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WOMEN'S AND GENDER STUDIES IN
ENGLISH-SPEAKING SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

A Review of Research in the Social Sciences

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ABSTRACT

This article seeks to broaden understanding of issues and controversies addressed in social science research on women's and gender studies by researchers and activists based in English-speaking sub-Saharan Africa. The topics covered were selected from those ratified by African women in the Africa Platform for Action in 1995 as well as from current debates on the politics of identity. The common feminist issues the authors identified were health; gender-based violence; sexuality, education, globalization and work; and politics, the state, and nongovernmental organizations. In addition, the authors address theoretical and methodological trends. All four coauthors are feminist sociologists: One scholar is based in an African academic institution, two are Africans based in U.S. academic institutions, and one is an African American based in a U.S. academic institution.

Keywords: Africa; sub-Saharan; theory/methodology; gender analysis; feminism; women's studies; English speaking; social science literature; work; health; sexuality; violence; same-sex relationships; education; politics; nongovernmental organizations

HISTORICIZING WOMEN'S STUDIES AND GENDER STUDIES IN AFRICA

Since the 1980s, there has been a proliferation of women's and gender research in Africa (Lewis 2002; Mama 1995, 1996; Manuh 2001; Nzomo 1998; Pereira 2002). This outgrowth of scholarship can be attributed to several factors, including (but not limited to) the global North women's movement, "the influence of the [women and] development industry, national political [and economic] conditions, the crisis in African education and the emergence of state feminism" (Mama 1996, 4). Prior to this period, in the 1950s and 1960s, women's activism was linked to nationalist struggles for independence. In addition, gender, race, and class relations were already integral to struggles African women were engaged in when compared to their counterparts in the global North, who only began to acknowledge the centrality of these issues in the 1980s (Lewis 2002, 1).

In the 1970s and 1980s, feminist scholarship and activism began to gain a foothold in women and development debates. Many feminists were involved in establishing the Association of African Women for Research and Development in 1977, with the purpose of "envisioning an agenda for African feminism" through scholarship and activism (Mama 1996, 6). African gender studies, especially in the southern region, are now even more focused on historical and critical political analysis. Much of this work has evolved out of women's involvement with liberation struggles, democratization, and neoliberal economic reforms.¹

Current approaches to the study of women and gender in Africa are rooted in African feminist as opposed to global North feminist ethnographies and theories. African gender studies specialists are conversant with postmodernist and other current political debates, but some of them caution against overreliance on postmodernist discourses on difference, stressing the need to generate systematic evidence around issues that unify and create space for dialogue rather than

confrontation and difference (Nzomo 1998, 13). These studies are closely integrated into wider political struggles and public debates about post independence nation building and globalization (Mama 1996; Manuh 2002). Their concerns center around imperialism, race, class, ethnicity, and geographical differences and explores the interactions between these factors (Imam 1997; Lewis 2002).

This article provides an overview of some of the issues and contestations addressed since the mid-1980s by feminist and non-feminist scholars and activists based in English-speaking sub-Saharan Africa. Although we recognize that there is substantial scholarship on women and gender studies in Africa written in French, Portuguese, and other languages by African and Africanist scholars, given our regions of specialization and language limitations, we focus mainly on those studies written in English. Specifically, we examine those works that address women's issues written by continental scholars, as this area of feminist scholarship on Africa has been largely invisible and silent in feminist discourses in the global North. We also review African gender studies in the social sciences, which on the continent are largely concentrated in the fields of sociology, history, anthropology, political science, and education and approached from a multidisciplinary perspective. Topics are selected from issues ratified by African women in the African Platform for Action, the regional document prepared for the World Conference on Women in 1995. We identified common issues in feminist social science debates, including health; gender-based violence; education (mainly higher education, due to space limitations); globalization and work; and politics, the state, and nongovernmental organizations. Sexuality was added to the list of topics, given its growing importance in African feminist studies.

RECONCEPTUALIZING METHODOLOGICAL PARADIGMS

To understand the state of social science research in Africa, most scholars emphasize the impact of the economic and political crisis on funding and institutional support for higher education (Makandawire 1997; Sawyer 1994). Thus, many scholars focus on Women in Development consultancies and donor-driven research at the expense of independent theoretical and innovative empirical research (Imam and Mama 1994; Kassimir 1998; Mama 1997; Nzomo 1998). The productivity of African social scientists is also impeded by the shortage of current publications, few publishing outlets, heavy teaching and administrative responsibilities, a repressive and hostile intellectual climate, and patriarchal institutional cultures (Bennett 2002; Imam and Mama 1994; Manuh 2002; Pereira 2002; Prah 2002). Studies on women are also less likely to receive funding from governments, as demonstrated in the dearth of gender disaggregated data and the general failure to incorporate women and gender in development policies (Imam and Mama 1994; Manuh and Adomako Ampofo 1995; Tsikata 2001c).

As in the global North, social science scholarship on women and gender has revitalized African social science production in the past two decades (Imam, Mama, and Sow 1997). The notion that research methods and techniques are atheoretical has been challenged, as are the false ideas of scientific neutrality and the separation of politics, theory, and methods (Adomako Ampofo 2004; Imam and Mama 1994; Steady 1986; Tsikata 2001d). Marxist social science research has also been criticized for its hostile and/or dismissive treatment of feminist issues (Graham 2001; Imam 1997).

In examining research on women and gender, quantitative methods are still viewed as more scientific than qualitative methods, and large-scale social surveys and formal interview techniques are most widely used in disciplines like sociology (Imam, Mama, and Sow 1997).

Qualitative methods are increasingly gaining preference because they foreground the experiences and voices of the research participants as well as incorporate other important factors that define the everyday life practices of women and men (Echo Magazine 2001; Gana Shettima 1998).

The use of various forms of historical methods, such as oral history and autobiographical and biographical studies, helped redefine conventional understandings of various historical events and processes (Lewis 2002). Many of the life history studies show how the public sphere/private sphere dichotomy never accurately reflected the African experience and illustrate the distinctive ways in which women exercised agency in the preindependence period by subverting conventional understandings of appropriate gender relations (e.g., Denzer 1995; Johnson-Odim and Mba 1997; Mbilinyi 1989; Mukurasi 1991; Shawulu 1990; Tsikata 1989).

In the area of theory, recent research in African gender studies takes a multidisciplinary approach, while integrating theory and practice with a view to restructuring power relations. Theory is also grounded in qualified generalizations that are context specific (Imam, Mama, and Sow 1997; Mama 2004).

CONFLICTS AND CONTESTATIONS IN WOMEN'S STUDIES AND GENDER RESEARCH IN AFRICA

At the center of questions regarding the relevance and application of research on women's and gender studies in Africa is how to name these concepts in ways that would "allow for a collective imagining of the concept" (Jita Allan 2001, 73). For example, while some African scholars have identified their work as "feminist," and recognize the relationship between activism and intellectualism in the liberation of women, many (especially male scholars who do studies of women) have rejected the term. Others have opted for the term "gender" or "women's"

studies as more neutral (see critiques by Mama 1995, 1996 and Imam 1997 on this debate). Imam (1997), for instance, argued that as a discipline, women's studies have always had a political gender consciousness in its recognition of gender subordination. Despite the lack of consensus among scholars and activists about these concepts and in various efforts to foster transformative relations between women and men in Africa, the concept of gender remains a crucial rhetorical tool for some.

