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Review

An alternative perspective: Islam, identity, and gender migration of Sudanese Muslim women in the UK

Ameena Alrasheed

University for Peace, United Nations Mandated University, San Jose, Costa Rica.

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This article is yet an attempt to provoke and stimulate minds, to seek an alternative understanding - an accurate one to the multiple nature of Islam. This is done by situating knowledge and mapping history, and including a minority of minorities. African Islam needs more articulation. Muslim women of Africa exist in Europe in silence. They face double/triple jeopardy generated from the interplay of racism and sexism and dominant policies that need to be challenged. Sudanese women in West Yorkshire are a representation of these women. Politics, state, religion, ethnicity, and social class seem to determine their position in West Yorkshire society, as it did for many other Muslim African women. Presenting them in this article is a step towards challenging the analogies drawn on them.

Key words: Identity, migration, Islam, gender, politics.

INTRODUCTION

They are married or single, divorced or widow mothers, girl daughters and older women; they are many but they are invisible as there is not enough data or sex disaggregated statistics on migrant women (UNPA Report, 2006).

This paper is an attempt to study a Minority Muslim group in the UK. The main question deals on how exile and living in West Yorkshire transformed Sudanese women's identity as Muslims, African, and Arabic speakers. The paper focuses on exploring the main factors behind immigration and living in West Yorkshire. It is organized around Sudanese women as African, Muslims and Arabic

speakers. The multi-faceted aspect of the particular Muslim identity is never researched but rather combined with the mainstream Muslim women from Asia. In other cases these women were categorized as African women, or as Arabic/Middle Eastern, neglecting the fact that these women cannot be identified in terms of one unified identity, ethnically, religiously, or otherwise. Many studies and presentations have been done concerning Muslim women and these have, in fact, focused on a particular category of Muslims, for example the dominant Asian Muslim women. However, in the background are other women who are Muslims and not Asian. Many of them are still un-researched and their numbers are on the

E-mail: ameena34@hotmail.com. Tel: (506)2205 9075, (506) 2249 3001. Fax: (506) 22491929.

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increase, but why do they migrate? What incentives do they have? How is it related to their gender and how does it affect them? These are questions that need to be tackled. Lewis's (1994) view on the issue of the Muslim community in Britain explains how their identity as Muslims is intrinsically related to the regions and areas they came from. Lewis (1994, p. 7) rightly states that:

In the late 1960s research had already shown that migrants were culturally embedded in communities, displaying distinct patterns of adaptation and group formation.

Lewis (1994) stresses further that the contribution of the British Muslim communities in understanding Muslims and Islam is limited to the nature of intellectual and cultural formation of religion and religious leadership in South Asia, since many Muslims born and educated in Britain are themselves from South Asian origin.

Hence, it is significant to present another example that reflects the diversity of the sectarian, regional and linguistic background of Muslim communities. Such a task is still far from being accomplished. Nevertheless, this study is an attempt to uncover and document another Muslim community, which differs in terms of ethnicity, linguistic, and cultural diversity, and to challenge the discourse of a main stream Islam that portrays Muslims as a one homogenous category.

The Sudanese women's history and their gender roles within their old patriarchal society demonstrate whether there is a trend among these women to use Islam as an identity which interprets their gender relations, and why. This is a point or a position that might help us in understanding how far these women would stand from the dominant mainstream Islam in West Yorkshire.

Tackling Islam and Muslim communities requires exploring and explaining the multifaceted nature of Islam in order to understand the diversity, difference and even contradictory positions of many Muslim groups. This was explored by Hriar (1997) as he demonstrates such multiplicity by emphasizing the seventy three sects¹, the influences that each group have, the power struggle in Arabic and Islamic countries and the power to implement Islamic rule and programme (Hriar, 1997 p. 11). Muslims around the world have been divided due to loyalty to one or other sect.

The daily life of these women shows many aspects that might shed light on how they perform in relation to their traditions, religion, and customs and how their lives are affected by dominant discourses in West Yorkshire. A case in point is the constant experience of social

¹ Apart from the sects Islam has four major doctrines as well. These doctrines resemble the division of the Christian faith, ie orthodox catholic, protestant etc.

harassment faced by many of the Sudanese women, particularly teenage girls, as few of them wear Hijab/veil. They have been subjected to a catalogue of abuse and persistently interrogated for not wearing the veil as they have been mistaken for Pakistani or Asian women. The statement of many of the women reflects the hegemonic nature of mainstream Islam in the UK. This situation led many of their teenage daughters to refuse categorically to enter any local shops in neighbourhoods dominated by Asian Muslims, fearing intimidation and harassment. This is a case that shows the conflicting edge between two Muslim groups in West Yorkshire. The case reflects as well the persistent divide not across religion only but rather across ethnicity among all Muslim groups.

Alternative religious and racial identity in the UK: Popular Islam versus political Islam

It is vital to present yet another alternative Islam that might in fact challenge the British mainstream Islam. This paper is in fact a call for alternative religious Muslims and alternative identities of Muslims around Europe. In general in the UK, African Islam is largely ignored. One can cite as one of many reasons for this, being the smaller numbers of Muslims from Africa who actually live in the UK compared to the majority of Muslims² living in the country. The representation of Islam and Muslims in the UK is usually presented by Muslims who are part of the mosques in the UK. The mosques in question are predominantly Asian mosques, and that reflects the representation of Muslims in the constructed groups of council of Muslims and other Islamic groups. Most of these mosques are off limits for Sudanese Muslims as well as for other African Muslims. The presence of an African ethnicity within the Asian mosques is categorically rejected and resented by Asian Muslims. The interplay of racism and sexism is directly connected to it. Paying homage to the multifaceted nature of Islam and exploring Sudanese Islam is essential to establish the dis/connectedness of Sudanese Islam and the Islam in the diaspora space.

Sudan's majority are Sunni Muslims (It is worth mentioning here that Pakistanis are also Sunni Muslims). Islam in Sudan is in fact a combination of Islam and various indigenous beliefs. The Sunni Muslims of Sudan are predominantly Sufi Muslims. Sufi Islam differs in its implications and the way it is practiced socially and culturally. However, the Islam in Sudan reflects two main streams: the popular Islam, which is the Sufi Islam and the political Islam which is the fundamental and

² Estimates of the Muslim population in England are between 1.5 million. Eighty percent who are from Pakistan, Bangladesh and India, other groups are mainly Arabs, Turkish, Somalis. (Tensin Benn & Haifaa Jawad 2003 :xxii)

ideological Islam. What makes the study of any Muslim groups limited when it relates to Sudanese Muslim women is the different nature of Islam and its patriarchy as stressed and presented by Kandiyoti (1991).

Kandiyoti highlights two differing examples of Sub-Saharan Africa and the Asian Middle Eastern. She describes it as a continuum ranging from less corporate forms of house holding involving the relative autonomy of mother and child units in Sub-Saharan Africa to the more corporate male-headed entities prevalent in the Middle East and Asian regions. The importance of Kandiyoti's articulation comes from the fact that she accurately instigates a division and a clear cut distinction between two different models that exhibit patriarchy. This great variation in women's positions under the two systems sheds light on the limitation of the studies and generalisation of Islam in Western countries. It presents a similar position of Sudanese women in relation to their religious identity and as well a manifestation of the limitation of the studies on Asian and Middle Eastern women carried out in the West. All fall short in accommodating the huge differences and variation in women's history in relation to Islam, politics and culture. These variations in the African system are grounded in complete cultural and historical processes. The examples of women's open resistance stand in contradiction to women's accommodation to the system, which Kandiyoti called classic patriarchy.

Kandiyoti examines the positions of women in these areas, and its relation to family and class. Unlike women in sub-Saharan Africa who attempt to resist unfavourable labour relations in the household, women in areas of classic patriarchy of South/East Asia often adhere as far and as long as they possibly can. Hence the fluctuation of women's power position results in their active reproduction of their own subordination.

An example of traditional Sufi group *tariqqa* is presented by Hutson (2001). The Tiganiyya of Kano in Nigeria is a Sufi Muslim group similar to many other groups existing in Sudan. Hutson (2001) describes the rules of script that operate in the Sub-Saharan Africa system. Analysing the patriarchal bargaining between men and women in the order, Hutson reveals how the actions of the women with positions of spiritual authority were both independent and shaped by the order's patriarchy (Hutson, 2001 p.734). Hence that the variations in the Sudanese case are grounded in complete cultural and historical process is self evident.

Exploring another dimension related to the study of Sudanese women is their ethnic identity. It is true that the presence of black communities in the UK has added a new dimension to issues of cultural identity and politics.

However as suggested by Brah (1996), these concepts need further exploration, as the term black itself does not

in fact reflect a homogenous category for black people living in the UK. Black/African/Asian people in Britain do not share the same culture, neither are they united in terms of their colour, race religion or other factors. Brah (1996) states that " political history of Britain during the 1970s and 1980s cannot be understood without addressing the significance of Black, as one of the most enabling, highly contested and contesting, new left political subjects of the period" (Brah, 1996 p. 14).

How have Sudanese women in particular been constructed in the UK in different discourses, policies and practices? How are such constructions contested by these women? Culture must be understood within the context of power relations among different groups, and that is why it is important to understand the history of colonialism and the country of origin's social and political history and the positions of women within it. Hall defined the concept of identity as a process that is never complete, and Brah (1996) stresses further that identity is an enigma, which by its very nature defies a precise definition (Brah, 1996 p. 16). Hence this is an articulation of a process which is difficult to define in accurate terms. However in an attempt to explore and to reveal the very specific history of Sudanese women, a brief historical account on their experiences and culture will follow.

Migration, gender, identity and Sudanese women

When exploring the current literature on migration and whether it does or does not apply to the Sudanese women, it is significant to view the Sudanese women in West Yorkshire as a group of Muslim women who migrated to the UK. There has been an increasing recognition of the importance of the role of female migration. The main trend within feminist theory has been an increase in preoccupation with questions of identity and the body. Debates tend to shift towards an acknowledgement of the complex interactions between categories of sex, class, 'race' and gender e.g minority studies in the US (Kofman et al., 2000).

In reviewing the literature on migration it is clear that there is an absence of gender relation analysis, and this undermines specific analysis of female migration. It is widely expressed within the European countries, that gender relations and sexuality are crucial in defining cultural boundaries and binary opposition between Modern/West and the traditional models/developing world. Religion has become the key signifier of incompatible differences, as always has been the case with Islam and Muslims. As Kofman et al. (2000) states:

Islamic groups regulated by patriarchal structure are singled out as being too distinctive in their lives and

social norms to be able to cohabit with groups whose practices are derived from Christian traditions.

Such a dichotomy is reproduced in many European countries particularly after 9/11 and the July bombing in Britain. Following these events, a stigma was reproduced and attached to Muslims and Islam round the globe which defined Muslim/Islam as the other.

Migration in general takes different forms, as labour migration, family reunification and formation, or migration of refugees and asylum seekers. Women enter the migration space through all these categories. However each of these categories says little about the reciprocal influences of these women in the new space, and what they endure in and out the migration space.

Sudanese women in West Yorkshire could as well be part of a category of broadly un-researched migrants, whether they are failed asylum seekers or they came as a part of family reunification, or as migrants from another European country. The fact that these women share an aspect of identity with other groups thoroughly studied, like Muslim women, or African women or even Middle Eastern women, exclude very important and peculiar aspects of their identity and erroneously situates them as part of a broad category of women judged on the basis of religion or geography only.

How the new space articulated the identity of its Muslim immigrants is explained by Barbara (1996) as she stresses that "beyond the local organizations the British are particularly notable for their expectation that every religious community will evolve a single hierarchy and leadership. If there is an archbishop of Canterbury, there has to be a chief Rabbi; one university centre of the study of Christian Muslim relations pairs the director general of the London Islamic centre with the archbishop as patrons, nothing more astonishes continental European visitors to Britain than the official encouragement given to Muslim organization" (Barbara, 1996 p. 13).

