Feminisms, WPS Agenda and Women's Peacebuilding and Peacemaking Networks in Africa: Solution or Quandary?

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ABSTRACT: The concept and practice of feminism continues to raise multiple contestations on the African continent, despite the varied contributions that feminists and gender advocates have made on the social, economic and political spheres. Feminism and gender continue to be perceived with suspicion, and as foreign importations that destabilise rather than edify the African governance, peace and security discourse. Through a desk review of existing literature, this chapter provided a qualitative exploration of the contested relationship between feminism and the existing patriarchal modes of governance in Africa, what this means for the future of feminism and the WPS agenda, as well as for the future of the governance, peace and security agenda in Africa. Strategically juxtaposing the gains that feminism has brought on the African landscape against the persistent exclusion of women from the key governance and political processes on the continent, the chapter made a case for the multifarious yet imperative role that African women have played to non-violently challenged patriarchal political models and set the standard for possible egalitarian political relations, further highlighting the major barriers to the women's empowerment agenda that are causing the fissures through which the said gains are getting lost. The chapter concluded that despite its achievements and impact socially, economically and politically, the existing contestations in the understanding of feminism and its related theories nd practices is a huge fissure that threatens its future existence on the continent. The analysis further shed hope on the possibility of reconciling this stated contestation by proffering recommendations that African feminists can adopt to continuously refine their strategies to impact on the currently prevailing patriarchal modes of governance, peace and security in order to perpetuate the seemingly lost gains of Beijing.

KEYWORDS: Feminisms, gender, WPS, women mediator networks, governance.

INTRODUCTION

The year 2022 marks 27 years since the Beijing Conference, a women's rights conference held in China in 1995 that catalysed the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the most advanced blue print for catalysing women's rights (United Nations, 1996). Further gender highlights for year 2022 include Mozambique's attainment of gender parity in cabinet (AIM, 2022), becoming the third African country to score on the African Union's (AU) 50-50 gender parity mark after Rwanda and Guinea Bissau. Close to two decades after adoption of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR1325) on women peace and security (WPS) which buttresses the importance of women's active participation in peace processes, women are still largely excluded from governance, peacebuilding and peacemaking processes. From 1992 to 2011, women globally constituted only 2 percent of mediators, 8 percent of negotiators and 5 percent of witnesses and signatories in all major peace processes (Ani, 2018). Out of the 16 peace agreements signed in Africa between 1992 and 2011, only two included women signatories and only three included women as lead mediators (Hamilton, 2020). Likewise, out of the 9 Special Representatives and 11 Special Envoys, Africa has only one female Special Envoy, Madame Bineta Diop (Hamilton, 2020).

Feminist oriented research continues to prove that peace settlements become more practical and effective when women are part of the mediation processes (Ngwazi, 2013). Despite this proven evidence, uptake of female delegates to the peace tables remains low to none (Ngwazi, 2013). The recent Mali mediation process held in March 2022, pursuant of persuading the military to cede power to civilians, showcased Goodluck Jonathan former President of Nigeria, assisted by the AU High Representative for Mali and the Sahel Maman Sambo Sidikou and the UN Secretary General's Special Representative and Head of the United Nations Multi-dimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) El Ghassim Wane. On the Mali side, all members of the Transitional Operative who sat at the negotiation table were likewise male. Men continue to hold strategic meditation roles in the presence of skilled and knowledgeable female mediators and peace and security experts like the Deputy President of the Economic Commission for West African States (ECOWAS) Commission Madam Finda Koroma and the AU Chairperson's Special Envoy on WPS Madame Benita Diop. The irony behind all these gender dynamics is that the ECOWAS region is leading on the continental level, regarding domestication of the WPS agenda. 13 out of 15 member states have adopted National Action Plans (NAPs) on

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UNSCR1325. The region also has a Regional Action Plan (RAP) (2017-2020) which is currently being evaluated for up scaling to third generation (Bangura, 2020). ECOWAS also developed a Plan of Action (2018-2020) on the WPS component of the ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework, which was evaluated in 2021 to inform the development of the next plan of action (Bangura, 2020).

