Body Politics and Women Citizens

African Experiences

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BODY POLITICS AND WOMEN CITIZENS
– AFRICAN EXPERIENCES

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FOREWORD FROM Sida

Why is *Body Politics* and *Women Citizens* important to development cooperation and the work at Sida? Why should we introduce new concepts when we already have so many others? Does the concept Body Politics really add something to Sida’s priority issues in development, issues such as women’s empowerment, gender-based violence, democracy and human rights? These are questions that may be raised in relation to the present volume.

The answer to them is “yes”. What makes the concept Body Politics so interesting is that it may provide a more profound understanding of important issues in development cooperation, issues such as human rights, empowerment and, not least, citizenship.

Men or women, we are all bodies. Bodies work, eat, sleep, have sex, make love, give birth, rape, starve, are beaten etc. Bodies have needs, desires, rights, and not least, experience well-being, or pain, or hunger. All this takes place in physical spaces. However obvious as this may seem, this is a perspective that tends to be ignored or forgotten.

Talking about Body Politics in a development context not only directs attention to the more obvious issues of sexual and reproductive health and rights, or gender-based violence, but also to yet another urgent issue – that of women’s economic empowerment and the difficulty of defending women’s rights in the context of global economic crisis.

It is interesting to note that the concept Body Politics as elaborated in this study is relevant to so many of the key issues in women’s economic empowerment, including labour and property rights. The same is valid for the quest for a broadened and more inclusive concept of Citizenship as a lived experience, which is one of the central themes of this book.

This study strives to link the ideal notions of universal human rights with the rights of women living in the realities of different African countries. It deals with the problematic discrepancy between citizen’s rights in general and those of women citizens in particular.

Citizen’s rights are frequently defined in a manner that does not include the rights connected to the everyday struggles in the life of many women. Consequently there is a difficulty in defending the citizen’s rights of women in the context of global economic restructuring and economic crisis. The study
also illustrates the many intersections between the different categories of these rights, demonstrating links between women’s bodily rights and their rights in the economic realm.

The volume is based on papers originally presented at the research conference “Body Politics and Gender Justice”, held in Cape Town in February 2009. The conference was co-organised by the African Gender Institute and the Swedish research network “Gender and Development Network” (GADNET) which is financed by Sida. The purpose of Sida’s support to Swedish research networks is to promote forums for dialogue on policy issues between researchers, policy makers and practitioners in development cooperation.

We hope that this book can serve the purpose of informing practitioners about some of the crucial issues in gender and development research, and at the same time inspire to continued reflection and further work on Body Politics and Women Citizens in development contexts. The views expressed in this volume are independent and are not part of any Sida policy position. It is published with the intention of helping to bridge the gap between academia and policy work, and also to promote dialogue in an important area that is in need of further discussion.

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INTRODUCTION

Ann Schlyter

African women are citizens according to national constitutions and they usually have the right to vote, but there are many challenges to their efforts to access or fully exercise their citizen rights. Global markets, states, communities and family set the scene for individual efforts. Women start with their own bodily experiences and make choices in order to make the best out of their life situation. The body politics in the crafting of citizenship is played out in everyday, as well as in transnational, politics.

The UN conferences in Nairobi 1985, Cairo 1994 and Beijing 1995 revitalised the women's movements all over the world and provided a basis for renewed dialogues with states about women's rights. They further triggered global cooperation between researchers, feminist activists and development practitioners, and this volume can be regarded as the outcome of a continuous global dialogue. The ten articles in this volume were first submitted to a conference in Cape Town\(^1\) in which African and Swedish, senior and younger scholars and gender activists met and discussed body politics and challenges in the struggle for gender justice.

During the last decade, laws in many countries have been changed and various systems for state delivery of services requested in UN documents have been reformed. There is progress, but it is slow and uneven. Several participants in the Cape Town conference even indicated reversal of assumed gains as neo-traditional and religious movements specifically focus on control of women's bodies in efforts to resist change, while others ascribed increasing difficulties in defending women's rights due to the global economic restructuring and the current economic crisis.

The African women's movement, in a broad sense, continues to claim rights, but has also become aware of the limitations of what Desiree Lewis in her chapter in this volume calls “an instrumentalist approach to rights”. There is no simple consensus on how to best support women citizens to help them fully enjoy their rights. International development agencies increasingly

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\(^1\) “Gender justice and body politics”, co-arranged by Africa Gender Institute at the Cape Town University and the Centre for Global Gender Studies, University of Gothenburg. February 2009.
discuss a move towards rights-based approaches. The chapters of this volume are not written with the aim of identifying challenges to rights-based approaches, but read with such eyes they provide the basis for a discussion that is presented as a postscript.

The ten articles selected for this volume are all grounded in local experience. The conversation interlinking the chapters travels across borders between the Cape and Cairo, thus drawing together African women’s experiences from various places on the continent.

Different spheres of life – work and livelihood, property, marriage and motherhood, pain and bodily rituals, and politics – are explored in empirical case studies. The volume pursues an understanding of women’s citizen rights as negotiated in the private, as well as in public, sphere and as being deeply embedded both in social constructions of the body and in material bodily conditions.

Although the ten chapters describe different, unique conditions and vary in focus and perspective, together they provide an insight into the complex realities of everyday life. The volume aims at enhancing the understanding of the diverse ways in which women craft their citizenship.

WHY BODY POLITICS?

The concept body politics in the title of this volume and of the Cape Town conference refers to a feminist tradition of taking women’s bodies as the starting point of political commitment or research. The experience women have of their bodies, the interpretations they make and the knowledge they acquire in their everyday lives constitute the basis for how they craft their citizenship. It can be said that body politics is the negotiation of power via the body.

The concept body politics is also used in order to analyse how state policies create (or do not create) space for women’s agency, and how political discourses construct individual and collective women’s bodies. Further, at the global level, the concept of body politics is used in analysis related to international agreements and the global division of labour. The body is always subject to social, cultural, economic and political definitions and policies are based on these perceptions.

In the field of development cooperation Harcourt (2005), has shown how concepts about women’s bodies have been constructed in the different discourses on “women in development”, “gender and development” and “women’s empowerment” and thereby informed policy formulation and implementation. In a recently published book Harcourt (2009) takes different female bodies (the reproductive, the productive, the violated, the sexualised and the techno-body) as points of departure in her analysis of gender and development discourses. Body politics is thus a concept which can be used in dis-
course analysis, but at the same time its frequent use in feminist research over
the last decade is a break with the dominance of the focus on texts and con-
ceptual constructions in the analysis of power. Body politics directs the inter-
est to real bodies, their corporality and the spaces they inhabit.

The concept gender politics is also used referring to the struggle for the
right to express a gender identity regardless of ascribed sex or genitalia; thus
one form of body politics. At the core of this body politics is sexuality and the
struggle for the right to enjoy sexual relations without discrimination or state
intervention dictating what is normal. Women’s sexuality and fertility have
historically been subjected to control, by individual men or the family as well
as by the state. The most contested of all women’s rights is their right to de-
cide over their own bodies. In the language of development, this right has
been linked primarily to health issues under the label women’s “sexual and
reproductive health and rights”, srhr. However, as several chapters in this
volume illustrate, states and authorities enact policies on the bodies of women
and men, girls and boys, even when they are formulated without direct bodily
references.

Global markets, trade and industrial polices directly affect working and
consuming bodies, housing policies affect how bodies are sheltered, and fam-
ily policies provide the framework for how gendered bodies interact within
the private sphere. By analysing women’s work, in the army, in the academic
world and in prostitution Edwards (2007) revealed the disciplinary as well as
the empowering sides of the body politics of the Swedish state. Swedish gen-
der equality policy has, over a long period of time, emphasised men’s involve-
ment in, and shared responsibility for, the work of promoting gender equality.
Over the last decade men’s response to gender equality has been debated and
researched all over the world (Connell, 2005). This volume insists that citi-
zenship is always negotiated and, obviously, more research is required about
men’s positions in these negotiations nonetheless, the necessary choices of
limitation and selection have resulted in a focus on women citizens.

Body politics is thus not a concept introduced to replace gender politics or
gender equality policies, although it also refers to power in the relationship
between women and men. The benefit of talking about body politics instead
of gender politics and of bodies instead of people is that it leads us think con-
cretely about what is happening, not to abstract subjects, but to real bodies of
flesh and blood that experience hunger and cold, that work and become tired,
that live and move around in homes, cities and physical landscapes.
Harcourt finds that body politics has been “a key mobilising force for human rights over the last few decades” (2009: 24). Human Rights as formulated in the UN Universal Declaration of 1948 are defined as indivisible and applicable to all the people in the world. Over the years a number of other human rights conventions have been developed, among them the Convention for Elimination of Discrimination against Women, CEDAW adopted in 1979 and ratified by 185 countries. All the seven African countries represented by studies in this volume have done so, and all but Egypt have also ratified the Maputo Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People’s Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa, which was adopted in 2003 after a long process in which the African women’s movements were very active. A year later these heads of states re-confirmed their commitment in a “Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa”. Annexes 1–5 present some of the articles and paragraphs in these documents that are most relevant to the issues raised in this volume.

While international conventions and treaties provide a basis and legitimacy for human rights activists, in most countries it is issues of the everyday struggle for life and livelihood that mobilise women to make claims on the state and to demand their citizen rights to take part in local and national decision making. The understanding of citizenship in this volume includes political rights but also how citizens shape their everyday lives in dialogue with, or in contestation against, the state. Citizenship was a sub-theme at the Cape Town conference mentioned above, which was initiated within a research cooperation programme about how women crafted their citizenship in their everyday practice in peri-urban areas in Cape Town and Lusaka.

There are academic and activist debates as well as public discourses on women’s rights, both as human rights and in terms of citizen rights. Given the gross overlapping it is surprising that the theoretical debates are held quite separately within different disciplines, with law scholars dominating the human rights discourse, while citizen rights have mainly been a concern of political scientists. Human rights scholars emphasise that rights are indivisible and universal, while political scientists focus on political rights often specific to citizens of a nation. By applying the body politics perspective and using women’s everyday life experiences as a departure point, this volume continues feminist scholars’ efforts to transcend disciplinary divisions.

Gouws’ (2005) review of the growing body of feminist theory on citizenship shows how feminist scholars have moved between the position of claiming equal rights as positive insurance against discrimination, and the position
of claiming rights which should not ignore the differences between women’s and men’s conditions. There is a risk that gender specific rights contribute to, and cement, prejudices and discrimination while with gender-neutral rights women are at risk of being included as citizens only on the condition of being close to the male norm which reinforces or reintroduces inequalities (Lister, 2003).

Human rights are universal, and one debated issue is how they can be legitimised in radically different societies. In several countries the argument is heard that human rights are Western ideas, especially when applied to women’s rights. The topic of women’s human rights in Africa raises contentious issues about the relationship between the individual and society, between independence and belonging. Several of the articles in this volume explore the tensions raised by the fact that both human rights and citizen rights (in their classical notion) place emphasis on the independence of individuals.

Up until the 1990s, research on citizenship in Africa focused on the colonial legacy and on post-colonial tension between modernists with a largely liberal notion of citizenship, and communitarians who define the kinship or ethnic group, not the individual, as the bearer of rights (Mamdani, 1996). There are violations of individual women’s rights built into both the communitarian and the modernist version of citizenship. If groups or families headed by men are the bearers of rights it usually means that women have to negotiate their limited rights in the context of customary law (Mahdi, 2006). The modernist version of citizenship, on the other hand, with its focus on gender-neutral individuals, tends to exclude women by placing them in a private sphere.

A citizen has the right to be protected by the state, but also the right to freedom from state interference both in the sphere of economy and in the sphere of family life. Citizen rights of non-interference of the state into private life make women more dependent on non-state actors such as husband and family. Consequently feminist scholars put forward an understanding of citizenship as negotiated both in the private and the public life. They have contested the disembodied notion of a citizen and unveiled citizenship as always gendered and situated in places and bodies (Yuval-Davis, 1997).

WORKING BODIES IN A GLOBAL ECONOMY

The first three chapters focus on working bodies: women’s work and livelihoods in the globalised economy. Although it is the withdrawal of states from responsibilities which most observers in Africa have noted, it is also noted that state policies, rules and controls have a direct impact on women’s work and bodies. The chapters confirm Connell’s (2005) observation that in practice the global neoliberal market functions as a form of masculinist politics.
Markets appear gender-neutral but as they work within existing gender relations, results can be disastrous for women.

With empirical evidence from a study of the effects of recent job layoffs in the mining sector in Zambia Patience Mususa highlights the exploitative nature of a global economic system that has depressed the cost of labour. In order to avoid total destitution people turn to informal and sometimes illegal mining. Mususa articulates the nature of economic life in these places and she gives voice to the women and children whose bodies are exploited. Their occupation is illegal but their products join the formal global market and international trade; the informal labour market is thus not separate from the formal. One of the lines along which the global labour market sorts people according to gender is the line between formal and informal work. Women often have to join the informal labour market where labour conditions are unregulated and sometimes appalling.

The chapter illustrates how the conditions imposed by this informal, and sometimes illegal, work reduce the workers to second-class citizens. These miners were affected by corporate policies to protect privatised resources in the form of dumpsites. Also many urban slum-dwellers around Africa have experienced how they can not escape illegality. They live on illegally occupied land, they work as vendors without licences, they have home-based production in areas zoned as residential etc. By-laws and other regulations turn all their means of existence into illegality (Schlyter, 2006). A person living on illegal means obviously has limited opportunities to claim citizen rights.

With the informalisation of work, the basis for collective action to improve conditions becomes weaker. Support to women’s capacity to organise and take collective action is one of the recommendations Kabeer (2009) offers to development agencies which, like Sida, have “women’s economic empowerment” as a prioritised area for development cooperation. In some situations collective mobilisation is also possible within informal work. Margareta Espling’s chapter describes how, in response to the increased monetisation of the society and to the lack of access to financial resources, women organise to collectively mobilise resources. Women’s saving associations are common all over Africa. My own studies in Zambia show that women living in poverty often find social networking and collective action a means of security and that they define their citizenship in relation to what they can do for their family and their community, rather than in relation to the state (Schlyter, 2009).

Espling revisited a number of women informants a decade after a first study, and she identifies aspects influencing the extent and direction of changes in their living conditions. During the decade that has gone, women with limited access to resources have redefined their livelihood strategies through transformation of traditional activities or by developing new ones. They have also adapted to their own aging bodies and changing household composition
over their life courses, often leading to lack of household labour, as husbands die or move out and children grow up and move. Espling reveals how structural adjustment and economic liberalisation, in this case together with war and destabilisation, has caused dramatic and cumbersome changes in an urban community in northern Mozambique.

In the development discourse over the last few decades, feminists have emphasised that African women are producers and agents, not merely victims or beneficiaries of development interventions. Today, international support to women’s small enterprises has accelerated and the World Bank “invests in women”. As an alternative to the exploitative nature of this rhetoric Harcourt (2009) argues for a rights-based approach which, as will be discussed in the postscript, has its own challenges.

While informalisation of work is one global tendency, another is the continuous relocation of industrial plants by transnational corporations to countries with lower wages. Paula Mählck investigates the differences in workers’ conditions within the motor car industries in Sweden and South Africa as these are forged through global forces. Starting from a criticism of the disembodied worker that often appears at the centre of analysis on globalisation and working life, Mählck explores how forms of oppression and resistance are experienced though bodily practices and how these are gendered in the two Volvo plants. She has a theoretical ambition to avoid essential assumptions of women’s bodies and carries out analyses of both discourses and material conditions. In the workers’ response to their situation she sees the interaction between bodies, language, technology, national policies and the neo-liberal organisation of capital.

Race and gender interact in the dynamics of global hierachisation of bodies at work. Increasingly black women are used as labourers in poorly paid, repetitive work or in the insecure informal sector of the economy. Even before the current economic and financial crisis, global economic restructuring pressed women and children into unregulated and often illegal work in many places in the Global South.

PROPERTY, MARRIAGE AND POLYGAMY

Access to waged employment is one way to economic empowerment; other ways are self employment and property ownership. Women have to have some reliable access to, and control over, their own resources in order to be able to make a living. One of Kabeer’s recommendations for support to women’s economic empowerment is to strengthen their property rights, especially the rights to land and housing. It is certainly empowerment to gain control over your own home, as it is both the physical shelter for your body and a provider of security and identity. Ownership of property such as housing can
also be a platform for business. In urban Zambia and Zimbabwe, urban women’s strategies for livelihoods and security were centred around home ownership (Larsson and Schlyter, 1993).

Consequently women’s, and especially widows’, property rights have been a focus for African women’s movements. Historically, citizenship and voting capacity have in many countries been tied to property ownership, and married women were not regarded as property owner. Still in some African countries, women lose most of their citizen rights when they marry. They need their husband’s consent not only on decisions of economic character, but also regarding their own body, their sexuality and fertility. For example, forced intercourse within a marriage is not regarded as rape; wives’ bodies are more or less regarded as the property of the husband. Customs in connection to inheritance too often deprive a widow of all matrimonial property.

In most countries laws are changed in accordance with international conventions so that women maintain their status as legal individuals within marriage. However, popular notions and practices of women’s subordination are maintained and new forms are emerging. Property rights and widow’s rights are, together with gender-based violence, issues of concern to women of all classes, and have thus united women in claims put forward by the women’s movements. The house, however simple and informal is, for many families, their only property of value. The relative wealth of the middle classes is often manifested in houses, which are also for them the most valuable family investment. McFadden (2005) argues that middle-class African women are defiantly redefining themselves as citizens and they demand the right to own and control property. At the same time it is mostly within the urban middle class that polygamy is on the increase; one of many examples of contradictory developments.

There are many social and emotional tensions in polygamous relationships, but Lucy Kondwani Chipeta focuses specifically on the problem of sharing resources from urban housing and other investment among husbands, wives and children in polygamous families in Malawi. The urban lifestyle of waged work, consumption and property ownership creates new problems in polygamous marriages to which there are no real, or imagined, traditional solutions. Rights to property and inheritance are easily manipulated, especially as polygamous marriages are entered in accordance with customary law, in which rules for property are not developed. Chipeta’s chapter explores strategies that women have adopted to protect their own and their children’s interests. They may not approve of polygamy, but they all had reasons to accept the situation and thereby contribute to the revival and spread of the custom in urban areas. A woman’s position in marriage and society makes it difficult for her to claim her citizen rights.
SEXUALITY, FERTILITY AND MOTHERHOOD

The global women’s health movements have taken an active part in the development of a practice to support sexual and reproductive health and rights, SRHR. The use of medicalised and depoliticised terms has facilitated interventions into the culturally sensitive issues of sexuality, fertility, and violence against women. Although the movements have addressed political and cultural issues, emphasis has been on reproductive health rather than sexual or other bodily rights, with the result that interventions “end up being limited to service related technical/medical approaches, sideling social, political, cultural, power and rights issues” (Runeborg, 2008).

Millennium Development Goal number five is to “improve maternal health” (See Annex 5). These goals were expected to strengthen the work of improving women’s situation however so far there has not been much progress. According to the Millennium Development Goals Report 2008 progress in maternal health in Sub-Saharan Africa was negligible (UN, 2009). It is a global shame that maternal deaths rates remain high. Thanks to measurable indicators progress, or lack of progress, can be assessed but it may also be that measurable indicators have reinforced the domination of service-oriented approaches rather than mobilisation in order to change attitudes and policies. The need to make a “connection between sexuality, human rights and development” has been highlighted and Sida has been in the forefront by adopting a concept paper on the issue, but worldwide the silence around sexuality in international development cooperation remains deafening (Runeborg, 2008).

Neoconservative ideological positions around sexuality grew strong during the Bush administration in US. Effects on development cooperation can, for example, be noticed in support to HIV prevention, which has campaigned for abstinence not for safer sex, ignoring pleasure and the risks likely taken by people seeking pleasure. At the same time there are a multitude of movements claiming sexual rights in opposing heteronormativity. Sexual rights are often understood as rights for sexual minorities with the consequence “that people need to adopt labels in order to claim these rights” (Cornwall, Correa and Jolly, 2008, p. 10).

With the following two chapters the volume returns to issues in the core of body politics: fertility and motherhood. Until the UN Conference on Population and Development in Cairo in 1994, the dominant point of departure for development agencies to engage in family planning was the aim of slowing down population growth. With the concept of women’s reproductive rights and health a new respect for women’s own agency and control over their own bodies gained ground.
By exploring whether Zambian women enjoy autonomy over their own fertility, Mulela Margaret Munalula connects to the declarations of rights. She analyses to what extent the body politics of the Zambian state, together with legal, social and relational prescriptions, limit women’s autonomy. There are multiple interests in a woman’s child-bearing and she is often treated as a minor. In the context of Zambia’s rapid population growth, widespread poverty and the HIV/AIDS pandemic, she discusses autonomy in relationship to the frameworks provided by modern and customary laws. She concludes that women’s autonomy is restricted for several reasons; one is that motherhood is so tightly connected to the identity of an African woman; another is that individualism is not a strong value. Munalula notes that in most African jurisdictions there are no laws to protect women and give them control over their sexuality – on the contrary, custom, culture and religion oppose women’s bodily autonomy. There is an increasing pressure on the State to constitutionally enshrine and implement socio-economic rights. Munalula welcomes state regulations to protect women’s sexual and reproductive rights, but she can also see the need for a nuanced approach to rights, which challenges the individualism intrinsic in an orthodox human rights approach.

Motherhood may be socially compulsory and a prerequisite for marriage, but it should not come too early in life. Teenage pregnancies are, in many African countries, regarded as a huge problem and harmful for those involved. In HIV prevention campaigns the state, the churches and social institutions are all committed to a body politics of keeping youth from sexual activities. Nolwazi Mkhwanazi discusses the efforts to prevent teenage pregnancies in South Africa with sex education, free contraceptives and youth-friendly clinics.

Given the high value of motherhood and the lack of prospects for girls living in poverty, it is no surprise to find that teenage girls aspire to the status of a mother. However, Mkhwanazi studied teenage pregnancies in a South African township and found that early childbearing is, in line with official politics, viewed as something bad. Moral blame falls on the mothers of the pregnant girls but, by stepping in and managing the situation by taking care of their grandchild, they restore their reputation. The young mothers often return to school. A denial of paternity has become commonplace and draws attention to changing ideas of manhood. The chapter reveals a contradiction between ideals and practice. Mkhwanazi points at agency of the girls and their mothers and at the responsibility of the community, and it contests a tendency to victimise the teenagers and grandmothers.
BODILY TRANSFORMATION; PAIN AND BELONGING

The gap between the declarations in CEDAW and in the Maputo Protocol (See the Annexes 1, 2, 3 and 4) and the situation of women living in polygamous marriages is wide. The distance is even greater between these declarations and the views of the proud women in Senegal and Egypt who are given voices in the following two chapters which focus on girls entering into womanhood through bodily transformation.

The matter is so delicate that even naming is associated with problems. Women activists, international development organisations and the Maputo Protocol use the concept female genital mutilation which directly points at its clear violation of women’s bodily integrity and rights. The authors of these two chapters prefer the more value-neutral concepts circumcision or genital cutting, as they have found that the concept mutilation provokes people involved into dismissing any efforts to change as Western interventions. To successfully support work against the practice it is necessary to understand more about the body politics of those involved, otherwise intervention may create reactions opposite to those intended.

The chapters discuss the meaning attached to the practice by the girls and the community where it is applied. Lisen Dellenborg’s study is carried out in Senegal. Unequal gender relations are enforced by initiation, which aims at transforming girls into humble, courageous, cooperative wives and self-sacrificing mothers. The chapter focuses on how the painful ritual becomes meaningful to the women through everyday metaphors and associations that merge the identity of circumcised women with that of moral women.

Compliance and submission are crucial to the constitution of a girl’s maturity and moral personhood. However, in her old age as a grandmother and mother-in-law in her son’s compound, an initiated woman will enjoy a high degree of independence. Understood in the context of a woman’s full life span, the initiation ritual communicates the fact that women will be rewarded later in life for the hardships they undergo when they are young. Dellenborg defines two sorts of citizenship: a political citizenship related to the Senegalese state, which is bureaucratic and led by an administrative authority, and a citizenship related to belonging in the sense of ethnic, religious and gender identity. Her argument is that an understanding of the local context is essential for the implementation of women’s human and citizen rights.

Only with support from the communities and the women themselves can any “harmful practice” be changed. Maria Malmström’s chapter explores how the meaning of circumcision and other painful experiences are changing among the younger generation of women in Cairo. If a woman has suffered in life she is perceived as a highly moral person and as a woman. Malmström shows that the suffering of circumcision that was previously a meaningful life
experience connected to female identity is tending to lose its significance due to the international and national discourse on female genital mutilation and possibly also with the wider dynamics of social change in Egypt. Instead, the practice has been a marker not only of womanhood, but of class, national and Muslim identity. As the most intimate sphere of life has been exposed in the international area, circumcision has also become a symbol of resistance against state politics and Western intervention.

**BODY POLITICS AND CITIZENSHIP IN NEW FORMS**

In many African countries, women’s movements have periodically been strong, but have not been able to push back neo-traditionalist tendencies which are manifest in phenomena such as support for polygamy and occurrence of virginity testing. The situation is similar in many post-colonial states; policies are enacted which threaten women’s and girls’ bodily integrity and destabilise potentially equitable gender relations.

Strengthening of women’s rights is always resisted by some members of society. Reactions have shown a variety of faces all around the world. Religious movements argue for a patriarchal society referring to the Bible or other scripts. Other movements try to establish legitimacy for their ideas by claiming that they are reviving a tradition, when actually they are transforming myths into contemporary contexts and create new rules and practices. In Africa such processes have been seen going hand in hand with a re-ethnification.

The last two chapters directly approach the body politics of women’s citizenship. With Mali as her example **Assitan Diallo** explores how women are formed as second-class citizen. She explores the various mechanisms of exclusion, marginalisation and downgrading of women by conveying the political context in which she is writing her chapter: the campaign of the religious leaders and other influential lobby groups (such as representatives of the elders) against a new family code adopted by the Parliament. She is not convinced that the state will be strong enough to stand by its commitment to reform, although it is a policy in line with **CEDAW** and the Maputo Protocol. The value of transnational strategies may have a limit, and Diallo wants efforts to strengthen the scattered women’s movement to mobilise all the anger and resistance Malian women have against tendencies to re-traditionalise their society.

**Desiree Lewis** notes that identity politics is different to what it was in the struggle against apartheid, and she offers her thoughts about what it is to be a full and active citizen of South Africa today. The various feminist visions of justice are marginalised in political and public debates and new forms of policy making are emerging. The South African women’s movements gave
strong inputs during the period of constitution writing after the fall of apartheid and was viewed as inspiration for women all over Africa, however now many observers talk about a backlash with the construction of ethno-nationalist neo-traditions.

Lewis focuses on the performance of bodies in public spectacles as a form to contest power and construct identity through collective imagination. She discusses a whole range of different spectacles, among them public virginity testing in support of a neo-traditional and patriarchal society in KwaZulu Natal. She gives example of how the South African women's movements elaborated their own forms of spectacles in response to new restrictions introduced on women's citizenship. By analysing events in political life as performance of spectacles, Lewis seeks to understand new forms of political agency.

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INTRODUCTION

The reduced presence of the state in the provision of social services and the contraction of a formal permanent labour force after the privatisation of Zambia Consolidated Copper Mines in 1997 have caused an increasing number of families on the Zambian Copperbelt to seek out alternative forms of employment. Women and children are entering the informal sector in large numbers to subsidise men’s declining involvement in the formal sector. The recent job layoffs in the mining sector in Zambia from October 2008 put further pressure in this direction. Job seekers are driven on one hand by a realistic fear of falling into extreme poverty and on the other by a desire to “make it” in the fast-paced world of global capitalism. These two factors, coupled with general disappointment with government economic policy, often lead people to seek opportunities outside the legal framework set up by the state. Illegality, then, becomes a legitimate survival strategy in the eyes of those who are faced with the daily constraints of life in a rapidly declining economy with ever diminishing state intervention. This paper shows how neo-liberalism’s ‘free market’ has co-opted women’s and children’s bodies into its labour in what are clearly recognised as unequal circumstances by the subjects themselves.

The paper is based on ethnographic research carried out in July–August 2008 in two copper dumpsites located in the Copperbelt region, one in an urban area and one in a rural area\(^3\). There I observed women and children working on the sites and I carried out informal interviews with informants both on site and at their homes. Why are women and children involved in these activities? What does their involvement tell us about the drastic restructuring of the local economy? How do these activities change the way people think about the ‘free market’? How is illegality justified and pursued as a legitimate moral strategy?

\(^3\) The names of the locations will not be disclosed in order to protect the anonymity of informants.
My aim is to provide some partial answers to these questions and to contribute to a deeper understanding of the informal economy of the Zambian Copperbelt and the body politic of neo-liberalism in this context. The body politic in this paper is understood in the Foucauldian sense as the forces, emanated through the ideological and material structures of society, that impact the negotiating body of the actor, in this case women and children working at copper mine dumpsites.

Background

In 1997, ZCCM (Zambia Consolidated Copper Mines) was privatised with the end result of leaving, over the course of a few years, most of the Zambian copper mining sector in private hands. Up to then, ZCCM was state-owned after an initial period of co-management between the state and foreign investors ended in the early 1980s. A nationalised copper industry was a major pillar in the vision of President Kenneth Kaunda, who ruled Zambia from independence up to 1991 as the leader of what many scholars labelled a ‘benevolent’ dictatorship. An integrated system of decent salaries, large benefit packages (including subsidised high-quality housing, education and health) and heavy involvement of the mining companies in the provision and maintenance of social services and infrastructure were the main characteristics of employment with ZCCM.

Declining copper prices, inefficient management and the pressure of World Bank and IMF led the democratically elected President Chiluba to undertake the wholesale privatisation of ZCCM in the mid-1990s. Most workers were laid off in the transition and had to rely for their subsistence on the severance benefit packages agreed by ZCCM, which included the purchase of the house occupied and a considerable sum in cash. This short-lived injection of cash caused an outburst of informal economic activities, often the only hope for most to make a living.