This position articulated by Barbara (1996) resembles the fact encountered by Sudanese women in Leeds in their attempt to formulate a women's group. They failed in their attempts since 2006 to register the group and to generate any possible government funding and support, while their attempt to request support for a Quranic reading group was welcomed and supported within only one week of its formulation

How gender influences migration was articulated by Mahler (Mahler, 2003 p. 812) as she stresses:

Gender influences migration lives, however gender has been regularly sidelined in scholarly research on international migration over the past 100 years, and the same pattern holds for the migration studies. This is an attempt to bringing gender into this promising body of

research.

The framework can work as a useful method to conduct the study of Sudanese women. In the framework the social location is said to conceptualize gender as a process, to deconstruct the myth, and to help demarcate between female and male in activities, task division, space time, dress etc. These distinctions are not natural; they are a human construct. Social location is defined by Silvey (2004 p. 822) as:

Referring to how people are positioned within power hierarchies created through historical political and economic geography and kinship-based and other social stratification factors.

Hence tackling gender as a structure, and uncovering reasons behind women being invisible should be challenged. By the same token, women from Sudan who live in West Yorkshire need to be studied as yet another diverse category of Muslims. Their invisibility reflects the lacking of comprehensive study on Muslim women in the UK that can single out their peculiar identity, culture and social life.

How Sudanese women are positioned within the power hierarchy of their new space, and how they are positioned historically are determinant factors in the study of these women's identity. It helps as well in the study of other minority Muslim groups in Europe. Moreover, if it were claimed that women in fact migrate across international boundaries at almost the same rate as men, then why not study prevailing gender relation and investigate its consequences? (Delaet, 1999 p. 13).

Migrating to Europe reflects various tendencies and patterns, dominant among different communities and groups. One example shows that there is always a tendency among women to stay and men to leave. In the case of migrant communities in the Netherlands, males/head of the households forced their wives and children to return to their country of origin; a situation that necessitated the interference of the Dutch authorities and led to the introduction of measures to ensure that female members of the family were not forced to leave. This is basically influenced by the change in social status that affects women deeply, the improvement in women's position compared to men which creates a better environment for women in relation to men.

Diverse cases of migrations were presented by Pessar (2003), Silvey (2004), Hondagneu (1999); some about the migrants' negotiating space, and how gender relations affect them; other cases show how the transnational obligations can limit men's ultimate return.

Other examples show that hierarchies are built equally on class, ethnicity, nationality, and sexuality levels as well

as on religious level. People are born into social locations that confer certain advantages and disadvantages. In this case the example of a child born in Britain and one in Somalia, can present how gender works on different levels that affect the group's or individual's social location.

People's social locations usually do shift over time and this suggests a non-fixed location is basically affected by power hierarchy namely ethnicity, class, 'race' and sexuality. The social location of Sudanese Muslim women has its multi-faceted dimension. As whether they are located within the broad and mainstream Muslims of Asian descent, or as part of a large community of African descent or in a third instance as part of a broad category of Middle Eastern or Arabic speaking communities. Within the social location and the power hierarchy mentioned, Sudanese women assume a conflicting position as ethnically African, religiously Muslims, and as part of a broad social class within the British society.

Sudanese women's experiences should be analysed on a multiple level. Using the gendered geographies of power helps in mapping and identifying the pluralistic positions of these women. As people's social locations do shift over time, as suggested by the framework presented, so people are situated within the power hierarchies that they have not constructed. This could be validated when tackling the issue of Sudanese women's identity, as African, Arabized and Islamic/Muslim group and most importantly ethnically diverse. It is worth mentioning that within the power hierarchies, the political, economic, historical, geographic and kinship factors are equally important and it shows how the hierarchies are built on class, 'race', ethnicity and sexuality. Among these women themselves and in their new space, the well-known issue of Darfur³ can present a good case reflects the interplay of identity, ethnicity, politics, class and economic conflict.

The issue of power and hegemonic gender regime is an essential issue. The available research reveals that the state assumes a key role both in the gendered lives of immigrant refugee women and men. The state also affects the production of cultural genres that emulate or challenge such immigrants' everyday lives (Silvey, 2004; Pessar and Mahler, 2003; Goldring, 2001; Hondagneu-Stelo, 1999).

The way in which female migrants are ignored in some fields might lead us to justify the lack of comprehensive studies of different Muslim groups; a trend to homogenise

³ Darfur crisis erupted when the Islamic regime in Khartoum used the Janjawid to lead the proxy war against Darfurians who are Muslims and portrayed as African. The discourse of Arabism and Islamism embedded in the politics of the Islamist victimized Darfurian, and led to the current war in the region, apart from the long discourse of marginalisation and exclusion of the western region of the country by the governing elites through the Sudanese history since independent in 1965.

Muslims is harmful, and it undermines their importance due to their smaller numbers. It also assumes that their role is passive and that they are insignificant. Such positions need to be challenged. Studying Sudanese women in West Yorkshire is an attempt to challenge efforts that homogenise Muslims and Islam.

Hondagneu stresses why female migrants were ignored:

The field had ignored female migrants owing to the widely shared assumption that women and children migrate to accompany or to reunite with their breadwinner migrant husband (Hondagneu-Stelo 1999 p. 29).

However, gender analysis should be extended in order to be able to analyse how social life is organized in the new space.

Hondagneu stresses further the importance of employing multiple research methods to produce new materials such as qualitative and quantitative methods used in the case tackled by Douglas Massey in 1987.⁴ The limitation of these studies lies in the fact that it falls short in examining Muslim women from Africa, who are culturally and distinctly different. It falls short as well in identifying the importance of females in migration within all its categories and particularly when aspects of class, ethnicity and 'race' play a crucial role in undermining other groups.

Negotiating gender and migration in the new space:

Migration is not a process best understood in economic and political terms; it is also socio cultural processes mediated by gendered and kinship ideologies institutions and practices (Passer and Mahler 2006 p. 34).

Migration as a socio-economic and cultural process has affected men and women differently. Lewis (1982 p. 1), Massey (1993 p. 431), Kucukcan (1999 p. 21) attributed the phenomena of migration and people's movement to social economic and political factors.

Such processes need to be truly considered when conducting this study. An important part of these processes is interrogating the legal margins in the host country and its ability to impose its force and influence old gender relations, in terms of affecting aspects of decision making, economic independence, child care, etc.

It is important to stress the fact that the changes in females' status as a result of migration do affect men's positions and interrelate with other challenges for both men and women, as the cross cutting edges, of racism, classism, religion and legal status. Examining women's

⁴ In this study, multiple methods were employed throughout its duration.

attitudes towards social, economic and political transformation in their new space and the complex process of migration shows that there is room to reproduce patriarchy in the new space; in many studies on migration it was suggested that patriarchy was reintroduced and reconstructed in many European Countries (Pessar, 2006; Mahler, 2006; Silvey, 2004).

Migration laws in Europe and its impact on migrant women, and how it influences gender relations among them, are well articulated by Bhabha (1996) and Crawley (1997 p. 40), as they stress that;

In many European countries immigration laws act to reproduce traditional notions of women's dependency on men by assuming that the latter are breadwinners and thus the heads of household; this is a persistent gender practice, long entrenched gendered notions of the male public sphere and the female private sphere also serve to impede states and international organizations from defending women's human rights against assaults experienced routinely in the more intimate spaces of families and ethnic communities (Bhabha, 1996; Crawley, 1997: 40).

Another previous articulation that undermines and sidelines gender relations is the one presented by Ravenstein as he suggests that females migrate more frequently than males within their country of birth, but are less likely to move further. This is a point disputed by Hoerder (2006) on the grounds that it suggests that women are primarily short distance migration compared to longer range migration for men, something which was not proven (Sinke, 2006: 83). Emphasising the importance of gender, historian Dirk Hoerder (2006) states that:

Not only are migration systems characterized as predominantly male or female, but it shows how the interplay of individual circumstances familial relationships, larger economic cycles and existing circuits of knowledge and transportation are gendered and how that interplay encourages or discourages certain types of migration at particular points in time, in particular places and even at times for particular individuals" (Hoerder, 2006 p. 28).

How can one benefit from such articulation of gender and gender relations in the Diaspora space, and how does it affect the study of Sudanese women? These examples help to clarify matters relating to this study, as it creates a platform to negotiate different patterns in dealing with Muslim women already existing in the UK. These women's experiences highlighted the interplay of the state policy, political and popular discourse and a variety of other institutional practices in the construction of the Sudanese identity. Islam with its popular feature in Sudan is a product of an interrelation and interplay of a

combination of Islamic and indigenous beliefs, and it is reflected in these women's identity and their performance of their religion.

Sudanese women past and post colonial era

AL Hag Hamad (1987) gave a thorough historical account on women in Sudan. He mentioned that the matrilineal system of succession was instrumental in the transfer of political power from the Christian Nubian royal families to the encroaching Muslim Arabs. He also explored the history of Sudanese medieval queens ruling over large tracts of territory. Al Hag Hamad gave a complete account of these queens and their eras⁵ (Hamad,⁶ 1987 p.8) Hamad articulated as well the high status royal women in Sudan history, starting from the queen Mother Nasala. The first Cushite to claim the title RE-ancient Egyptian title, Nasala lived in Meroe Northern Sudan. The Funj sultanate of Darfur shows the importance of the role of royal women, as land lords, queen mother called Abo. In the Islamic kingdom of Takali in Southern Kordofan, queen mother played per-eminent role in deciding the succession; a full account of queen mother in Sudan history is given by Shuqayer (1903) and Nachtigal (1971).

The history of the Christian kingdoms of Sudan, and the ruling queens is relatively recent and still manifested in the current position of Sudanese women around the country; to mention just a few, queen Mendi of Western Sudan, Elkandaka, Sitana etc. In short, Islam in Sudan is basically interacting with the dominant culture and shaped with elements of old indigenous beliefs in the way it is practiced and performed.

It was suggested that the Sufi influence of personal and emotional faith has made the Islamic movement in Sudan more open, pragmatic, and moderate in its handling of religious and political issues, relative to other Muslim Brotherhood movements in the region. Its members had modern education and an appreciation for, and a commitment to, economic and social development (Mohamed, 2000).

Sudanese women's position was widely affected by colonial policies as well as by Arabic Islamic discourse, which was adopted by the post colonial state of Sudan, mainly the Islamic regime of 1989, known as the NIF (National Islamic Front). Its rules and regulations have had a profound effect on Sudanese women.

In the recent history of colonialism, and prior to Sudan's independence in 1956, an attempt to expand female

⁵ See Susan Kenyon on Sudanese women for further details.

⁶ Hamad explored the high status of royal women in Sudan history, starting from the queen Mother Nasalsa, the first Cushite to claim the title RE- ancient Egyptian title- . Nasalsa lived in Meroe, northern Sudan

education was rejected by the government/the British authorities. Later the decision was reconsidered and only two classes were added to the Sudanese elementary school/*Kutab* for boys. Later Babiker Badri was granted permission to open an independent girl's school at his own expense in the Blue Nile Province Rufaa'a (Janice, 2007 p. 1880).

The post colonial era of Sudan manifests a drastic change in women's positions and their struggle for emancipation and equal rights. Hale describes the Sudanese women's movement as emanating from secularists and Islamists coexisting in contemporary northern Sudan and contesting its social terrain. Their platforms are similar in the sense of positioning women at the centre of an authentic culture and claiming the elevation of women as a goal; part of the similarity derives from the fact that both of these politics of authenticity are class interested (Hale, 1997 p. 104).

