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## 1. QUO VADIS WOMEN'S AND GENDER STUDIES IN AFRICA?

*Assessing the Activism/Academy Association*

In this chapter I explore the origins and development of Women's and Gender Studies<sup>1</sup> in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). The origins may in some cases overlap with the theoretical implications, as it was precisely the oppression of women that led to the women's movements and the subsequent establishment of Women's Studies. The title Women's or Gender Studies and others which I will explore indicate the ideological and political implications of the discourse. I also highlight my own positionality as a feminist using the insider/outsider perspective. I am an outsider as a researcher but also an insider as i was a student of Women's Studies and taught it as well.<sup>2</sup> I critique events using a feminist perspective.

In tracing its history I also highlight the patriarchal, colonial and racist context as well as some of my personal experiences. I emphasize the diverse areas in which Women's Studies impacted and how theoretically and practically the lessons and learnings have been intertwined. The origins also influenced the interdisciplinary nature of Women's Studies. I stress the specific nature of African feminism and its impact on the discipline. Social Science concepts were critiqued and new concepts formulated. Essentially Women's Studies constantly interrogated the relevance of the research to changing and improving women's lives. I trace some case studies and the political and all pervasive patriarchal context.

In conclusion I raise the challenges confronting Women's Studies and appeal for the return to its origins to strengthen the academic/activist links. Doing this would contribute to making Women's Studies more relevant and practically applicable and effective to its original central aim: that of improving the quality of women's and marginalized people's lives and promoting social justice in general. I have done desktop research, used my own experiences in Rwanda and South Africa, and did a few interviews. These are not representative as i had minimal responses to my requests for interviews due to workloads. Hence these interviews will indicate some tendencies that exist and in no way claim to be representative of what is happening in general. What has been obvious during the past is that the struggles of women/feminists are similar to the struggles for the implementation of Women's Studies – hence in what follows may be a conflation of the two in outlining the challenges and the development of Women's Studies.

ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT OF WOMEN'S STUDIES

The origins of Women's and Gender Studies as an academic discipline evolved out of the Women's movement and women's activism. With the Second Wave of Feminism in the 1960s, it was realized that rigorous and sound theory would enhance the women's struggles; hence the movement towards establishing Women's Studies emerged. This context: social movements, continued advocacy at all levels and women's rights as human rights were also manifested at government levels.

Hence there was a symbiotic relationship between the women's struggles on the ground and the evolving human rights and women's rights discourse at government and international levels. The United Nations (UN) Women's Decade (1975–1985) gave rise to progressive conventions, one of the most influential being the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). It was adopted in 1979 by the General Assembly of the UN and is seen as an international human rights bill for women. It outlines what discrimination means and proposes an action plan to cease the oppression of women. It defines discrimination against women as

...(A)ny distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field.  
(<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/> accessed 28 October 2015)

This decade for women too strengthened the awareness for the need for Women's Studies and reflections and discussions began. This concurrence of events is the product of the period and to reiterate – they mutually influenced one another. Subsequently other global platforms followed: the UN Women's conferences at Mexico (1975), Copenhagen (1980), Nairobi (1985) and Beijing (1995). Most African governments ratified the Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA) and related international instruments like the African Union Declaration on Gender and Development.

A central concept acknowledged within a feminist analysis is that women are not homogeneous – hence movements emerging in SSA varied from grassroots or working class women's struggles which emerged out of women's struggles for their rights and middle class professional women's movements. Globally women were involved in diverse ways and countries: the Peace Movement in Northern Ireland, women against *sati*<sup>3</sup> in India and the suffragette women in Switzerland, for example. Women got the vote in Switzerland as late as 1971 after a protracted struggle. Swiss women first demanded the vote in 1886 (<http://history-switzerland.geschichte-schweiz.ch/chronology-womens-right-vote-switzerland.html> accessed 12 December 2015). In mid 20th century struggles women managed to unite despite race, class and location as in the case of women's campaigns against violence against women

globally and the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa (SA). The fact that the Third United Nations (UN) Women's World Conference took place in Nairobi, Kenya in 1985 also had a major impact on African women's activism and advocacy. It was a dynamic period in which women's activism influenced and were influenced by government and global actions in return.

As part of this struggle women were also encouraged to enter previous male only domains. This meant that women were entering engineering and finance, for example. Another strategy that the women's movement explored was that women should go into positions of power and decision-making; in business and especially in government and promoting the establishment of National Gender Machinery and gender sensitive constitutions (Beijing Platform for Action-BPFA Critical areas 7 and 8). It was both pragmatic and strategic that women explore those positions where they could make most difference and politics was identified as a central and determining niche. The Australian women's movement was in the forefront of this and this hence gave rise to the formulation of the word '*femocrat*' feminist bureaucrat by them (Sawyer, 1990). Consequently, it was a global ploy of women activists to advocate for the participation of women in government. This interaction between activism, academia and policy-formulation also coincided with vigorous advocacy at different levels of influence.

But there was also opportunism and misinterpretation of the Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA) for individual and party political needs. For example, a phenomenon that I do not classify as feminist is what is termed 'wifeism' (Abdulla, 1995) and the 'First Lady Syndrome' (Mama, 2004; Ibrahim, 2004). Mama (2004) too, also distinguishes these movements from feminism. Both limit women's roles to those of wives/partners, mothers and secondary earners to men, wives supporting men in leadership and promoting narrow party politics. Nor do they dispute hierarchical gender relations. In 1992 Maryam Babandiga (Nigeria) and Susan Mubarak (Egypt), and others initiated these projects in their capacities as presidents' wives (Mama, 2004: 2). The 'First Lady syndrome' falls safely within the mode of patriarchal relations in that these women's actions stem from their being wives of the presidents and not presidents themselves, self-restricting women's roles. 'Wifeism' programmes were initiated as part of the decade for women (1975–1985) by government-sponsored women's bureaucracies in Nigeria (Abdullah, 1995: 213). Thus Nigeria's program was essentially to 'Build a better life for rural women' and to eradicate poverty (first critical area of concern in BPFA) for narrow party political needs only. Hence my analysis is that it was done on a party political card to promote their husbands. Of course it was important that some women's lives improved.

As stated earlier I will use Women's Studies instead of Gender Studies. I understand the concerns about the term feminist but this is decreasing as I will highlight later regarding the University of Buea in Cameroon where there was a deliberate choice to use the term feminist.<sup>4</sup> Hence the nomenclature, Women's Studies, is used. I do, however, want to accentuate that feminists initiated Women's Studies. It was in 1980 that Maria Mies, German feminist and prolific author, was one of the pioneers of

G. FESTER

Women's Studies at the Institute of Social Studies (now International Institute of Social Studies of Erasmus University, Rotterdam, Netherlands).<sup>5</sup> She emphasized that we study patriarchy, the position of women within society and the hierarchical gender relations in order to understand them so that we can change them for the improvement of women's lives and society in general (class lectures, 1980, Institute of Social Studies, Den Haag, Netherlands): 'the change of the status quo becomes the starting point for a scientific quest' (also Mies, 1983, p. 135).