This discrepancy between policy and practice in the ECOWAS is a microcosm of the discrepancy between policy and practice continentally, as well as evidence of a sheer lack of political willingness to fulfill promises on gender considerations by the current African leaders. Is feminism a solution to the current patriarchal conundrum in the area of peace and governance on the continent or is it a foreign imposed agenda set to further destabilise gender relations? What then is the future of feminism, gender equality and the WPS agenda in Africa against this politically laden dichotomy and why is there so much resistance against gender equality? What has been the impact if the women's rights movement since Beijing and how sustainable have the gains been? Twenty plus years post Beijing, can women watch the feminist gains getting eroded again? This chapter attempts to answer these principal questions through a qualitative exploration of the contested relationship between feminism and the existing patriarchal modes of governance in Africa, what this means for the future of feminism and the WPS agenda, as well as for the future of the governance, peace and security agenda in Africa. Through a strategic juxtaposition of the gains that feminism has brought on the African landscape against the persistent exclusion of women from the key governance and political processes on the continent, the chapter makes a case for the multifarious yet imperative role that African women have played to non-violently challenged patriarchal political models and set the standard for possible egalitarian political relations, further highlighting the major barriers to the women's empowerment agenda that are causing the fissures through which the said gains are getting lost. The chapter further sheds hope on the possibility of reconciling this stated contestation by looking at ways through which African feminists can continuously refine their strategies to impact on the currently prevailing patriarchal modes of governance, peace and security in order to perpetuate the seemingly lost gains of Beijing.

This analysis contributes to the generation of gender sensitive knowledge on both the theory and practice of WPS for democracy and sustainable development to be attained, in a continent where conflicts impact differently on women and men, boys and girls. The chapter is divided into five sections. After the introduction, the second section provides a crisp outline of nexus between feminism, gender, the WPS agenda and the women mediator networks in Africa. This outline contextualises the need for a liberatory focus to feminist and gender theorising as a democracy and development pre-requisite on this continent. The third section tracks the impact of feminism in Africa. Measuring the gains of feminism is important in formulating a rationale for the political value of feminism on a continent that is divided on the issue. In the fourth section, arguments that while the achievements of feminism on the African social, economic and political landscape are too obvious to write off, what is missing is the evidence to showcase how the said gains are contributing towards attainment of the much desired 50/50 benchmark towards Agenda 2063. What rather exists is a back and forth meandering pattern that sadly showcases more losses than gains on the practical implementation of the gender and women's rights issues since Beijing. Juxtaposing the gains of gender activism against the losses in a fast revolving and globalised world may help provide some useful insights not only for African feminists but also for policy makers in Africa and beyond to understand what the postcolonial problematic regarding gender and women's rights is. The final section brainstorms the challenges and limitations for African feminists to engage with a resistant and patriarchal post-colonial elite leadership without a clear cut, fit for purpose, timely and constantly revised modus operandi to arrest such resistances, further proffering recommendations for the need to rebrand and repackage the feminist and gender equality agenda as a weapon for countering the existing patriarchal hegemony. The term radical feminism in the old sense of the feminist agenda refers to body politics and sexual orientations, somewhat hot and contested topic in Africa. This chapter coins an alternative form of radicalism that African feminists, without being apologetic, need to engage with in order to save the feminist and gender equality movement from backlash and extinction, and this entails the need for African women to rebrand, repackage, research, document and reposition themselves more strategically to ensure buy-in from the resistant quarters of society.

Definitions and nexus between feminism, gender, WPS and women mediator networks

Put simply, feminism is a theoretical recognition and critique of patriarchy combined with practical efforts that seek to transform the status quo for egalitarian societies. Social scientists argue that theory is a practice infused with power relations that centre on – different variables such as race, gender, class, ability, age and sexual orientation (Macleod, 2006). The relationship between theory and practice is not free from historical, political and material conditions of a given people or society. As such, tracking the development of the feminist discourse in Africa reveals two waves of irrationality with regards to an understanding of the position and role of African women in as development agents since primordial Africa. The first wave is the irrationality of foregoing Euro-Centric scholars who devalued the roles of African women in society based on both patriarchal and racial grounds. These scholars informed a discursive and hegemonic narrative that feminism was born in the West and brought to Africa to liberate African women from oppression. The second wave is that of some modern African scholars who despite the current developments in the women's rights movements, still refute the existence of a feminist philosophy, branding feminist epistemology a foreign import with no relevance except to cause disruption of relations to the African people (Oyowe & Yurkivska, 2014). As a result, African feminist epistemology, an ideology that enhances the struggle for the rights of African women is often excluded from intellectual discourse,