The history of resistance to subordination since the 1940s led by Sudanese women has focussed largely on how religion has been manipulated to ensure male domination followed by the advocacy of economic emancipation for women and revision of family laws. The women's movement in Sudan has been a very strong one since its early establishment in 1946⁷, as it has been equally active in rural and urban areas. The movement has acquired a wider support base. Women's concerns have widened from personal laws to issues of economic empowerment, domestic violence and their public roles. The women's movement achieved some success in influencing state policy, such as gaining political rights, equal pay for equal work and calling for changes in family laws to provide more support for women. At the same time Sudanese women were given the right to work as judges and to assume high positions in the high court, a gain that was eventually reversed by the Islamic junta of 1989. In 1952, the first women's union was established by women graduates and teachers. In 1956 the movement called for social and economic development, women's education in the rural areas, change of the family laws in Sudan, fighting against illiteracy, in addition to the slogan of national awakening and struggle against the British colonisers. In 1965, Sudanese women gained their political rights, and the first Sudanese woman was elected to parliament⁸ (Babiker, 2002 p. 261). In 1989, an Islamic military coup took over in Sudan, dismantling democracy and democratic institutions and confining women to Sharia laws. The years 1990 to 2000 witnessed many events and changes in global politics as well. In Britain the July bombing and the 9/11 incidents

laid a shadow upon the very situation of Muslims around the globe, particularly those living in Europe and the US. One prominent characteristic of Sudanese women living in the UK is that they are few in numbers compared to other immigrants.

Referring to other aspects of these women's identity; being black is important. Black and African is a very specific aspect of blackness. In many instances Brah referred to Asian women as black women within the general context of black minorities in relation to the white British. However the description is problematic as far as Sudanese women are concerned. Their engagement within the social, political and racial politics of the UK placed them in a different category, unable to identify in terms of religion with the majority Muslim communities (Asian) and placed in a position of a double jeopardy facing exclusion from the social politics of the country. Here the question of difference is not a limited one and black is not only about colour; it is a political and cultural position and it explores who is different from who and at what time and where. Articulating the concept of difference and racial construction of the society in the UK, Brah (1996p. 185) stresses that,

The discourse might be primarily about gender but simply will not exist in isolation from other binaries, as class race and religion, even these binaries are problematic as which race, and also which religion?

The binary of religion is intrinsically differentiated and unstable, equally so is the race binary; black is not a coherent and stable construction, a gap of difference exists within black African/ black Asian in terms of history, politics and power.

Visualizing an alternative Muslim woman

The general position of Islam in relation to democracy is well articulated by Saad (Saad, 1997:14) who wrote about the troubled triangle of populism Islam and civil society in the Arab world. Ahmad stresses that Islam is posited as essentially opposed to democracy and pluralism and any scheme for human rights. Mohammed (2005), on the other hand, looks at the areas of the home, the education system and the labour market in the case of young working class British Pakistani Muslim women. She examined the marginal position of Asian Muslim women and attributes their position to the context under which the global decline of secularism and reassertion of right wing religious and Islamist ideologies enabled the assertion of marginality. Mohammed (2005) highlights more how the Pakistani community in Britain retains and continuously renews links with a simultaneous real and imaginary homeland through economic interests

⁷ See British National record, released on 2003, on Sudanese women 1945.

⁸ Fatima Ahmed Ibrahim was the first woman elected to parliament. She was the leader of the women's association and a member of the central committee of the Communist Party of Sudan.

as well as social and kinship networks strengthened by marriage. She stresses that "thus the ideal of womanhood promoted by right wing forces in post-Zia Pakistan travelled through these networks to influence albeit unevenly working class Pakistani communities in Britain (Mohammed, 2005 p. 179).

Hence it is about the right wing forces and Islamic conservatives who shape the existing mainstream Muslims in Britain, and that makes it even more important to examine another Muslim community that might not share the same ideology with the dominant Muslim group. This might be the reason why the UK resembles Sudan after the 1989 Islamic regime, in terms of what Sudanese women as Muslims encountered in West Yorkshire. To demonstrate Sudanese women's position after the 1989 Islamic regime, a description of the situation was well articulated by the *WLUML* (Women Living Under Muslim Laws) in the following words:

"The different face of Islamisation is visible in Sudan where it is being promoted by an authoritarian regime with much more brutal effects, women's job and promotions opportunities in the government have been severely restricted, their mobility made dependent on male and state approval at various levels, their rights to land ownerships curtailed and even their dress regulated, girls and women enrolled in educational institutions are formally subject to a dress code and many expelled in the event of violation of this code, further various state-instituted bodies have been established to patrol streets to ensure appropriate behaviour" [WLUML 1994 Dossier 18 October]

The current Islamic regime of Sudan enforced legislations and procedures on Islamic *principles*. The present legal practice and fundamentalist Islamic discourse violate previously guaranteed constitutional rights to equality in law of women and non-Muslims in Sudan. Historically, gender oppression has been practised against Sudanese women as part of the general social economic and political structure, patriarchal hierarchy and biases have mediated women's cultural identity. During independence, and particularly after 1960 women obtained a significant number of political and civil rights.

They obtained rights such as equality before laws, in job opportunities, the right to vote, the right to equal pay, the right to maternity leave, ownership rights and the right to hold public office (Babiker, 2002).

Rigid constructions of women's bodies occurred in countries like Sudan, Iran, Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia and imposed gender division took place. (Mohammad, 2005:183). The veil has always been constructed as the Islamic dress; however, it was imposed rigidly on Sudanese women in 1989 by the Islamic regime. However, among Sudanese women who do wear the veil,

their attitudes towards their teenage daughters is more liberal as they are rarely seen in veil if at all.

Mohammed (2005) examines the rise of conservative radical religious nationalism, which travels from the homeland to the new space in Britain. To her that explains the stress placed on women's roles, and the imposed division and exclusion and spatial constraints on them. This might explain the conservatism that tends to sway towards fundamentalism which characterizes the Pakistani Muslim community when compared to the Sudanese community. The behavioural requirements incumbent on a Muslim woman in Britain is not the same as in Pakistan. The norms and practices of the new space (Mohammed, 2005 p. 196) were taken into account in Ghazi (2005). The conservatism among Sudanese women took the same turn, and is directly influenced by the new space's dominant norms as those who travel from Sudan in their vast majority opposed the current Islamic regime.

It is crucial to stress that in order to position the African Muslim groups among the mainstream Muslims in the UK, it is important to explore their differences culturally, historically and socially in practicing Islam. How African Muslim women, practice and perform their religion is viewed by Abdi Ismail Samatar in relation to Somali women. Somali women constructed the first women's mosque in Somalia and possibly the first female mosque in the world in 1970.

The women completed the mosque in 1972 and a female sheikh led the prayers in this mosque. The case shows and proves the open ended nature of Islamic reinventions and its different features from Islam in South Asia.

This is stressed by many scholars when articulating the issue of women and Islam. It shows as well the interpretation of the hegemony of the languages, the diversity of its sources, and the political systems (Kandiyoti, 1991; Badran, 1991; Karam, 1998; Kazi, 1997; Lesch, 1998). A high trend among Muslim women in Africa to challenge the male interpretation of Islam was as well presented (Anaaem, 1991; Abdi Ismail, 2005). Sudanese republican women represent yet another case, as they are allowed to lead and to call for prayers in the same way as men.⁹ The Sudanese minority in the UK are a product of the immigrants who left the country. Most of the immigration is as recent as the 1980s, which witnessed higher rates of influx particularly after the year 1989 when the Islamic military regime took over. They carried their personal lives and self images with them, and in an attempt to adjust to a different society, unfamiliar with its rules regulation and culture, they were subjected to pressure relating to the considerable change

⁹ Republican party is a religious group, led by Astadh Mahmoud M Taha, who was executed by Islamisation in Sudan in 1983 see Alfikra.org

in life style. The characteristics of a Muslim Muslimness of, African Muslims in general and Sudanese Muslims in particular, vary considerably from that of the Asian Muslims.

Reproduction of patriarchy in the new space

Sudanese women's daily encounters

While the growing scholarly literature addressed the issue of exile Diaspora and the new space, Hall (1990), Brah (1996), Gilroy (1993) articulated the issue of African Muslims in the UK. It was suggested that the post-colonial theory is the key to understanding the diapasonic community formations; the African Muslim women in the UK are not widely known or thoroughly studied, as opposed to the South Asian Muslim women. Both groups incorporate conflicting nature in their practices.

One aspect that manifests a reproduction of patriarchy in the new space is the Muslim women's prayers in the Mosques. Within the Asian Muslim community, the Mosque is a male space and off limits for women, while Sudanese women usually pray in mosques with an allocated space for them. These are two groups where factors as class, social origin, and ethnicity play crucial role in identifying the difference in performance of a Muslim Muslim-ness among them.

Rethinking the text

The interplay of the elements of class, ethnicity and 'race' is important, as articulated by Hussain (2004) as he refers to the reasons behind the failure in the black Community experience in the UK. Hussain stresses:

African Muslim women generally within the Islamic imaginary were portrayed as licentious sexually and cheap morally, and this view originated from early days of slavery, however reading the Islamic text such views were expressed as well in different interpretations worldwide. It is important to stress that the gender is constructed differently for black African women and for black Asian women. The omission of the issue of race and class resulted in more complexity and difficulty in constructing one unit of resistance for racism sexist and exclusion (Hussain 2004 :51)¹⁰

Views of racism, sexism are widely and openly expressed

¹⁰ Organization of women of Asian and African decent (OWAAD) from 1987 till 1983 Husain stresses that the black women movement failed to grow because of internal contradictions, unity on conservative and reactionary ideas do not last long as perceived

in the Islamic religious Quranic texts. The distinctive identity of African Muslims in Britain and the interplay of racism and sexism participated in undermining their experiences. This is an attempt to explore this identity and in a way to embrace the collective identity of African Muslim women in Britain whose voices were not heard and their identity not explored and studied in scholarly work. The impact of their migration and their peculiar experiences is significant; studying Sudanese women in West Yorkshire would establish yet another platform for Black Muslim women.

When singling out the Muslim identity of this group of women, it is important to stress that it is not because they label themselves and focus by necessity on their Islamic cultural expression in place of other loyalties. However, it is an attempt to distinguish the very Islamic identity that does not go in conformity with the main stream Islamic identity of women in the UK. The fact of the lack of studies and works about these women was deemed insignificant due to their small numbers.

Barbara suggests that Muslims negotiate relationships with other Muslim communities in ways that forge communities of larger or smaller scale, among those who share loyalty to sacred texts and symbols. This however is proven to be wrong in relation to Pakistani Muslim communities, as they do share the same sacred texts, symbols and belief with the Muslim community of African origin; they both tend to contradict and conflict with each other in the way they read, interpret and perform the texts.

One aspect of the performance of a Muslim Muslim-ness among Sudanese women is their celebration of Christmas. In a public hall accompanied by their families, Sudanese women faced with a British Muslim official resentment to their act of celebrating Christmas as Muslims. More conflicting positions could emerge as the nature of a Muslim Muslim-ness does contradict the norm of the mainstream Islam in the UK.

Kucukcan (1999) challenged the Islam in Britain as equated with Asian Muslims in the public image, and explores the Turkish Muslims. Kucukcan, (1999 p. 191) stresses that:

The equation between a Turk and being a Muslim has been a landmark of the Turkish identity, Islamic values are deeply rooted in Turkish society, and despite the striking change the Turkish society has faced, Islamic imprint on the fabric of society still remains alive.

Kucukcan (1999) stresses, it seems that Islam in Britain is usually equated with Asian Muslims in the public imagine, which indicates that the Turks as a micro-community within the Islamic *umma* are not included in the studies of Muslims in Britain (Kucukcan, 1999).

Likewise, the Sudanese Muslim women are not

documented, for many reasons such as their small numbers, their ethnic origins, their relatively recent migration, as well as the fact that they have not been perceived as influential. All these factors contributed to their unnoticed presence, a position that this study will challenge. Challenging the undermined position of the African Muslim can be best articulated when studying Muslim Sudanese women.

The establishment of Mosques is yet another example as it has always been a priority for many Muslim groups including Arabic and Asians; however for Sudanese Muslim groups in Britain, the establishment of a community group and an Arabic language schools is an issue of utmost importance. Sudanese communities around the UK usually hold their events religious or otherwise in churches in Leeds, London, and Oxford, contrasting with other Muslim groups.