It also needs to be stressed that, contrary to the general myth, Women's Studies and Feminism does not focus only on women's lives for improvement, but rather privileges the improvement of women's and all people in general.<sup>6</sup> According to feminist analysis improving women's lives is not possible without improving the social conditions of all people and radical social, political and economic transformation. Hence feminism works towards social justice for all and the starting point is women's lives. The ultimate aim of feminism then is to work for a social justice environment where everyone – women and men, girls and boys, can realize their full potential. This must also not be done at the expense and exploitation of the earth (Mies & Vandana, 1993).

Because of the controversial nature of the word feminism, some women, even though they are doing feminist work, prefer to call themselves women or gender activists (Hassim, 2006). Which term one uses is profoundly political as the following illustrates:

We define and name ourselves publicly as Feminists because we celebrate our feminist identities and politics. We recognize that the work of fighting for women's rights is deeply political, and the process of naming is political too. Choosing to name ourselves Feminist places us in a clear ideological position. By naming ourselves as Feminists we politicise the struggle for women's rights, we question the legitimacy of the structures that keep women subjugated, and we develop tools for transformatory analysis and action. We have multiple and varied identities as African Feminists. We are African women – we live here in Africa and even when we live elsewhere, our focus is on the lives of African women on the continent. Our feminist identity is not qualified with '*If's*', '*Buts*', or '*Howevers*'. We are Feminists. Full stop. (Preamble African Feminist Charter, <http://www.awdf.org/pages/?pid=1&sid=62>, accessed 12 January 2014)

The African Feminist Forum took place from 15th–19th November 2006 in Accra, Ghana and it was at this meeting that feminist academics and activists from throughout Africa and the Diaspora reflected, deliberated and formulated the African Feminist Charter. The feminism referred to in this paper is the one promoted by the Africa Feminists' Forum. As we note from the above quotation, the name used is central – and to reiterate, the use of Women's and Gender Studies was a compromise in many cases as feminism was seen as too threatening for patriarchy. This new discipline was initiated precisely to promote and cement the link between

activism, academy, policy institutions and government. I will indicate examples later of how this manifested itself in South Africa and in SSA.

This concrete example of the activist/academy advocacy illustrates the impact of the two central aims of Women's Studies: that there must be a link between activism and academy and that this should lead to the improvement and empowerment of women's lives within a more just and equitable society. Having women in politics is believed to be one strategy to achieve this. Incorporating women into government was and still is a very uneven process globally because of patriarchal beliefs which are reinforced by most education, religion and culture. Rwanda is an exception. Despite its many contradictions and patriarchal structures, it has the highest representation of women in parliament (64%) in the world. Since September 2013 they broke their previous record of 56%. South Africa has, since 1994, always been in the top 6 regarding women's representation in government.

Academics from diverse fields, literature, economics, psychology, geography, etcetera, who all identified themselves as feminists used their disciplines to research the more women-centered aspects thereof. At the advent of Women's Studies many women also volunteered to teach Women's Studies. Apart from skepticism and hesitancy to engage in this 'new field', universities also did not always have the resources to fund new departments nor was it seen as a priority by management. Hence many feminists/women academics and later men from different departments offered their volunteer services as their contribution to the feminist struggle. Hence Women's Studies was born as an inter-disciplinary academic subject. This inter-disciplinary nature also accentuates the fact that our/women's lives cannot be compartmentalized into one discipline.

When a new discipline is germinating, there are often diverse opinions and struggles in order to coincide with various academic and ideological positionings. The use of the word gender also implies that a central aspect of investigation is to interrogate the unequal and hierarchical relationships between women, men, girls and boys and to explore strategies to challenge them. Male students are also encouraged to do Women's Studies as it is central to analyze male/female relations and hierarchies of power in order to change gender relations together with men.

But as much as there was collaboration between Feminist/Women's Studies scholars there were also tensions. Women from the developing world and black women in developed countries accused white women from the developed world of over-researching them and speaking from the 'gaze' as Mohanty (1988) stressed in aptly named article, *Under Western Eyes*. In a highly stratified and polarised country like apartheid South Africa this race/class tension too was prevalent. Many Black women accused white women of objectifying them. This is captured by Nkululeko (1987). She together with other Black African women writers claimed that African women are objectified by the 'oppressors'. Nkululeko argues:

Can an oppressed nation or segment of it (blacks), engaged in a struggle for liberation from its oppressors (whites), rely on knowledge produced,

G. FESTER

researched and theorized by others, no matter how progressive, who are members of the oppressor nation? (Nkululeko, 1987: 88)

This tension about whites writing about blacks in South Africa still continues today in some sectors as the new SA still struggles with racism and the challenges (although some would argue *failures*) of the 'Rainbow Nation'. As women academics and activists it is also important to constantly and continually self-reflect on these issues of power and how we use or even maybe abuse it.

We also need to be self-critical and evaluate our work. Hence hooks confronts black women or 'women of color' with her challenge:

By dismissing theory and privileging organization work, some women of color are able to see themselves as more politically engaged where it really counts. Yet by buying into this dichotomy of theory and practice we place ourselves always on the side of the experiential, and in doing so support the notion that ... the role of ... (white women) is to do the 'brain work, developing ideas, theories... while our role as (black women) is ...to contribute to experience ... (hooks, 1984: 113–114)

Hooks challenges black women to theorize and publish more, which is still often a challenge given the circumstances of the lives of majority black women academics and activists. But out of this black/white; first world/third world tension critical analyses emerged and strengthened the theoretical basis of Women's Studies and the politics of Difference.

There were major 'race' tensions at the 1990 *Women's and Gender Studies Conference* held in Durban, SA (Letlaka-Rennert, 1991; Funani, 1993). The same tensions emerged at the *Women in Africa and the African Diaspora* in Nsukka, Nigeria (Lewis, 1993; Funani, 1998). Hereafter, a central facet of Women's and Gender Studies was the acknowledgment of our differences: class, race, location, abilities, sexuality and other differences – all matrix-like axes of oppression.

