



# **No African Futures without the Liberation of Women: A Decolonial Feminist Perspective**

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## **Abstract**

Coloniality of gender speaks to the perennial question of the liberation of women from various forms of oppression. The ‘modern’ world system and its global order have remained fundamentally patriarchal. This implies that any initiative aimed at creating African futures has to address the fundamental question of the liberation of women. Liberation of women does not speak to the incorporation of women within the patriarchal system. The first step, as Thomas Sankara said in his 1987 speech, is to understand how the patriarchal system functions, to grasp its real nature in all its subtlety, in order to work out a line of action that can lead to women’s genuine emancipation. Decolonising gender therefore becomes a necessary task so that answers to what should be done are formulated from the perspective of asking correct questions. Decolonising gender is to enact a critique of racialized, colonial, and capitalist heterosexualist gender oppression as a lived transformation of the social (Lugones 2010). As such, decolonizing gender places the scholar in the midst of people in a historical, peopled, subjective/intersubjective understanding of the oppressing-resisting relation at the intersection of complex systems of oppression. To a significant extent, it has to be in accord with the subjectivities and intersubjectivities that construct and in part are constructed by the situation. This article deploys decolonial feminist ideas of Thomas Sankara, among others, to push forward the frontiers of the struggle for the liberation of women as a constitutive part of initiatives of creating African futures. Its central argument is that women’s liberation struggle should not be reduced to efforts of incorporation of women within the patriarchal, colonial and imperial modern system/s women seek to reject. Making use of Maria Lugones’ theoretical framework, we should be able to understand that the instrumentality of the colonial/modern gender system is subjecting both men and women of colour in all domains of existence and therefore allows us to reveal that the gender transformation discourse is not just a women’s emancipation discourse but rather efforts of both men and women to

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overcome the colonial global structure that is subjectifying in different ways. The change of the system and its structures, which are essentially patriarchal, is the main mechanism that will bring about possible equal futures for women in Africa, as case studies of Rwanda and South Africa show in the article.

## Résumé

La colonialité du genre traite de la lancinante question de la libération de la femme des différentes formes d'oppression. Le système du monde « moderne » et son ordre mondial sont restés fondamentalement patriarcaux. Cela implique que toute initiative visant la création d'un futur africain devra régler la question fondamentale de la libération de la femme. La libération de la femme ne prend pas en compte l'incorporation de la femme dans le système patriarcal. La première étape, comme le disait Thomas Sankara dans son discours de 1987, consiste à comprendre comment le système patriarcal fonctionne, pour appréhender sa véritable nature dans toute sa subtilité, afin de mettre au point une ligne d'action qui conduirait à la véritable émancipation de la femme. Décoloniser le genre devient donc une tâche essentielle devant permettre que les réponses à la question relative aux mesures à prendre soient formulées dans l'optique de poser des questions correctes. Décoloniser le genre c'est promulguer une critique de l'oppression sexiste hétérosexualiste, racialisée, coloniale et capitaliste en tant que transformation vécue du social (Lugones 2010). Ainsi, décoloniser le genre place le chercheur au cœur de la population suivant une interprétation subjective/intersubjective historique et variée de la relation oppression-résistance à la croisée de systèmes complexes d'oppression. Dans une large mesure, il doit être en accord avec les subjectivités et les intersubjectivités qui construisent et sont en partie occasionnées par la situation. Cet article déploie, entre autres, les idées féministes anticoloniales de Thomas Sankara, afin d'étendre les frontières de la lutte pour la libération de la femme comme étant un élément constitutif des initiatives en faveur de la création d'un avenir africain. Son argument de fond est que la lutte pour la libération de la femme ne doit pas être réduite aux efforts d'incorporation de la femme dans le/les systèmes patriarcaux, coloniaux et impériaux modernes que les femmes rejettent. Faisant appel au cadre théorique de Maria Lugones, l'on devrait être en mesure de comprendre que l'instrumentalité du système de genre colonial/moderne est en train d'assujettir les hommes et les femmes de couleur dans tous les domaines de la vie. Par conséquent, il nous révèle que le discours sur la transformation sociale n'est pas seulement axé sur l'émancipation de la femme mais plutôt sur les efforts conjoints à la fois des hommes et des femmes à surmonter la structure coloniale globale qui est subjectivante de différentes manières. Le changement de système et ses structures, qui sont essentiellement patriarcales est le principal mécanisme qui entrainera un avenir juste pour la femme Africaine, comme l'ont démontré dans l'article les études de cas au Rwanda et en Afrique du Sud.

