AFRICAN FEMINIST POLITICS OF KNOWLEDGE

Tensions, Challenges, Possibilities

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NORDISKA AFRIKAINSTITUTET 2009

Indexing terms:

Gender studies
Feminism
Women's rights
Academic freedom
Higher education
Research
Research workers
Women in development
Empowerment
Africa south of Sahara

Cover illustration:
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Cover design: Rogue Four Design
Language checking: Peter Colenbrander
Index: Rohan Bolton
ISBN 978-91-7106-662-6
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INTRODUCTION

Feminist Politics of Knowledge

Signe Arnfred and Akosua Adomako Ampofo

This book has two aims. First we seek to create a space in which feminist manoeuvrings in the diverse and often troubled waters of donor agencies, university institutions and governmental and non-governmental organisations are revealed and discussed. We expose the dilemmas and conflicts that feminist researcher-practitioners living and working in the Global South have to deal with on a daily basis. The chapters are written by feminist researchers and activists living and working in Africa. However, we believe that many of the challenges addressed will be recognised by feminist researchers living anywhere in the postcolonial world. The book does not seek to 'represent the entire continent', nor does it provide an exhaustive list of the kinds of challenges postcolonial feminist researchers and practitioners in Africa face. Second, we embark on some much needed analysis – disentangling the dilemmas, tensions, challenges and possibilities of feminist research and activism in the minefields of the cultures, practices and expectations of university bureaucracies, donor agencies and North-South collaboration. This kind of analysis is by its very nature 'bottom-up', taking as a point of departure the lived experiences, insights and context-specific reflections of the authors. The volume is innovative in this regard – building knowledge which we did not have before.

The field with which the book is concerned may thus be described as a series of interrelated dilemmas. A major dilemma of general relevance is that of funding. In a situation where much work on gender in Africa is commissioned by donor agencies, it is not always easy for the researchers involved to strike the delicate balance between autonomous research on the one hand and servicing the agendas of donors and/or governments on the other. As far as Africa-based researchers are concerned, the situation is often aggravated by the fact that many African countries and/or universities have not allocated independent funds for research, and that in general university teachers' salaries are not very high. Thus, in order to survive, or simply in order to have funds for academic research, many university employees in Africa take on consultancy work as a complementary activity. The dilemma in this context is the

terms of reference for the research and consulting: who decides the research agenda, the focus of the study and the concepts to be used? Thus dilemmas of funding extend into conflicting politics and strategies of knowledge. The epistemic power of donor agencies is a fact to be reckoned with – as testified and discussed in several of the chapters in this volume.

A second dilemma, related to the first, is the extent to which feminist researchers can carve out a relationship between political activism on the one hand and donor-driven projects, programmes and agendas on the other. Sometimes, donor initiatives may be taken up and taken over by feminists, with donor money being used for autonomous, transformative agendas. At other times, donor agendas are allowed to absorb all efforts and energies. The questions that emerge from the chapters are how to take advantage of donor money while maintaining organisational autonomy, and how to deploy donor priorities to serve a feminist agenda.

A third dilemma is the double identity – felt and experienced by many feminists – as academic researchers on the one hand and as activists/advocates for women's issues on the other. On the face of it, there would appear to be no reason why these two identities should not coexist happily, or at least comfortably. In reality, however, praxis and theory are often positioned in opposition to each other. Activists often find theory empty and removed from reality because it fails to speak to women's (and men's) lived experiences, the "immediacy, messiness and raw brutality" (Nnameka 2003, 358) of their lives. Scholars, by contrast, find activists unwilling to engage with the centrality of theory as providing a roadmap for transformation. How are these dilemmas between academic and activist concerns being worked out and resolved in practice? Gender research rooted in activist work, informed by women's struggles on the ground, is often an ideal of politically oriented feminist research. But through which networks and institutions can this work in practice? These are questions the book seeks to answer.

Although the authors of the volume come from different geographical and professional places and positions, they also share many similarities. All are located in a few countries on the African continent: Nigeria, South Africa, Ghana and Mozambique. It was never the intention for the reflections and analyses in this book to 'cover the continent', and the book does not embark on comparisons between different countries in terms of conditions or possibilities.[1] Further, although the authors come from diverse professional

1. We recognise that South Africa has better conditions for research compared to most other African countries.

locations, all are researchers – some are, or have been located in the academy, others are independent researchers, while yet others work within the NGO world, in some cases in organisations they have set up. They theorise from their experiences as persons based in Africa, highlighting the dilemmas and conflicts posed by identities as academics and researchers on the one hand, and dependence on donor funding on the other. Somewhere in the mix are often also ideological commitments to activism and advocacy work that may be in conflict with the philosophies of particular funding agencies or the climate of their institutional bases. The authors present stories of joys and pains, alliances and betrayals, successes and failures. Most write from a first person perspective, not merely because this is a feminist mode of writing, but also because in so doing they are able to unearth the relationships between their personal reflections and feminist politics and epistemologies. Thus, they are compelled to engage with notions of, and commitment to, the social utility of their work.

Bennett and Pereira show how groups of researchers, in spite of consultancy work, through mutual support and organised networks have managed to maintain their own agendas and carry out work whose relevance is perceived along the journey as well as at the destination. Ilumoka's chapter reflects the absurdity as well as the insidious nature of globally problematised issues, while Adomako Ampofo shows that problems of African women, which have been defined in the global North while experienced in the global South, can actually be destabilised both methodologically and conceptually, using funding agencies' money. Adomako Ampofo, Ezumah and Casimiro/Andrade speak to the tensions within and across feminist spaces, but they also show that finding a common ground is possible. There are also more painful accounts, such as those of Lundgren/Prah, and also Peirera, of how the research environment, especially in the university, cannot only stifle imaginative endeavours, but also erode women's sense of competence as knowledge producers. Lewis's chapter is painful at a more general level, showing how feminist endeavours are being coopted and depoliticised through subtle changes in modes of speech: how cooption and compromise occur through language. Throughout the volume, painful accounts intersect with success stories, while the authors also chart the challenges ahead and share visions of (more) feminist futures.

Perhaps some of the authors could be accused of being polemical and providing insufficient 'empirical evidence'. But questions of what constitutes 'evidence', the ways in which what is considered 'knowledge' is gathered and what kinds of 'knowledge' are validated, are among the very issues that the

book seeks to highlight. Perhaps it is time for African feminists to speak more forcefully for the liberation of feminist theory (and indeed all theory) from the personalisation and jargons that characterise Western scholarship? For example, Nnaemeka (2003) notes that those whose epistemological journeys are guided by orality are bound to theorise differently from those who come from a more literary tradition. Positionality is important. All the authors argue that what is generally considered mainstream, 'scientific' and 'objective' is usually only 'malestream'. Among the Akan of West Africa, when the community is totally stumped for ideas on an issue or when there is a deadlock over a decision, the community usually consults the *abrewa*, 'old lady'. The old lady's wisdom is received without question and the community can relax in the assurance that she will know what to do. No one requires that she produce 'empirical evidence' for her perspectives. Her perspectives are respected and validated because they have been built over a lifetime of experience, including the spiritual insight that comes with being an abrewa. In the same way, the feminist writers in this volume argue that their experiences and perspectives constitute knowledge that needs to be recognised, validated and included in the business of knowledge production and, ultimately, the transformation of their societies.

The Beginnings and Location of this Project

This project has a history that goes back several years. In 2001, the Nordic Africa Institute's research programme on Sexuality, Gender and Society in Africa, coordinated by Signe Arnfred, called for papers for a conference entitled Contexts of Gender in Africa: Dilemmas and Challenges of Feminist Research. The call was for papers in three sections: 1) Research, Activism, Consultancies: Dilemmas and Challenges; 2) Conceptualising Gender: Reflections on Concepts and Methods of Research; and 3) Thinking Sexualities in Contexts of Gender. However, despite Arnfred's expectation that several people would be anxious to write about the challenges they faced in straddling the multiple roles of researcher, activist and practitioner, the conference, which was held in Uppsala in February 2002, yielded only one paper that spoke directly to the dilemmas of doing feminist research, consulting and activism in Africa. This paper was written by Akosua Adomako Ampofo. Throughout the meeting, both overt discussions as well as less specific observations made it clear that tensions and contradictions exist between and among these spaces of feminist endeavour as they coalesce and collide. Several if not all of the participants had experienced the ten-

sions flowing from the triple identity as researcher, consultant and activist/advocate. Some also spoke of family-related identities as wives and mothers, daughters, sisters, aunts and so forth, and how these impinged on abilities to operate within and across these spheres. Many spoke of the difficulties of simply being a woman and/or working on gender-related issues, and how this created additional tensions. It became clear that these tensions form an important basis for sharing, reflection and analysis. The comments and discussions that followed the presentation of the only paper in the section also called for greater introspection, as all of us work within a global world with the different and often contradictory interests of donor agencies, especially international ones, and local populations. This latter theme emerged as an important one for almost all the authors in the current volume.

At the close of the Uppsala meeting, we (Adomako Ampofo and Arnfred) felt it was important to give words to these tensions and dilemmas. Because these dilemmas, lived by so many but spoken about by so few, are rarely put into writing, we decided to plan a second meeting which would focus specifically on the ways in which research, activism/advocacy and consultancy work challenge and/or reinforce each other. A new call for papers was circulated, and the workshop entitled Research, Activism, Consultancies: Dilemmas and Challenges was held at the University of Ghana in October 2003. The majority of the papers in this volume were first presented at that workshop. As is so often the case with edited collections like this one, the final assemblage of papers is the outcome of several factors. There was the open call for papers, but there were also specific attempts on our part to cover certain aspects of the issues we felt the collection ought to address. We wanted a mixture of researcher/activist identities; we wanted authors located in universities and outside universities; we wanted to show the interrelationship between women/feminist researchers and different types of women's organisations. We also wanted the papers (some of them at least) to reflect aspects of the history of feminist thinking and organising in Africa. We did not succeed equally well in fulfilling all of these intentions. We tried hard to get a contribution on the history, strengths and weaknesses of one of the very first African women's research organisation, AAWORD (Association of African Women for Research and Development).[2] We didn't succeed on this count. We were also unsuccessful in getting a contribution reflecting the general problems in the field from the specific vantage points of gay/lesbian activist/feminist scholars. Of course, the book may be read by some

2. In French, AFARD.

as leaving important themes unexplored – and perhaps this is as it should be, since, as we noted at the beginning, the point was never to exhaust the field, but rather to initiate discussion.

Feminist Politics of Knowledge: Researcher/Activist Alliances

Feminist knowledge must be situated, and very often is rooted in experience. Right from the start of the New Women's Movement, the so called 'Second Wave', knowledge and experience have been closely connected. Women's discovery of the fact that what counted as 'knowledge' (for example, in the social sciences) was based on male experience, often explicitly discounting women, gave rise in part to the very earliest connections between 'women's studies' and the New Women's Movement in the Global North. When Arnfred started her career as a feminist in Scandinavia in the 1970s, students were activists and activists were students. Political activism against gender discrimination in the labour market and for free access to abortions went hand in hand with consciousness raising groups, in which, through the sharing of experiences, young students/activists discovered that the personal is political. In student study circles, we, the students/activists, tried to develop thinking about women's positions in society. We also struggled long and hard against university cultures and authorities in order to redesign disciplines so they would take women's perspectives into account, and in order for universities to give space and resources to special centres for Women's Studies. An aspect of this struggle was the push for taking women into consideration in the context of Development Studies – a field of study which had emerged to support the development aid paradigm that had taken over where colonialism had left off in Africa.

The story of the theoretical and paradigmatic shifts and turns from Women in Development (WID) to Women and Development (WAD), and finally Gender and Development (GAD) have been told and analysed by several authors (see among others Kabeer 1994, Arnfred 2001, Sen 2006) with different emphases. However, what they have in common is a focus on the crucial role of the researcher/activist alliance in the push for integration, first of 'women', then of the power aspects of male-female gender relations in the analysis of 'development' as well as in the practice of development assistance. The push for 'gender' as an analytical category was indeed a push for new agenda setting in 'development', questioning the mainstream/malestream notion of 'development' spearheaded by the Bretton Woods Institutions (primarily the World Bank and the International

Monetary Fund, IMF). The series of UN World conferences on Women, Human Rights and Population held in the 1980s and 1990s provided a space for further advancements in feminist agendas in the area of 'development'. This advancement was still rooted in researcher/activist cooperation and culminated in the Platform for Action accepted at the Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing in 1995. In Africa, feminist scholarship and activism began to gain a foothold in women and development debates in the 1970s and 1980s. Both scholars and activists were involved in the establishment of the Association of African Women for Research and Development (AAWORD/AFARD) in Dakar in 1977. AAWORD envisioned an agenda for African feminism through research and activism (Adomako Ampofo et al. 2004).

Since then, however, the specific character of researcher/activist cooperation has changed from a situation where, as in Scandinavia in the 1970s, the researcher and the activist was more or less the same person, to one in which activism tends to be more local and specific (and often localised in the South), while research is perceived as more global, generalised and rooted in Northern perspectives. During this same period, many things have changed both in the women's movement and in the 'development' industry. Feminist theorising in the North, as noted by Lewis in this volume has lost the close contact with activism, becoming increasingly professionalised in an academic sense, transformed into a means for individual academic merit and career.[3] And in the field of 'development', to an increasing extent 'development discourse' has assumed a life of its own. Here the point of 'theory' is frequently to justify and legitimise practice, rather than to act as a guide for practice in a process of transformation. Development discourse may be seen, as Vincent Tucker argues, as "part of an imperial process whereby other peoples are appropriated and turned into objects" (Tucker 1999:1).

Nevertheless, at the same time other trends may also be discerned. The picture of Women/Gender in/and Development is rarely black and white. Many trends and good intentions are active simultaneously and issues of power and strategy are important in this context (see Arnfred 2001). Presumably, the fact that so many African academics depend on donor funding for their research, including funding from international NGOs, has meant that scholarship has had to have a relationship of some sort, even if a makeshift or tenuous one, with activist work. The challenge is to take advantage

3. An important exception to this generalisation is among women of colour in the Global North.

of this demand and to turn it into something useful from a feminist perspective (see Pereira's and Bennett's chapters).

Adomako Ampofo shows how the classroom, which is viewed as the theoretical space par excellence, can itself become an activist space with a conscious transformative agenda. Adomako Ampofo recounts a satisfying experience co-teaching a gender course on Culture and Gender in African Societies, with a focus on Men and Masculinities. She explains how a careful mix of course materials and pedagogic styles had the students (incidentally all male in this case) engaging in reflection and self-analysis, and in some cases led to a willingness to reconsider their own positions. As part of a carefully strategised political move in 2003, just such a transformative feminist agenda for teaching was institutionalised in the Gender and Women's Studies curriculum initiative of the African Gender Institute at the University of Cape Town. The programme brought together teachers of Gender and Women's Studies from across the continent to share, develop and refine resources and pedagogies for teaching that would transform gender relations. Workshops were held, curricula developed and a website and list serve established to facilitate sharing.

Struggling in the Discursive Field

One might assume that the point of carrying out research and creating knowledge would be for such knowledge to become a guide for practice, but this is not necessarily the case. Certainly the knowledge industry attached to development aid has grown. According to some analysts, however, the functions of this particular cooperation between knowledge and development aid has been more about the legitimisation of what already takes place than about the genuine transformation of practice. Guttal asserts, "Development now has entire armies of experts in every possible field at its disposal, ready and waiting to carry out its bidding. While these actors benefit greatly from grants and contracts through development aid budgets, equally important, they contribute to and hold up the massive corpus of knowledge that legitimizes development's existence and justifies its expansion" (Guttal 2006:27). Development buzzwords such as 'participation', 'empowerment', 'poverty reduction' and 'capacity building' – all frequently used in gender-and-development contexts – "lend development activities the normative basis they require, swathing development agencies with the mantle of rightness, and conferring on them the legitimacy to intervene on behalf of 'the poor' and needy" (Cornwall and Brock 2006:67).

These kind of dynamics are also behind the cooption into development discourse of initially radical feminist conceptualisations, from the notion of 'gender' over 'empowerment' to 'women's human rights'. As has been noted by some commentators, the shift in language from WID to GAD has not necessarily been paradigmatic, and for many people 'gender' has merely replaced 'women' (Kabeer 1994). Furthermore, like its earlier predecessor WID, in reality GAD has often restricted itself to dealing with women's practical needs and shown less concern for tackling politics – the unequal gender relations that feed and sustain the subordinate positions of women in many communities. The general picture today is one of radical concepts and ideas being coopted by powerful institutions and being transformed and depoliticised in the process. In her chapter, Lewis shows how processes very similar to those that have taken place in the general field of 'development discourse' have also been played out in the field of national South African politics. According to her analysis, "the emphasis in public discourse of gender transformation ... shifted dramatically from a bottom-up articulation of the interests of women's organizations, to the top-down codification of negotiated rights and entitlements that are believed to have national relevance" (Lewis, this volume).

Feminist reactions to this kind of analysis are diverse. Gita Sen offers an encouraging take on the situation, seeing the cooption of feminist conceptualisations by powerful states and development institutions not as a defeat, but rather as (partial) victory for the women's movement. Sen (2006) analyses the feminist agendas for and struggles during some of the important UN world conferences during the 1990s (particularly the International Conference on Human Rights held in Vienna in 1993 and the International Conference on Population and Development that took place in Cairo in 1994), during which critical research supported by activism waged major struggles to change old concepts and frameworks and introduce new ones. Based on this analysis, she cautions that "such a struggle is not a once-and-for-all-event. Winning the struggle over discourse (as happened at Vienna or Cairo) is only the first step. The greater the victory, the greater the likelihood that others will attempt to take over the discourse and subvert its meaning. The battle is not over, it has just begun" (Sen 2006:139).