This influenced Social Sciences. As more refined and detailed research and political struggles emerged within this activist/academic terrain in which Women's Studies was central, new subjects or subsections also were established, for e.g., Post-Colonial Studies, Identity Politics, Sexualities, Black Studies, Whiteness and many other fields of enquiry. Gay and Lesbian Studies and later Gay, Lesbian, Bi-, Transsexual, Intersexed and Queer (LGBTIQ) Studies and Queer Studies<sup>7</sup> emerged as a result of the marginalization of sexualities and LGBTIQ persons within Women's movements and Studies. These emerged out of rigorous debates and theorization but also practical struggles and tensions on the ground. Reinfelder (1997) and Fester (1997) underscore this also within the political movements and the importance of documenting these LGBTIQ struggles. Subsequently Masculinities Studies evolved. Another key analytical tool used is that of intersectionality:<sup>8</sup> how do issues of race, class, ethnicity, religion, language, location, sexuality, (dis)ability,

age and other axes of oppression. All these are linked or related to critical theory and critical race theory.

One of the key aims of Women's Studies and this activist/academic link was/is to tangibly influence policy. One very influential instance of this example of the links between theory, praxis and policy is that of Development Studies. It was Naila Kabeer (1993) who first interrogated 'development for whom?' and critiqued the stance 'that the community will benefit'. This challenged policy makers to interrogate who benefitted most from development in, for example, rural villages. The question that thus should be asked in development projects are: who benefits most and disaggregate the 'community': will rural poor women benefit? What does this mean for those with (dis)abilities and or marginalized First Nations? (in other words question: will chiefs, senior men, young people, differently abled or women benefit specifically?) etcetera. By using disaggregation, analysis could be sharpened and hence the design of development projects and implementation. This policy/praxis outcome for development interrogation is reflected too by the transition from the Women in Development (WID) approach to Women and Development (WAD) to the Gender and Development (GAD) shift in paradigm. Another positive development that Women's Studies contributed to Development was the distinction that Molyneux (1985) postulated: women's practical and strategic needs and practical gender and strategic gender needs. Furthermore because of feminists' concern for the environment, eco-feminism became an important aspect of Feminist/Women's and Gender studies. One of the most central texts on this is Mies and Shiva (1993). What is key about this work is the collaboratively exploration by women from the developed and developing world; in this case of Mies and Shiva, Germany and India respectively.

A concrete example of how the academy/activist link enhanced legislation was advocacy around customary marriages and the eventual formulation of the Recognition of the Customary Marriages Act in the post apartheid South Africa (SA). The Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO), Rural Women's Movement appealed to feminist academics at the Centre for Applied Legal Studies (CALS), University of Witwatersrand (Johannesburg, SA), to work on submissions to parliament on customary marriages in order to change the customs that relegate women to permanent minors. Within customary marriage women do not have access to land and are not entitled to their children in the case of separation or divorce. A partnership between the Joint Monitoring Committee on the Improvement for the Quality of Life and Status of Women (JMC) at parliament, grassroots rural women and feminist legal academics at CALS culminated in the Recognition of Customary Marriages Act 120 of 1998. This act addresses the equality of women within customary unions and ensures women's access to constitutional rights (Mukhapady, 2004; Govender, 2007). However, the implementation thereof is challenging.

At the African Union (AU) level the drafting and eventually formulation of the Women's Protocol to the African Charter of Human and People's Rights is another

G. FESTER

sterling example of the effective collaboration of feminist academics, political activists and femocrats/politicians. As a Gender Commissioner i was part of the South African representation. The Women's Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights (ACHPR-WP) was finalized at the Second Experts' meeting in Addis Ababa (March, 2003). What was impressive was the interaction between official delegations, women academics and activists beforehand. There was vociferous lobbying and all this was efficiently coordinated by the NGO, Femnet. Most of the Women's Protocol contained groundbreaking rights for women. However, because of consensus and compromise that these international documents have in order to maximize ratification, it is vague on reproductive rights and sexualities. So though women had different positions (progressive, radical or conservative), the compromise was a pragmatic and strategic one. The question of course is the long-term implications thereof.

Not only are women different in their class and other axes of impressions but also ideologically so. African feminisms and hence Women's Studies are diverse, contradictory, complex and differ ideologically, regionally and within cultural and faith contexts. In Africa, many women's or feminist movements were linked to national liberation struggles. This is in contrast to most feminists in the developed world where national liberation was not part of the women's movement. Mama (2002) succinctly summarizes these diverse aspects in Africa:

In African contexts, feminism has emerged out of women's ... commitment to national liberation, so it is hardly surprising that African women's movements today feature in ... different ... social movements characterising post-colonial life. African women are mobilising at [numerous] levels and deploying various strategies ... They ... range from the radically subversive to unashamedly conservative.... Today's women activists are as likely to be engaging the World Bank over the ... impact of structural adjustment ... as they are to be lobbying ... national governments over the marginalisation of women in ... political power, or challenging traditional and community-based organisations. (Mama, 2002: 1)

But these differences are not just a source of tension and negativity. These differences have led and stimulated rigorous and exciting research and enhanced the quality of debate and research output of Women's Studies departments continentally. However, because of the link between activism and academy and the resolve to work together as all women are oppressed by patriarchy, Transnational feminisms or feminisms without borders became a uniting strategy (Tripp, 2005; Mohanty, 2003).

Not only had there been tensions within the Women's Studies network but also outside within the academia, political science and politicians. Women's/Gender Studies was controversial in many aspects. Many men and also women accused academics involved in Women's/Gender Studies of promoting a foreign Western ideology. This is quite paradoxical as those accusers themselves were often

Christians, Communists or Socialists and these ideologies were not seen as foreign. However, this inspired African Women's Studies academics to do more research on pre-colonial African history and this resulted in a wealth of women's struggles documented. Qunta (1987) documented the pre-colonial women of power and rulers in Africa. Sri Lankan Jayawardena's seminal text *Nationalisms and Feminisms in the Third World* (Jayawardena, 1986) encapsulate the argument that women's struggles for liberation were integral to the pre-colonial and colonial history of the developing world.<sup>9</sup> In fact Walker (1982) stresses that it was a South African feminist, Schreiner (1883) that inspired the Suffragette Movement in the United Kingdom at the beginning of the 20th century.

#### METHODOLOGICAL AND THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

New wine must not be poured into old vessels. (Maria Mies, 1979)

One of the main critiques of the social sciences is the claim that all research is objective. Feminist/Women's Studies scholars refute this. All researchers bring along their own contexts and prejudices (Fonow & Cook, 1991). By admitting one's bias the research is more honest. All researchers come with their paradigms/frameworks (Mies, 1980, 1981) – hence there is no objective and unbiased research.