Due to such conflicting ways and attitudes in performing Islam, studying Sudanese women is highly significant in placing them in the map of Muslim communities in Britain, and exploring their identities (Rosmary Sales, Eleonore Kofman, Annie Phizachlea, Parvati Raghuram), (Eleonore Ed 42.)

Conclusion

It is fundamental and useful to utilize the frame work presented by Passer and Mahler, when studying Sudanese women in West Yorkshire, and to benefit from the articulation of Islam and Muslim identity presented by Moghissi (2005) and Warburg (1985).

Exploring Sudanese women's lives in their host country and questioning the transformations and changes of gender role and gender relations, is an examination of yet a multi-faceted aspect of a particular Muslim identity which is never researched. The main limitation with the current literature on Islam and Muslim women when applied to the study of Sudanese women¹¹ is the fact that when exploring the example of Islam in Sudan and in other Islamic countries, there are very considerable variations in Islam within the context of the country. It is indeed a different social location, a different geography of power and different cultural, political, and social rules we are interrogating.

Public representations of Muslims in the UK and around Europe largely ignore African Islam and Muslims. A possible reason for this neglect is the fact that the African Muslims constitute a minority when compared to Muslims of other ethnic background, and also because they are perceived as un-influential.

Muslim Sudanese women in the UK are one of the

¹¹ The study refers to the Northern Sudanese women. (Political north) of the country with its majority Muslim and Arabic speaking.

under-researched ethnic communities, and a proper understanding of Muslim communities in the UK, depends largely on analyzing Islam as a multi-faceted religion. It is obvious that Sudanese Muslims are not included in any study of Muslims in the UK. Political, social and religious development in Sudan was marked by the hegemony of the Arabic/Islamic discourse, supported by the emerging religious-oriented fundamentalists in Sudan. Muslim communities in the UK reproduce their distinct values, customs, social and cultural structures, and as they constitute a considerable number in general, their presence and expression of identity is predominantly Asian. Sudanese Muslims as a minority Muslim community are undermined and have not been included as part of diversified Muslim community. The interplay of 'race', ethnicity and culture is a factor in formulating this situation. An undermined position within the Islamic imaginary texts of African Muslim is reproduced within the mainstream Muslims in the UK. An articulation and the study of Sudanese Muslim women would fill a vacuum in research on African Muslim groups in the UK, and would stimulate others to tackle Muslim minorities around Europe.

Conflict of Interests

The author has not declared any conflict of interests.

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Full Length Research Paper

Towards institutionalizing gender equality in Africa: How effective are the global gender summits and convention? A critique

Luke Amadi^{1*} and Cajetan Amadi²

¹Educational Support and Development Initiative for the Less Privileged (ESDIL)

²Department of Educational Psychology, Guidance and Counselling
University of Port Harcourt, Nigeria.

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In the neo liberal order, gender equality discourse has had a renewed impetus following the post global gender summits and conventions inspired by options to enlarge the participation of women in governance and decision making processes such as the Beijing 35% affirmative action. However, decades on, institutionalizing gender equality in the periphery societies such as Africa has been elusive. This paper explores some prevailing dimensions of inequality and efforts at women emancipation and transformation to understand the verity of the summits and their resolutions. It deploys historical approach based on secondary data sources to provide brief genealogical mapping of some global gender conventions and summits namely; the first World Conference on Women held in Mexico City, 1975, the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), Second World Conference on Women held in Copenhagen 1980, World Conference to Review and Appraise the Achievements of the United Nations Decade for Women 1985, the Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing in 1995, Goal three (3) of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) 2000 etc. Results from the findings suggest that women are still marginalised, evidences were provided within health, educational, cultural, political and socio-economic dimensions. The paper calls for mainstreaming gender in top political offices across Africa to redefine women's status and force a concomitant transformation.

Key words: Gender inequality, sustainable development, global gender summits/ conventions, Africa.

INTRODUCTION

In the neo liberal order, the study of global women summits becomes necessary as gender inequality is undermining the standard unit of liberalism namely –

equality. Discourses and scholarly evidence on gender studies show that gender equality has recorded minimal success in Africa, parts of Latin America and South Asia

*Corresponding author. E-mail: lukamadi2@yahoo.com

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at the post- cold war era (AfDB, 2012; UNDP, 2012; OECD, 2013).

In Africa gender inequality has a long historical antecedence; first was the colonial trajectory extending to the symbolic colonial struggles in places like Ghana, Kenya, Senegal, Nigeria etc. In Eastern Nigeria, the Aba women riots of 1929 involved enterprising women of strong matriarchal culture. The core issue was the imposition of taxation on women and organization of a colonial political transition and power structure whose terms were contested by the persistent marginalization of women as the colonial state was male dominated.

For instance, in the context of colonial agricultural practices, the introduction of cash crop relegated women to the background. In Kenya as in most African countries, it was observed that women grow food for home consumption .Occasionally, they sell surplus food, or brew grains into beer to earn cash incomes. When colonial authorities attempted to “modernize” agricultural economies, they introduced cash crops like coffee and tea to men, by passing women....Colonial agricultural ministries established agricultural extension systems in colonial headquarters, focused on men delivering advice, training, and credit to men farmers....Kenya is an example, where large numbers of men migrate away from agricultural households, where women remain to grow food and feed their families. Studies of agricultural policy implementation showed that few extension officers, up to 40 percent, managed farms on their own. And women rarely receive credit in many societies because they limited opportunity to own the land and so have no collateral to offer. In Kenya women’s voices have been virtually silenced in the man-made political machinery” (Nzomo and Staudt, 1994 quoted in Staudt 2008:153).

Yet women continued to operate self-help groups, rotating savings among themselves, even small numbers of women are elected and appointed to political office (Staudt, 2008).

Similarly, in Ghana, Amadiume (2001) observed that; “Like most West African women, Ashanti women have always been farmers, traders, and politically active citizens, controlling a network of market systems, including one of the largest markets in Africa, Kumasi market. It has a daily trading population that ranges between 15,000 and 70,000”.

In Western Nigeria, the colonial marketing board relegated women who were the bulk of peasant farmers in cash crop production such as cocoa to the background as men held administrative positions.

By the twentieth century, state policies and laws institutionalized male privilege and transplanted the tools, ideology, and machinery of privilege from one nation to another, and throughout colonial empires in nearly global breath (Staudt, 2008:149).

Between the post 1948, UN universal declaration on human rights and the 1960s following the political

independence of most African countries, the emergent African elite (male dominated) towed the existing patriarchy in Africa which is a system and institution of male rule with women subordination.

From political independence until approximately 1970s, patrimonial autocracy with male domination remained a dominant mode of rule almost across Africa as the colonial state was equally unable to change the rules of the game. Three years after the Stockholm conference of 1972 was the first World Conference on women in Mexico in 1975 in which gender inequality found concrete expressions and the UN’s declaration of 1975 as International Women’s Year.

In the 1980s, a generalized sense of women constellation took form and deepened during the decade. This gave impetus to women social movements accompanied by the second Women Summit in Copenhagen in 1980 and Nairobi in 1985.

In 1987, the Brundtland Commission Report; “Our Common Future” emphasized sustainable development with prioritization of gender issues within its main pillars which was both reassuring and congenial as it opened a novel vista for women’s political relevance.

The late 80s saw the rise of some form of civil activism such as the civil riots of 1988 in Morocco that preceded the end of cold war and one party dictatorship in some African states in 1990. Women constellation re-emerged as a veritable platform for gender transformation, a number of gender based NGOs sprang which in recent times become popular and common ground for women from all walks of life; religion, creed and belief to form alliances and networks to assert relevance in governance. Examples are Tanzania Media Women Association (TAMWA), National Council For Women Society (NCWS), the Collaborative Centre for Gender and Development, Kenya, Gender Development Institute, Nigeria, Rural Nigerian Women Network (RNWN), Ghana National Council of Women and Development etc. Also significant in the 1990s, was the role played by women such as Winnie Mandela and the women wing of the African National Congress (ANC) during the apartheid South Africa and subsequent release of Nelson Mandela. The return to multi- party elections at the rise of neo liberal ideologies resulted in a more formidable rise of civil society organizations (CSOs) including NGOs and women cooperatives, gender equality awareness and platforms for increased participation of women in governance heightened and culminated into the Beijing Conference of 1995 and clamour for 35% affirmative action for women participation in governance and decision making processes. Gender equality discourse became a global concern as more African states undertook some sort of democracy reforms.

In 2000, the Beijing + 5 aimed to assess progress on the 1995 summit. Similarly, world leaders gathered in one of the largest ever UN meetings and adopted the

Millennium development Project aimed to half poverty globally by 2015. Goal three of the Millennium declaration focused on gender equality while goal five focussed on maternal child care. Some scholars like Moss and Stevens (2004), Easterly (2008) have been sceptical about the effectiveness of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in Africa.

Key historic moment was the election of a female President in Liberia Ellen Sirleaf Jonhson as the first African female President in 2005, which seems to enliven the hopes of women in top government positions.

Significantly, contradictory images of gender equality jostle for scholarly attention as divergent perspectives and arguments are held in mainstream media, international community and policy makers on how best to equitably integrate women into governance and decision making which has remained undervalued in global policy discourse. It becomes appropriate to interrogate the plausibility of Africa's nascent democracy project in the context of gender equality.

One central argument painted in glowing colours at the wake of neo liberal order has been the contention that liberal democracy will enhance political emancipation and transformation of women for popular and participatory roles in governance. Results in this direction have been minimal as inequality pervades.

In this paper gender inequality entails unequal access, participation and under representation of women in issues that affect them.

In this essay, we explore dimensions of gender inequality and argue that failure to institutionalize gender equality will continue to derail the global liberal democracy project. Thus, issues of gender, and political emancipation of women are central to Africa at the dawn of the 21st century. Yet few voices clamour for such equality as women are relegated from top political offices. We posit that gender equality which inevitably should have served as a dominant mode of political emancipation, human rights and social justice during much of the neo liberal order is a missing global policy agenda. The paper presents a critical analysis that makes some cogent policy observations that the failure to effectively mainstream gender equality into key development issues will repeatedly breed inequality in Africa.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Dynamics and overview of gender summits and conventions

Global gender summits have been given scant attention in the literature. Although there have been some important contributions from various perspectives discussing aspects of gender inequality in the neo liberal order (Hermings, 2005; Hartsock, 1998; Davis, 2008; Pearce,

2004).

Much effort has been made to relate democratization to women empowerment, which seems not to have recorded the much expected success (Dolphyne, 2000).

Inequality which is a substantial part of political practice remains prevalent across Asia, Latin America, part of East Europe, and Africa with evidence of poor participation of women as core stake holders in the business of governance. Neo Marxists are piqued at this unequal social status as capitalism an element of liberal democracy is riddled with inequality (Muller, 2013).

This historical challenge remains a fundamental development concern acknowledging the enormous problems that confronts women.

The 2012 UNDP Gender Inequality Index (GII) sheds new light on the position of women in over 150 countries; it yields insights in gender gaps in major areas of human development. The component indicators highlight areas in need of critical policy intervention and it stimulates proactive thinking and public policy to overcome systematic disadvantages of women. A critical instigation of improvement on the prevailing dynamics and possible alternatives seem inevitable in debates among feminist theorists (Butler, 2004; Robyn, 2000; Lynne, 2004, Braidotti, 1991; Pearce, 2004).

Viewing gender equality thinking as ongoing questioning and probing alternative options with the aim of effecting rapid changes is expedient. The literature on gender summits is best explored through a brief genealogical mapping of major trends in gender thinking, building up to an inventory of current and future directions in ongoing gender equality debate in Africa as well as possible distortions in striking a gender balance.

Is gender equality a matter of politics or of development reality? Writers have different views on the degree of autonomy of gender theory. Some treat gender theory primarily as part of social science and thus emphasize the influence of social realities (Barak 2010) as justification for men's superiority over women. Others implicitly view gender theory mainly as ideology (Kroska, 2007) perhaps with less policy utility.