Expectations were raised once again in 2004 when a new wave of foreign investment started to flow into the Copperbelt to finance a rapid expansion of copper mining, due to the rapidly rising copper prices caused by the dramatic economic growth of China and India and the resulting increasing demand for raw materials. In practice, however, formal employment did not increase much and the conditions of mining employment worsened considerably when compared to the ZCCM period. On the other hand, what the new boom did was to sustain and expand the fast-growing informal economy that replaced the increasingly diminished arena of formal wage labour on the Copperbelt. The boom ended just as fast as it started in the aftermath of the credit crunch in September 2008. These new developments further increased the prominence of the informal economy as the primary source of income for Copperbelt residents. The evidence discussed in this paper was collected shortly be-
fore the end of the new copper boom. Simutanyi (2008) and Fraser and Lungu (2006) provide a general picture of the negative effects of wholesale privatisation on the livelihoods of people living in the Copperbelt.

The extent of the expulsion from the Eden of the ZCCM period is clearly captured by the striking view of copper waste dumps, a common feature of the Copperbelt landscape. On one side of the dumps, large excavators scoop out chunks of flux stone that will later be reprocessed in local plants to extract copper. On the other side of the dumps, it is not unusual to see small groups of women and children busy digging and sorting out flux stone and copper ore with only the support of sieves, picks and shovels. The result of the work of these small gangs fuels the informal trade in copper ore to foreign buyers and of building materials to local residents4.

The very source of these trades is illegal. Mining companies own the dumpsites and formally prohibit informal digging and mining. On the other hand, mine employees and policemen turn a blind eye most of the time, in implicit recognition of the dumpsite workers’ basic needs. The dual economy of the copper dumpsites also highlights some important features of the new copper boom. The formal and the informal run parallel to each other and come together in a silent social contract where cunning local entrepreneurs (by some named ‘copper thieves’) ‘redistribute’ the wealth produced by the mines through kinship and other local networks. Though this paper does not deal directly with a comparison of workers on both sides of the mine dump; Mählck’s work in this volume on the car production company Volvo shows that comparative analysis of working bodies is needed across the varying gradations and sites of production processes in the market systems of global capitalism.

INFORMAL AND ILLEGAL LIVELIHOODS

The contrast between the ‘nationalised’ past and the ‘privatised’ present is clear: many people feel they are not benefiting from foreign investment and that the cause is the investors’ greed. Before privatisation, most of these women would not have felt compelled to eke out a living in such harsh working conditions.

4 Flux stone is an aggregate that is used for mixing concrete, or on its own to pave roads and driveways.
Ukubomba ichipuba (to work foolishly): exploitation and informality

“These investors want to take everything, even the waste that ZCCM left”. As she is digging up flux stone with her shovel at one of the main dumpsites of Kashoni, Rhoda reflects about the new wave of activity brought by the copper boom. Rhoda’s husband is a casualty of privatisation. Like many other miners, he passed away soon after losing his job. Rhoda is now on her own and has to support six children from the meagre income that she makes digging flux stone. Her 14-year-old son works with her at the dumpsite. For Rhoda, foreign investment after privatisation has clearly coincided with a marked worsening of living conditions.

The sense that foreign investment has done little to improve the lives of Copperbelt residents can also be captured by a Bemba expression used to describe work at copper dumpsites, ukubomba ichipuba (“to work foolishly”). Informal activities in the ZCCM period saw women involved in the trade of goods such as second hand clothes and vegetables. The children spent most of their time after school exploring the surrounding forests, playing sports at the recreation centres or reading in the local library. Most mineworkers in Kashoni had worked all their lives for the mines and so had their fathers and their grandfathers. Miners and their families were ill prepared for retrenchment; most assumed they would all be re-employed after foreign investors took over. Their expectations have not been met and most of them have remained jobless.

The newly acquired houses have provided a temporary safety net. However, many Kashoni miners only received their cash benefits several years after retrenchment and have been forced to sell their house or to rent it out and move to the peri-urban outskirts of town for subsistence farming. Families ‘illegally’ occupied land belonging to the mines for farming in an area aptly named Mai Lange (“shown by myself”); much of this land have been recently re-appropriated by foreign investors during the recent copper boom. Hansangule and Feeney (1998) anticipated these contests for land on the Copperbelt in a study carried out just after the privatisation of the mines in the mid 1990s. The pressure for usable land is so strong that most residents now use their backyards for agricultural activities for subsistence and small-scale trade.

5 Fictitious name for the urban area where one of the research sites is located.
6 Fictitious name. All names of real people in this paper have been anonymised to protect the welfare of informants.
7 On average, a dumpsite worker manages to sell about four tonnes of flux stone per month. Market price at the time of my research was ZMK (Zambian Kwacha) 70,000 per tonne. This would mean an income of ZMK 280,000 per month. Most underground miners in the bottom ranks would make anything between ZMK 300,000 and 1,500,000 per month. The majority of them are not permanently employed.
8 The first language of the homonymous ethnic group, Bemba has become the main lingua franca spoken on the Copperbelt by most non-Bemba residents. All the vernacular quotes in the paper are in Bemba.
Ukuibombela (to work for one self): everyday life at a copper dumpsite

Despite the perceived exploitative nature of working informally on the copper dumpsites, women are often pragmatic about the need for an income, no matter how meagre it may be. Mary, a digger at the Kashoni dumpsite, said she worked there because:

I need to feed my family. My husband got a job as a casual [worker] with a contractor at the mines in Kuampula9. He gets very little, not enough for him to share with us, so he has sent nothing since he went to work there six months ago. I don’t mind working, besides he looked after us when he worked for the (zccm) mines. You see, us women here, if we got jobs we would work, even for these new mines, we are working right now. You see over there, the woman with a shovel, she can dig, she can be a miner. These mines only want to employ abapwe umulopa mumishipa (‘those who have no blood running in their veins’)10. Who will employ our children? They are still sleeping in our homes. So we come to work.

The current decline in formal employment has pushed more and more women into the informal economy. Whereas these informal activities supplemented household incomes during the zccm period, now they have become the main source of income for most. Women and children are now increasingly expected to produce income for the household. In many cases, they are forced to do so by the death of the male breadwinner11. In some cases, children are pushed into dumpsite work by the death of both parents.

An average working day at the Kashoni dumpsite lasts from sunrise to sunset, approx. 12 hours, with a short lunch break on site that would not last more than 30 minutes. Women and children all complain of respiratory problems caused by the residual dust. Workers are also regularly harassed and beaten by the mining companies’ security officials, who are instructed by mine management to discourage illegal digging. Several informants told me that the reason that women and children were normally the ones working on the dumpsites is that they are less likely to be prosecuted than men. Media reports of young men being shot dead at private mine sites12 show that the threat to life is real and that locals take pragmatically dangerous decisions to earn a livelihood.

9 Anonymised name for another Copperbelt town.
10 The metaphor here refers to elderly people.
11 My own survey data show that, for example, in a Kashoni street comprising twenty households, eight have lost their husbands in the period between 1998 and 2008.
Despite these difficulties, the women interviewed prefer to face these challenges rather than embark on transactional sex and sex work. As one informant put it, “it is easy to go with a man for ZMK 20,000 but what will happen to your children when you die? Kukosa pa ku sheta (‘you have to be strong to be able to eat’)”. The reference here is to the risk of contracting HIV through sexual intercourse\(^{13}\). Women also prefer dumpsite work to micro-finance initiatives aimed at starting up other informal trades. The reasons given are that family responsibilities are at such a high level, emergencies are a regular occurrence and it would be difficult for them to repay the loans. All in all, dumpsite work offers an opportunity to earn an income with no start-up capital costs and a great degree of autonomy over the economic process. Any group of women and children can join the Kashoni dumpsite and start digging and selling flux stone without the involvement of any formal or informal third party. The fluidity of entry though does not necessarily make for similar levels of ingenuity and luck. As Espling clearly shows in her paper in this volume, the varying circumstances of women indicate the differing levels of success even in the same informal economy.

Pa illegal twali beula (during illegal, we made good): ‘illegal’ livelihoods

The new ideology of entrepreneurship and market competition is now mixed with the anxiety of destitution in a world of scarce (and almost entirely privatised) resources and non-existent public welfare intervention. These two factors together have led to the rise in informal activities often bordering on the illegal. People feel entitled to bypass Westernised notions of private property in the name of survival and individual gain. My informants all show a pragmatic approach that values economic self-sufficiency above wage labour. Informants see wage labour as limiting creativity and the space of individual agency; they also see it as an exploitative form of labour, where the employer gains much more than the employee from the fruits of the latter’s labour. The newly rediscovered valuation of individual agency through self-employment constitutes an important break from the ZCCM past. At the same time, it also shows a deep distrust of any form of economic development connected to the recent wave of foreign investment.

This distrust also constitutes the foundations of the implied moral legitimisation of illegality, whereas illegal activity is regarded both as a necessity for survival and a morally justified act of redistribution. If foreign investors are here to “take everything”, then there is nothing wrong with taking some of these resources away from the investors. Informants often mention a Bemba proverb to make this point: ubomba mwi bala alya mwi bala (“one who works in a field, eats from the field”). Walker and Peters’ (2001) work on land use in

\(^{13}\) According to the Central Statistical Office numbers from 2007, 14.3% of the Zambian population is HIV positive.
Malawi brings home similar arguments: when people illegally appropriate resources from private spaces they are not actually putting forward a claim over the ownership of these resources, but rather they are pointing out the unfair usage of the same resources by the legal owner.

The case of Kumbale mining dumpsite, in the rural Copperbelt, shows what these contests for resources entail in practice and how privatisation is radically changing the socio-economic dynamics on the ground. The workforce on this dumpsite is mostly composed of women and children. Informal operations at the dumpsite involve scavenging flux stone for copper extraction and surface mining of copper ore. Although the mine was sold by ZCCM to a group of local investors as far back as 1982, no formal mining took place until 2008, when a dispute about licences between two contending owners was resolved in favour of one of them. Since 2004, however, the mine dumpsite has been informally run by ‘illegal’ miners who came from as far away as Lusaka to exploit the opportunity of selling flux stone and copper ore on the thriving local and international markets fuelled by rising copper prices. Formal operations resumed in April 2008 and the ‘illegal’ workers went on a riot shortly afterwards to oppose the owner’s decision to stop all informal mining on his site. A compromise was then reached and informal miners were allowed to continue their operations, but could now sell only to the mine owner. In practice, the informal miners continue to sell part of their produce to other buyers. At the outpost there is no state law enforcement; the mine employs its own private security that occasionally confiscate copper ore accumulated for sale to other buyers. What is clearly at stake here is the very notion of legality and illegality. Informal miners went on a riot both to claim their rights over what they saw as a precious material resource “abandoned” by the state and to make a point about the exploitative nature of “foreign” investment.14

According to my informants, the general feeling was that it was unfair for the owner to stop an activity that has become the primary source of subsistence for so many destitute people.

In practice, the recent copper boom and the absence of any control over the dumpsite created a mini-boom in itself for the dumpsite workers. This period is remembered by informants as pa illegal (“during illegal”). The relatively high profit margins were also the main reason behind the involvement of many males, alongside the women and children. This also shows how unequal gender dynamics tend to structure informal markets as well as the formal economy. Women and children are now predominant in the dumpsite workforce following the resumption of formal control. The patriarchal family structures and their values put a cheaper price on women and children’s labour. Activities that

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14 The owner of the mine is a Zambian male of foreign descent. In the Zambian context, he is seen as a ‘foreign’ investor despite his Zambian citizenship.
are not seen as viable by males are now undertaken by women, who feel more compelled than males to provide for the basic needs of the household.

Sarah, a woman in her early thirties, moved to Kumbale in 2006 from the Zambian capital with her husband and her four daughters. During the height of illegal activity, Sarah and her husband used the proceeds from the copper ore sales to establish other successful informal activities. Three of her children work on the dumpsite. Sarah herself makes and sells a powerful local brew called *lutuku* to the local male population. Her husband set up a pig trade and he is now based in the capital. Sarah reminisces of the good times of *pa illegal* when she used to sell twenty containers\(^\text{15}\) of *lutuku* in a day:

\[ Pa \text{ illegal } \text{twali } \text{beula} \ (\text{‘during illegal we made good’}), \text{ in a day I sold twenty containers of brew, I would get people coming to buy drink very early in the morning. This place was like town, there were small businesses and minibuses. If you had to ask a young girl to collect water for you, they would answer you back saying ‘did you give birth to me?’ Many people left this place with sexually transmitted diseases. We made money. You see the house over there? The woman there built herself a house of concrete blocks and iron sheets and bought herself two trucks. Those from the villages came here with no shoes and left the place with shoes on their feet. It was paradise for them. Amahule (‘women involved in transactional sex’) from town came here with almost nothing and got copper from boys from the villages by sleeping with them. Other women had to buy 10 tonnes [of copper] for zmk 3.5 million. \]

Before the formal owner regained control of the mine, the copper boom created unprecedented wealth for people like Sarah, who would have otherwise had very few opportunities in the post-privatisation formal economy. In Sarah’s words, there was a sense of liberation and excitement about the new opportunities afforded by the ‘free market’. However, free market and legality are not complementary concepts in this new worldview. Furthermore, the resumption of ‘legality’, which coincided with the involvement of the mine owner in mining activities on the ground, is regarded by many as contrary to that very spirit of entrepreneurship and self-sufficiency.

Katherine, a woman in her early sixties, is still involved in the buying of copper ore from the informal miners, despite the new rules imposed by the mine owner. She arrived in Kumbale in 2006 from a distant Copperbelt town. The first time I met Katherine she appeared distressed, talking to a small crowd outside her second-hand clothing store. The mine security staff

\[15\] Each container has a 20 litre capacity.
had just confiscated 800 kg of copper ore that she had stashed in her shop. She spent zmk 2,000,000 on buying the copper and she would have made zmk 2,800,000 by reselling it. Katherine buys copper ore from children who scavenge and dig around the perimeter of the now fenced mining area. She pays the children zmk 2,500 per kilogram of copper ore, considerably more than the rates offered by the mine owner. He buys low grade copper ore at zmk 1,500 per kilogram, and on some rare occasions he pays up to zmk 2,000 per kilogram for higher grade copper ore. Katherine perceives the interference of the mine owner in her business as unfair and against the values of market competition:

They told us not to buy copper, what do they expect us to do? The people here, they did not cultivate because they were mining, now one buffalo [a two and half litre of ground maize] costs zmk 5,000. People are now buying on credit, where will they get the money? Me, I am a widow, my husband died because there was no work when the mines closed. I look after eight children; only three are mine, the others they are orphans I look after. Me, if I had to stop buying, what will happen to the children here? I buy at a fairer price than this European\textsuperscript{16} does, I give them zmk 2,500 per kilo; and because I am buying in small quantities I give them clothes for copper […] The market for copper is open! The government is only allowing Europeans to buy, what about us? I can go to the customs office, borrow from the government and do my own work. No, nothing for us Africans, we have no rights. They are taking gold, diamonds, what about us? We can organise ourselves into groups and get ourselves a license, we women can do it! […] Here, my daughter, there is no government. We are the ones helping the people.

Katherine’s words come full circle and echo Rhoda’s concerns about the greed of foreign investors. They also noted the perceived absence of government in everyday life. This, again, provides further legitimacy to ‘illegality’. If government is not willing or able to intervene to remedy the imbalances of foreign investment, then in local eyes it is only too fair that the ‘people’ take it upon themselves to produce and redistribute wealth. For many, the people involved in the illegal trade of flux stone and copper ore are not undesirable outlaws, but popular heroes.

\textsuperscript{16} The reference here is to the mine owner.
CONCLUSION

The diminished sphere of formal employment on the Copperbelt has pushed more women into informal economic activity, a sphere that they previously needed often just to complement their husbands' wages. In the absence of formal sector wages resulting from retrenchments and death, the informal sector has become the primary site of livelihood. The presence of women in these spheres hints at the social expectation in Zambia noted by Schlyter (1999) and Tranberg-Hansen (1996) of women's contribution to household basic needs. The very presence of women and children at mine dump sites, sites that they are prohibited from occupying and whose working conditions are difficult, indicates the contradictory nature of perceptions of women's bodies. On one hand, work at these sites falls outside regulatory boundaries of legality. On the other hand, women are doing what was seen as men's work. Men are doing similar work as casual but formal labour for the new mine investors. There is also the contradiction that even though women and children working informally at mine dumps are unlikely to be prosecuted, and as such are seen as soft legal entities. Their bodies are physically disciplined by beatings and by the confiscation of the products of their labour by mine security.

The involvement of women and children in the informal copper business also highlights the ways in which the notion of ‘free markets’ is perceived and how the local economy operates. At the point that the product of women and children's labour in an informal economy is alienated from them, and joins the formal flows of the international trade, in the copper industry, there is a disembodiment that occurs as concerns women's working bodies. Women's bodies become obscured within an inherently unequal system of trade. It is not free trade. At these junctures, the practice of digging up flux stone becomes political. A political activist would then, like Kathreen, ask why the market for copper is not open to her.

This paper indicates the awareness of global copper prices and highlights the unfair advantage foreign investors have over local entrepreneurs operating largely in the informal sector. The informal, then, is not a separate sphere from, but rather an interdependent part of the formal (Castells and Portes 1989; Moser 1978). The inequality of global capitalism that is reflected by the increasing casualisation of labour and the worsening living conditions of Copperbelt residents is coupled with the inequality of gendered dynamics that force women and children into the precariousness and danger of informal illegal activities in order to feed themselves and their households. Fear of destitution, the exploitative nature of capital and the absence of the state in welfare interventions set the framework for illegality as a legitimate economic strategy for survival and small-scale capital accumulation.
More research is needed to unfold the nuances of local views about what constitutes legitimate action and about the relevance of Westernised notions of legality and illegality. The implications of actors’ behaviour patterns and ideologies for practical interventions on the ground by national and local government, NGOs and other organisations also need to be further evaluated. The generalised resistance of state and NGO actors to operating in settings where ‘illegality’ is widespread is, in itself, a problem when devising and implementing interventions in the Zambian Copperbelt and other similar contexts.

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Mozambique has long been among the poorest countries in the world, however since the mid-1990s its economy has experienced remarkable recovery and growth. In 2001 Mozambique reached the point for debt reduction within the enhanced HIPC initiative of the IMF and the World Bank, and is therefore seen as a success story by proponents of structural adjustment reforms. Although it is often argued that poverty incidence has been reduced through policy reforms, economic data indicates continued high levels of inequality and extended poverty in the country (Virtanen & Ehrenpreis 2007). Under such economic circumstances it is interesting to find out how ordinary people, often poor and vulnerable, are coping with everyday life. It is particularly interesting to find out how economic growth and reduced poverty incidence reported at aggregated national level are reflected, or not, at micro level by looking into how individual households’ livelihood strategies have developed over time.

Historically there has been a clear association between economic growth and urbanisation; however in much of Sub-Saharan Africa this link has not been evident, and instead the locus of poverty has shifted to urban areas as they grow at an unprecedented rate (Rakodi 2002; Bryceson 2006a). With economic recession and structural adjustment policies during the 1980s and 90s, urban populations were struck particularly hard and the number of people seeking income-generating opportunities within the informal economy increased dramatically. As more people have entered into informal activities, competition increase and incomes have fallen, enhancing urban poverty.
and vulnerability leading urban households to experiment in their livelihood strategies. The poorest and most vulnerable households, which often are female headed, are forced to adopt strategies that enable them to survive on a day-to-day basis but not to improve their living situation and wellbeing (Rakodi 2002, Bryceson 2006b). The urban population has also grown dramatically in Mozambique. Between 1980 and 1997 the growth rate was 6.2% annually due to reclassification and rural-urban migration, especially during the armed conflict (INE 1997), and in 2004 36% of the population was urban. Furthermore, Mozambique is no exception from the general picture of Sub-Saharan Africa and the urban population faced enormous difficulties during the times of armed conflict, structural adjustment and economic crisis in the 1980s and 90s.

Researching livelihoods over time

This paper takes its point of departure from my own research made in the mid-1990s on how women with limited access to resources in three urban communities in Mozambique had adapted their livelihood strategies to cope with dramatically changing circumstances in their society; mainly the war of destabilisation as well as the structural adjustment and economic liberalisation policies (Espling 1999). Inspired by Whitehead’s (2002) article Tracking Livelihood Change, this paper aims at illustrating how the same individual women’s livelihoods have evolved over the years, as processes of social and economic change are continuously ongoing. In focus for this paper are the women living in one neighbourhood in Montepuez town in the peripheral northern Mozambique, who were interviewed for my study in the mid-90s. For the follow-up study initial tracking of the same 21 women was carried out in early 2007: 16 women were found and interviewed, two had moved away, one was travelling, and two had died. Additional and more elaborated fieldwork was carried out in October 2008 when 15 women were interviewed (the woman on travel was back and two of the women interviewed in 2007 had passed away). The main research tools employed were semi-structured interviews, informal conversations, and observation in homesteads and the neighbourhood.

The theoretical standpoint is that everyday activities and livelihood strategies of women (and men) in particular places must be related to wider contexts of social and economic change (Ellis 1998; Murray 2002; Rakodi & Lloyd-Jones 2002; Oberhauser et al. 2004). A livelihoods framework is adopted within a theoretical perspective of critical political geography combined with an actor-oriented gender approach: gendered agency informs and shapes the individual strategies of everyday politics in particular places (Whitehead 2002; Oberhauser et al. 2004; Painter & Jeffrey 2009). Women’s livelihood strategies are therefore continuously adapting in response to economic restructuring. This process of adaptation represents complex intersections of gender identi-
ties and material conditions, played out within existing power relations in particular places, shaped by both local and national social institutions.

In order to relate changes in women’s livelihoods in northern Mozambique to wider contexts of economic and social change, this paper begins with an overview of Mozambican economic restructuring during the last decade, focusing on poverty, small-scale agriculture and regional inequality.

**MOZAMBIQUE – A GEOPOLITICAL ECONOMY OF INEQUALITY**

With policies of market liberalisation and privatisation in a context of relative political stability, Mozambique has experienced economic recovery with high levels of GDP growth since the mid-1990s, the average GDP growth over the last decade has been around 8% annually (EIU 2007). Greatly diverging growth rates in different sectors have led to profound structural changes in the country’s economy. The dynamic, capital-intensive export sector dominated by mega-projects is growing, strongly driven by large inflows of foreign direct investments (FDI). The rest of the private sector, however, is performing well below its potential, as is the agricultural sector with productivity well below the African and regional average (Virtanen & Ehrenpreis 2007; EIU 2007 & 2008).

**GDP growth and inequality**

So, what has been the impact of high levels of economic growth on poverty reduction and inequality? Poverty incidence was reduced from 69% in 1996–97 to 54% in 2002–03, and even if the trend was encouraging, over one half of the population were still living in absolute poverty. In 2007 an estimated 74% of the population lived on less than USD 2 per day, and Mozambique had the lowest human development index in the Southern African Development Community (EIU 2008). On a national level, 57% of the consumption increase took place among the richest fifth of the population, against only 8% among the poorest. In rural areas the distribution was even more skewed; over 70% in the top income fifth, while less than 3% in the poorest. According to Virtanen & Ehrenpreis (2007:5), “the recent economic growth in Mozambique cannot, therefore, be considered pro-poor.” Similarly, Tvedten et al. (2009) found conditions of inequality, deep poverty and vulnerability in their studies of three local communities. They argue that the basis for continued chronic poverty is that broad economic development generally does not ‘trickle down’ to benefit the very poorest. They also found clear signs of an ongoing feminisation of poverty as women often live in economic dependence and lack secure rights to land, housing and other key resources.

In regional terms there is a continuation of the southern bias in resource allocation inherited from colonial times, which tends to perpetuate regional
inequality. As part of this process the strong, pre-independence economic ties with South Africa have been re-established through high inflows of FDI and trade. About 90% of FDI and 77% of total private investment in Mozambique has been made in the southern region. Almost 80% of investments in transport infrastructure take place around development corridors, especially the Maputo Development Corridor, and some 90% of total private investment in the manufacturing industry takes place in the Maputo region. Interestingly the local development impact of these large investment projects has been minimal; instead the incidence of poverty has increased in the southern region (Virtanen & Ehrenpreis 2007; EIU 2007).

Agriculture and poverty reduction

The overwhelming importance of small-scale agriculture in poverty reduction is due to its dominant role in people’s economic activities. Some 80% of the economically active population are engaged in the agricultural sector, and almost 90% of the women work in mainly small-scale agriculture. Small-scale farmers with an average farm size of 1.4 ha make up almost the entire farming community and cultivate 95% of the total cultivated area. In rural areas, subsistence agriculture provides about half of total income; the rest comes primarily from sales of agricultural produce and animal products, mainly supplemented by natural resource extraction (Virtanen & Ehrenpreis 2007; EIU 2008).

Post-war agricultural sector growth is a result of an increase in smallholder subsistence food crop production, mainly through an expansion of areas under cultivation and higher labour input. This recovery is based on previously applied technology; about 90% of the farmers still prepare their land by hoe (Virtanen & Ehrenpreis 2007). The current national policy aims at modernising the agricultural sector, which constitutes a major part of the government’s poverty reduction strategy. By focusing on increased agricultural productivity and the efficiency of rural markets, the idea is that smallholder farmers will become more involved in commercialised farming of both food and cash crops (EIU 2008). According to Virtanen & Ehrenpreis (2007:12), the challenge is “to transform the present system of subsistence agriculture, which is characterised by geographical dispersion, small units and low productivity, into an efficient commercially oriented system.” Additionally, investment in agriculture on a national level remains extremely low.

Northern poverty prevails

Montepuez is a rural district capital and one of the biggest urban centres in the peripheral northern region. According to the district profile (MAE 2005), subsistence agriculture is by far the dominating economic activity involving almost all households and 92% of the labour. Both men and women work the
land and, of the total number of people working in agriculture, 35% are children of both genders below 10 years of age. Some 98% of the women are agricultural workers on family land holdings, or their own plots. The average size of agricultural land is 1.4 ha, with 54% of land holdings being less than 1 ha. For the majority, land holdings are not by title deeds but used under a family/household regime, normally headed by a man. Women head some 10% of the households in the district. The local social organisation of the Macúas is matrilineal, however it has been gradually influenced by patrilineal organisation through religion, colonialism and modernisation.

Production practices for household subsistence are manual. Due to low production output and income from agriculture, the main harvest is generally insufficient to cover all basic food needs, which are usually supported by a second harvest or non-agricultural income. Extraction of natural resources is an important source of income, as is beer brewing. The rural infrastructures are far from sufficient. In 1997 housing conditions consisted almost completely of “a hut, with an earthen floor, grass or thatched roof and walls of reed or sticks” (Mae 2005:13), and over 90% of the population fetched water from wells, rivers or lakes. The formal educational level is low in comparison to the national average. National census data from 1997 indicates the following situation (Mae 2005): 79% of the population in the district were illiterate, predominantly women (89%). The situation in Montepuez was slightly better with 67% illiterate (women 80%, men 55%), and 50% of the population over 5 years of age that had never been to school (of which women 31%, men 19%).

In 2005 the number of inhabitants in Montepuez was estimated at 70,500, however figures of around 90,000 inhabitants were mentioned during field work in late 2008. Despite its population size, the town could be characterised as a large village, considering its structure and level of services. Informal trading plays a very important role in a rural centre like Montepuez, the most common being trade in basic necessities. In 2005 there were two banks operating, but no formal savings system accessible to the majority of the local peasant population. A number of micro-credit institutions were operating in the district, giving credit to both traders and peasant farmers. In 2003, the district had a poverty index estimated at 68%.

TRAJECTORIES OF URBAN WOMEN’S LIVELIHOODS

Gendered livelihoods encompass the material realities and ideological processes that shape and are shaped by economic strategies in diverse geographical locations (Oberhauser et al. 2004:205).

When interviewed in the mid-1990s, the main livelihood activity of all the 21 women but one was subsistence agriculture. The exception was a primary school teacher, who also grew crops for household sustenance. The women
were all involved in the same activities as they had always been. The majority of the women were living with their husbands, most of them working together on the family fields, jointly sustaining the household. However, there were signs of change indicating the general trend of an increased need to access cash in the urban society. There were two new tendencies in these women’s livelihood activities. One was that many of the women had adapted their activities to earning an income. These activities were all related to farming or natural resource extraction, most commonly to sell some of their produce, brew beer or cut firewood to sell. The other trend was that earlier the women would exchange food products or local beer for labour on their fields, whereas by the mid-90s most people would not work without payment. Consequently, the women needed to earn extra income to pay for the labour. The women were all involved in various combinations of social networks. Family and kin were very important, in rural home areas as well as within the urban area. Good neighbours and friends were also very important, as these relationships were embedded in daily life, based on closeness and trust. Some women had formed supportive groups of female friends, Nanchunawe, organised around activities such as burial ceremonies and condolence contributions, initiation rites, social gatherings and rotating work on each others’ fields.

More than a decade later when returning to Montepuez to follow up on how the women’s livelihood situations had evolved over the years, the overall picture was very much the same as earlier. Subsistence agriculture was still the completely dominating activity, supplemented by income-generating activities, such as sale of agricultural produce, beer and alcohol brewing, cutting of firewood and reed (for roofing) for sale. However, adaptations of livelihood activities had been made mainly due to changing household composition as well as due to changing economic and social circumstances in society.

Changes in household composition
The composition of the women’s households had undergone change over the years which influenced the social and economic organisation within the households. One third of the women interviewed were married, some to new husbands as compared to a decade ago, one third of the women had lost their husbands and another third of the women were either widowed or separated a decade ago and were still living without a husband, overall indicating a change towards fewer adult men in these households. At the same time the women’s children had grown up and gradually left to marry and build their own households. This trend leads to diminishing labour resources within the households, both in numbers as well as in the women’s bodily strength due to old age and sickness, which is vital in a livelihood situation completely depending on a labour-intensive agricultural economy. A decreasing number of able-bodied individuals in the households limits the number and variety of
activities carried out, as well as the time spent on each of these activities, leading to decreasing production output and a weakening household economy in terms of access to various kinds of resources. Some of the households had undergone reconstruction during the decade that had passed to include other individuals sharing in productive, income-generating and reproductive activities, most commonly a daughter who had moved back to live with her mother.