## Introduction

The central assertion of this article is that the creation of futures of Africa should entail the liberation of African women. It posits that the course of gender transformation has remained the weakest in the drive for African futures and this is as a result of the unchanging global power structure, which Africa finds itself in, which is marked by hierarchies on the basis of gender, race, religion, class and others. The article further problematizes the manner in which the discourse of gender transformation is pursued in general, and in Africa in particular, as it remains deeply embedded within the patriarchal snares where ultimately the efforts are mainly to incorporate women in the same patriarchal system rather than pursuing radical transformation that seeks to destroy the systems and structures of patriarchy. The article therefore questions the so-called gender transformation based on just numerical representation without looking at fundamental systematic and structural transformation of patriarchy.

The African Union (AU), in its efforts of determining and defining Africa's futures, has come up with a document envisioning African futures known as Agenda 2063. Agenda 2063 is said to be a call for action, a strategic framework and roadmap to achieve continental development goals. It is said to be representing a collective effort and an opportunity for Africa to regain its power to determine its own destiny, and is underpinned by the AU's vision to build an integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa, an Africa driven and managed by its own citizen and representing a dynamic force in the international arena. It is within this background that this article locates its conception of what African futures mean.

Gender equality, especially the rights of women, occupy an increasingly important place in the global and African political discourse and, by implication, have significance for the development discourse as enshrined in the ideals of the futures and visions of Africa. However, very little is known on how the gender instruments adopted by the AU and domesticated by member states are used in the pursuit of Agenda 2063. The realization of African futures through gender equality remains quite blurred. Olga Martin (2013:7) notes that the growing recognition of the leadership role of women in all spheres of development, including their participation in decision-making at the international, regional and national levels, is reflected in the creation of platforms of action related to gender. It is in this context that the AU has developed a gender policy and other instruments that focus on addressing gender inequalities and adopted a new resolution in 2011 that calls on countries to take concrete steps to increase women's political participation and leadership and report back to the United Nations (UN) Secretary General.

## **Gender and Patriarchy**

Despite the fact that Africa's organs of state and governance have jointly deployed various efforts towards women emancipation, measures such as numbers of women in parliaments and in high positions of states and governance have not translated to genuine liberation of women. Instead, the results of the efforts made are transpiring as efforts of incorporation of women within the patriarchal system they reject or a process of 'menization' of women whereby men and their roles in societies are used as a benchmark to measure the transformation of women. The extent to which a woman performs a 'man's job' is deemed to indicate that women have been emancipated.

The clarification of the question of gender is not only important but fundamental too; its importance lies in the clarification of gender transformation beyond the numbers game that distorts the fundamental problem of gender and women oppression. The effort of gender transformation must seek to answer a fundamental question whose preoccupation is to understand the system or order that defines the oppression of women; for it is in the understanding of such an order that a possibility of charting alternatives for better futures can be explored.

Thomas Sankara (2007) noted in a commemoration of International Women's Day on 8 March 1987 that:

Posing the question of women in Burkinabe society today means posing the abolition of the system of slavery to which they have been subjected for millennia. The first step is to try to understand how this system functions, to grasp its real nature in all its subtlety, in order then to work out a line of action that can lead to women's total emancipation (Sankara 2007).

Sankara makes a direct connection between subjugation of women in the post-colonial and the slavery periods, thus suggesting that colonial rule was just a phase in a long duration in the making of the global matrices of power termed 'coloniality'. This is a useful observation because it brings into sharp relief the connections between coloniality of being and coloniality of power (economic in slavery and political in colonial rule) in the making of a world and nation without women (Nkenkana 2014). Sankara notes this connection of coloniality of being and coloniality of power when he says:

We must understand how the struggle of Burkinabe women today is part of the worldwide struggle of all women and, beyond that, part of the struggle for the full rehabilitation of our continent. The condition of women is therefore at the heart of the question of humanity itself, here, there, and everywhere (Sankara 2007).

