are simply ways of white-washing hierarchical ways of being in society. Thus, by creatively engaging with the crisis of governance in Ebusa, Mawugbe stages radical alternatives at achieving equity as far as representation and participation in politics is concerned. Ocran (2014) affirms this call when she urges women to adopt more radical approaches to political participation and outlines, among other things, the need to boycott national elections as a means of registering resistance to systemic biases against women. Mawugbe's call in the play, *In the Chest of a Woman*, ties in with the ethical vision of decolonial feminism - to reject a political agenda that is at once an imposition and does not serve the interest of womenfolk.

Women Inclusion in Governance Revisited: Mawugbe and the Radical Agenda for System Change

Efo Kodjo Mawugbe's *In the Chest Of a Woman* tells the tale of Nana Yaa Kyeretwe, the queen of Kyeremfaso in her quest to reclaim her birthright as the rightful ruler of Ebusa Kingdom. The play, like most of Mawugbe's works, reviews existing norms and practices that are rooted in patriarchal ideology. In this play, Mawugbe fervidly contests the male-monopolised Akan traditional system of governance through Nana Yaa Kyeretwe's daring act of challenging the chauvinistic practice of male inheritance. The Intestate Succession Act (Law, PNDCL 111, 1985) as amended by PNDCL 264 remains the existing law guiding family inheritance in Ghana. These inheritance rules are executed among the two main ethnic groupings; the matrilineal and the patrilineal groups. Among the matrilineal group, who are mostly Akans and the largest meta ethnic group in Ghana, kinship and inheritance are

traced through the girlchild while the patrilineal group does so through the sons. In the matrilineal context, which filters into Mawugbe's creativity, kinship and inheritance is passed on from a man to his sister's son (Awusabo-Asare, 1990). This is why the character of Owusu is crucial to our understanding of feminist agency within the context of women's inclusion in governance.

Unable to ascend the Ebusa throne after her mother's demise despite being the first-born child, Nana Yaa Kyeretwe schemes her recoup by disguising her daughter as a male (Owusu) who becomes the heir apparent to the Ebusa throne and next in line to succeed Nana Kwaku Duah II; the younger brother of Nana Yaa Kyeretwe, father of Ekyaa and the monarch of Ebusa. Owusu is sent to the palace to be trained in the art of leadership, where he encounters his cousin, Ekyaa, who makes seductive advances toward him (something he vehemently rejects owing to his hidden gender). Ultimately, he (Owusu) is unable to ascend the Ebusa throne as the play ends with the unravelling of his gender as well as the naming of Akwasi Amoako as the father of Ekyaa's unborn child.

Critical commentary on Mawugbe's play, *In the Chest of a Woman*, suggests that although Mawugbe tries to debunk patriarchal legacies through his radical vision of female emancipation, there appears to be a premature penetration into the public space since the Ghanaian political enclave is not ready for female leadership. In "Debunking Patriarchal Legacy in African Traditional Setting: A Reading of Efo Kodjo Mawugbe's *In the Chest of a Woman*", Lare (2015) looks at the critical views of Efo Kodjo Mawugbe on some African traditional customs which deny identity and welfare to women and the ways in which such patriarchal legacies hinder female emancipation. Lare (2015) further contends that *In the Chest of a Woman* dispels myths that society has about women as being helpless, weak, immature, domesticated and in need of male direction and concludes by suggesting that "to arrive at tangible results in dismantling sexism and gender biases, sensitisation and education must continue to raise women's consciousness about their emancipatory becoming. In this struggle, both

men and women must be involved, since society cannot move forward without both genders' collaboration" (Lare 2015).

Nugah (2013) also sets out to investigate the gender roles and portrayal in two plays: Efua Sutherland's *Edufa* and Mawugbe's *In the Chest of a Woman*. He pays attention to the problems of gender imbalance and the corresponding lessons in the plays and he argues that while both dramatists recognise the unnatural trends in female subordinations and the vicious cycle of patriarchal domination, Sutherland's play *Edufa*, attempts to empower Ghanaian women in indirect ways; Mawugbe's play does the same in a forceful manner. Nugah concludes that the "life of men without women will be a mini hell full of agony and loneliness" (Nugah, 2013). Close to the critique in this paper is what Awo Mana Asiedu (2010) attempts in her paper titled, "Masculine Women, Feminist Men: Assertions and Contradictions in Mawugbe's *In the Chest of a Woman*". The paper examines Mawugbe's play as a model for celebrating the achievements of women through an analysis of the three female characters in the play: the Queen Mother, Nana Yaa Kyeretwe and Owusu Agyemang with the aim being:

"to question the motivations of male feminists or pro-feminist men, such as the playwright appears to be, and whether they need to be reoriented in order to fully achieve their aim of celebrating the female for all she is and can be" (Asiedu 2010).

While she appears to commend Mawugbe on the forceful motivation to propose a radical framework for female empowerment, Asiedu contends that such framings constitute an impersonation of masculinity and argues that for Mawugbe, to be a real woman is to impersonate male demonstrations of power which in a sense restricts the realities of a woman's being. While her contention is somewhat justifiable in terms of the unusual characterisation of Nana Yaa and the fact that she comes across as a woman with an uncommon boldness, which is a quality that is perceived not to be atypical of women, the argument within the ambits of Halberstam's (2002) notion of female masculinity, Mawugbe's women do not hide behind the male body to assume

recognition of existence. Rather, Mawugbe's artistry is a deliberate attempt to decouple masculinity from men to recover and secure the place of women in cultural and political spaces. Such a nuanced interpretation is crucial in how we reach the playwright's commitment to revisiting the politics of women's public life in postcolonial Ghana.

Mawugbe's characterisation should not be read as an overt contestation of male domination but as a covert intelligence to rethink approaches to female liberations, women's private and public life as well as the emergence of a gender wave of change in Ghana. Chrappah (2021) study is one of the current literature on Mawugbe's *In the Chest of a Woman*. She attempts a deconstruction of kingship politics in Ghanaian West-African Culture by showing how the tension between women and power amongst the Akans of Ghana. She argues that the concept of throne, which is the symbol of headship in traditional leadership remains masculinised and that a move towards women's inclusion would require unorthodox approaches. While her conclusions are worthy, especially as she recognises the radical character of Mawugbe's craft, the burden is that she "revisits the power issues that women suffer from historical times until present Ghana" (Chrappah 2021), giving little attention to the way forward. While the need to revisit the past as a basis for the present examination is acknowledged, the call for women's participation in politics requires practical implications for activism.

Although the consciousness to include women in political decision-making at all levels is not an entirely new concern, particularly when Ballington (2008) affirms the fact that the participation of women in politics remains a substantial democratic gain, the road to Ghana's commitment towards the inclusion of women in politics has been arduous and herculean. While the isolated instances of feminine awakening in terms of the measured rise in female political representation in the nation's body politics is obvious, Ghana is yet to make significant strides, sixty years after independence. Women make up 12.36 percent of politically appointed offices, 12.7 percent as parliamentarians, 19.25 percent as cabinet ministers and 17

percent as Municipal and District level appointees (Dzradosi *et al.*, 2018). Indeed, Global indicators for measuring the growth of women's inclusion in politics, like the 2020 Global Gender Gap Report and the UN's Women Agenda (2023), reveal Ghana's commitment as ineffectual as it is ranked 107 out of 153 countries for the gender index on politics (Women's Political Representation and Affirmative Action in Ghana, 2019). The critical questions begging for answers remain Mawugbe's argument in *In the Chest of a Woman*. Mawugbe's play carefully discontinues dominant oppressive traditional governance systems that are inimical to the African woman's political gains. The play thus contests and de-affirms 'naturalised' notions that erroneously equate leadership to masculine potential. Consequently, the play envisions the possibility of a new order of governance especially through the judgment of Owusu and the symbolic cutting of the phallic organ.

Mawugbe's play makes a radical change by rethinking the place of women in leadership and emasculates patriarchal articulations of female and being. *Mawugbe's In the Chest of a Woman* helps to unravel the power and hegemonic antecedents that frustrate feminist political futures and how a resilient subaltern woman's commitment becomes redemptive and liberatory. Thus, Mawugbe's piece is arguably an advocacy campaign and a radical move towards formulating a women's manifesto for Ghana whose proposal begins with a call to redefine the category of woman. He appears to argue that the problem of exclusion begins with patriarchal and colonial definitions of femininity and the fact that such definitions virtually compel female subordination and inferiorities. In other words, for Mawugbe, the starting point of liberation and by extension, inclusion regarding the political rights of women, should begin with liberal characteristics of womanhood. And this is why Nana Yaa's assertions hold significance for consideration. She confirms that:

“If there is anything men fear in this world it is a woman
who is a WOMAN! A woman who accepts challenges

A woman who can shout back when a man shouts

A woman who is all out to give the command like a man

A woman who in no uncertain terms, Rejects absolutely the definition of the word feminine to mean home oriented, passive, needing-to-be-guided-and-protected.

To men, such a woman is a real woman and a woe and a vice unto manhood. In short, what men fear most is female power in motion!" (Mawugbe, 2008).

Nana Yaa's attempt to redefine women is not a lazy affirmation of binary oppositions which suggests little or no critical departures from established traditions. We find, in this new category of woman, a quality of impudence which defies cultural stereotypes and deflates male ego. In other words, womanhood assumes meanings beyond patriarchal estimations, not scraps of dominant masculinities but a new way of being that is altogether valid without recourse to the man. It is important to recognise that although the semantics of 'like' ordinarily lay grounds for comparison and by far re-echoes the problematics of binary categories, the chapter's argument is that beyond the surface signification of Nana Yaa's physical appearance, there is an ideological production of power, autonomy and agency that is reached in the definitions of the 'real' woman. The praise singer forcefully unsettles the challenge of any probable masculine compensation through the use of animistic metaphors (Asiedu, 2010; Chrappah, 2021).

"She who bears the lion's heart

The only woman who treads where men fear to tread but is never harmed
Of her strength not even the tiger is an equal

Of her courage, only a lion can compare. Hail her. . . . Hail the mother whose mind is a cistern of wisdom. From which the younger ones take gentle sips . . . Yes here comes the mother of the people

The mother with a chest of a father" (Mawugbe, 2008)

The praise singer mediates our understanding of womanhood by framing the category of woman beyond the limits of

vulnerabilities to cunning predators who are poised to domesticate their adversaries. The animistic qualities of the tiger and the lion, as jungle heroes, are used as important metaphors and a subversive strategy to produce a counter-narrative that seeks to contest notions of impersonation, binary relations and essentialist reasoning. Mawugbe's redefinition of womanhood transcends victimhood to a complex status of conquerors and devourers (Asiedu, 2010). Recovering such alternative ways of knowing womanhood, what Mignolo (2007b) considers epistemic de-linking, is the starting logic to women's political rights and freedom for Mawugbe. In the opening scenes of the play, Mawugbe arouses our desire and suspicion about the fortunes of feminine power through the game motif. Part of this strategy is to discontinue the framing of womanhood using the male as an ontological referent.