Some cynicism in relation to gender equality is evident as some traces of poor gender transformation in Africa lie on women themselves whose vulnerability seems to constrict their assertiveness. Recent evidence such as Nigeria's 2011 general elections, Africa's largest democracy with a population of about 160 million, the only female presidential candidate Mrs. Sarah Jubril got only one vote. How often is gender equality in effect a transformative gesture? What is the politics of gender equality? Whom does this discourse serve? In between these views is a middle position that recognizes the intellectual as well as the political elements in gender equality theory. It does not make sense to isolate gender theory from political processes and treat it as a distinct intellectual exercise; but neither can we simply reduce it

to theory or propaganda. Gender inequality is every-day reality and should form a key global policy formulation and implementation discourse.

While a number of perspectives argue for more participatory approaches as they consider political leanings, civil emancipation in a broad sense, as more important in shaping gender equality than theoretical considerations (Chambers, 2010; Dolphyne, 2000). The advantage of the later view which is in line with this paper is that, it draws attention to the participatory role of gender equality through civil emancipation and collaborative efforts, such as the rise of CSOs and women networks in setting agendas, framing priorities, building coalitions, alliances and justifying policies. Its limitation is that it treats gender emancipation as a by-product of political processes and not as a reformative and reconstructionist endeavour. Gender transformation in the modern sense implies intentional social change in accordance with societal objectives; it is collective and participatory. What is appropriate transformation obviously varies according to class, culture, historical context and relations of power. Gender equality is the negotiation of these issues. The strength and the weakness of gender thinking is its policy oriented character and less commitment to practice. This is part of its vitality and inventiveness; it is problem driven rather than problem solving. In part for the same reasons, gender thinking ranks fairly low in global equality policies. How has global gender summits fared towards institutionalizing gender equality in Africa in the neo liberal order?

Historical evidence shows that the origin of democracy in the Greek city state of Athens as a system of government had a limited franchise with only adult males of Athenian descent eligible to vote. This limited or restricted franchise marked the incipient political discrimination against women.

Early gender emancipation movements dates back to 1840s in the United States of America. "The seed for the first Woman's Rights Convention was planted in 1840, when Elizabeth Cady Stanton met Lucretia Mott at the World Anti-Slavery Convention in London, the conference that refused to seat Mott and other women delegates from America because of their sex. Stanton, the young bride of an antislavery agent, and Mott, a Quaker preacher and veteran of reform, talked then of calling a convention to address the condition of women. Eight years later, it came about as a spontaneous event".¹ The Seneca falls convention which held in the United States in July 18 and 19, 1848 was described this way; "A crowd of about three hundred people, including forty men, came from five miles round. No woman felt capable of presiding; the task was undertaken by Lucretia's husband, James Mott. All of the resolutions were passed unanimously except for woman suffrage, a strange idea and scarcely a concept designed to appeal to the predominantly Quaker audience, whose male contingent commonly declined to

vote"²

About a hundred years later, the UN support for the rights of women began with the Organization's founding Charter. Among the purposes of the UN declared in Article 1 of its Charter is; "To achieve international cooperation ... in promoting and encouraging respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion."³

In Africa, the Aba women riot of 1929 in Eastern Nigeria as mentioned was among the early efforts at women emancipation in Africa. Such emancipation remains topical in recent literature. Dolphyne (2000) chronicled the nexus of African women and socio-cultural alienation through beliefs and practices which keep women subjugated, including bride-wealth, child marriage, polygamy, such as purdah, widowhood, inheritance of property, fertility, female circumcision. She suggested modalities for emancipation involving NGOs and government.

Global conventions as used in this paper refer to relevant gender conferences and related world development summits. We do not seek to map out a genealogical analysis of women emancipation summits in Africa rather to lucidly examine and interrogate salient and recent gender summits and their outcomes to be able to provide a broader elucidation of the subject matter in gender inequality discourse. For our purposes we examine; the 1948 UN declaration on human rights, the first World Conference on Women, held in Mexico City 1975, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), Second World Conference on Women held in Copenhagen 1980, World Conference to Review and Appraise the Achievements of the United Nations Decade for Women 1985, The Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing in 1995.

Within the UN's first year, the Economic and Social Council established its Commission on the Status of Women, as the principal global policy-making body dedicated exclusively to gender equality and advancement of women. Among its earliest accomplishments was ensuring gender neutral language in the draft Universal Declaration of Human Rights.⁴

The landmark Declaration, adopted by the General Assembly on 10th December 1948, reaffirms that "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights" and that "everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, color, sex, language, religion, ...birth or other status."⁵

The first world conference on women held in Mexico in 1975 as the international feminist movement began to gain momentum during the 1970s and the General Assembly declaration of 1975 as the International Women's Year. At the aftermath of the Conference, the years 1976-1985 were declared the UN Decade for Women, and established a Voluntary Fund for Decade⁶.

Subsequent summits and conventions followed.

For instance in 1979, the General Assembly adopted the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), which is often described as an International Bill of Rights for Women. In its 30 articles, the Convention explicitly defines discrimination against women and sets up an agenda for national action to end such discrimination. The Convention targeted “culture and tradition as influential forces shaping gender roles and family relations, and it is the first human rights treaty to affirm the reproductive rights of women”. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) stipulates the urgency of eliminating stereotypes, customs, and norms that give rise to the many legal, political and economic constraints on women. Article I of CEDAW defines discrimination as “any distinction, exclusion, or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, human rights, and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field.” Discriminations contribute to the perpetuation of gender inequalities

Five years after the Mexico City conference, a Second World Conference on Women was held in Copenhagen in 1980. The resulting Programme of Action called for stronger national measures to ensure women's ownership and control of property, as well as improvements in women's rights with respect to inheritance, child custody and loss of nationality.

In 1985, the World Conference to Review and Appraise the Achievements of the United Nations Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace, held in Nairobi. It was convened at a time when the movement for gender equality had finally gained true global recognition, and 15,000 representatives of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) participated in a parallel NGO Forum, the event, which many described as “the birth of global feminism”. Realizing that the goals of the Mexico City Conference had not been adequately met, the 157 participating governments adopted the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies to the year 2000. It broke ground in declaring all issues to be women's issues.⁸

An early result of the Nairobi Conference was the transformation of the Voluntary Fund for the UN Decade for Women into the UN Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM, now part of UN Women).

By 1995 almost all sub-Saharan African countries introduced some measure of political liberalization, and a majority permitted competitive elections. This has been belied with poor commitment to women political emancipation. Major neo-liberal gender equality thinking was the fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing in 1995, which went a step farther than the Nairobi

Conference. The Beijing Platform for Action asserted women's rights as human rights and committed to specific actions to ensure respect for those rights⁹; the core need for gender equality was brought to bear. Gender equality thinking was broadened to encompass “women rights “as human rights, combined with political emancipation, that is, enlarging the choices and opportunities of women for top political positions, and economic emancipation such as employment, improved livelihood fostering entrepreneurship and ‘achievement orientation’ proclivities. These were supposedly informed with the clamor for 35% affirmative action.

Women's political vulnerability remains on the increase as their options are narrowed in virtually all facets of social and political endeavours.

At the aftermath of the Millennium Declaration of the September 2000 Millennium Summit, gender issues were integrated in many of the subsequent Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) — and explicitly in Goal No. 3 (“Promote gender equality and empower women”) and Goal No. 5 (“Reduce by three quarters the maternal mortality ratio”). The UN system is mobilized to meet these goals.¹⁰

On 2 July 2010, the United Nations General Assembly unanimously voted to create a single UN body tasked with accelerating progress in achieving gender equality and women's empowerment. Thus four UN agencies and offices were merged into one namely, UN Women. The bodies are the UN Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), the Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW), the Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues, and the UN International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (UN-INSTRAW).¹¹

In the lead-up to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) Summit in September 2010, the Secretary-General launched a global effort convening 40 key leaders to define a collective strategy for accelerating progress on women's and children's health (Table 1).¹² On 14 September 2010, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon announced the appointment of Michelle Bachelet, former President of Chile, as Under-Secretary-General for UN Women. UN Women became operational on 1 January 2011.¹³

On 13 April 2012 a UN System-wide Action Plan (UN-SWAP) on gender equality and women's empowerment was adopted at a meeting of the United Nations Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) to be applied throughout the UN system.¹⁴

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The focus on global gender summits is important, which are major efforts at bringing global attention to gender equality. However, we draw a meta-analysis of Africa as a microcosm of this global clamour and more importantly as the poorest region of the world

Table 1. Selected global gender summits/conventions and resolutions.

Yr	Summit/Convention	Resolution
1948	Universal Declaration on Human Rights	"All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights" "everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, ... birth or other status."
1975	Declared as International Women's Year and the first World Conference on Women, held in Mexico City.	The years 1976-1985 was declared the UN Decade for Women, and a Voluntary Fund for Decade was established
1979	The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), was adopted . which is often described as an International Bill of Rights for Women	Set up 30 articles and sets up an agenda for national action to end discrimination. The Convention targets culture and tradition as influential forces shaping gender roles and family relations, and it is the first human rights treaty to affirm the reproductive rights of women.
1980	Second World Conference on Women was held in Copenhagen.	The resulting Programme of Action called for stronger national measures to ensure women's ownership and control of property, as well as improvements in women's rights with respect to inheritance, child custody and loss of nationality.
1985	World Conference to Review and Appraise the Achievements of the United Nations Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace, was convened in Nairobi.	The 157 participating governments adopted the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies to the Year 2000. It broke ground in declaring all issues to be women's issues
1995	The Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing in 1995, went a step farther than the Nairobi Conference.	Adopted the Beijing Platform for Action, asserted women's rights as human rights and committed to specific actions to ensure respect for those rights. (affirmative action)
2000	In the aftermath of the Millennium Declaration of the September 2000 Millennium Summit, gender issues were integrated in many of the subsequent Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) Goal No. 3 and Goal No. 5	"Promote gender equality and empower women" "Reduce by three quarters the maternal mortality ratio"
2010	UN women formed, through the merger of four UN agencies and offices.	Mandate to guide the system's coordination on gender.
2010	On 14 September 2010, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon announced the appointment of Michelle Bachelet, former President of Chile, as Under-Secretary-General for UN Women.	
2011	UN Women became operational	
2012	On 13 April 2012 a UN System-wide Action Plan (UN-SWAP) on gender equality and women's empowerment was adopted at a meeting of the United Nations Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB).	To apply its principles throughout the UN system.

Source: The Authors.

(Collier, 2007).

Recent shift to historical methods has been influential approaches to exploratory analysis of gender inequality. Feminist theorists such as Clare Hemmings, capture the essence of these shifts in contemporary gender debates. She observes that these shifts are broadly conceived of as corresponding to the decades of the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s respectively, and to a move from liberal, socialist and radical feminist thought to postmodern gender theory. A shift from the naïve, essentialist seventies, through the black feminist critiques and 'sex wars' of the eighties, and into the 'difference' nineties and beyond, charts the story as one of *progress* beyond falsely bounded categories and identities. A shift from the politicized, unified early second wave, through an entry into the academy in the eighties, and thence a fragmentation into multiple

feminisms and individual careers, charts the story as one of *loss* of commitment to social and political change (Hemmings, 2005:116).

This treatment opens with general historiographical analysis on the character of gender perception in era of nascent liberal democracy in Africa. As Hemmings (2005) recounts, historiography is in its broadest sense the name for historical accounts, or theories of history. Combined with the practice of genealogy, it has proven particularly amenable to feminist and queer work seeking to emphasize that all history takes place in the present, as we make and remake stories about the past to enable a particular present to gain legitimacy (p.118).

The argument then turns to relevant gender conventions/summits namely; the first World Conference on Women, held in Mexico City 1975, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of

Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), Second World Conference on Women held in Copenhagen 1980, World Conference to Review and Appraise the Achievements of the United Nations Decade for Women 1985, The Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing in 1995.