often labeled as a re-colonising pursuit that is alien to Africa, a curse word and an outright negation of Africaness (Eze, 1997). A further embedded challenge for the feminist movement in Africa, what this analysis terms an internal challenge, is the contestation between what feminism sets out to achieve and what different groups of women understand it to be. This contestation is two-pronged. The first prong relates to the Western feminists' perceptions of an African feminist worldview, while the second one is the tragedy of perception between African feminists and Africans who are anti-feminism. Agreeably, there is an extent to which African feminists who lived in the diaspora during the rise of feminism in the 19th century strategically appropriated and adapted some feminist ideas and practices generated in the West, feminist acts predate colonialism, although they were not named as such. Women had key roles to play in society as negotiators, peacebuilders, warriors and spiritualists ((Amadiume, 1987). The naming of women's mobilising acts as "women's movements" and "feminisms" have their roots in the rise of the national liberation struggles to the post-independence era, becoming more pronounced during the first and second UN decades (Guy-Sheftall).

The ideological challenge and contestation of values between Western and African feminists are also of political worth in this analysis. These differences account for the rise of the debate on the different strands of feminisms in Africa and an appreciation that women are not a homogenous entity but subjectivities whose life trajectories, needs, identities and beliefs are shaped by the different historical and material contexts in which they exist. As such, Africa modern scholarships refers to the existence of African feminisms as opposed to a single feminism, as well as to an acknowledged reality that feminist theory and practice have to engage with the politics of alliance along the continuum of intersectionality, as opposed to a practice around a shared unitary gender identity and shared social relations (Lewis, 2001; Matter, 2002; Guy-Sheftall). The need to distinguish between Western feminism and African feminisms gained ground in tandem with the rise of pan-Africanism, marked by movements such as negritude and nationalism to mention a few.

In all contexts, feminism is deeply political, and the process of naming it is political too, because of the alternative ideological position that it presents to the mainstream ideologies. This is because feminism by nature seeks to confront the authority of the philosophy, institutions and processes that facilitate the subjugation of women. Feminism further questions power hierarchies, positioning itself as a struggle between the powerful and the less powerful. In this manner, feminism ceases to be just a battle of sexes, but a battle of social, economic, environmental and political processes from the micro to the macro levels. The manner in which power hierarchies are ordered by patriarchal standards always advantage the more powerful at the expense of the less powerful. As such, in many patriarchal societies, and worse so in Africa, where patriarchal dynamics were aggravated by the principles of colonisation whose tenets of male bias favoured African men against African women, those in positions of power have imbibed the creed of oppression of the marginalised in line with the political economy of colonial patriarchy, often manifesting as a combative and controlling masculinity even in times of peace (Cockburn & Enloe, 2012). Cockburn and Enloe (2012) further remark that while a combative and controlling masculinity is necessary to war and conflict, male dominance and the culture of hegemonic masculinities give rise to war thoughts and habits. As a result, conflict and violence are experienced in gendered ways, as reflected in the masculine nature of the state itself, such that any action that is state-centric supports patriarchy (Boehmer, 1996). Taking the modern Nigerian family as a microcosm of Africa, (Nzegwu, 2006) argues that under contemporary globalisation, the international community has sought to compartmentalize and homogenise the universe under one value scheme. Feminism thus gains value not only as an entity in the women's movement but as an ideological entity in the African philosophical body politic, because it questions not only the domination of women by men, but also the domination of the rich over the poor, the domination of the elite over the masses nd the domination of the Global South by the West. For African feminists, feminism is a highly political decolonial tool for interrogating the hegemony of the West over the Global South on all fronts of human existence, questioning both the racial and capitalist tendencies of the West. The dividing line between Western and African feminisms thus summarises the argument that feminism is not a monolithic movement, but a movement of multiple and varied identities (Atanga, 2013).

The nexus between feminism and gender is clear, in the sense that feminism carries a gender equality agenda, and is a movement established to deliberately fight gender oppression caused by male privilege. Gender to be precise is a societal paradigm as opposed to sex which is genetic, and gender relations are ordered in terms of existing patterns of power and primacy that structure life chances of men and women. Thus based on the pre-conceived power norms, society enforces diverse social roles premised on sex differences, in turn informing relations of male control and female subservience. This status quo legitimizes the seemingly natural demotion of women from leadership and decision-making processes and frameworks, as supremacy of the male sex thus becomes a political strategy for maintaining existing power relations which subordinate women. Women's subordinate positions hinder them from accessing basic resources that enable their full and equal participation in politics. The obvious link between feminism and gender is that feminism aims to subvert patriarchy to enable equality between women and men.