Also problematized are high-profile national programs launched by first ladies in the 1980s, such as those launched by the wives of Rawlings of Ghana and Babangida of Nigeria, to improve the lives of rural and marginalized women. African feminist scholars view this as the governmental appropriation of feminism for agendas that have very little to do with the liberation of African women (Abdullah 1993; Mama 1995, 1996; Tsikata 2001a). In the next section, we review social science research on the specific themes of (1) health, (2) gender-based violence, (3) sexuality, (4) education, (5) globalization and work, and (6) politics, the state, and nongovernmental organizations.

THEMES IN WOMEN'S STUDIES AND GENDER RESEARCH IN AFRICA

Health

Issues of women's health in Africa, particularly women's reproductive health, have been the focus of much research in both the social and biomedical sciences, and from a multidisciplinary perspective. However, this work has tended to take an instrumental, "developmentalist" approach, assuming that women's health is influenced by the trickle-down effect of modernization and democracy (Lewis 2002). Thus, women's issues have been constructed in biological terms with a focus on their reproductive health, highlighting the

magnitude of maternal morbidity and mortality. Some scholars have pointed out that this approach is entrenched with cultural and Eurocentric stereotypes of women as mothers and wives and that it neglects the variety of women's health concerns (Boadu 2000) and their contributions as providers of health care services (Boadu 2000). Thus, women's studies scholars in Africa not only have sought to respond to the Western gaze and Eurocentric concepts but also have highlighted areas for critical enquiry such as the practices of traditional healers (Adomako Ampofo 2004; Machera 2004; Ratele 2004).

Recent studies on health have looked at how specific gendered traditions such as those within marriage institutions (e.g., early marriage, polygyny, seclusion, wife inheritance) and other cultural practices such as female genital cuttings influence women's maternal morbidity and their mortality and fertility behavior (Ezumah and Oreh 1999). They also address the importance of women's "status," measured primarily by education or reproductive behavior. However, the limitations of relying on structural measures to the neglect of other sources of power and authority such as seniority have been pointed out (Adomako Ampofo 2002; Tagoe 1995).

The establishment of the African Journal of Reproductive Health in 1993 made an important contribution toward highlighting the gendered dimensions of women's reproductive health, as did some Continental and national organizations.² Before the International Conference on Population and Development held in Cairo in 1994, reproductive health policies in sub-Saharan Africa were linked to population policies and focused on lowering population growth, hence "helping" women to "control" their fertility. African feminist scholars have criticized the objectification of women and cultural hegemony that occurred when the population enterprise reached Africa (Adomako Ampofo 2002). For example, Adomako Ampofo (2004) critiqued the

demographic concept of “unmet need,” pointing out that it neglects the centrality of notions of masculinity, and hence male dominance, in human reproduction. Using both quantitative and qualitative methods, she questioned the (over) reliance on traditional knowledge, attitude, practice–style survey questions in the measurement of demographic concepts such as the “unmet need” (for contraception).³

Teenage pregnancy has largely been constructed as a health problem (Katapa 1998), with scholars noting the physical and emotional challenges of becoming a mother as well as the contradictions that arise from this new concept created by the recent gap between onset of menarche and marriage. Important work appears in the volume Chelewa Chelewa (Komba-Maleka and Lijestrom 1994) that grew out of the Teenage Girls and Reproductive Health Study Group’s work at the University of Dar es Salaam. Although the authors paint unmarried girls who become pregnant as active agents who can succeed in their lives (Katapa 1998), they also point to the health risks of early, and often repeated, pregnancies that are associated with poverty, sexual exchange, and the failure to use family planning. On the other hand, Mbilinyi (1985) suggested that in focusing on teenage pregnancies (with attendant issues of prostitution, induced abortions, and baby dumping), African feminists may have unwittingly promoted a “bad girl” image of the pregnant teen by neglecting the boys or men who make them pregnant and young women’s rights to reproductive health information and services.

Inherent in feminist scholarly and activist discourse is the discussion of women’s reproductive rights. Nonetheless, Ilumoka (2003) argued that the “rights discourse” requires scrutiny and that the field of reproductive rights (and human rights and women’s rights) is an arena of struggle for African women to define their own agendas devoid of (ethnocentric) assumptions about the backwardness of African customs.

In much of Africa, women's right to reproductive health services, especially access to safe abortions, remains a concern. However, the issues continue to be hotly debated, and the subject of abortion remains contentious, revealing that there is no universal position for feminists across the African continent. Lewis (2002) pointed out how colonial authorities, especially in eastern and southern Africa, adopted campaigns to contain the population growth of Black people through the use of harmful injectibles and forced sterilization in Namibia and South Africa. Consequently, fertility control has been tainted with Malthusian images of enforced demographic control (Adomako Ampofo 2004; Lewis 2002). Bradford's (1991) work describes how the apartheid state urged white women to have babies while temporarily and permanently sterilizing Black women. Abortion was also used by the state, and by individual men, to control unwanted female fertility (Bradford 1991). So while abortion challenges patriarchal controls and reduces maternal mortality, patriarchy is also manifested in male-inspired abortions that seek to control women's bodies (Mpangile et al. 1998).

Research on women's experiences with, and responses to, HIV/AIDS is a vast and rapidly expanding field. Women's gender roles and the constructions of femininity and masculinity—such as behavior that sanctions polygyny, extramarital relations, and multiple partners for men as well as the enormous work burdens that many women confront—make women particularly vulnerable to HIV infection and result in poor care when they become infected (Adomako Ampofo 1998; Awusabo-Asare, Anarfi, and Agyeman 1993; Mbilinyi and Kaihula 2000). Particular attention has been paid to the perceptions of men's and women's sexual rights and whether women can refuse to have sex with their partners (Awusabo-Asare, Anarfi, and Agyeman 1993; Rajani and Kudrati 1996). Thus, Awusabo-Asare, Anarfi, and Agyeman (1993) pointed out that some women consider it hopeless to expect fidelity from their

partners and feel unable to refuse to have sex with nonmonogamous partners. The general consensus is that many women lack control over their sexuality, are unable to refuse sex to nonmonogamous partners, are unable to insist on or negotiate condom use, and it is male dominance in sexual matters that increases women's vulnerability (Adomako Ampofo 1995; AwusaboAsare, Anarfi, and Agyeman 1993; Mbilinyi and Kaihula 2000; Rajani and Kudrati 1996). The link between women's economic dependence on men and their vulnerability has also been addressed. For younger women, this is compounded by the fact that many adult men actively seek younger partners who are perceived to be free of HIV (Rajani and Kudrati 1996). Rajani and Kudrati (1996) also pointed out that there has been an overemphasis on the role of adults to the neglect of potentially risky peer encounters. For example, among street children, rape is frequently used as an expression of power (Adomako Ampofo et al. 2004; Rajani and Kudrati 1996). There are other women's concerns around HIV/AIDS. Long's (1996) work conveys how gender also gives women the burden of responsibility for protecting and taking care of themselves, their partners, and their families. McFadden (1992) argued that the medicalization of AIDS prevents understanding of the sociocultural circumstances that invariably affect its transmission, its prevention, and the treatment of those infected.