Arguably, Sankara correctly locates the gender discourse within the broader system that defines it. As indicated earlier, he argues that in order that gender transformation is made possible, we should understand how the system functions, to grasp its real nature in all its subtlety, in order then to work out a line of action that can lead to women's total emancipation. Therefore, an understanding of the manner in which gender is defined, particularly its transformation within the broader system that Sankara is alluding to is to precisely understand the global power structure with which gender is contextualized, structuralized, systematised and defined.

The patriarchal system that gives challenges to a future that limits the true liberation of women is enshrined in the broader global power structure within which the African future is generally entrapped. The dynamics of power structure across the globe as underpinned and shaped by the colonial-androcentric-neo-traditionalist matrices of power, that were described by Grosfoguel (2007:220) as colonial, racial, patriarchal and hegemonic, continue to hamper initiatives aimed at achieving gender transformation. In functioning within such a structure of power, identity and knowledge, Africa faces a very high risk of reproducing the same future that it is trying to address in as far as gender transformation is concerned. The challenge of gender transformation is enmeshed in power, knowledge and notions of being shaped by colonial and patriarchal orders.

Decolonizing gender therefore becomes a necessary task so that answers to what should be done are formulated from the perspective of asking correct questions. Decolonization of gender, as defined by Maria Lugones (2010), is to enact a critique of racialized, colonial, and capitalist heterosexualist gender oppression as a lived transformation of the social. As such, it places the scholar in the midst of people in a historical, peopled, subjective/intersubjective understanding of the oppressing-resisting relation at the intersection of complex systems of oppression. To a significant extent, it has to be in accord with the subjectivities and intersubjectivities that construct and in part are constructed by the reality that Maria Lugones (2010: 746-747) presents. As indicated earlier, the paper is, conceptually and theoretically, informed and underpinned by decolonial feminist theory as explained by Maria Lugones. Nelson Maldonado-Torres (2011) indicates that decoloniality is not a singular theoretical school of thought but a family of diverse positions that share a view of coloniality as the fundamental problem in the current modern age. Maldonado-Torres (2007) explained coloniality as global power structure that is related but different from colonialism.

## **Global Power Structures and Gender**

The problematic raised in this paper is that the manner in which gender transformation is articulated and pursued in Africa is imprisoned within a global patriarchal power structure and system that is not amenable to the full success of such an agenda. The asymmetrical architecture of global and African power structures and their patriarchal tendencies therefore continue to impact on the course futures of Africa are being advanced. It is for such reasons that this article advances a decolonial and a non-patriarchal agenda for pursuing the futures of Africa with which both men and women are equal role players. The unquestioned systems and orders that define African futures remain a fundamental problem to advance the course of liberation of women and just societies in Africa. The reason these systems and structures should be questioned is precisely the fact that their logic is found from the historical logic that has created the unequal world we are dealing with today.

Therefore, a historical conceptual context giving logic to this article is advancing, as highlighted by Maria Lugones, an understanding of the dichotomous hierarchy between the human and the non-human regarding a dichotomy of colonial modernity. Capturing the need for a historical context when looking at the discourse of gender transformation, Maria Lugones states that:

The reason to historicize gender formation is that without this history, we keep on centering our analysis on the patriarchy; that is, on a binary, hierarchical, oppressive gender formation that rests on male supremacy without any clear understanding of the mechanisms by which heterosexuality, capitalism, and racial classification are impossible to understand apart from each other. The heterosexualist patriarchy has been an ahistorical framework of analysis. To understand the relation of the birth of the colonial/modern gender system to the birth of global colonial capitalism – with the centrality of the coloniality of power to that system of global power – is to understand our present organization of life anew Maria Lugones (2007:186-187).