The important insight here is that the battle over discourse is a battlefield in itself. Concepts change meaning depending on who uses them, for what purposes they are used and in which contexts they appear. If concepts like 'participation', 'empowerment' and 'poverty reduction' appear in a text along with 'ownership', 'accountability' and 'governance', they are brought

to mean something different from what they might mean in a possible alternative 'chain of equivalence' with words like 'social justice', 'redistribution' and 'solidarity' (Cornwall and Brock 2006:71). The idea of a 'chain of equivalence' – meaning "words that work together to evoke a particular set of meanings" – is adopted from Ernesto Laclau. The idea is useful for making clear the extent to which the meaning of certain concepts depends on context and thus on continued struggle. Cornwall and Brock explain that "as a word comes to be included in a 'chain of equivalence', those meanings that are consistent with other words in the chain come to take precedence over other, more dissonant, meanings" (2006:48). The struggle in the field of discourse is not just about the words and concepts in isolation, but is also about how, and in which contexts, they are put to use. According to Gita Sen, feminists must continue struggling in order to maintain the feminist, transformative, agenda-setting meanings and implications of words such as 'empowerment' and 'women's human rights' (Sen 2006).

Deconstructing the Rights Discourse

The discursive victories pointed out by Gita Sen have typically been formulated in a language of rights. This was explicitly the case at the UN international conferences in Vienna and Cairo respectively ('Women's Human Rights' and 'Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights'). Viewed from African perspectives there are, however, pitfalls embedded in this rights discourse. The battle for meaning must be rooted in men's and women's own experiences. Lewis points out that "transnational instruments set in place a language of rights which targets universal and transhistorical subjects as clients and beneficiaries who 'receive' what has been conceptualised as just mainly by others" (Lewis, this volume). Lewis's focus is on official state-level discourse in South Africa, but it is striking how South African state discourse on women (and gender) runs parallel to international development discourse. Ilumoka's chapter also discusses and deconstructs development discourse. From her point of view as a Nigerian participant in the NGO forum of the UN International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo in 1994, the framing of demands in terms of 'rights' was a Northern feminist agenda. The concept of 'reproductive rights' has come to be accepted almost unquestioningly today: however, in her chapter Ilumoka shows how, during the Cairo conference, pressure was put on African women to conform to the rights discourse "silencing dissent and further exploration into precisely what was meant by reproductive rights, and what might

be differing perspectives on them" (Ilumoka, this volume). According to Ilumoka, based on her long experience of work with women's health issues as felt and experienced by Nigerian women, the health priorities of low income urban and rural women are related to means of livelihood, food, clean water, shelter, education and access to health services. They simply don't conceive of reproductive health as separate from other aspects of health that daily confront them. In Ilumoka's view then, to frame these things as rights and to re-prioritise them in terms of what is perceived to be specifically reproductive health issues is to impose a different framework and to redefine local women's roles and identities in a colonial manner.

In this optic, the dominance of the Global North over the South is ever present, a dominance which is also present within the women's movement, silencing dissent and stifling alternative views and perspectives. According to Ilumoka, these North-South as well as regional lobby efforts have done much to weaken national and regional level advocacy in Africa. The pressure is to speak in the accepted language, with no space allowed for conversations about ambivalences or for the voicing of discomfort, for example regarding advocacy of rights to abortion. Hence Ilumoka (this volume) notes that the "magic words – 'reproductive rights' – brought forth donor funding for projects professing to be focused on promoting women's reproductive rights, whilst any critique and reservation was viewed with suspicion". Similarly, Southern NGOs are seen as implementing partners, their task being not to conceptualise local issues and needs nor to define the agenda for action, but simply to implement predefined agendas. Based on this analysis, Ilumoka calls for resistance to the 'rights fundamentalism' imposed from the North. Her point is not that there is no basis for North/South alliances, but that such alliances must include a space for partners in the Global South to develop their own concepts and ideas.

According to this critique of the rights discourse, the struggles in the discursive field are even more complex: they cannot simply be about destabilising the established terminology regarding 'reproductive and sexual health and rights' against threats and onslaughts from conservative forces such as the New Right, some elements within the Catholic Church and/or fundamentalist Christianity and Islam, such as has been the case at the UN conferences. They must also be open to local critique, including the need for meaningful interpretation and reformulation in local contexts. Indeed, as Adomako Ampofo suggests in her chapter, religious spaces can be potent sites for activism, and a feminist (read: secular)/fundamentalist (read: religious) dichotomy may frequently be more theorised than real. Using the

examples of an organisation that works on issues of violence against women and children, as well as the work of a coalition pushing for the passage of domestic violence legislation in Ghana, she shows how deeply religious individuals are frequently at the forefront of struggles for women's rights. Unfortunately, all too often the concept of 'rights', especially as conceptualised in discourse framed in the Global North, is pitted against religion as a taken-for-granted enemy or obstructionist force, thereby creating unnecessary cleavages in feminist spaces. Completely overlooked is the distinction between a personal faith in a God or higher power and the major religious institutions (overwhelmingly established by men). A personal faith does not need a religious institution to abide, while a religion and its religious leaders are both defunct without a collective of adherents. Thus, like any human institution, the people who run the religious shows and enterprises may sometimes do so in ways that are at odds with (and may even subvert) the ways in which the 'faithful' understand their relationship to God and her/his tenets.

Hegemonic Notions of 'Sexuality'

Knowledge hegemonies are not only constructed between the North and the South but also internally between feminists. In her chapter, Ezumah makes a similar argument to the one posed by Ilumoka. She recounts an encounter in South Africa during which she was criticised for (over) prioritising Nigerian women's 'reproductive health' concerns and not paying any attention to the seemingly more important question of their sexuality and pleasure. Perhaps the critic saw this as a prioritising of practical over strategic needs. In any case, it reveals that feminists on the continent do not share a common definition of feminist concerns. Implicit in the critique that issues of sexual pleasure have been ignored is a notion, also conveyed by McFadden (2003), that sexual pleasure and power are intrinsic to feminist empowerment and that the silences around them reflect a lack of feminist agency and determination:

> For the majority of black women, the connection between power and pleasure is often not recognised, and remains a largely unembraced and undefined heritage ... In often obscure or hidden ways, it lies at the heart of female freedom and power; and when it is harnessed and 'deployed', it has the capacity to infuse every woman's personal experience of living and being with a liberating political force (McFadden 2003:50).

Here McFadden is arguing in favour of a discourse that enables women to step beyond the "bounded, limited notions of sexuality as being tied to reproduction or to the avoidance of disease or violation". Nevertheless, it is also important to realise that many African feminists do not see the need to privilege sexual pleasure. They see issues of protection from HIV infection and abuse as very important and, from a historical perspective, they see silences around sexuality as legitimate. Charmaine Pereira's response to McFadden captures this aptly: "Why should these silences [about African women's sexualities] simply be *condemned*, given the historical conditions of imperial expansion and racist fascination with the hypersexuality projected onto Africans by Europeans ... Rather than condemning the silences, would it not be more productive to map them with a view to their future exploration and understanding?" (2003:62). It is to such a debate on sexuality that Ezumah returns, revealing the importance of paying attention to context and underscoring the need to avoid designing a universal feminist agenda.

Activism as Feminist Research

Several of the chapters show that close connections between activism and research have remained a characteristic of feminist research in Africa (see chapters by Adomako Ampofo, Bennett, Casimiro and Andrade, Lewis and Peirera). Thought provoking, cutting edge research carried out by African feminists has often been inspired by the researchers' involvement in feminist activism and/or networking. Bennett makes a case for moving beyond research-being-inspired-by-activism to a genuine redefinition of (feminist) research, "moving the term [research] from primary reference to a dynamic between researcher and subject participants, towards a mesh of interaction (textual, communicative, organizational, and individual), which gradually uncovers 'new' information and facilitates fresh, unexpected inquiry" (Bennett, this volume). Based on her own experience over a decisive five-year period of work as a member of the coordination committee of NETSH (Network of Southern African Higher Education Institutions Challenging Sexual Harassment/Sexual Violence), Bennett has developed an argument defining theoretically oriented feminist research as quintessentially disuninterested in the polarisation of 'author'/'subject', 'theory'/'experience' and 'intellectual'/'activist'. In the context of NETSH, new insights emerged through discussions and debates at workshops and conferences that brought

together network members from diverse professional backgrounds, different universities and a variety of countries throughout the Southern Africa region. Furthermore, within the context of NETSH, new insights also emerged from the difficulties and resistances encountered in the processes of carrying out the committee's work. The difficulties were practical as well as epistemological. In contexts where "academic knowledge was conceptualised as the encyclopaedic alphabet of patriarchal class interests, designed as a code for the exclusion of women and deeply implicated in the material effects of sexism", the institutional culture and authority would almost a *priori* exclude the incompatible authority of the subjective narratives of rape survivors. Bennett describes the evolution of feminist thinking during a series of NETSH conferences between 1994 and 2000. At the first conference (1994), subjective narratives were not given space on the official agenda: even the feminists themselves could not (yet) bridge the gap between 'academic rigour' and 'subjective narrative'. By the second conference (1997), this had changed, and rape survivors' narratives were now taken as a point of departure for further analysis. By the time of the third conference (2000), the focus had moved on to discussions of masculinities and investigations of forces perpetuating institutional cultures of sexual violence. Bennett's chapter gives a detailed and unique description and analysis of how new approaches emerge through discussion and debate between feminists with very different backgrounds. In Bennett's optic, this development of new approaches is in itself a process of research: during these processes boundaries between 'researcher' and 'activist' are blurred and new knowledge is developed through new channels in new institutions.

Building Networks and Institutions: Autonomy is Paramount

Networks such as NETSH are obviously not alternatives to universities, but they are important supplementary sources of knowledge production. This is also Pereira's position in her account of the history of another network, the Network for Women's Studies in Nigeria, NWSN. Pereira argues that the interdependence of universities and other organisations as devices for creating and sustaining knowledge through teaching and research requires recognition, and she posits that the need for scholars to create additional knowledge environments through networks is even more critical for researchers working in the field of gender and women's studies. The need for networks that maintain relations between feminist researchers scattered across differ-

ent universities and research institutions, which are not infrequently hostile to feminist research and activism, should not be difficult to appreciate. Such networks are also important outside Africa, where feminist academics perpetually find themselves (ourselves) engaged in uphill epistemological struggles with mainstream academia, where 'man' and 'human' are perpetually conflated. According to Pereira, based on her experience of holding NWSN together for a number of years with no funding whatsoever, networks need autonomy and institutionalisation – autonomy in order to be able to set agendas determined solely by discussion among members. Such agenda setting has been the aim of NWSN from the very beginning, "to set up a process through which we will indeed be able to set our own agenda for the future development of gender and women's studies locally, but also with some awareness of the regional and international contexts" (Pereira quoting from Amina Mama's report from the network's inaugural workshop in 1996). Autonomy means autonomy in relation to universities, but also autonomy in relation to donors. Autonomy in relation to universities means minimising struggles with hostile environments. This aspect of the struggle played a major role in discussions during the first NETSH workshop in 1996, where the contradictory problematic of first having to fight for administrative acknowledgement and cooperation, and secondly – in order to maintain that autonomy – having to fight for political disengagement from this same administration was noted. Mama explains "concern was expressed over the difficulty of maintaining political and academic integrity, if we have to depend on administration. Relationships with administration represent a major challenge to all concerned with advancing women's studies" (Mama 1996:65).

Autonomy in relation to donors is a no less thorny issue since networks typically need at least some additional funding over and above what they can generate from members in order to keep them updated, and in order to arrange occasional workshops to share experiences and develop ideas. Membership fees are not enough for this. Personal commitment and collective engagement from members are necessary in any case, but sustainability and institutionalisation are the real challenges, and for this a great deal of funding is needed. Adomako Ampofo describes a network of feminist researchers both within and outside the academy that was born in an institutional (university) space in 1990 and eventually gained official blessing and support in 2005 when it was transformed into a centre at that same university. She shows how DAWS (the Development and Women's Studies Programme) successfully sourced funding from the British Council which enabled it to

build a respectable collection of books and films for teaching and research, as well as research grants for its members to spend time at UK institutions. Today, CEGENSA, the Centre for Gender Studies and Advocacy, is officially mandated to carry out advocacy and build links with governmental and civil society organisations in addition to its research and curriculum-development mandates.

Casimiro and Andrade document another important network of feminist gender researchers, the Women and Law in Southern Africa research trust (WLSA). This network was initiated in 1990, partly as a follow up to discussions at the Nairobi UN World Conference for Women in 1985. In the early years, this research network was able to get funding from Danida (Danish International Development Agency) to carry out research combined with lobbying work and legal activism. This was possible because of the close collaboration between the African project managers and a few Danish researchers who had the confidence of Danida, and who acted as intermediaries between the donor agency and the African researchers. However, there have been constant struggles along the way. One problem, from the donor's point of view, has been that the researchers from the seven Southern African countries (including Mozambique) were not sufficiently poor and needy, nor were they rural women – i.e., they did not fit the victim-image, which is often so important in the development aid arena. Another problem has been that the immediate and short term impact of the donor money being spent could not be readily 'measured': donors often measure 'impact' in terms of visibly improved, immediate, quantifiable living conditions for a given target group. The impact of a series of research projects with a feminist inclination needs to be registered and legitimised in different ways. Thus, in terms of funding, the life of the WLSA network has not been smooth. On the other hand, the WLSA experience also provides lessons on the possibilities, through struggles and alliances, for securing funding for feminist research and for developing feminist approaches. According to Casimiro and Andrade:

> We in the Mozambican WLSA team learnt a lot through the regional collaboration, and meetings with feminist researchers in neighbouring countries were of great importance ... It was as part of the research conducted under this project that we acquired our information, our knowledge and our experience of feminist theory. It was in this project that we became feminists, learning that knowledge and the feminist position is recreated and developed day by day. (Casimiro and Andrade, this volume)

As was the case with the DAWS network in Ghana, the Mozambican WLSA was initially located within university space, the Centre of African Studies at the Eduardo Mondlane University. Later, when conditions at the Eduardo Mondlane University grew harsher politically, it moved out and established itself as a research NGO.

All these networks discuss bridging the gap between researchers and activists, although in different ways. NETSH could be characterised as a researcher/activist network, where the sharing of knowledge between 'researchers' and 'activists' is important, so important in fact that the very distinction between 'researchers' and 'activists' may be erased or is at least blurred, with new creative thinking emerging from the meeting between different types of knowledge and experience. CEGENSA, WLSA and NWSN are researchers' networks, where the importance of the network lies in the contact and communication between researchers who share experiences and draw inspiration from each other, for example regarding relevant conceptualisations and research methodologies, curricula for the teaching of gender studies, new literature and so forth. As funding becomes available, actual research projects may also be developed within these networks – as has indeed been the case in all three organisations. All these networks, however, also have an activist agenda, the researchers seeing themselves as activists and advocates, taking an active part in the gender politics of their countries, or – as in the case of NWSN – designing their research as 'action research'. Such action research at NWSN is developed in collaboration with activist agendas, and feeds back into political activism, calling attention to, and fighting against, sexual harassment on those university campuses where the NWSN work takes place.

Dilemmas of Funding

An incipient danger for feminist work in Africa is 'the consultancy syndrome', named thus in the report of the first meeting of the NWSN network in 1996 (Mama 1996:31). 'The consultancy syndrome' encapsulates the interlocking dangers of, on the one hand, low salaries and bad conditions for research in terms of "poor infrastructure, frequent power cuts, lack of communication and computing facilities, no running water, and abominable toilets – and whatever else characterises the daily realities of African university life (though to a lesser extent in most South African institutions than on the rest of the continent)", and on the other hand the "money, pres-

tige and useful-for-the-future donor contacts" (Arnfred 2004:88, 94), which are embedded in consultancy work. Being able to survive as a researcher in poorly equipped university settings often necessitates generation of funds besides one's salary. An obvious and relatively well-paid way to achieve this is, of course, through consultancy work. Consultancies will also often be the only way for the social scientist to actually get a chance to conduct some fieldwork. We acknowledge that scholars in the Global North also engage in consultancy work, for prestige, status and monetary compensation. However, the exigencies for this are less present than for scholars in the South. The material conditions of African academics favour accepting consultancy work. The ethical and methodological dilemmas inherent in accepting being a 'consultant' are highlighted by most of the authors in this volume: they recognise that consultancies are not necessarily beneficial to their work as academics and/or activists. The saying "he who pays the piper calls the tune" summarises the dilemmas inherent in this phenomenon. In the chapter co-authored by Lundgren and Prah, Prah writes about the attractions of consultancy work: for instance, being paid US$ 1,000 for introducing a 'gender perspective' into a road impact assessment report in a matter of 12 days. She doesn't ask many questions, only to discover that the bulk of the report is very superficially done and that she herself will also not be able to do anything that she considers appropriate. "I felt very guilty", she writes. "What kind of research had I done? I thought I had as good as prostituted myself, allowing myself to be used. I had not helped the women in any way, for sure". The story says nothing about the donor being dissatisfied. The Ghanaian colleague who had asked Prah to help with the 'gender perspective' for this assignment was a 'professional consultant', nevertheless doing less than professional work, according to Prah's standards. One aspect of the dilemmas of funding, or at least the dilemma of consultancies, is that demands of consultancy work are very different from those of academic work, without the distinction always being drawn very clearly. Lundgren and Prah relate how consultancy styles of work can creep into university contexts. Lundgren reports from her experience reviewing files for promotion at her university in Ghana, noting that much of the work submitted turns out to be output from donor-related (consultancy) research. She asks: "What does it mean, for example, that out of 23 publications, ten are technical reports, out of the remaining 13, nine are commissioned reports from outside funds and two are training-oriented?"

The issue here is the quality of research, and also concepts, methods and autonomy. These are in fact interconnected. Good scholarly research

must be open to questions regarding concepts, theory and methodological approaches. It must have the freedom to be critical and to pose unpopular questions. This, however, is not the style of mainstream donor-commissioned 'research'. As stated in a report from the second NWSN workshop held in 1996, "the incompatibility between some donor agencies and researchers was referred to. Whilst researchers needed the donor's funds (in the absence of domestic sources of funding), donors wanted short, sharp, project research that did not leave room for theory, or researchers setting their own agenda or for the intellectual development of academics" (Pereira1997:51).