Research on women's health and well-being has been politicized by linking it to gender-based violence, health care services, economic and political forces, and issues such as the control of women's sexuality. Thus, the effect of structural reforms on women's access to health care and their health-seeking behavior has received some attention (Emeagwali 1995; Manuh 1998). In this context, groups considered to be particularly vulnerable have received attention, such as women in conflict/war situations and refugee women. Theorizing around health is also expanding to include the link between women's social roles and their health and women's mental

health (Boadu 2000). Boadu's (2000) work on the mental health of female doctors, nurses, and stone quarry workers in Ghana, for instance, highlights the fact that for women, health problems are dominated by psychosocial considerations such as social relationships, work, and mothering roles. The relationship between women's health and well-being and gender-based violence highlights the need for more comprehensive studies on how violence affects women's lives. The following section will examine key issues relating to gender-based violence in Africa.

Gender-Based Violence

Relatively unspoken of until the 1990s (Coker-Appiah and Cusack 1999; Mama 1997), gender-based violence is a widespread and escalating phenomenon in Africa. As in the global North, the relative silence is due to the fact that most victims do not report incidences of gender-based violence. Reported cases are rarely documented because they are viewed as a domestic and private matter. Most countries also do not have customary or statutory laws to protect women from violence, although there are laws against assault and some contexts of rape. Since the 1990s, there has been increasing pressure from women's nongovernmental organizations to institute legislation against gender-based violence in such areas as rape, wife battering, and sexual harassment (Armstrong 1990; Bennett 1999; Carrol and Ofori Atta 1998; Coker-Appiah and Cusack 1999; Ofei-Aboagye 1994).⁴ A wealth of advocacy-oriented research based on country and regional case studies have been produced, particularly in South Africa, to support this effort. One of the accomplishments of this advocacy process has been that the Rwanda War Crimes Tribunal recognized gender-based violence as an instrument of genocide and a crime against humanity and tried such cases at the tribunal.

Violence is also being examined from a structural context, with emphasis on the historical, social, political, and economic conditions that foster it; allow women to tolerate it; and

empower men to perpetrate abuses against women (Ibeanu 2001; Mama 1997; Odendaal 1993). For example, Mama (1997) explained how colonialism was both a violent and a gendered process that exploited preexisting social divisions within African culture. The coercive control of women that was endemic to colonialism—e.g., rape as a form of military conquest and the domestication of women—has continued in the post independence period and been sanctioned by repressive political regimes. A structural perspective therefore broadens understanding of the connections between the physical, sexual, and psychological impacts of violence and such issues as access to resources, reconciliation, reintegration, and long-term peace building (Ibeanu 2001).

General themes covered in gender-based violence research in Africa are domestic violence (e.g., wife battering, assault of cowives in polygamous marriages, assault on maids and foster children by women employers/guardians, and assault on mothers and grandmothers), sexual violence (e.g., rape, incest, sexual harassment, and female genital cutting, the latter of which is generally perceived to be popularized and sensationalized in Western scholarship and lobbying; Lewis 2002), traditional practices defined as violence (e.g., child marriage and accusation of witchcraft), and the role of the state in relation to violence (e.g., conflict situations, institutional violence, and economic violence).

Wife battering is the most prevalent yet underreported form of violence against women in Africa (Abane 2000; Atinmo 2000; Coker-Appiah and Cusack 1999; Gizaw 2002; Kuenyehia 1998; Machera 2000; Ofei-Aboagye 1994). In most countries, feminists describe it as a way of life for many women, irrespective of class and ethnic background (Abane 2000; Atinmo 2000; Carrol and Ofori Atta 1998; Coker-Appiah and Cussack 1999; Gizaw 2002). Cultural understandings of men's right to control women lead many societies to condone the physical disciplining of women and girls (Gizaw 2002; Machera 2000; Ofei-Aboagye 1994; Prah and

Adomako Ampofo forthcoming). For example, a study of 50 women clients attending a legal aid clinic in Ghana found that women used the terms “beating” and “disciplining” interchangeably and accepted some level of beating as disciplining, although excessive beating was considered deplorable (Ofei-Aboagye 1994). Given that not all behaviors that are claimed to be tradition or culture are actually static or of value, some scholars advocate deconstructing their meanings and using historical analysis to investigate the origins of those practices that are oppressive (Imam 1997).

Rape is another problem that goes unreported because the rapists are usually known to the victims and because of the stigma associated with the victims and their relatives (Armstrong 1990; Carrol and Ofori-Atta 1998; Coker-Appiah and Cusack 1999). As in the global North, females who are victims of rape are usually blamed and ridiculed for inviting attention through body language and dress. Thus, girls and women who have been raped are sometimes married off quickly to protect the family (Carrol and Ofori Atta 1998). Although there are laws against assault in many countries, forced sex within marriage is not viewed as rape (Coker-Appiah and Cussack 1999).⁵ Rape is also linked to the growing pace of urbanization and widening class disparities in many African cities (Odendaal 1993).⁶

As in other parts of the world, in Africa, women are victims of rape in conflict and war situations such as the civil wars in Rwanda and Sierra Leone. Studies in Africa reveal that rape and the forcible abduction of women are strategies of war that are systematically used to assert power over ethnic groups, by overpowering “their” women (Turshen 1998). Ibeanu’s (2001) study of the Ogoni sociopolitical and economic crisis in Nigeria in the 1990s is an example of how women are treated under conditions of civil conflict.⁷

The issue of the state’s role in conflict-based violence against women in Africa has been

further addressed in a number of studies. Feminist scholars are especially concerned with how the social construction of masculine aggression gains social acceptance through the state's complicity with the use of violence, either overtly or by its silence, during war and peacetime, and the adverse implications for women in those social spaces (Coker-Appiah and Cusack 1999; Imam 1997; Kuenyehia 1998; Turshen and Twagiramariya 1998). Most of the studies that address these issues are based on qualitative research. Topics addressed include the transmission of sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS, pregnancy as a consequence of rape, the gendered effects of displacement and dislocation, the vulnerabilities women refugees face during flight from their homes, and the psychological and economic implications for women who lose their husbands and lands in the aftermath of civil conflicts.

Studies have also examined how women are used by the legal system to reinforce gender stereotypes through the monitoring and policing of their activities, to the extent of criminalizing their activities as deviant. Tibatemwa-Ekirikubinsa's study *Women's Violent Crime in Uganda* (1999; cited in Lewis 2002) is based on case studies that show how gender biases are built into the legal system, resulting in a lack of legal recourse for women. To advocate for gender-equitable legislative reforms, several women's nongovernmental organization, such as *Women Living under Muslim Laws* and *Women and Law in South Africa*, have conducted advocacy research studies designed to examine existing laws of particular countries and to establish what rights and practices exist so as to determine the impact of these laws.