The history referred to by Lugones helps us to understand the legacy and the depth of inheritance of the colonial system that Africa and its futures continue to grapple with today. Toyin Falola (2005) captures the state of Africa and its predicament of inheritance of colonial development. Toyin Falola, augmenting Maria Lugones on the importance and justification of understanding the historical context of current phenomena in Africa, notes that:

Contemporary Africans have a right to be angry, but they must also probe into the reasons for institutional failure, the roots of which lie in colonial past. They

must question the inherited forms of government, economy and relations between Africa and the West. They must situate the African condition in a global context: a poor continent supports the industrialised West with its labour, raw materials, markets and service payments on debts, among other mechanisms that transfer wealth abroad. They must situate African politics in the context of colonialism: modern political institutions are derived more from the colonial past than the precolonial... The postcolonial seeks its roots in the colonial, alienated from the precolonial and established local traditions. The modern country was modelled after the 'colonial country': black governors merely replaced the white ones... We must also raise the issue of power and autonomy in the global context: to what extent can Africa self-develop? Africa was self-developing before the colonial intrusion. With violence, colonialism created new frontiers, developed new political and economic objectives, and ordered people around. When colonialism was over, Africa began to think about development in colonial, Western terms (Toyin Falola 2005:4).

Toyin Falola and Maria Lugones, among others, fittingly capture the main issue that this article is centred on. The futures remain affected if the system and structure inherited from the past have not changed in Africa. There is evidence to such. And some of the evidence is presented in this article in form of case studies from Rwanda and South Africa. It is the change of the system and structure that is patriarchal that will bring about possible equal futures for women in Africa.

Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013) and Maldonado-Torres (2007), along the lines of Toyin Falola and Maria Lugones, argue that the fundamental challenge in the context of the obtaining African reality is that, since the time of colonial encounters, Africans have not yet been able to take full charge of their own fate although they are not completely at the mercy of global imperial designs that are in place since the time of conquest. Africa and Africans have been at the crossroads since the time of colonial encounters in the fifteenth century. Going against the global imperial designs of domination, exploitation and racism has proven to be a lifetime struggle for Africans.

The essence of African struggles as articulated by Fanon (1968) has been to forge new categories of thought, to construct new subjectivities and create new modes of being and becoming. Such a vast struggle cannot be fought in one site (as if it were political theatre only) but in various domains and realms simultaneously simply because global imperial designs and colonial matrices of power have permeated and infiltrated every institution and every social, political, economic, spiritual, aesthetic, cultural and cognitive arena of African life (Maldonado-Torres 2007; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013).

Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013:3) summarises the predicament of Africa and Africans in a term called 'postcolonial neocolonised world' – referring

to the structural, systematic, cultural, discursive, and epistemological pattern of domination and exploitation that has engulfed Africans since the conquest. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013) argues that the new postcolonial nation is historically a male-constructed space, narrated into modern self-consciousness by male leaders, activists, writers, in which women are often cast as symbols or totems, as the bearers of tradition.

Therefore, as articulated by Maria Lugones, Toyin Falola, Ndlovu-Gatsheni, Maldonado-Torres and others regarding the inheritance rather than transformation, the manner in which the system and structure of Africa's future is configured limits the articulation and pursuit of gender transformation. The inherited structure produces hierarchies with which the world in general and Africa in particular functions and among such hierarchies is patriarchy, as indicated earlier. The patriarchal structure which is found across systems of power in Africa and the world at large poses a challenge with regard to the necessary gender transformation.

Oyewumi (1997:7) argues that gender has been a foundational category upon which social categories have been erected since early times. Hence, gender has been ontologically conceptualised. The category of the citizen, which has been the cornerstone of much of Western political theory, was male, despite the much-acclaimed Western democratic traditions. The argument that gender is caught up in the global power structure that perpetuates the hierarchies that are a barrier in the systematic transformation of gender is found in the concept of ontological conceptualization of gender as Oyewumi has outlined:

Understanding the place of gender in pre-colonial societies is pivotal to understanding the nature and scope of changes in the social structure that the processes constituting colonial/modern Eurocentred capitalism imposed. Those changes were introduced through slow, discontinuous, and heterogenous processes that violently inferiorised colonized women. The gender system introduced was one thoroughly informed through the coloniality of power. Understanding the place of gender in pre-colonial societies is also pivotal in understanding the extent and importance of the gender system in disintegrating communal relations, egalitarian relations, ritual thinking, collective decision-making, collective authority and economies. And thus in understanding the extent to which the imposition of this gender system was a constitutive of the coloniality of power as the coloniality of power was constitutive of it. The logic of relation between them is of mutual constitution. But it should be clear by now that the colonial, modern, gender system cannot exist without the coloniality of power, since the classification of the population in terms of race is a necessary condition of its possibility (Oyewumi 2011:10).



Oyeronke Oyewumi makes a fundamental point in identifying gender as a colonial category and that the concern is not so much to displace culpability for contemporary male dominance to the British colonisers, but rather to begin to recognise and tease out the ways in which the colonial legacy has been internalised and is being reproduced. The degree to which colonial categories have been internalized and have become very much a part of everyday life, even as the culture itself refuses to recede completely but continues to assert itself, is an important issue (Oyewumi 2011:11). Indeed, the liberation of women in Africa is caught up in what Maria Lugones termed the darker side of modern/colonial gender system.

### **Rethinking Gender**

Gender transformation that will bring about the desired African futures must not be limited to reporting 'progress' of gender without looking at fundamental systematic and structural transformation of patriarchy. A need for a rethinking of gender transformation that goes beyond numerical representation to fundamental structural transformation is required. This part of the article imagines gender beyond statistical representation and provides pointers of how such an exercise could be done. The article asserts that a fundamental problem resulting in the misinterpretation of systematic and structural conditions perpetuating gender inequalities is a focus on women as the subject of change in gender transformation and/or mainstreaming and a focus on fitting women into the status quo rather than transforming the status quo.

Anne McClintock (1995) makes an important point, with which a context of the contemporary phenomenon of gender transformation discourse is explored, as she locates the problematic of gender transformation in the broader context of nationalism;

All nations depend on powerful constructions of gender. Despite many nationalists' ideological investment in the idea of popular unity, nations have historically amounted to the sanctioned institutionalisation of gender difference. No nation in the world gives women and men the same access to the rights and resources of the nation-state. Rather than expressing the flowering into time of the organic essence of a timeless people, nations are contested systems of cultural representation that limit and legitimize peoples' access to the resources of the nation-state.... Nationalism has typically sprung from masculinised memory, masculinized humiliation and masculinised hope..... Nationalism is thus constituted from the very beginning as a gendered discourse and cannot be understood without a theory of gender power (McClintock 1995: 353-355).

The importance of Anne McClintock's argument lies in the broadening of understanding the implications of African futures in as far as women are concerned. This argument helps us understand broadly the implications gender transformation has and the ramifications of African nationalism as the driver of African futures to the historical construct of the global power structures.

Lewis Gordon (1996:7) asserts that patriarchy as it currently exists in Africa must be understood within the context of Africa's peripheral and dependent position within the global power structure (capitalist economy). Gordon (1996) borrows from Frantz Fanon's idea that the African bourgeoisie desires to mimic its counterparts in the metropole, thus functioning as subordinate mirror image of the colonial bourgeoisie (Fanon 1963:149). This also draws from Nkwame Nkrumah's idea of neocoloniality – the idea of continued colonial power designs that seek to subordinate independent states and their political class to the interests of the former colonial empires (Nkrumah 1965). In this sense, the African elite are haunted by the scandal of subservience, wretchedness and subordination.

African advancement of gender transformation must understand that gender is not absolute. It is a manifestation of different systems and structures, be it social, economic, cultural or spiritual within society. The re-writing of African history that continues to disregard women is something that Africa's pursuit of its future should guard against. McFadden (2000) states that the notion of gender is no longer an idea that can be dismissed as 'western' and/or 'other' by an older, formerly hegemonic nationalist discourse, particularly with regard to race and identity. Gender has instead begun to occupy an increasingly central place as a political thinking tool, particularly in terms of comprehensively re-defining African realities within the numerous locations. It is throwing up new discourses that sometimes speak more covertly to unfinished historical tasks relating to our search for freedom as black women and black men (McFadden 2000:1).