In the mid-90s Ancha was married and had one daughter at home. The daughter was in school but assisted in household chores. Ancha’s main activity was subsistence agriculture. She worked her fields alone, while her husband had his own fields. To earn money for clothes and other necessities she usually sold some of her produce or firewood. Ancha had a large family network living nearby and she participated in a group of *Nanchunawe*. She could get help and support from either her female friends or her family network. She thought they were sustaining their household well.

In 2008 Ancha was divorced. The daughter had married and moved to Pemba on the coast, but an older daughter who had been married had become mentally ill and had returned to her mother’s house together with three of her children. The older boys were helping out around the house, whereas their mother did not do anything. In January 2007 Ancha and her family were living in an old rundown house, but in October 2008 they had moved to a new house constructed by Ancha’s married daughter in Pemba, as heavy rains had washed the old house away. Ancha was still doing agricultural work: on her own fields as well as a member of an association of older women. On her own fields she produced maize, groundnuts and cassava, of which she sold a part to buy basic necessities. She also cut firewood to sell. The association of 50 women cultivated rice and their production had increased considerably. One part was sold and the money deposited in a bank (but she did not know for what purpose!), one part was divided among members for consumption, and one part was kept for seeds. Ancha was the sole provider in her household; she was feeling well even though her bodily strength was weakening and the subsistence production had decreased since her husband left. Because of the joint work of the association Ancha could not work so much on her own fields anymore. Her biggest worry was her sick daughter. Both Ancha’s family network and her younger daughter supported her with food, clothes and money. Ancha was still in a group of *Nanchunawe*, their activities involving mutual support at burial ceremonies and working on each other’s fields.

The level of Ancha’s agency was based on her limited access to resources, the main resources being her weakening bodily strength and her family network. As sole provider in a household of five, she joined the association of older women to produce rice in order to obtain food and income in addition to what she was able to produce herself.
Changes in economic activities

The general ongoing change in society is the increased need for accessing cash, and an overall observation is that many more people are active in various forms of informal trading of many more kinds of goods. The general opinion among the women interviewed was that women in particular have become much more economically active outside their homes in various kinds of income-generating activities. One activity that seems to have been growing throughout the neighbourhood, especially among women, is the production and sale of Cabanga and Nipa. Cabanga is a local beer that takes a few days to produce; Nipa requires greater investment of time and money; it is a stronger drink and the producers have to buy sugar to be able to make it. Several of the women interviewed were involved in this kind of production to supplement household income, based on their own agricultural produce when available, otherwise on purchased ingredients. Another recent process is the expansion of agricultural land, probably for three main reasons: peace and relative stability, increased need for cash and the fact that there are many more things to buy in the local markets nowadays. The latter two are interrelated and are both incentives to increase agricultural production for the market, either of traditional food crops or by entering into cash crop production.

In the mid-90s Teresa’s main activity was subsistence agriculture. In order to earn cash she used to produce Cabanga and cakes to sell outside her house. By 2008 Teresa had married a new husband who was seasonally employed in the local cotton factory. Teresa relied on two main activities to sustain her household: agriculture as well as producing and selling Nipa. Seasonally and during weekends Teresa and her husband would work jointly on the fields. Teresa had one old field where she produced groundnuts and sorghum. Two years ago they opened up three new fields where they produce rice, maize and cassava. The new fields were opened with hired workers, who were paid in cash as well as with Nipa. As the size of their agricultural land has increased considerably, the husband’s cash income is used to pay agricultural workers. With increased agricultural production Teresa can sell some of the produce, some maize is used for producing Nipa, and the rest is consumed. The production and sale of Nipa is carried out all through the year and is regarded as the most important activity for easing the vulnerability of the household.

In her household Teresa has access to a wider resource base, including her husband’s cash income, enhancing her gendered agency to act. These resources have been used to enlarge their natural resource base through adding to their land area in order to further increase agricultural production for consumption and sale, as well as for input into the production of the alcoholic drinks, bringing the regular income that is most highly valued.
Social networks turning economic

All but three of the women interviewed in the mid-90s were members of groups of Nanchunawe, a mainly social and cultural reciprocity network at the time. More than a decade later all the women interviewed were members of groups of Nanchunawe, even the three that did not belong to any at the earlier stage. The major change within these networks was the addition of rotating economic reciprocity in savings and credits, stique, which did not exist in any of the groups encountered in the mid-90s, again indicating increased monetisation in this agriculturally-based economy. The local economic reciprocity system works so that the group members decide on a minimum amount that everyone has to contribute at each meeting of a round, and it is up to anyone to add to the minimum amount according to her means. The woman receiving the lump sum must give back the minimum amount plus the same additional amounts to the same persons who added any amounts to the lump sum she received. In some groups the women also add ‘a gift’ to the contribution in money, normally some household item, like a cup, a plate or even a capulana (wrapper), which similarly has to be given to the same person who added ‘a gift’ in the first place.

In the mid-90s Maria was married with seven children at home. Her husband was unemployed and she regarded herself as the sole supporter of everyone living in her household. Maria had three fields that she cultivated alone, her husband helping out from time to time, but not regularly. Sometimes she hired workers for intensive work. Maria did not sell any of her produce; instead she used a part for producing Cabanga and Nipa to sell. She would earn more from selling brew than from selling her produce. The money was used to pay for agricultural workers. Maria was also trying to open up yet another field to produce cotton – she had six men working there – to earn even more money. Maria had some female friends that she could ask for support but she was not member of any group of Nanchunawe.

In 2008 Maria was divorced, living with five children who all went to school. Maria was the sole supporter of her household; she worked harder than earlier and produced more. Maria’s main activities were still agriculture and producing Cabanga and Nipa. The brew was produced for sale all year around and the income was used to buy household necessities, to pay school fees and material, as well as to pay agricultural workers. Hired labour could also be paid in produce or brew. Gradually Maria had enlarged her land area by hiring workers, and her production had steadily increased. Her business was going well! In 2007 Maria had invested a lot in a big, new house with zinc sheet roofing. In 2008 the house had been completely destroyed by heavy rains and they had constructed a new smaller house to which the zinc sheets were shifted. Maria had also bought a small house in the village where she stays when working on the fields, she also bought a bicycle so she could trans-
port her produce to town herself. For the last two years Maria had been member of a group of Nanchunawe. Their joint activities involved various kinds of mutual support, but the main activity was stique. In January 2007 the group joined on Sundays to contribute 50 meticais (USD 2) each plus ‘a gift’. If someone wanted she could add to that amount. Gradually the amounts had increased and in Oct. 2008 the minimum contribution was 200 meticais per person plus ‘a gift’. Maria used the money she got from stique to buy sugar to produce Nipa or to pay agricultural workers. Maria found that through stique women could develop their own activities and many more women had become heads of households, deciding for themselves.

Even though she has been the sole provider for her large household for a long time, Maria’s level of agency is high, rooted in her own knowledge, ingenuity and capacity to act. Maria is an entrepreneur and already in the mid-90s she was a small-scale businesswoman, controlling her own activities and always on the move to further develop them. The income she has earned from her activities has further strengthened her to act, and in joining a group of savings and credits, she is able to mobilise larger sums of money for investments in her economic activities.

**CONCLUDING DISCUSSION**

Despite the prolonged period of economic growth in Mozambique, extended poverty prevails in northern Mozambique. On a national scale the market-oriented growth strategy, driven by large-scale FDI and donor support, has perpetuated both socio-economic as well as regional inequalities. There are also signs of growing gender inequality as women are more often found among the poor and chronic poor, lacking access to, and control over, key resources. The northern region is still characterised by a small-scale agricultural economy, based on manual, labour-intensive techniques with low production output and income, as well as very low levels of formal education. For the current national policy, emphasising the modernisation and commercialisation of smallholder agriculture, to be even somewhat successful in such a context it needs to be supported by a strategy seriously targeting small-scale agriculture, with an emphasis on a gender aware approach to reduce chronic poverty and vulnerability.

In a context of general market liberalisation the women in Montepuez have, in various ways and to varying degrees, adapted their livelihood strategies in order to cope with ongoing change. The strategy each woman adopted for her livelihood depends on the level of access to various kinds of resources – land, cash income and social networks – as well as on household composition at different times. Equally important are locally constructed gender identities and power relations, conditioning the woman’s level of gendered agency that shapes the politics of her everyday life.
These findings indicate that in a small-scale, labour intensive agricultural economy, changing household composition over the course of life as well as age, formal education, health and bodily strength, are the most vital aspects influencing the extent and direction of changes in daily activities and livelihood strategies possible. The changing social and economic contexts have, to varying degrees, influenced the women in their search for income-generating activities, either through changing traditional activities or developing new ones, such as selling part of their production or entering into cash crop production and petty trade. Another response to the increased monetisation of society, especially to the difficulty of accessing financial resources, is the increasing collective organisation among women in the locally constructed savings systems and economic reciprocity networks. In their everyday struggles to support their households, continuously reconstructing how they organise their daily activities, the women have also gradually changed the locally constructed gender roles and relations. By entering the public space, performing activities that women formerly did not do and by earning incomes of their own, women have enhanced their gendered agency in local society.

As pointed out by Schlyter in the Introduction, support to women’s capacity to organise themselves for collective action and resource mobilisation would certainly be an area for intervention even under informal economic conditions, in order to further enhance women’s capacities to make strategic choices in their everyday lives. However, such support would have to be adapted to the material conditions, gender identities and existing power relations in particular places.

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BODES AT WORK IN VOLVO PLANTS IN SWEDEN AND SOUTH AFRICA

Paula Mählck

INTRODUCTION

Global structures of inequality necessitate intercontinental inquiry, generating political geographic discourses between the Global North and the Global South; the East and the West. In this article I take up this challenge by exploring body politics and the neoliberal organisation of capital and global division of labour in the motor industry. I do this by studying global changes in working conditions in a transnational corporation; more specifically, workers’ bodily experiences and embodied practices in the different workplaces and gendered forms of oppression and resistance as they are forged through globalising forces.

Theories on globalisation and working life are often designed for issues operating on macro level such as networks and flow and mobility of workers. Within this field workers’ experiences, including how they perceive their bodies in their workplaces, are less theorised. Consequently the article has the theoretical ambition to discuss and, to some extent, reclaim focus on how bodies are experienced, used and organised in working life and how such processes are gendered, classed and racialised.

Background

The autumn of 2008 will, among other things, be remembered as the starting point for the worst world scale economic crisis since the 1930s. Across the world the automobile sector has shown to be particularly exposed to the financial situation, leaving masses of workers unemployed. In this text some results from interviews with workers and management in Volvo bus plants in Sweden and

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18 Parts of this text are published in “Embodying Global Division of Labour: Reflections from Sweden and South Africa” (2009) in “Centrum med många inriktningar. En festskrift till Gunilla Bjerens”. Centre for Gender Studies Report Series no 43. They are published with the consent of the editor.
South Africa will be presented\textsuperscript{19}. In Durban, South Africa, 24 workers, and three people from management were interviewed. Similarly, in Umeå Sweden, 24 workers were interviewed. As recommended by Patton (1987) we have striven for maximum variation in terms of gender, ethnicity and age as well as work occupation within the factory. Having conducted similar, but not identical, case studies in different factories within the same transnational corporation, \textit{tnc}, in different parts of the world theoretical and methodological ambitions have not been to compare equivalents, but rather to gain a deeper understanding of how local and global relations mutually impact on workers’ everyday lives in different plants in the same global company. The Volvo Group is a Swedish majority-owned \textit{tnc} with sales activities in 180 countries, production units in 19 countries and more than 100,000 employees all over the world.\textsuperscript{20}

South Africa and Sweden are very different in terms of size, demographic constitution and political and economic development. Nevertheless, the countries are connected historically through the anti-apartheid movement and several bilateral agreements in various sectors of society. During the 1990s Botswana established an economic policy aimed at attracting foreign investment into the country. This manifested itself through favourable tax regulations, among other measures. In 1993 The Swedish Motor Corporation started assembly of Volvo trucks and buses from kits from Gothenburg and in 2000 this company was taken over by the Volvo Group and Volvo established itself in the region. When production grew too big to benefit from the government tax breaks, in 2005 production was moved from Gaborone in Botswana to Durban in South Africa, leaving 80 workers in Gaborone unemployed. The South African factory mainly works with parts produced in, and shipped from, the Swedish factory in Umeå.

\textbf{THEORETICAL UNDERSTANDINGS OF BODIES AT WORK}

To date there is a considerable amount of research on the ways work and workers in the global South have been gendered (Mies, 1998; Ong, 1987). The ideal worker has been identified as a young woman who is regarded as being particularly suited to handling repetitive, “fine/not so heavy” work. Young women are also seen as more dependent and easier to control, and thus exploit, than their male counterparts.

\textsuperscript{19} The empirical material in this text is part of a larger project on workers’ everyday working life in transnational corporations, funded by the Swedish Research Council (\textit{vr}) (2005–2008). Within this larger study a similar case study of Volvo workers in Mexico was conducted in 2006 (see also Rathzel et al 2008). The text has benefitted from discussions with the research team Aina Tollefsen, Irene Molina, Diana Mulinari and Nora Rathzel. Responsibility for the content lies with the author.

Studies with a post-colonial perspective point at the legacy of colonialism and the way racialised labour is utilised on a world scale as being largely intertwined. Historically mainly racialised male workers have been employed and separated from their families whereas now young racialised female workers are becoming the prime factory and service worker group (Bonachic, 2008: 52:3). Although it is recognised that most of the global factories are in the global South, the racialisation of female workers has received less attention. This is often taken for granted and ignored (ibid.).

Noting the need for more attention to the racialisation of female workers, in this paper I have chosen to focus on two particular perspectives; the historical materialist perspective on the body and the interactionist ontology.

Using a historical materialism perspective, David Harvey’s (1998) work is on bodies and the division of labour on a world scale. He writes: “Class, racial, gender and all manner of other divisions are marked upon the human body by the virtue of the different socio-ecological process that do their work upon that body” (p. 403). He further argues that working bodies needs to be analysed with specific attention to the conflict between workers and capital. This conflict needs to be analysed both at the level of the actual workplace and on a more abstract level, such as the world market.

In the same article Harvey also suggests a widening of the concept of body politics to include struggles to make a living. The article (which is about a campaign for better living led by African-American women working as cleaners in Baltimore) is a relevant critique of some feminist research on body politics for not considering the material conditions of bodies, nevertheless it does not treat the body in terms of the lived efforts involved in the struggle to make a living explicitly, neither is there an analysis of the racialisation of work and workers (Wolkowitz, 2006).

From a feminist perspective, women’s bodies have often been the starting point for studying body politics in working life. This theoretical field has been dominated by highly abstract poststructuralist feminists that have primarily made textual analysis of bodies, stressing fluidity and the context-bound ways in which bodies are constructed. While acknowledging the tremendous impact this research has had for enhancing less essentialised views on women’s bodies, this text moves away from a purely textual analysis of the body to an analysis in which language and materiality are fully embedded into each other. This is done by introducing what Nancy Tuana calls an interactionist ontology as an analytical starting point (Tuana, 2008). From a material feminist perspective Tuana studies global environmental changes and the embodiment of Hurricane Katrina, as well as the embodiment of women and men. Her main argument is that feminist theory need to be trans-disciplinary and develop an epistemology that moves beyond a dichotomous thinking of nature vs. culture or material vs. semiotic. Instead the porosity of these poles must be stressed or
in Tuana’s own words “The world is neither fabricated in the sense created out of human cultural practice, nor is its existence independent of human interactions of a multitude of forms, including cultural” (ibid. p. 191).

This broader interactionist perspective changes the fundamentals of the social constructivism vs. “realism” debate and makes the study of the material dimensions of the social and the agency of the natural possible, without falling into biological essentialism. This is knowledge that is too often missing and is often desperately needed since it reveals “the intersections between things and people, between feats of engineering and social structures, between experiences and bodies” (ibid. p. 189). The absence of this knowledge has proven to have particular negative effects on marginalised groups since they generally have fewer resources. Tuana exemplifies this by analysing the relationship between racism, poverty, disability and the chances of surviving the hurricane. She changes the perspective from studying women’s embodiment to studying the embodiment of the hurricane and its environmental, social and economic consequences, as well as the embodiment of women and men.

Let us now explore how these theoretical arguments can be applied to the analysis of the neo-liberal organisation of capital and global division of labour; more specifically the bodies at work in Volvo plants in Sweden and South Africa.

FACTORY WORK REFLECTING THE GLOBAL DIVISION OF LABOUR

“Over two million women and men die each year as a result of occupational accidents and work-related diseases, and average more than 5 000 every day. Across the globe, there are some 270 million occupational accidents annually and 160 million workers suffer from occupational diseases. […] Increasingly, the conditions imposed by the impediments of globalisation are resulting in the replacement of safe and healthy workplaces in one part of the world by more dangerous working environments in others. […]” (Labour & Environment: collective commitments for sustainable development 2006:2621.)

From the quotation above we can see that workers’ health and workplace-related health and safety is a burning issue across the globe and that it is intertwined with the “post” colonial north-south division of labour. In South Africa the workplace accident fatality estimate is 19/100 000 workers whereas in Sweden it is 2/100 00022. In both Sweden and South Africa workers within
the manufacturing sector are considered to be involved in high risk work in terms of health and safety (Laborsta – database of labour statistics)\(^3\).

One of the dominating features of globalisation, and for our purposes the neo-liberal organisation of capital, is the global work division of labour. In this study it manifests itself, among other ways, in that production and workplaces have moved to so called “middle income countries” whereas the surplus capital still goes in the direction of the metropolis, Sweden. The Swedish factory in Umeå produces cabs and kits that are shipped to, among other places, South Africa where they are assembled into trucks.

A manager describes the reasons for re-locating manufacturing to non-European countries like this:

[...] You can say that labour is cheaper here than it is in Europe. Yes of course it is. That is why we have factories in China, which has even cheaper labour than in South Africa, in India which is again cheaper than South Africa, I mean we have our factories strategically located in the markets we need to be in, but we have to be cost efficient. All the time I’m competing against Tuve (the Swedish factory where the management is: my comment). South Africa, India, China we are all the time competing against Tuve. If I cannot import a kit and produce it cheaper than Tuve then why should the market come here and buy it from me. Give it to Tuve. [...] 

In this quotation the global division of labour becomes clear, as well as the internal competition for work and profit within the company as it is experienced on the management level.

From Tuana’s (2008) viewpoint it follows that the neo-liberal organisation of capital, global division of labour and the material consequences for working bodies should be read as the result of complex interactions of local-global material-semiotic relations. In this case the global division of labour within the company is produced by the interaction of the colonial legacy, environmental and political relationships. These material-semiotic relations have material effects on the working bodies and, thus, produce the material-semiotic body. In accordance with Harvey’s historical materialist analysis of the relational body, a feminist material perspective connects the working body with global processes. However, the feminist material perspective puts greater emphasis on the lived efforts involved in work and the body that these efforts produce.

It is worth noting that the factories had quite different production tasks indicating a global work division, as well as a hierarchical technological and information transfer, that followed the North-South divide. If we relate the quotation to the overall picture of the gender and race distribution of workers and management, particularly within the South African factory, we can see that the hierarchical organisation of labour on a global scale coincides with the hierarchical organisation of labour within the factories. There are always specific explanations, in this case the post-apartheid quota policies that have been introduced into South African workplaces, which prescribe that the composition of the workforce should reflect the composition of the population in any given area.

In the South African factory the management was predominately male and white, of British or Swedish origin, whereas the majority of workers were male and black of African or Indian decent24. Although the same ethnic/racial hierarchisation of bodies in terms of management-worker labour relations was not observed in the Swedish factory, we could see that different bodies were situated differently within the plant, and valued differently in the workplace. The following section will focus more extensively on these processes.

Women in production

Being aware of the vast differences between the factories in terms of size and modes of production, as well as differences between the categories of women working within them, one commonality was the way in which women in both factories reported having to struggle with equipment and heavy work that was designed for bigger and stronger bodies i.e. male bodies. In the Swedish factory this had increased occupational health problems for women, often resulting in long-term illness. A black woman worker in the South African factory describes her work situation:

[...] I feel it is heavy. Because parts are heavy. But I’m used to it now. But when I came here I was always complaining because when I go home I never eat, I just fall asleep until the next morning.

A black male worker answers the question of whether women and men can do the same work in the South African factory:

[...]

24 Because of a certain divergence in the use of the concepts of ethnicity and race in Sweden and South Africa, socially and politically, I have chosen to base the analysis on both these concepts for the sake of being context-specific. However, this is done being well aware of the fact that both ethnicity and race are highly complex and contested concepts (for an elaboration of these concepts, see Brah 2001).
Here I would say no. Because obviously, like fitting tyres you have big wheels, with a tyre on it. This is very heavy. Of course a woman will not be able to do that. It is very... they could try but I’m not sure.

Despite the heavy work women workers in the South African factory expressed great confidence in their skills as workers. Overall, there was a sense of confidence and optimism among the South African workers. They stressed the unique social and economic position of South Africa in the region and the recent successful transition from apartheid to democracy. Many, and particularly those who had worked in other automobile companies, did not think the company lived up to their expectations in terms of technological level and working conditions, (including salaries) “We don’t even work with computers here”. With regard to working conditions they were surprised about the management’s reluctance to work with the union. Since the company had recently settled in after leaving Botswana, the workers interpreted this as lack of knowledge that would be adjusted once the management became accustomed to South African labour market structures.

Within a competitive system

Although the workers in Sweden expressed self-confidence in relation to their work, there was also a sense of being peripheral, both within Sweden as well as globally. This manifested itself, among other ways, in the competitive relationships with the plants in Tuve and Gent, as well as a constant pressure and anxiety over the possibility that some of the manufacturing would be moved abroad.

In Sweden the number of women in the factory had increased over the last ten-year period. During the same period, work organisation had changed from more team-based production to work on the line. This change had considerably decreased workers’ job satisfaction; they now experienced greater stress and health problems. The current tendency was to employ young workers for work on the line and the majority of women workers were working on the line. The work on the line had proven to be particularly harsh on women’s bodies. This had sometimes led to an increased tension and competition between women and men for favourable positions in the factory (i.e. less heavy, less monotonous and less stressful work).

The tensions between women and men were not as visible in the South African factory. One reason for this may be that the work on the line had not been introduced and there were generally less differences between favourable and less favourable positions within the factory as compared to the Swedish factory. A white male of Swedish ethnic background who had worked for almost two decades in assembly and who had tried to be transferred, but had not succeeded, describes it like this:
We know that assembly is heavy. Men are stronger than women. They can deal with it. But the company says that both women and men should be able to do the work that it doesn’t matter. But it doesn’t work. [...] Women’s bodies don’t hold and they have to change work. So it can be a disadvantage to do sports and keep ... [fit: my comment] Yes if you are a bit fragile you can get better work.

From this quotation we can read that this male worker perceives the current situation as being advantageous for women, however, the current sick leave situation for women working in the factory indicates the opposite.

The tension between women and men workers sometimes expressed itself in terms of sexual harassment. A white woman worker of Swedish ethnic background describes it like this:

I have to say the jargon was terrible. I could not accept to be called names. A guy once called me this, then I pushed him against the wall and said ‘I call you by your first name and family name and I want you to call me by my first name and family name and nothing else’ [...] I think you have to make a statement and not accept this; ‘you can speak like this in your bedroom but not here’. [...] You have to draw the line but the line is a very thin line when it comes to women. From being accepted as a working colleague to being a bitch, it is a very thin line.

From the last two quotations we can read a situation in which women and men are competing for workplaces that are less harsh on their bodies.

What creates the situation is the global competitive system in which the different factories in the TNC are competing against each other for profit and, in the long run, their very existence (see the first quotation), the way technology is shaped and used to extract as much surplus value from working bodies (i.e. the reintroduction of working on the line) and the way gendered bodies respond to this (less work satisfaction and increased health problems particularly for women). Finally we can also read national gender equality politics reflected in the company’s “gender equality policies” i.e. “Both women and men should be able to do this work”.

The workers’ verbal and embodied response to this situation is also visible in the last quotation. Hence, what we see is that it is the rich interaction between bodies, language, technology, national politics and the neo-liberal organisation of capital that construct the current situation.
The combination of Harvey’s historical materialist perspective on the working body with Tuana’s interactionist ontology allows us to move the analysis from workers’ embodiment in the factories to an analysis in which gender relations, the embodiment of the neo-liberal organisation of capital, national politics and workers embodiment is analysed.

CONCLUSION

In this article I have briefly illustrated global changes in working conditions and workers’ bodily experiences in the same transnational corporation at different geographical locations, Sweden and South Africa. The factories were hierarchically organised in relation to technological and information transfer that followed a North-South divide.

The global competition for profit within the same transnational company had changed the way work was organised and the use of technology. This had resulted in the reintroduction of work on the line in the Swedish factory which had particularly harsh consequences for women’s bodies. In the South African factory both women and men reported heavy work, the women having to struggle with equipment designed for male bodies. The workers also reported on the management’s reluctance to work with the union, low technological level as well as low salaries as compared to other motor industries in the region. In both factories the management were white and male dominated with Swedish or British ethnic background, the working staff composition and work organisation reflected national politics, in Sweden gender equality politics and in South Africa national quota politics.

We can see that the global organisation of capital and global division of labour as well as national politics has significance for how labour is organised within factories and that the workers’ bodily experiences from this were similar but not identical in the different workplace. A commonality was the particularly negative effects on women’s bodies. The small snapshot of empirical material on global change and workers’ bodily experiences that has been highlighted in this article has hopefully enabled a deeper understanding of how local and global relations mutually impact on workers’ everyday lives in different plants, in different geographical locations in the same global company.

Theoretically the results indicate a need to expand macro-oriented theories to combine different analytical levels and look at the ways in which they are interconnected. This is achieved by bridging historical materialist views on the working body with material feminism from a post-colonial perspective. More specifically this implies a broad interactionist perspective – the mutual constitution of gender, class and race relations, working bodies, technology, language and politics. Such a perspective enables an analysis of the
working body and global division of labour that focuses on ways in which
global structures of inequality are interconnected, constructed and main-
tained at different analytical levels, without losing sight of the material or
falling into biological essentialism.

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INTRODUCTION

Polygamy is practiced in urban areas in Malawi and the injustice of sharing of property within the polygamous families has become an issue. Both men and women have been victims of this injustice as concerns sharing of resources, but the women and children have suffered more. Malawi, although it appears to have become modernised since democracy was introduced, remains a traditional society which still practises polygamy. The law on civil marriage is based on the formal British legal system in which marriage is monogamous, and polygamy is prohibited by penal code. However, the predominant form of marriage in Malawi is based on customary law which allows polygamy. Consequently, polygamy still affects one fifth of married women. There is a discrepancy between the declarations of equality in the constitution and customary law and traditions. Customary law acts as a norm in the socialisation process, and forms the actual relationship between men and women.

Malawi is a party to several international instruments that uphold nondiscrimination and equality of individuals. These include the protocol to the African Charter on Human and People’s Rights on the Rights of women in Africa, cedaw and sadc Head of States and Government, declaring its addendum on prevention and eradication of violence against women and children. Malawi’s constitutions has also entrenched a bill of rights which includes right of women and proscribes discrimination on any grounds. Polygamy generally conflicts with the spirit of cedaw and other protocols which guarantee equal rights for men and women in marriage. Polygamy is regarded as some form of slavery of women and children, them being used as labourers on farms that are controlled by men. This violates the right not to be held in slavery or servitude (Section 27(1) Malawi Constitution). This paper examines the problem of sharing of resources in the form of housing and other investments among men, women and children in polygamous families.

25 http://genderindex.org/country/Malawi-3-10-09
The citizenship of women is controversial in Malawian society. Being born a woman, automatically assigns roles of dependence. On the birth of a girl child, ridiculing statements are made. For instance, if asked about the gender of a new-born baby girl, the answers could be *tabeleka hule* meaning it’s a prostitute, or *otipatsa nsomba* meaning she will bring fish to the household, which is a metaphor meaning she will get someone who will buy fish for us. This means the female body is assigned names of inferiority and as a piece of property in the market, implying exchange of her body for wealth to the society. Even though the universal conventions and country constitutions recognise women as equals in development and citizenry, the community still regards them with low esteem. Evidence that women are considered as second-class citizens is illustrated in polygamous families where the husband makes unilateral decisions on the disposal of property.

In Malawi, polygamy is not a new phenomenon; it has been used for hundreds of years as a means of showing masculinity associated with wealth and a man’s strength. However with urbanisation and modernisation, the practice of polygamy is becoming problematic especially where the resources are becoming too limited to sustain multiple family members. Urban family members are becoming more individualistic and conflicts are bound to occur. In rural areas, even though polygamy was more acceptable, the husband’s sharing of love and assistance tended to be more favourable to the younger wife which is illustrated in the following song:

*Mother: Wamwana wane Joni, Joni wamwana wane Joni kacheme wawuso wali kumphala* (My son John, can you call your dad from the men’s shelter).

*Joni: Namwe wamama ngati wadada wakumutemwani wali kuwanyinu vibamu vinkhonde wali kw imwe chibamu chimoza ine yayi mtima kwawawa amama* (Mother, why do you bother as if dad loves you, he gives five loaves of bread to your co-wife and only one to you, that pains me a lot).

This is an expression by the son of unfairness in distribution of resources in the rural areas and this does not differ from the situation in the urban areas. Consequently whatever happens, there is likely to be injustice in the sharing of resources amongst the polygamous family members. This paper tries to examine the urban scenario of sharing of resources in polygamous families and documents the experiences of men and women as concerns polygamy. It is based on a study that used the qualitative approach of life histories and case studies.
CONCEPTUAL CONSIDERATIONS

The paper uses the patriarchal analytical framework in understanding the position of women in polygamous marriages. Within feminism, patriarchy refers to the system, which men as a group are constructed as superior to women as a group and therefore they are assumed to have authority over women. The patriarchy approach may lack flexibility as it assumes that men’s position is superior in the same way in all traditional and legal systems. There are spatial and cultural variations which determine the extent of women’s vulnerability to men’s oppression.