Linked to the above and by stating one's positionality is the essence of what is called Feminist Standpoint Theory. Standpoint Feminism is a position taken by feminist theorists that places women's knowledge at the center of research. It stands particularly for a specifically woman – centered or 'women's epistemological standpoint' (Assiter, 1996 quoted in [www.yorku.ca/mic/sosc3990A/projects/standfem/stanfem.html](http://www.yorku.ca/mic/sosc3990A/projects/standfem/stanfem.html) accessed 2 March 2014). Women's Studies is eclectic and uses other disciplines and theories including Marxism. Standpoint feminism is imbedded in Marxism. Hennessey (1995) avers,

Marxism's usefulness to feminism is that it understands the social ensemble of economic, political, and ideological arrangements. ([www.yorku.ca/mic/sosc3990A/projects/standfem/stanfem.html](http://www.yorku.ca/mic/sosc3990A/projects/standfem/stanfem.html) accessed 2 March, 2014)

A feminist standpoint therefore is indispensable in examining the methodical patriarchal oppressions that negates or trivializes women's knowledge. Feminism standpoint theory embraces the following:

The principal claim regarding feminist standpoint theories is that certain socio-political positions occupied by women (and by extension other groups who lack social and economic privilege) can become sites of epistemic privilege and thus productive starting points for enquiry into questions about not only those who are socially and politically marginalized, but also those who, by dint of social and political privilege, occupy the positions of oppressors. This claim is captured by Sandra Harding thus: "Starting off research from women's lives will generate less partial and distorted accounts

G. FESTER

not only of women's lives but also of men's lives and of the whole social order." (1993: 56) (<http://www.iep.utm.edu/fem-stan/> accessed 27 October, 2015)

Furthermore – all feminist standpoints stress all knowledge enquiries are socially situated and one's social situation (or axes of oppressions) – gender, class, race, ethnicity, language, sexuality and physical capacities, etc., – all contribute to forming what we understand and limits what we may know.

The concrete example by Terri Eliot succinctly illustrates this:

Person A approaches a building and enters it unproblematically. As she approaches she sees something perfectly familiar which, if asked, she might call 'The Entrance'. Person X approaches the same building and sees a great stack of stairs and the glaring lack of a ramp for her wheelchair [1994: 424]. The experience of person A is of the entrance to a building whereas the experience of person X is of a barrier to entrance and (at best) an inconvenience. Person X's social location—a person with a disability—means that the building presents differently to her from how it does to someone without a disability. (<http://www.open.edu/openlearnworks/mod/page/view.php?id=52644> accessed 3 November 2015)

The above also illustrates another key aspect of Women's Studies: that aspects of our personal lives are profoundly political – in other words – the personal is political. 'The personal will thus also be analyzed and influence epistemology. 'Knowledge (which) projects that correctly produced knowledge will lead to the adoption of the best political strategies...' (Andermahr et al., 1997). ([www.yorku.ca/mic/sosc3990A/projects/standfem/standfem.html](http://www.yorku.ca/mic/sosc3990A/projects/standfem/standfem.html) accessed 2 March 2014).

The above is significant. Because Women's and Gender Studies strives not to be merely academic but also practical in order to change and improve the position of women and other marginalized peoples, to have the most effective political strategies is imperative.

The Insider/Outside perspective is another significant concept Women's Studies brought to the academy (Hill Collins, 1991, 2002; Reay, 1996). This perspective refers to the acknowledgment of the ambivalent role researchers within classical Women's Studies have: that is, as an academic, usually privileged, but also as a political activist or participant in that women's struggle that seeks to change the position of women (Court & Abbas, 2013). Subsequently, unlike other research where the impersonal word, 'the researcher' is used, in Women's Studies the personal pronouns, like 'I' and 'we' are used. Hence we bring along feminist epistemology (knowledge from our own experience as activists) but also as an academic that critiques the work as far as possible. The insider/outside perspective is used in other subjects like in Education as Mercer (2007) postulates.

Closely linked to insider/outside perspectives is the concept of Reflexivity: that is that as academics we also constantly have to reflect on our own roles to what

#### QUO VADIS WOMEN'S AND GENDER STUDIES IN AFRICA?

extent we are using/abusing our power vis a vis ourselves and our institutions but more importantly to the research participants:

The validity of our interpretations depends on the integrity of the interaction of our personal experiences with the power of feminist theory and the power or lack of power of the researched. Our conclusions should always be open to criticism. (Holland & Ramazanoglu, 1994: 146)

Not only do we interrogate our relationships with others but we also must be aware that there are many 'truths' and that our truth is not the universal truth.

Simultaneously the academic discipline like Women's Studies would be a critical platform from which to further promote the feminist agenda. The aim within this new discipline was also to do research exploring less intimidating and hierarchical data collection processes. Those 'researched' were not seen as 'respondents' but rather co-creators of new knowledge hence in feminist/women's studies the term preferred is 'research participants'.

In the analysis of women's lives the central stereotypical theory was that all women work in the private and that men do the public work and what men do is more valued by society. This confirms the critique that women cannot be homogenised and that women's lives are mediated by their context, culture and religion. This challenged African women in Women's Studies to research how most African women's lives differ from women in the developed world. This led to the conclusion that:

Many of the life studies show how the public/private sphere dichotomy never accurately reflected the African experience and illustrate the distinctive ways in which women exercised their agency in the pre-independence period by subverting conventional understandings of appropriate gender relations. (Adomako Ampofo et al., 2004: 688)

Academics in Women's Studies also were challenged that they have to be academically sharp and endeavour always to ensure that their work is academically sound and thorough:

Feminists' work needs to be rigorous if it is to be regarded as intellectually compelling, politically persuasive, policy-relevant and meaningful to anyone other than feminists themselves. (Maynard, 1994: 24)

It is hence noted that Women's and Gender Studies contributed new analytical and methodological tools to academia.

#### BRIEF CASE STUDIES

The Institute of Social Studies (ISS) in the Netherlands (now International Institute of Social Studies of Erasmus University, Rotterdam, Netherlands) was one of the

G. FESTER

first globally to have a major course, Women and Development, for the Master's Degree in Development (late 1970s). Mia Berden (The Netherlands) was the driving force behind establishing it. She had world-renowned feminist academics, Prof Maria Mies (Germany/India) and Dr Kumari Jayawardena (Sri Lanka) to assist as staff. One of the unique features of it was to have a central module of fieldwork throughout the course, as the philosophy was not to separate theory from praxis. Participants/students had to work with women's organizations in the Netherlands. This meant a constant interrogation of theories and how these were applied to the reality. Whatever was discussed in the academia was then applied to the praxis/reality and tested. In this way there was a dynamic articulation between the relevance and applicability of theory to the reality. Students were consciously selected from various parts of the world to theorize collectively and emerge with specific as well as global perspectives on the oppression of women and patriarchy and the inter-relatedness through capitalism. As a student there during 1980 i participated in this fieldwork and it was a profound learning experience: critiquing and applying theories to the reality. The various Dutch women's projects we worked with were the Women's Open School, Women against Fascism group, the Sex workers' Trade Unions, to name but a few.