 Feminist analysis has made an effort to employ feminist praxis as a framework of analysis for peace and security issues to show how gender affects peace processes (Hudson, 2016), and how gender can be theorised and understood in the context of everyday reality and community organisation in the African governance, peace and security arena (Ekiyor & Wanyeki, n/d). Unless gender relations from the domestic sphere to the public sphere are rectified from the micro to the macro levels, decision making on

governance, peace and security will continue to be a one size fits all arrangement which defeats the cause for gender equality on the African continent.

Establishing the link between the WPS agenda as a theory of change towards democracy and gender and feminist analysis as theories of change towards the inclusion of women as equal participants in building democratic states is imperative. In modern development discourse, democracy is incomplete without the achievement of sustainable development. One of the central tenets of SGDs is gender equality, and in essence, there cannot be any sustainable development and democracy without the attainment of gender equality and inclusive representation of people of both genders on all fronts and spheres of life (IDEA, 2013). This principle brings out the link between the theory of transitology, which is a study of change processes towards democracy, and feminist epistemology, which seeks to examine social, political and ethical aspects of knowing, using a wide range of approaches, including the political and ethical dimensions of knowing. In line with this agenda of gender equality in peace and governance processes, the UNSCR1325 and its subsequent 10 resolutions on women peace and security unanimously call for the elimination of violence in all peace and security processes as well as the inclusion of women in decision-making processes for peacebuilding. From a feminist perspective, any development policies and practices that exclude women and girls are devoid of a human rights perspective since women and girls constitute more than half of the globe's population. At the normative level, the framework of feminist epistemology summarises the goal of the Beijing Platform for Action (1995). It focuses on the attainment of gender equality in all theoretical and practical processes of existence. This is in line with the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), adopted in 1979 by the UN General Assembly, also known as an international bill of rights for women, and consisting of 30 articles which elucidate what constitutes discrimination against women and girls, further setting up an agenda for national action to end such discrimination (United Nations., Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs & United Nations, 1985). Furthermore, UNSCR1325 recognises that peace and security efforts are more sustainable when women participate in conflict prevention, mitigation, and delivery of relief and recovery measures. Most importantly, the WPS agenda essentially recognizes that gender equality is also a security issue much as it is a social justice issue (Johnson-Freese, 2020).

Tracking the achievements of feminism in Africa

In Africa, the Charter of Feminist Principles for African Feminists (98. The Charter of Feminist Principles for frican Feminist Forum, 2018), developed by African feminists in Accra in the year 2006, affirmed an African common position on the understanding of the multiple dimensions of African feminisms. This charter provides guidelines on how to strengthen and grow the feminist movement on the continent, guided by the ethos of pan-Africanism. In line with the aspirations of this Charter, there is evidence that concrete feminist struggles have shaped societal visions, leading to developments like the successive growth of scholarship and activism, as well as the enormous claims made in the global discourse on the political, economic and socio-cultural fronts (Ahikire, 2008).

In the 1990s, following the UN Decade and the Nairobi Conference, the women's movements across the African continent registered gains in various fields, including in the areas of governance, health, education, domestic relations, legal and policy reforms for gender and women's rights through the activism of the national gender machineries that were established through women's activism post-independence. In the area of education for example, Mama (2001) notes the rise of women's studies and feminist academies, such as Codesria, the School of Women and Gender Studies established as an academic unit at Makerere University and the African Gender Institute in South Africa to mention a few, accompanied by a growing number of indigenous women scholars getting involved in studies of gender relations. Since then, African feminist scholarship has made important theoretical contributions to the international fields of both feminist studies and African studies, in turn contributing to knowledge production in and on African politics (Mama, 2001). In the African academy and development research processes, the framework of feminist epistemology enables strong political claims for the achievement of sustainable development goals through the generation of relevant knowledge, using gender-balanced methodological conceptions for conflict transformation research and praxis. Suffice to reiterate that the manner knowledge comes into being, determines who benefits from it and who controls it. Once the knowledge on peace and security comes from women more men will gain insights into those democratising debates and practices, and more women will get involved in these processes. Through the work of non-governmental organisations, many people continent wise have been exposed to the agenda to fight for women and girl children's rights, including issues of sexual and reproductive health rights, sexual and gender based violence and related harmful practices. Likewise, superfluously new democratic spaces have been created through the proliferation of promotion of rights of 'civil society organizations' as well as the promotion of participatory governance mechanisms at institutional levels. All these efforts have the potential to democratise other political spaces beyond those of formal politics. Ironically, however, the degree to which transformations in the sex ratio in formal democratic spaces translates into tangible gains in policies that remedy previous gendered differences remain vague (IDEA, 2013).