Malawi has two marriage systems – matrilineal and patrilineal – and polygamy is mostly common among patrilineal society. Somewhat simplified it could be claimed that women in matrilineal societies have more freedom than in patrilineal societies and experience less male control than those in patrilineal societies. In matrilineal societies women have the freedom to divorce and remarry without problems or strings. In this society no bride price is paid so they are not tied down. With these cultural variations it would be wrong to conclude that all women are oppressed in a similar manner, neither does that guarantee lack of exploitation by men. Men have few ties to women in this society and aspects of their citizenship are threatened similar to the situation for women in the patrilineal society. However, one note is that this scenario is different in urban areas where men are more empowered. It could be said that urban men are liberated from the societal oppression in their wives’ homes, while rural women’s liberal position is threatened.

Masculinity

Masculinity in a Malawian cultural situation is strengthened if a man has conquering power thus possessing several women, sex and money. The marrying of many women may be included as a masculinity ideal in the African context. Connell and Mares, cited in Nakamura (2004) maintain that notions of masculinity and femininity are grounded in a relational power dynamics between men and women. The Nakamura definition of masculinity as being a husband, father, provider and protector of family is one approach, however this definition denies the centrality of sexuality and control over women in conceptions of masculinity.

Norms related to masculinity and sexuality, such as those which expose male sexual needs as uncontrollable, multiple partners as evidence of sexual prowess and dominance over women (physical and sexual), are indicated as risk factors for HIV infection (Barker and Ricardo, 2005).
Polygamy

Harriet Beecher Stowe as quoted in Embry (1987) describes polygamy as slavery which debases and degrades womanhood, motherhood and family. It is also said to deprive women of their unique place in the family and of their domestic rights. However, there are divergent views on polygamy; others regard polygamy as an opportunity for women’s independence, different from the Victorian ideal of home maker (Embry, 1987). Some modern women view polygamy as a creative plan that free females from a limited role. Despite the divergent views on polygamy, Article 6 of the Maputo Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa encourages ‘monogamy…as the preferred form of marriage’ (see Annex 4). Where polygamy exists, the Protocol seeks to promote and protect the rights of women and for both woman and man to be regarded as equal partners in marriage (Kopano, 2006). But in practice this is not recognised in Malawi. Women are still regarded as bulldozers and second class citizens. Tradition does not recognise a woman as having equal rights to a man; the man has more control even in the matrilineal societies where women are more liberal, their uncles and brothers have more say in their lives and also in access to resources.

Citizenship

Citizenship is variably defined as the status of being vested with the rights, privileges, and duties of a citizen. It may also be defined as the character of an individual viewed as a member of society; behaviour in terms of the duties, obligations and functions of a citizen. In polygamous families women’s rights are not fully exercised, thus reducing their status as full citizens with full rights. In polygamous families the name of the husband appears on all wives’ certificates concerning land and housing. Although the constitution allows women to own property in their own right, society does not recognise this right. In patrilineal society, upon marriage girls move to the home of their husband and inherit no land from their parents. Bride prices and dowries are commonly used, and girls are seen as the property of the husband and his clan. This also implies that if the husband dies, his wife is still the property of his clan and may be inherited by his brothers.

EXPERIENCES OF MEN AND WOMEN IN POLYGAMOUS FAMILIES

This section presents experiences of men, women and children in polygamous families.

The narratives presented are selected from about seven case studies collected in 2008, thus years after the adoption of African Charter on Human Rights and Women’s Rights. It was important to see whether the charter has
had any influence on the way women are treated. The sample was purposely selected making sure that the study targeted the members of polygamous families, the informants include first and second wives, husbands and children. In-depth interviews were conducted to highlight their problems as well as their experiences. The data has been analysed using narrative analysis documenting experiences and analysing the verbal and body language used in describing their experiences.

Reaping on what she did not sow

Mrs. Banda (not her really name) was married to her husband for 17 years when her husband expressed the need to marry a second wife. She narrated her experiences in the polygamous marriage as follows:

My husband told me that he wanted to marry another wife and I had very little choice so I agreed. He had been in this secret marriage until one day I discovered that he started disappearing from home longer than usual. I confronted him and he told me that indeed he had a concubine who he wanted to marry as a second wife. This woman was from matrilineal society where polygamy is rarely practiced and I sensed danger. Before my husband married a second wife we had built a house using a mortgage from my husband’s work place. Upon completion of the house we used the rentals to build another house that we intended to occupy upon completion. During the time we were constructing this house, although I was not formally employed, we had to sacrifice, our eating habits changed to save for the house. After completion my husband told me we were going to share with my co-wife. I had no source of income but I couldn’t swallow my pride to share a house with my co-wife so I went to the village. While in the village my husband hardly helped me with basic necessities, I had to fend for myself and also take care of his parents.

In polygamous families there is very little room to negotiate resources, especially when one party is not financially empowered. Mrs. Banda had, with her work at home, supported her husband in the construction of the house, but she had no control over the resources. The second wife who had contributed nothing enjoyed the sweat of her co-wife. Mrs. Banda decided to go the village, which would put her in a disadvantageous position if her husband died intestate, because according to the Wills and Inheritance Act the wife, upon the death of the husband, inherits the house that she resides in. In this case Mrs. Banda senior would inherit a village house, which has no economic value, while the second wife would inherit the house in the urban area, which
has high economic value. This house can be rented out at a profit while that of the senior wife, being located in the village, has no value at all and it cannot be sold should the necessity arise. This also denies the children from the first wife access to property in the urban area which is likely to be inherited by the second wife.

Patriarchal courts

Naphiri met her husband when she was working as a secretary. They got married and had two children. The husband was a businessman but after a few years the business went bankrupt and the wife continued supporting the family. After some time the family found a plot on which to build a house. Naphiri explains her ordeal as follows:

I obtained a loan with which we built the house which was registered in my husband’s name. After a few years I discovered my husband was cheating on me and when I confronted him he told me that indeed he was in love with another woman and wanted to marry her. By then the woman was already expecting his child. My husband married the woman and brought her in the house. I could not contain the situation and I decided to divorce my husband. The court proceeding commenced and all was finalised. Because I wanted the divorce I was told to pay back the lobola which I did. The house was given to my husband and I was only given the household properties. I protested because we had built the house with the money I borrowed from my work place but the courts maintained their stand because the house was in my husband’s name. I tried to appeal but I was unsuccessful, probably because the courts are full of men who could not help me. I had to leave without the house which I suffered to build and leave it to my co-wife. I suffered with the children alone.

In the case above we see the work of an unwritten gender contract which may not be substantiated in law but still guides the court. It is assumed that a woman cannot have control over resources. Therefore at the time of divorce she is not allowed to keep the property, although she had paid for it. This case shows injustice due to advantages of men being regarded as the sole owners of property or having colluded with the authorities to rule against the woman. This was in 1990s at a time when human rights were not actively supported, but the case cannot be reviewed and therefore construe an injustice. It must be assumed that this case would have been treated differently if it had occurred after Human Rights Charter for Women was adopted, as the courts would have been forced to consider the provision in the charter.
Making hay while the sun shines
Sharing resources in polygamous families can be problematic and there is usually competition between the two wives which leads to conflicts. Each of the women strategises in order to gain more access to resources. The experience of Mrs. Poto junior reveals some of the ways in which she managed to access family resources.

I married my husband as a second wife when I was 18 years old. I have been married to him for 8 years and we have two children who are 4 and 7 years old. My husband has four children with his first wife. My children being very young I asked my husband to change the title of one of the houses to my youngest child’s name so that I should support him in case something happens while he is young, and he did, even before asking his elder wife. I did this because I am afraid of my co-wife’s older children who may not want to share the resources upon my husband’s death.

Mrs. Poto senior said ‘I was not consulted about the change of ownership. Men normally don’t consult women when they know they will get a negative response, therefore I did not give my consent and indeed I would have not given any consent to such a transaction’. The husband’s act of not consulting his first wife is an expression of masculinity where men feel they have the power to do anything with their resources and that no one is in a position to question their authority. Thereby women are regarded as second-class citizens without rights to property, even property that they have helped to build. The above case seems to agree with Makasa (2005) that the power of being in control of resources in a household plays an important role in understanding the lived, gendered experiences in polygamous families.

Reaping from the consequences of conquest
Juliet married James as a second wife when he was a top civil servant and she was a registered nurse. James moved in with Juliet in their luxurious house in one of the suburbs and he rented a smaller house in high density housing area for his first wife. Juliet had also risen to a top position at her work and helped James to invest in a farm. Juliet explains some of her experiences as follows:

I met my husband when I was in nursing school by then I had two children from my previous husband and James married me. James bought a house and I decided to buy my own house in my own name knowing how vulnerable my children will be since James had two sets of children. We live in my husband’s house and since my husband is no longer working, my office
pays rent for the house and he has a tobacco farm and he gets money from his pension. We have two children and two grandchildren but my husband does not contribute anything to household management and uses his money to maintain his first wife and children.

While in the first cases we see first wives being economically disadvantaged by polygamy, in this case we see exploitation of the second wife. When asked why she keeps on with the relationship she explained that ‘I am used to being married and I wouldn’t want to leave him and lose respect, I would rather continue staying with him’.

It can be observed that culture and the notion of respectability make women stay in unhappy, and sometimes abusive, marriages. Women continue to put up a facade that they are married which is important in African culture. Teno quoted by Höller (2003) said that there are also many women in towns who do not want to be alone and who are prepared to accept being a second or a third wife in order to have the status of being married, and this does appear to be the case. Sometimes polygamy is shown as being connected to ideas of social nobility, respect and self-empowerment. As in the case of Juliet, she knows that her husband is supporting his first wife through exploiting her. She still wants to keep him to avoid embarrassment in the community.

Fear of property grabbing by first wife’s children

Mrs. Malaya married her boss while she was working for him as a secretary but she later retired. Mr. Malaya sent his first wife to the farm. By then his children from the first wife were all grown up. He never had any children with his second wife, but he was taking care of his second wife’s children from her first marriage. Mrs Malaya narrates the strategies she used to protect her property from the husband’s first wife’s children:

We built a house jointly using our combined pension money. We occupied the new house and after 10 years of marriage, my husband passed away. The house was registered in my husband’s name and he died intestate and the house was part of the deceased’s property. I was afraid that the house would be given to my husband’s first wife’s children who threatened to possess the house. They had no information that this was a joint venture. I decided not to move out of the house as a retention strategy. I tried to change ownership but it was difficult. Although I was having financial difficulties I thought it was wise to continue living in a five bedroomed house to protect it from being grabbed.
Women sometimes do not have information on inheritance laws. Mrs. Malaya did not know that according to Wills and Inheritance Act she was entitled to the house as long as she was residing in that house, but still felt that it enhanced her rights. This is a common problem to most women that they have no information on procedures and may lose property unnecessarily. However, her situation was tricky because she was in a polygamous marriage and from a matrilineal society where the heirs to the property used to be the nephews.

Men’s coping strategies

Men may adopt ways of protecting their property when in polygamous marriages.

Men are aware of the likely disadvantaged position they may be in when they marry younger second wives. It is assumed that the younger wives use their charm to control the decisions of the husband, especially those concerning disposal or distribution of the property the man had with his first wife. This may include the disposal of the house or change of ownership of the house to the young woman’s children or to herself. Men have therefore adopted ways of coping with situations in which the second wife, or any of their wives, try to con them. The experience of Mr. Mkwaila is presented below:

I married a second wife when my wife developed problems in having children. We had six children but I needed more and the second wife gave me another eight children. However, raising fourteen children and two wives was not an easy task so I sent my elder wife to my village but retained four of her children. I am 80 years old and I have many sons who are fighting over my house. Now my fear is that they will continue fighting and some may sell the house several times after my death, so I sold the house to ensure that all get a fair share. I have also written a will which outlines how they share the proceeds.

In this case we see Mr. Mkwaila protecting his property from his children’s greed, although it is not known how he has handled his will to ensure justice in sharing of resources. This is one of the coping strategies elderly men apply to prevent fights between children from multiple women. In situations like this it is unlikely that any deal will appear fair to all involved. However there is no guarantee that the second wife would manipulate him to get the money which he seems to be protecting against his wives and sons. In polygamous families there is a lot of competition, and it is the survival of the fittest. Those who are clever amass wealth and those who are not as competitive lose out in the game of scarce resources.
Children’s voices from polygamous families

The study wanted to find out how children access resources in polygamous families. One of the children from a first wife narrated his experiences as follows:

Before my father married a second wife we used to go to places like the lake at Christmas. Slowly the luxury came to a halt and my father told us that he was building a house for us. He told us that we were taking tea without milk because he was investing in the house and we were convinced that we would enjoy it in the future. When the house was complete my father asked my mother to share the house with his second wife but she refused and she opted to go to the village even though she spent a lot of time helping in the construction of the house. I and my siblings remained with my father and step mother. Life was not the same. We had no freedom in this house; after my mother left we did not feel at home at all. Our step-siblings seem to enjoy it in the house while we are like strangers. Sometimes they tell us to go to our mother because we are not their mother’s children. We normally fight because we tend to be defensive.

In this narrative the first wife does not enjoy the labour of her hands. The husband seems to have tricked her and her children into thinking that they were building a house for them to occupy, when he was thinking of sharing the house with his second wife. The spirit of competition between the children from the first wife and the stepmother and also the children from the first wife can also be observed as the latter have no sense of belonging. This is common in polygamous families. The second wife and her children take over the space in the house which the first wife and children used to enjoy. This seems to be unfair to the first wife’s children but they have very little negotiating power as juniors.

CONCLUSION

The paper has shown that women in polygamous families are regarded as second-class citizens. Regardless of whether the constitution recognises equal opportunity and rights between husband and wife, traditional laws still have the upper hand in Malawi. The woman has no right of access to property, neither has she the right to make decisions about how to dispose of or manage family property. Rather, she is regarded as part of the property. The constitution is not very clear as to the right of the wife to household property. Traditionally, in cases of separation the wife is only entitled to kitchen utensils,
while the more valuable properties such as houses are assumed to belong to the husband, regardless of whether the wife has helped to purchase or acquire such property. Even women who are economically empowered may often be subordinated to their husbands.

The issues of polygamy have been institutionalised in Malawi and many women have accepted it. This became evident from the media where some non-Muslims, Muslim leaders and women protested against a campaign by feminists to outlaw and stop polygamy. According to Mnela (2008) the men’s argument for polygamy is that it helps to absorb women whose numbers are high. They also regard it as a realistic answer to adulterous affairs and the lamentable conditions of widows or divorcees. In these times of AIDS pandemic, a first wife would rather have her husband marry a second wife than be promiscuous. Similarly, a woman would rather be a second wife than a concubine. There is a fear of being ridiculed by society for not having a husband, and in order to achieve financial security they allow themselves to be exploited or subjected to unfair treatment. However, the paper has shown that women, especially the younger ones, in order to claim their rights and survive have also adopted coping strategies which may seem deceptive.

The conclusion may be that as long as people consider men to stand above women, the notion of polygamy will relegate women to the status of objects rather than human beings with full rights. Polygamy exacerbates socio-economic abuse of women and children as the man often abdicates his responsibility of providing for the needs of his family as his economic burdens become heavier.

Polygamy generally conflicts with the spirit of CEDAW which guarantees equal rights for men and women in marriage (see Annex 2). The dual law system in Malawi as regards marriage perpetuates the practice of polygamy. It seems that in Malawi, the traditional norms are too strong to break and a lot of effort is needed to ensure compliance with international and national principles of social justice. There is the necessity for a concerted effort to reconstruct polygamy to ensure that there is equity in distribution of resources as this marriage institution appears to survive irrespective of laws. The experience of sharing resources has implications for a legal review to allow equal access to family resources. Intervention by the law is required to protect women.
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INTRODUCTION
This paper is about the relationship between motherhood, social responsibility and autonomy. It is an attempt to find harmony in women’s reproductive autonomy and social responsibility. Motherhood enjoys hegemony in African society. Consequently the question that arises is ‘to what extent do women freely choose to be mothers and have many children’? The paper seeks to understand the dynamics of contemporary perceptions of a woman’s ‘body’ as the primary factor in child bearing. It problematises the struggle by various players in society to control the woman’s ‘body’ within the context of a human rights framework. In other words, it tackles the need for women as individuals to be free of state and other intervention in the processes of procreation. Finally it advocates a balance between reproductive autonomy and responsible child bearing.

Context
The paper is set against the backdrop of Zambia’s high poverty levels, the HIV/AIDS pandemic and the rapidly increasing population. Unsustainable population growth has taken on a new urgency in the face of increasing pressure on the state to constitutionally enshrine and implement socio-economic rights. Zambia’s Population Policy indicates that Zambia has a very high fertility rate, a major factor in the rapid growth of the population. The high fertility rate is attributed to cultural and institutional factors. These factors include early child bearing, the economic benefits of large families, high infant and child mortality rates, and the low socio-economic status of women (Population Policy, 2007).

The Policy indicates that Zambia’s population increased from 3.5 million in 1963 to 9.9 million in 2000 and is estimated to be 12 million currently. With a fertility rate of 5.9 per cent and a growth rate of 2.4 per cent, the population is expected to double itself within another generation. This exponential growth is expected to continue, even if fertility levels were to decline considerably because the momentum for growth is already built into the young...
age structure of the population. Zambia’s fertility rate has registered only a minimal decline over the space of two decades (Stichter, 1995). The implications for the economy are substantial. Zambia will have to treble the present infrastructure for food production, goods and services in order to improve the standard of living of the population (Population Policy, 2007).

In order to achieve its objectives, the Population Policy is premised primarily on voluntary acceptance of family planning methods in accordance with fundamental human rights. Thus all couples and individuals are expected to decide freely and responsibly on the timing, number and spacing of their children for a manageable family size. Secondly, the Government assumes a responsibility of facilitating people’s ability to make informed choices. It is expected to create an enabling environment in which citizens can effectively manage their lives (Population Policy, 2007). Ultimately, the policy aims to reduce population growth through self-regulation.

The Policy objectives include reducing the high level of fertility, especially that prevailing among adolescents. They aim at improving sexual and reproductive health including family planning. Policy targets are: firstly, the attainment and maintenance of a population growth rate that is at least three times lower than the rate of economic growth; secondly, a reduction in the proportion of adolescents having children; and thirdly making sexual and reproductive health services including family planning information available, accessible and affordable to at least half of all those needing the services in the reproductive age group by 2030 (Population Policy, 2007).

There are a number of development frameworks to support the implementation of the Policy and foster sustainable population growth. Zambia combines the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) supported by the Human Rights Based approach to fulfil its own Vision 2030. Among the most pertinent of the MDGs, are goals 1, 3 and 5 (see Annex 6). Goal 1 looks to eradicate poverty and hunger; Goal 3 advocates gender equality and empowerment of women; Goal 5 targets improved maternal health. The indicators of Goal 5 on achievement of universal access to maternal health by 2015 targets the contraception prevalence rate, the adolescent birth rate and the unmet need for family planning.

Zambia’s long term development plan, ‘Vision 2030’, was launched on 16th January 2007. The vision is that Zambia will, by 2030, be a prosperous middle-income nation that provides opportunities for improving the wellbeing of all Zambians. Consequently Zambia should embody the values of socio-economic justice, underpinned by the principles inter alia of gender-responsive, sustainable development. Zambia should respect human rights and good traditional and family values. The vision is to be realised through a series of medium-term development plans beginning with the Fifth National Development Plan 2006–2010 (State House Website).
However it is questionable whether this can be achieved given the current demographic picture. Furthermore there is no clarity concerning what are considered to be good traditional family values and what constitutes gender-responsive, sustainable development.

This paper provides a fresh and reasoned approach to a sustainable change in the demographic pattern by comparing the ‘universal’ concept of motherhood and autonomy to the African concept of womanhood. The universal concept is, however, presented not as the referent or recommended standard but as a basis for deriving the paper’s more nuanced approach.

THE UNIVERSAL RIGHT OF A WOMAN TO CONTROL HER FERTILITY

The human rights-based approach incorporates certain universal values. It is generally agreed that human rights constitute a non-hierarchic and indivisible whole embodying the non-discrimination and non-retrogression principles (Hellum, 2007). The human rights approach basically obliges the state to refrain from interfering with the individual’s autonomy in decision-making.

Consequently human rights play a pivotal role in the interpretation of a population policy propagated under the auspices of Zambia’s development goals. However a population policy that seeks to reduce fertility rates may appear to be in contradiction to a woman’s autonomy. This is because the last three decades or so have seen a gradual shift from conflating population policy with childbearing rights and treating family planning as an essential part of demographic control (Kethusegile, 2000). Under the ‘population control’ approach, issues of childbearing were not regarded as individual rights but as a part of the state’s plan to control population growth, facilitate development and end poverty. However the Cairo Conference in 1994 revolutionised the concept of childbearing and placed it firmly in the human rights arena by recognising a concept of reproductive rights (Banda, 2005).

The concept of reproductive rights grew out of women’s movements and birth control movements, feminist political thought and international human rights principles. Four basic ethical principles underpin reproductive rights namely, bodily integrity, personhood, equality and diversity. Thus on the one hand the principles involve protection against coercion and abuse whether by state officials, medical personnel, kin or sexual partners and on the other the fulfilment of basic needs and goods (Petchesky, 2000).

This feminist view advocated the individual’s right (especially women) to ultimately decide on matters affecting them personally in the realm of childbearing, pregnancy and sexuality (Petchesky, 2000). Such a concept is clearly much contested and a woman’s childbearing is in most parts of the world is controlled by male partners, families and society in general (Naa–Adjetey, 2003). Biologically, even where individual women seek control over their own
bodies and reproductive capacity this is, of necessity, constrained by the involvement of another individual, usually male, with his own needs and entitlements. Both or either of these parties is, at any given moment, pitted against wider social expectations and responsibility for the survival and wellbeing of the species.

According to Article 16(e) of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), State Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in all matters relating to marriage and family relations (see Annex 2). They shall ensure, on a basis of equality of men and women, the same rights to decide freely and responsibly on the number and spacing of their children and to have access to the information, education and means to enable them to exercise these rights. The right to choice constitutes a negative and a positive right. Thus the State must not only refrain from interfering through legislation, policy and practice, but take active steps to promote and fulfil the right of choice. Such steps include provision of information and services to enable women to make responsible, childbearing choices (Hellum, 2007).

The realisation of this right is essential for the fulfilment of other minimum, core obligations such as life, education and employment (Hellum, 2007). For instance literacy is needed in order to understand and use modern contraceptive methods. Teenage pregnancy endangers this access to basic education, thereby affecting access to employment and livelihoods. According to the CEDAW Committee, the choice of whether to be a mother cannot be compromised due to marital status or gender, or by regulations that require the authorisation of husbands, partners, parents or health care providers. State parties must prioritise the prevention of unwanted pregnancy. State parties must monitor provision of health services to ensure equal access and quality of care. State parties must require all health services to be consistent with the human rights of women, including the rights to autonomy, privacy, confidentiality, informed consent and choice (UN 1999). Consequently other parties’ moral convictions should not prevail over a woman or girl child’s access to information required to make an informed and responsible decision.

RIGHTS IN THE DOMESTIC SETTING

Many of the global definitions of sexuality and motherhood reveal the search for individual sexual and childbearing autonomy. This is because the realisation of global concepts of autonomy takes place in domestic environments with varying levels of adherence to human rights standards. Tensions also arise from the difficulties of choosing priorities and from competing rights and interests particularly when motherhood is presented as a reproductive health issue.
Reproductive health rights may not compete with other health needs because delivery of public health must maximise minimal resources to achieve successes that are visible in the short term. The process of childbearing not only fails to yield immediate economic returns but also prevents women from engaging in productive activities. Furthermore the reproductive roles of women render their health needs more specialised, requiring more resources when such specialised care is often not cost effective from both the medical and social perspective (Kethusegile, 2000). Hence it is generally recognised that women’s biologically determined procreative role is the basis of inequality in access to health as well as other areas (Kethusegile, 2000). As Yamin argues under a reproductive rights framework, expectations are high:

If taken seriously, the perspective of rights enunciated in Cairo literally changes how we approach reproductive and sexual health. The inquiry becomes how the woman herself perceives the risks she faces from pregnancy or a given contraceptive method, or what her desires are with respect to marriage or children, her sexuality or simply sex. And therein lies a momentous shift, because the woman is deemed to have dignity and is empowered to make choices about her fundamental well-being, choices that go beyond immediate interactions with health professionals to the wider context of her life, where her health is shaped (Yamin, 2004).

In Yamin’s view, however, the definition of reproductive health – and health generally – has by and large not penetrated medical practice, which continues to be dominated by the bio-medical paradigm. Consequently, within the paternalism of the traditional physician-patient relationship, the very concept of rights continues to challenge the physician’s exclusive role as the one who determines the patient’s best interests (Yamin, 2004). And this tension, rooted in patriarchy, goes beyond the physician to other interested parties in society.

The struggle over control of women’s childbearing autonomy is most graphically illustrated in the polarised perception of the right to abortion. In the USA this debate has been taken to the highest courts because the US Constitution recognises a right of personal privacy inherent in the right to liberty. In the case of Carey v Population Services International 431 U.S. 678 the Supreme Court observed that, “If the right of privacy means anything, it is the right of the individual, married or single, to be free of unwarranted governmental intrusion into matters so fundamentally affecting a person as the decision whether to bear or beget a child...” And in Roe v Wade 410 U.S. 113 the Court acknowledged a husband’s equal right to the children he has fathered and raised and his deep and proper concern and interest in his wife’s pregnancy but noted that before birth it is an inescapable biological fact that state regul-
lation with respect to the child a woman is carrying will have a far greater impact on the mother’s liberty than the father’s. Consequently, a rule requiring the husband’s consent would serve as an effective veto over a married woman’s decision. Such a veto may be exercised by psychological or physical force. The “husband’s interest in the life of the child his wife is carrying does not permit” him to exercise “such a troubling degree of authority over his wife”. Authority that, though legally derived from common law, is now considered to be constitutionally repugnant (Kay, 1996).

THE AFRICAN (ZAMBIAN) CONCEPT OF AUTONOMY

African women realise their motherhood rights in an environment that often differs substantially from that pertaining in the global or Western human rights arena. The African concept of motherhood thus needs specific consideration.

In Africa it is largely agreed that the concept of ‘woman’ is often linked to that of ‘mother’. This means that being a woman is fulfilled through motherhood. It is also defined by the communalism that underscores the African way of life. Thus there are many beliefs, myths, taboos, laws and practices tabulated below that show the strong link between femininity and motherhood and its acceptance as the African way of life such as:

Socio-cultural prescriptions

One of the primary functions of the customary law marriage is the continuation of the lineage group through reproduction. Genetrical and uxorial rights are transmitted by the payment of bride price or lobola (Banda 2005). A childless marriage is despised and blame attributed to the female spouse. A woman who is infertile is identified in derogatory terms (WLSA, 1996). Consequently in some parts of Zambia, female infertility is recognized as grounds for divorce (WLSA, 1997).

Patriarchy

Patriarchy plays a key role even among the matrilineal peoples of Africa. Women’s reproductive capacities are exchanged between male-headed families through the ritual of heterosexual marriage. It is through this process of appropriation, that women’s right to decide what happens to their bodies is abrogated in the interests of the family (McFadden, 1992). A woman’s decision-making powers over all aspects of her life are thereby impaired.

Religion

Many Africans are very religious. The teaching of the Church, particularly the Catholic Church, advocates the spouses’ inalienable right to found a family and to decide on the number and spacing of their children. The couple
must take into full consideration their duties to themselves and the children already born, the family and society. However, this right must be enjoyed in accordance with the objective moral order that excludes recourse to contraception, sterilisation or abortion. Anything other than periodic abstinence is contrary to moral law and an assault on the sacredness of life (Eriksson, 2000). Judaism portrays family planning less rigidly whereas Islam has both elements of liberalism and conservatism (Eriksson 2000). Protestant orders are traditionally less rigid than the Catholic Church but are also quite conservative because of the African culture within which they operate.

Contraception phobia

The African approach to contraception is problematic. Even where knowledge of a contraceptive method is widespread, actual use of contraceptives is at a relatively lower level (Kethusegile, 2000). Condoms for instance are unpopular for a number of reasons including diminished pleasure and obstructed fertility (Tersbol, 2003). Condoms are also popularly associated with immorality and infidelity and therefore shunned (Hellum, 2007). Government policies are ambivalent. In 2001 for example, the Government suspended a television advertisement campaign promoting the use of condoms as protection against HIV, particularly among young people. They branded it offensive and in bad taste following a Catholic Bishops’ Conference (Hellum, 2007). Then in 2004 the government banned the distribution of condoms in schools on the grounds that their distribution promoted immorality and pre-marital sex.

Men are often uncooperative about using condoms, coitus interruptus and other methods, more so after consuming alcohol. The male spouse also has a decisive role to play in the decision to use female controlled contraceptives (WLSA, 2007). Thus there is ambivalence about whether the pregnancies resulting from a reluctance to use contraceptives are wanted or not (Tersbol, 2003).

HIV/AIDS

There is a sense in which the advent of HIV/AIDS was expected to lower birth rates in African countries. Research carried out in Zambia shows that this did not happen and fertility rates remain high. Paradoxically, the pressure to have children is so strong that even the threat of HIV transmission does not curb it. Women in many instances have children simply because they have a deep-rooted desire to do so (WLSA, 2007). As far back as the early nineties, it was observed that:

A woman’s decision to limit her fertility in response to her status as an HIV infected person is impacted by …the final knowledge that her life will soon end, which in turn generates an even more
intense desire to perpetuate herself through giving birth to a child regardless of how long it might live (McFadden, 1992).