In addition to being 'short and sharp', donor-funded project reports must also apply a certain language, in the style of 'development buzzwords'. Thus, donor organisations command not only economic power but also epistemic power. In much research in Africa and elsewhere in the global South, donors set the agenda, either explicitly or implicitly. The World Bank, for example, is a major, indeed a decisive, producer of knowledge (Guttal 2006). The World Bank is staffed by clever academics, who pick up trends, sometimes controversial trends, and reissue them as development blueprints. Such powerful organisations determine what is worth knowing, and also, in some cases, who is deemed worthy as a knower (see Pereira, this volume). What is not worth knowing, in this episteme, will be labelled ignorance. As less powerful or well-known donors follow the powerful ones, an implicit and often unrecognised politics of knowledge is embedded in the dilemmas of funding. On the surface, and in its own self-representation, the World Bank is pursuing 'rightness' and 'goodness' (see examples provided by Cornwall and Brock 2006). However, as pointed out by Pereira "one of the unfortunate consequences of the convergence of epistemic and economic power wielded by funders is that their practice (like that of dictators) is rarely subject to critique". Those who would be able to provide this critique are all too often those who receive the funding – and who bites the hand that feeds her? This is where the comparison with dictatorships becomes relevant: "The willingness to engage with dissenting views is a precondition not only for knowledge building, but also for democratisation. Yet, how many agencies, particularly those that champion both knowledge building and democratisation, are themselves able to engage with dissent or critique?" Pereira asks in this volume. Although most powerful organisations are loathe to give up any of their knowledge-creating clout, shifts in the World Bank's position on poverty eradication over the last decade and a half give room for muted hope. While the Bank's shift in paradigm can by

no means be read as feminist, the responses to the Jubilee 2000 movement show that concerted pressure can be effective.[4]

Autonomy and Agenda Setting

Thus, despite the economic and epistemic power of donors, some of the chapters in this volume reflect local resistance and show that despite the minefield it is possible, sometimes, to direct both a theoretical process as well as the methodology of one's work. Getting funding for goals determined by oneself and not by the donor is a field of expertise – and maybe even an art – in its own right.

It is interesting that both DAWS *within* a university in Ghana, and NWSN *outside* the university in Nigeria were able to become institutionalised with UK development assistance funding through British Council Higher Education Links. Both CEGENSA (the Centre for Women's Studies and Advocacy, which developed out of DAWS) and NWSN (now IWSN) determine their own programmes and activities, suggesting that working with particular funders can open up space for autonomous work. This is not to suggest that the British Council does not have a framework (indeed, one currently has to link programmes to one or more of the Millennium Development Goals – MDGs). However, the framework is sufficiently broad to allow for local agenda setting. The funding provided support to run workshops, purchase equipment and other resources such as books and for members to travel to the UK, where they could enjoy much needed space

4. *Jubilee 2000* was an international coalition movement in over 40 countries based on the Biblical principle of a 'Jubilee year' quoted in Leviticus (every 50th year), in which inequalities were levelled, as people enslaved because of debts were to be freed and lands lost because of debt were returned. *Jubilee 2000* called for cancellation of Third World debt by the year 2000. Famous supporters of the movement were Bono, Muhammad Ali and Youssou N'dour. Since 1996, in response to *Jubilee 2000* and other civil society and governmental pressures, the IMF and World Bank HIPC (Highly Indebted Poor Countries) programmes have been modified in several ways to include some debt cancellation as well as other reliefs that recognise a stronger link between debt relief and poverty reduction. Gender also formed an important component of the drafting of Poverty Reduction Strategy papers to qualify for HIPC (and hence debt relief) status. Gender also formed an important component of the drafting of Poverty Reduction Strategy papers to qualify for HIPC (and hence debt relief) status. Although the HIPC initiatives that grew out of a response, in part, to *Jubilee 2000* are not about outright debt cancellation they do provide some debt relief and restructuring, and a stronger link between debt relief and poverty reduction, and thus represent a paradigm shift, albeit a rather small one.

to research and write. Although DAWS has now received formal university approval with an ambitious mandate as the Centre for Gender Studies and Advocacy, it is doubtful that either NWSN or DAWS could have survived without the external funding support they received.

Adomako Ampofo describes work in which she carries out research that critiques a dominant concept in population studies with funding received from the Population Council itself. Pereira – who as NWSN coordinator has a great deal of experience in fund raising – suggests that actual research into donor agendas may be needed. One has to study the funding sources and understand them on their own terms. What are their priorities, what programmes do they run, what language do they use? And what are the ideological assumptions underlying the issues as they present them and the determination of their funding priorities? "It seems to me", Pereira says, "that the pursuit of self-determined organizational agendas in the course of fund raising requires an engagement with the donor's own agenda as well as an understanding of, and healthy resistance to, the epistemic power wielded by the donor". Ultimately, the task of raising funds should be seen not as one of carrying out activities for which donor funds are available, but as one of deploying funders' priorities to serve the agenda of one's own projects. This is only partly an intellectual task – writing proposals with an extensive literature review, incisive research questions, appropriate methodology and so on. The covert features of this task have more to do with the internal politics of the funding agency: who runs which programmes?; how much power does 'the boss' wield?; who is willing to defend your proposal if the boss is not enthusiastic?; and the (lack of) internal democracy within funding agencies, including, perhaps even those that ostensibly strengthen 'democracy', 'transparency' and 'accountability'.

Feminism Survives on Visions

Feminist activism and scholarship are ultimately about transformation. Visions and hope for a better future are necessary ingredients of feminist knowledge production. Elsewhere, Pereira puts it like this:

> There is no way of creating knowledge that is not circumscribed by the oppressions of our times if we cannot imagine a better future, if we cannot dream of a way of life that does away with the domination that is part of our everyday realities, if we cannot envision other ways of being. Without imagination, we cannot search for the kind of knowledge that allows us to fully understand our divided realities in order to transcend them. (Pereira 2002)

As argued by several authors in this volume, feminist knowledge must connect to experience, activism and advocacy. In this context, Ilumoka (this volume) notes, "in the face of the onslaught of global capital, growing patriarchal power and the universalising tendencies of powerful Northern women's groups, two processes are indispensable: a) developing clear visions and agendas, and b) organising and institution building to actualise those visions". Activism and knowledge production go hand in hand. As noted by so many feminist scholars over the ages, charting new paths for gender and women's studies is a continuing political, institutional and intellectual struggle. We have tried in this introductory chapter to set out the political, epistemological and financial terrain on which feminist scholarship and activism on the continent is carried out. We hope we have been able to convey not only the challenges that litter the landscape, but also the dynamism of those voyaging across it.

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CHAPTER ONE

One Who has Truth – She has Strength

The Feminist Activist Inside and Outside the Academy in Ghana[1]

Akosua Adomako Ampofo[2]

Introduction

The title of this chapter speaks to a conviction that maintaining commitment to core feminist goals in one's scholarship and praxis provides the strength needed to carry on scholarship and praxis in a context where the exigencies of life so often threaten to crowd out these goals. These 'exigencies' include, but are not limited to, the need to publish and progress in the academy, as well as the need to earn a living in a developing economy. The context is complicated by the fact that feminist scholarship is still viewed as being on the fringes by many in the academy in Africa. In other words, the threat of having apparently laudable (feminist) goals side-tracked by the material realities of life is very real and ever present. This may lead one to carry out research on subjects, or for organisations, that are at odds with one's (feminist) goals. It may also lead to the unquestioning adoption of the latest epistemological or methodological fads. Furthermore, in the pursuit of one's goals it is easy to fall into the trap of validating the product, for example an increase in the number of courses on women or gender, while paying less attention to the outcome, such as whether these courses are transformative in agenda and content. I contend that ultimately it is only possible to maintain one's strength as a feminist scholar and activist through constant reflection, both personal and communal.

The reflections and proposals in this chapter were first presented at a meeting on Contexts of Gender in Africa held in Uppsala, Sweden, in Feb-

1. A reversal and appropriation of a Mamprussi proverb, "One who has strength has the truth".

2. My sincere thanks to the external reviewers, to my sister colleagues Josephine Beoku-Betts and Mary Osirim and co-editor Signe Arnfred, who provided critical comments on earlier versions of this chapter.

ruary 2002. That meeting had three broad themes, one on Research, Activism, Consultancies: Dilemmas and Challenges, for which I wrote the earlier version of this paper, and two others, Conceptualising Gender: Reflections on Concepts and Methods of Research, for which I wrote another paper, "Whose 'Unmet Need' and Issues of 'Agreement' in Reproductive Decision Making" and Thinking Sexualities in Contexts of Gender.[3] As I shuttled between the writing of both papers, I found myself surprised that the one which has evolved into this chapter proved more difficult to write than the more technical theoretical/methodological paper. I had anticipated that this autobiographical narrative would simply flow from my inner being, as it were. This was not to be the case and there were several reasons for this. First, the process of personal reflection and self-analysis as it relates to so-called scientific enquiry remains something many academics, even feminist academics, do very little of, probably because the process does not seem to be a particularly intellectual exercise. After all, most scientific disciplines still train you to remove yourself, and the 'personal' from so-called objective scientific enquiry.[4] Secondly, and related to the first point, even where introspection occurs, it does not usually form part of the so-called intellectual discourse, except, perhaps, as an anecdote to support or expatiate on a finding.[5] Thirdly, African women academics who are also activists are frequently so overwhelmed by the constraints imposed by multi-tasking that we rarely find the opportunity to go behind the scenes of our ideological or theoretical positions to examine and re-examine them, to ask ourselves, "How do I really feel about this perspective? Do I really support this position or have I been compelled to?" Such an examination is important for the simple reason that it provides a barometer that can guide us to re-evaluate

3. Incidentally, only one paper was presented under the theme 'Research, Activism, Consultancies: Dilemmas and Challenges' – mine. Most of the remaining papers were published in a book that emerged out of that meeting, *Rethinking African Sexualities* edited by Signe Arnfred (2004).

4. There are a few exceptions to this trend and some notable exceptions are the co-authored pieces "Dialoguing Women" by Nwando Achebe and Bridget Teboh (2007) that appeared in *Africa after Gender* and Josephine Beoku-Betts's and Wairimũ Njambi's "African Feminist Scholars in Women's Studies: Negotiating Spaces of Dislocation and Transformation in the Study of Women" that appeared in *Meridians* (2005). The journal *Feminist Africa* also routinely provides personal narratives and interviews with scholar-activists.

5. It is true that feminist work and writing has long engaged with the question of 'subjectivity'. However, this is typically limited to a personalised contextualisation apropos the topic of enquiry and autobiographical accounts per se are less common.

our positions, or even quit particular enterprises that we suddenly discover are at odds with our convictions. As feminist activists, we sometimes run with an issue that we hope will work for the well being of women, or that will promote greater gender equity. Then we develop a political commitment to an agenda that will, we hope, ensure that the issue receives attention. Often we seem to remain glued to this position, seemingly unable to concede that there might be nuances and perspectives that we may have ignored. Ilumoka's chapter in this volume illustrates this from the perspective of reproductive health and the concept of 'rights' and 'bodily integrity'. In our quest to ensure that women have control over their bodies, we run the danger of failing to acknowledge that the concept of rights over one's body is highly political, is viewed differently by women in different contexts (for example, there is frequently a conflict between individual rights, collective rights and individual responsibility) and that women have the right to differ from the perceived 'correct' feminist perspective. As scholars who need to publish, in order to have our intellectual efforts legitimised we work within particular paradigms and theoretical frameworks. Often these paradigms and frameworks are constructed in Western or Eurocentric contexts, either because these are the ones we have been trained in and are familiar with because they are (re)produced in the accepted international journals, or because we feel that failure to work within them reduces the value of our own work. Too often, we remain content to collect data for our colleagues from Europe of North America while they drive the theoretical directions of the intellectual enterprise. Yet in a world that remains divided along geopolitical lines and with conflicting geopolitical interests that determine how knowledge is produced and used, the African researcher cannot afford to provide a mere echo of thoughts emanating from the Global North, nor do we have the luxury, as Mkandawire argued (1997), of being mere empiricists. Happily, emerging feminist scholarship on the continent not only criticises Western forms of knowing and knowledge, it has also engaged in theory building that is impacting global feminist scholarship. I believe that African scholars have to be advocates for the survival of our continent and its people. To understand and appreciate our positions as African feminists located in Africa – positions of privilege and power in some contexts as well as positions of disadvantage and on the margins in others – requires a great deal of personal reflection. Reflections on the challenges and possibilities of these positions are the issues this chapter turns to.

I begin the chapter by providing a brief background of my academic training. I then go on to discuss my experiences as and perspectives on being

a researcher/teacher/ consultant and an activist. This is an autobiographical account of the challenges, implications, as well as the responses that these multiple 'roles', responsibilities and allegiances have meant for me.[6] Nonetheless, while I make no claim that this account represents or describes general trends among African feminists, I dare say that my experiences are not unique, and have a broad relevance. On occasion, I have felt contradictions among these 'roles' that I have not always been able to resolve to my satisfaction. At the same time, I also believe the opportunity I have had to straddle these 'roles' has made me more skilful in the performance of each of them, as I have come into contact, made friends and shared experiences with, as well as learned from a variety of people, including many strong, wise, sensitive and intellectually stalwart women. The narrative also addresses my struggles with questions of doing 'academic' versus 'contract' research work, and the construction and dissemination of knowledge. Ultimately, I believe that it is only by being truthful to the principles of a feminist activism that we can be part of, and draw on the strength that emanates from being part of the collective enterprise that gender transformation requires.

My Academic Trajectory

Since the 1980s, African states have undergone much change and upheaval. While some continue to struggle with authoritarian and military regimes, almost all, whether multiparty democracies or dictatorships, whether 'free market'[7] or socialist, have experienced what Mikell refers to as "the failure of male-dominated" politics (1997:1). Our countries have suffered the imposition of Western-designed, neoliberal structural reforms. The economic dependence of our states has encouraged them to neglect the needs of women, who are invariably perceived as having an inelastic supply of emotional and physical energy to deal with the increasing demands placed on many of us. Women's studies and gender analyses within this context have come to be viewed by many feminists, myself included, as a project that will contribute to the desired end of greater equality. As feminists, many of us also feel compelled to become engaged in advocacy that will lead to immediate changes,

6. I parenthesise 'roles' because the word suggests that they carry with them comparable responsibilities, which is not necessarily the case.

7. I prefer to parenthesise 'free market' since, for many retailers and buyers in Africa the market has been anything but 'free', its character being determined to a large extent by people from outside the continent both physically and culturally.

such as law reforms. Therefore, as background to the accounts that follow, I present a brief sketch of my feminist journey.

By the time I arrived in my late teens, I had discovered that I was a feminist, as I found a synergy between my convictions and those of feminist scholars such as Mohanty and writers such as Ama Atta Aidoo.[8] Nonetheless, although I self-identified as a feminist, it was not until I was in my 30s that I was able to use the term unself-consciously. As a young student (of architecture), I had little exposure to feminist literature and my early misgivings, given my social context and this limited exposure, were evoked by images of bra-burning, man-hating women who rejected men, marriage, motherhood and family. I certainly enjoyed male company and anticipated marriage and motherhood. My second difficulty with stating my position at the time was with the oft-proposed contradiction between (my new-found) feminism and (my equally new-found) Christian conviction. However, as my knowledge of scripture deepened, and as I became more familiar with liberation theology and different feminisms (including the work of Christian feminists), the tensions eased. I begun to recognise that much of what is presented as "the place of women" by religious leaders did not reflect the life and teachings of Christ. Indeed, for me Christ emerged as someone who would identify strongly with the feminist cause.[9] This 'revelation' was an important part of the personal history that has shaped my philosophies, passions and practice of a feminist existence. For with the biblical Christ as

8. For me, a feminist is a person who believes in the equal personhood and humanity of the sexes, and advocates for equal treatment of, and opportunities for, females and males. The difference between people who are merely 'good' human beings who try to treat everyone fairly, and feminists, is that the latter actively promote and privilege the welfare of women (see Mohanty, Russo and Torres 1991).

9. There are several examples of Christ's counter-culture behaviour when it comes to his relationship with women. Jesus associated with women (Luke 23:49) at a time when Jewish tradition frowned on women studying with rabbis. According to Jewish thinking at the time, women were generally viewed as the cause of men's sexual sins, and so to prevent Jewish men from yielding to temptation they were instructed not to speak in public to women, including their own wives. Not only did Jesus speak to a woman in public (John 4:27), he dared to touch women in public (Mark 5:41). He also allowed a 'sinful' woman to shed tears over his feet and to dry them with her hair in a most intimate manner (Luke 8:2). He encouraged a woman who desired to follow him to do so, even when this conflicted with her domestic duties (Like 10:42). While not replete with them, the Old Testament does provide examples of women in prominent leadership positions (see, for example, the story of Deborah, Book of Judges), as do the New Testament letters of Paul.

an example, the feminist project could not be about change by any means possible, nor could it be about condemning those who differed: it meant one could be "Jew or Greek, female or male, slave or free".[10]

My university training in architecture, spatial planning, geography, development planning and finally sociology left a more ambivalent impression, even though the multidisciplinary accumulation helped me escape the restrictiveness of disciplinary correctness, something feminist scholarship seeks to do. Being in male-dominated undergraduate (architecture) and graduate (planning) programmes, my female colleagues and I learned to negotiate, and often struggle, for our space as equal partners. I also picked up a few lessons on how to strategise and lobby potential antagonists. Nonetheless, although at least two of my lecturers revealed sensitivity to gender in the design of buildings, until I entered a PhD programme there was certainly no reference to specific gender frameworks, let alone feminist work, in the rest of my academic training. Indeed, the undertones (and often overtones) of my training frequently encouraged a paternalistic, problem-solving approach to the 'woman question'. The so-called population problem, which became one of my early interests when I joined the University of Ghana as a Research Fellow, should suffice to illustrate first my ignorance and then my journey towards becoming critical.