African gender scholars are particularly active in advocating for legislative changes in how international instruments such as the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)* and the *African Charter on Human and People's Rights* have addressed the particular plight of African women refugees and internally displaced

women. For example, Oloka Onyango (1996) pointed out that international laws have failed to establish adequate mechanisms to address the particular circumstances of women as refugees. He maintained that solutions to these problems can only be effective when there is “a comprehensive reconstruction of the basic premises of international, regional, and domestic human rights law to alter the status of women” (1996, 394).

In sum, much of the work on gender-based violence in Africa takes a structural perspective, emphasizing the connections between the physical, sexual, psychological, economic, social, and political processes at the local and global levels. The following sections build on these emerging research areas by focusing on sexuality and same-sex relationships.

Sexuality

Among the issues currently receiving researchers’ attention are the misrepresentation and silencing of African female sexuality and the complex intersecting dimensions of gender, race, religion, and culture as well as same-sex relationships. However, some African feminist scholars and activists have suggested that a strong silence remains regarding the question of female sexuality within African women’s and gender studies (Mama 1996; McFadden 2001, 2003; Sexuality 1996). They note that little research has been done regarding sexual desires, homoerotic desires, lesbian relations, and other sexual transformations, including those that may have followed the colonial and decolonization processes as well as impacts of the new global economy. As Mama pointed out, “Considering that sexuality has been a major area of interest within women’s studies internationally, the first question one asks in surveying African women’s studies is why there are so few studies of sexuality” (1996, 39). Both Mama (1996) and Pereira (2003) suggested that these silences need to be understood given racist European fascinations with projecting hypersexuality onto Africans. Feminist scholars such as Mama (1996) and Imam

(2001) have carefully addressed various historical records that contribute to the silence on African women's sexuality, such as colonial attitude, appropriation of reductive and sexist ideologies of the family and women's bodies by religious and nationalist movements, representations of HIV/AIDS, and practices of female genital cuttings in the global North. As Mama suggested, "In view of the constraining effects of [female genital cuttings] on female sexuality, one is left to ask, where is the research on traditions which empower women, which give them more, rather than less, control of their sexual and reproductive lives? Given the frequent claims to this effect, why is there not more research on aspects of indigenous cultures which empower women's sexuality" (1996, 47).

Similarly, in her theorization of practices of *Magnomaka* and *Bolokoli-kêla* in Mali, Diallo (2003) questioned the mainstream feminist model in the global North, which was used to explain female genital operation practices in Africa while maintaining a silence on other aspects of women's sexuality.⁸ She described the Malian practice of *Magnomaka* as one of enhancing "sexual pleasure" while another, *Bolokoli-kêla*, served to "hinder" women's sexuality.

Even with such strong silence, a number of studies have emerged recently in Africa that view sexuality from multiple theoretical and methodological approaches (see especially Ahanmisi 1992; Akitunde 2001; Diallo 2004; Gays and Lesbians of Zimbabwe 1999; Imam 2001, 2002; Kahyana 2002; Kerata Chacha 2002; Long 2001; Mama 1996; McFadden 2003; Muthien 2003; Muzaki 2002; Ratele 2004; Tadesse 1997). Such studies have looked at sexuality not only as an interdisciplinary question but also as an issue that cannot be separated from African women's racialized and gendered histories and other social, political, religious, and economic relations. They combine feminist theory with postcolonial theories and analyses of critical race, sexuality, and cultural studies to address the complexities of sexuality practices in

Africa today, and they also explore practices of resistance and empowerment as important elements of female sexuality.

In examining the intersections of sexuality with gender, race, culture, and identity politics, some scholars have problematized orthodox disciplines and their essentializing notions of identity formations. For example, in one study of sexuality politics in contemporary South Africa, Ratele asked, “If questions about sex deserve any seriousness, even if it’s only because many people around the world still find inter-racial, inter-ethnic, inter-cultural, or inter-religious coupling irritating or at best titillating, should critical scholars and activists not come out and advocate inter-group sex education as part of gender-conscious antiracism, multiculturalism, or religious and ethnic tolerance?” (2004,1). A particular aspect of sexuality and identity that has not received much attention is homosexual relationships. A few writers have broken the silence and have urged scholars to seriously question practices of heteronormativity and to promote discussions about sexual orientation (Gays and Lesbians of Zimbabwe 1999; Long 2001; Machera 2000; McFadden 2001; Muthien 2003). These issues are addressed in the next section.

Same-Sex Relationships

There are several kinds of discussions of same-sex relationships in Africa. While some studies question notions that homosexuality in Africa is taboo and “unAfrican” (Muthien 2003; Tamale 2003; Yahaya 2003), organizations such as Gays and Lesbians of Zimbabwe focus on universal human rights standards and how they “can be used by sexual minorities to claim equality and freedom from discrimination” (Gays and Lesbians of Zimbabwe 1999, 1).⁹

Another important topic is the practice of woman-to-woman marriage. For example, building on an earlier study that looked at such marriage practices from the perspectives of the women involved (Njambi and O’Brien 2000), Kerata Chacha’s study of woman-to-woman

marriage in Tanzania presents it “as a system that radically disrupts the male domination and allows women to traverse gender barriers in order to gap up or rectify reproductive, social and economic problems— by examining it within the framework of colonial judicial systems against African customary law” (2002, 3). Perspectives among scholars vary on the issue of sexuality between such women, with no generalizable account possible, although the issue needs more careful study. Nonetheless, same-sex relationships should not necessarily be conflated with same-sex sexual relations. For example, see the pioneering work on woman-to-woman marriage in Nigeria by Amadiume (1987).

A number of gender and women’s studies scholars have also looked at the relationship between religious (and/or traditional) practices and sexuality practices. These studies have problematized the fundamentalist religious views of female sexuality and have been critical of reductive approaches that tend to treat all cultural and religious practices as a single and interchangeable discourse. For example, in her studies of Muslim religious discourses on sexuality, Imam suggested, “Issues of divorce, seclusion, and even access to education all have implications for considerations of sexuality. That they vary points to the need to recognize and distinguish different Muslim discourses of sexuality” (2001, 18).

Education

This section addresses the history and theory of education and the role of education in the struggle for social justice and gender equality in Africa. Of particular importance to African feminist scholars and activists is the impact of imposed formal educational systems on African societies under colonialism. For example, Gaidzanwa (1997) explained how in Zimbabwe, colonial women’s education was designed to prepare women as housewives and subsistence farmers. In contrast, education in precolonial African societies served a conceptual and practical

purpose designed to fit the needs of the social and physical environment. While recognizing the existence of gender hierarchies in various social and political contexts, women did participate at very complicated intellectual levels in leadership positions, such as in spiritual belief systems; in state matriarchal political systems; in secret societies; and through everyday activities, in agriculture, family management, trade, and health care provision (Assie-Lumumba 1997, 2001).