Crucial to Mawugbe's propositions for a new feminist politics in *In the Chest of a Woman* is the call to approach politics firstly as an ideological war which is not simply won with a demand for fair representation but as a paradigm that is imbricated in the interest of continued feminine relevance and survival. This conclusion is deduced taking cognisance of the operations of the game motif. Although Chrappah (2021) argues that the game motif "is evident that possessing a mentality of politics as a game is crucial and helps engage circumspection approaches in order to realise one's dreams". She overlooks the progressions to victory imbued in the game of oware as the analysis will show. The stages in the oware game; picking up, sowing and harvesting arguably summarise Mawugbe's debate. In picking up seeds, which is marked by emptying the content of the board game, Mawugbe proposes scrutiny of the decolonial remains of the woman matter as earlier argument has shown. Unpacking such subsisting components, for Mawugbe, is preparatory for the launch of a counter discourse as the onset of new feminist politics (i.e. exemplified in the counterclockwise direction in sowing). Indeed, while the play grapples with feminist political gains within the dynamics in the public sphere, Mawugbe draws attention to strategic manoeuvring as it is safer for sustained inclusion.

“In your desire to capture these two marbles by hook or crook, **you’ve left your rear unguarded** thereby giving me two clear options; either to let you capture two of my soldiers and I take six of yours out of two, or I rescue my two soldiers to allow you to marshal your forces. (pause). No! It is a stupid battle strategy to allow your enemy time to reconsolidate his position. **Go in for the kill** whilst the troops are still in utter disarray. **(Emphasis is mine)**. That way, you are assured of sweet, quick and lasting victory.

Hahahaha.... So I am going in for the six, whilst you have the two out of one if you still want it. (Plays, but Owusu seems not to be responding). What’s the matter with you my child? Aren’t you going to play the game?” (Mawugbe, 2008)

As a pro-feminist, Mawugbe demonstrates awareness of impending challenges that are carefully orchestrated by colonial power relics and the suspicious male gaze. The playwright makes two proposals: ‘not leaving the rear unguarded’ and ‘going for the kill’ (i.e. the last stage of the game which is the harvesting) are cautiously constructed around the woman’s ability to look beyond consolatory gains and firmly insists on mainstream advocacy geared towards systemic change. Akiyode-Afolabi (2018) corroborates this position when she talks about the need for building critical consciousness and challenging the hegemony of patriarchal structures in politics as a means of negotiating and redefining the democratic spaces. Mawugbe’s counsel is crucial especially in the ways in which the failed 2015 New Patriotic Party (NPP) women’s seat initiative, the nomination of Eva Naa Merley Lokko, Ghana’s first vice-presidential candidate on the ticket of the Progressive Peoples’ Party (PPP) in the 2012 Presidential as well as the Parliamentary elections and the nomination of Professor Naana Jane Opoku-Agyemang as the first female vice-presidential candidate of the main opposition party, The National Democratic Congress (NDC) into perspective. The two women are an embodiment of Mawugbe’s ideal woman for the new postcolonial Ghana’s body politics, especially because the former president John Dramani Mahama (the Flagbearer of the National Democratic Congress) describes Professor Naana Jane Opoku-

Agyemang as “a distinguished scholar, a conscientious public servant and a role model who has contributed to shattering the many glass ceilings that have held women down for generations” (Mahama, 2020). The argument is that the nomination of these women is a marketing strategy to buy political integrity beyond a true affirmation of their inevitable contribution to the project of leadership and governance.

Gendering Leadership: Juxtaposing the Inclusion of Women in Politics and the Challenge with Evolving Genders

Ghana in recent times has experienced a crisis with calls to legalize homosexuality and part of this crisis is a result of the highly polarised religious twist and the need to protect the cultural heritage of the Ghanaian people. Issues of sex and sexualised identities as far as the Ghanaian context is concerned are restricted to discussions on the traditional genders. Esia-Donkoh, Kumi-Kyereme, Awusabo-Asare and Stillman (2017) acknowledge that although the general perceptions of Ghanaians about sexual education are relevant, it is rooted in a fear-based approach which is why its educational content is limited to an emphasis on morality as opposed to lessons on the use of contraceptives and family planning related content. The historical rationale, therefore of accommodating evolving genders, is intolerant to anything unorthodox and dissenting position. Mawugbe’s attempt at creating a she- male character is therefore fundamental to re-visiting discourses of inclusive sexualities and re-framing the politics of being in contemporary Ghana.

While it appears that Mawugbe intends to set up “a new culture that should give chance to women for new identification as full humans despite the seeming exaggerated role of Nana Yaa” (Kodjovi, 2016), the point to note is that his radical quest for the disruption of gender norms and gendered references is an extended metaphor for revisiting the participation of women in politics and thus, Mawugbe’s call for inclusion should be read from both private and public spheres. Although Mawugbe’s revisionary style may appear intrinsically masculinist,

especially with his Owusu, Mawugbe's broader contention is understood within Butler's concept of stylisation and the radical feminist framework. Butler (2002) as cited in Salih and Butler (2004) explains that:

“Gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being. A political genealogy of gender ontologies, if it is successful, will deconstruct the substantive appearance of gender into its constitutive acts and locate and account for those acts within the compulsory frames set by the various forces that police the social appearance of gender” (Butler 2002 as cited in Salih and Butler 2004).

What Butler (2002) suggests is that the subject is not free to choose which gender he/she is going to enact since such performance is already pre-determined within the regulatory framework and thus, the subject has restricted choices in stylisation. Mawugbe's attempt at re-assigning the constituted dominant role to the marginalised is therefore not simply an attempt at masking masculinity as Asiedu (2010) observes. By the creation of he/she, Mawugbe does not only radically disrupt the masculine signifying economy and the binary categorisations of the subjects, but he also re-imagines the Ghanaian society in ways that support women empowerment, deconstructing indigenous royal politics, its biases and an ultimate implication for nonconformist sexualities.

The character of the he/she (Owusu) in Mawugbe's *In the Chest of a Woman* intimates new feminist politics in terms of probing the possibility of women at the helm of governance and the accommodation of alternative genders in contemporary Ghana. While we recognise Owusu's discomfort in his strategic identity role, which is possibly an indication of the national uneasiness with queer identities and by extension male suspicion of women in power, we acknowledge Mawugbe's effort at calling for effective cultural change for women's political emancipation. He appears to de-emphasise the prejudices of

'abnormality' in Ghanaian society by reconfiguring discourses on Ghana's political history and sexual subjectivities through the admirable quality of the character of Owusu. Mawugbe proposes a revision of Ghana's putative heteronormative practice to embrace evolving trends in sexual self-definition within the broader framework of cultural integration and belongingness. He also advances the need to recognise the political rights of women using Nana Yaa as an archetype. Asiedu explains that:

"Owusu appears to be the hope of a balanced combination of both (masculine and feminine) traits, she emerges from her ordeal of forced impersonation of masculinity into a new freedom to be who she truly would like to be." (Asiedu, 2010).

Beyond the variance with the point of impersonating masculinity, Asiedu's assertion remains crucial in terms of re-reading Owusu's characterisation as a way of mediating the future of women in politics. By mediation, Mawugbe fails to subscribe to institutionalized apparatuses that relaunch female subordinates in ways that seem heroic. And this is evident in the counsel Nana Yaa provides:

NANA YAA: You are going to fight to capture the stool, my child. You have a right to it just as anybody. (Boldly). And I am saying you SHALL be King. I repeat KING, Not queen, after my brother, Kwaku Duah (Mawugbe, 2008).

Nana Yaa's bold insistence on making her son-daughter king and not queen is important for two reasons. On the private level, Mawugbe contends that supposed gender-sensitive referents are in themselves insensitive to the emancipatory agenda for women and that such signifiers succeed in widening the already stratified layers of being. In other words, to be queen is to compromise on the very foundations of equality and equity and this is why Nana Yaa appears dissatisfied with 'Some pieces of barren land with four or five cottages scattered here and there'. On the public level, the office of the queen mother inaugurates the motif of a second-in-command position which is of consequence to the

ethos of women empowerment as far as the place of women in nation-building is concerned. While some critics acknowledge the second-in-command status as negotiating entry into a bonafide masculine territory, the emphasis on 'you shall be KING' is a careful disapproval of re-launched patriarchal schemes to keep the woman perpetually second to the man.

NANA: Let my mother know that if I am to rule, I want a **whole** kingdom and not some piece of barren land with four or five cottages scattered here and there. (General murmurs of disapproval)

QUEEN MOTHER: But you are not a man. NANA: I am a woman, I agree, **but am not going** to indulge in the fanciful notion that men have a priority on leadership

talent.

The only sure talent men have demonstrated is the ability to cheat and suppress

we

[sic] the opposite sex. Who are men anyway? 1ST ELDER: You must know how you talk before us!

NANA: I only asked a question, or does my womanhood deprive me of that right too? (Pause) I want to know whether the art of nation building is the prerogative of men alone. Isn't that a legitimate question to ask?

2ND ELDER: Nation building belongs to the energetic.

NANA: (Very Sharply) And who says you men are the most energetic of the human species? Who says so? Where and when was it said? I want to know! (Dead silence. Queen Mother confers with 1st Elder)

1ST ELDER: Well, Princess, your mother insists that never in the history of Ebusa has a woman ruled where there is a man to do so. And as such you have to accept. . . .

NANA: Tell her I say NO. {**I don't want to be honoured then**}. Tell her that. Where is it written that a woman

cannot rule when there is a man? I want someone to tell me
(Mawugbe, 2008: 20). (Boldened for emphasis)

The above interaction provides an important opportunity to better understand how leadership is stratified based on gender distinctions. Nana Yaa's responses reveal how historical and patriarchal constructions of leadership are harmful to the politics of inclusion. To begin with, leadership continues to be prioritised as a masculine prerogative qualification to political leadership and is judged against hyper masculine traits both in rhetoric and in behaviour, which is why women who 'dare' to venture into this preserved domain for men are considered 'unusual'. Mawugbe further problematizes the mitigating measures (compensation offered to Nana Yaa) as a rebranded male strategy to remain in control. Indeed, the failed affirmative action of 2015 is simply an indication of the waning masculine benevolence towards the political chances of women (Abagre and Bukari, 2013). The playwright proposes an equal and competitive political terrain for both men and women.

Moreover, the idea of 'whole', something that is complete, unabridged and intact, as Nana Yaa's demand shows is an indication of her disapproval of her assumed consequential position. In other words, to demand a whole kingdom is to demand a full recognition of her self-worth as a woman which should not be explained in relation to the man's. Thus, her initial insistence on ensuring the son-daughter as king should be read as an affirmation to prioritise the ability of the woman to live beyond traditional essence. In other words, accepting to be queen, as the dialogue shows, is an attempt to legitimize female subjectivities as fixed and natural. What is more revealing, is how Mawugbe stresses the alterations in being, through the power of gender referents. The polemics of 'he', as per the significance of the he-she character, unsettles the rigidity in gender categorisations as the pronoun 'he' no longer becomes exclusively masculine. The ideological motivation for Mawugbe's choice is an invocation of required sincerity in learning to live independently. Mawugbe's conceptions of doing gender are thus located in how he unpacks gender systems by

muting reinforced essentialness of sex differences and social mappings that heighten power dynamics between the genders. Mawugbe advocates a transition from gender dualism to gender pluralism so that there is little bureaucracy in the structural circumstances of the sexes.