In 1987, Momsen and Townsend identified fertility issues as one of the most significant aspects of 'women's worlds' in Third World countries. Whether true or not, I dare say that for women in sub-Saharan Africa concerns about our fertility and reproductive health have been among the most studied, discussed and contested of issues. The diverse representations speak volumes about the interpretations of women from the Global South in knowledge production and development efforts, but I will return to the issue of appropriation and representation shortly. During my early years at the Institute of African Studies in the late 1980s and early 1990s, I was attracted by the discourse on women's 'control over their fertility' and the focus on their 'reproductive health'. Constructions of women around childbearing and motherhood seemed logical to me, given my training in development and later in social demography. I was also influenced by the fact that both my father-in-law and husband worked in obstetrics and stories of women's fertility and infertility, childbearing and maternal mortality were daily fare. So while I may have approached the subject with a certain level of righteous indignation and missionary zeal, a critical (feminist) ap-

10. See Book of Galatians 3:28.

proach came belatedly and more slowly. There was something seductive in the development and demographic literature, supported by findings from large-scale surveys that pointed to the need to enhance women's uptake of modern family planning services for their physical and even emotional well being. Not to be ignored were the benefits that would accrue to countries of the Global South if women had fewer children. The methodological process based on quantitative analyses also made it possible to see the women (and men) as mere numbers. I am not proud to acknowledge that if I ran statistical analyses that suggested women had an 'unmet need' for contraception, I would get excited.[11] However, slowly an intuitive and intellectual transformation occurred: I became uncomfortable with the instrumental approach to issues of women's reproductive health and behaviour. Slowly, I began to reject much of what I was reading and sought alternative paradigms, for there was something wrong with the binary picture that essentially represented African women as not intelligent enough to be able to determine their fertility, or as completely dominated by and obedient to men. One day, I discovered that there were feminist demographers, and once I began to examine reproductive issues with a more critical eye informed by a feminist perspective, well-established and taken-for-granted concepts such as the notion of women's 'unmet need' for family planning began to crumble. The anecdotes of my father-in-law and husband took on a more nuanced character, involving partners, ex-partners, parents, in-laws as well as the political economy of the country.

The African Feminist Scholar Inside and Outside the Academy: Research

When I first started working as a Research Fellow at the Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana in 1989, I discovered that if I intended to undertake any research or attend conferences, I would have to seek external funding.

Additionally, like many of my colleagues, I began to rely on consulting work to make up for the deficient salary I earned at the time as a university researcher and teacher.[12] This had several implications. First, teaching

11. My critique of that demographic concept formed the basis of the second paper I presented at the 2002 conference and which appeared in the book *Rethinking African Sexualities* edited by Signe Arnfred (2004).

12. While salaries are still not adequate, they have improved considerably since those early adjustment years.

and research and consulting are each full time jobs and require significant investments of time if they are to be carried out properly. Further, while contract work paid some of the bills, it generally did little to further my academic career or significantly address issues of transformation. The local or international contractor rarely required one to have a deep or particularly critical engagement with the literature, although I often challenged myself to undertake this task. However, the outcomes have not always been negative. Doing work for international or local agencies has also opened doors to a number of domains which have benefited my work as an advocate by way of the networks I have built, and also because I have been privy to information that has supported lobbying and advocacy, sometimes in relation to the same agencies that have provided financial support. I have also tried to develop innovative ways of inserting the questions I consider important in the research. Finally, new opportunities for mentoring younger scholars have emerged that have been enriching for me both as mentee and mentor. In the next sections, I look at each of these three areas – researcher, consultant and advocate – in a little more detail.

The Feminist Scholar in the Academy

There are many useful articles on the role of African universities in shaping development and political trends in Africa (see, for example, Court 1982; Mkandawire 1997; Sawyerr 1994; Tettey and Pupulampu 2000). There is also a growing body of work on gender issues in the academy (for example Manuh, Gariba and Budu's, and Peirera's volumes in the 2007 Ford Foundation series, as well as two recent issues of *Feminist Africa*).[13] Here I do not repeat those debates, rather I try to link the issue of being a feminist scholar within the academy with one's role as an activist who also, from time to time, engages in contract research. Research, whatever form it takes, is important for the progress of societies, to the extent that it helps us to better understand them. Policies, issues, theories, plans and existing ways of doing things can be clarified and improved on the basis of research, so that research serves as the link between ideas, information and practice. For those of us in the academy, demands are placed on us by national governments, international institutions and our fellow citizens to provide information about particular aspects of society that serve as a basis

13. See *Feminist Africa*, issues 8 & 9, 2007 – Rethinking Universities II (http://www.feministafrica.org/index.php/issue_nine)

for planning and decision-making (Atteh 1996; Mkandawire 1997; Tettey and Pupulampu 2000).

The research and teaching terrain for an African woman in Africa is bedevilled by a host of challenges. First, the relations in academia are distorted both in terms of sheer numbers, so that women have low statistical visibility, as well as in terms of existing power relations.[14] Prah (2003) discusses how the low statistical visibility of females has implications for the number of women who will occupy policy-making positions in the university, since it is academics of high rank who get to sit on the influential policy-making boards. She cites how in her own institution, the University of Cape Coast (UCC), between 1995 and 2000 no more than three women sat on the Academic Board at any given time. At the University of Ghana, the picture has been friendlier: between 1995 and 2007 the proportion of women on the Academic Board ranged between 10 and 16 per cent.[15] Prah (2003) argues that groups with high statistical visibility may perceive those with low statistical visibility as weak, unimportant and lacking in status. This affects the balance of power, because those considered to be insignificant are not likely to be considered for influential and high-ranking positions, neither are they likely to be consulted on matters viewed as important unless it is absolutely necessary, as for instance in situations where there is a need to woo all groups in order to build a strong consensus. She contends that a group's low statistical visibility may also affect the self-esteem and confidence levels of its members. For instance, members of such a group might not be motivated to become high achievers because there are very few of them. I have felt this invisibility most sharply when it has come to the use of language. In so many contexts – official meetings, open fora, pubic lectures and on one occasion even in an advert for a deanship – the language refers to a 'he', as if women could not possibly be available or contribute in the capacity under discussion. The language thus excluded me.

Second, within the university system little or no thought is given to

14. The average percentage of female academic staff in the three oldest Ghanaian universities in the 1960s, 1970s, 1980s, 1990s was 11 per cent, 9 per cent, 9 per cent and 13 per cent respectively (Brown, Anokye and Britwum 1996).

15. The Academic Board is an important and influential forum chaired by the vice chancellor and currently comprises all professors and associate professors of the university, deans, vice deans, directors of institutes, heads of department and centres and representatives of various units. It is here that major university policies are formulated and discussed. At the University of Ghana, where I teach, 42 of the Board's 285 members were female as at October 2007.

providing support structures that will enable females to perform their work efficiently – support such as the provision of childcare facilities, the organisation of meeting times such that women can still take care of domestic responsibilities, access to accommodation which allows women to perform their multiple roles, and so forth. What all of this means is that before women even begin to think of the time constraints imposed by these multiple roles, they have to deal with the structural barriers that make teaching and research a challenge. Women who choose a way around this by prioritising their careers are perceived as abnormal and frequently made to feel guilty.[16]

Thirdly, female academics would appear to have access to fewer resources either as a result of ignorance about what is available, in itself a built-in structural constraint, and also as a result of more direct discrimination. Female academics themselves certainly perceive that they are discriminated against when it comes to the distribution of resources.[17] Certainly it was my own experience when I was a young researcher that male colleagues knew about opportunities for travel or funding long before the official memorandum reached my institute (and hence me). By this time, the application deadlines were too close, if they had not already passed, to write a decent proposal. These domains remain areas of continual struggle for many women.[18] I have survived within the academy, as well as in my efforts to be an activist and a consultant, for several reasons. First, I have been blessed with an extremely supportive family. Over the years, particularly when my daughters were young, my mother-in-law and her household provided childcare and other forms of domestic support whenever my husband and I have needed these. So, like my male colleagues, I have had access to a wide range of (female) domestic and reproductive services. This support has been provided without any questioning of my maternal competence from those closest to me. Quite the contrary, I have received encouragement and my perceived achievements have been celebrated. I fully recognise that this is a

16. Following the work of a visitation panel between 2007-08, the University of Ghana is undergoing major structural reforms, including the implementation of gender-specific actions to support female faculty and students. The Centre for Gender Studies and Advocacy is leading the development of a gender policy, which it initiated in 2006.

17. Respondents in Prah's study (2003) argued, for example, that access to resources has less to do with scarcity than with how these resources are distributed by those in power, that is male academics and administrators.

18. The arrival of the internet in the late 1980s and the recent adoption of intranet for university communications have significantly reduced some of these disparities in access to information.

privilege that is not shared by many of my female colleagues and is one that I should not take for granted. Second, I have been blessed to have had as mentors women and men who guided and nurtured me intellectually, who helped shape my work, many of them having been my friends as well. This shaping and support has come from academic colleagues both in Ghana and abroad. My collaborations with women and men in activist/civil society organisations have also provided insights 'from the field', and new and exciting opportunities to share my research.

Some of the Politics of Gender Research

It is important to recognise the dominance of particular approaches to doing work on gender, ranging from the purely technocratic work conducted in much of the development industry, to work that services hegemonic development discourses. Thus there often exists a tension between researchers who identify as feminists, whose scholarship is rooted in a feminist consciousness and who foreground gender and issues of inequality in their work, and those who adopt a more 'pragmatic' approach, who generally focus on one or more topical issues such as female genital mutilation (FGM), violence and so forth and who may not necessarily identify as feminists (Adomako Ampofo, Beoku-Betts, Njambi and Osirim 2004). Many of those who fall in the latter category point out that the experience of gender is not shared by all women (or men) and that there are many particularities, such as political crises or poverty, that better explain the relative conditions of women and men. In between these two poles, of course, are the many scholars who work in particular areas such as HIV/AIDS or domestic violence, and who, within these, draw on feminist theorising to link women's conditions to female oppression.

Here I will return to the issue of role-juggling between being an academic, a consultant and an activist. Because of the inevitable drains on one's time, energy and emotions, an intellectual distancing by social science researchers from society often occurs so that we go through the motions of doing research, teaching and even so-called activist work. Often we churn out 'policy-oriented' research for state or international agencies. The power relations that structure knowledge production both locally and internationally stymie our efforts even further. It is so important for us to question who produces 'knowledge' and how and where it is disseminated, whose voices are privileged and which forms of scholarship are legitimated (Mkandawire 1997; Tetteh and Pupulampu 2000). Partly because 'Western' epistemol-

ogies and the cultural worldviews of 'traditional' disciplines have largely failed to take into account local explanations for phenomena which affect local peoples, 'Culture' has (re)emerged as the place where gender is most passionately contested and (re)invented in oppressive forms. In the name of 'Culture', then, women continue to be oppressed, and 'Culture' becomes the scapegoat, whose fault it is that Africa fails to 'develop'. Yet almost by definition, contract work for a donor agency, or an academic publication for a 'peer-reviewed' international journal, must craft gender issues in Africa from a perspective which denies people their agency and allows the prescription of pre-formulated models.

In the academy, we far too often find students writing a graduate thesis, and even some faculty writing for publication, feeling compelled to include a 'policy recommendations' section. I agree with Tetteh and Pupulampu (2000) that if we are to focus primarily on 'policy-oriented' research (read: practical/useful), we may risk weakening our theoretical enquiries. Perhaps the issue is not whether we should do policy-oriented work or not, but what kind of 'policy' work we do, and on whose terms. As I see it, it is crucial that as researchers we should consciously seek to meet the needs, either directly or indirectly, of the communities that have privileged us, and in which we live.[19] I think that this is even more critical for feminist researchers, because most of us believe that our teaching and research must ultimately contribute to improving the lives of African women and gender relations.

Early in my career at the University of Ghana, in true social-demography mode, I wanted to carry out a study of attitudes to (pre-marital) sex among adolescents in Ghana. I put together what in later years I realised was a rather passionate and journalistic proposal and begun walking from institution to institution in Accra to see if some organisation might be interested in what I was interested in. One afternoon I walked into the offices of the then director of Maternal and Child Health (MCH) at the Ministry of Health (MOH). I told her what I wanted to do and asked if the Ministry might be interested in funding my research. It so happened that the MCH division of MOH was interested in looking at the 'reproductive health' of adolescents, and the Director was working with a UN Population Fund

19. An example of how a small contribution can be made may suffice. During my PhD research on reproductive decision-making among couples, I discovered that many couples wanted to understand more about contraceptive options as well as infertility. I decided, after asking respondents if they thought it might be useful, to conduct a seminar on these issues. My husband, an MD, was the resource person, so I had to pay for only the venue and refreshments.

(UNFPA) representative to design a framework for a situation analysis. They 'hired' me and also gave me a free hand to design the study. In return for their supporting my budget, I had to provide them with a report and participate in some dissemination workshops. As part of my research design, in secondary schools students viewed a highly acclaimed Zimbabwean feature film and held discussions about the plot, the protagonists and sex in general.[20] The MOH had the information to guide policy design and the setting up of an Adolescent Reproductive Health Steering Committee that it wanted (and which I joined), and I was able to carry out a critical enquiry and collect masses of data from across the country from which to theorise about adolescent behaviours and attitudes. I was also able to inject my report with nuanced analyses of young people's notions of sexuality and morality. I also learned a great deal about young people's agency, and the fact that many of them were, contrary to prevailing popular thought, not interested in engaging in sex. And I had a great deal of fun. The dynamics of this inter-generational mutual learning process is something that I have since become very interested in theoretically.

Collaborative encounters have been where much of my learning has occurred – through dialogue, hearing different perspectives, being exposed to new scholarship and even disagreements. Not only can collaborative encounters be intellectually stimulating and enhance our learning, they also often make it easier and cheaper to do research. It is true, collaboration and sharing make one vulnerable. Some people will use your ideas or work without acknowledging your input, not even in a cursory footnote; others may patronise you; and yet others not take on their share of the workload either technically and intellectually. However, collaborations enhance our personhood and strategically they tell people that we are team players. At the University of Ghana, where I work, I have since 2005, in addition to being a professor at the Institute of African Studies, headed a new Centre for Gender Studies and Advocacy. This has truly been a collaborative endeavour with my Deputy Head, Dzodzi Tsikata, as well as colleagues from around the university, women and men, from the Humanities as well as the Physical and Applied Sciences, who work on one or more of our sub-committees.

20. The film tells the story about two bright and attractive teenagers who fall in love and eventually have sex. The girl falls pregnant and, even though they try to work things out, the relationship falls apart because the boy wants to take up a prestigious university scholarship. School is a struggle for the girl but eventually she is able to make something of her life, while the boy does not seem to do too well.

It has been this collaboration that has helped us navigate the university bureaucracy and build this young centre with the help of colleagues who come with diverse skills and who are represented on different boards and committees in the university.

One of the major challenges for intellectual work is the recognition that we need dialogue and collaboration with our colleagues in the North, despite all that has been said about the myths of global sisterhood, and despite any pressure we might experience towards relying on Western methodologies, ways of conceptualising and theorising that we may sometimes resent as attempts at subverting our personal, professional and intellectual autonomy. Nnaemeka (2005) notes that after years of struggle and stock-taking, she came to the conclusion that the theorising of feminism created structures of power in the feminist movement analogous to those for which patriarchy is attacked. As positions of margin and centre became delineated, the resistance of the marginalised to the imperious hegemony at the centre became more apparent. Many of us have bitter stories of such colonial encounters that started out promising to be exciting but soon turned out not to be partnerships of equals: decisions are questioned and over-turned without consultation let alone discussion, the budget is not transparent, co-researchers are played off against each other in a soap-opera like game of power, work we produce is not acknowledged because we have been paid (as consultants) for our knowledge and we are not seen as knowledge-producing collaborators. Yet those of us in the Global South and those in the Global North need each other: because context matters in defining perspective; because feminist theorising benefits from these diverse perspectives; because feminists in the Global North rarely speak our local languages and need us to help them enter our space; because northern-based researchers have access to more and better resources to carry out research and to publish (they hold gate-keeping positions in journals and funding agencies); and because space-sharing is a feminist thing to do. However, the issue of gate-keeping requires some discussion, because these gates are often kept tightly shut, or are only opened a crack periodically, thus serving as a disincentive for African researchers to publish in 'international' journals or to seek to write books with 'international' presses. It is far easier to focus on preparing research reports for funding agencies anyway. As African feminists, we need to be able to represent our continent in the works that get published and cited, for we are often as authoritative, if not more so, when it comes to the lives of women on the continent – after all, too often this is our lived experience, or that of our mothers, sisters and aunts. We might also provide a

more sensitive perspective.[21] This kind of gate-keeping ultimately has implications for the production of knowledge, the development of concepts and theories and for policy. We need to be critical, and loud, about this kind of hegemony that essentially subordinates our own knowledge and experiences.[22] We want our sisters (and brothers) in the North to accord our work the same legitimacy they accord their own. They can do this, for example, by using our works in their courses, as some are already doing, and by seeking to include us in positions of influence. We expect that our African sisters, who are now located in the North, whether by design or accident of history,[23] will show us special support. One of my own most fruitful long term transnational collaborations has been with two colleagues in North America, Beoku-Betts and Osirim, both Africanists and both sociologists. I cite this example because the mere fact that we have worked together for several years across two continents is testimony to the possible. I met one of these women, Josephine Beoku-Betts, at a conference while I was a PhD student in the US in the early 1990s. She made useful comments on my presentation, and, thereafter she sent me several references and a collegial relationship was built. Over the years, she drew me into a circle of sister colleagues in the Diaspora and together we have forged some exciting collaborations. Through Josephine, I met Mary Osirim, and together we have collaborated on women's caucuses, publications, seminars in each other's countries and international conferences. Both women are slightly senior to me in age as well as status, and yet they have never pulled rank on me or expected me, as the younger partner, to do most of the work in our engagements. Our commitment to an African feminist agenda and each other's professional

21. I was initially interested in, and then appalled by a publication I received in the mail. It was a coffee-table type book with an attractive cover showing a group of smiling African children against the backdrop of peaceful-looking mountains. The title of the volume is *African Poverty* (White and Killick 2001). While the book's cover is not a statement about its contents, and whether the authors were collaborators in the selection of the cover design I cannot say, but the fact that African poverty had now moved from merely being the flavour of the moment to being romanticised at the expense of African children I found deeply disturbing.