Beyond theoretical debates, the paper builds on seminal secondary data sources which include World Bank reports, African Development Bank and UNDP reports, OECD (2012) Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI), AU reports (2004) and related existing literature.

This paper makes some novel contributions to the field of gender studies and development policy as it demonstrates why gender equality policies in the neo liberal order should share top priority as over-arching directives of international development discourse.

DISCUSSION

Dimensions of prevailing inequality at post gender summits

On close inspection the classic aim of liberal democracy seems internally challenged at the time of revaluating women participation in governance and decision making processes. UN Women (2000) reports that women's representation at the highest levels of national and international decision-making has not changed in the five years since the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing.

Recent World Bank and African Development Bank report on *World Development 2012 Gender Equality and Development* shows that disparities persist in many areas. Four such areas are described as priorities: Health sector, as female mortality exceeds male mortality; Persistent inequalities in education; Unequal pay and productivity of women and men; Unequal status of men and women within the household and in society (AfDB, 2012).

During the Beijing Conference, only 21 of the 189 countries that made commitments to improve the status of women gave the highest priority to the issue of increasing women's participation at all levels of decision-making. Since Beijing, extensive discussions have continued on this at governmental and non-governmental levels.

Similarly, UNDP (2012) report shows that gender inequality remains a major barrier to human development. Girls and women have made major strides since 1990, but they have not yet gained gender equity. The disadvantages facing women and girls are a major source of inequality. All too often, women and girls are discriminated against in health, education, political representation, labor market, etc - with negative repercussions for development of their capabilities and their freedom of choice.

Gender Inequality Index (GII) reports that women are marginalized in virtually all sectors of human endeavour (UNDP, 2012). Women continue to be in the minority in national parliaments, with an average of 13 per cent

worldwide in 1999, despite the fact that women comprise the majority of the electorate in almost all countries (UN Women, 2000).

Arguably, gender summits and their ambitious resolutions are underestimated in global policy discourse. The notion that women emancipation counts for less because "we are in a man's world" continues to underwrite the status of women. As major political positions are held by the men, this reflects a deep-seated inequality and dichotomy along gender lines. In this scenario, women in the poor societies such as Africa are most vulnerable as cultural practices apply in key social decisions which negatively affect gender equality. During the Beijing Conference, only 21 of the 189 countries that made commitments to improve the status of women gave the highest priority to the issue of increasing women's participation at all levels of decision-making. Since Beijing, extensive discussions have continued on this at governmental and non-governmental levels (UN Women, 2000) (Table 2).

Gender inequality is further due to changing forms of the international system including development failures and local crisis across Africa.

Despite a number of global gender summits and their robust resolutions, several dimensions of gender inequality still exist in Africa.

On 1 March, 2011, the Commission on the Status of Women convened an interactive expert panel to examine the emerging issue "Gender equality and sustainable development" to serve as an input to the preparatory process for the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, which held in Rio de Janeiro in June 2012. The Conference focused on two main themes: (a) a green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication; and (b) the institutional framework for sustainable development.¹⁵

However, it was noted that human civilization has never been closer to gender inequality. In a period of sustainable development and globalization, a third of humanity live in poverty, and another 2 billion people are projected to join the human race over the next 40 years, employment in every sector is male dominated, politics and policy remains largely an exclusive preserve of the men¹⁷. The United States which claims to advocate gender equality has never considered the need for a female President. It was only in 1992 that Carol Mosely – Braun became the first African American woman to be elected to the US Senate (Patterson, 2010). As of August 1999, there were only 10 women serving as heads of state and government, namely; Bangladesh, Guyana, Ireland, Latvia, New Zealand, Panama, San Marino, Sri Lanka (President and Prime Minister) and Switzerland. Women's representation in government decision-making positions at the cabinet (ministerial) and sub-ministerial levels (deputy minister, permanent secretary and head of department) shows very slow progress. (UN, Women,

Table 2. Women executives in terms of geography.

Geographical area	Cases of Women Prime Ministers or Presidents	Further breakdown
* Africa	6	All Sub-Saharan
Asia	9	South Asia: 6; Southeast: 32 cases each from Bangladesh, the Philippines, and Sri Lanka
Caribbean	5	2 cases from Haiti and Netherlands Antilles
Europe	14	Western Europe 10: (3 of which are Nordic); 4: Eastern. 2 cases from Ireland. Latin America 5
Middle East	1	Israel
North America	3	Two cases from Bermuda
Oceania	2	Both cases are from New Zealand

Source: Jalalzai F (2004). Women Political Leaders: Past and Present Women & Politics, Vol. 26(3/4). The Haworth Press, Inc.*Africa's data is authors's update.

Table 3. African women in top political offices (Prime Minister/President).

Country	Name	Year	Position
Rwanda	Agathe Uwilingiyimana	1993	Prime Minister
Sao Tome and Principe	Maria das Neves Ceita Batista de Sousa	2002-	Prime Minister
Senegal	Madoir Boye	2001-2002	Prime Minister
Burundi	Sylvie Kinigi	1993-94	Prime Minister
Central African Republic	Elisabeth Domitien	1975-1976	Prime Minister
Liberia	Ellen Johnson Sirleaf	2006-	President

Source: Author.

2000) (Table 3),

In 1996, women made up 6.8 per cent of cabinet ministers worldwide, 7 per cent in 1997 and 7.4 per cent in 1998.

In 1999, there were only 677 female members of the upper house or senate, compared to 5,639 male members.

The majority of women ministers are still concentrated in social sectors such as education, health, and women and family affairs (UN Women, 2000)

In Germany, one of Europe's largest democracy was only in 2005 that parliamentarians selected Angela Merkel as the first female Chancellor of Germany.

Several prevailing dimensions of gender inequality are discernible. The following could be examined;

Political dimension: Women all over Africa are politically de-aligned; this has resulted in massive political apathy. "In the early twenty first century, only a handful women were added; the Philippines, Sri Lanka and

Bangladesh are the only countries to have elected two different women as Chief Executives....In 2006, voters elected two women presidents and set important precedents. In war torn Liberia, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf became the new president, the first ever female chief executive in an African country. In Chile, voters selected first ever female president, socialist, and feminist Michelle Bachelet" (Staudt, 2008:157).

Socio-Cultural Dimension: Despite the several global summits, not much has changed. Old habits of thought die hard. Africans are strongly attached to their traditional belief system. Traditional patriarchal practices are still in existence even when they erode the fundamental human rights of women. Gender issues have not been prioritized in many African countries; in several rural African countries issues like female genital mutilation, child marriage etc are still in practice. For instance, in South Africa in 2006, high -level political leader Jacob Zuma raped a young woman, used Zulu masculine culture as the justification and was judged not guilty at the trial in

2006. The case roused people to reflect on misogyny (Staudt, 2008:150).

According to the World Health Organization, approximately 98% of women in Somalia undergo Female Genital Mutilation (FGM),¹⁶ and it is mostly performed on girls between the ages four to 11 years in its most severe form; infibulation is reported.

Female Rights Abuses: On the subject of the rights of women in Africa, the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights states in Article 17 that; "Women shall have the right to live in a positive cultural context and to participate at all levels in the determination of cultural policies."

In a recent study on gender issues in Kenya, Ciarunji Chesaina observed that; "Kenyan women are known for their contribution to the welfare, not only of their individual families, but also of the nation at large. Kenya's food security, for example, depends largely on the efforts of the Kenyan woman. 88 per cent of Kenya's women live in the rural areas where the bulk of the food for the nation is grown. 60 to 80 per cent of the tasks involved in agricultural food production are performed by women. In the urban areas over 60 per cent of food processing and food marketing is done by women". The study further noted that; "The women on the other hand, having been brought up to take a secondary position *vis a vis* men, often do not know their rights as human beings in marital relationships and will therefore not seek legal help when their security is threatened by husbands"¹⁷

Within the North African axis, Muslim practices inhibit the rights of women. In places like Egypt are growing concerns on gender inequality. In 2009, Egypt was ranked 82 out of 102 in the 2009 Social Institutions and Gender Index. The country is ranked 65 out of 86 in the 2012 Social Institutions and Gender Index (OECD Development Centres (2012).

Egypt is ranked at 113 (out of a total of 187 countries) in the 2011 Human Development Index, with a score of 0.644. The Gender Inequality Index score is not provided for 2011. Egypt is ranked 123rd in the 2011 Global Gender Gap Index, with a score of 0.5933 (OECD Development Centres, 2012).

The works of Qasim Amin, one of Egypt's most important writers on feminist issues, prove that the subordination of females is a result of misinterpretations of Islam, and that the Egyptian feminist movement wants to apply the teachings of the religion, and not to copy the West. Amin demonstrated that the respect for female rights and equality was an obligation in correct Islamic practices.¹⁸

Amin was supported by the leading Islamic Egyptian scholar, Sheikh Mohamed Abduh, who argued for feminism from a religious point of view. The argument they offered was that the Qu'ran established female rights and freed them from the inequality they suffered from

during the pre-Islamic age, but misinterpretations of the Qu'ran transformed women into second-class citizens once again¹⁹

Sudan (excluding South Sudan) is ranked 85 out of 86 in the 2012 Social Institutions and Gender Index. The country was ranked 102 out of 102 in the 2009 Social Institutions and Gender Index (OECD Development Centres, 2012).

The 2011 Human Development Index (HDI) score for Sudan is 0.408, ranking the country in 169th place out of 187 countries with data. The 2011 Gender Inequality Index of 0.611 places Sudan 128 out of 187 countries. Sudan was not ranked in the 2011 Global Gender Gap report (The OECD Development Centres, 2012).

In Rwanda, women have assumed new roles and key responsibilities in public offices at the post genocide era, perhaps occupying the position the men have left vacant. Rwanda is currently ranked higher among most African countries on gender empowerment and equality.

According to Rwandan radio and print freelance journalist, Didier Bikorimana; "The country made history in 2008, when 45 women were elected out of 80 members of parliament. At 56%, this is by far the highest percentage of women MPs in any government in the world. The constitution of Rwanda, adopted in 2003, states that at least 30% of posts in "decision-making organs" must go to women across the country". In elections for district and sector council officials last year, women won 43.2% of district and Kigali City advisory posts. Women lead a third of Rwanda's ministries, including foreign affairs, agriculture and health, and every police office in Rwanda has a "gender desk" to take reports of violence against women, as does the national Army" (Bikorimana, 2012).

Usta Kaitesi, a teacher of gender and law and Vice-Dean of post-graduate research in Rwanda University's Faculty of Law, says political will was lacking in the years up to the genocide even though the country had already signed the 1978 UN Convention prohibiting all discrimination against women. "Generally, there was an environment of tolerating discrimination" she says, regarding ethnicity, religion and gender (Bikorimana, 2012).

Nowadays, she says, "There is political will to avoid discrimination in Rwanda, and that will give a legal direction" (Bikorimana, 2012).

"Most countries do have good laws, laws that don't have any form of injustice but the application of such laws is another issue altogether," she adds. "So in Rwanda there is a political will to empower women and women are quite aware of their role to play in society."²⁰ She painted the post genocide Rwandan women in this light; "The genocide also played a role in the women empowerment. "Many women were left as widows because of the genocide. Others had to work hard in the place of their jailed husbands for allegedly taking part in

Table 4. Wage and self-employment in non-agricultural informal employment, by sex 1994-2000.