Conclusion

What this paper has sought to do is to argue that beyond the dominant discourses of women's oppression, kingship and the option of disrupting hegemony as earlier scholars have established, Mawugbe's 'In the Chest of a Woman' is a prototype of a woman's manifesto for political inclusion in postcolonial Ghana. Arguing from the decolonial and feminist frames, the paper begins by demonstrating that defining femininity in relation to masculinity exacerbates the prevailing cultural circumstances of the African woman, particularly concerning individuality and dependency issues. Secondly, this paper has made clear the fact that the strategic move of creating a he/she (in the person of Owusu) and the transgressive acts displayed by Nana Yaa are indicative of the new dimensions of gender roles. The paper has highlighted, among other things, the need for rethinking womanhood and re-conceptualizing politics as an ideological war, not just of representation, but as a game that requires strategic manoeuvring to stay counted and recognized. The paper has also demonstrated that the political terrain in Ghana and the West Africa sub-region demands an unorthodox feminist approach rather than a continued negotiatory and by far compromising tactics juxtaposing Ghana's cultural uneasiness with evolving sexualities as a functionally extended metaphor for gendering leadership in contemporary times. The paper recommends gender mainstreaming as a systemic strategy for resolving the crisis of women's exclusion in politics and places Mawugbe's play within the frame of speaking narratives that have an intrinsic commitment to combat female subjectivities and inaugurates new feminist politics.

References

- Abagre, C.I. and Bukari, F.I.M., (2013) 'Promoting affirmative action in higher education: A case study of the University for Development Studies bridging programme'. *Journal of Education and Practice*. 4(9) pp.19-28. Available at: <https://www.iiste.org/Journals/index.php/JEP/article/download/5743/5906>
- Agovi, K.E., (1990) 'The origin of literary theatre in colonial Ghana, 1920-1957'. *Institute of African Studies Research Review*. 6(1) pp.1-23. Available at: <https://d.lib.msu.edu/aejp>
- Akaenyi, N. J., (2023) 'Gender Ambiguity and Identity Politics in Efo Kodwo Mawugbe's In the Chest of a Woman'. *AKSU Journal of English*. 3(1), pp. 115-125. Available at: <https://aksujournalofenglish.org.ng/aksujel/20/12/gender-ambiguity-and-identity-politics-in-efo-kodgo-mawugbes-in-the-chest-of-a-woman/>
- Akiyode-Afolabi, A., (2018) *Political participation, feminist organising and the creation of inclusive democratic spaces*. Maputo: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Mozambique. Available at: <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/mosambik/17883.pdf>
- Asiedu, A.M., (2010) 'Masculine women, feminist men: assertions and contradictions in Mawugbe's In the Chest of a Woman'. *Theatre History Studies*. 30(1), pp.122-137. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1353/thst.2010.0030>
- Awusabo-Asare, K., (1990) 'Matriliney and the new intestate succession law of Ghana'. *Canadian Journal of African Studies/La Revue Canadienne des études Africaines*. 24(1) pp.1-16. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00083968.1990.10803849>
- Ballington, J., (2008) *Equality in Politics: A survey of Women and Men in Parliaments* (No. 54). Geneva: Inter-parliamentary Union. Available at: <http://www.ipu.org/PDF/publications/equality08-overview-e.pdf>
- Bauer, G. and Darkwah, A.K., (2020) 'We would rather be leaders than parliamentarians: women and office in Ghana'. *European Journal of Politics and Gender*. 3(1) pp.101-119. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1332/251510819X15698351185989>

- Butler, J., (2002) *Gender trouble*. London: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203902752>
- Chrappah, A., (2021) 'Disruption of Gender Norms to Advance Contemporary Politics: A Radical Feminist Analysis of Efo Kodjo Mawugbe's In the Chest of a Woman'. Fargo: North Dakota State University. Available at: <https://library.ndsu.edu/ir/bitstream/handle/10365/31860/Disruption%20of%20Gender%20Norms%20to%20Advance%20Contemporary%20Politics%20-%20A%20Radical%20Feminist%20Analysis%20of%20Efo%20Kodjo%20Mawugbe%E2%80%99s%20In%20the%20Chest%20of%20a%20Woman.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>
- Cixous, H., Cohen, K. and Cohen, P., (1976) 'The laugh of the Medusa'. *Signs: Journal of women in culture and society*. 1(4) pp.875-893. <https://doi.org/10.1086/493306>
- Darkwa, L. A. O., (2015) 'In Our Father's Name in Our Motherland: The Politics of Women's Political Participation in Ghana'. In B. Y. Gede, ed. *Constitutionalism, Democratic Governance and the African State*. Accra: Black Mask. pp.239-274. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-59074-9_41
- Dzradosi, C.E., Agyekum, M.W. and Ocloo, M. P., (2018) 'A Gender Analysis of Political Appointments in Ghana Since Independence: Report 2018'. Accra: Institute of Local Government Studies and Friedrich-Erbert-Stiftung. Available at: <http://www.fesghana.org/uploads/PDF/Gender%20Ilgs>
- Esia-Donkoh, K., Kumi-Kyereme, A., Awusabo-Asare, K. and Stillman, M., (2017) 'Perceptions about sexuality education in Ghana'. In proceedings: 2017 International Population Conference, IUSSP. South Africa: Cape Town: pp.57-65. Available at: <https://api.semanticscholar.org/CorpusID:210536099>
- Halberstam, J., (2002) 'An introduction to female masculinity: masculinity without men'. *The masculinity studies reader*. Malden: Blackwell Publishing. pp.355-374. Available at: <https://latinomascularities.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/halberstam-intro-to-female-masculinity.pdf>

Gender and Feminist Meditations

- Hartmann, H. I., (1981) 'The family as the locus of gender, class, and political struggle: The example of housework'. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*. 6(3) pp.366–394. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1086/493813>
- Huntington, S. P. and Nelson, J. M., (1976) *No easy choice: Political Participation in Developing Countries*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. <https://doi.org/10.4159/harvard.9780674863842>
- Irigaray, L., (2004) *Luce Irigaray: Key Writings*. London: A&C Black
- Ismaila, M. and Akakpo, S.B., (2024) 'Teaching Through Creative Process: Drama in Education Practice in Ghana'. *NJ: Drama Australia Journal*. 47(1) pp.1–20. Available at: <https://njdrama.scholasticahq.com/issue/10868>
- Kuumba, M. B., (2006) 'African women, resistance cultures and cultural resistances'. *Agenda*, 20(68) pp.112–121. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09502380500529656>
- Law, PNDCL 111, Intestate Succession Law, 1985, Ghana
- Lare, D., (2015). 'Debunking patriarchal legacy in african traditional setting: A reading of Efo Kodjo Mawugbe's In the Chest of a Woman'. *Littera Aperta. International Journal of Literary and Cultural Studies*. (2) pp.103–123. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.21071/ltap.v2i2.10826>
- Lugones, M. (2010). 'Towards a Decolonial Feminism'. *Hypatia*, 25(4): pp. 742–759. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1527-2001.2010.01137.x>.
- Mahama, J., (2020) Speech delivered at the Outdoor of Professor Naana Jane Opoku-Agyemang as Vice-Presidential Running Mate [Online] Available at: <https://www.johnmahama.org/news/john-mahama-s-address-outdoor of-the-2020-running-mate> [Accessed 29 July, 2022]
- Maldonado-Torres, N. and Cavooris, R., (2017) 'The decolonial turn'. In *New Approaches to Latin American studies*. London: Routledge. pp.111–127. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315158365>
- Mawugbe E.K., (2008) *In the Chest of a Woman*. Kumasi: Isaac Books and Stationery Services.

- Mignolo, W. D., (2007a) 'Delinking: The rhetoric of modernity, the logic of coloniality and the grammar of decoloniality'. *Cultural studies*. 21(2-3) pp.449-514. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09502380601162647>
- Mignolo, W. D., (2007b) 'Epistemic disobedience, independent thought and decolonial freedom'. *Theory, culture & society*. 26(7-8) pp.159-181. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276409349275>
- Ndlovu-Gatsheni, S. J. (2015) 'Decoloniality as the Future of Africa'. *History Compass*. 13 (10) pp.485-496. Available at : <https://doi.org/10.1111/hic3.12264>
- Nugah E.B., (2013) *Gender Portrayal in Edufa and in the Chest of a Woman*. Master's thesis. University of Ghana. Available at: <http://197.255.68.203/handle/123456789/7300>
- Ocran, R. K., (2014) *Women's political participation: a comparative study on Ghana and Tanzania*. Master's thesis. University of Eastern Finland. Available at: https://erepo.uef.fi/bitstream/handle/123456789/13983/urn_nbn_fi_uef-20140924.pdf?sequence=1
- Prah, M., (2007) *Ghana's feminist movement: aspirations, challenges, achievements*. Woeli Pub. Services. Available at: https://books.google.com/books/about/Ghana_s_Feminist_Movement.html?id=unQoAQAAIAAJ
- Salih, S. and Butler, J., (2004) *The Judith butler reader*. Malden: MA: Blackwell. Available at: <https://archive.org/search.php?query=external-identifier%3A%22urn%3Alcp%3Ajudithbutlerread000butl%3Alcpdf%3A64439cf6-695b-48e5-9ea7-c5c5d030c9ab%22>
- Sossou, M.A., (2011) 'We do not enjoy equal political rights: Ghanaian women's perceptions on political participation in Ghana'. *Sage Open*. 1(1) pp1-9. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244011410715>
- Spivak, G. C. (1988) *Can the subaltern speak?*. Oxford University Press.
- Van Deth, J. W., (2014) 'A conceptual map of political participation'. *Acta Politica*. 49(3) pp.349-367. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1057/ap.2014.6>


Gender and Feminist Meditations

- Verba, S., Schlozman, K. L. and Brady, H., (1995) *Voice and Equality*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1pnc1k7>
- Walby, S., (1986) *Patriarchy at Work: Patriarchal and Capitalist Relations in Employment*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Women's Political Representation and Affirmative Action in Ghana, (2019). NAI Policy Note No 1, The Nordic Africa Institute [Online]. Available at: <http://nai.divaportal.org/smash/get/diva2:1284607/FULLTEXT01.pdf> [Accessed: 10 January, 2019]
- Yankah, V., (2012) 'Language and Meaning in Efo Mawugbe's In the Chest of a Woman'. In Makokha, J.K. S., Obiero, O. J., and West-Pavlov, R. (eds.) *Style in African Literature: Essays on Literary Stylistics and Narrative Styles*. Brill. pp.399-421. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1163/9789401207553_021



Stella Nyanzi the Activist-Philosopher

Sarah Setlaelo 

Center for African Studies
Harvard University 
Cambridge, United States

Abstract

Stella Nyanzi, the Ugandan medical and social anthropologist, feminist scholar and political activist is arguably a contemporary example of Ghanaian philosopher Kwame Gyekye's self-assertive person, and German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche's free spirit. Gyekye and Nietzsche are most likely to be read through the binary lens that distinguishes African and Western thought, however, on closer inspection, their respective conceptions of people who are change agents in society show a striking convergence. This chapter aims to demonstrate that the self-assertive individual and the free spirit are agents of change who are crucial to the development, progress and overall advancement of humankind, within their respective socio-cultural and socio-political contexts. Their autonomous, self-determining, and self-assertive attributes *emancipate* them from conformity to the prevailing traditions, culture and morality of their societies. Their critical and contemplative thinking enables them to *re-evaluate* the customs, practices and rules of their communities. Their intellectual distinction equips them with the capacity to create and *incorporate* new and progressive values. Nyanzi appears to embody these attributes and they confer upon her the status of an activist-philosopher, someone who demonstrates a symbiosis of thought leadership and activism, theory and praxis. Furthermore, the "self-assertive-free spirit" profile developed in this chapter by referencing Nyanzi as a case study, could be true of many other change agents, in various cultural, societal and political contexts. Moreover, through the lens of women's political participation



in Africa, a “self-assertive-free-spirit” is an ideal candidate for feminist political leadership in Africa.