22. I recognise that issues of commodification (Tetteh and Pupulampu 2000) are an important part of the practice of gate keeping: however, it is beyond the scope of this paper to enter that discussion. In any case, Tetteh and Pupulampu (2000), as well as Yankah (1995) and Mkandawire (1993, 1997) provide adequate analyses elsewhere.

23. We certainly do not expect to hear any of the arrogance displayed by a "well-known French Africanist [who] concluded only recently that there was only 'one intellectual in the whole of Black Africa'" (see Mkandawire 1997:15).

development is reflected in the sharing of information, materials and the conscious support for each other's work.

I Work Hard for My Money: Consultancy Work

The chronic shortage of funds to do research in our universities has been exacerbated by the implementation of neoliberal economic perspectives which, in the 1990s, called for cuts in government subsidies to tertiary institutions (Adomako Ampofo 2002). The new millennium saw the World Bank and International Monetary Fund revise their position and tertiary institutions are back on the agenda. However, a deep harm has already been done, for where funds were unavailable for research or other forms of professional enhancement, consulting or NGO-ing enterprises became the way to survive (Diouf and Mamdani 1994) and the practice can become quite addictive.[24] The development industry in particular is now having unforeseen effects on scholarship. The emergence of women in development as a field of policy and project activities has impacted women's studies and gender research (Mama 1999) by problematising women's lives along particular basic needs lines such as reproductive health, education, access to credit and so forth, frequently leaving more fundamental issues of equal citizenship untouched.

While scholars outside the continent also undertake consultancies, they may need them more for professional advancement and status and less for their daily bread than we do in Africa, hence they are less frequently found to be in conflict with research and teaching responsibilities. Yet even for us in Africa, contract work does not have to be in conflict with academic research and the two can, in fact, be mutually supportive. For example, the data from a consultancy report can sometimes be translated into an academic article, and students can participate in data collection so that they gain 'field experience'. By these means, the space can become an activist space where we teach about relations between theory and praxis and draw on students' suggestions on how transformations might occur.

The typical scenario for a consultancy is that we are hired by an organisation to carry out an empirical study, an evaluation or a training programme. We are presented with specific Terms of Reference (TOR), a timeframe

24. In this paper, I do not examine the trend for many academics to be involved in NGOs, nor their membership of external 'Centres' and 'Think tanks'. Suffice it to note, however, that NGO work is not necessarily a political, altruistic, voluntary practice devoid of the economic benefits normally associated with undertaking consultancy work.

within which to complete the assignment and are offered a fixed, or sometimes negotiated payment for our services. Sometimes we apply for these consultancies on a competitive basis in response to an advert, or because we have been recommended by a friend or colleague. Other times, someone in the organisation that needs the job done approaches us directly and asks us if we can carry out the particular assignment. Because of the TOR and the often-rigid timeframe that the contracting agency imposes on consultants, we come under a lot of pressure to produce an output (usually a report) by a fixed date. Further, because some of us juggle a number of consultancies simultaneously, we are not able to give of our best. This is unfortunate. None of us wants to be accused of being part of the phenomenon of "new patterns of data gathering and consumption that lead to highly selective collection of data, fudging of data to meet deadlines and to fit the predisposition of clients" (Mkandawire 1993,135). When we produce shoddy work, this closes the doors to other researchers and reinforces the role of expatriates in research and consulting. Mkandawire (1997) estimates that by 1997 Africa was paying foreign experts an estimated total of $ 10 billion per annum. Shoddy work on gender issues is also a huge disservice to the cause of gender transformation, often leading people to discard the entire enterprise of engendering research.

Our consultancy work can be helpful beyond providing an income and occasional hotel stays away from home. It can also be relevant to our teaching. In 1990, soon after I joined the University of Ghana, I was roped into a study a senior colleague, Takyiwaa Manuh, was undertaking for the (Ghana) Statistical Services. The work required us to carry out analyses of data on women from the three national censuses undertaken up until that time. As an introduction to the analyses, we decided to provide a discussion of some of the conceptual and methodological limitations built into the censuses. For example, in our report we critiqued the conceptualisation of the 'household' and 'economically active' persons, and the effects these have on women's positions, such as making women's work invisible because it is not defined, much less counted. This may be common fare today, but 19 years ago these efforts provided new impetus for our teaching of Gender and Development in African Societies.

To cite another example, from 2000-04 a male colleague, Kweku Yeboah, and I carried out three National Reproductive Health Baseline Surveys for Save the Children Fund (SCF), Ghana. While we defined the research issues together with SCF and recommended how the data be collected, the ultimate focus was SCF's prerogative. However, we got paid a decent amount

of money and were armed with a wealth of data. The data we gathered included a rich collection on health issues for which little data were available, such as on breast-feeding, 'female genital mutilation' and the use of herbs to dry the vagina for sex. These data have been most useful in providing very recent empirical findings on many issues for which I previously relied on anecdotal evidence or small-scale qualitative studies in my teaching. The data, experiences and insights that have been gained from consulting work have also helped me frame or refine research questions, interrogate concepts and methods and reconstruct my own research philosophies.

For me as an academic, the challenge lies in being able to earn an income from a consultancy while still carrying out critical analyses of the data and publishing from it, being true to one's ideological positions, and not being torn apart as a person because of the sheer workload. The privilege of being an elite woman brings responsibility – the responsibility to draw from my multiple contexts and experiences. The resources that consultancy provides are extremely useful for activist work – the money, connections to powerful and influential organisations and people, the networks with individuals and groups and the technical information. Personally, I do not see how we can afford not to be activists – the immediacy of the issues that face us, the position of women and the terrain we fight for compels us. Can our consulting for various organisations also bring about change in the lives of African women? It can if we take the lessons learned into new places – the written page, the classroom, as well as engagements with civil society and state. Osirim (forthcoming) notes how African and African American women scholars are strongly committed to both research and activism in their professional lives, and that for them a division between scholarship and activism would seem artificial. Drawing on work by Patricia Hill Collins, Osirim emphasises that theory-building for these feminist scholars is related to their experiences in the world – their engagement with the real world problems of development, state-formation and gender relations that they see themselves, their communities and their nations facing. The same is true for all feminist scholars in the Global South.

I am Woman, Watch me Roar: Advocacy[25]

In December 2000, the people of Ghana voted a new government into office. This government was re-elected in 2004. Whatever our political per-

25. Borrowed from the 1972 hit song "I am woman" by Helen Reddy.

suasion, most well-intentioned Ghanaians, I believe, were interested in a 'positive change'.[26] The New Patriotic Party (NPP) government established a new ministry, initially the Ministry for Women's' Affairs, MOWA, later revised to include children, hence MOWAC. While many women activists were, at best, apprehensive about the ability of this ministry to bring about change for women,[27] the collective of women activists recognised the creation of the ministry as an opportunity for verbalising our own political agenda and vision for women of Ghana.[28] A variety of civil society organisations, under the rubric of the Domestic Violence (DV) Coalition, have worked with MOWAC and other state agencies to address issues of violence, citizenship and rights. I have been part of this process as a member of the coalition and also as a scholar interested in the subject of gender-based violence. I have joined the DV coalition on marches, press and other public events. However, I feel that my major contribution to the efforts to get the legislation passed came from my role as a scholar. I contributed to drafting press releases and other statements, and served as a resource person at dissemination or advocacy events on gender-based violence, such as a session with members of parliament.

I am certainly not unique in living with a sense of mission – there are hundreds, nay, millions of African women like me feeling that we must participate in some way in acting out our concerns over the economic crisis facing our country and continent, while at the same time working to change gender inequalities and perceptions of gender and gender relations. We are challenging the silences around gender relations and what those silences mean for women – the inequities, but also specifically violence, the state's relations with us and its policies (or lack thereof). We engage in public discourse whether at public forums or in the media. We are willing to be controversial and to be attacked. We are strategising for political and economic ends. For me, perhaps, two of the most rewarding areas of activism have been in the church and in the classroom. The church is a traditionally patriarchal institution where men have been in the forefront of leadership, if not necessarily always in decision-making, and it has been very rewarding, educative and humbling for me to be accorded space by both men and

26. This was the slogan of the NPP government during its election campaign.

27. See Tsikata (2000a, b) for a discussion of the history of women's bureaux in Africa and their general failure to deliver.

28. Elsewhere, I discuss in greater detail the rocky nature of MOWAC's relationship with civil society, especially over the passage of domestic violence legislation (Adomako Ampofo 2008).

women to transform gender relations and our thinking around theology. While perhaps I have often been non-confrontational in my 'style', the issues have not necessarily been without contestation.

African feminist scholars see the classroom as an activist space. Osirim (forthcoming) notes, "In our teaching we strive to remove/reduce hierarchies in the classroom ... [W]e often strive to unite theory with praxis and choose to teach and engage students in service-learning courses ... [We] engage in scholar-activism in the classroom". Beoku-Betts and Njambi (2005,126) assert that they "attempt ... to disrupt the normalised images of African women ... including those of victimhood". Since the early 1990s, I have taught or co-taught two graduate courses in Gender, always from a transformative perspective with the goal of getting students to critically question what is seen as 'normal' or 'natural'. Of course, even if our reputations have not preceded us, students soon recognise our own values. Nonetheless, apart from some heated debates, I have never experienced any resentment from students. Most gratifying have been the testimonies, even if embellished to make the student look good, about male students' wives who have praised them for becoming more sensitive, or female students who provide anecdotes of negotiating change in the relationships or spaces they find themselves in. Since then, the setting up of the Centre for Gender Studies and Advocacy, CEGENSA, at the University of Ghana, which has grown out of the small Development and Women's Studies programme at the Institute of African Studies, has provided a formal space in which to make gender a legitimate part of university business through curriculum development, policy design, research, mentoring, extension and advocacy, provision of resources and the creation of a sexual assault crisis unit. Although ostensibly set up by the University Council in 2004, CEGENSA's existence as an academic and service centre is the result of efforts by the local women's movement, international collaborations and the individual and collective efforts of feminist scholars. It started as a programme to link the academy to policy, then we designed courses to be co-taught by faculty around the university, and later the programme benefited from collaborations with colleagues in UK institutions through formal Ghana-UK links. In 2000, several members joined the Gender and Women's Studies for Africa's Transformation project coordinated by the African Gender Institute at the University of Cape Town. That project provided an opportunity to be part of curriculum development workshops. CEGENSA has since held two curriculum workshops that brought together teachers of gender from tertiary institutions in Ghana.

In Conclusion: "One Who has Strength – She has the Truth"

The point of the proverb that begins this paper is not to suggest that truth is relative, but to indicate that in this world we live in, 'the truth' survives if those of us who have it and care to share it survive ourselves. We need to be resilient, but we also need to be wise. Sometimes I have been stretched to the limit as I have tried to write and rewrite articles whose submission dates were yesterday, mark student papers, prepare reading material for my classes, write research proposals so that I can have money to do some of the work I am interested in, carry out administrative and other university responsibilities, and meet the deadlines of the agencies for whom I occasionally do consulting work.[29]

The three roles of researcher, consultant and advocate, as I have argued, are not mutually exclusive, nor, in spite of the time demands, mutually upsetting. On the contrary, they can be mutually supportive. Research provides intellectual meaning and a sense of identity, legitimacy and status within the academic community. Consulting offers a livelihood and can provide avenues for publishing and teaching while building a professional reputation. Consulting also provides empirical data that can be used towards the production of an (academic) publication. It provides opportunities for students to gain experience and earn some money as assistants. It allows entry into places with influential persons and can enhance our CVs, thereby increasing the chances of success in seeking funds for research work. Advocacy and activism provide a sense of purpose and satisfaction as we witness change.

Consultancy work and the reports emanating from it can also be used to leverage funding for activist research projects and vice-versa. Late in 2007, CEGENSA, together with two activist organisations, put in a research grant application for a multi-layered study on gender violence and HIV. Our research focuses on young people in three tertiary institutions, as well as on HIV-positive women in selected communities. The study, in turn, will: feed into the services each of our organisations offers our constituents; enhance women's opportunities to participate in familial, local and national discourse and decision making; strengthen women's abilities to resist and respond to violence; and strengthen legal and psychological support to survivors of vio-

29. As a rule, I never undertake a consultancy for which I have to carry out a major revisiting of the literature. Unless I can find a collaborator, I also never take on assignments for which I have insufficient technical expertise. I rarely take on more than one consultancy a year as, with increasing responsibilities at the university, I have found that this is as much as I can reasonably manage and still remain sane and true to the agencies.

lence and HIV+ women through working with civil society organisations as well as duty bearers. Not long after our proposal was approved for funding, I was offered a contract assignment to evaluate the work of an activist organisation that has had many years of experience in the area of gender-based violence. The preliminary research for the proposal strengthened my understanding of the work required for this consultancy, while the consultancy work has provided deep insights into the possibilities for community work by activists and duty bearers in the area of gender-based violence. At the same time, the insights from both the consultancy and the research work, and CEGENSA's collaborations with the two activist organisations, significantly strengthened a recent article of mine on the women's movement and the passage of domestic violence legislation in Ghana (Adomako Ampofo 2008). The lessons and experiences also find their way into the classroom when my students and I discuss the politics of social movements.

Ultimately, however, whether we are in the field collecting data for our pet research or a consultancy assignment, in the classroom, at our computers typing away at an article, we are engaged in activism. While economic issues may determine some of the consultancies we take on, a feeling that we owe our continent something determines the kinds of consultancies we accept, the subjects of the research we pursue and the courses we teach.

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CHAPTER TWO

Connections to Research

The Southern African Network of Higher Education Institutions Challenging Sexual Harassment /Sexual Violence, 1996–2001

Jane Bennett

Introduction

Battling with neither grace nor panache against the institutional culture of an American graduate programme, I wrote a doctoral dissertation on the politics of representing rape in the same years in which I worked as a hotline counsellor at the Rape Crisis Centre of the city. As the need to keep a roof over my head meant full-time work during the day, my nights were divided between the small, brightly lit cubicle housing the hotline phone and the cocoon of my own apartment, where the computer hummed and the 'secondary literature' lay in disorganised, pliant heaps on the floor.

The difference between the two zones was dramatic: with all the training in the world, there was no way of being completely prepared for the moment the hotline phone rang. The calling voice could be coming from any street or crevice in the city, driven by shards of loneliness and pain (who calls a hotline? and when?), telling stories in no predictable words or pattern. The 'control' I had as the woman answering the phone was limited to my convictions about the importance of doing that answering and the recognition that my access to 'control' – in that cubicle – was beside the point. On the nights on which I worked at my own desk, however, control was everything: designing command over others' (written) words, revealing my manipulation of theory and paradigm, organising data (an interesting term), arranging myself – for the panoptic omniscience of examiners – as knowledgeable.

If one difference between the zone of the hotline and the zone of the computer lay in issues of control, another – not unrelated – lay in the significance of the experience of rape and the politics of that significance. The

epistemological principles guiding the process of listening to an unseen stranger's autobiographical narrative of rape prioritised her (usually, not always, *her*) right to construct that narrative as a critically political right. Reconstructive moves from the listener ("are you sure it happened like that?", "that doesn't make sense", "what about putting it another way?") would have been unthinkable, the behaviour of someone invested in the cannibalisation of the autobiographer's body (systemically akin, in fact, to the raping assailant in her story). While all counsellors worked within a framework well versed in the connection between one rape and another, and used insights drawn from these connections to attune themselves to the nuances of each new autobiography, it was never assumed that one story could be replaced by another or that a counsellor's previous listening experience could predict the shape, complexity, silences or depth of the next narrative she would encounter. From the perspective of the hotline counsellor – in the moment when she picked up the ringing phone – one experience of rape bore whole, unique and sufficient witness to the nature of late 20th century urban American patriarchy, but did so from the irreplaceable authority of the woman or man speaking about what had happened to/in them.

The work of the dissertation author, however, involved the integration of representations of rape into scaffolds of theory on discourse and required that I myself become the architect of those representations' salience: a deferential architect, one whose skill would be appraised by sociolinguistic experts (not one of them self-identified as either rapist or raped) – an architect whose connection with those telling autobiographical rape narratives was more a focus of scientific scrutiny concerning verifiability than a zone raising ethical or political questions. The epistemological paradigms through which I acquired status as an educated woman demanded that I own my 'data', and that I take full intellectual responsibility for that colonisation.

I recognise, as I write, the anger still alive within my blood as I recall the deictic imperatives of doctoral performance. It may be an illegitimate anger, rooted in the infantilisation inherent in postgraduate research, an anger projected on to questions of epistemology, evading deeper anxieties about my scholarship or credibility. It is certainly true that the process of engaging with language through diverse theorisations of discourse, offered me extraordinary intellectual adventure. It is also true that my particular experience of graduate school supervision was not markedly brutal. In an article on the politics of writing, I once introduced myself through a debate with a feminist colleague:

> A feminist friend and I have an ongoing debate about the meaning ... of reading (and writing) as a sphere of primary experience. Her position is that despite the value of the written word to her life, the most important things she knows come from direct experience of the body, unmediated by any text. My position is that reading has been so critical to what (I feel) I know about being that I am willing to prioritise textual voices as essential sources of my experience.[1]

It is irrefutable that my sanity, and whatever capacity I have to move beyond the sepulchre of my ancestry, is indebted to literacy, and although the readings which have most deeply resoldered my neural highways have not – on the whole – been those recommended by course readers or research supervisors, they have nonetheless often been discovered in university libraries, discussed as touchstones with peers and shared (over, now, 20 years) with those I've had the privilege of teaching. This is especially true of feminist writing, a vast and complex field whose contestations and vitality continue to exasperate, goad and energise me. As a thinker and researcher, I am shaped by academic conceptions of rigour, value, purpose and integrity in more ways than I can enumerate: I am capable of *speech on behalf of*.

And yet.