Socio-economic needs
Motherhood is intertwined in numerous economic exchanges in Africa. For instance research done in Namibia shows that pressure to become mothers is evident even among unmarried women (Tersbol, 2003). Women have children in order to secure support from their partners who in turn demand children in order to secure control over the woman and justify support rendered (Tersbol, 2003). Economic exchanges are also intertwined in the decision even among married women to get pregnant, to such an extent that women are willing to risk their lives through pregnancy in order to secure their marital and socio-economic status.

Women’s lack of financial independence is a major hindrance to their reproductive autonomy. Cultural arrangements such as the payment of lobola that transfer control over fertility to the male spouse and his family further weaken the woman’s status. Whilst “…most demographers assume that women in developing countries prefer a lower number of children than men do... bearing many children maybe the most effective female strategy for achieving long term as well as short-term security” (Jensen, 2003). The law reinforces this perception. For instance Zambian maintenance and inheritance laws award substantial property rights to the children of the family rather than to the needy spouse.

The economic value of children is still considered to be an important factor in the increase or decline in fertility for social security reasons. In most countries in the world it has been observed that fertility falls with an increase in education and for those countries that have recorded a decline in fertility rates, such factors as increased female participation in the labour force have proved to be responsible (Kethusegile, 2000). However in Africa economic change has not led to a significant decline in fertility because even as the direct labour utility of children declines the security function persists (Jensen, 2003).

The concept of belonging
Research carried out across the southern African region shows that non-material concerns may also drive women’s choices, or lack thereof, causing much confusion to global definitions of autonomy. These non-material concerns are captured in work done by WLSA on the ‘concept of belonging’ (Armstrong, 1995).

Thinking further about belonging points to the value orientations inherent in customary law…The important unit is not the individual as much as it is the social network. And social net-
works transcend the life or death of any individual...This non-individualism has been hard to grasp for Europeans... The revolution of modernity, including modern law and human rights, was exactly to focus on the individual, disregarding their position in fixed relations and hierarchies (Arnfred, 1996).

The need to ‘belong’ to the extended or marital family and community may, for instance, manifest itself as peer pressure to reproduce because without the permanent linkages created through childbirth a woman remains an outsider to the marital family.

**CONTRADICTIONS IN FEMINIST VIEWS OF WOMANHOOD**

In response to the factors above, African feminists have pursued radical change through regional documents such as the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People’s Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa. The African Women’s Protocol provides that State Parties shall ensure that the right to health of women, including sexual and reproductive health, is respected and promoted (Banda, 2005). This includes the right to control fertility, the right to decide whether to have children, the number of children and the spacing of children, the right to choose any method of contraception and the right to receive family planning education. State parties are enjoined to take all appropriate measures to provide access to said rights.

Commentary on the content and import of these rights argues that the provisions of the Protocol create a human rights-based approach to sexual and reproductive rights quite novel to the traditional welfare approach (Mukasa, 2008). This is because in most African jurisdictions there are no laws that specifically protect women and give them control over their sexuality. Rather custom, culture and religion oppose such autonomy.

Not all African feminists take issue with the socio-culturally determined notion of motherhood or traditional welfare approach. Some, as observed by Banda, argue that it is not ‘African’ to see the conflation of womanhood with motherhood as a site of oppression (Banda, 2005). Others, as observed by Bowman, argue that women choose to have large numbers of children and what is important is regulating the rate of childbirth within the high numbers by firstly, spacing births of children through long periods of breastfeeding and abstinence and secondly, enforcing such spacing through various taboos that vary across the African continent (Bowman, 2003). And yet others argue that the real issue is whether customary laws relating to childbearing are inherently bad for women’s status and rights. Some steps in re-thinking customary law therefore examine its evolution and search for the customary values that underpin it, with a view to exploiting what is positive (Armstrong, 1995).
The contradictions in approach illuminate the difficulties of achieving a fine balance between autonomy and social responsibility. How are women to be assured of autonomy and yet encouraged to have smaller families?

AN ALTERNATIVE STRATEGY

Overwhelmed by the conflicting universal, regional and indigenous standards pertaining in their countries, too many African governments appear to have stepped back from the thorny issue of population growth. But it is a problem that cannot be ignored much longer. And it appears to me that it is a problem that can be tackled by taking a closer look at the concept of autonomy as a practical African human rights principle. Undoubtedly women must enjoy their bodily autonomy and be free from both state and non-state actors in matters relating to motherhood. However implementing reproductive rights and at the same time having a manageable population size requires a re-conceptualisation of the right and duty to bear children as a right and duty to provide a certain minimum level of wellbeing for the children that are born. It requires bridging the gap between absolute autonomy and social reality. Such an enterprise requires substantial transformation (Petchesky, 2000) and a more nuanced approach to the individualism inherent in the concept of human rights.

Such an approach may also benefit from the fact that the African concept of human rights hinges on the duty aspect of rights claims. This is especially so in the case of reproductive rights. As women realise their autonomy from state actors they must still be protected from non-state actors that play a more dominant role in curtailing autonomy by revering communal group interests. Women’s autonomy is, in the African context, always subject to the corresponding responsibility that goes with community. It is the responsibility of the state to stress the benefits of smaller families for society as a whole and thereby shed light on everyone’s responsibility for achieving such smaller families. Motherhood should be enjoyed in a manner that takes into account each individual’s duty not to overburden society with unmanageable families.

The question therefore follows: is there a responsibility-based approach to reproductive autonomy? Nedelsky’s suggestion that rights need to be analysed and implemented in the context of dependence or relational feminism serves as a guide to my own thinking. She states:

There is a two-fold objective in reconceiving autonomy: (1) to recognize that the irreducible tension between the individual

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26 In August 2009 Zambia launched a programme to encourage sustainable family sizes of preferably only two children per family.
and the collective makes choices or trade-offs necessary; and (2) at the same time, to move beyond a conception of human beings which sees them exclusively as separate individuals and focuses on the threat of the community. The collective is not simply a potential threat to individuals, but is constitutive of them, and thus is a source of their autonomy as well as a danger to it...The task...is to think of autonomy in terms of the forms of human interactions in which it will develop and flourish (Nedelsky, 1998).

My suggestion is therefore that the Zambian woman’s autonomy over motherhood must evolve in a manner that gives priority to her wellbeing as a means of fulfilling the wellbeing of those she is connected to, including her children. Thus her autonomy must be balanced with the larger national interests of a manageable population size and sustained economic growth.

The law has a place in all this. It cannot maintain a selective presence in women’s lives by hiding behind a gender-biased view of constitutionally guaranteed privacy or socially sanctioned morality. Undoubtedly law is already in the sexual and reproductive arena through its stipulations concerning marriage, sexual morality and abortion. In eliminating gender bias it has to go further to regulate fully and concretely. For it is the law that must ensure that society is schooled in a new perception of motherhood by creating a legal framework that supports women’s sexual and reproductive autonomy. It is the law that should create incentives for smaller families. And it is the law that should facilitate the implementation of smaller families through legal provisions that force the government to invest in this effort. Only the law can oblige key sectors of society, such as medical facilities, to provide woman-friendly and adequate family planning information and support services.

CONCLUSION

The paper began from the point of view that the woman’s body is central to any viable population policy and that her perception of her body’s role in childbearing, and consequently the choices she makes, do to a large extent determine the growth and size of the population. By focusing on the Zambian woman as an African woman, the paper brings to the fore the competing interests in controlling the woman’s body resulting in the special peculiarities that African women share with regard to their motherhood choices.

As a consequence of the multiple interests in a woman’s childbearing, she is often treated as a minor and thus prevented from making choices and decisions in respect of her own reproductive life. Recognising and acknowledging a woman’s reproductive autonomy is one way of nurturing positive change.
Empowering women through the traditional human rights-based approach however has its own pitfalls, at least to the extent that it appears to present autonomy as firstly, absolute freedom without corresponding responsibility, and secondly as a disconnection from other entities and bodies.

This paper thus concludes that there is an obligation on the part of the State to not only keep out of choices made by individual women in the reproductive rights arena but also to ensure that the arena protects all women and directs those with interlinked and legitimate interests to respect women’s autonomy and allow them the space to procreate in a responsible manner. The state must therefore intervene and regulate in order to liberate and make choice meaningful and beneficial for both individual women and society as a whole.

REFERENCES


TEENAGE PREGNANCY AND HIV IN SOUTH AFRICA

Nolwazi Mkhwanazi

INTRODUCTION

Worldwide, early childbearing is associated with poverty and poor health. In sub-Saharan Africa, early childbearing is also associated with an increased vulnerability to HIV/AIDS. South African statistics reveal that one in three girls becomes pregnant during their teenage years. The majority of these teenage pregnancies are said to be unplanned, unwanted and the teenagers’ relationships, unstable (Jewkes, 2001). Since the 1970s substantial research has gone into identifying the causes of teenage pregnancy (MacLeod, 1999), and a variety of approaches have been employed to curb the phenomenon. Despite these measures, the rates of teenage pregnancy in South Africa remain high.

The issue of what should be done with the high rates of teenage pregnancy has generated intense public debate in South Africa. Some, for example, David Harrison, the Chief Executive Officer of loveLife, a national HIV prevention campaign for South African youth, are of the opinion that one way of reducing teenage pregnancy and protecting young people against HIV infection is to make schooling until Grade 12 obligatory. Others maintain that a more nuanced understanding of the drivers of early childbearing which take into account the local, social and cultural context may provide us with a clearer understanding of early childbearing (Makubalo 2008).

There are a growing number of academics in South Africa who are challenging the popular negative representation of early childbearing. These academics draw attention not only to the politics that surround discourses and representations of teenage pregnancy but also to the ways in which knowledge about teenage pregnancy is created (Jewkes, 2008; Macleod, 2002; 2003; Macleod and Durrheim, 2002; Makiwane and Udjo, 2006). These academics maintain that socially embedded accounts of teenage pregnancy may present an alternative view of early childbearing.

Drawing on ethnographic data from the township of Nyanga East in the Western Cape Province, this paper discusses these two stances in relation to the lives of young people in South Africa. Before I begin the discussion, let me describe how the data on which this paper is based was collected.
RESEARCH CONTEXT AND METHODS

Created in 1946, Nyanga is a township located 20–25 kilometers from the centre of Cape Town, the capital of the province. The state's attempt to restrict the free movement and mixing of black people with other races, and at the same time ensure the availability of a black labour force, led to the creation of this township. Most townships were created on the outskirts of cities.

Like many townships in South Africa, Nyanga East is overcrowded. There is a high rate of unemployment. Government facilities such as schools and clinics are inadequate and understaffed. There is a high crime rate. Violence and fear pervade the lives of the majority of residents. A striking feature about households in Nyanga was that many of them were female-headed and consisted of a number of generations. This is a feature which Jones (1996) also recorded in his work on Xhosa kinship and domestic organisation. The continuing high rates of teenage pregnancy have contributed to the formation of the matrifilial families. Matrifilial families are defined as ‘women-led family groups that include in their membership at least one never married or formerly married mother and her natural putative or effective child or children, where the mother is the head of the group’ (Jones, 1996, p. 71).

This paper is based on ethnographic data collected over a five-year period. Ethnographic research rests on the commitment to understanding the world from other people’s point of view. A guiding principle in such research is to participate in, and observe, the everyday lives of the research participants and in so doing begin to engage with their social and cultural knowledge. Towards this end, in my research I sought out activities and events which enabled me to be in contact with young people.

The scope of inquiry covered numerous areas connected (but not limited) to teenage pregnancy. These included experiences of childhood, coming of age rites, experiences of schooling, the care of children, rituals associated with pregnancy and marriage, experiences of violence etc. For example, during part of the research period I volunteered to work for community-based organisations (CBOs) and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that were concerned with youth issues. I attended locally-based workshops that targeted youth. Over a six-month period, I assisted a representative from the department of health set up a youth forum on health. I also volunteered to work in a state-owned children’s home where I was able to observe and learn more about ideas surrounding child care and motherhood. Throughout the research period, I conducted formal interviews with young and old, male and female inhabitants of the township, as well as informal conversations with numerous young people. Recruitment was opportunistic and inclusion criteria were location and similar ethnic and cultural background. The formal interviews were conducted in both isiXhosa and English and often a mixture of the two. The interviews were tape-recorded.
Within the scholarship on teenage pregnancy in South Africa, my choice of method, which involved being immersed in the everyday lives of young people in Nyanga East for an extended period of time, is unusual.27 The particular approach I took not only allowed me to build enduring relationships in the township, it also allowed me to experience the richness and complexity of people’s everyday lives. In the process of engaging in the lives of the research participants, I became aware of the particular local social and cultural ideas of how to act and how to think about the world and how these ideas, although challenged both within and outside of the township, affected decision-making around sex and sexuality.

LINKING TEENAGE PREGNANCY TO HIV

In 2006 one of loveLife’s billboards carried the message “Face it: teen pregnancy increases the risk of HIV”. In defence of the billboard, which was seen to stigmatise pregnant teenagers, David Harrison stated that being pregnant as a teenager doubles the risk of HIV infection because young girls have higher rates of transmission and because the biological condition of pregnancy and lactation ‘may predispose to HIV infection’ (Harrison, 2008, p. 1).

South African statistics on the prevalence of HIV/AIDS vary. However, when the distribution of HIV is examined they tell a similar story. Young, black, South African females have the highest prevalence of HIV. This is something that has been known for some time now. The 2005 Nelson Mandela/Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) study of HIV/AIDS, for example, showed that since they published their initial statistics in 2002, the overall prevalence of HIV/AIDS had, in the three years, decreased (from 11.4% to 10.8%). However, it transpired that not only do females have a high overall prevalence (13.3% as opposed to the 8.2% for males), but also that the overall prevalence had actually increased for females. The overall HIV prevalence had also increased for individuals of between 15 and 24 years old and for those classified as ‘African’ as opposed to White, Indian or Coloured.

Black South African females aged between 15 and 24 years old have thus been, and continue to be, the most vulnerable group to HIV infection. Over the last decade a number of explanations have been put forward to account for this situation. Many of these explanations revolve around young girl’s inability to negotiate safer sex practices whether this is because of differences in age and the inequality that accompanies such differences; a fear of gender-based violence; wanting to prove fidelity or an unspoken rule about transactional sex.

27 The exception here is the work of Preston-Whyte et al 1991.
In South Africa, sexuality education remains a key prevention strategy advocated by government departments, organisations and people who seek to address the HIV/AIDS epidemic and teenage pregnancy. With regard to young people, loveLife is at the forefront of campaigning for sexuality education. At its inception in 1999, loveLife promised to reduce HIV infection rates by half among youth in five years (1999–2004) through initiating ‘more open communication about sex, sexuality and gender relations’ among youth. Its campaign strategy has mainly been media-driven. Despite not being able to achieve its goal in the ten years since it began, loveLife has reported successes in providing sexuality education and in encouraging behaviour changes.

The reported effectiveness of the sexuality education campaigns led me to assume that AIDS and teenage pregnancy would be salient in the lives of young people in Nyanga East. I expected that they would be concerned about becoming infected with HIV or becoming pregnant as teenagers. Furthermore, I expected that they would actively take measures to avoid becoming pregnant or infected, once they knew what those measures were. My experiences and observations led me to see that, despite their rhetoric, young people’s perceptions and experiences of teenage pregnancy and HIV/AIDS were at variance with the discourses about their changing behaviour circulating in reproductive health circles. Their everyday actions revealed a different attitude to HIV and teenage pregnancy.

For example, in their relationships young people differentiated between ukujola and ukuthandana. The latter was more serious than the former and in the latter, sexual intercourse was an expression of love and not using condoms was an expression of fidelity. What I heard from young people indicated that they continued to engage in sexual practices that put them at risk of sexually transmitted infections and early child bearing. Sexual decision-making for these young people was mediated by other concerns. The perceived association between HIV/AIDS and teenage pregnancy that many researchers and reproductive health experts see as axiomatic, was not always so for these young people in Nyanga East. Teenage mothers, for example, told me that when they found out that they were pregnant their immediate reaction was to be ‘scared’, they would often add that they were scared of what their families would say. None of the teenage mothers said that they were afraid because they thought that they had contracted HIV. The scare tactic of associating teenage pregnancy with HIV infection had little currency in the everyday lives of youth in Nyanga East.
Reducing teenage pregnancy and HIV infection rates by keeping young people in school

The idea that schooling has an inverse effect on the rates of teenage pregnancy assumes two things. Firstly, that schools are safe and nurturing environments for young people. Secondly, it assumes that what is taught in schools will enable young people to make ‘appropriate’ decisions regarding their sexual and reproductive health. In 2008, amidst concern about assault, crime and violence in schools, a South African Human Rights Commission report wrote that ‘being at school is more dangerous for children than being anywhere else.’ Female, gay and lesbian learners were said to be the most vulnerable groups. An earlier report by Human Rights Watch in 2001 found that ‘a discriminatory barrier was formed between girls and a good education’.

Schools have, for a long time, not been safe environments for female learners who are subjected to sexual harassment and abuse by both male students and teachers. The social anthropologist, Isak Niehaus has argued that in South African low veld schools, during apartheid and during the post-apartheid era, the contestation of the appropriate expressions of masculine sexuality by younger and older men was ‘realised through the silencing of women and through the subordination of women’s bodies’ (Niehaus, 2000, p. 390). This continues today. Media reports abound of teachers who force learners to have sexual relations with them or male learners who sexually assault female learners.

The attempts to curb teenage pregnancy by insisting that youth are educated until grade 12 do not take into account the conditions under which the majority of learners are taught. Furthermore, exposure to sexuality education does not mean that the lessons learned will be practised. Every year the number of school girls who become pregnant makes national headlines. In 2004/2005 about 2 542 school girls in the Gauteng province became pregnant despite access to free contraceptives and youth-friendly clinics. In the poorer province of the Eastern Cape, 5 015 school girls, almost double the number the previous year, became pregnant in 2007.

It is often assumed that girls who become pregnant while at school drop out. This results in them having limited job opportunities and being more likely to perpetuate a cycle of poverty. In Nyanga East, many of the teenage mothers who were at school returned to school after giving birth. It was not unusual for the teenager’s mother or a relative to look after her child while a teenage mother continued with her studies. This is not a new finding. Earlier studies on teenage pregnancy also found that many teenage mothers planned to continue studying. The youngest teenagers were often encouraged by their parents to return to school (Macleod, 1999; Preston-Whyte, 1993). The advent of a teenage pregnancy in Nyanga East affected more than just the teenage girls. It also had major repercussions on the lives of those connected to her.
THE OCCURRENCE OF TEENAGE PREGNANCY

Fundiswa, a 21-year-old woman related her experience of teenage pregnancy and motherhood to me. She told me that her grandmother with whom she lived was very strict and used to beat her. She also said that despite these beatings, which were aimed at deterring her from sexual activity, she continued to have sex with her boyfriend. Fundiswa claimed that she was not using contraceptives because she was scared that her grandmother would find out. Finding evidence of contraceptive use would, she told me, give her grandmother proof that she was sexually active. Fundiswa became pregnant at the age of 15 years old.

When I first found out I was pregnant I wanted to do an abortion but I didn’t know which clinic was doing it. I heard that there was an old woman in Langa that was doing it and I thought of going there but I was scared. So I told my boyfriend [about the pregnancy]… The day when I found out, I was going for the needle [contraceptive injection] for the first time and the nurses asked me questions and they had to test me before they gave me the needle and I was positive [pregnant]. I didn’t tell anyone [because] at first, I was scared. My grandmother and my uncle are very strict. After I told my boyfriend, I told my cousin. She didn’t tell anyone. She was older than me and she didn’t have a baby! I was thinking why me? Then my cousin told my mother and my mother told my grandmother. They didn’t over react. They accepted the pregnancy. I only told them when I was five months pregnant. I didn’t show. My stomach was very small. I went to school until I was nine months pregnant and gave birth the day the schools closed.

Fundiswa’s story is similar to many teenage mothers’ experiences. Young mothers would tell me that, they slept with their boyfriends and, for a variety of reasons, they were not using a contraceptive. They would not ‘notice’ that they were pregnant until their second trimester. They were often accused of being pregnant or were going to the clinic to get or renew their contraception when they discovered that they were pregnant. The teenage mothers’ feelings about finding out that they were pregnant were expressed using words such as ‘scared’ and ‘shocked’. Since many teenagers were aware of contraceptives and that not using contraceptives increased the likelihood of becoming pregnant, a teenager’s reaction of being ‘scared’ when she found out that she was pregnant, I suggest, arises from particular local social and cultural ideals about gender and generational relationships in particular, and about how to act and be in the world, in general.
Broadly speaking, in Nyanga East it was considered improper for parents and children to discuss sexual matters. At a girl’s menarche, a mother’s advice to her daughter was ‘not to sleep with boys’. The popular idiom ‘to sleep with someone’ meant to have sexual intercourse. In this instance, the idiom meant more than do not have sexual intercourse with boys; it meant ‘do not become pregnant’. Mothers knew that their teenage daughter would, at one point or another, have sexual intercourse as they themselves had done whilst growing up. So to simply tell a daughter ‘not to sleep with boys’ allowed a mother to advise her daughter while adequately respecting the norm of not talking to children about sexual intercourse.

Another way a mother tried to guide her daughter was to become stricter with her. This included using corporal punishment to express her disapproval, as Fundiswa’s grandmother did. When a girl became pregnant it indicated that her mother had not taught her how to conduct herself. Whilst most mothers blamed their daughter for becoming pregnant, in the wider community the blame for the occurrence of a teenage pregnancy was often placed on the teenager’s mother. In general, the advent of teenage pregnancy brought shame to the girl’s family. Pregnant teenagers were laughed at and ridiculed not only by their peers but by others in the community.

There were many reasons why early childbearing was viewed negatively in Nyanga East. From a social point of view, teenage pregnancy indicated bad parenting and an inability of mothers to teach their daughters ‘proper conduct’. Thus when a teenager became pregnant, her mother stepped in to manage the pregnancy. Indeed, when a girl became pregnant her relationship with her mother became significant. The creation of ‘mother’ and ‘daughter’ relationships was crucial to the management of a teenage pregnancy. The management of a teenage pregnancy by ‘mothers’ allowed for particular tenets of proper conduct to be effectively transmitted between generations and for ‘mothers’ to confirm their own adherence to the local moral codes.

From an economic point of view pregnant teenagers created a burden on already stretched household resources. A trend in Nyanga East was that the genitor would deny paternity. For example, when Fundiswa’s boyfriend’s family was approached to pay inhlawulo (damage fees), her boyfriend denied paternity. His parents said that they would only consider paying inhlawulo when the baby was born and when they could see that the child bore a resemblance to their son. Fundiswa’s son died from yellow jaundice at eighteen months, before his paternal relatives had come to visit the mother and child.

The mother and daughter did not necessarily have to be a biological mother and daughter. I called them mother and daughter relationships because they were formed between an older woman and the pregnant teenager.
The denial of paternity is an extremely important aspect which, although not a new phenomenon, has become commonplace in Nyanga East and draws attention to changing ideas about manhood. Historically, Xhosa boys had to undergo initiation in ‘the bush’ in order to become men (amadoda). In ‘the bush’, boys were instructed on how to behave and on their various roles as men. Initiation therefore created a particular idea of and values surrounding manhood. At the beginning of the twenty first century, these values were being questioned and many young males felt that the particular instruction taught in initiation was no longer relevant. Many men around them were unemployed and dependent on women and the respect ensured for initiated men was questionable.

Living in circumstances of poverty, young males had also come to realise that even if they had undergone initiation, the successful pathways of being a respected ‘man’ involved public displays of consumption and promiscuity. In intimate sexual relations among youth, proof of love and fidelity involved not using condoms, and girls were often, for a variety of reasons, not using contraceptives. The result, in most instances, was that the girl conceived. She may or may not have become infected with HIV. Since becoming a father decreased an individual’s financial resources and the ability to publicly display conspicuous consumption, paternity was in most cases denied, leaving the teenage mother and her family to cope with childcare on an already stretched household budget.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

While many people living inside and outside of the township agree that providing sexuality education is an important way of reducing teenage pregnancy, there is no agreement on who should provide the education and what that education should entail. The lack of agreement highlights the ways in which the issue of body politics is central to the phenomenon of early childbearing. The community and families on the one hand, and the state and NGOs on the other, differ in their perceptions of not only how young people should be and act in the world, but also on their perceptions of their roles towards young people.

The NGOs who provided sexuality education programmes that reached the youth of Nyanga East assumed that these youth did not receive sexuality education at home. This was because they also assumed that there was only one kind of sexuality education that should be given. This sexuality education was to involve ‘more open communication about sex, sexuality and gender relations and a biomedical understanding of the body and reproduction’. Ideas about sexuality education in Nyanga East were embedded in local ideas about proper conduct, particularly about what parents and children can do
or say to each other. It was therefore more than just sexuality education, it was also about creating a person who acted within local norms or one who was aware of what constituted ‘proper conduct’ in that particular local setting.

To community members and parents in Nyanga East, the occurrence of teenage pregnancy, for example, was an indication not only of bad parenting but also of the breakdown of norms surrounding ‘proper conduct’. Education, for them, thus entailed youth learning how to conduct themselves properly in everyday life. It was hoped that learning this would translate to knowing how to conduct themselves in sexual matters.

There are two different ideas about belonging and citizenship that are at play. NGOs and government bodies perceived young people as rational and autonomous individuals who should make decisions in the light of their immediate circumstances. For people living in Nyanga, belonging created personhood. A person comes into being through relationships and a person is inseparable from these relationships. This notion is echoed through the saying ‘umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu’. I was often told that a child was a reflection of the family and the community that they grew up in and it is thus the duty of the parents and the community at large to teach children about proper conduct and thus ensure belonging. Children were to unquestioningly accept guidance from elders.

Indeed when a teenager did not listen to the guidance of her mother and became pregnant, the way in which the pregnancy was managed was an attempt to inculcate particular values into the teenager and reaffirm local ideals of proper conduct. These ideals, as we saw, contradicted practices. With regard to the continuing high rates of teenage pregnancy, I suggest that in Nyanga East the way in which teenage pregnancy was managed perpetuated the very contradiction by reproducing the conditions that ensure the high rates of early childbearing.

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In southern Senegal, West Africa, partial removal of the clitoris for girls and circumcision of the penile prepuce for boys are prerequisites for the initiation into gender specific “secret societies”, and conceived of as one ordeal among several essential for moulding young people into moral persons of a certain gender. Through pain and, what according to Western psychological theories perhaps would be called trauma, children and youth are infused with “proper” gendered dispositions that become inscribed in their bodies physically, cognitively and emotionally. Self-mastery, endurance and vigour are highly held moral values relevant to both genders. The cultivation begins in early childhood but nowhere is this moral and educative cultivation more intense, severe and explicit than during the initiation ritual.

The article aims at situating female genital cutting\(^{29}\) within local discourses of morality, highlighting women’s agency, strength and resilience where outsiders, from a general liberal understanding of genital cutting as a practice detrimental to the female body and psyche, tend to see only victims (cf. Mohanty 1991). The argument is that in order to understand women’s motivation to support female genital cutting we need to understand how these rituals, according to these African women, create strong female character and identity and how individuals are able to transform experiences of suffering into meaningful, lived experiences.

The theme of the article is relevant for Africa beyond Senegal: ordeals are common in African initiation rituals, and hardships and pain used at peda-

\(^{29}\) Internationally, female genital mutilation (FGM) is the generally accepted term adopted by Western as well as many African activists working against the practice. Until the 1970s, the concept female circumcision was used but has since come to be understood as euphemistic because it links the female practices with male circumcision. The choice of terminology in describing these practices is politically sensitive, not to say explosive. In a local context where female “circumcision” is practised, the concept of FGM is generally felt to be insulting. I chose the more value-neutral term of “genital cutting” which is common in contemporary social science literature.
gogical tools for both boys and girls. Also, initiation associations are common in West and Central Africa and fundamental aspects of political power (Ellis and Haar 2004). The particular case is taken from the Senegalese region called Casamance where I carried out sixteen months of anthropological fieldwork for my doctoral dissertation, studying female genital cutting (FGC) and initiation among a group of people calling themselves Jola. 

TWO FORMS OF CITIZENSHIP

In this particular West African community hardships, suffering and pain are crucial for the understandings of gender, morality, body and identity. Without the bodily mark of genital cutting and the following status of initiated, a person will not be considered a member of the Jola community, not even a moral person. Jola men and women thus have two sorts of citizenships: a political citizenship related to the Senegalese state, which is bureaucratic and led by an administrative authority, and a citizenship related to belonging in the sense of ethnic, religious and gender identity. The latter form of citizenship may be described in Lonsdale’s (2000) terms of a “moral ethnicity”, which refers to a common identity held by a collective and based on civic virtue: a complex web of social obligations, loyalties and belonging, connected to “personhood”, which need not be political. In Casamance, this belonging is created through various gendered practices and rituals related to genital cutting, initiation and parenthood. Female and male elders whose authority is based in the control of the initiation associations, in social science literature popularly called “secret societies”, lead the rituals. These leaders, as well as the other elders in the community, collectively keep track of those who have gone through genital cutting and are initiated and those that are not. Elders commonly physically examine grandchildren who have lived elsewhere during a period of their childhood. If the child’s genitals are not cut, a circumcision ceremony is arranged. Likewise, uncircumcised women married into the local community usually are coerced, by their mothers-in-law and co-wives in particular, to undergo clitoridectomy. If they do not eventually accept “circumcision” they are not considered members of the local moral community and will be continuously harassed.

