



# Prelude

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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

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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

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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

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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.

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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 unmasks 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 5<sup>th</sup> 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.

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