Globally, UNSCR 1325 has largely impacted the understanding and practice of the security concept, including the inclusion of a gender perspective in military security. In the area of conflict, this Resolution calls on military institutions to effectively address the different needs and challenges regarding the protection of civilians in conflict, preventing and addressing Conflict-Related Sexual

and Gender-Based Violence, as well as creating positive conditions of service for military personnel (UNSCR1325, 2000). Although the implementation progress within militaries has been slow since the promulgation of UNSCR1325, largely stemming from both lack of resources and a lack of organizational commitment - or both globally (Johnson-Freese, 2020), much progress is noted in that 28 countries including Angola, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Cote d'I Voire, Democratic Republic of Congo, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Ivory Coast, Kenya, Liberia, Mali, Mozambique, Namibia, Niger, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, Sierra Leone, South Africa, South Sudan, Sudan, Togo, Tunisia and Uganda have adopted NAPs have publicly launched National Action Plans (NAPs) on the implementation of UNSCR1325 in Africa. NAPs guide the context-specific implementation of the tenets of UNSCR1325 in an inclusive, participatory and gender-sensitive manner. These NAPs have indirectly enhanced the work of the security sector by integrating a gender perspective into the work of the Peacekeeping Operations because some of them cover the role of the armed forces, focusing on three main areas of increasing the representation of women in the armed forces and international missions (Amling & O'Reilly, 2016). This also includes integrating a gender perspective in pre-deployment training and promoting the protection of women's rights in conflict and post-conflict areas. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, for example, implementation of the National Action Plan on women, peace and security has focused on the need for soldiers to have a strong understanding of the provisions in the guidelines and a gender perspective more generally, further stressing the importance of pre-deployment training and interactions with civil society and NGOs in peacekeeping missions (Amling & O'Reilly, 2016).Suffice to mention that the adoption of NAPs does not correspond with their effective implementation, as global support for implementation has lacked active commitment, and less than 25% of the 28 states with formalized NAPs have budgets to implement them.

In Liberia, including women and civil society in peace processes enhanced the resolve for inclusive peace in the fight to transition the country from Charles Taylor's authoritarian rule to peace (Masitoh, 2020). From 1991, the Women in Peacebuilding Network (WIPNET) mobilised women in the early days of Liberia's first civil war, staging peaceful marches and bringing warring parties together for dialogue until Charles Taylor conceded and the Accra peace agreement was signed in 2003. Post the peace agreement WIPNET continued sensitising women and the rest of civil society on how to effectively engage in and monitor the implementation of the peace agreement. Despite the resistance that the women met from the rulers and other policymakers, WIPNET continued to actively engage in physical visits to the disarmament camps to convince fighters to lay down their arms, which catalyzed the disarmament process (Masitoh, 2020). In Mozambique women mobilised in the margins of the 1992 peace processes following their exclusion from the peace table and evidence presents the fact that the peace agreement was reached as a result of women's agency and influence. Likewise, the Gambia dynamic proves that a sheer mobilisation and inclusion of citizens from below enhanced the prospects to overthrow Lieutenant Yahya Jammeh from 22 years of authoritarian rule through a process led electoral process (Hartman, 2017).

In recent years the continent has witnessed the rise of a number of networks that connect efforts for peacebuilding and peacemaking from regional, sub-regional and national levels that work on peacemaking. Some of these networks originated in Africa, while others originated in the West and developed octopus presence in Africa. These networks which include FemWise Africa, Nordic Women Mediators, the Women Mediators across the Commonwealth and the African Women Leaders Network vary in their structure, formality and mandate, but are connected to each other, sometimes harnessing resources, skills and practical efforts for peacebuilding and peacemaking across regions and nations (Waintrub, 2020). The networks which support women efforts in various ways have had their impact felt at three specific levels; including connecting women mediators with resources and opportunities, enhancing the visibility of women mediators and increasing the demand for mediation (Waintrub, 2020). The women's networks also connect their members with opportunities, for example through offering their members access to training for upgrading and/or formalising their skills, as many of these members get accredited for practical engagements with mediation post training. Such work, especially that with respect to Track 1 work, as Waintraub notes, (2020)

> Reached its peak on September 26th, 2019, when representatives of the newly   launched *Global Alliance of Regional Women Mediator Networks* – a network of   networks – handed over a list of over thirty highly skilled and experienced women mediators to United Nations (UN) Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohamed.