Oyeronke Oyewumi (2011), among others, argues that in order to understand the structures of gender and gender relations, we must start with Africa. Also, in order to develop valid theories of gender, all types of experiences from around the world must be documented. That is, if structures of gender emerged out of particular histories and social contexts, we must pay attention to the continuous ways in which gender is made and remade in everyday interactions and by institutions. In this sense, then, gender is actually more about gendering – a process – than about something inherent in social relations. Given this, therefore, it is very clear that effort towards appropriating social relations without unpacking the gendering

process which is embedded in the system and structure of patriarchy is to mis-define gender and its transformation.

Augmenting Oyewumi's point mentioned above, Maria Lugones notes that:

The elements that constitute the global, Eurocentred, capitalist model of power do not stand in separation from each other and none of them is prior to the process that constitutes the patterns. Indeed, the mythical presentation of these elements as metaphysically prior is an important aspect of the cognitive model of Eurocentred, global capitalism (Lugones 2008:3).

Clearly, the understanding of Maria Lugones is that in constituting a social classification, coloniality permeates all aspects of social existence and gives rise to new social and geocultural identities. Quijano (2001:1) makes a similar argument that:

With the expansion of European colonialism, the classification of geocultural identities such as European, Indian, African, etc was imposed on the population of the planet. Since then, it has permeated every area of social existence and it constitutes the most effective form of material and inter-subjective social domination. Thus, 'coloniality' does not just refer to 'racial' classification. It is an encompassing phenomenon, since it is one of the axes of the system of power and as such it permeates all control of sexual access, collective authority, labour, subjectivity/inter-subjectivity and the production of knowledge from within these inter-subjective relations (Quijano 2001:1).

Therefore a continuous separation of these encompassing phenomena perpetuates their insignificant efforts in as far as gender transformation discourse is concerned. It is in this context that an analysis of intersection of indicators such as gender, race and class would allow us to redefine the problematic of Africa and Africans and women in particular. It will help us to understand beyond the numbers game the fundamental problem of African challenges. A proper definition of such issues would then allow us to move forward better in addressing such issues.

Decolonising gender, as Maria Lugones (2010) argues, is to enact a critique of racialized, colonial and capital heterosexualist gender oppression as a lived transformation of the social. To a significant extent it has to be in accord with the subjectivities and inter-subjectivities that partly construct and in part are constructed by the reality that Maria Lugones (2010:746-747) notes:

To think the scope of the gender system of eurocentred global capitalism, it is necessary to understand the extent to which the very process of narrowing of the concept of gender to control of sex, its resources and products constitutes gender domination. To understand this narrowing and to understand the intermeshing of racialisation and gendering, it is important to think whether the

social arrangements prior to colonization regarding the 'sexes' gave differential meaning to them across all areas of existence (Lugones 2008: 12).

A decolonial gender transformation for advancing African futures should be that which takes into account Thomas Sankara's fundamental problematique of the meaning of women's emancipation mentioned earlier. Maria Lugones (2008), in support of Thomas Sankara, argues that an articulation of the colonial/modern gender system, both in the large strokes and in all its detailed and lived experiences will enable us to see what was imposed on us as a people. Maria Lugones allows us to see even further on the subtlety of the system that Sankara observed. That, in fact, the instrumentality of the colonial/modern gender system is subjecting both African women and men in all domains of existence. Maria Lugones in helping us understand the intersections of gender in our society notes that:

We need to place ourselves in a position to call each other to reject this gender system as we perform a transformation of communal relations (Lugones 2008:1).