Keywords: Stella Nyanzi, Kwame Gyekye, Friedrich Nietzsche, Free Spirit, Change Agent, Feminist Activism, Feminist Theory, Feminist Political Leadership

Introduction

Historians and scholars usually document the catalytic roles that some individuals play in the evolution of their societies, however, few of those documentaries offer a theoretical understanding of the attributes and activities of these exceptional individuals. In the context of feminist political leadership, there are some exceptional individuals who are catalytic change agents both in and out of formal politics. Thus a case study of medical anthropologist, scholar, feminist and political activist, Dr. Stella Nyanzi provides us with the opportunity to theorize women’s and feminist political leadership in Africa. A study of Nyanzi’s combined scholarship and activism helps us to formulate a framework of the attributes and quest of a change agent. She is a arguably a contemporary example of Ghanaian philosopher Kwame Gyekye’s moderate communitarian self-assertive individual and German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche’s radical free spirit, as will be demonstrated throughout the chapter. Gyekye and Nietzsche are most likely to be read through the binary lens that divides African and Western thought, but on closer inspection, their respective conceptions of people who are change agents in society show a striking convergence. Both the self-assertive individual and the free spirit are exceptional individuals who are crucial to the development, progress and overall advancement of humankind, within their respective contexts.

Nyanzi’s body of work is composed of numerous scientific studies; more than sixty published academic works and she has been cited more than two thousand times. In her works, she often reaches controversial, although empirical conclusions on sexuality, HIV/Aids, human rights and African culture, among other topics that are central to African social wellbeing. Her observations and theories, which are conveyed through

her literary output and social commentary, have resulted in her being persecuted, harassed, threatened, imprisoned and marginalized. The sum impact of her radicalism, however, is that her emancipated resistance to moral, social and political conformity has distinguished her as a change agent. Her intellectual prowess has gained her credibility, as she is able to re-evaluate African society in intelligible ways that contribute to the body of knowledge, catalyse resistance and shine the international spotlight on authoritarian, patriarchal and paternalistic practices in Uganda, The Gambia, Tanzania, and Africa as a whole.

Towards theorizing Nyanzi as a change agent, firstly it is important to justify why the analytical framework employed derives from a male African philosopher and a male Western philosopher, to study an African feminist. This raises the question of methodology and the problem of studying African subjects through Western theories, as Oyèrónkẹ Oyèwùmí (1997) cautions. In this analysis, neither Gyekye nor Nietzsche are privileged but rather the focus is on Nyanzi. She captured the global community's imagination on 18 April 2016, when she staged a naked protest at the Makerere University in Uganda. Her disrobing protest was against alleged tyranny by university administrators who had also locked her out of her office because she refused to teach a particular course. Feminist academic and activist Sylvia Tamale happened to be at Makerere at that time and when she arrived on the scene, Nyanzi had put her clothing back on, but was still yelling obscenities and profanities. Despite Tamale's initial reaction of trying to bring Nyanzi in line with society's taboo conception of public nakedness, she later writes:

“Society ‘reads’ women’s bodies along the landmarks forged by the law. Female naked protests represent a resistance and subversion of the dominant scripts engraved on women’s bodies — scripts of subordination, passivity, sexuality, subservience, vulnerability, etc. Hence, through the process of naked protests, women engage in a re-scripting and reconfiguration of their bodies” (Tamale, 2017:79).

The significance of Nyanzi's naked protest as a reflection of self-assertiveness and an embodiment of a free spirit, lies in how it rescripts and reconfigures the female body to become a tool of resistance and rebellion. The documentary accounts of Nyanzi demonstrate that she is both an activist and thinker (philosopher) and can be found on many platforms, including South African History Online (2020), on media platforms (Newsweek, 19 April 2016; All Africa, 30 October 2016; BBC, 11 April 2017;), and in scholarly literature (Mudavanhu, 2019; Makoni, 2021; Kahyana, 2024; Byarugaba, 2024) among others.

Since that catalytic event at Makerere, she embarked on a political campaign of "radical rudeness" that questioned what Gyekye (2003:305) would term "inelegant, undignified, or unenlightened" cultural values; and what Nietzsche (1910:207) would call the "increased stupidity" that is often required for cultural conformity and stability. Nyanzi (2020:558) asserts and justifies her approach as follows: "I see radical rudeness as the only viable means to challenge those in power. As I have said elsewhere, challenging power isn't polite or beautiful." She went on to condemn Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni in the process by calling him "a pair of buttocks," and was subsequently imprisoned twice under cyber harassment laws for a combined period of almost two years (pen-international.org). In her own words, Nyanzi explains the circumstances around her first arrest in 2017:

"Specifically, they ridiculed me for publicly challenging the president and his wife for reneging on a promise to provide free sanitary pads to schoolgirls. On the third day of my detention with neither charge nor trial, I finally learnt that I was charged with using social media for public solicitation of money and fundraising for sanitary pads which I distributed across the country. I was not surprised by these attempts to criminalize my social media activity. The month before my arrest, I had already been subjected to gruelling interrogation at the headquarters of the Criminal Intelligence and Investigation Department (CIID). I had also been indefinitely suspended from my

permanent employment at Makerere University—allegedly because I insulted the First Lady who was also the Minister of Education. My home was under intense surveillance. My family’s movements were monitored, and our family vehicle was trailed. My phone communication was tapped. I was barred from boarding a plane to attend an academic conference at the University of Amsterdam and indefinitely banned from traveling abroad. And I received several anonymous death threats via social media, phone, and radio. After spending three nights in detention, I was arraigned before the Chief Magistrate’s Court amidst heightened security and charged with cyber harassment and offensive communication against the president of Uganda” (Nyanzi, 2020:552).

The profiles of emancipated individuals that are offered by the two philosophers can serve as a theoretical point of departure that can be aligned with decolonial and feminist epistemic imperatives. While situating Nyanzi, an African feminist, within this theoretical framework, there may be possible objections to this approach. For example, Nietzsche has been labelled a misogynist because of some of his derogatory statements about women. Also, Gyekye’s African philosophy tradition has the notorious reputation of erasing the contributions of women to African history, epistemology and leadership. In this respect, Africana philosopher Lewis R. Gordon speaks of “teleological suspension”, in his book *Disciplinary Decadence: Living Thought in Trying Times* (2006). This is a willingness to go beyond one’s discipline, methodology and ideology for the sake of engaging a pluralistic reality, in an interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary and transdisciplinary manner.

As such, not only can the African-Western binary of personhood be dissolved in the case of profiling extraordinary individuals, but “male-centric” philosophies can also be of some utility as a discursive point of departure for critical feminist theorizing. Secondly, since Nyanzi is conferred with the title “activist-philosopher” in this chapter, it is crucial to define it for conceptual clarity. The double-barrelled term is

hyphenated to capture a symbiotic relationship between the two roles, even while each of them carries its own meaning. Thirdly, an outline of the quest of change agents is provided, elaborating on how they are produced by their cultural milieu to become *emancipated* from conformity; to *re-evaluate* traditions, customs and values; and to *incorporate* new knowledge and values, for the development and progress of their communities. Throughout the chapter, some examples of Nyanzi's feminist political leadership activities are cited.

Activist-Philosopher

According to South African philosopher Mabogo Percy More, an activist or rebel who is also a philosopher, is not just simply someone who pursues disorder or lawlessness for its own sake, but is instead, fundamentally a revolutionary. He references Frantz Fanon's remark that, "anyone who rebels against the status quo becomes a revolutionary" (More, 2017:16). The notions of rebellion and revolution are also raised by feminist theorists who speak of "counter publics", constructed by feminist activism and theory. The notion of the "public" means that the status quo is constituted of public spaces (in concrete and abstract ways) that are constructed by and for males. Therefore, these public spaces must be reconstructed in order to accommodate non-male genders as well and the first step of this rebellion is the establishment of counter publics. South African feminist scholar Pumla Dineo Gqola (2021:36) argues that there needs to be greater acceptance and transformation to accommodate these counter publics.

Subversive and rebellious activism is always met with resistance by those who benefit from the status quo and this is sometimes a deterrent for activists. In this respect, Gqola (2015:15) adds that there will always be resistance to rebellion, and "[a]n effective backlash always does much more than neutralise gains, though; it reverses the gains we see everywhere, and it reminds those who might benefit from such gains that they are not quite free." French feminist and philosopher Simone de Beauvoir (2009:753) claims that "in woman [...] freedom remains abstract and empty; it cannot

authentically assume itself except in revolt.” Beauvoir and Gqola are both emphasizing the activism role of confronting the status quo, which is one component of the hyphenated phrase, activist-philosopher.

The second term in the phrase, is the philosopher aspect. While, it may be common consensus that a philosopher gains their credentials by being trained in philosophy and attaining a doctorate in philosophy, but if these criteria were applied strictly, few recognized philosophers would meet them. For example, Black Consciousness Movement leader, Steve Biko, is sometimes considered a philosopher, but he does not meet these criteria, given that he was a medical student, training in medicine rather than philosophy. Regarding the doctoral degree criterion, Beauvoir, for example, was trained in philosophy but did not attain a doctorate in the discipline, nor was she a university philosophy professor.

To try and address this impasse, More (2017: 83) argues: “A philosopher is an individual who has the capacity to make an original contribution to the development of philosophical thought and to the world of ideas irrespective of his training in the discipline.” I find this justification plausible, because it seems that philosopher status can be earned through demonstrated, original contribution to philosophy specifically, and more broadly to interdisciplinary, transdisciplinary and cross-disciplinary thought leadership. Thus, an activist-philosopher confronts the status quo through intellectual and philosophical reflection (theory) that is directed towards political and social activism (praxis).

Whereas the account of Nyanzi the activist-philosopher draws significantly from the concepts of Gyekye and Nietzsche, some feminist literature also captures the symbiosis of activism and thought leadership. For example, women who participated in the Fees Must Fall/Rhodes Must Fall Movement against university fee increases and for the decolonisation of education in South Africa, highlighted the symbiosis of rioting (activism) and writing (intellectualism). Student activists Simamkele Dlakavu and Sandy Ndelu (2017) maintained that this approach

of combining theory and praxis would etch the protests and ideas of women in public memory, and history would freeze this rioting and writing in memory as a reference point. Gqola (2001), provides an operational example of the merger of the two activities when she argues for praxis through activism that can also be displayed in academia, while taking on the form of creative expression in media. The thrust of her argument is that the Cartesian dualism that artificially separates theory and praxis should give way to the production of knowledge in multiple textures and spaces (Gqola, 2001:11-12). This ties in with the notions of reconfiguration and re-scripting the body for the dual activities of rioting and writing.

Nyanzi's purported crime was trying to hold the Ugandan president and government accountable to his own campaign promise to provide sanitary pads for girls so that their schooling would not be interrupted when they are menstruating. What is interesting about this debacle is that the authorities deflected attention from the actual problem, reneging on a campaign promise and failed service delivery, and instead attempted to silence her freedom of speech and expression. Nyanzi, like other Ugandan activists, was fighting against misrule and repression in the political sphere on the one hand and for social justice and human rights in the social sphere. Kahyana (2024) maintains that women activists in particular, follow a long tradition of African women who continually fought against injustice dating back to precolonial and colonial times. A further category of activists to which Nyanzi belongs is that of academic activists or activist-academics.

