



This is a repository copy of *Tokenism, African women and extractives*.

White Rose Research Online URL for this paper:
<https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/186777/>

Version: Published Version

Article:

Okong'o, N. (2021) *Tokenism, African women and extractives*. *Academia Letters*, 2021. 2560. ISSN 2771-9359

<https://doi.org/10.20935/al2560>

Reuse

This article is distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) licence. This licence allows you to distribute, remix, tweak, and build upon the work, even commercially, as long as you credit the authors for the original work. More information and the full terms of the licence here:
<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/>

Takedown

If you consider content in White Rose Research Online to be in breach of UK law, please notify us by emailing eprints@whiterose.ac.uk including the URL of the record and the reason for the withdrawal request.



eprints@whiterose.ac.uk
<https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/>

Tokenism, African Women and Extractives

Nerea Okong'o, University of Sheffield, UK

The tokenised existence of black African women is common play in extractive industries today. Black African women are treated as lesser beings and an anomaly in the sector. This is evidenced through the absence of African women on the board of Extractive companies and key technical roles albeit with a few 'props' used in an attempt to create an impression of a diverse and inclusive workforce. Whilst this has been argued to be as a result of fewer black women meeting the market threshold for recruitment, the existential gaps in extractive infrastructure points to a sector wide problem that transcends beyond race, biology, and culture and is borderline to neo-colonialism. With less than a third of companies listed on the FTSE Index having women on their board, an interesting dimension emerges and the question as to whether extractive industries really benefits black African women remains (See...WIM, 2013; Woryk, 2011). Although some African women have managed to break the glass ceiling in leadership, African women are often given responsibility for sectors that are about to collapse or are unprofitable. The gender pay gap is also such that African women are earning a lot less than their white and other minority women counterparts. The reality of course is that even with the best intentions and policies, the extractive industry structure just doesn't allow women and especially black women to enter the industry and thrive. As most companies are foreign-owned and report to their mother companies, they are not compelled to ensure diversity and equality in their countries of operation (See...Krauser et.al, 2019). The lack of permanence and recognition of the needs and difference between black African women, black women (American, Caribbean etc) and white women has also ensured that African women rarely get the opportunity to thrive in these sectors as they are disadvantaged not only by their race but also by competing social issues like motherhood, poverty, and lack of empowerment making them perfect candidates for tokenism within extractive sectors. This is due to their focus on survival rather than equality and equal opportunities. Black African women are

therefore less likely to challenge the status quo and will likely accept tokenism as a reward for hard work. This is indeed messy as how do you help an oppressed person who does not know they are oppressed? This situation has resulted in black African women fighting amongst themselves for these tokenised opportunities without realising that such ‘carrots’ are only but a part of social control meant to keep women in their place and for companies to continue operating without being held accountable on their inclusivity and diversity policies.

Despite the above, I argue that although tokenism is a huge problem for women’s rights and experiences within masculinised sectors particularly for black African women and women in general, it is also necessary. This is because it has the ability to get black women ‘at the door’ which is important as there is no point in coming up with solutions if black women are not a part of these solutions. The danger however, is that companies are too focused on tokenism as a solution for inequality, lack of diversity and racism that they have failed to invest in infrastructure that will enable black women to not only enter masculinised sectors like extractives, but to thrive in them. As such in an attempt to define or rather (de)complicate the gender concept in extractives, its therefore imperative to recognise black African women in African extractives as an individual category that needs to be harnessed and nurtured in order to yield better outcomes for women in Africa. The framing of gender therefore has to change to adapt an African feminist perspective and approach in order to provide an insider look into the issue of Africanism and the place of African women in extractive industries, albeit recognising the extensive control extractive industries have on African countries with 53 out of 54 countries having some form of extraction going on (See...AU et.al, 2010). Such framing enables feminist discourse to draw from the multiple facets of ‘woman’ to include race, biology, ideology, practice, constraint, conflict and power whilst affirming its complexities and multi-faceted nature from an African lens. As such, it will take a more radical approach to ensure that conversations around tokenism change to ensure black African women are at the heart of the conversations both as participants and leaders. This will ensure that the false sense of belonging and acceptance validated through misogynistic policies and infrastructure are dismantled and black women experiences, identity and context identified and recognised as key issues towards ensuring better outcomes for women in extractive and other sectors that thrive on masculinity. This is also good for the sectors as a more diverse and inclusive workforce ensures more social legitimacy and acceptance especially in contexts such as Africa where the locals have always been considered inferior to their white counterparts despite having higher qualifications and a better understanding of the local context.

References

- AU et.al, 2010. African Union, Economic Commission for Africa, African Development Bank Consortium, 2010. Framework and Guidelines on Land Policy in Africa. Land Policy in Africa: A Framework to Strengthen Land Rights, Enhance Productivity and Secure Livelihoods.
- WIM. 2013. Women in Mining (UK). Mining for Talent: A study of women on boards in the mining industry by WIM (UK) and PwC. In P. LLC (Ed.). London.
- Woryk, M. 2011. Women in Corporate Governance: A Cinderella's Story. U. Dayton L. Rev. 37, 21.
- Krauser, M., Wegenast, T., Schneider, G. and Elgersma, I.H., 2019. A gendered resource curse? Mineral ownership, female unemployment and domestic violence in Sub-Saharan Africa. *Zeitschrift für Friedens-und Konfliktforschung*, 8(2), pp.213-237.