Several scholars have also analyzed the unintended effect of the colonial educational system in creating critical and subversive minds that challenged its own presence. For example, middle-class women's organizations such as the Forum for African Women's Education and the Association of African Women for Research and Development have played significant roles in demanding more gender equity in education throughout the continent (Assie-Lumumba 2001; Etta 1994; Gaidzanwa 1997).

The effects of gender discrimination at the primary, secondary, and tertiary levels are key issues in postcolonial research on women and education in Africa (Assie-Lumumba 2001; Gaidzanwa 1997; Katapa and Ngaiza 2001; Mbilinyi 1998; Prah 2002; Tamale and Oloka-Onyango 2000). Empirical studies in different regions focus on gender disparities in specific contexts measured by access, completion rates, attainment levels, curriculum content, and feminization of certain fields. Studies suggest that while much has been done by many governments to rhetorically and legislatively support regional and international conventions and declarations to redress gender disparities in education, most have failed to implement these intentions strategically and programmatically, especially at the tertiary level (Meena 2007; Mondoh and Mujidi 2006; Etta 1994). According to some there is a need for skill and capacity building to mainstream gender in core development sector areas like education (Meena 2007), while others stress that to avoid negative political consequences for marginalized groups, it is

necessary to critically examine the factors that determine which aspects and categories of the educational system are expanding (Gaidzanwa 1997). Others point to the increasing dependency of African governments on external donors, leading to loss of autonomy over the process of educational reforms (Mlama 2007).

In analyzing patterns of gender inequity in education, studies have also explored the interlocking impact of race, class, ethnicity, and regional differentiation on women's lives. For example, South African women represent diverse race and class categories with implications for their positioning in the educational and labor market structure. While significant strides have been taken through affirmative action policies to address both race and gender inequities in education, women still dominate low level administrative and non-professional positions in the labor market, years after the dismantling of apartheid (Higgs 2007; Moja 2007). Similarly, negative parental attitudes and cultural practices adversely impact enrollment and retention rates for girls in rural regions of many African countries.

Gender scholars also draw attention to specific factors that exacerbate educational problems for girls, especially those in secondary school. These are early marriage, teenage pregnancy, sexual violence at the primary and secondary school levels, domestic and agricultural responsibilities, the feminization of certain forms of employment, and potential unemployment. Some scholars also question the effects of discriminatory policies that condone punitive attitudes toward young women's sexuality, such as when pregnant schoolgirls are expelled from secondary school whereas the men or boys who father their children are not held accountable (Assie-Lumumba 1997; Etta 1994; Moja 2007). The rising HIV/AIDS pandemic in Africa has also affected the educational sector in regard to the large numbers of teachers who are dying as well as orphans without support for schooling. Young girls are particularly vulnerable to the

disease as a result of rape and coerced sex and their school drop out rates are higher than male counterparts because of increased domestic responsibilities in taking care of sick parents and siblings after the death of parents (Mlama 2007).

The impact of neoliberal reforms, especially structural adjustment programs (SAPs), is also pertinent. The general consensus is that SAPs have weakened the state's ability to provide basic education to its citizens (Mbilinyi 1998). Some observe that the growing privatization of primary and secondary schools and the adverse effects of severe government cutbacks have kept many poor children away from school and had a disproportionate effect on women and girls (Assie-Lumumba 1997; Etta 1994; Gaidzanwa 1997; Katapa and Ngaiza 2001; Kwesiga 2002; Mbilinyi 1998; Otunga 1997). For example, despite the expansion of free or subsidized primary education, there are fewer girls relative to boys entering secondary schools, and the potential applicant pool for women entering university, and ultimately professional and administrative careers, remains small, especially in scientific institutions (Assie-Lumumba 1997; Gaidzanwa 1997; Kwesiga 2002; Prah 2002; Namuddu 1993).

Some attention has also been given to the need for women's strategic involvement in educational administration and decision making (Mama 1996; Manuh 2002; Prah 2002). Gaidzanwa's (1997) combined qualitative/quantitative study on Zimbabwe reveals that women are concentrated in middle- and lower-level academic positions and that most of them are white. Women are also underrepresented in important committees and as chairpersons of departments. Prah's (2002) study of women faculty at the University of Cape Coast in Ghana concludes that the concerns and needs of women faculty are largely ignored because of their low statistical and political visibility in the workplace. In particular, some study participants complained of male bias in opportunities for career advancement, such as grants, scholarships, and fellowships.

In an effort to redress gender inequity in African higher education institutions, affirmative action programs have been instituted. Studies in Uganda suggest that there is resentment and resistance toward these programs and misogynist attitudes toward women as intellectually less capable than men (Kasente 2002; Kwesiga 2002). Others feel that affirmative action is still a numbers game designed to allow a limited number of women to gain access to higher educational institutions while they continue to be hostile environments for women (Mama 1996; Manuh 2002).

Sexual harassment and sexual violence are also endemic problems affecting women students at all educational levels, including women faculty and staff (Gaidzanwa 1997; Hallam 1994; Jelil Ladebo 2003; Kwesiga 2002; Mejiuni Fashina 2000; Phiri 2000; Tamale and Oloka-Onyango 2000). In higher education institutions, some of the key debates pertain to understandings of sexual harassment in situations where students commonly have relations with and marry university staff. Pereira (2002) suggested that distinctions should be made between the concepts of sexual harassment and sexual corruption, the latter being applied to women students who solicit their male lecturers for grades, course entrance, and examination questions. What seems pertinent to understanding these problems is the need for more contextually grounded definitions and concepts that reflect the complexity of gender-based dynamics as manifested in such issues as sexual harassment cases and affirmative action programs (Bennett 2002).

Finally, the emergence of women and gender studies programs in several African universities since the 1990s is significant (Moja 2007; Kasente 2002; Odejide 2002). Although these programs are growing, they remain confined to women students and faculty and have a limited impact on the mainstreaming of gender issues in universities (Tamale and Oloka-Onyango 2000). Nonetheless, there are a number of universities in Uganda, Tanzania, Nigeria,

and Ghana that are involved in mainstreaming gender equity concerns, such as affirmative action programs, strengthening women's academic presence and research status, addressing sexual harassment problems, lobbying national policy makers, and maintaining liaisons with the wider women's movement (Bennett 2002). Some argue that with the development of state-coordinated initiatives to promote gender and development, these programs might lose their political force and end up servicing mainstream or conservative gender training and advocacy (Awe, cited in Mama 2000). Whatever the outcome, most studies make it clear that women and gender studies programs provide the critical knowledge base presently needed to harness skill development for gender mainstreaming and to prepare a critical mass of people who can positively influence educational reforms that promote gender equality (Mlana 2007).

Work and Globalization

During the past 15 years, African gender researchers have significantly expanded the scholarship on women and work in the region (Afonja 1990; Darkwah 2002, 2007; Gana Shettima 1998; Mama 1996; Manuh 1994, 1997; Rutenge Bagile 2002-2003). While they have analyzed the changing roles that women occupy in the formal and informal sectors, many scholars have recently shifted their attention to the effects of SAPs on African women (Fall 1999; Garba and Garba 1999; Nzomo 1995; Pereira 2003; Rutenge Bagile 2002-2003).¹⁰ Previously, they found that African women made important strides in the professions, business, and government, but the majority of African women remained concentrated in agriculture and the microenterprise (informal) sector.