Kariuki, Kratou and Laakso (2022) engage the work of academic activists and explain the linkages between attacks on scholars, decreased academic freedom as well as the stagnation of democracy. They note that attacks at African universities are higher (76 out of 285) than any other regions and elaborate on the work of the Scholars at Risk (SAR) network that tracks attacks on academic freedom at 500 universities in 40 countries and intervene to protect the lives and jobs of at-risk scholars. The attacks include: "killings, disappearances, wrongful imprisonments or detention, prosecutions, restrictions on travel

and retaliatory dismissal, loss of position or expulsion from study” (Kariuki, Kratou & Laakso, 2022:4). Nyanzi’s plight has also been on the radar of SAR and she has received support from the network.

Later sections elaborate on the revolt that leads to the emancipation of the change agent, followed by the re-evaluation of norms, morals and culture and finally, the incorporation of new values and norms. As such, an activist is subversive, non-conforming and rebellious against the status quo and incites revolution, not merely for dismantling, but also for rebuilding. A philosophical activist also facilitates conceptual and theoretical deconstruction and reconstruction of the status quo, and put differently, their activism dismantles and rebuilds, while their philosophy deconstructs and reconstructs.

The following three sections demonstrate that the self-assertive individual and the free spirit are agents of change within their respective socio-cultural and socio-political contexts and are crucial to the development, progress and overall advancement of humankind. Gyekye offers an articulation of the attributes of a change agent – namely self-assertiveness, autonomy and self-determination. Nietzsche provides a three-stage process of emancipation, re-evaluation and incorporation that his free spirit undertakes. Both the attributes and the process combine to theorize the quest of the agent of change. In each of the three subsections, Gyekye’s and Nietzsche’s conceptual frameworks provide the departure and then feminist literature about and by Nyanzi helps to elaborate on the attributes and quest of the change agent. The “self-assertive-free spirit” profile developed by referencing Nyanzi as a case study, is intended as a contribution to theorizing feminist political leadership in Africa.

Emancipation

In *Human, All Too Human* (1910), the first book of the free spirit trilogy, Nietzsche formally introduces us to his free spirit change agents who are the “great minds” (1910:25) that arise from the “great emancipation” (1910:4). He defines them as follows: “We

call that [woman] a *free-thinker who thinks otherwise* [differently] than is expected of [her] in consideration of [her] origin, surroundings, position, and office, or by reason of the prevailing contemporary views” (Nietzsche 1910:209, emphasis added). The free spirit emerges from a culture that is, according to Nietzsche (1910:207), preserved by a common spirit, principles, and faith which are handed down by customs and preserved by strenuous character and habits. The key phrase here is “thinks otherwise”, or differently.

Gyekye (2003:306, emphasis added) also identifies exceptional individuals in the community and refers to them as “*some autonomous, self-assertive individual persons.*” Their self-assertiveness enables them to thoughtfully question and reevaluate “inelegant, undignified, or unenlightened” cultural values and practices (Gyekye 2003:305). It is only through the exercise of their capacity for self-assertion that they can make intelligible, autonomous goals and plans that result in the “creation and historical development of human culture” (Gyekye 1997:54). Much like the free spirit thinks differently from other community members, only *some* members of the African community have the demonstrated capacity to be autonomous, self-determining, self-assertive persons.

Autonomy is defined in feminist literature, similarly in moral psychology or moral philosophy, as “self-government or self-direction”, which describes how one acts based on “motives, reasons, or values that are one’s *own*” (Stoljar, 2024, para. 1). However, Stoljar asserts that the concept was previously considered by feminists to capture a personhood that is masculinist, atomistic, non-emotional, a reasoner – a self that is lone and devoid of social relationships. This critique gave rise to the more attractive term, “relational autonomy,” which reconceptualises autonomy as more socially embedded.

Interestingly, Gyekye’s self-assertive person and Nietzsche’s free spirit each have a different conception of autonomy, which coincides with Stoljar’s distinction between atomistic and relational autonomy. The free spirit and the self-assertive individual have different degrees of proximity to the

community, while they pursue their quests as change agents. The former may distance themselves by detaching from the community to gain the necessary perspective and the latter challenges the status quo while still naturally embedded in communal relationships.

In the case of Nyanzi, she was initially geographically embedded in her community. She conducted her academia and activism in Uganda for years, however, after being imprisoned, she grew apprehensive about her safety and security and that of her three children and thus in January 2022, she relocated to Germany, after she was accepted for a writers-in-exile program. Explaining her choice to go into exile, she was quoted saying: “Because I’m very much a *free-thinking, loud-mouthed, crass woman who boldly speaks her mind*, I think one of the greatest joys is to be able to criticise Museveni’s dictatorship and not fear for my life” (Davies, 2022, para. 3, emphasis added). She has had to flee Uganda, but her commitment to her community continues in exile as she has retained relational autonomy. Moreover, she can still be self-assertive (“criticise Museveni’s dictatorship”), while having the safety and security to be a free spirit (“free-thinking, loud-mouth, crass woman”).

Gyekye (1997:54) adds that the term “autonomy” can be traced to its Greek etymology, meaning: “self-governing” or “self-directing”, in order to achieve self-determination or self-realization. So in his view, autonomy is the pre-requisite of self-determination, which is also associated to self-realization. Self-determination usually describes matters of political independence or sovereignty, nation-state-building, and nationalism or ethnicity, which allude to collective actions. After the emancipation from conformity, the free spirit develops a drive for self-determination. In other words, their self-determination may be met with the kind of resistance discussed in the section above on the activist-philosopher.

More than a dangerous drive for self-determination, very often it is an ambivalent and contradictory journey as found by one of the women founding members of the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM), Dr. Mamphela Ramphele. She highlights

that even when there is an intellectual appreciation of gender equity issues, it is often difficult to translate it into behavioural changes on the part of both men and women (Yates *et al.*, 1998: 91). In fact, she makes the uncomfortable acknowledgement that women at times perpetuate inequality. This happens particularly when it comes to the household domain, where they enjoy being admired for the responsibilities that they carry as caregivers of men and children and as such, they have a measure of self-determination within certain parameters and with limitations.

Nancy Hirschmann (2006:209) in her conception of feminist freedom notes that women at times participate in structures of power and oppression, which make other choices and activities possible. Her point is that both women and men participate in patriarchy and so some women may perpetuate masculine laws, rules and regulations if they perceive any benefit from them. The cofounder of the Bantu Women's League, Charlotte Maxeke, as early as the beginning of the 20th century, criticized how women were fixed in a timeless past of tradition and domestication (April, 2012: 3). Ramphele adds that one of the dividends they received was a form of agency and autonomy in the domestic sphere (in Yates *et al.*, 1998:92).

Gqola refers to this self-sabotaging role that black women assumed, as the "cult of femininity." She explains that in contemporary times, decades after the peak of the BCM in the 1970's, there is now a "women empowerment" movement that applies mainly to women that have assumed occupation in the public sphere. The private and household domain that Ramphele refers to, however, remains largely gender conservative. Gqola explains the cult of femininity as follows:

"A completely different set of rules, framed in direct contradiction to the ostensible 'women's empowerment' discourse continues to govern the 'private' world of the home, and other spaces in between: public transport, the streets, clubs, restaurants, shebeens, etc. Outside of work, the dominant gender-talk is that women must adhere to very limiting notions of femininity. The recycling of the 'cult of femininity' takes place across sectors, as public

culture demonstrates. Indeed, it is so pervasive that it retains high visibility amongst the ranks of ostensibly 'highly empowered' women. In interview after media interview, the question is posed to economically powerful women, 'who are you really?' Thus, pressure is applied to prove that they exhibit traditionally feminine traits, in other words, that as powerful as such women are at work, they submit to the patriarchal 'cult of femininity' elsewhere, illustrating that South African media are as much a product of this society as they are of a global late-capitalist patriarchal order" (Gqola, 2007:116).

It is evident from the passage above that the cult of femininity is so well constructed that it operates in both traditional and progressive female spaces and thus emancipation is the first stage of the quest of a change agent. Many customs, traditions, roles and practices in a given culture are millennia, centuries or decades old and resistant to change and progress and a radical change in thinking or mentality is required to overcome the psychological pull of the prevailing cultures. One such prevailing norm in radical communitarianism holds that the individual is defined according to the environing community and so their essential, physical or psychological characteristics are subordinated to the communal ethos (Menkiti, 1984).

Feminism confronts many of these intractable aspects of culture, particularly in terms of how they inform gender relations. African feminism attempts to retrieve what was lost, retain what is useful and challenge what is harmful within African culture, for the sake of the common good and societal progress. Nietzsche speaks of the possibility of progress only on condition that ancient (error based) culture should be forsaken. He maintains that this will happen when people, "*consciously* resolve to develop themselves towards a new culture; whilst formerly they only developed unconsciously and by chance" (Nietzsche, 1910:39), emphasis original).

Nyanzi, has demonstrated consistently that she is emancipated from those parameters and defines her own scope of autonomy, due to her self-assertive and free spirit

traits. Keguro Macharia (2016:188) claims that Nyanzi displays “a certain African genius for waywardness” that at times “accumulates odd stories, little moments, folksy wisdom, and seemingly disconnected anecdotes.” However, she goes on to claim that this waywardness is not particularly “interested in forging new paths that others can follow” (Macharia, 2016:188). I think that the notion of waywardness could be linked to my earlier discussions about rebellion. While Macharia claims that the endeavour is not necessarily to forge new paths, in the case of the activist-philosophers, when they rebel, they do so not to pursue disorder or lawlessness for its own sake. The stories, wisdom and anecdotes that they accumulate contribute to the entire enterprise or quest of forging a new way of life for themselves and others. The radical nature and inclinations of the self-assertive-free-spirit *emancipate* them from conformity to the prevailing traditions, culture and morality of their societies. Emancipation is the first stage of change agent’s quest and the same could apply to an African feminist political leader, activist or thinker.

Re-evaluation

In the second book of the free spirit trilogy, *Daybreak* (1995), Nietzsche’s free spirit repudiates the very moral fibre of the community. Nietzsche initially addresses what he considers to be the irrational origins of morality by questioning the legitimacy of things, just because they are enduring (such as culture, customs and tradition). He argues that these legacies are so saturated with reason that they seem probable, even if they are not based on facts or truths. He asks whether something is right just because it is prevailing. For Nietzsche, morality is nothing more than obedience to customs, which are based on traditional ways of behaving and evaluating. In other words, things are not inherently moral or not, but are given more weight based on how long people subscribe to them and thus following these moral precepts is sometimes an irrational obedience to higher authority because it is commanded, not because it is useful. Hence the need for re-evaluation.

Gyekye also points out some features that he considers to be negative in African culture and require re-evaluation. Interestingly, in the preface of his book *Tradition and Modernity: Philosophical Reflections on the African Experience* (1997), he highlights the resistance towards science and technology by Africans, as well as the clinging to harmful traditions of social and moral practices that should be eradicated – such as the inheritance system. By raising the problem of the traditional inheritance system, Gyekye's and Nyanzi's concerns coincide as she also does work on widow inheritance (see Nyanzi, Emodu-Walakira & Serwaniko, 2006). He cautions that while some aspects of Western modernity may not be appropriate for non-western societies and cultures, a critical reinterpretation and re-evaluation of inherited cultural traditions is still necessary.