30 The fieldwork was conducted in Lower Casamance between December 1997 and July 1999. I stayed in a small village of about 400 inhabitants, in the compound of an extended, polygynous Muslim Jola family. Interviews were conducted with people in different villages in the area, where I also attended several initiation rites for girls and boys. I did not witness any circumcision ceremony since it is forbidden for men and uncircumcised women and girls to witness the act. Therefore, I have no first-hand information from observing the operation. The project was financed by The Swedish International Development Agency’s research section (Sida/Sarec), The Nordic Africa Institute, Svenska Sällskapet för Antropologi och Geografi (SSAG), Stiftelsen Lars Hiertas minne, The Knut & Alice Wallenberg Foundation, the Paul and Marie Berghaus Donations Fund, Hierta-Retzåsstiftelsen, and Göteborg University. The doctoral dissertation was accepted in 2007 (Dellenborg 2007).
THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN GENITAL CUTTING AND INITIATION

The first ritual step of the Jola female initiation is the physical act of removing the tip of the clitoris. The cutting is followed by an education period in a secluded female sacred space. The most common description of an uncircumcised woman is that she is someone “who knows nothing”. Clitoridectomy and the ensuing initiation ritual (ñakay) is a socialisation process and an important education for girls. According to Jola women and men, this knowledge – practical, theoretical and corporeal knowledge – can only be transferred from older women to girls through the cutting ceremony and the subsequent initiation ritual.

The cutting is usually performed when the girls are four to eight years old during a simple but nonetheless important and sacred ritual involving only a few women and girls. It may take several years before the circumcised girls continue with the initiation and participate in ñakay, which is an elaborate ritual stretching over several months and may involve hundreds of girls and several thousand guests. Although they are separated in time, these rites must be explored in relation to each other and in relation to the male initiation rites practised by Jola. Boys are initiated in a similar ritual that involves circumcision of the penile prepuce and a seclusion period in a male sacred space. In both cases, genital cutting is the prerequisite for entering the initiation ritual.

ETHNOGRAPHIC SETTING

Numbering close to 400 000 of Senegal’s poly-ethnic population of approximately 10.5 million inhabitants, the Jola form the largest ethnic group in Lower Casamance and are among the few African groups to practise subsistence wet rice cultivation. Palm nuts are grown for their oil and millet, sorghum and maize are supplementary food crops, groundnuts are the most important cash crop. The majority of young women and men labour migrate during the dry season and ideally return home for cultivation in the rainy season.

The majority of the Jola populations are Muslim. There is also a Catholic minority. Both practise indigenous Casamance religions centred on ancestor shrines and sacrificial. In contrast to the Muslim Jola, the Christian Jola do not practise FGC, while male circumcision is practised by both Christian and Muslim Jola. This article deals exclusively with the Muslim Jola population.
Gender disjunction

Contemporary Jola society is marked by gender dissonance: Jola men are considered superior to women in legal and political domains, but as initiated mothers, women also have considerable power inside and outside the family realm. The maternal role is culturally emphasised and Jola women have a relatively high degree of personal, social and economic autonomy. Although a married woman’s husband and his kin make great efforts to control her and are sanctioned by the local community in doing so, as initiated mothers, women have relatively strong influence in society in general, their natal villages in particular. Typically, women have more authority in their role as sister and mother than in their role as wife (cf. Sacks 1979).

Furthermore, women are supposed to be docile and patient, while on the other hand, as mothers they are seen to be strong and powerful (cf. Rosander 1998). This gender disjunction is, as we will see, reflected in the initiation rituals. In order to understand these inconsistencies, gender must be analysed in relation to factors such as age, marriage and parenthood. Age and childbirth are the organising principles. Although childbirth is the ultimate criterion for female gender identity and social adulthood, it is only one step in the process of forming this identity, a process that demands constant affirmation through practice (cf. Busby 2000). In order to be considered a female person, a woman should conform to cultural norms of behaviour and attitudes in relation to her husband’s and her own family, children, co-wives and co-villagers. These norms should be acted out in everyday life as well as in ritual, and they differ with age.

FEMALE GENDER IDEALS

In women, modesty and servility are highly esteemed, as are courage, industriousness and cooperativeness. Self-control and discreetness are other valued attributes. Demands requiring behaviour according to these norms increase as a girl reaches puberty. Teenage girls spend most of their time helping their mothers, grandmothers and mother’s co-wives with household tasks, such as pounding rice, cooking, doing laundry, fetching water, collecting wood, attending to children and working in the rice fields. During long days, the workload is heavy for these young girls, and they are expected to carry it out without complaint. Respect for older people is an absolute imperative. Youths should not question their parents’ decisions nor enquire about sensitive issues such as initiation, genital cutting and childbirth.

A newly-married woman has few privileges and is considered to rank lowest in the hierarchy of her husband’s compound where she has moved from her natal village. The number and nature of household tasks these women are expected to perform and the servile attitude and respectful behaviour
they are expected to show the husband and his kin socially betray their lack of authority. People emphasised that a Jola woman should obey her husband, perform domestic work without complaint and not go for visits without his permission. She should cook for his kin, carry water, fetch wood and take over the burdensome tasks of cultivation and childbearing from her mother-in-law and senior co-wives. It was said that God will recompense her for the hardships she suffers, for the respect she shows her husband and his kin.

Stoicism is essential for presenting oneself as a moral person both as a woman and as a man. To reveal that one is or has been in pain was thought to be a sign of weakness. Suffering is considered a part of life; a good teacher and a source of strength (cf. Malmström 2009). This ideology of endurance makes it risky to express suffering. Few women admitted that they had suffered during genital cutting and the pain related to childbirth was never mentioned.

For a woman, her position among her husband’s wives (first, second or subsequent) and the number of children she has borne are decisive for her status in her husband’s compound. The more children she gives birth to, the firmer her position. If she is the first wife of a polygynous household, she will be in charge of her co-wives together with, but subordinate to, her mother-in-law. If the first wife remains childless, however, she will have no say and in practice her co-wife, if she has children, will be in charge.

Childbearing, childrearing and motherhood are among the hardships and self-sacrifices that a woman is expected to endure for her children, and for her husband and his kin, to whom she gives new life. In West Africa, morality is most strongly reflected in the notion of blessings (Arabic: *baraka*). God bestows these upon those who perform moral deeds; enduring hardship is indeed considered a moral deed. The highest feminine ideal in Lower Casamance is to be an industrious mother who can bear pain and hardship without complaint. A woman who does not live up to these ideals and who is jealous of her co-wives, who does not cooperate with others is lazy, disrespectful or disobedient to her husband, mother-in-law and the first wife, is of bad repute. Her bad manners are assumed to turn back on her; her children will not be blessed, her husband and his kin will not respect her.

As is common for most African societies, old age is associated with the most venerated social status. The highest female kin position is that of mother of an adult son, mother-in-law and paternal grandmother in his compound (cf. Bledsoe 2002). Under her guidance, the daughters-in-law will perform the heavier household tasks such as fetching water, washing clothes and cultivating and pounding rice. This leaves the older women with more time for themselves. If she is healthy and strong enough, she may focus more on cultivating for her own interests (a Jola woman has rights of usufruct in her husband’s and her father’s village). These rewards do not come automatically but de-
pend on negotiation, the size of the household and relationships between the members.

Understood in the context of a woman’s full lifespan, her subservience and the hardships she endures as a young wife will be rewarded later in life. One quality that is, however, demanded of all women regardless of age is the ability to bear hardship without complaint. The values of endurance and self-mastery do not diminish with age. Complaining about hardships would engender suspicion about the individual’s ability to cope with the demands inherent in life and to be a moral female person.

We will now see how this moral female person is created through initiation.

THE INITIATION RITE – HARDSHIPS AND PLEASURES

A conspicuous theme of the initiation ritual (ñakay) is the wordless disciplining of the initiate’s body and mind. Initiates are trained to handle all sorts of hardships: hunger, lack of sleep, shame, physical pain and fear of the unknown. They are expected to be brave, patient and obedient and to endure the genital cutting, and later the ordeals of initiation without complaint. The norms of subordination and respect are pervasive during initiation. In a multitude of ways ñakay brings out the importance of hierarchy as marked by the attitudes of respect towards parents, older people and older siblings in Jola society.

In the months preceding the planned celebration of ñakay in my host village, the upcoming events thrilled the two uninitiated teenage girls in “my” family. They had passed genital cutting as little girls many years ago, and were now looking forward to the initiation with fervour. They told me about the punishments and the harsh treatment they would face in the grove. Their initiated friends had surreptitiously told them that in the grove the girls wear a simple cloth tied around the body and knotted at the back of the neck. Apart from this cloth, they are naked. The girls related with horror that as initiates they would not be allowed to wash or change their piece of cloth for the whole period in the initiation grove. They must sleep on the ground on raffia mats and even though the nights are chilly during the dry season when the initiations rite is celebrated they are not allowed cover.

A young initiated woman told me that occasionally they were forbidden to sleep altogether and they ate poorly: the initiated women and the already initiated girls ate fish and meat while the initiates were served rice only. When they had finished eating, the initiated older girls wiped their hands on the hair of the initiates: “They insulted you”, she said. “And you could say nothing”. She gave me examples of how the women would correct initiates who had been insolent or lazy, by forcing them to eat sand, to perform physically demanding tests, or they might let the initiated girls beat them or make them feel ashamed in other ways.
In addition to being subjected to physical pain, hardships, shaming and humiliation, the initiates are also challenged psychologically. They are to become acquainted with magical aspects of their society and are shown fearful masks. The women said that I could not witness these “things” because I had not been prepared like the initiates, so I was vulnerable and could end up with psychological problems. The initiates are thus not made to suffer meaningless physical and psychological ordeals but are instead trained in how to handle these hardships.

Acceptance and willingness

Another quality that is stressed during initiation is a girl’s acceptance of, and determination to suffer, the hardships of initiation and to willingly subordinate herself to the elders. This acceptance is symbolically manifested in several rites during ñakay such as the fact that they should dance energetically in spite of hunger and fatigue. The dancing enables a public judgement not only of the individual girl’s dancing skills but also, and more importantly, of her ability to cope with the ordeals and difficulties of the initiation.

Through the ordeals, the young Jola girl is believed to develop the esteemed qualities of endurance and self-mastery. A girl’s acceptance is, however, crucial for this transformation; initiated men and women openly stated that ñakay cannot transform a girl who is not prepared for, or does not accept, the transformation. There are always “headstrong” girls they said, which means such a girl is stubborn and will not change attitude. These comments further underscore that without a girl’s own desire to transform into a hard-working, cooperative, humble wife and self-sacrificing mother, she will not mature into a moral female person.

Learning “correct” female attitudes

From talking mainly with the uninitiated teenage girls in my host family, I understood that initiates are not necessarily instructed in new things. Friends who have already been initiated pass on information to novices. Moreover, before they are initiated, girls have often already acquired the skills demanded of a married woman, such as caring for a household and children; it is not necessary to be initiated to gain this knowledge. However, it is important to distinguish between information, such as tasks, activities, songs and words that mothers and their initiated friends may teach the uninitiated, and understanding of what is revealed in the grove and the bodily experience of initiation. As we have seen, an important part of the knowledge is experiential, such as the undisputable subordination to and harsh treatment from the initiated girls and women, and the tight unity between the initiates. This knowledge has to be experienced in order to be internalised in the mind and inscribed in the body. Referring to the uninitiated as people who “know nothing” certainly depicts
the uninitiated as rude and uneducated, but more profoundly it refers to their lack of bodily and mental experience of initiation; the ordeals and rewards that communicate knowledge that is difficult to put into words (cf. Morinis 1985).

The pleasures of initiation
Paradoxically as it may seem, women and men, young and old, commonly spoke of ñakay as a time of pleasure. I learned that the hardships in the initiation grove alternate with dancing, singing, playing games and eating together, all of which make initiation a strong emotional experience. In addition to the emphasis on submission to elders, self-mastery and courage, an essential aim of ñakay is to develop these strong feelings of social togetherness among the co-initiates. The experience inculcates the principle of equality, support and solidarity among peers, and the important insight that if you are good at cooperating with others your life will be “sweet”.

The rituals thus mirror ordinary life: the painful ritual acts become meaningful to both the initiates and the initiated women through everyday metaphors and associations that merge the identity of initiated women with that of moral women. In this way, individuals are able to transform experiences of pain, suffering and hardships in ritual and every day contexts into meaningful, lived experiences.

DISCUSSION
Girls’ journeys into adulthood have, in social science literature as well as activist writings, largely been considered closely linked to their biological development such as menarche or the birth of a first child, and as therefore not clearly ritually defined. The development of female identity and adulthood has consequently tended to be considered more of a continuous process and as more “naturally” developed than male identity and adulthood, which have been understood as socially imposed by more violent and clear cut means such as circumcision (see for instance de Beauvoir 1997, and Lincoln 1991).

In this paper I argue that female genital cutting and initiation ordeals constitute deliberate ways of achieving maturity and of testing bravery much in the same way that male initiation ordeals are. Those women who have stoically suffered the ordeal of clitoridectomy and the following initiation rite are considered to have proven strong moral character, determination and personal strength. To Jola women the rites create women as moral persons. This creation, as we have seen, is not automatically accomplished with the cutting or achieved initiation status per se. The transformation into a moral female person demands that the individual displays courage and determination to willingly submit the ordeals. In other words, a girl has to actively engage in, not passively endure, her own transformation into a moral female person. They
need to actively foster their body and mind to be resistant to suffering, to master their feelings, to respect the elders even though they are maltreating them, to be silent and cooperative. This I suggest is a display of girls’ and young women’s agency: in accepting the ordeals they are agents taking responsibility over their future life.

Following Saba Mahmood (2005) I argue that, for analytical reasons, the meaning of agency needs to be broadened and separated from the common liberal and feminist way of understanding agency as resistance to power relations that subordinate an individual. In reference to Michael Foucault, Mahmood suggests that the relations and norms that subordinate a subject are the very same that produce the individual subject’s identity and therefore are experienced as desirable and also form actions. My aim here is not primarily to look for the empowering aspects of genital cutting and initiation that exist in relation to its local context but to “focus on the conceptions of self, moral agency, and discipline that undergird the practices … so as to come to an understanding of the desires that animate it” (Mahmood 2005:203).

The Jola society is a society where women are constrained in many respects and where the initiation rite offers women some sort of empowerment and space for agency, such as periodical mobility, vacation, possibility to meet female friends and family members, to dance, eat well and even take a lover. Furthermore, the respect induced in initiates for authority, the experience of social togetherness and the alternation of ordeals and enjoyment during initiation parallel the experiences of everyday life. On a meta-level initiation communicates what life is like and how it should be lived.

CONCLUSION

As Schlyter points out in the introduction to this issue of Sida Studies, citizenship is created in a variety of ways, and women’s political participation and emancipation may be constructed in ways not compatible to a liberal notion of freedom and agency. This, I argue, certainly is the case in Casamance. Contemporary Jola society is marked by gender dissonance, which is reflected and recreated in the initiation rituals: on the one hand, the female rites affirm the gender order, according to which women should be docile wives and self-sacrificing mothers. On the other hand, controversial as it may seem from a feminist or activist perspective, clitoridectomy in its wider cultural and social context actually provides individual women with self-esteem, cultural recognition as moral female persons, and space for agency.

Consequently, women generally met national and international campaigns against female genital mutilation with mistrust. Many perceived these campaigns as part of imperialistic strategies counteracting local culture and women, in particular, suspect the campaigns of being attempts to abolish the
secret societies. Jola men and women perceive imperialism in two ways; on the one hand it is power felt to be exercised by the Western world and the *toubabs* (‘the whites’) over Africa, and on the other, and more directly, it is the power felt to be exercised by the Senegalese State over Casamance. Since January 1999, Senegal has had a national law forbidding female genital mutilation. In 2005, Senegal ratified the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa, also called the Maputo Protocol, which in article five states that “State Parties shall prohibit and condemn all forms of harmful practices”, such as female genital mutilation. However, Jola women expressed suspicion about the agenda of the Senegalese government and the law has consequently been interpreted by most initiated Jola women as yet another government strategy to counteract local Jola culture and Islam as it is practised in Casamance (Dellenborg 2004).

As soon as we recognise this inconsistency, we see that implementation of women’s rights indeed is complex, especially since successful support of women’s rights has to be provided in line with the wishes of the women concerned and their movements. However, following the lawyer and human right activist Abduallahi An-Na’im (1992), an understanding of cultural meanings does not make human rights irrelevant. Quite the contrary, according to An-Na’im, a relativistic approach is essential for the creation of human rights as truly universal. I agree, and it is my conviction that with a greater understanding of the complex social, cultural and political context of female genital cutting, and of women’s support of the practice, the opportunities for acting to achieve sustainable implementation of women’s human rights are enhanced.

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Since Senegal’s independence in 1960, a separatist movement has grown strong in Casamance. The political situation that often pits Casamance against the rest of Senegal has contributed to a social and political process of creating and strengthening a common Jola ethnic identity. The practice of female genital cutting has gained a particular role in this process (Dellenborg 2007).


BEARING THE PAIN: CHANGING VIEWS OF THE MEANING AND MORALITY OF SUFFERING

Maria Malmström

This paper is concerned with the significance of ordeals as connected to constructions of female gender identity and morality among the popular classes of Muslim women of Cairo. The text is structured around pain and suffering as social experience, but also concerns pain as individual and embodied. The thrust of this paper is how the lived experiences of pain and suffering, as narrated by women in Cairo, are shaped and challenged by the social and political changes that impinge on these women’s lives. Thus, how the subject is constructed through the intricate interplay of the global hegemonic structures of power, where the most intimate sphere has been exposed in the international arena, and the lived experience of female circumcision, defloration and childbirth.

This paper is part of an extensive study32 on constructions of gender through the prism of female circumcision and the interplay with the wider social dynamics in Egypt today. Fieldwork in Cairo was carried out from August 2002 until July 2003. The actors are Muslim women of different generations from the lower class neighbourhoods of Cairo. The issue of female circumcision has become a global political minefield with ‘Western’33 interventions34 affecting Egyptian politics and social development, not least in the area of democracy and human rights. My analysis has revealed how intricately interwoven female circumcision is in women’s daily lives, where idioms of suffering are an imperative component. However, these idioms of suffering are today challenged by different Western interventions.

32 This article is based on Maria Malmström’s doctorate thesis, which examined constructions of gender among women in Cairo through the prism of female circumcision. The study seeks to understand how the experiences of femininity and female circumcision are shaped and challenged by the social and political changes that impinge on these women’s lives. The project was funded by Sida/Sarec.
33 Categories such as the ‘West’ should here be regarded as an analytical category. This category is of course not any monolithic or homogenous unit.
34 See the next paragraph for explanation of the term.
THE BODY POLITICS OF FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION

The politics of female genital mutilation in Egypt are linked to a powerful and predominantly Western discourse that has been opposing the practice in Africa for the last two decades. This puts pressure on the states where the practice is widespread to exhibit their devotion to international ideals (Boyle, 2002). The global human rights discourse differs from earlier Western policies, which focused on health in relation to female genital mutilation. It modifies earlier Western feminist arguments that read female genital mutilation as patriarchal control over women’s bodies and sexuality, and as a symbol of women’s subordination (Hernlund & Shell-Duncan, 2007). Although human rights are regarded as universally applicable, the values on which they are based can be traced to a specifically European history and tradition of thought. In countries where the practice is performed, states have adopted policies that prohibit the practice even when the laws do not reflect what the majority of the population want (Boyle, 2002). For many Egyptians that I met during my year in Cairo, Western intrusions are felt to be an attack on Egyptian culture and identity and they are considered to disgrace and dishonour Egypt as a nation. The post-colonialist critique as an approach to the politics of female circumcision stresses the need for contextualised understandings of indigenous meanings (Obiora, 1997) arguing against the human rights approach.

The first external intervention in Egypt drew upon liberal discourse and sought to ban female circumcision by reference to its violation of human rights principles (Beijing Declaration, 1995). This began in Cairo in 1994 with the United Nations International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD). The conference encompassed a wide range of positions, national as well as international, represented by the Egyptian state, feminists, human rights activists, academics, medical, legal and religious professionals. The ICPD conference broke the national taboo of speaking publicly about female circumcision and sparked off highly politicised debates not only in Egypt, but in the West as well.

The increased politicisation of female circumcision in Egypt after the ICPD conference intensified another internal struggle over what kind of modernisation Egypt should seek; whether to follow the course of Mubarak’s West-oriented government or to that of the political Islamists. The effects of privatisation and structural adjustment policies in Egypt are perceived by the people that I met to be unwanted Western political interference. The women I spoke with reacted with anger and dissatisfaction about the Egyptian state’s weakness towards the Western world and their economic mismanagement. The political Islamist movement, in turn, strives for a religious and ‘moral’ modernisation and it supports female circumcision as part of Islam.35

35 However, it is not a part of Islam for all Egyptian Muslims.
Furthermore, the fact that female circumcision is performed in an Arab Muslim country gives it further global political ramifications. The events of 9/11 and the fear of Arab terrorism, and the anti-Muslim intolerance this generated, fuelled Western interventions into Egyptian national affairs. These interventions in turn generated fear, paranoia and a sense of hopelessness among the Egyptian population. With the Iraq war and the deteriorating situation in Palestine, many felt threatened and believed that a complete colonisation of Arab countries was approaching. Many did not understand what they felt were unfair Western perceptions of Muslims and Arabs. The deteriorating conditions of life and the instability in the region contributed to a loss of control and undermined individual and collective security. Thus, social and political dynamics, such as modernisation, the after effects of 9/11 and more recent events concerning female circumcision, have together begun to dis-embed female circumcision from the socio-cultural context in which it used to be taken for granted (Malmström, 2009).

DAILY EXPRESSIONS OF SUFFERING

Life of women among the popular classes is full of hardships. Culturally, such hardships are also regarded as closely connected to being and becoming a woman. This is especially so for what women refer to as the three most central pains: female circumcision, defloration and childbirth. However, there is a distinct difference in the way these pains are culturally construed and socially dealt with. Notably, while other painful experiences such as having problems in your marriage, or poverty are freely and repeatedly expressed in daily life, the three pains of life, although ordeals in a woman’s life, are nevertheless not verbally articulated.

Suffering in life is not a question of being unfortunate. Instead, it is perceived as a crucial part of a woman’s life. Suffering and pain are understood as ‘natural’ and as expected parts of life. Being able to endure pain and suffering provides highly qualifying merits (for a similar relationship between the pain of female circumcision and the teaching of endurance see Dellenborg 2007 and in this volume). This reflects a moral discourse that is closely connected to the gender ideology situated within the context of local understandings.

The women legitimate and cultivate their suffering through different narratives, which are models for the ideal gender identity: soap operas and music videos. One of the daily tasks easily combined with household work or with socialising, particularly among the older women I met, was the watching of unhappy Egyptian love movies and music videos, all filled with dramatic sufferings in recognition of their own life (Behar, 1990). The other narrative used in this way was drawn from Islam and is more ontological in character.
A general notion among particular the older women was to refer to the Quran, the sections of women’s hardships in life, or to different hadiths, since both emphasise the unique hardships of motherhood. The women were convinced that God would give women compensation in paradise, since women suffered greatly in life. This religious knowledge and trust gave many of these older women consolation in life and made their suffering meaningful.

To be able to be perceived as an honourable woman, the endurance of hardships is continuously dependent on an audience. Conversations between women in their daily life were filled with expressions of their ordeals. It was a female way to explicitly communicate the everyday, at the same time as the performance confirmed a particular image of themselves as women (Behar, 1990). In other words, when women talk about the hardships they endure, they speak of themselves as women. The expressions women used were often dramatic with sweeping gestures, fairly repetitive, often including food metaphors and proverbs. Clearly, women’s lives were undoubtedly difficult, with social tragedies such as marriages too early, domestic violence, infant mortality, poverty and other dramas. Furthermore, the married women explicitly complained about their many bodily pains and illnesses and the spoken hardships were a dominant topic of the daily conversations. They were tired (ta’baan), they sighed, they moaned, they had pain (‘alam) in their body, especially in their legs, chest or arms.

Not only older women, but also the younger generation of women, were convinced that women suffer much more in life than men do, today as in former days. Yasmine, twenty-years old and a university student said “Suffering is the life of an Egyptian woman”. At the same time, the younger women often expressed irritation towards the older generation of women, whom they felt were constantly complaining about the afflictions of life. These young women were also fairly negative to all kinds of physical pain and thereby challenged conventional ideas about the significance of pain in relation to proper womanhood.

These are the verbally expressed experiences connected to the socialisation into womanhood. But, as I indicated before, there are other domains of experiences which are not expressed. These are painful experiences in the domain of sexuality and reproduction.

THE THREE PAINS OF LIFE

Three bodily pains that every woman among the urban poor has to pass through in their lifecycle are female circumcision, defloration and childbirth. There is a close link between the three events in a woman’s life, and it is impossible to understand the Cairo women’s view on female circumcision without discussing childbirth and defloration at the same time. When talking
about one with me, women were often reminded of the others. Especially the circumcision and defloration were experientially linked. My argument is that the body is an active agent in parallel to other agents of socialisation. The duration of pain during defloration or childbirth may communicate with a body memory from the experiences of female circumcision.

The women I spoke to relived pain in their lower abdomen years after the circumcision in totally different life situations than these three crises. As one young woman told me, her genitals began to ache years after when she saw blood and meat in the butcher's shops outside on the streets. As Morinis (1985) points out, intense personal painful experience produces self-awareness and also that which is being taught becomes unforgettable. The body has a memory, which is not always conscious; strongly painful memories are probably never forgotten. A “body memory is something we are rather than have” (Johansen, 2002, p. 315). Body memories can be awakened by other body memories of pain or with new pain such as during the recurrent, painful depilation of the vulva.

The body memories may be articulated and categorised in different ways in various contexts, but among the urban poor in Cairo, the importance of pain in the upbringing of a girl with its socially defined purpose is tied to themes of hardening and preparation for a future role clearly connected to the modelling of womanhood.

The pain as experienced by the individual, repeatedly experienced again and again during a woman's life, is a body memory of a socially inflicted pain. The personal experience of pain transforms into a social experience of meaning as well as to a social memory (Davies, 1992). Sensory occurrence may be transformed into a meaningful experience if it is, subsequently, socially shared and seen as purposeful action. Through the senses and the contextual meaning of them, i.e. learning through the body, the Egyptian girls are moulded feminine. They are taught morality through the endurance of pain and through the body’s capabilities to sense, where the body actively experiences and remembers to be a moral woman in daily life and in accordance with the norms of the idiom of suffering. Women’s body memories are also important in the creation of virtuous Muslim womanhood since endurance is a key virtue within Islam.

The first pain: Female circumcision

Um Mahmood was an Egyptian woman in her sixties. She married when she was twelve years old and had given birth to sixteen children. However, only five had survived. Um Mahmood explained why pain is so important in circumcision:
We circumcise our girls to cut this place. To let them feel pain in this place, to be afraid and protect this place from anything. If you take the fire in your bare hands, you will feel it and you will remember. You should let her burn herself; this will help her not making any mistakes.

Um Mahmood also clarified that knowledge is achieved with time:

I felt enormous pain. I could not sleep at night. I cried and I screamed. But look! Look at me! I have been married a long time and I have many children. I can understand everything. When you get older, you will understand the meaning of female circumcision. Inšá’ alláh (God willing).

Um Mahmood’s explanation of the significance of pain links it to the ideology of honour. She told me that circumcision means pain but that this pain is less intense than the suffering that will result if it is not done. If the girl has sexual intercourse before marriage and loses her baraka, and her honour, which also belongs to rest of the family, the suffering will be immense for all her family members and the girl’s life will be ruined. The procedure is supposed to have a deterrent effect and prevent her from making acquaintances with boys; it should help her keep the honour of the family and prepare her to become a polite and modest woman, wife and mother.

Many of the younger women also remembered their circumcision and its aftermath as painful, even if it had been performed under local anaesthesia or narcosis. Habiba, a young university student who was a neighbour of Um Mahmood, who had been circumcised by a dáya, said “It was a black day because of the pain. It feels as if you are going to die when they cut. The pain is not necessary”. Most of the younger women viewed pain differently from the older women. When Hania, Um Mahmood’s daughter-in-law, talked about her experience she became angry and said “It is not important to have pain. It makes no sense. You forget the circumcision, but never the pain. You will not forget the pain”. She explained that every time she spoke or thought about circumcision she experienced her own pain again. As we will see, young girls’ perceptions of pain as meaningless have far-reaching consequences for the constructions of gender and the production of morality. Twenty-year old, unmarried Rana said:

It was such agony. Today, when I hear someone speaking about circumcision, the same agony comes back, the memories, and I feel the same thing again. It is a dreadful experience for a girl. Something from your body is cut off. I bled a lot and the pain was intense. I was given no anaesthesia like girls get today.
There was more pain and suffering before … today it is a little painful … before there were foolish people. Today, the girls visit the clinic where they get anaesthesia and suturing.

Although most of the young women I spoke to considered pain to be meaningless, they were ambivalent about the necessity of circumcision. Ryham, twenty-four year old and newly married, is typical of young women in today’s Cairo:

Maybe I would want to do it for my daughters if someone [a physician] who has more knowledge can convince me. But I cannot see anything good coming from circumcision… Maybe we will have better technology. Maybe it will be proven that it is good for girls.

The second pain: Defloration

The official beginning of a woman’s sexual life starts with marriage and defloration, ḏuḥlā. According to the women I met, ‘the traditional form’ ḏuḥlā bilâdi is less common now than it used to be but it is still common in rural areas. In urban areas, ḏuḥlā bilâdi is nowadays associated with backwardness although some families still practice it. In Cairo today, many families prefer ‘modern’ defloration for their children. Um Mahmood commented:

*Duḥlā* [referring to the modern version] today is a different fashion. The man and the woman are alone and they only give the expected evidence, in the form of a blood-stained cloth, to the family the morning after. Today, couples know what to do. It is not like before. It is a new time… But all my daughters did ḏuḥlā bilâdi… like me.

As Um Mahmood explained, modern defloration is a private matter between husband and wife. The husband is supposed to ‘open’ his wife’s hymen, in contrast to ḏuḥlā bilâdi, which is clearly a public event. Still, it is important to show the families on both sides the blood from the ruptured hymen even if this does not happen straight after the first night. With ḏuḥlā bilâdi, the bride and bridgroom, their mothers and the dāya are supposed to meet in the bride’s bedroom in her family home. The bride is expected to undress below the waist and then to sit in the same position as she did when she was circumcised. The dāya then ruptures the hymen and sometimes scratches the wall of the vagina to bring forth the required blood. This is witnessed by the husband, the bride’s mother and the husband’s mother while the other family members and friends wait outside in anticipation. The dāya’s professional reputation for demonstrating the virginity of the bride is crucial for her future
work though the bride’s physical virginity is not as important as the social and visible virginity that they dâya manages to demonstrate. The bridegroom receives the cloth with the blood and all the women begin to sing and ululate loudly to celebrate to the intact honour of the family. The family does not lose face.