Rhoda Reddock, former students at the ISS, from Trinidad and Tobago is currently Vice Chancellor, University of West Indies (Caribbean). She shared her experiences as a student:

It was an international programme which provided an understanding of the global reach of feminism. I was there in the period of Maria Mies and she was a great influence on me. My greatest lesson from her was the intrinsic link between women's studies and the women's movement and the need to maintaining the activist passion in academic programmes in order to maintain their *raison d'etre*. In terms of Best Practice and what we should emulate: they are the theoretical rigour and strength, innovative teaching approaches, building strategic alliances at all levels of university systems and the wider society. We need to make the unit/department known to the wider society and valued by the wider society. That way it is harder for programmes to be removed or downgraded. (interview, June 2013)

The essential foundations that Rhoda experienced at the ISS were helpful for her subsequent work in the Caribbean. The last two sentences, with references to threats for Women's Studies pertain to the very real threats that the Women's Studies programs experienced at the ISS in the 1980s and elsewhere.

Another ISS 1980s student, former coordinator of Women's Studies, Tata Institute Mumbai (India), Chhaya Datar noted her impressions:

As a writer and feminist activist, coming from the Marxist background I relied too much on the class analysis and looked at the women from the class lens. Maria showed us how international division of labour was taking

advantage of women's cheap labour in the third world countries by reinforcing their feminine socialisation practices. Another very important lesson I learned was the role of violence in evolving and maintaining the patriarchal order all over the world history. (interview, June 2013)

Key lesson was that patriarchy has specific formats in different cultural country contexts and was adapted by capitalism in diverse ways. The impact of the work of the ISS in different countries is impressive. Many women that graduated from the Women's Studies course, have all, in their respective countries, initiated Women's Studies (India), women's radio station (Belize) and participated in formal politics in order to promote women's issues (South Africa).

There are many other institutions that emphasize the theory/praxis link. An example which concretely strives to link Activism and the Academy is the Women and Gender Studies, College of Liberal and Creative Arts. The Dean, Paul Sherwin, Department of Women and Gender Studies, stresses this (work study in Feminist Projects (3 units) – WGS 698 (<http://www.sfu.ca/-bulletin/courses/index.html> accessed 31 July 2013).

In 1977 feminists established the Association of African Women for Research and Development with the aim off 'envisioning an agenda for African feminism in order to strengthen scholarship and feminist activism (Mama, 1996: 6; in Adomako Ampofo, Beoku-Betts, Njambi, & Osirim, 2004: 4). African Gender Studies, especially in the South, highlighted historical and critical analysis in a more focused fashion. This too emerged out of women's liberation struggles, democratization and critique of neo-liberal economic reforms.

Formally modules in Women's Studies emerged in Africa post-1990s. The first formal structures were at the Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda in the form of the School of Women and Gender Studies in 1991. According Dr Josephine Ahikire (Dean), it developed into a dynamic institution impacting nationally and internationally in terms of its intake and influence. Apart from teaching, research and publications, it also sees its role as networking, doing outreach and advocacy and gender mainstreaming. It seeks to influence development in the region (<http://womenstudies.mak.ac.ug/message-dean> accessed 28 October 2015).

Diverse and ambivalent practices were experienced at various universities: University of Cheikh Anta Diop (UCAD), Senegal (Diaw, 2007),<sup>10</sup> Cape Town, South Africa (Bennet & Vasu, 2007), Buea, Cameroon (Endeley & Nchang, 2007), Addis Baba, Ethiopia (Mulugeta, 2007). University administrations are contradictory- on the one hand supportive and still reinforcing a heteropatriarchal discourse. Barnes and Mama (2007) speculate whether it is a postcolonial tendency that rejects proposals from local women but will execute the same ideas if proposed by international initiatives. This was the case with both Cape Town and Cheikh Anta Diop universities. At Addis Ababa University the management recognizes the importance of having the Women's Studies program but does not facilitate it. The already overworked women staff because of their commitment does extra work to

G. FESTER

make their Women's Studies function optimally, cognizant of their collusion in their own exploitation (Barnes & Mama, 2007).

The University of Buea, the only English medium university out of 6 in Cameroon is also the only one that offers Women's and Gender Studies (Endeley & Nchang Ngaling, 2007: 64). Many believe that the progress at this university was due to its uniqueness as having the only woman vice-chancellor in the country. The representation of women in Institutions of Higher Education in Africa is minimal but so too is it at a global level. In 1994 93% professors in Sweden in Institutions of higher learning, colleges and universities were men (UNESCO, 1998: 2). This indicates the challenges and ambiguity of the situation in Sweden where women are prominent in all fields of life. It also is contradictory considering that Swedish women have been participating in higher education for 120 years and the number of women students at university is 60% (Endeley & Nchang Ngaling, 2007: 66).

Despite the hesitancy around the word feminist, Endeley and Nchang Ngaling use the word feminist in all their references. What they summarize as the aims of Feminist pedagogy seems to coincide with what most Women's Studies in SSA strive for:

Feminist pedagogy aims to promote 3 principles:

1. to strive for egalitarian relationships in the classroom so that all students would value themselves as individuals
2. use experience of classroom as a learning resource in order to bring about social transformation
3. also linked to praxis outside classroom. (Endeley & Nchang Ngaling, 2007: 66)

The above is not limited to tertiary institutions. The Federation of African Women Educators (FAWE) has also instituted gender responsive pedagogy for all their teachers at primary and high schools in order for them to promote girl/woman affirming and women-centered education which they refer to as 'gender-responsive pedagogy' (Ladegonde, 2013).

Further research by Endeley and Ngaling (2007) was based on primary data through questionnaires collected in 2002 from 185 teachers out of a total of 226 at UB. They do not indicate how they targeted the 185 and to what extent they are representative. Secondary data was gleaned from university records and related documents. Both quantitative and qualitative techniques were utilized. Some research findings give one an insight into the situation at UB:

- 13.6% claim that 'feminism does not deserve much attention in academia';
- 3.4% state that 'women want to override and control men';
- The majority believes that 'feminism is part of African thought and practice'.

Unfortunately the subsequent male vice-chancellor at UB does not have an understanding of gender equality according to Endeley and Ngaling. Subsequently this 'inevitably makes a mockery of Women's Studies' (2007: 81). However a

weakness of the institution is that UB does not have any gender policy or plan of action as noted by Endeley and Ardener 2004 (quoted in Endeley & Ngaling, 2007).