Region/country	Self-employment as % of non-agricultural informal employment			Wage employment as % of non-agricultural informal employment		
	Total	Women	Men	Total	Women	Men
North Africa	62	72	60	38	28	40
Algeria	67	81	64	33	19	36
Morocco	81	89	78	19	11	22
Tunisia	52	51	52	48	49	48
Egypt	50	67	47	50	33	53
Sub-Saharan Africa	70	72	70	30	29	30
Benin	95	98	91	5	2	9
Chad	93	99	86	7	1	14
Guinea	95	98	94	52	6	26
Kenya	42	33	56	58	67	44
South Africa	22	27	23	72	73	77

Source: UNIFEM 2003, Progress of the World's Women. Quoted in AU (2004).

the genocide. So even young girls got that mentality to perform genuinely to access good jobs, and good jobs means going to school first".²¹

"President Kagame credits women's empowerment for some of the strides Rwanda has made in terms of development. In the last five years, one million Rwandans have emerged from poverty, with poverty rates falling from 56.7% in 2005/6 to 44.9% in 2009/10" (Bikorimana, 2012).

The scenario in Ethiopia is not different, according to OECD report (2010); "In Ethiopia, women have limited control over resources and access to ownership rights, placing them in a vulnerable position and compromising their ability to care for the health and welfare of their children. It is estimated that over one-third of Ethiopian children under the age of five are malnourished. Although 75% of all economically active women work in agriculture and they account for nearly 45% of the total agricultural labour force, they still have less access to land, credit and other property than men. This means that they have little control over household wealth and little say in how resources are allocated. Even though women are often the main producers of food, they rarely have rights to or control the land on which it is produced". (p3)

Wage Inequality: While the international Labour Organization (ILO) produced conventions that established principles (such as "Equal pay for equal work")-agreed in tripartite negotiations among government, business, and labour-national governments enforced these principles only to the extent that internal political forces and laws supported such measures. For women who laboured for income in the informal economy, laws and regulations had no impact on earnings (Staudt, 2008:151) (Table 4).

In the economic context, women do not have a pride of

place even where they are more competent than the men. In employment, several organizations are headed by men. In every developing region men outnumber women in paid employment. Women are largely relegated to more vulnerable forms of employment. Women are over-represented in informal employment, with its lack of benefits and security. Top-level jobs still go to men — to an overwhelming degree. Njogu and Orchardson-Mazrui (2013) observed that; "Violence against women caused by, among other things, economic inequality between the genders, the acceptance of physical violence to resolve conflicts, low female autonomy and control of decision making in household affairs and legal restrictions against divorce for women has been on the increase. They argued that whenever women are in abusive relationships, they find it difficult to move out due to attitudes associated with divorce. However, that was not always the case. In Northern Namibia / Southern Angola, women in the Ovambo communities used to be fairly independent. Matrimonial relations could be easily separated unilaterally by the woman, without negative consequences. This changed with the coming of Christianity which stigmatized divorce and made it difficult for women to opt out" (Njogu and Orchardson-Mazrui, 2013).

In Nigeria, the credible performance of the late Professor Dora Akunyili as former Director General-National Agency for Foods, Drugs, Administration and Control (NAFDAC) , where several men in a similar circumstance acquiesced to corruption in drug peddling, stands a taste of time.

Health Dimensions: HIV/AIDS have been critical indicators of gender inequality. According to the (2008) WHO and UNAIDS, global estimates, women comprise 50% of people living with HIV. In sub-Saharan Africa,

Table 5. Gender poverty ratio in selected countries, 1980s and 90s.

Country	Women per 100 men in the poorest quintile ¹
Botswana (1993)	192
Cote d'Ivoire (1986-88)	123
Ethiopia (1989-90)	127
Ghana (Urban 1987-1988)	141
Ghana (rural 1987-1988)	140
Madagascar (1992)	109
Niger (1989)	113
Rwanda (1985-1986)	132

Source: UNIFEM, Progress of the World's Women, 2000:96 Quoted in AU (2004).

women constitute 60% of people living with HIV. In other regions, men having sex with men (MSM), injecting drug users (IDU), sex workers and their clients are among those most-at-risk for HIV, but the proportion of women living with HIV has been increasing in the last 10 years. This includes married or regular partners of clients of commercial sex, IDU and MSM, as well as female sex workers and injecting drug users. Gender inequalities are a key driver of the epidemic in several ways²²

Sexual exploitation: Beyond political inequality are “sexual assault and domestic violence which primarily burdens women” (Staudt, 2008:151). Violence against women (physical, sexual and emotional), which is experienced by 10 to 60% of women (ages 15-49 years) worldwide increases their vulnerability to HIV. Forced sex can contribute to HIV transmission due to tears and lacerations resulting from the use of force. Women, who fear or experience violence, lack the power to ask their partners to use condoms or refuse unprotected sex. Fear of violence can prevent women from learning and/or sharing their HIV status and accessing treatment.²³

Gender-Related Barriers: There is a common notion in African that; “she is a woman” ,this vitiates the status of women and relegates them to the backdrop even where they are more competent than men. This includes limiting women to hold certain positions because of their sex; also, access to services which prevent women from accessing HIV prevention, treatment and care. Women may face barriers due to their lack of access to and control over resources, child-care responsibilities, restricted mobility and limited decision-making power. Many women, especially those living with HIV, lose their homes, inheritance, possessions, livelihoods and even their children when their partners die. This forces many women to adopt survival strategies that increase their chances of contracting and spreading HIV. Educating girls makes them more equipped to make safer sexual decisions.²⁴

Poverty: According to the African Union 2004 policy document; *The Road to Gender Equality in Africa*; “African women bear a disproportionate burden of poverty compared to men, a phenomenon that has been described as the ‘feminization of poverty’” (AU, 2004). The document further observed that in Sub-Saharan Africa both the incidence and depth of poverty are high compared to other regions of the world, although the incidence varies across and within countries. Sub Saharan Africa also lags behind other regions in terms of the non-income measures of poverty. A comprehensive understanding of be reached by examining the multidimensional nature of poverty. In addition to low levels of income, the poor are those who have poor access to government services. Moreover, the poor also face varying degrees of vulnerability, isolation, dependence and a sense of powerlessness. Poverty may also result from beliefs, norms and values of a society” (p4) (Table 5).

Educational Inequality: African women are discriminated educationally compared to their men. Preference is usually given to boy child to the girl child.

In Somalia, talking about gender issues in relation to education, UNICEF’s Mike Pflanz reports on challenges of teenage female drop out in Burtinle District of Somalia; “it is all the more striking here in Somalia, where both culture and curriculum have traditionally shied away from talking to children about the changes they face as they grow up” (UNICEF, 2008). “A son’s education is seen as important in Somalia. The thinking is if a boy receives a good education, he will find salaried work and be able to look after his parents into their old age. A daughter, by contrast, is seen first as domestic help, then as dowry” (UNICEF, 2008).

According to the Director Galkayo Education Centre for Peace and Development (GECPD), Hawa Aden Mohamed; “Even before she is married, she is needed around her parents’ home, cleaning the compound, the dishes, looking after younger siblings,” (UNICEF, 2008).

The UNDP Somalia Gender Briefing (2013) observed that; "The Gender Inequality Index for Somalia is 0.776 (with a maximum of 1 denoting complete inequality), placing Somalia at the fourth highest position globally. Somalia has extremely high maternal mortality, rape, female genital mutilation and child marriage rates, and violence against women and girls is common, though statistics are difficult to find. The participation and role of women in politics and decision-making sphere is extremely limited, perpetuating narrow gender based roles and inequalities (p2).

In South Sudan, Gender disparities are evident in key poverty indicators, including a female illiteracy rate as high as 84-86%. Lack of education and access to health services, and early marriages (from 12 years) combine to result in extremely high rates of infant mortality (102 per 1,000 live births) and one of the highest maternal mortality rates in the world (2,054 per 100,000 live births). Sexual and gender based violence is rampant and perpetrators unfortunately enjoy high degrees of impunity.²⁵

South Sudanese women's time burden is said to have increased by 300% impairing their ability to break the circle of poverty, within which many families are trapped. The costs to South Sudan's prosperity and growth of such violations and gender disparities cannot be underestimated.²⁶

"Net enrolment in primary education is, on average, lower in countries with high levels of early marriage. In the countries where more than half of girls aged 15-19 years are married (Democratic Republic of Congo, Niger, Afghanistan, Congo, Mali), on average fewer than half primary school aged children are in school. From this evidence, it therefore appears that women's lack of decision making power in the family and household is associated with lower enrolment in schools" (OECD, 2010).

Conclusion

The status of women in contemporary development thinking reflects a wide gap between development and social realities that ought to have been driving a more equitable and socially stable polity. Thus, a recurring inequality exists in gender discourse. It is appropriate to consider issues of gender inequality as part of the wider historical relations between men and women in tandem with changing social relations, and dialectics. Gender equality and gender has carried very different meanings.

Despite the rhetoric, liberal democracy's real achievement in the promotion of gender transformation in Africa has been relatively meagre. According to Joseph (1997), Huntington also believed that "the ability of the US to affect the development of democracy elsewhere is limited" and echoed Dahl's contention that the process of

transformation is too complex and too poorly understood to justify "such initiatives".

Gender transformation in Africa should contribute significantly to the understanding of the need for equality in "practice", it should form an integral component of liberal democracy. Liberal democracy seems to treat gender equality as a non-component of its tenets of freedom and equality. In the United States gender inequality is still an issue of concern (Patterson, 2010).

The processes of economic and political liberalization in Africa are not just concurrent events in the late twentieth century: they are part of a broader dynamic of global transformation. While substantive changes have occurred, many of these "transitions" also exhibit an illusory quality (Joseph, 1997).

As the 1990s ushered in some political changes, its verity has not been palpable as state institutions simply downplay the relevance of gender equality. Significantly, the post-cold war discursive analysis of gender equality is fraught with disillusion and covert levity.

In spite of the global summits and conventions, Africa has not evolved the much anticipated gender equality as has been substantially demonstrated in this paper. The point this paper has tried to make is that the prevailing neo liberal order has beamed a searchlight of optimism in bridging the age long inequality; however, pockets of resistance have been germane despite the end of one party system, military dictatorships and return to multiparty system in Africa, divergent relics of inequality pervades.

Critique of global summits and conventions reveals that despite the 1948 Universal Declaration on Human Rights- "universalization of human rights", in the context of gender equality has been faced with numerous obstacles both in Africa and most developing countries.

Cultural rights still prevail over civil rights. African norms and values are paramount irrespective of constitutional provisions. Human rights abuses and gender inequality have been on the increase. The recent human rights report ranked gender inequality and sexual abuse high in Africa. Equally, human rights issues have been elitist, the rights of the poor and oppressed are hardly guaranteed with women in majority.

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) which was adopted in 1979 has been weak to forge a collective internationally acceptable instrument to fully guard against "all forms of discrimination against women". Ironically in most developing countries cultural practices such as female genital mutilation still exist. While in developed countries white racism and sexual discrimination pervade. This undermines the objectives of CEDAW.

In Africa, women have not been able to effectively coordinate themselves to "remove cultural barriers" which limit their emancipation.

The 1980 Copenhagen convention which was more pro women with focus on stronger national measures to ensure women's ownership and control of property, as well as improvements in women's rights with respect to inheritance, child custody and loss of nationality, has a variety of shortcomings. Critiques have argued on its emphasis on economic rather than political rights of women as political rights are prelude to economic rights. Thus if political rights of women are fully guaranteed and women assert a strong place in governance, their rights to ownership and control of property could be better actualized. As Nkrumah in the nationalist struggle once told Ghanaians "seek ye first the kingdom of political power all other things shall be added unto you".

The Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing in 1995, Primarily sought for 35% affirmative action on women participation in governance and decision making processes among other things. As a robust and influential initiative it has not been effective within country specific challenges rather have largely been superficial in influencing policy discourse. Since its clamor, all over the world, female leaders have not increased either through elections or through political appointments both in Africa and any other part of the world. The recent appointment of Michelle Bachelet to head UN women could effect a change considering her feminist pedigree.

Several empirical studies have shown that the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and its targets are not realizable. Easterly (2008) demonstrates, "How the Millennium Development Goals are Unfair to Africa". Equally, Clemens and Moss (2005) in their seminal study; "What is Wrong with Millennium Development Goals?", argued in a similar direction provided empirical evidence on how the goals would not be realizable.