These women on the rooster of qualified mediators have increased the numbers of women involved in mediation processes globally, while also enhancing the worm of conflict transformation in the field. Additionally, having such highly skilled women on the field also helps create a strong accountability mechanism for international institutions, thus deleting the proverbial script about the dearth of qualified women as mediators that is often expressed in response to calls to improve representation (Waintrub, 2020). Between now and 2021, FemWise Africa has enabled the training and accreditation of women mediators from all African countries, further connection local level actors to regional and continental peace and mediation processes. Suffice to reiterate that ddespite these efforts, the exclusion of women from peace mediation efforts seem to be increasing than before. While the mediation processes in Kenya and Zimbabwe can be hailed for including Mandela and Mushonga respectively, recent dynamics in Mali and Guinea are evidence of a huge backlash on the agenda of WPS since adoption of UNSCR1325 on WPS in 2000.

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The feminist backlash and its consequences to the development agenda in Africa

While the progress brought by feminism through the work of women's civil society organisations has been noted, feminist scholarship is worrisome of the discursive challenges for African Feminisms brought by the bureaucratic ethos of top-down and agenda setting rhetoric imposed on women's civil society organisations by the hegemony of donors as eroding feminism and the women's rights and gender equality discourse in big ways (Lewis, 2006). Lewis (2006) further notes that information and knowledge produced by such civil society organisations often aim to consolidate elite interests, manipulative modes of spending and distribution, as well as universal economic and political disparities. In the area of gender justice and legislation for women's rights, it remains ironic that while many African governments have made progressive strides in promulgating gender sensitive constitutions, laws and policies that theoretically imply the improvement of women's positions in society – in reality, implementation of such legislations is still low, owing to lack of political will to commit resources for such (Moolman, 2001). South Africa for example, has what is considered one of the most progressive constitutions in the world with a multi-party democratic system and gay rights enshrined therein, yet gross inequities that have serious implications on women's strategic gender needs such as access to land, water, health services, education and employment still exist and the country has one of the highest levels of violence (Machisa & etal, 2011), sometimes ruptured along race and gender lines. It is on record that 56% of the women murdered in 2009 were killed by an intimate male partner (Abrahams & etal, 2013), 25% to 40% of women have experienced sexual and/or physical intimate partner violence in their lives (Jewkes, Levin, & Penn-Kekana, 2002), just below 50% of women report having experienced emotional or economic abuse at the hands of their intimate partners at one time in their lifetime while prevalent estimates of women who survived rape range between 12% and 28% (Dunkle & *etal*, 2004). Regarding international protocols, national governments end at ratifying without domesticating the international statues, and taking CEDAW for example, it is clear that there are no actual mechanisms by which states can be held accountable to the United Nations for violation of women's rights in a manner that is meaningful for women and girls. The sustaining argument is that while the UN may insist on certain measures and sanctions to try and catalyse member states to protect women's rights across the world, implementation of laws and policies that directly affects women is under the control and regulation of the nation-state (Moolman, 2001).

In the area of governance, a decided and deliberate political unwillingness to address gender inequality is a common denominator for most of the African countries. Noting how the nationalist elite recognised women's roles as fellow combatants during the armed struggle for liberation, Essof (Essof, 2003: X) exposes a calculated lack of commitment to consider women as equal partners in politics when she notes that, [by the mid 1990s in Zimbabwe] "*... the political will to meaningfully address gender inequality in Zimbabwe [had] diminished rapidly, being replaced by the desire to control women both in the private and public sphere.*" Despite years of sensitization and awareness raising on gender and women's rights, patriarchal resistance is evidenced by the under representation of women in peace and governance processes. While global trends show a rise in the numbers of women in cabinet in other regions, in Southern Africa and other African regions, the numbers of women in cabinet remain dismally low, still below the 50/50 gender parity threshold set by the African Union. The statistics in Table 1 below may help buttress this point:

Table 1. Women in cabinet. The table reflects countries that have reached the 50-60% threshold in women's inclusion in Cabinet up to 1 January 2020.