And yet, the epistemological clash between the world of the hotline counsellor (for whom the voice at the other end of the phone holds powerful authority over her/his own experience) and the world of the academic writer (who must forge links between one voice and another, metalinguistically commanding the terms of this negotiation) is visceral. It is felt at the level of the body, articulated in bitter arguments between NGO workers and academics about the direction or ownership of knowledge and soaked in the bloody legacies of colonialism, racism and classism. No discussion of research ethics quite captures the material palpability of the tension of this chasm.

Hippocratic Oaths: Feminist Research Ethics

One of the most persistent anxieties in writing on feminist research involves the possibility of violation through the process of the research, the likelihood of 'doing harm'. There is, in fact, an inevitable logic to this anxiety: in many contexts, public theorisation on 'doing women's studies' was rooted in sharply focused analyses of the androcentric epistemologies which underlie

1. Bennett, 2000, pp. 3-12.

discipline-based canons of knowledge, and discussed the incontrovertible evidence of these canons' capacity to cause damage to women and to gender relations. The connection between epistemological frame and ontological injury is fundamental to feminist theory.

In 1970, in New York, Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics*[2] – reading literary texts as unmediated illustrations of male psyches – made contemporary Northern feminist history as a model of epistemological analysis;[3] Adrienne Rich's collection of essays, *Lies, Secrets and Silences*[4] is a more complex example of classic 'Second Wave' theory in the Northern late 1970s and 1980s, in which every discipline was subjected to the epistemological scrutiny of feminist analysis.[5] Despite the disciplinary differences among these theorists (and as the 1980s wore on, the increasingly nuanced debates emerging between feminists working within particular fields), their epistemological unity is (especially in retrospect) dramatic: academic knowledge was conceptualised as the encyclopaedic alphabet of patriarchal class interests, designed as a code for the exclusion of women and deeply implicated in the material effects of sexism. The recognition that the construction of hegemonic knowledge caused lasting, vicious and deliberate wounds was articulated as *personal*[6] and as deeply, politically, inhumane – 'unethical'.

The ignorance of race (and of its implication in class interests) in much mid-1970s/early 1980s Northern feminist theory on epistemology is staggering, revealing (among other things) its conscious grasp of 'epistemological injury' as thin. Two decades of debate have elaborated the significance of locating racism within the construction of canonical knowledge in the North,[7] but it is only within the writings of critical race theorists such as

2. Millett, 1970.

3. Kate Millett's was not the first text to do this by a long shot: see Virginia Woolf, Simone de Beauvoir.

4. Rich, 1979.

5. Anthropology: Karen Sacks, Rayna Rapp; History: Joan Kelly, Nancy Stepan; Psychology: Jean Baker Miller, Nancy Chodorow, Juliet Mitchell; Sociology: Zillah Eistenstein; Biology: Evelyn Fox Keller; Religious Studies: Mary Daly.

6. This idea was hardly new — the interaction of 'knowledge-production' with class interests is one of the founding principles of Marxist-based epistemological theory. Nevertheless, besides feminist writings, there is no other example of so large an 'indigenous literature' written within the institutions of the 'coloniser' against the organising epistemologies of the institution.

7. See the work, for example, of Paul Gilroy, Henry Louis Gates, Patricia Hill-Collins, Trinh Minh-ha.

Kimberle Crenshaw[8] that multiple deixis animates analysis of justice, of policy on redressing the injuries caused through epistemological exclusion.

Researchers' self-reflexivity is demanded as a key skill in much feminist writing, and classifications of racial, class, gender and sexual identity are often integrated into authorial signature as shortcuts into positionality. Difficult to interpret beyond the essentialisations enforced through hegemonic oppressions, researchers' self-descriptions as 'white', 'born in Northern Tanzania' and/or 'Catholic' sometimes bring little illumination to the deeper task of epistemological self-reflexivity. Such a task requires not simply that a writer self-categorise, but that he/she explore the consequences of mobile subjectivity and efficacy for the political direction of her/his own work.

While most African feminist writers are likely to be embedded in middle class conditions of labour – given the current conditions of access to higher education and the resources required by researchers – my own experience leads me to think that it is fairly unusual for African-based researchers and writers to be confined within the universe of professional publication. Questions of epistemological ethics travel beyond the 'researcher-subject' interaction into zones of advocacy, service provision and policy consultancy. Such journeys may offer insight into the texture of African feminist *living*, in contexts where location as an 'intellectual' complements, complicates, facilitates and endangers work in NGOs, religious and artistic communities, parliamentary fora or training rooms.

While I have found theorisation of feminist research ethics around 'positionality', 'self-location' and 'self-reflexivity' provocative in its insistence on the centrality of the (privileged) representing voice to the significance of the text, I remain interested in exploring research as a process encompassing the possibility of *multiple* deictic positions for those involved. It is not that I imagine such exploration will obviate or simplify questions of epistemological injury or allow for cleaner explication of the 'principles' of ethical, feminist writing and research. It is, rather, that I believe an approach to research which acknowledges the mobility of participants may reflect more accurately the reality of the conditions under which feminist research is negotiated. Such an approach may also transform the definition of *research*, moving the term from primary reference to a dynamic between researcher and subject participants towards a mesh of interaction (textual, communicative, organisational and individual), which gradually uncovers 'new' information and facilitates fresh and unexpected inquiry.

8. Chrenshaw et al., 2001.

NETSH: The Growth of a Network

It is in the context of this claim that this chapter explores an initiative undertaken by individuals working in diverse Southern African institutions of higher education to establish a network capable of challenging sexual harassment and sexual violence on campuses. The work of this initiative addresses the seeming impossibility of creating conversation between the need to hear survivors' authority and the task of discursively astute and directed negotiation with institutional conventions about power, discipline and culture. The term 'address' I use advisedly: the tension between the authority of those who experience systemic, albeit personalised violation and conceptions of authority based on the thinking of researchers (and managers) consciously trained against subjectively derived deduction is not one that can be 'bridged' or 'resolved'.[9] What the example of NETSH (Network of Southern African Higher Education Institutions Challenging Sexual Harassment/Sexual Violence) suggests is that interesting political questions, difficult realities and compelling epistemological debates can become illuminated through deliberate engagement with the lack of connection between survivor and institution: *research* itself is released from acid debates over loci of authority into a process more concerned with flow than statement, more invested in long-term vision than in the short-term stakes of status and boundary.

In order to explore my claim for NETSH's capacity to contribute to definitions of *research*, the following section describes something of the initiative's discursive and organisational history between 1994 and 2000. Although proceedings from several of the conferences which took place in this period through NETSH are available as 'grey' literature, there is no current writing that attempts to synthesise or comment upon the overall direction of the discussions raised: given their importance, they are summarised in some depth here. The implications of these discussions, and – centrally – of the attempt to continue organising individuals in diverse Southern African institutions, are analysed through this overview of NETSH-based contexts for institutional activism.

NETSH is, of course, far from the only African feminist network designed to effect political change through integrating the experience of women and men into grounded institutional advocacy. The final section of the

9. The tension does not occur between poles of equal strength: the dominance of the latter depends, in sophisticated algorithm, on the erasure, cannibalisation and distortion of the former.

chapter looks at NETSH as one example of African feminist networking, not because it is an example of particularly powerful solidarity or especially effective institutional change, but because the process of *understanding sexual violence* is radically reshaped through concrete interaction with those working in higher education institutions at the frontlines of violation: survivors, residence administrators, friends, deans, counsellors, priests and imams, secretaries or disciplinary officers. As will be explored, the difficulties of sustaining networks – through donor funding, local institutional hospitability and individuals' workloads – are formidable. While my interests here certainly involve some documentation and exploration of a particular effort to confront gender-based violence, they also centrally concern an argument defining theoretically-oriented feminist research as quintessentially uninterested in the polarisation of 'author' and 'subject', 'theory' and 'experience', 'intellectual' and 'activist'.[10]

Over the past five years, Southern African institutions of higher education have moved, through a combination of restructuring initiatives and projects explicitly dedicated to the improvement of the quality of life on campus for educators and learners, into increasing acceptance of their seminal role in the leadership of democratic strategy and practice in the region.

Since its inception in 1996, the African Gender Institute (AGI) at the University of Cape Town has been committed to working within higher education as an appropriate zone in which to initiate and drive diverse programmes of capacity-building. These programmes have included funded projects which support African women researchers' development; the design and delivery of workshops in organisational transformation and in gender analysis for research purposes; the delivery of on-campus teaching programmes within the University of Cape Town's undergraduate and graduate faculties; the initiation of projects which – through several routes – will strengthen gender/women's studies on the continent; and, together with key individuals from many other universities and technikons, the co-development of a Network of Southern African Higher Education Institutions Challenging Sexual Harassment/Sexual Violence. A focus on sexual harassment and sexual violence on campuses allowed for the recognition of the multiple routes through which individuals may become vulnerable to violence and fear: a 'case' of sexual harassment or sexual violence is always

10. This does not entail the collapsing of the terms. As will be argued in the third section of the chapter, such terms are used to defend particular epistemological claims and demand political deconstruction as they are encountered and deployed.

embedded in institutionally specific dynamics of 'race', sexuality, nationality, gender and culture.

From my location within the African Gender Institute, the logic of beginning the story of NETSH's design in the mid-1990s within the sphere of my own environment is seductive. It is also deeply flawed. While there is a version of the story connected to the African Gender Institute, and in which I am an active character, the sheer fact of a network's initiation entails the presence of multiple 'beginnings', tales of diverse individuals within different locales, thinking about the sexual attacks encountered on their campuses and taking on the responsibility for understanding the nature of those attacks and stopping them. I proceed, therefore, in describing the evolution of NETSH's conceptual and practical strengths in the years 1996-2001, in full acknowledgement not only of the partiality of my view but also in recognition that all these voices together, from other universities and countries, would present a much *richer* perspective on the network's potential.

Early Reports on Sexual Harassment

By the late 1980s/early 1990s, university and technikon students on different campuses in the SADC region were identifying sexual harassment and sexual violence on their campuses as sources of outrage. In the following, three different reports will be brought forward. First in 1987, from the University of the Western Cape, Collette Solomon reports[11] on women students' activism on campus when the reported rapes of peers attracted no serious administrative attention from university management. The student activists protested in several ways and encountered intense hostility – both from most university officers and from other students on campus. Solomon writes:

> We were told that we had sidestepped certain structures on campus. Structures which I hasten to add had knowledge of the incidents, but had done nothing constructive. We were told that we were behaving like feminists (as if that is a negative label) because we had organised a women's only meeting, for obvious reasons, where the victims were present and related their expe-

11. Collette Solomon, journalist for article for Campus Newspaper entitled "International Women's Day celebrations focus on rape!", given as addendum to paper by Bernadette Johnson, UWC Student Representative Council Gender Officer, on "Student Organising and Sexual Harassment" at Southern African Conference on Challenging Sexual Harassment within Tertiary Education, 29-30 October 1994, held at University of Cape Town, hosted by the Equal Opportunity Research Project.

> riences. Because we had organised in this fashion we were also labelled as being divisive. We were told we were being emotional about this issue ...We were actually even asked why we were so angry about the issue when the victims had probably not even been virgins at the time of the rape.[12]

Solomon's article hints at an institutional climate in which, while the concept of protest against structural injustice was well embedded in campus culture,[13] the demand for women's safety led very quickly to reactive discourse saturated with hostility to feminist principles about gender equality.

A similar discourse erupted over the second report, describing an intervention initiated by the University of Botswana in 1992. In March 1992, the Student Representative Council received complaints from women students that certain faculty were guilty of sexually harassing them: intimidating them when they refused sexual overtures, marking students on the basis of their perceived sexual attractiveness and inviting them to visit their offices for sex.[14] Unlike the situation described at UWC, report authors Sheila Tlou and Lebohang Letsie describe the university administration's response to the SRC's complaints as proactive: the University's Gender Policy and Programme Committee was commissioned to initiate immediate research into the issue and the Vice Chancellor made it clear that one complaint of sexual harassment would justify the development of formal policies. Such executive support did not, however, protect the researchers from the hostility of the institutional culture to the work. Not only did the researchers struggle to collect information from students, but also academic and non-academic staff were very reluctant, overall, to fill out questionnaires or participate in any form of live interview. In addition, the researchers were vilified:

The researchers conducting the study were brought under scrutiny – they were labelled as freaks, as uninformed, as culturally alienated and as victims of feminist propaganda from the West. Their credentials as 'good' women were questioned. The male researchers were branded as having been pressured into accepting culturally unacceptable notions of manhood and womanhood.[15]

Lastly, the University of Cape Town's 1991 Report on Sexual Harassment at the University introduces the issue by quoting from an anonymous

12. See footnote 11.
13. The University of the Western Cape was one of the most active anti-apartheid South African campuses.
14. Tlou and Letsie, 1997.
15. Tlou and Letsie, op.cit., pp. 18-19.

pamphlet circulated on the campus in September 1989: "Some men on this campus have declared war against women. They have claimed the right to decide where women should be and when. They are dictating to women what they should wear and how they should live their lives".[16]

What is also included in the pamphlet is an invocation of one of the most powerful moments of anti-apartheid struggle organised by women:

> you've struck the women, you've struck a rock
> women on this campus shall not be intimidated
> women reserve the right to walk around as they please
> women shall organise and mobilise

This invocation places the pamphlet in performative synchrony with a very particular history, that of black South African women's rejection of institutional coercion and harassment under apartheid. The focus of the pamphlet's outrage is on the *climate* of misogyny facing women students, a climate explicitly named as military oppression, including a range of assaults (from 'dictation' about dress and behaviour to physical and sexual attack).

The UCT Report tries to unpack the social and academic culture of students by analysing questionnaires distributed in men's and women's residences (n =200) and by careful and detailed interviews with students, residence wardens, university management and others. Despite the complexity revealed in the report,[17] it concludes that sexual harassment and sexism are widely accepted within the residence systems and that complaints about sexual harassment – formal or informal – were met with political scepticism, hostility or derision.

16. Simons et al., 1991, p. 8.

17. By the late 1980s, the University of Cape Town had taken critical steps to begin intervention in the apartheid-based elitism of the university's student population. Whereas in 1985, white students made up 91 per cent of students in residence, by 1990 the profile had shifted so that black students ('African', 'coloured' and 'Indian') comprised 50 per cent of the residence population. The meaning of 'race' dominated struggles over identity, authority and issues of cultural control over university membership, and the UCT Report traces debates on sexual harassment, which are embedded in struggles against racism. The theoretical point is clear: for the UCT students surveyed, issues of discrimination could not readily be flattened into single-axis analysis. Black women students' experience (despite their diversity) differed markedly from that of white women: black men did not share social, linguistic or political relationships to masculinity with white men.

There are substantial differences between the studies from the University of the Western Cape, the University of Botswana and the University of Cape Town. Each campus is enmeshed in historically specific conditions concerning resources, access and national policies on higher education and development. In addition, the abovementioned reports demonstrate – dramatically – the meaning of 'partiality' in the analysis of sexual harassment and sexual violence. Bernadette Johnson's paper, on which Collette Solomon's UWC report is based, speaks with the voice of a student activist to the growth of a vigorous feminist movement on campus, encompassing the development of women's studies, the provision of training in residence and political protest against rape – the focus is on institutional combat. Sheila Tlou and Lebohang Letsie, as senior researchers, are empowered to explore particular complaints by students, complaints which target male lecturers[18] and demand interrogation of academic culture. The UCT Report, commissioned through a Deputy Vice Chancellor and written as the work of a Committee, focuses on residence students' experience (mostly) of other students and of their residence environments.

At the same time, all three reports bear witness to the hostility of the environments in which the authors are working. Not only was sexual harassment and sexual violence prevalent, but the articulation of protest, analysis and demand for change encountered an arsenal of 'erasers': the facts of sexual harassment and sexual violence were threatened by political arguments on appropriate struggles, socio-anthropological claims about gender-identity, academic trivialisation, physical and verbal bullying, economic predictions about the value of those who insisted on taking gender discrimination seriously and personalised vitriol.

Bodies of Voice: Conferences in Cape Town, Gaborone, Harare

Cape Town Conference 1994

Such negation was expressed differently within each institution. It was collective recognition of the *impact* of sexual harassment, an impact which reverberated through survivors' bodies and minds into the lives of anyone who reacted with concrete action against the abuse, which forged an extraordinarily consensual space for the initiation of regional solidarity among

18. In later research by Lebohang Letsie, she turns her analysis to administrative staff issues, and uncovers a broad band of sexually harassing behaviours experienced by secretarial staff.

individuals working in higher education. At a 1994 conference held at the University of Cape Town, over 100 women and men based at higher education institutions participated. The level of regional interest in the issue, for which the conference organisers had been unprepared, energised a programme of discussion which positioned higher education campuses as zones in which substantial – and holistic – political work on gender needed to be undertaken. The opening address at the University of Cape Town by Mamphela Ramphele set the tone:

> At a recent Conference in Kenya on the connection between economic policy and human rights violations, John Njenga (the Catholic Archbishop of Mombasa) pointed out that: "Education as a human right is increasingly becoming an impossible ideal for many who have suffered the consequences of unfair 'economic policies'"...

In many discussions about the need for connections between the legacy of colonialism and the need for economic and social change, education is invoked as one of the most important areas in which policy-makers' intervention can make a difference to the future ...What does not get discussed is the fact that gender alters the meaning of 'educational opportunity' and that this is particularly important for tertiary education.[19]

I was present at the Conference as a part-time contract researcher in the Equal Opportunity Research Project directed by Ramphele, charged with the task of initiating research into the implementation of the university's sexual harassment policy. What was momentous for me within that conference room was the solidarity of the participants.

Rather than summarise the individuals' input, the Conference Report collated collective perspectives on different zones of activity through which sexual violence and sexual harassment could be tackled: policy formation, research, training, public protest, advocacy around new – or better – service provision. The collation of the Conference voices as a whole strategy, despite the vast differences among Southern African campuses, may strike one at first reading as slightly simplistic. In retrospect, however, the Report strikes me as the reflection of a – yes, simple – solidarity, in the face of survivors' pain.