The state of the global power structure and its limitations in advancing gender transformation, the limitation of African futures as manifesting in the misinterpreted problematic discussed above allow us to arrive at what Lugones (2008) terms 'colonial/modern gender system'. It is important to note that Lugones' framework may very well be critical of the categorical/essentialist logic of modernity and be critical of the dichotomy between women and men, without seeing coloniality or the colonial difference. Such a framework would not have, and may exclude, the very possibility of resistance to the modern, colonial, gender system and the coloniality of gender because it cannot see the world as accurately as the world is. It is in this context that the Paris Latin American Women's group, as captured in Iman et al (1997) had to say:

To believe that by switching from one mode of production to another we destroy, not only women's oppression but an entire conceptualisation of the world, of the state, of power, women, children, education is to castrate Marxism by reducing it to a very crude form of economism in order to avoid calling into question, first of all, the power, hierarchy and vertical structure of our political organisations and the power which our dear male comrades have held throughout history (Iman et al 1997:201).

This implies that gender subordination requires to be located not merely in the dynamics of production (or of particular modes) but in a 'net of cultural habits' which are in turn sustained as an activity of both sexes (Haug in Iman et al 1997:201-202). Iman et al (1997) emphasize the multi-layered relationships within which women's oppression is produced and reproduced.

Gender relations permeate the whole of society; they are structures as well as daily practices. They are always in motion and contested. They are full of contradictions and anachronisms. They are themselves always produced anew. Their foundation is the division of labour in the production of life and the means of living. Thus, the status of women will improve only with the elimination of the system that exploits them, as Thomas Sankara (1997) opined.

Guided by decolonial conceptions of the global matrix of power encapsulated in three levels (i.e. coloniality of power, coloniality of knowledge and coloniality of being) it is important and fundamental to define the African futures in the context of gender within the context of the different notions of the global matrix of power. This way, an analysis and conception of gender shall not be narrowed down to just an oppression of one by the other but rather the conception of the intersection of gender, race and class and the conception of gender as a systematic and structural phenomenon inherited from the colonial forms of power.

As outlined earlier, the limitations emanating from the coloniality of gender are at play today and manifest in very shallow ways of belittling the discourse of gender and emancipation of women to incorporation within the patriarchal system, emancipation of women through the numbers game that suggest that to have more women is to resolve the fundamental power relations challenge that is embedded in the system and structure that is gendered, racial and unequal. These efforts, while important, do not provide a clear view of what the futures of Africa could be in as far as gender transformation is concerned. It is not clear whether these efforts provide the shifting poles between men and women.

The alternative must define the discourse of gender within the decolonial humanist perspectives where an analysis of gender is not confined to its victims but rather the structure and the system that has deprived both men and women humanity and victimized them in one way or the other. Decolonial humanism, in as far as gender is concerned, must move beyond the use of males as subject of humanity with which women should be measured against.

Rethinking gender through decolonial humanism must use the tools of analysis of coloniality (coloniality of power, knowledge and being) and unpack such tools and what each means in as far as gender and its transformation is concerned. It is in using such tools of analysis that we begin to seek the humanity through decolonial humanism. This is done so that the image of men that define humanity in the modern colonial world is not taken as a given but deconstructed beyond normalization of gender hierarchy.

## **The Case of South Africa and Rwanda**

This section of the article briefly provides evidence of the miss-defined problematic of gender in Africa. Case studies focus on South Africa and Rwanda because these two countries are often purported to be good examples regarding gender transformation. The turning point of these two countries are seen significantly in 1994, when for South Africa, for the first time in history, black Africans are afforded equal status to that of whites and for Rwanda we see a population perishing because of genocide.

Bennet (2014) argues that since the Rwandan genocide in 1994, women have come to play a more important role in the formal sector although the majority of Rwandan women still work in subsistence farming. Women occupy some of the most important government ministries and make up more than fifty per cent of the country's parliamentarians. Rwanda, which has a population of 11.4 million, must have at least 30 per cent of members of parliament as females. In the late 1990s, the Rwandan government passed groundbreaking legislation on topics that are typically considered 'women's issues'. These laws gave women the right to own and inherit land, the right to open a bank account without the authorization of a male figure, and afforded special rights and protections to children. Furthermore, the African Development Bank (2008) notes that in Rwanda, women account for 55.2 per cent of the 4,492,000 economically active population. Women have low rates of employment (34.6 per cent) in the formal public sector. With 83.6 per cent participation in agriculture, women are very engaged in the sector as independent farmers, wage farmers and unpaid family labour.