To reiterate: Lyonga and Endeley (2006: 57, quoted in Endeley & Ngaling, 2007) argue that it was the presence of the woman vice-chancellor, Dr Njeuma, that expedited the progress in attainment of Gender Equality. Her leadership style, transformative feminism and gender sensitivity since the inception of the university in 1993 to the end of her tenure in 2005 contributed to this change. Systems set up during Njeuma's tenure assisted with mainstreaming of gender. Hence having women in the top echelons of institutions is a good strategy to emulate.

At South African universities there are also many challenges. I was a member of the council of the University of the Western Cape (UWC), Cape Town from about 2008 to 2011. Committees i was assigned to were the Research and Senior Appointments Committees.<sup>11</sup> What stands out in my memory during an interview of a young woman academic for promotion. The patriarchal behavior of one the senior male professors and top management team humiliated the woman interviewee, resulting in her bursting into tears. As chairperson of the committee I intervened as i thought his behavior was unprofessional. He then accused me of not allowing him to speak. My response was that as chairperson i would not allow candidates to be humiliated and undermined as he had been doing. He then threatened that he would inform the university council of my silencing him. I was not intimidated. I reiterated that as chair i would ensure that everyone was respected in the meeting. There were several other cases of intimidation of women academics by this senior male manager through formal complaints to the university authorities. The outcome of one enquiry in which senior counsel was consulted was dissatisfactory. He was found guilty of 'inappropriate behavior' and was asked to apologize. He refused and after a while this was just left 'forgotten'.

As his contract was due to expire our senior appointments committee recommended after we interviewed him that his contract not be renewed. He, like other senior managers at that time, were all male and near or past retirement ages with the exception of one woman. The appointments committee believed that it was essential that there should be new, younger and more diverse representation at management level. This would complement the experienced older male senior management. According to Mary Hames, Director of the UWC Gender Equity Unit (GEU, telephonically interviewed 30 October 2015), this individual is still at the university in the capacity as senior consultant.

From my experience as vice-chair of the University of Western Cape University (UWC) Council i learnt there was a limited understanding of gender issues and specifically why one should use gender-sensitive language in all subjects. I raised the importance of gender-sensitive language being used in classes. A very central senior council management staff member referred me to further discuss this with the Dean of Humanities and Arts. The assumptions, I interpreted was that the Science, Dentistry, Education and other faculties were not affected by gendered and

patriarchal powers and privileges. It seemed that the more i explained the more he did not understand. In my attempts to explore this further, I was constantly hampered because of other crises. The University has a gender policy but few know about its existence or its content. I was informed by Mary Hames (interview 30 October 2015), that the gender policy was outdated. Another observation was that it seems as if these policies must be done by women only. There appears to be an understanding that gender issues are not promoted by all but that this task is only for women.

Hames shared that initially she had to report directly to the Vice-Chancellor. However, when the new Vice-Chancellor started about a year ago (2014), she was informed by him that in future she did not have to report to him. This she interpreted as downscaling or that the Gender Equity Unit was not important to him.

Furthermore Hames elaborated that recently there had been a UWC review committee to assess restructuring. One of the recommendations was that the GEU should close. This was a shock to the director as the chairperson of the committee was an eminent feminist Political Science professor and author. Mary Hames believed that the chair should have been able to convince the committee of the importance of having the GEU. The GEU complements the work of the Academic department of Women's and Gender Studies in that it is more of a feminist advocacy unit for marginalized groups on campus, including foreign students. It also acts as a forum in highlighting feminist concerns and exposes the patriarchy on the campus and community. The tasks it was integrally involved in were the formulation of the language and sexual harassment policies. One of the many positives is the production of the play; 'Reclaiming the P-word', a very challenging and provocative play focusing on women's sexualities. GEU was also central in exposing the abysmal conditions that foreign students and their families were forced to live in.

An institution doing influential Pan-African work is the African Gender Institute (AGI) at the University of Cape Town (UCT), South Africa. They have regular summer schools and workshops in order to promote academic research and documentation thereof. An example of this was the Intensive Training three-week seminar for academics/activists from about 25 different African countries. The focus of the course was: 'Building Capacity for Feminist research in Africa: Gender, Sexuality and Politics'. The AGI has also started one of the most accessible journals in Africa on Women's and Gender Issues, *Feminist Africa*. It is available online and hard copies are sent free of charge to African universities. There is also a deliberate policy to include writers from various African countries regularly. It seems, according to two of the South African black women academics who had worked there that the AGI was Pan-African at the expense of South Africa which was marginalized (Anonymous; private conversations over the years). This was the tendency earlier. Whether this is currently still the situation I have not been able to assess.

At the College of Education, University of Rwanda (UR, former Kigali Institute for Education), i was the only woman professor during the April 2012–August 2014 period. Probably because of this and my earlier experiences I was the only woman on the Senior Appointments' and Research and Ethics Committees. Very

#### QUO VADIS WOMEN'S AND GENDER STUDIES IN AFRICA?

few women candidates applied for promotion positions. No matter how I highlighted the expertise, experience and qualifications of women candidates, I was outvoted. At one stage I drew the attention of the committee to the Rwandan Constitution (clause 9.4) that stipulates that there should be 30% women at all decision-making levels. There was no response to this. When two women were recommended for promotion at a later stage, the senate questioned the decision and requested that the committee reassess the applications. This recommendation was subsequently reversed on the grounds that they did not have the qualifications for promotion as they did not have the required number of publications. No women were promoted during my period there. There are two women in the top management of UR since the restructuring in 2014.

The above experiences also demand self-reflection on my part: how do I understand the power dynamics of the committee in which I often felt my voice was not heard? Was it because I was a woman and foreign or what was it that I experienced not being taken seriously as an individual? It is difficult to distinguish. On another occasion I wanted to recuse myself from the committee for the interview of the head of my department. The majority males all protested that I was an integral part of the committee and hence could not be recused. On this occasion I felt affirmed. How to understand my subjective experiences is complex.

#### *Quo Vadis/Whither Women's Studies?*

If we ask ourselves to what extent does Women's/Gender Studies still adhere to its origins and the initial political agenda, I need to emphasize that in all cases known to me there are no or minimal links with the women's movements. However, the African Gender Institute (AGI) in SA still has Pan African workshops to assist in the training of women academics and activists, assisting them with documenting their struggles and to deepen feminist theory and praxis.