Rank	Country	% women	Women	Total ministers
60 – 69%				
1	Spain	66.7	10	15
1	Finland	61.1	11	18
50 – 59.9%				
3	Nicaragua	58.8	10	17
4	Colombia	57.9	11	19
5	Austria	57.1	8	14
6	Peru	55.0	11	20
7	Sweden	54.5	12	22
8	Rwanda	53.6	15	28
9	Albania	53.3	8	15
10	France	52.9	9	17
11	Andorra	50.0	6	12
12	Canada	50.0	18	36
13	Costa Rica	50.0	12	24
14	Guinea-Bissau	50.0	8	16

Source: https:www.unwomen.org

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Of the 14 countries listed above, as at January 2020, only two countries Rwanda and Guinea-Bissau had reached 50% gender parity in cabinet, and of the two African countries listed, none are in SADC. In 2020 the world celebrated the 25th anniversary of Beijing, yet despite this, gender considerations in development processes continue to be watered down. This backlash is a signal that the future of feminism, especially in the region, is bleak, and the African Union's desire to achieve gender parity as part of the Agenda 2063 benchmarks remains questionable. Patriarchy remains a huge enemy of the region and in the face of prevailing conflicts, the detrimental effects of conflict on women such as sexual and gender based violence, sexual exploitation and abuse, displacement and other gender related challenges remain a force to reckon with.

The gender discourse is also perceived as a threat because is has challenged the norms of African culture and tradition to test on the social and economic fronts. Some women have become educated and economically independent to a point where dependency and subordination to men has been put to test (Meer, 2011). Resultantly, social boundaries have been pushed and transgressed, traditional authority questioned and traditional reality turned upside down (Meer, 2011). This subversion of the norm has found a match in what (Mkandawire, 2005) refers to as the pan-African concept. Mkandawire's pan-African concept of/against feminism refers to the ethical panic that has seized the African traditional society, especially men, in an uprising against African women who allegedly want to transform gender norms under what is perceived as a foreign feminist or gender agenda, and must be kept under check. This has yielded a lot of backlash as gender equality finds the basis to be critiqued and tagged negatively as a risk and threat to the family institution and to traditional society's moral balance. These contestations are also rife in modern scholarship. Oyewumi (1997) for example, argues that the concept of gender and its dynamics in Yoruba societies today is a result of Western imperialism, further opining that gender was non-existent in pre- colonial Yoruba society, and is both imported and alien. As such, in many Africa societies gender activists have been labeled as immoral, as lesbians (who are perceived as queer and unacceptable) and as social and family misfits because of the misinterpretations that arise when the term feminism is used. This naming has posed a threat for self-censorship to some feminists, taking the gender equality progression five steps forward and three steps backwards, as many feminist activists now find it difficult to identify completely with the "F-word"[1] (Tamale, 2006), which is being increasingly demonized, bastardized and derogated. Often, many women tend to identify as gender activists whilst denying the feminist tag, despite the link between the two (Ahikire, 2008).

These contestations speak to both the difficulties associated with feminism as a movement in Africa and the philosophical differences between Western feminism and African feminisms. In distinguishing African feminism from Western feminism, Gwendolyn Mikell (1997) has argued that the origins of African feminisms differ from those of Western feminism, further postulating that because the personal is political, African feminisms are largely shaped by the African women's resistance to colonial patriarchy and to Western hegemony and its legacy as anchored within African culture. As such, the Western feminist perspective about essentialism, the female body, and radical feminism are not characteristic of the general perspective of African feminisms which is in the main heterosexual, pro-natal, and concerned with race issues, class issues in the African society, in addition to many other bread, butter and culture issues (Mikell, 1997).