The third pain: Childbirth

If it was mentioned at all, childbirth was usually referred to in very general terms, unless there had been complications such as miscarriages or stillbirths. However, when they talked about childbirth, the women depicted it in similar terms to the ‘tiring pain’ of circumcision. Sometimes they would compare the pain of an episiotomy to that of circumcision. When speaking about her circumcision one woman said “Fi alam [in pain]. I cannot remember. I was so small. But the pain was the same as when I gave birth”.

Most of the older women I met had had traumatic experiences of stillbirths, miscarriages and neonatal deaths. Um Mahmood’s experiences were quite typical. She was fifteen the first time she fell pregnant and about thirty the last time. She gave birth to all her children at home. She almost whispered when she told me “I gave birth sixteen times. I was pregnant all the time. I was a foolish woman. After forty days I met my husband again”. Um Mahmood told me long stories of the deaths of her eleven children; eight sons and three daughters. Five children had survived.

SURROUNDED BY SILENCE

In contrast to the experienced every day hardships discussed earlier, the individual experience related to a woman’s three crises does not have any socially acceptable form or forum of verbal expression. Women in the Egyptian context are not allowed to express their suffering verbally during the operation, during the silent celebration, or in the social interaction in their everyday lives. These social disciplinarian acts demand silence. Verbal complaints to other women would be understood as a failure and also as shameful, since these acts are connected to sexuality and reproduction. Silence and secrecy escort the making of a feminine self and enduring the three body-in-pain crises with patience produces a virtuous self and a self-understanding (Morinis, 1985), in which the painful experiences are continuously engraved on the inside of the body. (See Dellenborg in this volume for a parallel of the value of self-mastery that demands silence.) Kleinman et al. (1997) highlights the role of language in shaping the experience of suffering, where some experiences of pain are communicated and others are veiled in silence. Consequently, for many women speaking to me about these hardships was the first time in their life they expressed their individual experiences.
Um Mahmood said that nobody is actually capable of sharing another person’s pain, since it is only the individual woman who alone can feel and carry the pain, because “it is only the one who touches the fire who is able to feel pain”. Like Scarry, (1985), Um Mahmood argues that there are no words for severe pain. This argument corresponds with Scarry’s findings of the unsharability of infliction and that “physical pain does not simply resist language but actively destroys it” (Scarry 1985, p. 4). She suggests that “Whatever pain achieves, it achieves in part through its unsharability, and it ensures this unsharability through its resistance to language” (Scarry, 1985, p. 4). Similarly to Scarry, in my field the silence is partly situated in the core of pain itself. However, these pains are also socially silenced. This silence is a central component of proper upbringing and production of morality. The verbal expression of these pains, all within the sphere of sexuality, is considered shameful. But there is also the dilemma of consciously causing pain on one’s own children. Hence the verbally muted pain in the Egyptian context is socially sanctioned and inflicted on one’s own children, and is therefore constantly fraught with dilemma as well as ambiguity in the local society.

THE AMBIVALENCE OF ORDEALS AND THE PRODUCTION OF SEXUAL MUTILATION

“Do you think I am permanently sexually destroyed?” asked Heba, a university student, as we were drinking our sweet, cardamom-flavoured coffee, at one of the popular downtown coffee shops. She looked anxiously into my eyes, seeking a reassuring response as she inhaled from her water-pipe. This was not the first time she had asked me this. Indeed, many of the young, unmarried women I spoke to would repeatedly bring this up. Heba had also discussed the matter with her older sister, who had responded despondently that maybe they had both been destroyed for life, but what could they do about it?

The Western interventionist discourse on female genital mutilation engenders this kind of uncertainty in many young women. In tandem, the physically inscribed pain associated with female circumcision, deforation and childbirth are no longer regarded by younger women as either necessary or gratifying. It seems that the suffering that used to be valued as a worthy and purposeful endurance of hardship is now losing its significance. The ‘new’ way of perceiving this kind of suffering seems to be to view it as devoid of meaning and as being associated with ideas of sexual mutilation and sickness.

The mothers in my study did not associate circumcision with sexual dysfunction; they told me that they had not been worried about having been sexually mutilated prior to marriage. However, as Hernlund (2003) found in
the Gambia, in contemporary Cairo too the anti-female genital mutilation campaigns seem to rephrase the pain of circumcision for younger women, making it intolerable and meaningless. These discourses have transformed many young Egyptian women’s experiences of ordeals into a new kind of hardship that carry little value since the endurance of pain no longer yields moral merits or generates proper womanhood. It is therefore pertinent to ask whether it may be possible for young women to move beyond this new self-definition as a ‘destroyed woman’.

However, although young women often see suffering as meaningless, this does not mean that they consider female circumcision meaningless. They reflect upon and criticise the practice, but with considerable ambivalence. Women take different stances and one and the same person may hold contradictory views. The ambivalence and uncertainty evoked by political change and modernisation means that young women in particular shift positions in their pursuit of viable strategies for coping with the conflicting demands they face. In doing so, they become agents in the ongoing reformulation of gender ideology as they both challenge and embrace existing norms.

The way in which gender, class and religion interact in the younger women’s identity formation is complex. The majority of young women strive for social mobility. However, the role of religion in this seems to be shifting as many women choose orthodox Islam for a while and then seek other forms of Islam or vice versa. Given this ambivalence, it is difficult to foresee what positions these young women will adopt regarding female circumcision when the question arises in relation to their future daughters. They may continue to support the practice but take measures to stop the pain associated with it by medicalising it further. They may come to view it as a form of sexual mutilation and when they become paternal grandmothers they may oppose the circumcision of their granddaughters. Or they may come to view circumcision as a modern Islamic practice.

The female genital mutilation discourse must be understood against this backdrop of post-colonial politics and modernisation, which transform ideals of gender. For today’s young women these changes have brought greater access to education, later marriages and the birth of fewer children. This means that even though young women face new challenges in aspiring to be ‘modern’, many are spared the hardships that coloured their mothers’ lives. These factors nurture new ways of thinking about pain and many young women no longer consider it to be an essential part of becoming a proper woman. In this way, modernisation has contributed to the reformulation of the significance of pain.
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WOMEN IN THE BACK SEAT IN MALIAN CITIZENSHIP

Assitan Diallo

INTRODUCTION

A gender analysis of citizenship in Mali is often met with sceptical reactions, or simply a dismissal of any relevance of such a discussion. I am often told that women already have the rights to vote, to participate in every process inherent in democratic governance and the freedom of choice and expression. Not enough, I would say! Statistics on individual wellbeing, access to resources in the labour market and political participation show important discrepancies between women and men (CNDIFE, 2008). Through various mechanisms of exclusion, marginalisation and downgrading, women find themselves second-class citizens, being the majority of the poorest and the least represented in public institutions and elective bodies. The crafting of this undervalued citizenship is a pervasive process that infiltrates the making of successive generations of Malians and is likely to impede on the onset of true democratic governance in the country.

The present analysis includes a wide range of possible influences on women’s citizenship: gendered socialisation, the State’s ambiguous standpoints and pressure from the women’s movement. The first section of the paper is built on my own research regarding gender identities as they are constructed in practice and through social discourses. Considerations and values attached to women’s bodies are believed to be the foundation of their undervalued citizenship. As stated by Schlyter in the introduction chapter, body politics is “used to analyse how state policies create (or do not create) space for women’s political agency, and how political discourses construct individual and collective women’s bodies.” In the second section of the paper, the body politics of citizenship is approached through the State’s investment in the advancement of women and its capability of bringing about substantial and steady changes in women’s bodily conditions. Much of the discussion aims at uncovering why positive State policies and laws have so little impact on women’s reality in Mali.
FRESH MUD BODY

In discussing what space there is for feminism in scholarship on Africa, Pereira (2002:11) suggested “that in addition to subverting existing gender hierarchies, feminist knowledge and imagination are concerned with asking different kinds of questions, requiring new conceptualizations about wider realities that include women as well as men”. I have taken such path in joining fellow African feminists who seek to convey the specific content of the gender concept constructed locally. Through interviews, and analysis of songs and proverbs from the Malian cultural repertoire, I have examined the categorisation of gender and various perceptions that underscore gender inequalities. This section is based on some of these research findings.

Gender representations

A common metaphor in Malian society is to picture the socialisation process as moulding fresh mud before the task at hand gets more difficult. This way of thinking justifies for example, why women’s bodies and mind are manipulated in many ways according to traditions, early in their lives. The crafting of Malian women’s lower status starts in the family through a socialisation process that minimises their capacity to take care of themselves. They are identified as dependent members of the household. Furthermore, in older stages of life, mothers are placed under their sons’ tutorship whereas aged fathers receive whatever assistance they need in their own home. The system of bride-price, gendered division of labour in the family and age discrepancy among couples (usually husbands are much older than their wives) are additional factors that reinforce the normative dependency of the female subgroup.

Hence, insights into crafting the second class citizenship of women begin with a close look at the local construction of femininity and masculinity, in light of prevalent social norms and values. This paper argues for an elasticity of the conceptualisation of gender which goes beyond the usual categories of men and women. In Mali, domestic chores and social activities mostly define femininity, whereas the production of goods (material properties and regular income) and decision-making constitute the main dimensions of masculinity. In conformity with these norms, womanhood is described along the line of personal characteristics that do not threaten the social order. A good woman is gentle, imperceptible and manipulative. The “go get it” opportunistic capability, so much encouraged in men, is perceived as aggressiveness in women, particularly in workplaces and in political spaces. Women who are very active in politics, though not a new phenomenon and fairly well accepted, are often described as pretentious and transgressing their gender role boundaries (Konaré, 1999).
Social discourses on gender relations

My own research points to the fact that parallel to this characterisation of gender groups in Mali, there is also the cultural notion of transgression across gender lines. This refers to behaviours perceived as deviant from established norms. Consequently, the woman who displays her personal choices has freedom of mind and takes independent initiatives, is regarded differently. That is, she who exercises agency on individual and professional levels outside the defined boundaries set for women is called “a woman in pants” or “a manly woman”. The man, who is perceived as to replacing his trousers with a woman’s wrap-around, is referred to as “a worthless man”. He is described as one who falls short of his social obligations, lacks courage and power to assert himself. Interestingly enough, individuals who are perceived as unfit to assume their social obligations are denied a gender identity. Therefore, the homosexuals (male or female) are called “neither men nor women” and prostitutes are said to be “no-women” (Diallo, 2004b).

Exceptions becoming the rule, transgressions across gender lines are increasing rapidly through changes in individual socioeconomic roles. Daily needs and challenges often lead Malians to transgress social norms in an environment of generalised poverty and widespread globalisation of the world. Observed changes in norms around masculinity and femininity do not seem to be enough of a catalyst for the deconstruction of gender identities. In a prevailing “unfriendly” social context, women’s agency for freedom spaces allowed them to operate skilfully around barriers generated by norms and values to control their mobility, autonomy and decision-making. They have and use different types of power in varying circumstances, and at different stages of their life cycle. Hence, they are ingenious workers who make ends meet at home when men have hard time fulfilling their share of responsibilities. Sometimes, they own enough resources to launch economic activities that supersede their ascribed roles of spouse and mother. With increasing educational level, more and more women are becoming active in high administrative positions and political bodies. The amount of exchanges and joint ventures among women has greatly increased, forcing the way for transformative actions at individual level as well as collectively (Diallo and Vaa, 2002).

Alterations in the normative division of labour have been possible through assistance in childcare responsibilities and housework obligations, and access to diversified safety nets. Though denounced here and there as irresponsible behaviour, urban women use substitutes to fulfil their family roles in order to sustain their gainful activities. The availability of housekeepers, female child fostering and assistance from women co-residents, provides a unique way out of domestic confinement. In doing so, women seem to have succeeded in gaining a ‘de facto’ power that allows them to meet their survival needs and achieve personal ambitions (Diallo, 1998). New individualities have emerged
in a cultural context that is constantly fading away from its traditional roots as a result of women’s agency and increasing globalisation of socio-cultural contexts.

Generally speaking, socialisation into gender-specific characteristics continuously reinforces women’s dependency on men. Women’s rights are taken hostage between family roles and expectations attached to femininity. The process of defining women as inferior human beings starts in the family is transposed at the societal level and then institutionalised in the public arena. Women’s maturity is viewed as not sufficient to grant them full decision-making power or representative status in the community. They are usually informed, asked for their opinion in an informal manner and occasionally invited to join men in decision-making at community level. This status quo of gender inequality and women’s disempowerment is the starting point of gender differentials in citizenship.

THE CRAFTING OF SECOND-CLASS CITIZENSHIP

Women have participated fully in the upheaval necessary to launch a democratisation process that is believed to grant freedom and justice to both men and women in Mali. As in the case of the independence movement, women were central agents in an overwhelming mobilisation and passionate political discourses that led to the restructuring of State institutions and the emergence of new political bodies. Despite these historical roles in building the Nation-State, in changing political regime and refashioning proactive citizenship, current gender relations leave little power to women to voice their choices, make optimum use of socio-economic opportunities and set goals for personal fulfilment. How does the State react to the persisting inequality between women and men? What strategies and initiatives are implemented to address these observed discrepancies?

“Bosses and followers”

Women are mostly perceived as second-class workers. They are employed in service sectors, in agricultural production or in a large crowd in the informal sector. In agriculture, men’s workload is usually less than that of the women; however the physical hardship involved in men’s share of activities is used to justify the claim that they are the key providers of commodities in rural areas. Urban men predominate in the public services and the private sector, whereas the majority of women make a living from informal economic activities. This makes men appear as the sole income earners in the family. Social discourses on gender roles present men as more fit for decision-making. Consequently, they hold most of the strategic positions in the government, administrative bodies and political parties.
Public funds have been used to train women candidates as a way of increasing female leadership. Still, they remain a minority in elected bodies, which does not do any justice to women’s real weight and value in representing the people. The social position attached to women’s bodies is leading the way: men are bosses, women are followers. The reality gives a picture of the majority of women confined in folkloric activities during elections period, putting out their forces for male candidates. When women happen to be the candidates for elected positions, they do not take the chance to address issues related to gender inequality (Diallo, 2007).

Faced with exclusion, women try to work around men-dominated spaces seeking inclusion in existing institutions and mechanisms that are likely to be biased towards men’s interests. In many cases, women find themselves in leadership positions without authority, or in such minority that their voices are overwhelmed. This is the case of the National Assembly where men outnumber women ten times over. For some people, this type of limited power is no power for women since discrimination in gender relations is the rule. For others, limited power is a situation of different types of power for men and women, a step forward in shaping the political game according to women’s needs and values. However, leadership without authority is regarded by many as women’s powerlessness. The commitment to democratisation does not seem to include the necessity of a revision of gender relations in the household. As an example, men are granted an unquestionable status of head of households to the extent that women are denied this social position even if they are the main providers in the family. The status of head of household and various privileges ascribed to men remain the same even when they are incapable of living up to the related social expectations. It is often said that there is no head of household in the extreme case of a single female breadwinner in the family.

Investing in women

A fair amount of the Malian national budget goes into education. For decades, particular emphasis has been placed on closing the gap between girls and boys in primary school. Increasing girls’ education remains a primary concern in development programmes and projects, given the strong commitment to the Millennium Development Goals in Mali. Still, attempts to integrate gender studies or key gender issues into the curricula of the educational system appear to be an impossible equation.

Given a high rate of maternal morbidity and mortality, women’s bodies have been a constant target of the State. Health policies have placed a particular emphasis on women’s access to prenatal care and childbearing services. Awareness-raising and training on women’s reproductive health have helped to establish a strong partnership between government institutions and non-governmental organisations.
Access to housing, particularly for women heads of household, has greatly improved recently due to State’s initiatives towards the most vulnerable population subgroups. As concerns customary laws, women are eternally “homeless”. They are viewed as temporary members of their parental home, since they are doomed to leave upon marriage. The conjugal home, even in cases where expenses are shared, is perceived as the husband’s property. There are no legal restrictions on women owning property. However, socio-cultural norms favour such ownership for the sake of women’s offspring, but condemn women living on their own when unmarried, and women trying to avoid living arrangements in their husbands’ house, such as co-residence with co-spouses or in-laws. House ownership is culturally correct for the purpose of income-generating, not for promoting women’s autonomy (Vaa, 1996).

The notion of gender mainstreaming grew out of the realisation that gender issues should not remain marginal to the ideas and practices of development organisations, but should be central to them and hence located in their ‘mainstream’. How this is to occur, whether by being integrated into them or radically transforming them, has long been debated (Smyth, 2007).

In general, including a gender-sensitive dimension in mainstream actions has been perceived by many as a minor concern compared to the great challenges of bringing about economic growth in the country, the assumption being that with prosperity come increasing opportunities for all. Governmental planning and prioritising often overlooks gender issues supposedly mainstreamed into development through various sectors’ policies and activities. In the aftermath of launching the democratisation process in 1991, women fought hard to have their concern for gender equity inserted into the preamble of the new Constitution.

Altogether, my reading of the interrelationships between the two notions, democracy and gender equity, is one of a dramatic encounter. State feminism, as lived here in Mali, is quite ambiguous and unfinished. The Malian State is a signatory to almost all the international conventions and treaties on the behalf of gender justice. What is keeping this State from delivering its promises? Is the State strong enough to stand by its displayed commitment to gender justice in its national legislation?

**TRANSFORMING BODY POLITICS**

Some of the key questions that the present paper raises concern the altruistic commitment of the State to removing gender bias from its policies and programmes, and achieving effective gender mainstreaming in the development process. Some others deal with women’s organisations, particularly their capacities to take up the challenge of negotiating full citizenship based on State laws and international commitments.
In general, civil society in Mali has been a think-tank and a space for exchanges on ways and means of women’s empowerment. It has provided an appropriate framework in which to mobilise energy, boost popular involvement, sustain collective expression and enable the management of crises and social conflicts. A growing proportion of women, particularly in cities, are taking matters into their own hands and pushing the agenda of gender equity and women’s empowerment forward (Konaré, 1999). These women are trying to negotiate for gender justice through the use of existing bodies of politics and advocacy for better gender relations. The following points of discussion illustrate just that.

Negotiating the Electoral Code
The fight for a gender-sensitive Electoral Code in Mali reflects a continental resistance to the idea of positive discrimination that would boost women’s full citizenship (iKnow Politics, 2008). Three years ago, representatives of political parties in the Malian parliament rejected almost unanimously the inclusion of a quota system in the electoral code as a means of addressing the low representation of women in administrative and political bodies. They claimed that women need to be qualified and fit for the job, hereby developing aptitudes and competencies that are necessary on the electoral market (Haidara, 2006). There has always been a heavy stress on women leaders because of demands for high standards. This is based on the assumption that men deserve whatever positions they have, and women have to excel above normal to get into ‘the men’s club’ (Reddock, 2004). Does this not sound familiar to the customary notion of ‘women in pants’, i.e. ‘manly women’ performing across the gender line?

Negotiating the Family Code
The Ordeal of the reform for the new Family Code has been underway since 1989. On August 2009, the National Assembly endorsed the future law (Ministère de la Justice, 2009) which was removed shortly after for re-examination, on the demand of the Head of the State. Media reported that angry crowds throughout the country were denouncing the document (UNIFEM Mali, 2009). In the name of Islam, they promised not to ‘rest until this Code is trashed out’, thus forbidding the President from signing it into a law after the overwhelming approval of Parliament. Muslim religious leaders, followed by an estimated crowd of fifty thousand men and women, protested against the executive body and the legislative body of Malian Politics, and most of all against the upcoming changes in women’s bodily conditions in the family and communities. They argued that external pressures from the international community were forcing the authorities and legislators to bow down to mate-
rrial interests, selling out Malian social and religious values (Le Quotidien Les Echos, 2009; Nouvelle Republique 2009).

Does it matter that this legislative body consists predominantly of men representatives of the silent majority of the Malian population? Does it count that it is the Department of Justice, instead of the Ministry for Women’s Affairs, which handled and presented the draft Code to the National Assembly? Most of these religious leaders have been agreeable stakeholders at some points in the elaboration process of this new Family Code, whereas many of those being mobilised had most likely not read either the old Code or the reformed document. They are reacting strongly to the implicit deconstruction of their representations of the female body. In doing so, they are reducing the decisions of political bodies represented in the Parliament into a single focus: “Keeping women as they are – second-class citizens”!

The current “Code de marriage et de tutelle” declares that husbands are heads of households, and that wives must comply with their choice of residence. It also says that women should obey their spouses and be under their tutorship. In the absence of clause with regard to inheritance, the customary rule of unequal share based on the beneficiary’s sex is the norm. Current debates on the reforms being submitted clearly show that the population, both men and women, are far from ready for a substantial change in the position of women in Malian society. There are powerful Islamic lobbies and representatives of the elderly who are key actors in this protest process, and they are making sure that challenging ideas are not included in any legislation to be enacted by the President of our secular republic.

Civil ruling on inheritance based on gender equality is, in their view, a dangerous violation of Muslim laws, and a rejection of customary laws. One argument put forward by the Head of “l’Union Nationale des Femmes Musulmanes du Mali”36 is that elite women, mostly in urban areas with specific objectives and requests, do not in any way represent the majority of women reverent to their traditions37. In my view this illustrates the fact that often, in male dominated movements, a woman is sent to represent the gatekeepers against changes in the rules particularly when it favours women. However, it should be acknowledged that there are divergent standpoints between women in different positions, and that there is a need to uncover their different priorities, and mainstream the necessary transformative actions in development planning.

36 The Union of Muslim Women in Mali.
Shortcomings in negotiations

The failed reform of the Family Code is a case of a reversal in which protagonists attempted to destroy victories gained four decades ago. The main drawback in this process is that modernity is intertwined with tradition in the current transitional stage of social evolution, and women are paying the price! The State in Mali appears as an informal space that mixes customary, religious and modern laws, procedures and methods. This is so despite the dismantling of customary tribunals in the 60s (Asdi, 2004).

Regarding the neo-traditionalist tendencies that have driven the protest against the new family code, promoting any form of equality in the context of a highly stratified society is an overt attack to its foundation. Voices have been raised against the quest for gender equality, which is believed to include the rejection of feminine identity and roles as they currently are. Advocating women’s rights has often been viewed as promoting individual decision-making to overrule the existing social order of interdependency and the primacy of the elderly (Diallo, 2004a:187). However, there is no line defining what passes as traditional or modern. The two realms interpenetrate in complex manners in Africa. They do so in such a way as to render this dichotomy a mockery of reality (Godwin, 2006).

There are great challenges involved in negotiating gender justice, which may be defined in the present context as women exercising full and equal rights according to Malian Constitution. The call for accountability is an important means for ending discrimination and structural inequality. Women must hold policy-makers accountable for their failed promises and lack of action, and demand that the necessary steps be taken to attend to the stated needs (UNIFEM, 2009). There has, however, not been much success in making the Malian State accountable to women. Women’s organisations have engaged much within the State’s agenda, perhaps at the cost of the strategy of joining mainstream non-state actors where potential male partners may be found.

Efforts invested in the advancement of women have yet to lead to a real social movement in Africa. There is still a widespread unawareness of national strategies and policies aimed at fostering equality between women and men. This situation has been worsened by a lack of synergy and clear vision among civil society organisations engaged in transformative actions (Reddock, 2003).

Tapping into the wealth out there......

In contemplating the possibility of full citizenship, in an improved context of more gender justice, attention is drawn on the added value of transnational strategies. This leads inevitably to asking whether the State will be strong enough to stand by its commitments within the international community, to
foster “women-friendly” regulations as a way of implementing CEDAW\textsuperscript{38}, the Maputo Protocol\textsuperscript{39} and the African Union’s Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa\textsuperscript{40}. The African Union has called on the Heads of States to commit to gender equality by ensuring parity in public institutions and adopting gender responsive planning and capacity building in their respective country. This comes out as a clear mandate to implement all instruments that promote women’s human rights (Musa and Bassey, 2009). Would local implementation of transnational strategies and policies succeed where the State failed to restore women’s full right to citizenship?

Improving women’s second class citizenship requires that they are empowered with skills and agency to seek fulfilment in the men’s world of public affairs. In Mali, development partners have provided women with training that allowed them to become prepared and be in charge of their own political agendas. Campaigns to promote women’s candidacy for various elected seats and pressure on leaders of political parties, are now a familiar feature of the political panorama. In order to make this happen, partners from the international community have organised themselves into a dynamic consultative body that promotes women’s human rights as an effective outcome of the State’s gender mainstreaming approach (Rios-Kohn, 2003).

The value added from transnational strategies and development assistance may have its limits. There is a need to enhance the women’s movement in a way that makes maximum use of the wealth out there... in a globalised world.

CONCLUSION

So far, achievements through women’s agency are more a result of individual successes than collective endeavours. In general, women’s bodily conditions have not changed on a large scale. Women’s resistance to the re-traditionalisation of Malian society has yet to be rooted in clear and inventive strategies that would reflect their vision of a transformative citizenship. Many efforts should be invested in upgrading the strength of the scattered women’s movement in order to nurture the changes that are in motion.

In order to move women from the back seat of citizenship to leadership with authority, dynamic political citizenry must be sustained through linking women members of Parliament with those active in civil society organisations and structures of local government. Initiatives aimed at cross-generational

\textsuperscript{38} The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (see Annex 1 and Annex 2).
\textsuperscript{39} The Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights – the Rights of Women in Africa (see Annex 3 and Annex 4).
\textsuperscript{40} www.africa-union.org/AU summit 2004/gender/decl.pdf
teamwork and mentorship constitutes another promising venue for broadening
the women’s movement in Mali, and renewing its vitality.

It is also crucial to maintain pressure on male decision-makers and law-
makers in order to ensure their support for women’s empowerment and equality
among all citizens. Their accountability has only been challenged so far in
a hesitant and intermittent manner.

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In a suggestive study of the politics of spectacle in Argentina, Diana Taylor (1997) questions the neo-Marxist trend towards defining spectacle as false consciousness, as ideological practice that detracts from “real politics”. Drawing on performance theory, she shows how public spectacle can both construct and interrogate a sense of gender and nation. In what follows, I consider how recent South African struggles can be examined in relation to the patterns that she identifies. I am especially concerned with how power relations – at deep unconscious levels – are enacted through the public performance and representation of gendered bodies. My primary concern is therefore with unraveling the everyday processes of identity construction and subjectivity that drive South African struggles for, and about, power in the present day.

My focus is on how certain events function to construct identities through collective imagining and fantasy. Here I take into account the way in which spectacle provides sources for the fictions, symbols, memories and narratives that are central to individuals’ personal sense of gender and personhood. I am also interested in how spectacles stir the imagination of actors and spectators, in many cases breaking down barriers between actors and spectators and allowing spectators to invent or confirm a sense of self in various ways. I show that public spectacles in the present play an important part in socially marking bodies, and therefore also in creating political meanings about gendered and other social identities. Although these spectacles have often been sensationalised as newsworthy national events, they are rarely defined as central political processes. I argue that while formally-recognised freedoms guarantee numerous rights and freedoms, everyday performances of self acquire public prominence through spectacle, and therefore signal a form of “politics” beyond the formal political sphere. At the same time, political struggles seem likely to take on new forms as groups and individuals enlist their bodies as powerful signifiers of resistance to oppression.
SPECTACULAR ACTS AND POWER

Spectacles involving the degradation and torture of human bodies have loomed large in South African life. During the Apartheid period, these included acts performed by both agents and opponents of the Apartheid government such as the torture of political prisoners, “necklacing”\(^{41}\) and young activists forcing women consumer boycott-breakers to drink cooking oil. Much of the meaning of past acts derives from how acts of repression become theatrical performances. Certain ritualistic and graphic demonstrations of humiliation and degradation enact particular groups’ control over, and naming of, the bodies of projected outsiders. Their resonance also stems from their being witnessed by those who are not principle participants. In this way, they allow witnesses to participate vicariously in the identity-construction and meaning-making that they configure.

It has often been acknowledged that these acts reinforce authority by constructing ethnic, racial or anti-apartheid identities. But less emphasis has been placed on the way they centralise gendered and sexualised meanings in ways that often encode complex patterns of authority and contestation. In this section I turn to these meanings in aspects of spectacle in the post-apartheid context.

Paradoxically, one of the most important recent features of individual and collective behaviour in South Africa – sanctioned both at the level of the state and within the nation-state – is discipline and authoritarianism. This is paradoxical because formally the post-apartheid state demonstrates and is committed to good governance, constitutional rights, citizens’ bodily integrity and freedom of speech and expression. Yet many repressive and coercive practices are manifested in public spectacles, rather than in formal politics such as government institutions, legislation and policy-making. The power of visuality and the somatic has been crucial to these spectacles. At one level, we see this in the disciplining of actual women, especially black women. The control of black women’s bodies has been central to the construction of masculinist citizenship and nationhood, as well as masculinised ethnicity. At another level, authoritarian cultures draw on, and are rationalised by, gendered behaviour and language, by somatic symbols and meanings through which notions such as citizenship, order and the healthy social body are imagined.

One of the most prominent post-apartheid spectacles for instituting control over black women’s bodies is the practice of virginity testing. As a practice that claims to establish whether young women have had sexual intercourse, virginity testing categorises women’s bodies according to “A”, “B”\(^{41}\) Necklacing was a practice in which individuals believed to have betrayed the anti-apartheid struggle in various ways were punished in public by being set alight; burning tyres were placed around their bodies.
and “C” grades, “A” indicating that women are “pure and untouched”, “B” indicating that women have been penetrated in some way, and “C” indicating that they are “wholly spoilt”. Since the mid-1990s, the rapid rise of the virginity testing movement, especially in the KwaZulu-Natal province42, has seen a growing emphasis on the prestige status of virginity linked to revivals of tradition. Tests, which often take place in public venues like football stadiums or community centres, involve large numbers of girls and young women participating in testing and its attendant rituals (see Walker, Graeme and Cornell, 2004). The high visibility of testing ceremonies also involves the issuing of certificates, public naming and shaming, speeches given by prominent politicians and elaborate displays of ethnicity through dress and ceremonies.