Essentially, both Nietzsche and Gyekye are concerned about the stagnation of the community or society's progress due to traditions, customs and cultures that no longer serve people. The critical and contemplative thinking of change agents enables them to *re-evaluate* the customs, practices and rules of their communities. Gyekye proposes a means to reconcile what should be rejected and retained during the process of re-evaluation:

“This critical re-evaluation of a received cultural tradition will not only suggest refinement or appropriate amendment that, in the name of renewal and revitalization, ought to be made to it but also direct attention to the aspects of it that, in the name of progress and success, ought to be expunged from the cultural life and thought of a people. It is, remember, this critical reinterpretation and re-evaluation that will also lead to the euphoric affirmation of the abiding worth of what can truly be acknowledged as positive features of the values of a cultural tradition” (Gyekye, 1997:263).

Whereas Nietzsche's free spirit leans towards repudiating the morals of society and going back to the drawing board, Gyekye's self-assertive person attempts the dialectical process of resolving conflicting interests by beginning with the thesis, introducing

the antithesis and finally bringing about a synthesis. Nyanzi's quest follows the process of the free spirit – emancipation, re-evaluation, incorporation – however like the self-assertive person, it balances the communalistic and individualistic features. In her dual role as an activist-philosopher, her re-evaluation activities include challenging traditional morality, contributing to discourse on freedom of speech and expression and contributing to scientific knowledge, empirical information and epistemology through research and scholarship.

As a prominent advocate and activist for the LGBTQI+ community, she is often criticised by moral conservatives, while she is in turn critical towards their discrimination and prejudices. In the months leading up the promulgation of the Ugandan anti-homosexuality law, Nyanzi spoke with Danson Kahyana (2023) about the impending implications and consequences. Kahyana (2023:44) firstly notes that the law is framed as a defence against Western values that are attempting to corrupt African morality, pandering to the Muslim leaders, Christian churches and traditionalists that he hopes will support his presidential bid in 2026. Secondly, Nyanzi adds that the bills are intended to criminalise sexualities while claiming to protect African values but finds that this is an absurd claim because “Before colonialism... Africa embraced different sexualities like polygyny, polygamy and polyandry, to mention but a few. The view that Africa has always had one form of sexuality is ahistorical and a figment of the imagination” (Kahyana & Nyanzi, 2023:44). Thirdly, Nyanzi names a cluster of other repressive laws like the Public Order Management Act (2013), the Computer Misuse Act (2011), the Anti-Pornography Act (2014), the NonGovernmental Organisations Act (2016) and the Computer Misuse (Amendment) Act (2022) that also criminalise dissent (Kahyana & Nyanzi, 2023:45).

When Ugandan President, Museveni signed the stringent anti-LGBTQ law on 29 May 2023, which includes capital punishment for so-called “aggravated homosexuality” and a 20-year prison sentence for “promoting” homosexuality, Nyanzi's official response was, “Cry beloved Uganda, cry for this sad day for the rights of LGBTIQ+ people and their

allies. La luta continua!” (Reuters, 30 May 2023). Nyanzi’s criticism of the government’s treatment of feminized and queer people using the mechanism of radical rudeness that disrupts existing social systems has resulted in intimidation, violence and imprisonment (Rodriguez, 2022:36). Her work focuses on sexuality, gender, culture and power and her own life intersected with these themes when she was imprisoned and due to hostile treatment and lack of ante-natal care, she tragically suffered a miscarriage.

As a scholar, one of the most significant contributions made by Nyanzi to the body of knowledge is an integrated understanding of sex and sexuality. She proposes a more nuanced, complex definition of sexuality that captures a range of meanings made by various groups (Marais, 2019). Specifically, Nyanzi asserts that:

“This definition of sexuality should also not merely be situated within the body and involve bodily functions, but it should embrace: desire, the erotic, emotions, sensuality, fantasy, intimacy, commitment, power, relationship, negotiation, exploration, exploitation, expression, trust, personhood, belonging, identity, pleasure, entertainment, consumption, obligation, transaction, dependence, work, income, resistance, abuse, masculine entitlement, feminine propriety, respectability, spirituality, custom and ritual” (Nyanzi, 2011:48).

The spark that ignited the social media debacle that ultimately resulted in Nyanzi’s arrest was the #Pads4GirlsUg campaign in 2017 which publicised the plight of menstrual hygiene and period product poverty. While the advocacy may have challenged unwarranted taboos associated with this very natural aspect of womanhood, it antagonized powerful figures in government and challenged patriarchal stereotypes (Mutsvairoa *et al.*, 2021). Soon there was tremendous cultural and political backlash from the Ugandan government. Nyanzi (2020:555) asserts that the campaign was criticised blatantly by the First Lady and Minister of Education, Janet Museveni, on a television interview, for offering menstrual education to both girls and boys. Rather than

apologize that her husband did not deliver on his presidential campaign promise to provide pads to girls, she deflected attention to Nyanzi's radical rudeness. Moreover, Rosemary Nansubuga Seninde, a Member of Parliament and Minister of State for Primary Education in Uganda, insisted that menstruation cannot be discussed publicly as it is taboo and should be a secret, claiming that is the culture of Buganda (Nyanzi, 2020:555). Nyanzi reflects on the divisive debate that this issue caused:

“These attempts to shame and denigrate our provision of menstrual education to students generated debates within Uganda. Rather than align themselves with sensitization and public education about menstrual issues, it was disheartening that many powerful public officials adopted moralizing tones steeped deep in cultural shaming, taboo and secrecy. Many public officials criticized our education methods and processes—claiming (correctly) that we were breaking social norms and abusing cultural taboos which they claim forbid the discussion of menstruation outside the intimate circles of paternal aunts and their nieces” (Nyanzi, 2020:556).

In an article titled “The Political Force of the Comedic” Webber *et al.* (2021) note that Nyanzi uses satirical humour to challenge the coercive power of Uganda's President Museveni. Even though she is known to be a feminist activist and prolific researcher, it appears that her profane, often vulgar protests and her irreverent, unrepentant attitude toward authority have become her “claim to fame” (Webber *et al.*, 2021: 428). This genre of political humour is aimed at expressing opposition, establishing political subjectivity and bolstering civic support’ (Davis *et al.*, 2018: 3905 in Webber *et al.*, 2021:428). This new vehicle or means of protest has become alarming to many political leaders and according to Sebeelo (2020), the Nyanzi case has shone a light on the ambivalence about social media across African countries, pertaining to freedom of speech.

In the wake of Nyanzi's imprisonment, another social media campaign caught the attention of Ugandan law enforcement in February 2020. Sheena Bagaine, a university

student, utilized her online space for anonymous women to name and shame perpetrators of sexual violence. She was subsequently accused by one of the alleged perpetrators of cyberstalking, cyber harassment and offensive communication – the same charges levelled against Nyanzi. Hernández (2022:101) highlights that “in both cases, the Computer Misuse Act (2011) was used to justify the detentions, which, beyond contextual differences, punished a similar offence: That of upsetting the status quo.” The fear imposed by these laws affects the personal capacity of women to challenge sexist social norms not only at the highest levels but also in their closest environments (Hernández, 2022: 101). Both Nyanzi and Bagaine were rebelling against the status quo, not merely for dismantling but also for rebuilding. Nyanzi as philosophical activist, also engages in conceptual and theoretical deconstruction and reconstruction of the status quo. Thus her activism dismantles and rebuilds, while her philosophy deconstructs and reconstructs.

Incorporation

Both the philosophers that I engage claim that exceptional individuals have the capacity, ability and intellectual acuity to experiment, research and cultivate new knowledge that inspires communal development and progress. The third instalment of Nietzsche’s trilogy, *The Gay Science* (1974), speaks of an alternative means of knowledge generation through the adoption of scientific enquiry and experimentation as a way of life, rather than continuing to accept perpetuated error without question. The free spirit is tasked with incorporating the newfound knowledge that issues from their experiments and filtering it into society until it becomes instinctive for all (Nietzsche, 1974:85). In this way, the free spirit is the pioneer of a new age of thought. The ultimate goal of free spirits is that:

“We... want to become those we are – human beings who are new, unique, incomparable, who give themselves laws, who create themselves. To that end we must become the best learners and discoverers of everything that is lawful and necessary in the world: we must become physicists

in order to become creators in this sense – while hitherto all valuations and ideals have been based on ignorance of physics or were constructed so as to contradict it” (Nietzsche, 1974:266).

In this passage Nietzsche is outlining the entire progression of emancipation, re-evaluation and incorporation that informs my case study. He affirms that this process is meant to facilitate the exercise of free will. Nietzsche’s free spirit becomes who they are when they possess the underlying value of autonomy because exceptional individuals give themselves laws and create themselves. This value of autonomy has already been discussed in the section on emancipation, based on Gyekye’s definition of the attributes of the self-assertive person. Ann Mullin (2000:393-394), adds that a free spirit has the talent or capacity to assimilate the old with the new; to simplify the complex in order to enhance growth and power; to know what to digest and to not digest. This aligns with Gyekye’s explanation of how synthesis between the old and new occurs during the re-evaluation stage.

Gyekye’s self-assertive individual is also a bearer of new knowledge, laws and values that arise from their pursuit of progress and advancement within the context of African communitarianism. They have the innate ability to align individual and community responsibilities in a way that fosters the common good. Their autonomy affords them the latitude to attend to their personal and individual needs, as well as to make independent evaluations and choices (Gyekye, 2002:306). Such individual responsibility demands that, through self-attention, they exert themselves and strive “to attain some appropriate status socially, economically, intellectually, and so on” (Gyekye, 2002:311-312). It is their duty to develop their natural abilities in order to attain their goals, and to become influential so that their quest makes an impact. If we suggest that the third stage of the change agent’s quest is incorporating newfound knowledge from experimentation, assimilating the old with the new, and attaining some appropriate social and intellectual status to disseminate the knowledge, let’s consider how Nyanzi has achieved this. She describes herself as a knowledge

producer, bearing “three identities: academic, poet and activist” (Akbaş & Seeland, 2023:80). In social media parlance, one could also add that she is a social media content creator and digital media activist.

As an academic, the topics and themes of her academic output of books, articles, research and public intellectual commentary exhibit what many conservative African leaders and community members would consider to be “immoral.” In this respect, Nietzsche (1995:10) reassures us that: “The free human being is immoral because in all things [she] is determined to depend upon [herself] and not upon a tradition.” Examples of Nyanzi’s free spirit in this respect are her writings (some in collaboration with other scholars) about contentious topics such as state-sponsored homophobia (2015), queer pride and protest (2014), elderly widows’ sexuality (2011), male promiscuity (2009), the dangers of African ritual sex (2008), the respectability and personhood of women in the context of HIV/AIDS politics (2007), widow inheritance (2006), abortion (2005), the transactional sexual practices of Gambian “beach boys” (2005), market women (2005) and sexual relationships among school pupils (2001) among many related topics. She provides rigorous scientific and empirical evidence for her claims and arguments, which at times is unpalatable in the African cultural context. Gyekye raises the concern that Africans hold various misconceptions about science and its utility. His greater concern is that Africa will continue to lag behind the global community and have its material growth stunted if it does not “engage in sustained investigations and to provide intelligible scientific explanations or analyses of their own observations and experiences” (Gyekye, 1997:244).