Generally, these scholars concur on several major issues. First, women have been and continue to be engaged in both productive and reproductive labor, which differed in various historical periods and geographical locations. Second, a gendered division of labor exists

between women's and men's work. Third, women's labor still remains invisible and devalued yet indispensable to state economies. Finally, women's work has substantially increased in the recent period of economic crisis and adjustment beginning in the mid-1980s (Adepoju 1994b; Magubane 2001; Mama 1996; Manuh 1994, 1997; Masinde 1993; Mbilinyi 1992, 1994; Rutenge Bagile 2002-2003). Mbilinyi (1992) noted that in Tanzania, many women do not prioritize sharing their work with men, even though wives remain responsible for domestic tasks, because they have access to domestic workers or other dependents to do housework. These choices make social transformation less likely.

Some feminist scholars examining women and work engage in critical political analysis and apply the intersectionality perspective in their studies. Using a political economy lens, Benjamin (2001) added race and imperialism/capitalism to the intersecting factors of gender and class in explaining the position of many working-class women in South Africa. Zimbabwe and South Africa are among the most highly industrialized nations on the continent and have provided more opportunities for formal-sector employment. However, due to South Africa's agreement with the World Trade Organization requiring lower tariffs on clothing and textiles, thousands of women in these sectors have recently lost their jobs in an effort to compete with lower priced imports (Benjamin 2001). During the past 15 years, scholars have noted the loss of about 2.5 million formal-sector positions for women due to economic crises (Adepoju 1994a).

Although most studies of work on the African continent examine women's position in the contemporary period, some scholars trace women's productive and reproductive labors over time. While women's labor was a major component in many precolonial societies, women did not command the labor of others and were not equal to men (Afonja 1990; Mama 1996). During the colonial period, an ideology of domesticity combined with modern capitalism to exclude

African women from the formal sector (Mama 1996). Although independence for African states signaled greater educational opportunities for some women, occupational inequality persisted for most women.

Gender scholars highlight women's current participation in formal-sector positions while also acknowledging that men still far outdistance women in such jobs. During the past two decades, women's labor force participation rates have increased most noticeably in the public sector. Research from Kenya documents that women comprised about 21 percent of all employees in the public and the private sector, but about 75 percent of women in public employment were clustered in low-wage, low-status positions (Nzomo 1995). Women in the private sector are concentrated in low-salaried fields such as sales, service, and clerical work, while at the upper end of the spectrum they are clustered in primary and secondary school teaching and nursing (Adepoju 1994b; Mama 1996; Manuh and Adomako Ampofo 1995; Nzomo 1995). Some women have entered medicine, law, business, and academia, but overall, their participation in these areas remains low (Mama 1996). The lack of education and training, gender-segregation in the labor market, lack of access to critical resources, patriarchal cultures, and heavy reproductive burdens limit women's formal-sector employment (Adepoju 1994a; Magubane 2001; Mama 1996).

Most African women work as farmers and/or farm laborers and as entrepreneurs and workers in the microenterprise sector (Manuh and Adomako Ampofo 1995). Women in subsistence agriculture bear the responsibilities for farming and daily farm management particularly due to male labor migration to urban areas (Adepoju 1994b). Despite women's heavy workloads, women often lack the authority to make major decisions (Farah 1989). Muro (1989) argued that agriculture is in decline partly because of the failure to acknowledge women

as primary producers. Within formal waged work, women constitute a high proportion of the agricultural laborers. Mbilinyi (1991) observed that the employment of more women as farm workers in Tanzania illustrates the efforts of owners to increase profits because women are often seasonal workers, earning lower salaries than men earn. Women occupy dual roles in agriculture and the microenterprise sector, since women market about 60 percent of the food crops in Africa (Magubane 2001).

During the past two decades, the microenterprise sector has become an increasingly important socioeconomic and political phenomenon (Darkwah 2002; Mama 1996; Rutenge Bagile 2002-2003). More research has been conducted on women's work in this sector than on any other area within African economies. This scholarship is a response to the major increase in the numbers of women and men involved in informal work in the wake of economic crisis and SAPs. In fact, Munguti, Kabui, and Isoilo (2002) stated that poor Kenyan women enter the microenterprise sector as a coping strategy during economic crises. Gender segregation persists since women are concentrated in areas such as food processing, trading, and sewing (Adepoju 1994b; Mama 1996).

Rutenge Bagile (2002-2003) reported that for some women, entering the microenterprise sector improves their economic status, while for others, it means greater burdens. Women still experience discrimination in their lack of access to credit, lack of access to property, low levels of social capital, and police harassment. Moreover, women encountered increased domestic violence since some men felt disempowered by women's financial independence and their enhanced role in decision making (Prah and Adomako Ampofo forthcoming; Rutenge Bagile 2002-2003).

Gender studies scholars have increasingly drawn our attention to the impact of

globalization on women's status (Darkwah 2002, 2007; Fall 1999; Magubane 2001; Munguti, Kabui, and Isoilo 2002; Pereira 2003). Most of these scholars agree that globalization and the International Monetary Fund–imposed SAPs have led to the growing feminization of the labor market in low-level positions, an expansion in sex work, an increase in women's workloads, and further feminization of poverty. With the adoption of SAPs in about 40 African nations, governments have retrenched public-sector workers and decreased spending on education, housing, and health care.

Some researchers note that globalization has created both benefits and problems for African women. Discussing Ghanaian women's engagement in transnational trade, Darkwah (2002, 2007) showed how trade liberalization advantaged women by streamlining access to imported goods such as clothing. She also illustrated how the later devaluation of the Ghanaian cedi jeopardized their position. On the other hand, in Kenya and Uganda, trade liberalization produced some benefits for women, including increased access to employment in nontraditional, export-oriented goods, such as flowers and fruit (Pheko 1999). While trade liberalization provides access to employment for women, these advantages may be limited to the low-wage sector of the labor market (Pheko 1999).

The AIDS epidemic, as well as globalization, has influenced a renewed interest in the subject of sex work and the ambiguities around it. Some accounts portray women's agency and their own positive self-perceptions (Adomako Ampofo 1999, 2007; Mbilinyi and Kaihula 2000; Tekloa 2002), pointing out that for most women, prostitution is an economic strategy selected in the face of increasingly limited economic options. Contrary to some Afrocentric perspectives that seek to portray prostitution as a legacy of colonialism, research in gender and women's studies shows that even though colonialism brought with it the proliferation of urban centers and

a cash economy—both of which significantly disrupted power and gender relations, thereby promoting commodified sexual exchanges—forms of commodified sex existed before colonial interventions (Adomako Ampofo 2001; Tekloa 2002). Complex social and gender relations are involved in prostitution. For example, Mbilinyi and Kaihula (2000), in their work in rural Tanzania, showed how many rural households depend on women's incomes following men's loss of incomes in agriculture and the formal sector.