While virginity testing clearly institutes others’ control over young women’s sexuality and assumes that young women’s bodies belong to others, many young women participate voluntarily in the practice. For many young women involved in testing, the practice creates opportunities for fantasy meaning: it confers a strong sense of dignity and pride associated with communal belonging and acceptance. In explaining many young women’s enthusiastic participation, it is therefore significant to consider how the practice can counteract their real-life experiences of subordination on the basis of gender, class, race and youth. The pride they derive from public approval is at odds with the way that testing violates women’s rights to privacy, bodily integrity and gender equality. At the same time, the practice addresses the desire for a fantasy sense of dignity within their communities. This dignity is reinforced by the way that virginity testing is linked to a fictive yet compelling sense of “Zulu” ethnicity, a promise of connectedness to past customs that appear to be uncontaminated by a present associated with the prevalence of HIV/AIDS, violent crime, unemployment and the bleak future that neo-liberal South Africa holds for large numbers of black South Africans, particularly the poor in rural areas. For older women who inspect young women’s bodies, testing confers the authority to control the youth, and the enactment of authority denied under patriarchy. Such authority offers power and status where the old apartheid order of “tradition” – in the face of a rapidly urbanisation and the breakdown of communal and traditional networks and belief systems – is rapidly eroding.

For older men, the power is obvious. It is noteworthy that the virginity testing movement started in the mid-1990s, shortly after the introduction of democracy. This phase eroded the ethnic institutions set up by apartheid, and this threatened the privileges of many leaders in rural areas. Virginity testing has consequently worked to reinstate traditional systems of authority, systems based not only on gender, but also on age – through inscribing the

42 KwaZulu-Natal has the largest number of Zulu-speaking South Africans in the country. In this province, ethnic identity has been central to party political struggles, with images, narratives and memories of Zulu ethnicity often being mobilised to reinforce a sense of “identity”.

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bodies of young women. Most importantly, testing shrouds this authority in ceremonial ritual, and offers abundant symbolic resources for all participants – testers, the women who are tested, and those who drive and sanction the process – to create a sense of self through fantasies of belonging, to discover gendered subjectivity through personalised emotional and fantasy meaning.

While virginity testing is an obviously spectacular practice, ritualised in public life and now the subject of numerous studies43, there have been many other localised spectacles – often taken up in national debate – in recent public life. In February of 2008, for example, a twenty-five year old woman wearing a miniskirt at a Johannesburg taxi rank was subjected to abuse by taxi drivers. They sexually molested her, poured alcohol over her head and called her names to teach her a lesson for her immodest dress (see Mapumulo, 2008). The young woman was therefore scripted as a sexualised receptacle of male virility and as a signifier of a corrupt modernity. Although this incident made headlines, it was one of a series of similar events at the infamous Noordhoek taxi rank, a public space which, like many others in South Africa, is a prime site of masculine entitlement and aggression. The woman’s debased body therefore became the common ground around which different men could position themselves, and affirm their precarious masculinity. In similar ways to the “curative rape” of lesbians44, the violent conquest of the woman’s “undisciplined” body came to signify their reclamation of a threatened masculinity and their imagined suppression of female independence. The incident starkly captures the way in which women’s bodies are constructed as surfaces for political inscription, and the particular ways in which black female bodies are charged with meanings in others’ scripting.

Events at the Noordhoek taxi rank, in the centre of one of South Africa’s most urbanised provinces, are similar to the ritualised humiliation of young women in rural KwaZulu-Natal. Here, within a short period of time, young women wearing trousers were tormented, assaulted and made to be “proper women” by young men regulating their obedience and decorum. Between 2007 and 2008, several incidents of the consequences of women breaking a ban on the wearing of trousers made headlines in the South African regional and national media. In one, for example, Zandile Mpanza had her pants ripped off, was assaulted and then made to parade around Umlazi’s T Section in KwaZulu-Natal half-naked (Packree, 2007).

43 See, for example, Leclere-Madala, 2001.
44 From the perspective of the perpetrators, the sexual violence directed at black lesbians has been defined as “curative rape”, a way of forcing lesbians to become heterosexual. As a backlash against individual sexual freedoms, these acts of violence have increased in the face of constitutional and legislative rights to sexual freedoms. See ILGA report, 2005.
Similar acts of disciplining young women in different areas are evidence of the compulsive need for assertions of identity to take the form of elaborately staged theatre. Given the enduring structural basis of patriarchal entitlement and privilege in much of South Africa, the men involved in these acts might not have had any “logical” reason for feeling challenged by the women in their communities. But self-definition and positive identification requires that authority be rehearsed in order to become real in the minds of social subjects. Through enacting their control over women’s bodies, certain men have fictionalised their control in order to reinforce their personal sense of a superior identity. At the same time, their performance seeks to remind women of their socially prescribed subordination and powerlessness. Public acts of marking women’s bodies not only create meanings for those directly involved in the acts; they also reinforce the legitimacy of an aggressively patriarchal status quo in the public sphere. In so doing, they seek to confirm and reproduce a brutally hierarchical order, one which is diametrically opposed to the social freedoms associated with legislation and policy-making in post-apartheid South Africa.

At the same time as the Noordhoek incident, another spectacle became the subject of more animated public attention: the making of a racist video by white male students at the Reitz residence at the University of the Free State (see Tromp, Molosankwe and Visagie, 2008). Leaked to the media, the video was a response to proposals for increasing racial integration at the university. It featured a group of white male students humiliating black workers, mainly women, by making them play rugby, eat food that had been urinated on, and taunting them in farcical contests and award ceremonies. The production of this video immediately after calls for integration at the university clearly reveals its role in helping to recall an identity perceived as being under threat in the “new” South Africa. Although the lively discussion about the video focused on racism, the incident speaks volumes about a beleaguered group’s response to the threatened displacement of hegemonic white masculinity. In particular, the making of the video indicates the importance of spectatorship and staged performances of power in processes of group identification.

In the early 1900s, the staging of the epic event of the Great Trek45 played an important role in confirming a sense of identity among Afrikaners. The original Great Trek involved the migration of Afrikaners seeking freedom from the British and new political and economic opportunities. As Anne McClintock (1991) has shown, the staging of the Great Trek in 1938 functioned symbolically. Afrikaners sought to recall a sense of common destiny and origins by reconstructing an event that had been central to their history of seeking freedom and defining authority. McClintock emphasises the centrality of

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45 Trek literally means journey.
public performance in recalling this memory and confirming identity. While the Reitz video may be a comparatively paltry performance, it reveals similarly efforts to summon forth images, icons and relationships that rehearse identity and power. The special status of rugby in the video’s content, as a ritualised enactment of hegemonic white masculinity, is a particularly potent symbol. Recalling a competitive sport which has been central to the construction of white masculinity, the video vividly sought to identify and celebrate the uniqueness of a particular group. The video was intended for restricted viewing – allowing a group of young white men to reinvent a past omnipotence in the face of their (perceived) threatened social supremacy. Consequently, in the same way that black male taxi drivers scripted the body of a young black female to imagine their sexual and social dominance, so did white men at the Reitz residence construct debased black bodies, especially female ones, to fictionalise their ascendancy.

Following Benedict Anderson (1983), many commentators on the construction of nations and communities remind us that the enduring force of a sense of community derives from how powerfully collectivities are imagined. Spectacles play a central role in this imagining because they allow for the construction of an inner world of fantasy which is linked to an outer political reality. Incidents such as the degradation of women at the Noordhoek taxi rank and in the Reitz video reveal how black female corporeality resonates in different groups’ fantasies of control and conquest.

It is worth remarking on similar fantasies throughout Africa. In many countries, racist fiction about the contaminating effect of women’s bodies in the public sphere have continued in the post-colonial period. In Ghana, market women in urban areas have been defined as an undifferentiated mass of corrupt elements who bear responsibility for Ghana’s economic problems. During the eighties in Nigeria, the military government blamed women traders for economic crises, with the state’s modernising and disciplining missions instituting a formidable array of mechanisms against working women in cities. In Zimbabwe, immediately after independence, the government implemented policies of urban population control targeting women in ruthless round-ups. Public spectacles demonising African women as degenerate and corrupting have therefore been central to hegemonic postcolonial definitions of the healthy social body.

On one hand, such acts can be read as patriarchy’s “rational”, instrumentalist and politically driven responses to the threats of women’s economic and political empowerment. But it is also important to read them as “irrational”, as forms of making scapegoats of and demonising that mirror the peculiar logic of the burning of witches in western Europe. Reflecting the instrumentalist approach of many activists, CEDAW defines harmful traditional practice, for example, female genital mutilation, virginity testing and so on, as patriar-
chy’s efforts to control women’s sexuality. But as is the case with the spectacles mentioned above, these practices also have a self-constituting discursive function; they enlist women’s bodies as signifiers to ritualise acts of purging or discipline – and so imagine fictions of a cleansed body politic.

GENDERED AUTHORITY

It is necessary to go beyond the control of actual women’s bodies to explore the gendered character of spectacle in contemporary South Africa. In considering the origins of the gender discourse informing ideas about cleansed social bodies, it is once again useful to recall the sexualised and gendered images and behaviour that filtered into acts of repression in apartheid South Africa. Many of the relationships between torturers and victims, as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearings clearly revealed, were gendered and eroticised. Both female and male prisoners were often feminised in relation to white masculinist political and sexualised potency, and relations of subordination explicitly reflected patriarchal and heterosexist power dynamics.

The gendered face of this repression resonates in the present. This was very apparent in the rape trial of Jacob Zuma, the current President of South Africa. Throughout the trial, Zuma blatantly invoked theatricality and used a very palpable display of corporeality to construct himself as an authoritarian patriarch. As readers of newspapers or watchers of television, South Africans were drawn into a spectacle reminding them of the absolute ferocity of a power that was heavily connotated as heterosexist male virility.

Apart from being alerted to the overwhelming figure of Zuma, spectators were made to witness how the law, the courts and the media could degrade, harass, and silence women; spectators were warned that the consequences of female disobedience was the “burning of the bitch”46. The accuser in the Zuma rape trial was effectively stripped of her citizenship: threats by Zuma supporters led her to leave South Africa, with the events surrounding the trial symbolically conveying the way that exile and loss of citizenship are the price to be paid for defying patriarchal authority.

In 2007, evidence of this fierce authoritarianism surfaced in the female figure of Geraldine Fraser Moleketi, the then Minister of Public Service and Administration. During the strike action organised by trade unions in 2007, Fraser Moleketi regularly appeared in public life as the disciplinarian voice of the state, condemning strikers for unleashing chaos in the body politic. In ways related to Zuma’s theatrics, she featured in television interviews and other public forums. Workers were both demonised and feminised as disor-

46 “Burn the bitch” was the call taken up by Zuma’s supporters in condemning the accuser in the trial.
GENDERED SPECTACLE

Clearly, the behaviour of many of the workers was often masculinist; violent and aggressive. Lootings were dominated by men rehearsing the militaristic repertoire of South African hegemonic masculinity. But noteworthy here are the uneven and ambivalent gendered images and messages conveyed in public life and the media. In ways reminiscent of the demonising of market women by the state in Ghana, Zimbabwe and Nigeria, the “chaotic” stream of agitation was equated with the chaotic eruption of female bodies and sexuality. The politics of repression and authoritarianism in the new South Africa therefore has deeply gendered underpinnings, and draws extensively on gendered myths and corporeal images of power and disorder, of duty, disloyalty and transgression.

The disciplining of the deputy Minister of Health, Nozizwe Madlala-Routledge in 2008 revealed similar dynamics. Contesting the policy towards HIV/AIDS of both Thabo Mbeki and the then Health Minister, Madlala-Routledge was sharply reprimanded and eventually dismissed for having failed to obey her President and the Minister. The codes that were used to define her transgression were patriarchal and familial. As a disobedient daughter of the nation, Madlala-Routledge – like the accuser in the Zuma rape trial – was disciplined within and expelled from the patriarchal family of the ruling party.

What is striking about such displays of power and discipline is how rapidly they have been institutionalised as the “inevitable” face of authority in South Africa. They function as powerful warnings to South Africans, portents of the consequences of deviance. A viewing public is consequently engendered and controlled, or warned of controls that will be taken in the case of transgression. Theatrics and performance therefore come to be closely connected to the operation of the contemporary South African state, with the state’s unofficial but incessantly performed messages of a healthy social body revolving around purging, expelling or reprimanding wayward, deviant and feminised bodies.

47 Mbeki was the President of South Africa at the time.
POST-APARTHEID RESISTANCE: FROM SOCIAL MOVEMENTS TO SPECTACLE

While repressive power has obviously been exercised through spectacles in the present, spectacles subverting power have been playing an increasingly prominent, albeit uneven role. In early 2008, protests, coordinated mainly by the organisation People Opposing Women Abuse (powa), against the territorial control of Noordhoek taxi drivers was an example of spectacle contesting authority. In one of these protests, hundreds of women wearing miniskirts and led by a prominent radio personality, marched to the taxi rank to express solidarity and celebrate their control over their own bodies, and their rights to public spaces (see Lowe Morna, 2008). Marked by the spirited and noisy display of bodies and dress, the demonstrations were exuberant and joyful retorts to the repressive patriarchal violence previously exercised over the bodies of women at the rank: while this violence had culminated in the brutal humiliation of particular young women in stories making headlines, it was (and still is) routine in the verbal abuse, harassment and rape of women at Noordhoek and many other taxi ranks in the country.

The sheer energy of the active body is crucial in determining the power of subversive acts in certain spectacles. Protests against Noordhoek taxi-drivers’ aggression highlights the power of the mobile body, and the way that conceptual and politicised action can be manifested in embodied acts. Consequently, attention to the politicised body enormously expands ideas evident in a social movement study such as Voices Protest: Social Movements in Post-Apartheid South Africa (Ballard, Habib and Valodia, 2006). As a crucial study of present-day resistance, the collection examines post-apartheid struggle mainly by tracing how thought precedes and guides action, by showing how political action – conceived in terms of a Cartesian binary – emanates from the mind. Traditionally, politicised performance and embodied struggle have been defined through acts in which the mind is seen to influence the body. In the case of organised marches or funeral processions during the anti-apartheid struggle, symbols, movements and sounds linked to bodily performance served a very focused purpose in challenging the apartheid government. In the present day, however, it becomes important to consider how resistance and the body movements and sounds associated with them have been deviating from those rooted in a specific moment of resistance. It becomes crucial to think about how bodies occupy and move in spaces in less ritualistic and organised ways, for example, in performing acts of irreverence, mockery, parody, revelry, sabotage and subversion.

The Noordhoek protests are evidence of this spontaneous and relatively disorganised spectacle, a spectacle which enlists a repertoire of images and signifiers that uncomplicatedly subvert patriarchal authority. Defiant and irrev-
erent, the protests regularly featured women wearing mini-skirts, carrying placards that proclaimed their disobedience and defiance, and generally celebrating the behaviour and dress that have been used to castigate women. Overall, the demonstrations (clearly different from the orderly march or procession) proclaimed women’s rights to be whom they wish to be.

We can liken the power and subversive force of such protest to the subversively riotous powers of many gay pride parades, where the foundations of heterosexist normalcy are challenged not only through a cerebral rejection of the status quo (marches or placards challenging heterosexism), but through a joyous and exuberant celebration of difference and autonomy, of entirely “other” ways of being “embodied”. Powa’s demonstrations and other protests at Noordhoek defined and celebrated freedoms that elude and mock the normative bodies prescribed both by patriarchal heterosexist scripts, and by the orthodox routes of orderly protest that patriarchal regimes and the neo-liberal state encourages.48

As riotous bodily performance, these illustrate codes different from the sobriety of anti-apartheid processions and marches in a previous era. Generally, the enlisting of the unfettered vigour of the body in motion as well as its shocking primordial nakedness or near-nakedness have been key to the resistances of both gay and lesbian protest, and protests by colonised and other multiply subordinated women. Often eluding the civil codes of rebellion used by other less marginalised groups, these rebellions frequently unsettle an entrenched mind-body opposition: the sanctification of the logical mind in determining the “ordered” movement of the body. In so doing, they undermine the foundations of the hegemony of repressive regimes – including patriarchy, neo-liberal democracy and nationalism that speak in the name of the “truth” – the spurious truth of “human” behaviour, or of “reason”, or of citizenship.

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48 It is significant to note here that many ostensibly progressive proponents of human rights in South Africa express their dismay about the perceived “excess” of many gay pride marches.
    doc.ilga.org/ilga/publications/publications...english/other_publications/lesbian_and_bisexual_women_s_health_report (Accessed 20 August 2009.)
POSTSCRIPT: CHALLENGES TO RIGHTS-BASED APPROACHES IN SUPPORT OF WOMEN CITIZENS

Ann Schlyter

For decades international development agencies have adopted a gender-aware terminology and applied a mainstreaming strategy, but few reports of success can be identified. Implementation remains inconsistent and the impact on gender equality largely unknown (Moser and Moser, 2005). Human rights have now become the dominating rational in West European support to women. The Swedish Policy for Global Development, adopted in 2003, places strong emphasis on the human rights perspective. With democracy and women’s economic empowerment among the current priority areas in Swedish development cooperation, special emphasis is placed on political and economic rights. How a rights-based approach differs from previous approaches is, however, not obvious. This postscript will draw from the chapters of the volume to identify challenges which need to be taken seriously in the work of supporting women’s rights.

The African women’s movements have, since Nairobi and Beijing, used international conventions to legitimise their claims for women’s rights to bodily autonomy and integrity and for their rights as citizens to an independent life as social, economic and political actors. The rights perspective has helped to mobilise many women, but Yuval Davis (2006) sees a danger in the tendency to regard women’s struggle as a legal issue, led by professionals in non-governmental organisations. It is difficult to mobilise broadly based movements if human rights are experienced as pre-determined. Some African feminists have lost their confidence in how much rights-claiming and activism within the UN framework can achieve.

Major challenges to rights-based approaches relate to poverty and livelihoods in the global economy. Poverty itself violates the human rights of having basic bodily needs satisfied. The processes of economic globalisation are not gender neutral; in Southern Africa such processes have worked to the disadvantage of many women. The urban women struggling to make a livelihood described by Espling, or the mine workers, marginalised as informal workers although integrated into global markets, presented by Mususa all are living, so to say, at the bottom of the global hierarchy of labour, seemingly
structured along race and gender lines, as in the model presented by Mählck. The chapters in this volume have not addressed trade agreements, corporate responsibly, or other areas where measures of change in the global division of labour are determined, but they do point at the necessity of supporting women’s economic empowerment, in the informal as well as in the formal sector. In developing countries without an elaborated welfare system, right-based claims are not easy to make in the economic sector of life.

One general challenge is the contestations of visions of equality. Globalisation has, in some respects, worked to women’s advantage. Women’s organisations are now operating within global networks and engaged in dialogue about rights and strategies for their work. However, there are also global networks resisting gender equality and especially women’s bodily rights, many of them arguing on the basis of religion or tradition. In Africa there are numerous cultural/political movements working for the re-establishment of patriarchal customs, for example the Zulu-nationalism mentioned by Lewis. Some Catholic, Pentecostal and other churches run campaigns against divorce, use of contraceptives and abortion, while parts of political Islam interpret Sharia law as incompatible to women’s human rights as defined by international law.

The Chipeta, Malmström and Diallo chapters show how, at local level, such resistance to gender equality has taken different forms and involve women as well as men. The fact that women are not united in their claims for human rights raises special challenges. Women belonging to different groups pursue different body politics. Support to democratic processes and women’s political participation should be complemented with support to organisations within different groups which may influence attitudes and values in a positive direction for women’s rights.

One priority in rights-based development cooperation is to support the reform of legal frameworks and regulations if these are not already in line with human rights conventions. There are several challenges related to legal reforms. Many states in Africa have, in their work with legislative revision, taken steps in accordance with CEDAW and the Maputo Protocol (see Annexes 1 and 2). Sometimes, there is open political confrontation such as the one Diallo observes. Decisions by the Mali Parliament are opposed by religious leaders and their followers as concerns reform of family law. In other countries, there might not be open political mobilisation against women’s citizenship rights, but the increase of for example urban polygamous marriages, mentioned in Chipeta’s chapter points at resistance in action.

Most countries in southern Africa have multiple legal systems, similar to what Chipeta describes in Malawi. A constitution that recognises equal rights between women and men in marriage is worth little as long as custom allows polygamous marriages and leading politicians approve of it. Even in South
Africa, which has one of the most radical constitutions in the world, Lewis’ chapter describes how the current President displays an aggressive heteronormative masculinity which he constructs as part of tradition. This is far from the liabilities under the CEDAW Convention where state parties undertake to work for change of values in relation to gender equality.

Laws can be changed, but if there is no simultaneous process of change of values among the population, modern laws are alienated from the women and men who follow what they see as decent and right. International conventions have positively influenced national law and practice, but international campaigns have, in some cases, also created unintentional reactions. Malmström shows how, in Cairo, human rights are regarded as Western interventions, and Dellenborg points at the tensions between what international conventions and agencies regard as harmful practices, and the body politics as applied by those involved. To successfully support work against female genital mutilation it is necessary to understand more about the body politics of those involved, perhaps starting by accepting the local naming of the custom, otherwise intervention may create reactions opposite to those intended.

Human rights-based support to women’s bodily autonomy and citizenship is severely challenged by accusations of human rights being Western interventions with a universalised understanding of women as individuals out of social context. Such criticism must be rejected but at the same time met by the acknowledgment that no individual exists in a social and political vacuum, devoid of duties. In the everyday life of the women presented in these chapters, individual rights may be seen as irrelevant, while belonging is crucial for both their identity and practical survival. Mkhwanazi concludes that belonging creates personhood, and the value of belonging is also central in the findings of Dellenborg and Malmström.

Munalula identifies special challenges to a human rights-based approach in efforts to empower women to enjoy reproductive rights. She discusses critically the value of individual rights when not related to responsibilities. She also points at the fact that freedom from state intervention makes individuals more vulnerable to non-state actors. Individualistic interpretations of human rights are problematic if the wide range of the responsibilities tied to motherhood is neglected, while on the other hand there is often lack of state support for the rights of individual women in the context of their families. Munalula sees a need for a nuanced and practical approach to rights.

One of the greatest challenges when applying a rights-based approach to women’s empowerment is to maintain that human rights are universal and at the same time engage in a dialogue about what rights can be claimed in a specific situation, and how it can be done. In line with Munalula’s quest for a practical approach, feminists have argued that human rights contain universal principles which can be adapted and made meaningful in dialogue. Uni-
versality and specificity of rights are thus not mutually exclusive (Fox 2009). Women’s movements in, for example, Zambia have mobilised around issues such as inheritance or violence and have gained broad support from women living in poor conditions. In these cases it has been easy to identify the universal principles to underpin specific claims for rights.

Finally, a challenge in the support of women’s rights, closely related to those mentioned above, is to find ways of adequately incorporating their own agency, lived experiences and knowledge. Supporting women’s full and active citizenship involves an emphasis on participation in the public sphere. However women negotiate their position both in public and in their homes in various ways, and with different views on what is most important for them as women and as citizens. Thinking in terms of body politics helps to overcome the division between the private and the public, between customary and modern, and instead to analyse citizenship as a lived, interpretive experience.

REFERENCES


ANNEX 1
THE CONVENTION ON THE ELIMINATION OF ALL FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN, CEDAW; PART I, ARTICLES 3 AND 5

PART I

Article 3
States Parties shall take in all fields, in particular in the political, social, economic and cultural fields, all appropriate measures, including legislation, to ensure the full development and advancement of women, for the purpose of guaranteeing them the exercise and enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms on a basis of equality with men.

Article 5
States Parties shall take all appropriate measures:
(a) To modify the social and cultural patterns of conduct of men and women, with a view to achieving the elimination of prejudices and customary and all other practices which are based on the idea of the inferiority or the superiority of either of the sexes or on stereotyped roles for men and women;
(b) To ensure that family education includes a proper understanding of maternity as a social function and the recognition of the common responsibility of men and women in the upbringing and development of their children, it being understood that the interest of the children is the primordial consideration in all cases.

ANNEX 2
THE CONVENTION ON THE ELIMINATION OF ALL
FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN,
CEDAW; PART IV, ARTICLES 15 AND 16

PART IV

Article 15
1. States Parties shall accord to women equality with men before the law.
2. States Parties shall accord to women, in civil matters, a legal capacity identical to that of men and the same opportunities to exercise that capacity. In particular, they shall give women equal rights to conclude contracts and to administer property and shall treat them equally in all stages of procedure in courts and tribunals.
3. States Parties agree that all contracts and all other private instruments of any kind with a legal effect which is directed at restricting the legal capacity of women shall be deemed null and void.
4. States Parties shall accord to men and women the same rights with regard to the law relating to the movement of persons and the freedom to choose their residence and domicile.

Article 16
1. States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in all matters relating to marriage and family relations and in particular shall ensure, on a basis of equality of men and women:
   (a) The same right to enter into marriage;
   (b) The same right freely to choose a spouse and to enter into marriage only with their free and full consent;
   (c) The same rights and responsibilities during marriage and at its dissolution;
   (d) The same rights and responsibilities as parents, irrespective of their marital status, in matters relating to their children; in all cases the interests of the children shall be paramount;
   (e) The same rights to decide freely and responsibly on the number and...
spacing of their children and to have access to the information, education and means to enable them to exercise these rights;

(f) The same rights and responsibilities with regard to guardianship, wardship, trusteeship and adoption of children, or similar institutions where these concepts exist in national legislation; in all cases the interests of the children shall be paramount;

(g) The same personal rights as husband and wife, including the right to choose a family name, a profession and an occupation;

(h) The same rights for both spouses in respect of the ownership, acquisition, management, administration, enjoyment and disposition of property, whether free of charge or for a valuable consideration.

2. The betrothal and the marriage of a child shall have no legal effect, and all necessary action, including legislation, shall be taken to specify a minimum age for marriage and to make the registration of marriages in an official registry compulsory.

ANNEX 3
THE MAPUTO PROTOCOL TO THE AFRICAN CHARTER ON HUMAN AND PEOPLES’ RIGHTS ON THE RIGHTS OF WOMEN IN AFRICA; ARTICLE 5

ELIMINATION OF HARMFUL PRACTICES

States Parties shall prohibit and condemn all forms of harmful practices which negatively affect the human rights of women and which are contrary to recognised international standards. States Parties shall take all necessary legislative and other measures to eliminate such practices, including:

– creation of public awareness in all sectors of society regarding harmful practices through information, formal and informal education and outreach programmes;
– prohibition, through legislative measures backed by sanctions, of all forms of female genital mutilation, scarification, medicalisation and para-medicalisation of female genital mutilation and all other practices in order to eradicate them;
– provision of necessary support to victims of harmful practices through basic services such as health services, legal and judicial support, emotional and psychological counselling as well as vocational training to make them self-supporting;
– protection of women who are at risk of being subjected to harmful practices or all other forms of violence, abuse and intolerance.

ANNEX 4
THE MAPUTO PROTOCOL TO THE AFRICAN CHARTER ON HUMAN AND PEOPLES’ RIGHTS ON THE RIGHTS OF WOMEN IN AFRICA; ARTICLE 6

MARRIAGE

States Parties shall ensure that women and men enjoy equal rights and are regarded as equal partners in marriage. They shall enact appropriate national legislative measures to guarantee that:

– no marriage shall take place without the free and full consent of both parties;
– the minimum age of marriage for women shall be 18 years;
– monogamy is encouraged as the preferred form of marriage and that the rights of women in marriage and family, including in polygamous marital relationships are promoted and protected;
– every marriage shall be recorded in writing and registered in accordance with national laws, in order to be legally recognised;
– the husband and wife shall, by mutual agreement, choose their matrimonial regime and place of residence;
– a married woman shall have the right to retain her maiden name, to use it as she pleases, jointly or separately with her husband’s surname;
– a woman shall have the right to retain her nationality or to acquire the nationality of her husband;
– a woman and a man shall have equal rights, with respect to the nationality of their children except where this is contrary to a provision in national legislation or is contrary to national security interests;
– a woman and a man shall jointly contribute to safeguarding the interests of the family, protecting and educating their children;
– during her marriage, a woman shall have the right to acquire her own property and to administer and manage it freely.

ANNEX 5

THE SOLEMN DECLARATION ON GENDER EQUALITY IN AFRICA

The Heads of State and Government of Member States of the African Union.

ASSEMBLY/AU/DECL.12 (III) NO. 5–7:

5. Expand and Promote the gender parity principle that we have adopted—regarding the Commission of the African Union to all the other organs of the African Union, including its NEPAD programme, to the Regional Economic Communities, and to the national and local levels in collaboration with political parties and the National parliaments in our countries;

6. Ensure the active promotion and protection of all human rights for women and girls including the right to development by raising awareness or by legislation where necessary;

7. Actively promote the implementation of legislation to guarantee women’s land, property and inheritance rights including their rights to housing;

ANNEX 6

THE MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS; GOALS 1, 3 AND 5

GOAL 1: ERADICATE EXTREME POVERTY AND HUNGER

Target 1:
Halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people whose income is less than $1 a day.

GOAL 3: PROMOTE GENDER EQUALITY AND EMPOWER WOMEN

Target 1:
Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and in all levels of education no later than 2015.

GOAL 5: IMPROVE MATERNAL HEALTH

Target 1:
Reduce by three quarters the maternal mortality rate.

(Accessed in November 2009 at www.un.org/millenniumgoals/)
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Body Politics and Women Citizens

African Experiences

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Editor Ann Schlyter has since decades conducted research on gender and urban development, mostly in Africa.

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