Nyanzi the poet is a revelation! Not only is her radical thinking conveyed through her scholarship; she is also an advocate for freedom of speech and expression, which she practices through the resistance strategy of “radical rudeness,” that aims to disrupt conservative norms (Makoni, 2021). Her poems and social media posts are the sites for much of her radical rudeness. Her poetry and other writings were smuggled out of prison by among others, the Ubuntu Reading Group and so

her story was shared and disseminated in real time (Rodriguez, 2022). Nyanzi is situated among other notable authors who were imprisoned for their dissent, such as Italian philosopher Antonio Gramsci (1947) and North American radical philosopher George Jackson (1970). They are part of “a long lineage of writers that have challenged dominant regimes and articulated the necessity of otherwise possible worlds” and who “articulate the zeitgeist of socio-political movements by locating additional battlegrounds for organizing” (Janak, 2021: 7).

After her release, in September 2022, she embarked on a book tour in Kenya after her prolific output of three poetry books in three consecutive years – *No Roses From My Mouth* (2020), which was written while she was in prison; *Don't Come in My Mouth: Poems That Rattled Uganda* (2021); and *Eulogies of My Mouth Poems For A Poisoned Uganda* (2022). Webber *et al.* (2021: 427) argue that satirical critique, such as that employed by Nyanzi, particularly in her poetry, needs to be intelligible for it to be politically efficacious and its intelligibility depends on the stylistic form of its presentation. The self-assertive change agent is usually articulate and demonstrates an ability to eloquently convey their thoughts in a way that engenders action.

In her third identity as an activist, Nyanzi has garnered both notoriety and acclaim. At times activism and protest may have unintended consequences such as civil unrest or carnage. On the other hand, knowledge produced in the intellectual or academic domains may be misunderstood, or make no impression at all. Moreover, Nyanzi's defiant disrobing protest was dismissed by many traditionalists and conservatives as a clear display of moral decay. So, if one views her conduct through a conservative African lens, it could be argued that her questioning and evaluation of the culture, tradition, customs and norms may fail the test of intelligibility. Conversely, from among the global community that understands the theory and praxis captured in her academic output, her poetry and her radical rudeness device, she has received tremendous support for her brave defiance of authoritarianism, patriarchy, sexism and homophobia.

The extension of her activism to digital platforms is often cited as an example of the new era of digital humanists, and according to Ross (2021), Nyanzi's story, which I refer to as her quest, serves two purposes. Firstly, she stands in the present that needs reshaping, while reconsidering old genealogies and imagining new futures, by entertaining the counter narratives of the most oppressed (Ross, 2021:486). This idea echoes my earlier discussions of the counter publics mentioned by Gqola, which are constructed and established by feminist theorists. This also speaks to the stage of re-evaluation where the activist-philosopher has the dual task of dismantling and rebuilding, deconstructing and reconstructing. Secondly, one encounters the shadow of this endeavour, where digital activity can be surveilled, and digital tools can be used to silence dissidents and consequently, activists can be harmed (Ross, 2021:486).

Unlike Nietzsche's lone and atomic free spirit, Nyanzi emulates the more socially connected self-assertive change agent of Gyekye's community. She is an example of relational autonomy. She recognises that this quest cannot be borne by any single individual, and so Nyanzi continually prompts future research and activism, asking two questions: "how can knowledge producers deal with such challenges, and how can queer knowledge contribute to society as a whole?" (Akbaş & Seeland, 2023:80). Nyanzi is grappling with these questions and more and her book chapter "Queering Queer Africa" (2014) proposes a new paradigm of African queerness by offering an alternative framework for understanding gendered subjectivities, in the context of the breadth and interconnectedness of people's lives. In this respect, she asserts:

"[The] canvas of possibilities demanding queer production of knowledge from Africa includes relationships, pleasure, intimacy, parenthood, education, voice and expression, representation and visibility, housing and shelter, movement, migration, exile and asylum, employment, income generation, livelihoods, family, ritual, health, spirituality, religion, faith, violence, security and safety,

nationalism, ethnicity, and globalization” (Nyanzi, 2014: 63).

Heeding Nyanzi’s call for queer knowledge production, Spronk and Nyeck (2021:389) determine to “calibrate the study of gender and sexuality as part and parcel of people’s everyday lives rather than following the grid of a global LGBT+ discourse” that attributes intrinsic psychic traits to people. Oudenhuisen (2021) concurs and adds that because desires are multiple and include family bonds, queering should extend beyond the domain of sexuality. This approach makes a clear connection between theory and praxis by “studying sexuality as it emerges from people’s daily vagaries and fortunes” and formulating theoretical repertoires that incorporate incompleteness, sociality and relatedness (Spronk & Nyeck, 2021: 389). The new knowledge that Nyanzi is contributing and incorporating to this discourse is the notion that same-sex and cross-sex lives are intimately connected and so, sexuality does not necessarily form one’s core identity, to the exclusion of all other human attributes and experiences. The scope of her contributions touch on numerous, multidimensional and crucial aspects society, as her oeuvre of her thought, speech, and actions demonstrates.

Conclusion

This chapter was aimed at theorizing the activities of change agents who are crucial to the development, progress and overall advancement of humankind, within their respective socio-cultural and socio-political contexts. The description of two kinds of exceptional individuals – Kwame Gyekye’s self-assertive person and Nietzsche’s free spirit – who play this catalytic role, demonstrates that even though they come from different contexts (African and Western, respectively), their attributes and quests show remarkable similarities. This comparative analysis offered the building blocks for a framework that was used to conduct a case study of Dr. Stella Nyanzi, a change agent and an example of both Gyekye’s and Nietzsche’s exceptional person.

The dominant *attributes* of the change agent are outlined by Gyekye’s as self-assertiveness, autonomy and self-

determination, which collectively characterize the self-assertive person. Nietzsche's offers a three-stage *process* of emancipation, re-evaluation and incorporation, which captures the activities or process of the change agent. Both the attributes and the process combine to theorize the quest of the agent of change. Each of the three subsections initially outlined Gyekye's and Nietzsche's conceptual frameworks, and then engaged feminist literature about and by Nyanzi to elaborate on the attributes and process of the change agent.

The intersection of the two philosopher's conceptions of extraordinary individuals provides us with the concept of the "self-assertive-free-spirit." The concept can be consolidated into the title or mantle of an "activist-philosopher," which captures the change agent's intellectual and philosophical reflection (theory), that is directed towards political and social activism (praxis). Regarding the profile of the activist-philosopher, they are inherently rebellious in thought and practice as they revolt against the status quo to establish counter publics, which advance counter-narratives. By definition, their philosopher title means that they have the capacity to make original contributions to the interdisciplinary, transdisciplinary, and multidisciplinary the world of ideas, even if they are not formally trained in philosophy. They pair rioting (activism) and writing (theorising) to reconfigure, rescript and revolutionize their societies.

This framework contributes to feminist meditations on women's political leadership in Africa by demonstrating the dual tasks of dismantling and building, deconstruction and reconstruction, in thought leadership and activism. Women and feminist political leaders enter the political arena whether through direct, participatory or representative democracy and are usually confronted with the status quo that is inherently patriarchal, paternalistic and sexist, and in need of re-evaluation. In contradistinction to Nyanzi, some women ally themselves with patriarchy and male leaders for various kinds of benefit, such as Museveni's wife and Seninde, when they denounced the #Pads4GirlsUg campaign. This dynamic was highlighted by Ramphele, one of the women leaders of the Black

Consciousness Movement, as well as Gqola, when she speaks of the self-sabotaging “cult of femininity” phenomenon. As such, even if women political leaders may enjoy some autonomy and self-determination, this relative freedom could still be within certain parameters and limitations, imposed or chosen.

The first stage of the quest undertaken by the self-assertive-free-spirit agent of change is emancipation from the culture. Gyekye defines the emancipated self-assertive person as autonomous and self-determining, and highlights that it is only some members of the community who have the combination of these attributes. Nietzsche states that a free spirit is a free thinker, who thinks differently to their origins, surroundings and prevailing contemporary views. They both have the attribute of autonomy, however the free spirit has a more atomistic approach, while the self-assertive person practices relational autonomy. Like Nyanzi, women’s and feminist leadership in Africa rests on an underlying communal ethos, which embraces both the communalistic and individualistic characteristic of the person, as highlighted by Gyekye. However, one of the dangers of subversion against the government is state retaliation as experienced by Nyanzi through intimidation, harassment, imprisonment and death threats. As a result, despite her loyalty to her community she had to go into exile.

The second stage of the quest of the self-assertive-free-spirit is their re-evaluation of the culture. They grapple with traditions, customs, morality, and norms. According to Gyekye, they evaluate inelegant, undignified, or unenlightened cultural values, and Nietzsche claims that they can recognize the increased stupidity that is often required for cultural conformity and stability. They question the legitimacy of practices that are adhered to because they are enduring, not because they are useful. They interrogate irrational obedience to higher authority. Nyanzi’s confrontations with Museveni and Ugandan political leadership are an apt example of a free-thinking, free-speaking, free spirit. As an activist-philosopher, re-evaluation is part of the academic, research, scholarship and knowledge generation enterprise. The challenge encountered with the re-evaluation process is determining what needs to be revised, retained or

rejected. Nyanzi highlights vulnerabilities, discriminations, and oppressions suffered by sections of the society who are marginalized or non-conformist. In response she speaks truth to power, in support of various social justice causes.

The third and final stage of the self-assertive-free-spirit's quest is to *incorporate* what they have discovered or formulated from their evaluative activities. An appropriate way to explain this stage of the change agent's journey is with reference to Nietzsche's assertion that the free spirit becomes who they are – new, unique and incomparable. This speaks to an authenticity that is cultivated from *emancipation*. This authenticity is about individual transformation, which is foundational to becoming a student of the world, a discover of what the world needs, and an advocate of what the world should become – which speaks to the stage of *re-evaluation*. Finally, one carries the mantle of a physicist and creator who is adept at constructing a new society based on new valuations and ideals – which is the *incorporation* function. The case study of Dr. Stella Nyanzi the academic, poet and activist captures this three-stage quest, where she courageously defies authoritarianism, patriarchy, sexism and homophobia; while maintaining a connection between theory and praxis, as she formulates new theoretical repertoires that reflect lived experience.

Overall, this chapter supplements the usual historical documentation of the catalytic role that some individuals play in the evolution of their societies, by offering a theoretical understanding of certain common attributes and activities of these exceptional individuals. The chapter also demonstrated that exceptional individuals are not merely fictional ideal types and so, African women leaders and feminists can be catalysts and change agents in their societies if they are self-assertive, autonomous, self-determining and embark on the quest of emancipation, re-evaluation and incorporation. The “self-assertive-free spirit” profile developed by referencing Nyanzi as a case study, could be true of many other agents of change, in various societal contexts. A “self-assertive-free-spirit” is an ideal candidate for feminist political leadership in Africa.