Qualitative studies, which create space for research subjects to be located in their work, also have provided insights into the conditions and experiences of sex work, pointing to the variations by age, status, and location. While older women rarely refer to risks inherent in the work, the younger women's stories are full of fears and insecurities arising from abuses—gang rape, refusal to wear condoms, clients who try to avoid payment, and offensive sexual acts. There is also rivalry and competition. Madams are accused of cheating young protégés out of money or stealing clothing and jewelry, while the latter say they provide assistance, care, and support (Tekloa 2002).

There are other significant concerns around sexual exploitation, especially trafficking in women and child prostitution, which some argue is based on severe poverty and the ways in which globalization makes human beings easy goods to transport and trade in (Adomako Ampofo 2002). Studies in which sex workers are interviewed frame entry into sex work in economic terms—the failure of a business, nonsupport from partners, the need to care for dependents—and as a stopgap. Scholars point to the failure of the state in discussions of women's struggles for survival, and in the final section, we address issues of the state and nongovernmental organizations.

Politics, the State, and Nongovernmental Organizations

During the past two decades, there has been considerable research on the impact of emerging states and state policy on women's status. Gender scholars have explored the contributions of African women to the continent's liberation wars as well as post independence states' opportunities for women in elected and appointed offices, women's participation in civil society organizations, and the development of feminist politics. While political crises and war characterized many African states in the 1980s and 1990s, Africa also witnessed the establishment of many dynamic nongovernmental women's organizations that offered hope during political turmoil. Through many of these nongovernmental organizations, women resisted structural adjustment and other policies that opposed their needs and struggled for basic human rights (McFadden 2001; Pereira 2003).

Some research on African states explored women's relationship to independence movements. Despite their commitment to the independence of their nations, as illustrated in their participation in the Zimbabwean liberation war, African women continued to experience subordinate status during the postcolonial period. Working within the intersectionality paradigm, feminist scholars note how the nexus of imperialism, race, class, and gender severely limited women's position, especially during the process of nation building in the newly independent African states (Lewis 2002; McFadden 2001; Nzomo 1993). McFadden (2001) acknowledged that the neocolonial state sought to retard women's basic human rights through the reestablishment of traditional courts and statuses in the legal systems of Zimbabwe and South Africa. Such actions speak to the collusion between men of different classes and races to exclude women from democratic practices and institutions that women fought so courageously to build.

Other feminist scholars have examined how postcolonial states fail women. For example,

Nzomo (1993) noted how the patriarchal state largely ignores women's human rights regarding rape, domestic violence, and sexual harassment. Other scholars have explored how the patronizing nature of the postcolonial state created a "femocracy" (Abdullah 1993; Mama 1995, 1996, 2000). Mama defined femocracy as "an anti-democratic female power structure, which claims to exist for the advancement of ordinary women, but is dominated by a small clique of women whose authority derives from their being married to powerful men" (1995, 41).¹¹ Nzomo (1993) paid similar attention to the emergence of the women's movement in Kenya as symbolized by the National Council of Women of Kenya, which she described as "muzzled and ineffective." As noted earlier, when discussing national programs launched by African first ladies, scholars studying state-sponsored feminism recognize that the intersection of gender and class can limit the position of poor women in masculinist regimes while enhancing the status of upper-class women (Mama 1995, 1996, 2000; Nzomo 1993; Tsikata 2000).

One way to rectify the underrepresentation of women in politics is through affirmative action, reserved-seat policies such as that adopted by Uganda guaranteeing at least 39 women district representatives in its parliament (Tamale 1999). To discover if these officials were actually representing women's interests, Tamale (1999) interviewed 40 female and 15 male legislators and concluded that even when affirmative action candidates believe they are representing women's interests, they largely speak for educated middle- and upper-class women because members must have completed upper secondary school to occupy a seat. Problems have also been noted in this system at the local level in Uganda where women are elected in a separate process after the conclusion of regular elections (Ahikire 2003). In fact, women's representation remains most challenging at the local levels throughout the continent where affirmative action is largely absent and male privilege is strongest (Hassim 2003). Today, at least ten African nations

have used a quota system to increase the number of women in their legislatures. Some feminist scholars have noted that quotas when combined with a proportional representation list system can make a difference in the number of women in African parliaments (Gouws 2004). On the other hand, Hassim (2006) discovered that in southern Africa, proportional representation gives significant power to party leaders who may choose women that will not challenge the status quo by pursuing feminist policies leading to broader social transformation.

Given these problems, some African scholars think that increasing the numbers of women in elected office is not the best method for improving the status of most women. International treaties combined with activism have been more effective for advancing women's position. African feminist activists and scholars have participated in local and global movements and shared information on women's human rights, particularly concerning sexual rights and reproductive health, customary laws and practices, and economic rights (McFadden 2001; Nigerian NGO 2001). Some studies have highlighted the role of international treaties in advancing African women's human rights. Tamale (2001) discussed the importance of CEDAW and the African Charter for Human and People's Rights as treaties that can empower women¹² but that have been underutilized because many women feel alienated from such legal instruments. An example of what can be, but rarely is, done is the suit brought by Sarah Longwe against the Intercontinental Hotel in Lusaka, Zambia, for denying entrance to women unaccompanied by men. The judge stated that a court could look to treaties such as CEDAW and the African Charter, which has now been incorporated in national statutory laws, if a matter was not covered under domestic legislation (Tamale 2001).

Although some African women have been successful in applying CEDAW to their cases, feminist scholars and nongovernmental organization activists have drawn our attention to nations

whose implementation of CEDAW has been ineffective. Discussing the work of Nigeria's nongovernmental organization CEDAW coalition, Lewis and Imam (2001) concluded that the Nigerian government inadequately depicted their implementation of CEDAW and also failed to accurately report on the status of Nigerian women, particularly the discrimination of customary laws against women with regard to marriage, family law, and the administration of property (Nigerian NGO 2001).

A series of studies on national machineries in Africa explores the role of international treaties and policies on the status of women. The researchers pointed to some of the major problems in state efforts to implement the treaties when they set up various national machineries such as women's bureaus (Chisala and Nkonkomalimba 2000; Dambe 2000; Mama 2000; Tsikata 2000; Wangusa 2000; Zimbabwe Women's Resource Centre and Network 2000). They noted a lack of political commitment, under-resourcing, ambiguous locations in the state apparatus, and competition from the organizations of first ladies.

Nonetheless, some important achievements were observed among the bureaucracies for women such as the efforts of the Ministry of Community Development and Women's Affairs in Zimbabwe to promote equal pay for equal work (Zimbabwe Women's Resource Centre and Network 2000). In Botswana, they improved gender awareness and the lessening of stereotypes, while in Uganda, the state funded increased research on inheritance, rape, justice, and equity for women (Dambe 2000; Wangusa 2000). The Gender in Development Division offered sensitization workshops to introduce gender analysis to ministries in Zambia (Chisala and Nkonkomalimba 2000).