Although the Report assumes survivors, and includes quite intensive discussion on definitions of sexual harassment which would explain its

19. M.A. Ramphele, "Challenging Sexual Harassment: Strategies Within Tertiary Education", Conference at University of Cape Town, 29-30 October 1994. Unpublished paper, available from the African Gender Institute, contact jane.bennett@uct.ac.za

psychological, physical, spiritual and/or economic impact, there is no first person witness in the report's pages. Although many presentations included side-references to 'personal' experience of (for example) being harassed by particular words, no presentation concentrated on an autobiographical experience of rape or sexual harassment. Nevertheless, conference spaces unfilled by papers and panels – teatimes, evenings, lunches, conversations in the bathrooms – were packed with exchanges about personal experiences. Such experiences included narratives of others (staff, students, friends) who had been attacked and direct discussion of storytellers' own encounters with assailants and bullies. In a room full of confident, vocally skilful and interesting men and women a current of respect for mutual knowledge of a very particular evil gave *body* to the talk of presentations, a body which demanded attention.

The year following the 1994 conference gave shape to participants' explicit interest in moving beyond individual contexts and perspectives through the formation of a Coordinating Committee of people charged with finding an appropriate activist forum, to a shared regional conviction that campus-based sexual violence and sexual harassment were intolerable. The Committee's composition attempted both representativity and realism: membership needed to bring geographical and contextual differences to the table and, simultaneously, to recognise that none of us had job responsibilities in which challenging sexual harassment and sexual violence constituted a primary (or, in some cases, even 'valid') focus for daily work.

Over the next five years, NETSH developed as a collective of diversely placed people working on SADC campuses. This development took place through moments of concerted, intensive interaction during Coordinating Committee planning meetings, workshops and conferences, as well as during long periods when the only possible collective activities involved database work, resource dissemination, e-mail communication and fundraising. From the perspective of any one institution, since NETSH was based on individual affiliations, the network's impact would be very uneven, perhaps in some cases barely discernible.

The choice to develop NETSH through individuals' commitment was a political one: in the face of institutional hostility to any form of feminist activism, it would have been naïve to canvass for participation based on institutional 'membership' signed on at executive levels of management. More importantly, it was recognised that the coal-face work being done to shift dangerous and sexist campus cultures was initiated and implemented by individuals, often working beyond the borders of their professional respon-

sibilities, inspiring others through creativity, dedication and a savvy strategic consciousness about the need for long-term vision. Rooting the body of the network in individual volunteerism was politically appropriate, but it meant placing huge responsibilities on the shoulders of already burdened staff and student leaders. The narrative of ongoing work on challenging sexual harassment and sexual violence across dozens of campuses was intimately embedded in local institutional contexts, and the decision to create a linking network risked tough questions about the possibility of visible impact on a day-to-day level.

An overview of the five years' work of NETSH, however, illuminates an astonishing trajectory of discursive and practical development in coming to terms with the prevalence of sexually harassing and abusive behaviour on SADC campuses. A synopsis of 'events' coordinated shows two regional conferences, one held in Gaborone (1997) and the other in Harare (2000), and at least six substantial workshops and regular meetings of Coordinating Committee members. While I suspect that this trajectory merely hints at the locally rich battles over sexism, democracy, resources and authority waged on different SADC campuses during these years, the opportunities built through NETSH for cross-institutional discussion did facilitate deepening comprehension both of 'sexual harassment' and, as crucially, of the size of the transformational tasks ahead.

Gaborone Conference 1997

The National Institute of Development Research and Documentation at the University of Botswana was responsible, through the leadership of Lebohang Letsie with other Coordinating Committee members, for organising a Conference in Gaborone in 1997. One goal of the Conference was to bring back together as many as possible of the 1994 participants, expand the participation of Botswanan allies and formalise the structure and organising principles of NETSH.

The concluding remarks of Ansu Datta, then the Director of National Institute of Development Research and Documentation at the University of Botswana, capture something of the direction in which regional theorisation on sexual harassment and sexual violence was moving. In 1994, although of course individual participants brought particular perspectives with them, the overarching discourse was thematised, through shock and outrage, around the need to tackle institutional culture holistically. By 1997, however, Datta concluded:

> From the deliberations it has become clear that sexual harassment on university campus is only the tip of a proverbial iceberg ... yet, the battle on campus is notable for several reasons. Sexism here can be a most subtle kind of hidden agenda; the ideology sustained sexism is likely to be garbed in its most sophisticated form; and perhaps it is at this level that we may find the most blatant hypocrisy regarding the gender issue – the yawning gap between what is avowed and what is met in practice .. [I]t came out quite clearly from the Conference that sexism, the bedrock of sexual harassment, is a complex phenomenon and that unless we are careful we stand the risk of indulging in what may be called quick-fix remedies, simplistic solutions to involved syndromes.[20]

Datta's suggestions capture the shape of a very particular difficulty facing conference activists: where behaviour experienced as impossibly destructive by survivors is discursively protected (such behaviour is 'natural', 'normal', 'culturally prescribed', 'innocent'), the work of voicing resistance needs long-term, intricately strategised theorisation. There is a terrible tension between the immediacy of an outraged response to a specific sexual attack and the insight Datta explicates – institutionally, there is no option of 'fighting back' through the deployment of clear force or clean retribution. Feminist epistemologies, revolutionary in their logic concerning what McFadden names as "bodily integrity",[21] are met institutionally by a traditionally powerful split. Aspects of feminist theory and its implications for practice can be assimilated via the prism of the 'public', while the 'private' – the bordered zones of bodily interaction most intimately, nakedly, involved with reproduction and sexuality – must remain 'untouched', private. Thus feminist invitations to examine the meaning of community under gendered laws of access to humanity, find themselves acceptable to language concerning the right to (say) education but offensive to scripts of the body, to discussions on bodily significance.

Datta's remarks on hypocrisy and gaps are in conversation with those of Patricia McFadden, then the Director of the Feminist Studies Centre in Harare. McFadden opened the conference with a passionate attempt to lay bare some of patriarchy's discursive tools against the recognition of women's bodies as 'unownable' (a recognition reasonable enough in postcolonial environments fully apprised of what it has meant, historically, to trade in the ownership of African bodies). Her presentation surveys the contempo-

20. Datta, 1997 , p. 61.
21. McFadden, 1997.

rary constructions of African women's sexuality, polarising 'femininisation' against 'othering'. While the former, she argues, accounts for cultural permission to 'parade' young naked women before SADC heads of states in nationalist ceremonies, the latter positions resistance to violations of women's bodily integrity as (literally) 'other': Western, foreign, overeducated, unpalatable, unAfrican, beyond culture, inhuman – 'unfeminine'.[22]

McFadden and Datta both move the description of sexual harassment from a conversation stretching for connection between diverse experiences, in blind faith that such connection could clothe over the exposures and humiliations of sexualised assault, into forensic analysis of the *interests* galvanising such assaults. Although it is certain that several participants at the 1994 conference were deeply conscious of the complexities at the heart of sexual harassment, the surface discourse concentrated on the straightforward injustice of sexual attacks and the conviction that institutions, like universities and technikons, could 'eradicate' them through a web of planned policy-focused processes. In 1997, contained between Datta and McFadden, presentations did not abandon the work of designing activist interventions, but the political depth of the epistemological, discursive, contextual and physical battles participants were undertaking was visible. Daily 'energisers' reflected this: Nozipho Kwenaite, Dean of Students from the University of North, led participants in the lighthearted but/and military chorus – "*amajoni, amajoni wesexual harassment*".[23]

The theorisation of gender, culture, sexuality and violence crafted through the two conferences is the result of a research process realised through discussion and unmarked *as* research. There were (as already described) several pieces of work formally identified as 'research', such as that brought to the Conferences by Lebohang Letsie, [24] one of a number of sociological surveys looking at attitudes, experiences and policy environments. These formal studies played a critical role, first in creating – through the printed word – a collective of intra-institutional voices with information about sexual harassment and sexual violence and then, within the conference sites, as touchstones through which to offer traditionally 'academic' validity to problems denigrated as trivial or irrelevant.

22. McFadden, op.cit, p. 12.
23. A translation of this line: the soldiers, the soldiers of sexual harassment!
24. The first research done in South African universities was done at the University of Natal, followed closely by the research at UCT and research undertaken by Amanda Gouws and Andrienetta Kritzinger at the University of Stellenbosch, see Gouws and Kritzinger, 1995.

Reading the Conferences themselves, however, as points within a research process whose perimeters went beyond individual institutions reveals an ever-deepening conceptual complexity achieved as much through attention to particular position papers as through the organisational work required to bring dozens of people together. Who wanted to come, which professional portfolios claimed authority, which institutions made it possible for ten (rather than one) of their members to participate, how discussions negotiated regional, linguistic, racial and gender differences – all these questions came to inform questions about the place of political activism on sexual violence in higher education. There were increasingly complex discussions about whether activism against sexual harassment and sexual violence should be driven by management structures and focused primarily on policy development, or whether the voices of much less powerful sectors of the campus (residence wardens, counsellors, junior lecturers, administrative staff, students themselves) constituted the primary base of solidarity (and strategic decision-making) for the campus. There were also debates about epistemology. Some voices were deeply embedded in radical African feminist politics (such as Pat McFadden's, arguing passionately for the *bodily integrity* of African women, during the opening of the Gaborone Conference). Others, rooted in religious constituencies and faith-based philosophies, approached the issue of gender-based violence more from the perspective of 'good' Christian or Islamic practice than from the notion of transgressive gender-advocacy. There were strengths to both approaches – what was interesting to the researcher in me was the organic emergence of critical theoretical debates on gender and sexuality, and the possibility of containing actually quite distinct perspectives within one auditorium.

Harare Conference 2000

The emerging theoretical complexity of NETSH's work became particularly clear as the new Coordinating Committee began work in the years following the 1997 Conference. New fundraising work needed doing, a network membership needed development, local workshops needed design and delivery and the University of Zimbabwe had been nominated to host the next regional conference. The work of creating an environment hospitable to hosting this conference took ingenuity and political savvy among those within the Gender Studies Association/Affirmative Action Project at the University of Zimbabwe, and the work of NETSH was skilfully 'absorbed' into plans to hold a regional conference on Gender Equity, Democracy and

Human Rights in Institutions of Higher Education in Southern Africa.

This Conference, held in July 2000, occurred a month after the Zimbabwean parliamentary elections that returned ZANU-PF under Robert Mugabe to power, amid deep anxiety over government economic policies and a sense that Zimbabwean activism was facing enormous challenges of direction. Dr. Hope Sadza, then a University of Zimbabwe Council member, opened the Conference with direct appeals to participants to consider the full meaning of democracy in the post-election climate and yoked the question of gender discrimination to national policies on human rights. The Conference programme was complex: NETSH membership lists had been the basis for invitations and through well-placed presentations on sexual harassment and sexual violence, the NETSH agenda was subtly woven into 'broader' analyses of curricula, institutional cultures and – critically – the construction of masculinities.

At one level, the discussion of sexual harassment and sexual violence on campuses found itself submerged in a kaleidoscopic approach to 'gender', 'democracy' and 'equity'. At another – much more powerful I would argue – the theoretical language of sexual assault, developed through the Gaborone encounters, had found appropriate location within debates on gender identity, definitions of human rights and painfully complex avowals about democracy (in the presence of national definitions concerning democracy not palatable to all in the room). While new connections (between those initiating gender studies programmes and those battling sexist cultures in residences, for example) were forged, older links between those who had worked within NETSH purely through the focus on sexual harassment and sexual violence were challenged, especially through the conference's exploration of masculinities.

NETSH arranged for Tony Sardien, then a trainer with the Gender Education and Training Project (GETNET) in Cape Town, to bring a workshop on masculinities to the Harare Conference. In addition to this, a powerful student-focused research project run by the Department of Sociology at the University of Zimbabwe led to the presentation of a number of papers on gender identities on the campus, several of them authored by students, male and female. Many of these papers have since been collected into a book[25] and although academically uneven, they are extraordinary examples of analytical engagement with the links between class, ethnicity and gendered identities on a campus, identities through which students either survive their aca-

25. Gaidzanwa, 2001.

demic lives or – through deprivation, isolation or duty – fail. The Conference audience included nearly equal numbers of men and women: however, for some NETSH members permission for an overt focus on masculinity destabilised something of the earlier Conferences' political solidarity.

Within the public Conference discourse, performances of masculinity ranged from verbal sexual harassment in response to a keynote address by Amina Mama (she was asked whether she wouldn't prefer being the questioner's wife to giving public addresses on equity), through complaints about male peers' intolerance of those men interested in gender studies, to heartfelt male requests in Tony Sardien's workshop to have traditional 'masculine roles' (such as paying lobola, or being expected to tolerate aggression from other men) re-examined.[26] At the end of the Conference, participants were asked to stand up and collectively recite a poem:

> For every woman tired of acting weak when
> She knows she is strong, there is a man weary of appearing
> Strong when he feels vulnerable
> For every woman sick of acting dumb, there is a man burdened
> With the constant expectation of 'knowing everything'...
> For every woman feeling tied down by having children, there is a man denied
> The full joy of sharing parenthood.
> For every woman denied meaningful employment or equal pay
> There is a man bearing full financial responsibility for another human being
> ...

For many participants, this poem was entirely congruent with the sense of new gender paradigms suggested by Conference discussions, and hinted at gendered warmth and reciprocity. Some others were appalled by the seeming loss of analysis of patriarchy:

"What utter rubbish – what are we going to be saying next: for every woman raped until she can't move, there's a man wanting to have his life destroyed?? What about the truth: for every woman deprived of a job, there's a man who is happy to control her – why does equality have to be so blind?"[27]

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26. Not all men in this workshop were interested in such re-examination. In response to the question, "what is hard about being a man?", several answers suggest deep conservatism about gender identity: "feeling bad when provided for by a woman", "losing job to a woman", "seeing your daughter go out with another man".

27. From e-mail correspondence to author post-conference. The sender prefers anonymity, but has agreed to use of quotation here.

While six years earlier, in the 1994 Conference, Ramphele had argued for the transgressive construction of 'new' genders, among participants, many of whom were already sophisticated gender analysts, it took until 2000 for the implications of commitments to different incarnations of gendered identity to become fully embedded in public theoretical debate. Explorations of sexual harassment had shifted from appalled recognition of women's vulnerability to engagement with the masculinities responsible for male perpetration. This was a move painful in its illumination of conflict and confusion about whether masculinities could be reconstituted in ways that didn't fundamentally alienate them from 'womanhood', but a move essential to realism about the shape of the institutional battle against sexual harassment and sexual violence. International literature and regional research and publishing on masculinities certainly influenced the move, as did increasing donor interest in projects that tackled men's relationships to gender equality. Within the network of those whose focus was on sexual harassment and sexual violence in SADC higher education, however, the NETSH-co-organised conferences offered opportunities to research understanding of gendered violence in incrementally deepening ways.

The survey of Conference-based discussions suggests the development of indigenously-rooted theories of gender, sexuality and violence, spearheaded through collective exposure to the narrative of sexual assault on different campuses. There is no doubt in my mind that my thinking about such assaults has been strengthened by immersion in the organisation (through several different roles over the years) of occasions designed to effect – primarily – political activism in a specific area. That strength is not merely the obvious side-effect of taking other people's opinions and experiences seriously. It is more the result of negotiations of agency, mobility, identity and voice that occur in the process of transforming oneself from the 'author' of theorised experience into a member of a complex collective, visible at certain points, irrelevant at others, influential in some zones, naïvely powerless in others, successfully cooperative in places, radically isolated and maverick elsewhere. Such fluidity and its lessons were critical to the work of co-organising NETSH events.

Bodies in Action: Organising NETSH Activities – Tensions and Challenges

In 1997, at the Gaborone conference, participants spent a good half of the programme time in the systematic coordination of principles though which

a network could become formalised as a body, empowered through constituency mandate to initiate and support local projects, to receive resources where possible and to demand inclusion in institutional policy discussions. Through intensive group-based debate, language was formulated to encompass statements of vision, mission and strategic aim and the structure of the proposed network was agreed upon.[28] NETSH was to be organised at three levels: a membership of 'signed up' individuals working in different ways on their campuses to challenge sexual harassment/sexual violence; a Coordinating Committee on which at least one person from every country represented within the membership sits; and a secretariat located at the African Gender Institute. Of these levels, the Coordinating Committee was to be the most powerful, directing and planning workshops, resource initiatives and local public advocacy work. By 1997, five countries were represented on the committee (Botswana, Lesotho, South Africa, Swaziland, Zimbabwe) and explicit commitments were made to develop membership and Coordinating Committee participation from other SADC countries: Zambia, Malawi, Namibia, Mozambique and Angola.

The process of designing a network structure raised questions which illuminated the politics of advocacy against sexual harassment at two levels. *Firstly*, tensions about representativity arose: were prospective NETSH members to 'represent' the institutions in which they were based as workers or students? Were Coordinating Committee members to 'represent' the interests of all institutions in the countries from which they came? All democratically-built organisations face debates about representation. What was peculiar to the NETSH tensions was the knowledge that no individual interested in NETSH's mission or aims carried the full support of her/his institution: while a vice rector here, or a committee there, had shown support for challenges to sexual harassment and sexual violence, as institutions each university was economically, culturally and intellectually largely hostile to the kinds of changes envisaged. Individuals could *not*, with integrity,

28. In 1997, these were articulated as follows: "Statement of Vision – Sexual harassment and sexual violence damage and distort the opportunity to work and to learn within Southern African institutions of education. The Network is committed to eliminating sexual harassment and sexual violence within education, and thereby, to contribute to the creation of Southern African societies where all sectors of life are free from sexual harassment and sexual violence. Statement of Mission – The Network's mission is to contribute to the elimination of sexual harassment and sexual violence in all Southern African institutions of education. The Network's initial focus will be on the elimination of sexual harassment and sexual violence in tertiary education".

'represent' their institutions – to do so would have meant constant rehearsal of covert misogyny, overt scepticism about the value of concentrating on sexual harassment, contradicted by flashes of feminist brilliance and energy. In addition, to work towards a structure comprised of 'institutions' would most likely exclude the participation of exactly the individuals most interested in challenging sexual harassment and sexual violence: people, for the most part, without much professional authority.