It needs to be reflected on how in general at universities the content of courses has changed over time? To what extent is it feeding into policy and hence really contributing to the improvement of women's and marginalized people's lives? Or has it just become a vehicle for 'feminist careerists' (Mohanty, 2003) or 'gender divas' (McFadden, 2003)? Academia has also become vehicles for individual women's careers as Mohanty (2003) argues. Granted, often women academics do not have tenure and have enormous workloads. According to Elaine Salo (former AGI Staff member, currently at Delaware University) women staff of Women's Studies often have to be counselors and support for women students experiencing trauma and other challenging situations (private conversation).

#### *Some Strategies and Way Forward*

What have been some of the best practices globally and what can we learn from the past and from one another? It has also been argued that linking the academy with

G. FESTER

reality and political struggles will enhance the quality of activism and advocacy and vice versa.

Within the African context there are stark contradictions in women's lives and this polarity is increasing. Reflect, for example, on the status of women politicians, those in the gender industry and academia and assess the gap between rich and poor women widening. The very 'gender industry' targeted to erase women's inequality has furthered the gap between women themselves (Manicom, 2005).

The first observation I should emphasize is that the Women's and Gender Studies currently observed at most institutions is a far cry from what it previously was. There seems to be no link directly or indirectly with women's movements or any women's structures. For example, in Rwanda there is no link between the Gender Centre and the National Women Council (NWC), which is mandated by law to empower women at all levels of Rwandan society. The work of National Women Council may be strengthened if there were some links with Women's/Gender Studies. I had the opportunity to interview focus groups in six districts throughout Rwanda and 26 interviews with representatives from government, civil society, faith-based and international organizations and academics. All of them interpreted that in Article 9.4 of the National Constitution, which set a 30% quota for women in decision-making positions at all levels, applies only to central government and not all decision-making bodies (Fester & Makuza, 2013). If the NWC had more resources and a dynamic link and input with the Gender Center, it could have done more effective advocacy and education.

In terms of best practice I think the following should be explored: we should relook at our strategies and survey how the academy and activism can be enhanced by linking up. It is also important that Women's and Gender Studies has their autonomy and do not have to be bound by academic or political restrictions as is the case in some countries. The funding received from an international institution for the Rwandan Gender Center had to undergo stringent university policy processes. This is not the problem but laptops that had to be bought for students were not bought in four years.

There must be a deliberate policy to strengthen theory on African conditions and gender relations. Hooks is correct that we Black women sometimes privilege activism and do not theorize enough. When i enquired from staff about why they were not publishing they explained that they have demanding workloads and marking to do, and sometimes do not feel confident enough. There are also the domestic demands that most women still have.

There should be networking with government and policy makers in order to feed both research and policy reformulation. It is important that the research is made available- hence more publishing. An impressive body of African feminists' research has been made possible by the journal, *Feminist Africa*. It has made great strides. Complementing activism with academic will enhance both. Challenges are the lack of resources. There will definitely be much progress if there is the strengthening of collaboration, more sharing, supporting and solidarity.

CONCLUSIONS

There seems to be ambivalent responses to Women's and Gender Studies by the management of universities. If international donors or foreign agencies propose a structure or event, the university authorities are eager to comply, unlike what they do when locals raise similar issues. This means that there is not an internalization of the importance of Women's/Gender Studies. If there is, it will ultimately, directly and indirectly, contribute to promoting gender equality and affirming women and marginalized groups. Considering the impressive constitutions of most African countries and their ratification of progressive international instruments, which states they should promote gender equality, promoting Women's and Gender Studies would contribute to this goal. Most African countries have ratified the very radical gender promotion highlighted by international instruments. The only exceptions are Sudan, Southern Sudan and Togo. These international instruments all relate to the. The universities as centers of learning are therefore neglecting their duties.

In reading about the experiences of many academics at African universities regarding Women's and Gender Studies what Diaw has to say about UCAD paints a very general picture:

The hostilities of the institution towards the concept of gender can be linked to its institutional and intellectual cultures. This experience shows how the institutional culture can actually be anti-intellectual, upholding the notion that knowledge and the mode of production of knowledge are not gendered. (Diaw, 2007: 14)

These adverse contexts hamper progress in instituting effective Women's Studies departments and subsequently promoting gender equality directly or indirectly. Perhaps open dialogue and advocacy should be done. If the country has ratified international instruments and the constitution promotes gender equality, civil society and feminist groups could facilitate these open forums for accountability.

The reason for the universities' bias towards accepting foreign proposals may be financial. Often these proposals from foreign institutions come with substantial funding. However, one wonders why local funding is not prioritized to do women's studies. The limited funding that is there could be creatively budgeted if there were the political will to promote gender equality. It makes one reflect on Seidman's words:

Does feminist rhetoric simply mask patriarchal intent, where male leaders claim to support gender equality but fail to provide resources or power to attain it? (Seidman, 2003: 542)

The empowerment of women and girl children as well as the rights of the child – also affirming and promoting girl children are constitutional mandates. But the majority of African countries do not popularize the contents nor do they implement them. Consequently relating to the above, I agree with Seidman. One just has to do

G. FESTER

an analysis of some national budgets to learn to what extent major funding goes to military and salaries of politicians.

There has to be gender policies at universities related to promoting Gender Equality and countering patriarchy which prevails in all aspects of life in Africa, as well as globally. If there are policies these should be advertised vociferously so that people are aware of them and use them optimally to enhance the quality of their lives. Policies also have to be updated regularly so that they reflect the current situations and challenges.

Women academics should seek out strategic partnerships. Some of these could be with human rights male activists and politicians who claim they promote the poor and marginalized as allies, professional bodies (like women's legal centers) and engage collectively with them. Also big corporations who do social responsibility can support progressive endeavors financially without adding strings attached or expecting that women/feminist academics have to compromise themselves. Working with religious and traditional leaders as allies is also strategic and often religions and cultures reinforce patriarchy and the subservience of women and girls. Established leading women/feminist academics should also actively engage in inter-generational dialogues with younger feminists to mentor/femtor<sup>12</sup> them but also listen to what their needs and priorities are as they may differ from the older feminists' concerns.

Policies should include how to increase the number of women academics, inclusive gender-sensitive language and curriculum. Patriarchal concepts and understandings in all curricula should be analyzed, for example, Religious Studies. There could be committees established consisting of staff from different faculties. Together there should be research of how to present all curricula with less androcentric and patriarchal content. This will be challenging and solutions may not be immediate.

Best practices should be emulated or adapted. The example of women from different constituencies with access to power and influence and collectively promote women's empowerment with grassroots women is an excellent model to emulate. The case of the rural grassroots women (Rural Women's Movement) with academics (Centre for Applied Legal Studies, WITS university) and Women in decision-making positions (women in the South African parliament) is an impressive example. Collectively they worked on policies and legislation to improve the quality of life of poor and grassroots women by formulating the Recognition of Customary Marriages Act in SA.