The past two decades have seen remarkable increases in the number of women's nongovernmental organizations. Even when some African regimes have attempted to silence

women in the political realm, women continue to respond to state policies and strive for their full human rights through civil society organizations (Tsikata 2001b). Pereira described the current focus of such organizations as “the denial of women’s human rights, restricted access to justice, the need for reproductive health, struggles for legal rights and literacy and against human trafficking” (2003, 793-94). Groups such as BAOBAB for Women’s Human Rights have drawn international attention in their efforts to inform women of their rights under state, religious, and customary laws.¹³ Women’s nongovernmental organizations in Zimbabwe and Nigeria and voluntary development organizations in Ghana have been credited with assisting in poverty alleviation, health education, and literacy in local communities (Imam, Ngur-Adi, and Mukubwa-Hendrickson 1992; Manuh 1989; Zimbabwe Women’s Resource Centre and Network 2000). Moreover, Pereira (2003) noted that Nigerian women’s organizations have expressed resistance to multinational oil corporations, the state, and more generally, globalization.

Women’s non-governmental organizations in several African nations including Tanzania, South Africa and Ghana have also formed broad-based coalitions with other civil society groups to press their concerns with the state for gender equality, equity and sustainable development in the form of Women’s Manifestos. Gender studies scholars have indicated that in such nations as Ghana, these documents were the result of a very inclusive process bringing together women from all regions of the country, trade union groups, NETRIGHT (the coalition for women’s rights in Ghana) and the Coalition for the Domestic Violence Bill among others (Mama 2005). These Manifestos are directed at government agencies, political parties and elected officials to promote their accountability on gender justice.

CONCLUSION

In this article, we have pointed to the ways in which scholarship and activism on women

in all regions of Anglophone sub-Saharan Africa have been conducted on the continent, and we have discussed some of the key areas that research has been focused on. For gender scholars on the continent, there is a close synergy between research and activism in their work, which differs from their Africanist colleagues working mainly outside the continent. Furthermore, while the African researchers cited in this article are based on the continent, many of them also work in the diaspora. For scholars on the continent, the guiding principle in social science research on women and gender in sub-Saharan Africa is that it must remain sensitive to the social contexts and complexities of women's and men's lives and linked to action to promote gender equity and social change. However, given the present political, social, and economic climate in Africa, the major challenge to women's studies and gender research is the survival of its feminist activist variants instead of deradicalized studies of women and gender, as presented in research, training, and policy planning in the academic institutions.

One of the most significant calls among the works reviewed here is the need to recognize the many cultures and multiple identities that need to be studied and understood. African gender researchers are becoming more sensitive to the ways in which class, race, and age, as well as colonialism and imperialism, affect and intersect on gendered social relations. Although these scholars are beginning to explore the impact of other social differences such as ethnicity, religious fundamentalism, and sexual orientation on women's status, gaps in the literature still remain in these areas. In particular, religious differences are of increasing importance in assessing women's position in African societies, however, because of space limitations, we had to exclude this area from our review. Aspects of indigenous cultures that empower women are also underrepresented in research. The process of increasing the visibility of continental scholarship is hampered by the state of the academy and publishing in Africa, along with the fact

that most of the research continues to be carried out by scholars in the global North. In addition, scholars do very little cross-referencing of their own works. New initiatives such as the Strengthening Gender and Women's Studies for Africa's Social Transformation, at the University of Cape Town, serve as a means to create more enabling environments for institutions and individuals to become more self-reliant by means of the World Wide Web, electronic journals, and listservers that enable scholars on women and gender on the continent to network among themselves, to access works by other African scholars that otherwise would have been overlooked, and as Lewis (2002) indicated in her review essay, provide a basis to establish links where conversations have not begun.

NOTES

1. Although both groups of feminist scholar/activists are not mutually exclusive, among those associated with the establishment of AAWORD are Simi Afonja, Bolanle Awe, Nina Mba, Molara Ogundipe, Filomena Steady, Fatou Sow, N'dri Assie Lumumba, Zenebeworke Tadesse, Christine Obbo, Achola Pala Okeyo, and Nawal El Sadaawi. Those associated with the second phase of research and activism are Amina Mama, Ayesha Imam, Charmaine Pereira, Maria Nzomo, Rudo Gaidzanwa, Patricia MacFadden, and Takyiwaa Manuh, to name a few.
2. Examples are continental organizations such as Amanitare based in Zimbabwe and national organizations such as the Women's Health Project in South Africa and the Empowerment and Action Research Center in Nigeria.
3. The need for comparative fertility data on a global scale prompted the creation of demographic surveys that measure individuals' knowledge, attitudes, and practices related to a range of reproductive issues.
4. Some of these organizations are the Gender Studies and Human Rights Documentation Center

in Ghana, Women and Law in West Africa, the Tanzania Media Women's Organization, the Emang Basadi Women's Organization in Botswana, and BAOBAB for Women's Human Rights.

5. For example, since the 2002 drafting of a domestic violence bill by the attorney general's department in Ghana and massive work by a coalition of women's groups to publicize the bill, there continue to be statements, some even by the minister of women's and children's affairs, that marital rape is a "foreign" concept.

6. For example, in Namibia, Odendaal (1993) suggested that there are links between the rate of unemployment, population growth, youth crime, and an emerging middle class of Black Namibians and the increasing incidence of rape crimes.

7. This was a time when the state, oil companies, and people in the Ogoni region were engaged in a violent civil conflict over the distribution of profits and other resources from the wealth produced from the mining of crude oil. Many women became the victims of rape and were ostracized and verbally abused by their husbands, relatives, community leaders, and local women's organizations. Many women were also abandoned and forced into arranged marriages.

8. According to Diallo (2003), feminist writers and activists who have theorized about "female genital mutilation" emphasized that the practice is an expression of patriarchal control and oppression of women.

9. See Long's (2001) study on other parts of Africa regarding issues of same-sex relationships in which she described the legal framework that criminalizes homosexuality in Egypt. Long described the physical and psychological torture and severe beatings by police that gay people in Egypt are subjected to when they have consensual sex and offers some recommendations for action to be implemented by the Egyptian government. Tamale (2003) also described ways in which the patriarchal state makes it difficult for "sex outlaws" of any kind to fight for basic

human rights.

10. The International Monetary Fund and the World Bank generally impose structural adjustment programs on nations that are experiencing economic crisis and are unable to pay their debts to commercial banks, foreign governments, and the World Bank. Structural adjustment programs are designed to enable these nations to qualify for new World Bank and International Monetary Fund loans. To qualify for more loans, however, nations have to meet several conditions that generally include currency devaluations, the adoption of a free market economy, and major reductions in state expenditures.

11. Femocracy was apparent in the establishment of the Better Life Programme for Rural Women in Nigeria in the late 1980s. However, femocracy is also about the bureaucratization of feminism through women's (state) machineries.

12. Tamale discussed several landmark cases wherein these treaties have been used to provide women with "broader and more comprehensive protection than domestic laws" (2001b, 100).

13. BAOBAB is the actual name of the organization, not an acronym. It is based in Lagos, Nigeria, and has been working closely with individuals convicted under the new Sharia criminal legislation in Nigeria passed since 2000.

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