In a globalised world where the issue of women's rights intersects interestingly with the issue of human rights, distinguishing African feminisms from Western feminism based on hetero-normative ideals provokes a huge debate that questions the future survival of the feminist debate in Africa, given the fact that some African people also identify with the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) agenda, despite the contestations against the LGBTQ agenda that exist in the majority of African constitutions. This issue has two pronged arguments. Firstly, pushing for a purely hetero-normative perspective of African feminisms risks being viewed by other sectors of society as not only conservative and homogenizing, but also limiting the narrative of women's rights to different kinds of patriarchal orthodoxies. Yet at the same time, for the other sector of African society, Mikell (1997), notes the need for Africans to reflect on the future of feminism in a region where the narrative of bodily rights and the LBGTQ community is highly funded from the West and has been imbibed by certain quarters of the region as an ideal narrative for women and men's liberation, versus the resistances that the local people have on the agenda. This narrative has crept deeper even into the crevices of how politics and economics are conceptualised on the continent, with political parties now also forming lines of ideological demarcation based on their conceptualization of the LGBTQ agenda. In Africa, conservative political parties which defy the LGBTQ agenda have been viewed by part of the polity and the West as non-progressive when compared to opposition political parties that imbibe the LGBTQ agenda. A Zambian newspaper once described President Hichilema's support for gays and lesbians during his campaign period as the "most terrible political mistake" made by a political leader, while the following seemingly apologetic statement by the UNPD political party youths in Zambia may serve to demonstrate this point, "*We as UPND youths we wish to state that despite President HH FULLY supporting gay rights he remains an elder at the Seventh Day Adventist (SDA) and therefore a Christian*" (Banda, 2019). What then is the future of feminism against this dichotomy which is politically laden, and in the face of the need to push the women, peace and security agenda more progressively towards the protection of women's rights?

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[1]Feminism, because of the misunderstandings around it, is being equated the same value as the four letter word 'fuck', hence it is basterdised to the "F" word.

Feminisms, WPS Agenda and Women's Peacebuilding and Peacemaking Networks in Africa: Solution or Quandary?

Resisting the resistant

Lewis (2006) describes African feminists and all those currently in support of the gender equality agenda on the continent as post-colonialists who face growing backlash and resistance to the gender, feminist and women's rights agenda. Lewis (2006) further challenges African feminist and gender advocates to reformulate and strengthen their approach, sharpen their analytical tools and revise the methods as a strategy to strategically counter and contest the threats posed by anti-feminist forces who breed backlash and resistance to the gender equality agenda. One way of doing this is perhaps being mindful of the usage of words and terminology in order to get buy in from those who fuel anti-feminist resistance movements. Where governments and other influential people equate feminism with foreign imported agendas and lesbianism which is contested terrain in many countries in Africa, parking the F-word and using alternative words such as gender could be one such strategy. This is not necessarily a sign of cowardice, but a strategy to sustain the momentum and remove all possible threats for extinction of the equality agenda. Further strategies include intensifying research, knowledge production; documentation and dissemination to all quotas of society, aimed at making everyone, including the resistant policy makers understand the value of gender and feminism in development discourse. Involving male advocates in feminist, gender and WPS work is also a good strategy, while increasing bottom up ownership and financing of feminist, gender and WPS work is also an added advantage that limits the agenda setting tendencies of some funders. Strengthening civil military relations in-country and also at regional and continental levels may increase the security sectors' understanding and appreciation of the feminist, gender and WPS agenda. Gender budgeting within governments would also enhance the allocation of time and resources towards the gender equality and WPS agenda. Most importantly, pitching the gender equality agenda as a priority for political deliberation at regional and continental forums such as the regional economic commission meetings and the Africa Union platforms is another way of demanding accountability for women's rights from the continental leaders within the rubric of the WPS agenda. While the existence of the women's mediator and peacebuilding networks is acknowledged, branding of these networks as belonging to women and girls though legitimate, might in the long run create an identity crisis with potential to further widen the rift between women and men, with negative outcomes such as rejection or trivialization of the women's rights agenda. Whilst the international world is now running with engendering feminist foreign policies in their countries, the fact that Africa is still grappling with the contestations between the realism of feminism or lack of it in a continent where feminism clearly has a pivotal role to play is a sign of a continental state of affairs that lies somewhere between stubborn resistance and the failure to learn and leap forward.

CONCLUSIONS

This article explored the meaning, linkages, contributions and losses of the feminist, gender and WPS agenda. The articles established the inextricable link and value of the three concepts under discussion, both at the theoretical and practical levels, further noting the threats and setbacks that the agenda of gender, women's rights and WPS face owing to ideological contestations on the continent. To conclude, the article established that the current conflict challenges in the region require a better understanding of the value of feminism as a political agenda, yet the misunderstandings around the concept of feminism continue to threaten its progressiveness. There is therefore need for the current leadership in Africa to agree on the importance and political value of feminist activism is the struggle for women's rights has to be achieved with uniformity in all countries.

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