But fundamentally Women's Studies must return to its origins: that between link between Women's Studies and the civil societies political feminist/women's movements. This will ensure a consolidation of the origins. The current Women's Studies must engage with the central question – how to recreate if absent or consolidate where present the link between the women's/feminist movement and the academy? Or in the words of Barnes and Mama (2007: 1):

## QUO VADIS WOMEN'S AND GENDER STUDIES IN AFRICA?

What do we teach the young women and men in our classrooms about their histories and traditions? How do we engage meaningfully with a generation seemingly mesmerised by the chimeric materialism of freedom? How do academics engage with women who live far outside the ivory towers but can have a strong organisational presence? How do feminists survive and mentor each other in the academy long enough to do all these things? Where do they find allies in the struggle to keep critical consciousness alive- and kicking? How long is this piece of string, anyway?

In order for feminist academics in Women's Studies to be able to find answers to the above, there should also constantly be self-reflection regarding commitment to the promotion of Women's Studies and the aims. This could be enhanced by providing a supportive atmosphere to colleagues. Linking up with a network of Women's Studies staff regionally and globally and exchanging strategies could be a positive enhancement.

In being true to ourselves we should acknowledge our differences and the various degrees of power and privilege many women have. This is as opposed to, for example, 'sisters' in rural areas, those with (dis)abilities, and those in non-heteronormative relationships. We must explore working in such a way in order to empower those who are most oppressed. In doing so our efforts in building effective and influential Women's Studies Departments, could contribute to empowering women and girls. Audre Lorde leaves us with some hope:

It is not our differences that separate women but our reluctance to recognize these differences and to deal effectively with the distortions that have resulted from ignoring and misnaming these differences... As Paulo Freire shows so well in 'The Pedagogy of the Oppressed', the true focus of revolutionary change is never merely the oppressive situations that we seek to escape but that piece of the oppressor that is planted deep within each of us and that knows only the oppressor's tactics, the oppressor's relations. Change means growth, and growth can be painful. But we sharpen self-definition by exposing the self in work and struggle together with those whom we define as different for ourselves, although sharing the same goals. For Black and White, old and young, lesbian and heterosexual women alike, this can mean new paths to our survival...develop[ing] new definitions of power and new patterns of relating across difference. (Lorde, 1997: 379, 380)

The challenge of feminism and implementing effective Women's and Gender Studies continues. Challenge of feminisms is that we take on not only the theories but also adapt our lives in accordance with those theories – the personal remains profoundly political: how precisely 'do we take the policies made in the board room and apply them in the bedrooms.'

NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> In this paper I will use Women's Studies instead of Gender Studies. In some institutions the name Feminist Studies is used. Even though I personally, as a feminist, prefer the term Feminist Studies I accept that there are concerns about this term and that in general in Africa and elsewhere there is ambivalence about the term feminist. Hence the nomenclature, Women's Studies, is used.
- <sup>2</sup> The small letter 'i' will be used within sentences and the 'I' at the start of a sentence. This is to express humility- why should i use a capital letter for me? In my own language and many others 'i' is always written with a small letter. It also follows in the tradition of eminent and influential black feminist, bell hooks, who never uses capital letters for her name.
- <sup>3</sup> Sati is described as a Hindu custom in India in which the widow was burnt to ashes on her dead husband's pyre. Basically the custom of Sati was believed to be a voluntary Hindu act in which the woman voluntarily decides to end her life with her husband after his death. But there were many incidences in which the women were forced to commit Sati, sometimes even dragged against her wish to the lighted pyre (<http://adaniel.tripod.com/sati.htm/> accessed 12 December 2015).
- <sup>4</sup> This even pertains to current Europe. See Anja Meulenbelt & Renée Römken (2015), *Het F-boek feminisme van nu in woord en beeld (Current Feminism in word and images, my translation)* atrial/Spectrum, Amsterdam.
- <sup>5</sup> In the USA it started in the 1970s: Salper, Roberta (November 2011). "San Diego State 1970: The Initial Year of the Nation's First Women's Studies Program". (Feminist Studies 37(3): 658–682). The Interdisciplinary journal, *Feminist Studies*, started in 1972 and the USA National Women's Studies Association was established in 1977.
- <sup>6</sup> Granted there are different types of feminists like Radical who distance themselves from men and Bourgeois who want emancipation for women without critically assessing nor altering the current exploitative social relations and economic systems Others are: Eco feminists, but this cannot be elaborated on within the confines of this paper. I use feminism as defined by the African Feminist Charter referred to later.
- <sup>7</sup> According to my research these are not at African universities.
- <sup>8</sup> The concept 'Intersectionality' was first introduced by Kimberle Crenshaw (Yuval Davis, 2006: 193–202). It explores the interrelationship between gender, class, race, etc as systems of oppression that reinforce and enhance one another. Later, because of the development of struggles and greater insight and critique, other axes of oppression have been added, like (dis)ability, age, sexuality, nationality, ethnicity, citizenship and many others.
- <sup>9</sup> Amadiume, Ifi (1987). *Male Daughters, Female Husbands*. Zed Press Ltd. London and New Jersey is a major text highlighting the powerful and ambivalent women's roles in pre-colonial Africa.
- <sup>10</sup> Diaw (2007: 21) refers to the 'Francophone heritage' of UCAD, hence it is 'not responsive' to gender issues. She further states '(a)s with many African francophone universities of the sub-region (West Africa), there is no women's or gender studies department. Also that 'Awa Thiam proposed in 1987 – in vain – the creation of a department of anthropology of the sexes'. Currently as part of an AU and UN project, at the Cheikh Diop there is a Master's degree in Women and Peace Studies.'
- <sup>11</sup> In using feminist epistemological standpoint i utilise the first person, 'I'. The small letter 'i' will be used within sentences and the 'I' at the start of a sentence. This is to express humility – why should i use a capital letter for me? In my own language and many others 'i' is always written with a small letter. It also follows in the tradition of eminent and influential black feminist, bell hooks, who never uses capital letters for her name.
- <sup>12</sup> Canadian feminists at the 25th anniversary of their Human Rights Charter on February 14, 2006 of the 1981 "Valentines Day" constitutional conference on women's equality, organized by the Ad Hoc Committee of Canadian Women on the Constitution. Here they shared that they preferred to use the word 'femtor' as opposed to mentor.

## QUO VADIS WOMEN'S AND GENDER STUDIES IN AFRICA?

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G. FESTER

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QUO VADIS WOMEN'S AND GENDER STUDIES IN AFRICA?

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