References

- April T. 2012. Theorising women: The intellectual contributions of Charlotte Maxeke to the struggle for liberation in South Africa. PHD Thesis. Cape Town: University of the Western Cape.
- Akbaş D & Seeland P. 2024. Bridging a gap: Global knowledge production and its disconnectivity. *Static*, 3(1):79–85.
- Beauvoir de S. 2009. *The Second Sex*. HM Parshley (transl). New York: Vintage Books.
- Byarugaba M. 2024. Help, the women are naked: Bodies, power & resistance in 'post-colonial' Uganda. *Journal of Gender, Culture and Society*, 4(2):77–82. <https://doi.org/10.32996/jgcs.2024.4.2.8>
- Davies L. 27 January 2022. I'm free at last: Uganda's rudest poet on prison, protest and finding a new voice in Germany. *The Guardian*.
- Dlakavu S, Ndelu S & Matandela M. 2017. Writing and rioting: Black womxn in the time of Fallism. *Agenda*, 31(3–4):105–109. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10130950.2017.1392163>
- Franco P. 2011. Nietzsche's enlightenment: the free-spirit trilogy of the middle period. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. <https://doi.org/10.7208/chicago/9780226259840.001.0001>
- Gordon LR. 2006. *Disciplinary decadence: Living thought in trying times*. Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers.
- Gqola PD. 2001. Contradictory locations: Black women and the discourse of the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) in South Africa. *Meridians*, 2(1):130–152. <https://doi.org/10.1215/15366936-2.1.130>
- Gqola PD. 2007. How the 'cult of femininity' and violent masculinities support endemic gender-based violence in contemporary South Africa. *African Identities*, 5(1):111–124. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14725840701253894>
- Gqola PD. 2015. *Rape: A South African nightmare*. Johannesburg: MF Books.
- Gqola PD. 2021. *Female fear factory: Gender and patriarchy under racial capitalism*. La Verge: Melinda Ferguson Books.
- Gyekye K. 1997. *Tradition and modernity: Philosophical reflections on the African experience*. New York: Oxford University Press.

- Gyekye K. 2002. Person and community in African thought. In: PH Coetzee & A.P.J. Roux (eds) *Philosophy from Africa: A text with readings*, edited. 2nd Edition. New York: Routledge. 297-312.
- Hernández AR. 2022. The politics of sisterhood: A feminist approach to agency and youth in processes of social change in urban Uganda. In: Pablo Arconada Ledesma et. al. (Eds). *Nuevas Aproximaciones a las Realidades Africanas y sus Diásporas*. Ediciones Universidad de Valladolid.
- Hirschmann N. 2006. Towards a feminist theory of freedom. In: David Miller (Ed). *The Liberty Reader*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Kahyana SD. 2024. Rudeness/incivility as political strategy: The poetics and politics of Stella Nyanzi's Facebook work. In: Katherine Bruce-Lockhart, Jonathon L. Earle, Nakanyike B. Musisi & Edgar C. Taylor (eds). *Decolonising state and society in Uganda: The politics of knowledge and public life*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kangere M, Kemitare J & Michau L. 2017. Hashtag activism: Popularizing feminist analysis of violence against women in the Horn, East and Southern Africa, *Feminist Media Studies*, 17(5):1-4. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2017.1350526>
- Kariuki E, Kratou H & Laakso L. 2022. Attacks on scholars a threat to democracy in Africa: The link between decreased academic freedom and the stagnation of democracy. *NAI Policy Notes*. 4(1-8).
- Janak J. 2021. Cultivating solidarity from the inside out: Abolitionist efforts to trans-gress the Prison Walls. *Behemoth: A Journal on Civilisation*, 14(3):6-13.
- Jassey K & Nyanzi S. 2007. How to be a 'proper' woman in the time of AIDS. *Nordiska Afrikainstitutet*.
- Macharia K. 2016. On being area-studied: A litany of complaint. *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 22(2):83-190. <https://doi.org/10.1215/10642684-3428711>
- Makoni B. 2021. A pair of buttocks' that everybody hates: Radical rudeness as a resistance strategy. *Gender & Language*, 15(4):549-558. <https://doi.org/10.1558/genl.21522>

Gender and Feminist Meditations

- Marais K. 2019. Calls for pleasure: How African feminists are challenging and unsilencing women's sexualities, *Agenda*, 33(3):1-9. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10130950.2019.1644960>
- Menkiti I. 1984. Person and community in African traditional thought. In: R. Wright (ed). *African Philosophy: An Introduction*. Lanham: University Press of America. 171-181.
- More MP. 2017. *Steve Biko: Philosophy, identity and liberation*. Cape Town: HSRC Press.
- Mullin A. 2000. Nietzsche's free spirit. *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 38(3):383-405. <https://doi.org/10.1353/hph.2005.0059>
- Mutsvairo B, Ragnedda M & Orgeret KS. 2021. Era or error of transformation? Assessing afrocentric attributes to digitalization. *Information, Communication & Society*, 24(3):295-308. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2020.1863445>
- Nietzsche F. 1909. *Human, all too human: A book for free spirits, Part I*. Helen Zimmern (transl). Edinburgh, London: T.N Foulis.
- Nietzsche F. 1974. *The gay science*. Walter Kaufmann (transl). New York: Vintage Books.
- Nietzsche F. 1995. *Daybreak: Thoughts on the prejudices of morality*. Maudemarie Clark and Brian Leiter (eds), R.J Hollingdale (transl). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Nyanzi B, Nyanzi S, Wolff B & Whitworth J. 2005. Money, men and markets: Economic and sexual empowerment of market women in southwestern Uganda. *Culture, Health & Sexuality*, 7(1):13-26. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13691050410001731099>
- Nyanzi S. 2001. The negotiation of sexual relationships among school pupils in south-western Uganda. *AIDS Care*, 13(1):83-98. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09540120020018206>
- Nyanzi S, Nyanzi B & Bessie K. 2005. "Abortion? That's for women!" Narratives and experiences of commercial motorbike riders in south-western Uganda. *African Journal of Reproductive Health*, 4(1):142-161. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3583169>

- Nyanzi S, Rosenberg-Jallow O, Bah O & Nyanzi S. 2005. Bumsters, big black organs and old white gold: Embodied racial myths in sexual relationships of Gambian beach boys. *Culture, Health & Sexuality*, 7(6):557-569. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13691050500245687>
- Nyanzi S, Emodu-Walakira M & Serwaniko W. 2006. The widow, the will, and widow-inheritance in Kampala: Revisiting victimization arguments. *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, 43(1):12-33. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00083968.2010.9707581>
- Nyanzi S, Nassimbwa J, Kayizzi V & Kabanda S. 2008. 'African sex is dangerous!' Renegotiating 'ritual sex' in contemporary Masaka District. *Africa*, 78(4):518-539. <https://doi.org/10.3366/E0001972008000429>
- Nyanzi S, Nyanzi-Wakholi B & Kalina B. 2009. Male promiscuity: the negotiation of masculinities by motorbike taxi-riders in Masaka, Uganda. *Men and Masculinities*, 12(1):73-89. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1097184X07309503>
- Nyanzi S. 2011. Ambivalence surrounding elderly widows' sexuality in urban Uganda. *Ageing International*, 36(3):378-400. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12126-011-9115-2>
- Nyanzi S. 2014. Queer pride and protest: A reading of the bodies at Uganda's first Gay Beach Pride. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 40(1):36-40. <https://doi.org/10.1086/676892>
- Nyanzi S, Karamagi A. 2015. The social-political dynamics of the anti-homosexuality legislation in Uganda. *Agenda*, 29(1): 24-38. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10130950.2015.1024917>
- Nyanzi S. 2020. Personal narrative: Bloody precarious activism in Uganda. In: C Bobel, IT Winkler, B Fahs · KA Hasson, EA Kissling & TA Roberts. *The Palgrave Handbook of Critical Menstruation Studies*. 551-560. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-15-0614-7_42
- Oudenhuijsen LW. 2021. Quietly queer(ing): The normative value of sutura and its potential for young women in urban Senegal. *Africa*, 91(3): 434-452. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0001972021000243>
- Oyěwùmí O. 1997. *The invention of women. Making an African sense of western genderdiscourses*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

- Rodriguez SM. 2022. African feminisms for abolitionist futures: Archival hauntings in a speculative geography, *Agenda*, 36(4):29-39. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10130950.2022.2182970>
- Rodriguez SM. 2023. Forging black safety in the carceral diaspora: Perverse criminalization, sexual corrections, and connection-making in a death world. *Social Justice: A Journal of Crime, Conflict & World Order*. 1-21
- Ross N. 2021. Dr. Nyanzi's Protests: Silences, Futures, and the Present. In: D Kim & A Koh (eds). *Alternative Historiographies of the Digital Humanities*. Punctum Books. 483-487. <https://doi.org/10.53288/0274.1.18>
- Sebeelo TB. 2020. Hashtag activism, politics and resistance in Africa: Examining #ThisFlag and #RhodesMustFall online movements. *Insight on Africa* 13(1):95-109. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0975087820971514>
- South African History Online. 2020. Stella Nyanzi. Available online from: <https://www.sahistory.org.za/people/stella-nyanzi>
- Spronk R & Nyeck SN. 2021. Frontiers and pioneers in (the study of) queer experiences in Africa Introduction. *Africa*, 91(3):388-97. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0001972021000231>
- Stoljar N. 2024. Feminist Perspectives on Autonomy. In: EN. Zalta & U Nodelman (eds.). *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2024 Edition).
- Tamale S. 2017. Nudity, protest and the law in Uganda. *Feminist Africa*, 22:52-86.



UJ Press

Across Africa, women continue to face structural, cultural, and political barriers that limit their participation in governance. This volume, financially supported by Akina Mama Wa Afrika, brings together scholars and activists to explore the diverse ways women are challenging these constraints and claiming space in political life. From Nigerian women using social media to amplify their voices, to Zimbabwe's Nambya women dealing with patriarchal cultural practices, the chapters examine both the obstacles and strategies for empowerment. Empirical studies from South Africa, Ghana, and Uganda highlight how rural women, literary interventions, and activist-leaders like Stella Nyanzi are reshaping political participation and challenging entrenched gender norms. Drawing on African feminism, comparative analyses, and real-world case studies, the book offers insights into increasing women's representation in decision-making platforms and national assemblies, advancing gender equality, and fostering inclusive governance. Essential for scholars, policymakers, and advocates, this collection illuminates the pathways toward a more equitable political future in Africa.

Dr Dikeledi A. Mokoena is a South African academic and lecturer at the University of Johannesburg's Department of Anthropology and Development Studies. Her research focuses on Gender, Politics of Development and Feminist Political Economy, which explores the intersection of gender and economics in African contexts. Dr Mokoena is a former youth leader of a pan-Africanist movement and has served in various leadership portfolios. Dr Mokoena has a colourful history in political activism & remains an activist scholar. Her work is centred around promoting pan-African unity, collective leadership, and African feminist principles for a more just and equal world.

Sharon A. Omotoso is an Associate Researcher at the Institute for the Future of Knowledge, University of Johannesburg. She is also Associate Professor (Gender and Media Studies) at the Institute of African Studies, University of Ibadan where she heads the Women's Research and Documentation Centre (WORDOC). Her works integrate the transdisciplinary fields of Applied Ethics, Media/Information Literacy, Gender Studies, Higher education leadership, African Politics and African Philosophy. On these, she serves on editorial boards of scholarly journals and consults for international agencies. As an Alexandra von Humboldt fellow, her strength lies in developing innovative concepts that contribute to debates in scholarship, activism, and policy engagements.