However, it is important to note that in the aftermath of the genocide, Rwanda found itself a country composed of 70 per cent women because the genocide had been perpetrated by and largely toward men. There were simply fewer men due to death, imprisonment and flight. Killings also targeted civic leaders during the genocide. Out of more than 780 judges nationwide, for example, only twenty survived. Prior to 1994, women only held between 10 and 15 per cent of seats in Parliament. Out of sheer necessity, and a desire to rebuild their country, women stepped up as leaders in every realm of the nation, including politics. Given this, one can conclude that what can fundamentally be attributed to the progress of Rwanda is an unfortunate circumstance that the genocide left the country in. These unfortunate circumstances give Rwanda limited options but to utilize the available human resource whose majority is women. It is under this fundamental circumstance that the progress of gender equality and transformation in Rwanda could be attributed to. The policies towards rebuilding Rwanda after 1994 had to take into cognisance the demographic structure of the country after the genocide.

Therefore, one posits that it is not just in the policies where the gender transformation progress in Rwanda can be attributed – as indicated above, the nature of the demography of Rwanda after the aftermath of genocide played a tremendous role. This argument is permissible given that the parliamentary representation of women in Rwanda before 1994 ranged between 10 and 15 per cent, for instance (Bennet 2014). Rwanda's gender transformation progress is important because it does, indeed, speak to the fundamental issues of system and structure even if this is out of circumstances that are unfortunate. So it is not just in statistical representation in parliaments and other institutions that Rwanda's progress can be attributed but the fundamental restructuring of its population structure as a result of genocide.

Similar to Rwanda is also a celebrated story of South Africa's progressive gender transformation accomplishment. The South African constitution of 1996 has been exemplary as far as gender equality goes because it established the Commission for Gender Equality. There is also a women's ministry in government to ensure that, indeed, transformation takes place. The commission and the ministry are aimed at promoting respect for gender equality and the protection, development and attainment of gender equality.

Indeed, South Africa is recognized by many as one of the most progressive, forward-thinking, countries when it comes to gender, if viewed through the lens of its new policies and laws. Yet, despite commendable accomplishments that have been registered in terms of equality laws and structures, lived experiences continue to ring alarm bells given untransformed gender relations on numerous areas of life. Some advancement has been made, while other issues stagnate or even regress. For example, more women are in leadership positions in the South African government than in most other governments in the world (*Worldwide Guide to Women in Leadership*, 2008). Yet, at the same time, South Africa has one of the highest rates of rape in the world (see, for example, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2001). And there are numerous reports about appalling domestic violence against women and children. It is clear that a need to move beyond the symbolic to the substantive is required.

## **Conclusion**

African futures remain a possibility subject to reconfiguration of the system and structure of power that has remained patriarchal. The African Union has an important role to play. The modern world system and its global order have remained fundamentally patriarchal and this means that any initiative

aimed at creating African futures has to address the fundamental question of the substantive liberation of women. The first step, as argued by Thomas Sankara, is to understand how the patriarchal system functions, to grasp its real nature in all its subtlety, in order to work out a line of action that can lead to women's genuine emancipation. Decolonizing gender therefore becomes a necessary task so that answers to what should be done are formulated from the perspective of asking correct questions.

Colonial/modern gender system, a concept that helps in understanding the instrumentality of the colonial/modern gender system is subjecting both men and women of colour in all domains of existence, allows a case to be made that the gender transformation discourse is not just a women's emancipation discourse but rather efforts of both men and women at overcoming the colonial global structure that is subjectifying all sexes in different ways. Guided by decolonial conceptions of the global matrix of power, it is important to define the African futures in the context of gender within the context of the various notions of the global matrix of power. This way, an analysis and conception of gender shall not be narrowed down to just an oppression of one by the other but rather the conception of the intersection of gender, race and class and the conception of gender as a systematic and structural phenomenon inherited from the colonial forms of power.

Many countries, including Rwanda and South Africa, remain cases to be studied extensively and deeper than just looking at statistical representation when addressing issues of gender transformation. The importance of digging deeper than the numbers game or statistical representation cannot be overemphasized.

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