Coordinating Committee members faced slightly different dilemmas of representativity. They were more familiar with traditional political dilemmas of accountability, and the questions for them involved the diversity and numbers of institutions within the countries they came from. South African members could not be expected to fairly represent the interests of the (at least) 30 institutions of higher education in the country,[29] while members from Swaziland could find themselves accused of having access only to the viewpoint of a very small (relatively) single institution. As critically, given the inevitable difficulties of galvanising work in one institution, how were Coordinating Committee members to access the authority to inspire connections and new projects in institutions at which they were not workers or students without risking the 'denigration' of their own campuses?[30]

Wrestling with these issues continued over three years' worth of Coordinating Committees and in training workshops organised by NETSH in different countries. Immediate solutions took the shape of naming Coordinating Committee members based on the individual's access to resources, energy, political grasp of the problems and ability to gain respect within their local context. Such solutions risked compromising deep democracy and simultaneously increased the likelihood that those already with strong (even contentious) local profiles and individual resilience would be asked to take on the leadership of NETSH activism. The job responsibilities of these individuals were likely to be intense: in the years in which I worked among Coordinating members, several suffered severe bouts of ill-health as a result of institutionally based overwork and environmental hostility to their feminism.

29. The number of the institutions would have been the least of the difficulties here: apartheid education policies radically segregated South African education systems, leaving huge disparities in resources between them and deep ideological divisions.

30. In order to create joint institutional projects on challenging sexual harassment, it has to be acknowledged that sexual harassment does in fact take place. Where there is no permission for this, an individual who discusses cases of sexual harassment. occurring on her/his own campus with people from other campuses can be accused of 'disloyalty' or 'troublemaking'.

Questions of representativity, therefore, became shaped as much by the terrain in which the network wanted to work as by predictable organisational negotiations about power and accountability. The process of building a network found itself embedded in the dynamics of sexual harassment: successful and communicative activism had to find ways of combating institutionally effective ways of silencing feminist voices and marginalising feminised (women's, usually) bodies. While it would be stretching a metaphor to identify the NETSH process as a 'survivor', to recognise that organisation against sexual violence engages the complex aggression of 'normal' institutional authorities would not entail exaggeration. One of the earliest observations of sexual harassment researchers was that the performance of institutional hostility to their public exploration of abusive gender dynamics mirrored the interests of perpetrators. It is not surprising, therefore, that engagement with building a whole network of inter-institutionally-based individuals meant that we struggled to find straightforward ways of bringing directed energy to the task of challenging sexual harassment regionally.

Secondly, the organisation of NETSH raised dilemmas over resources. While at a constitutional level, the Coordinating Committee held leadership in the direction and flow of NETSH projects, the secretariat (at the African Gender Institute) was accountable for the management of funds raised to support NETSH work.[31] Coordinating Committee members thus had no independent access to NETSH funding and were dependent on administrative procedures far beyond their institutional control for integration into Committee meetings and into local negotiations over prospective new projects. Members based at the African Gender Institute, on the other hand, needed regular information and communication with Committee members in order to implement plans: this was rarely effected without delays, the need for clarification or problems of connectivity.

Well aware of the political difficulties at the African Gender Institute, Coordinating Committee members and others spoke of the hope that the secretariat could rotate, a hope supported by everyone at the African Gender Institute. The reality was, however, that African Gender Institute participants came to be seen as key to NETSH life and where these participants were forced to take on new responsibilities, changed portfolios, or left the Institute, NETSH cohesion suffered. Accusations and self-accusations about commitment, connection and agency occasionally coloured Coordinating

31. In the years 1994-2001, nearly all these funds came from the Ford Foundation. NORAD also contributed funding to the Gaborone Conference.

Committee meetings. Despite the positive evaluations made by people in a range of training workshops about the quality of NETSH members' grasp of sexual harassment issues and of the value of creating linkages between individuals to help them develop institutionally-specific strategies, people who had taken on large organisational roles within NETSH experienced fatigue, isolation and the sense of being pushed to the limits of what was possible.[32]

The organisational issues here are, like those of representativity, not uncommon in the work of alliance-creation, advocacy and movement-building. I would argue, however, that organising against sexual harassment and sexual violence creates particular difficulties for those with leadership responsibilities. Public 'expertise' in the area puts one very directly in connection with resource needs: for training, for advocacy work, for meeting survivors' needs (safe housing, academic support, travel to supportive space, healthcare, etc.). It is extremely difficult to sustain effective local challenges to sexual harassment and sexual violence without both high-level political support *and* access to resources. Where the only resources for the work are funnelled through a geographically distant (albeit strongly collegial) connection, one is placed in a position of dependency that compromises autonomous initiative: one is in fact 'feminised'. Coordinating Committee members undertook the organisation of conferences within their 'own' institutional space (Gaborone in 1997 and Harare in 2000) and simultaneously had to negotiate the politics of energising and building local conference committees and work with the NETSH secretariat. Colleagues at the secretariat rarely understood the full complexity of the local dynamics faced in Gaborone and Harare and also needed information acceptable to the University of Cape Town's administrative systems.[33] Both Coordinating Committee members who did this (Lebohang Letsie and Rekopantswe Mate) worked with immense political skill and inspirational dedication across the borders of institutions and countries (negotiating with diverse local inter-

32. An evaluation of NETSH was commissioned by the African Gender Institute in July 2001, with Hope Chigudu conducting it. While the evaluation confirmed that NETSH training workshops were valued by participants and that the NETSH vision and goals resonated strongly with members surveyed, it also described the AGI convenor's (then Bernedette Muthien, now Director of the NGO, Engender) levels of pressure and sense of isolation.

33. As the AGI is located within the University of Cape Town, this meant that all financial transactions – such as the transfer of monies from a donor fund for the support of a project – were administered through UCT systems.

ests as well). Positioned from within the African Gender Institute as part of the secretariat, I frequently experienced my work as that of an ignorant bully – asking for budgets and plans, from a position of financial 'authority' and simultaneously cavernous ignorance of the waters being forded by my Committee colleagues.

Regular Coordinating Committee meetings did much to renew and refresh lines of communication fractured by distance, contextual difference and the fact that we collectively shared no 'discipline', 'professional role' or institutional status. The value of face-to-face meetings, discussions and in-depth planning was visible not simply in the organisation of concrete projects (training, conferences, advocacy tools). Questions endemic to organising (representativity, financial power, leadership, communicative integrity) become saturated with the significances of gender, race and class, coagulations into powerlessness. Such powerlessness can be engineered overtly, or may be the result of simply not recognising the inevitable trajectories of 'normal' routes into community. Whatever the case, it is infused with the salience of structural oppressions. Thus, within NETSH organising, positioned accountabilities had the potential of becoming patterned into meanings of gender and class/race dynamics. Along such lines, the African Gender Institute became legible as 'masculine', 'white', 'South African-dominant' , while another Coordinating Committee member resonated as 'feminine', 'black', 'other SADC country'.

The situation described had, at one level, almost nothing to do with the actual people involved, who worked together with respect, affection and a robust intolerance for preciousness or personalised power-mongering. At another level, the possibility that NETSH dynamics would simply mimic conventionally oppressive forces was real – I *was* white and the African Gender Institute *was* located within South Africa and associated with a university whose colonialist legacy is powerful: the 'masculinity' of this position was indisputable. It took the hours of intensive, direct communication between all Coordinating Committee members to ensure that more complicated relations than 'masculine/feminine', 'white/black' and 'over-resourced/under-resourced' animated NETSH planning. A more kaleidoscopic, angled, poetically sharp[34] palette of recognitions concerning identity and power was demanded in the task of theorising the prevalence of sexual harassment and sexual violence and of acting against it. Such recognitions could not, ever,

34. 'Poetic' – meaning panoptic capacity to sustain the seemingly disjunct and the wit and intelligence to reveal incongruence.

discount our vulnerability to crude rehearsals of racial, national or gendered language and performance, but neither could they risk confinement to the very terms through which sexual violation is persistently possible.[35]

Theory Informed by Practice

In 1994, the initiation of NETSH was fuelled from numerous sources: national and regional discourses concerning gender, an astonishing year of political realignments within the SADC region and within South Africa itself and the work of fiercely direct – and diverse -- African feminists. As argued above, however, perhaps the most stimulating energies came from the years before 1994, in which struggles about the meaning of bodies' access to citizenship, education and opportunity had been waged on many campuses (and elsewhere). The political difficulty of representing the raped (or sexually harassed) body as a legitimate zone for solidarity within institutional spaces had been encountered as a shock, even to fairly seasoned social analysts:

> To my surprise, while there was certainly a moment at which it was like, "o no, is it true that a first year was raped in that residence?" and a sense that something wrong had happened, it kind of dissolved, just seeped back into the floor, and when I raised the need to do some serious studying of the circumstances of how these things happen, how we can prevent them, I was treated as though I'd made a very inappropriate and emotional suggestion; I was treated as though I was an embarassment to the department.[36]

The bodies (and voices) of the assaulted created in complex ways the most compelling sources of insistence that higher educational institutions take sexual harassment and sexual violence seriously. NETSH's 'personal' connection with these assaults was, from the outset, multiple: those interested in joining as members included survivors, witnesses, confused friends, outraged would-be guerrilla-protectors, silenced sympathisers, story-tellers, explorers and service-providers. Although established from within the borders of the academy, and despite the influence of some valuable pieces of traditionally crafted research on the issue,[37] NETSH was not imagined as a research network.

35. For more analysis of this point, see Rao and Friedman, 1998.

36. B. Mapetla, lecturer in sociology at VISTA, personal communication, Oct. 1995.

37. See the work of Amanda Gouws and Andrienetta Kritzinger, Thandabantu Nhlapo, Fathima Hafferjee, Carla Sutherland and others.

The process of organising fora through which isolated individuals could be supported in the work of building intra-institutional energies through which to design policies, run educational workshops or negotiate for new resources uncovered the nature of sexual harassment and sexual violence on SADC campuses. Unlike other feminist networks in the region, such as Women and Law in Southern Africa (WLSA), NETSH's primary task was not research-focused and yet the complexity of the connections between gender, culture, violence and sexuality became incrementally deepened, explored and debated as discussions looked for ways to, for example, theorise women students' experiences of being sexually targeted by men lecturers 'alongside' analysis of men students' struggles to survive economically within resource-barren campuses.

At one level, therefore, the succession of NESTH-generated opportunities to devote sustained critical attention to the conceptual and practical work of challenging sexual harassment and sexual violence on different campuses escalated the intensity of theoretical debate on gendered dynamics within higher education. The 1994 questions concerning the isolation, gendered hostility and institutionally rooted secondary victimisation faced by those who 'outed' the insidiousness of sexual harassment had developed by 2000 into intensive heuristic engagement with masculinities. At the Harare conference that year, the work being presented by the University of Zimbabwe students and faculty and the interest in the GETNET masculinities workshop was explicitly connected to the demand to explore 'changing' men. While individuals continued to wrestle with intricate local dynamics of instituting new research, policy change or educational programmes on different campuses, the meta-level of the discourse had shifted – through six years of interaction – from appalled political loneliness to complex, practical and undaunted solidarity.

The capacity of conferencing to deepen the kinds of theoretical and practical questions possible within a field of study is, of course, well documented. A deeper level at which NETSH organising influenced the process of conceptualising sexual harassment and sexual violence in SADC higher education came through the politics of designing, building and sustaining a network. Developing the knowledge necessary to create effective communicative linkages, negotiate issues of fund-raising and fund-management and ensure transparency was a long-term process, which demanded balance and careful respect for others' experiences. The skills required speak to the difficulty of all organisation-building, but are particularly crucial to the work of challenging sexual harassment and sexual violence. Issues of silenced voices,

traumatised people, defensive institutional structures and resourcelessness pressurise activists (at all institutional levels) in complex ways, rarely grasped in quick discussion across institutions. The negotiation of a collectively-designed NETSH event, such as a conference, taught as much about institutional dynamics as any paper or presentation.

After the July 2000 Conference in Harare, NETSH received funding for another two years' work from the Ford Foundation. The funding was routed through the African Gender Institute and made provision for a full-time position dedicated to the growth of the Network. This post was taken up by Bernedette Muthien, and, together with a new Coordinating Committee, the years 2001-02 saw new workshops, the development of regional audits of available resources and the design and dissemination of a handbook. From July 2000, my own relationship to NETSH shifted from secretariat member to collegial engagement, wherever possible, with Bernedette Muthien inside the African Gender Institute as her work moved NETSH into new waters.

Summing Up

In 1994, when I first came to the African Gender Institute, my relationship to issues of sexual harassment on SADC campuses involved a part-time job at the University of Cape Town as a consultant researcher, commissioned to explore the implementation of the university's policy on sexual harassment. The work placed me in direct engagement with institutional voices, all of which had integrity, but few of which were in synchrony: disciplinary officers spoke of the 'attrition' of complainants; women students voiced fury, insecurity and confusion; some feminist lecturers bore witness to the way the campus had – in fact – changed for the better in the past ten years; counselling staff pointed to the financial and cultural strain many incoming students endured. My own position was marginal, a footnote to a footnote: I was employed by the Equal Opportunity Research Project, a young non-faculty-based research project set up to support the work of a Deputy Vice Chancellor.

After NETSH was initiated following the 1994 conference hosted by the Equal Opportunity Research Project, I was involved more and more in the day-to-day planning for funding and project design. What I came to 'know' as a *researcher* about sexual harassment and sexual violence on SADC campuses accrued over a five-year process of adjustment, evaluation, self-criticism and (literal) mobility across national, institutional and personal borders. The moments of failure (inability to find new funds, postponed

events, confusions around agency) and the moments of accomplishment (a well-run workshop, dissemination of a set of resources, the knock at the e-mail door asking for information and support) have become infused with a sense of growing insight concerning the meaning of being gendered and sexual. Apprehension (even horror) at the sight of the gulf between African feminist recognitions of 'bodily integrity' and neo-patriarchal convictions about the epistemological irrelevance of women's embodied experiences has been, at every turn, offset by the palpable reality that we are not destroyed by sexual assault. Outraged, yes; hurt, yes; individually dislocated and silent, yes often; but in any relation to permanent – collective – death, no.

While the statistics on prevalence or perception and qualitative material narrating incident and case depict – as they must – the profile of African (mostly women's) victimisation, what *research* (here, the intricately communicative, directed, exploration of contextualised sexual harassment and sexual violence over five years) suggests is resilient, intelligent, border-crossing strategy towards reimagining the African body as un-invadable.

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CHAPTER THREE

Reflections of a Feminist Scholar-Activist in Nigeria

Charmaine Pereira

Introduction

This chapter explores my experiences of trying to carve a space for women's studies within the Nigerian academy, and of linking activism in this sphere with activism on gender justice outside the academy. I reflect on the difficulties of sustaining intellectual work in the university at a time when the economy was, and as it continues to be, in crisis and politics were subsumed under military rule. Differing understandings of my identity, and therefore my 'place' in the academy and the society at large, have been at play in shaping the possibilities of my contributing to developing feminist praxis and women's studies. The fact that work on gender and women's studies in Africa has often been carried out without necessarily being marked by feminist politics (Tsikata 2001a; Mama 1996a) highlights the need for more analytical work in this area (Pereira 2000).

Negotiating identities, whether determined by others or self-defined, has textured my experience in significant ways. As a Kenyan of Indian descent, married to a Nigerian, my self-identification as an African feminist has often been at odds with dominant definitions of myself as a 'Niger wife' (a foreign woman married to a Nigerian man), or even as a 'white' woman! In the northern Nigerian context of the early 1990s, women and men of Asian descent as well as those of European descent (expatriates) were equally referred to as 'white'. Coming from a background of anti-racist struggles in the United Kingdom, at a time when people of Asian descent involved in such struggles self-identified as 'black', including myself, I found this new categorisation astonishing, to say the least. In common parlance, to be an expatriate is 'to be white' and 'to have foreign exchange' (particularly US dollars).

I interpret this scenario as a manifestation of Nigeria's particular history and politics (see e.g., Hall 1980). The development of racialised hierarchies and divisions in Nigeria appears to be shaped by historical relations of dom-

ination brought about through colonialism and capitalism and sustained by prevailing global and local conditions of social and economic underdevelopment. Unlike those parts of the African continent where settler colonialism was a dominant feature of political history, Nigeria experienced indirect rule for the most part. In everyday interactions, race consciousness and racial hierarchies have not structured social relations in West African countries such as Nigeria and Ghana in as pervasive a manner as they do for example, in South Africa or, to a lesser extent, Kenya or Uganda.

In contemporary Nigeria, whilst the differences in colour are only partially reflected in language, this is not because such differences are not perceptible. It is because the significant feature, and the assumed common feature about racial groups such as Euro-Americans and Asians (collectively referred to as expatriates) in the Nigerian context is their association with foreign capital. The identification of class interests has not taken place along a singular dimension of race but across several. The continued significance of racialised hierarchies and consciousness reflects to a large extent, but not exclusively, the continued salience of foreign capital. Regional differences in the way in which such capital is deployed – whether through transnational oil companies in the Niger Delta or Lebanese and Indian factories and trade in Lagos and parts of the North, for example – are likely to be implicated in apparent regional differences in the manifestation of racialised consciousness.

The situation is complicated by the interplay of race and gender ideologies. My obvious difference from those around me on the grounds of race was further accentuated by my identification as a feminist. In my new setting, the dominant view of feminism was that it was 'un-African' and 'alien'. It is clear, however, that the epithet of 'alien' is quite selectively applied in the domain of knowledge production, practice and politics. The generalised acceptance (until relatively recently) of other 'alien' phenomena, such as 'modernisation', raises the question of what lies behind the widespread resistance to feminism. Changes in the dominant perceptions of feminism are slow to come about, even among activists clearly working to further gender equity. Yet such change is evident in the greater tendency to talk either in terms of African feminism or to use terms such as womanism (see Tsikata 1997).

Knowledge Production: The University

The scope for knowledge production in Nigerian universities is shaped by the broader social, political, economic and cultural context within which