While the relevance of gender equality and women's empowerment for sustainable development has long been established in intergovernmental commitments, such as the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, Agenda 21, and the various global summits/conventions mentioned above, it has become increasingly evident that women's contributions to sustainable development are both undervalued and underutilized.

In 1992, governments and world leaders at the Rio Earth Summit made a historic commitment to sustainable development—an economic system that promotes the health of both people and ecosystems. Twenty years later, the Rio +20 summit emphasized that "sustainable development must be inclusive and people centred, benefiting and involving all people, including youth and children. We recognize that gender equality and women's empowerment are important for sustainable development and our common future. We reaffirm our commitments to ensure women's equal rights, access and opportunities for participation and leadership in the economy, society and political decision-making". Despite this "commitment"

gender inequality in Africa has been on the increase.

According to the Beijing Declaration document, "Review of the national reports show that profound changes in the status and role of women have occurred in the years since the start of the United Nations Decade for Women in 1976, some more markedly since the FWCW. Women have entered the labour force in unprecedented numbers, increasing the potential for their ability to participate in economic decision making at various levels, starting with the household. Women, individually and collectively, have been major actors in the rise of civil society throughout the world, stimulating pressure for increased awareness of the gender equality dimensions of all issues, and demanding a role in national and global decision making processes. Thus, the role of non-governmental organizations, especially women's organizations, in putting the concerns of women and gender equality on the national and international agenda was acknowledged by many Governments".²⁷

"Despite much progress, responses from Member States indicate that much more work needs to be done with regard to implementation of the Platform for Action. Two major areas - violence and poverty - continue to be major obstacles to gender equality worldwide. Globalization has added new dimensions to both areas, creating new challenges for the implementation of the Platform, such as trafficking in women and girls, changing nature of armed conflict, growing gap between nations and genders, the detachment of macroeconomic policy from social protection concerns."²⁸

"Overall, the analysis of the national reports on the implementation of the Platform for Action revealed that there had been no major breakthrough with regard to equal sharing of decision making in political structures at national and international levels. In most countries of the world, representation of women remains low. Even in countries where a "critical mass" in decision-making positions within the public sector has been achieved, there are few women on boards of directors of major business corporations. There is need for more careful monitoring of progress in ensuring women's equal participation in these positions of economic power."²⁹

According to OECD research findings; *Gender Inequality and the MDGs: What are the missing dimensions?* 21 countries reflected in 2010 issue in which gender inequality is most entrenched, are the same countries which are making the slowest progress towards achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.³⁰

Getting women out of Inequality will involve full Implementation of Affirmative Action across Africa, Constitutional reform to enlarge the chances of women, novel re-orientation on discriminatory cultural practices, re-invention of governance with novel participatory roles for women etc.

Our focus therefore has been policy driven, historical, exploratory and discursive. In search of alternative

dynamics of women emancipation, we suggest a possible global re-alignment of key policies purported to provide a critical break in mainstreaming gender equality.

Conflict of Interests

The author has not declared any conflict of interests.

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Full Length Research Paper

Micro-hegemony and political orders in Uganda

AYEKO-Kümmeth Jane

University of Byareuth, Germany

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In the last twenty years, local government in Uganda has been transformed into one of power centers with authoritative actors. Within the existing constitutional structures local government is a host of powerful actors whose activities influence public policy decisions as well as determine the fortunes of local areas. The creation of new power centers has implied more avenues of influence. Both the political and institutional environment is continually under transformation. In this article, the dynamics of public policy decisions is explored in the context of a decentralised local government in Uganda. Using empirical data, it is critically examined how policy decisions are made, who makes them, for whom and for what purpose. Analysis is based on three areas—human resources policies, financing and public procurement. The use of power herein is referred to as micro-hegemony as opposed to formal institutions. It is argued that public policy decisions in Uganda's local government arena are not only informed by constitutional provisions, rather external factors such as power play a decisive role. The interplay between actors' application of their formal positions fused within power centres contained in LG structural design play together to produce micro-hegemony, making it a more decisive factor in public policy decisions.

Key words: Local government, decentralisation, micro-hegemony public policy decisions.

INTRODUCTION

The wave of Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAP) which included reforms in the public sector such as change in governance systems and privatisation had its toll in different countries especially in the developing world. In the context of governance, most countries adopted decentralisation as a system of Local Government (LG). In Uganda, LG has its roots in two key pieces of legislation: article 176 within chapter eleven of the 1995 constitution as well as the Local Government Act (LGA) also known as 'CAP 243'. Upon its commencement on 24th March, 1997; the Act aimed to amend, consolidate and streamline the existing law on Local Governments in line with the constitution in order to give effect to decentralisation and devolution. Therein contained was the component of subsidiarity whereby power was transferred from central government to respective local governments in a coordinated manner.

The most fundamental aspect of this devolution was the power of decision making which meant power to perform devolved functions such as planning, initiating and executing policies in respect of all matters affecting the people within their jurisdiction. Consequently, a five tier structure of LG comprising two separate wings (technical and policy) was set up with the district being the highest. The political wing was supposed to work in tandem with the technical wing. As per this arrangement only Local Council III and V constitute LG while Local Council I, II and V are administrative units. A

district local government in rural areas often consists of the district council and the subcounty councils while those in urban areas include a municipal council, the municipal division council and where there is no municipal it consists of a town council. Institutionally, there are rules and regulations governing each level. Being the highest political authority within its area of jurisdiction, the council has both legislative and executive powers which can be exercised in accordance to the constitution and the LGA.¹

The LG arena in Uganda is composed of both corporate and individual actors. The council, the District Executive Committee (DEC) and the different boards and other committees represent corporate actors. As per the objectives of decentralisation, local councillors including the district chairperson being directly elected by the locals are accountable to their electorates. As a corporate body with legislative and executive powers, the council can be sued or can sue. On the other hand, individual actors are categorised in two groups namely politicians and technocrats (administrators). Political actors include the district chairperson, vice chairperson, speaker, and the respective councillors while technocrats include the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO), deputy CAO, the Senior Assistant Secretary (SAS), and the different departmental staff such as clerks, procurement officers, office administrators et cetera. Constitutionally, all political actors are supposed to serve a period of five years unless removed from office due to abuse of office, or severe illness. The 1995 constitution also provides for appointment of a Resident District Commissioner (RDC) by the president for each district. The RDC is responsible for monitoring the implementation of central and LG services in the district, and acts as the chairperson of the district security committee of the district.ⁱⁱⁱ The problem with Uganda's LG system is that the creation of new institutions of governance did not only create more power centres, but also powerful actors whose exercise of power led to the emergence of micro-hegemony.² Accordingly, this paper explores policy decisions within the bounds of constitutionalism, allocation and reproduction of power and its exercise using field studies from four Ugandan districts.

Based on empirical evidence, it argues that in the context of LG, public policy decisions are not only informed by constitutional provisions, rather other factors such as power play a decisive role. The interplay between actors' application of their formal positions fused within power centres contained in the system's structural design play together to produce micro-hegemony, making it a more decisive factor in policy decisions. It is therefore undoubtable that the making of public policy decisions goes beyond constitutional provisions and is more complex and dynamic than it appears to be.

METHODOLOGY AND TOOLS

Data for this paper were collected using qualitative research methods such as face to face and telephone interviews, and participatory observation with the aim of exploring the power dynamics in Uganda's LG setting and its implications on decision making processes bearing in mind the presence of institutional asymmetry and a vast majority of actors. The study is predominantly based on information derived from empirical field studies conducted between 2012 and 2013 in four Ugandan districts namely Kabarole, Mukono, Wakiso and Pallisa. These districts were purposely chosen to provide a geographical balance that is to enable the research to cover all regions in the country. The four districts are located in west, central and east respectively. Furthermore economic and political factors were taken into consideration. Each district presents different features in terms of these factors, for instance Kabarole is mainly a strong hold for the ruling party—National Resistance Movement (NRM), the central districts of Mukono and Wakiso are opposition strong holds while Pallisa in the east often produces a mixture of NRM and opposition. In addition, there was need to examine LG in kingdom and non-kingdom areas. Kabarole, Mukono and Wakiso are located in kingdom territories while Pallisa is not. Kabarole and Pallisa represent rural LG while Wakiso and Mukono are urban LG. Respondents in this study included politicians, civil servants herein referred to as technocrats and academicians drawn from within and outside of government. Participants were chosen based on their role and status in the political arena. The main period of examination is the NRM era (1986 to date). Using Actor-centered Institutionalism, the study examines how actor and institutional interaction influences the decision making process in LG. Data are thematically and critically analysed reflecting constitutional provisions. The rest of the paper is structured as follows; the next section presents an examination of LG in the context of decentralisation drawing on some scholarly literature on the subject. This is followed by empirical evidence on how micro-hegemony develops and how it is applied to influence public policy decisions.

Conceptualising local government and decentralisation

¹ For details on Uganda's LG system see the 1997 LGA (CAP 243) and the 1995 Constitution of Uganda

² Aware of the discourse on Hegemony, (see Antonio Gramsci 1891-1937) the concept of 'micro-hegemony' is herein used to suggest manifestation of hegemony at other levels of government such as in local government.

Local government refers to formal agencies within the state (Johnston and Pattie, 1996: 672). It is a system where by locally elected members represent their communities and make policy decisions on their behalf. Local governments often act within powers delegated to them by legislation or central government. This implies that they have authority to perform such duties as may be delegated to them. Authority often denotes some sort of formal power contained or constituted in legal institutions. In the context of Uganda, LG is decentralised. Decentralisation is 'the restructuring or reorganisation of authority so that there is a system of co-responsibility between institutions of governance at the central, regional and local levels according to the principle of subsidiarity, thus increasing the overall quality and effectiveness of the system of governance, while increasing the authority and capacities of sub-national levels' (UNDP, 1999). In the context of LG, decentralisation is seen to provide better future prospects that would revamp it and restore its authority thus remedying LG from domination by central government. Decentralisation thrives on three broad assumptions namely (i) the principle of subsidiarity, (ii) improved governance, accountability, transparency, democratisation and citizen participation, (iii) improved service delivery. In the context of this article, each of these involves policy decisions as the next section explores.

The principle of subsidiarity

The principle of subsidiarity holds that for decentralised LG to function properly, decisions should be made at the most appropriate lowest level as possible. This principle aims to redistribute authority and responsibility for the planning, financing and management of certain public functions from the government to LG. By devolving power and authority, the principle of subsidiarity bridges the gap between government and its citizens. As such, it enables citizens to participate in public policy decisions especially on matters that affect their daily lives. By shifting the responsibility to make policy decisions to LG, power is redistributed among various groups/actors within. Proponents of decentralisation believe that reallocation of power and authority to these key stakeholders will enable elected leaders to make decisions that address local needs, because as governance functions are decentralised, LG are able to establish clear decision making parameters for devolved responsibilities. This implies that local leaders have significant discretionary power necessary to create infrastructure that makes decentralisation effective, but at the same time remain accountable to local communities (Ribot, 2004:1). As shall be shown later, this is not always the case. Most often, government retains unrestricted power that enables it to dictate policy decisions on LG.

Improved governance, accountability, democratisation and citizen participation

This assumption suggests that decentralisation facilitates promotion of democratic principles. First of all, LGs are able to conduct elections at local level, thus citizens are able to directly decide who they want to be their representative. This enhances the relationship between people and their leaders who in turn are assumed to better know the needs of their communities; hence can better address them. By encouraging people's participation in local politics, awareness on political issues is increased and people can hold their leaders accountable. Accountability translates to transparent decision making while decisions will reflect community interests. As a result, LGs can perform better and effectively (Rondinelli et al., 1984). In this way, participation is seen as a form/pathway to democracy. In the case of Uganda, the restructure of LG that resulted from decentralisation/ devolution created more avenues for more people to join politics, thus increasing local participation in politics. Participation enables people gain political agency and wield influence over the context and direction of their lives (Cornwall and Brock, 2005). The structure of Uganda's devolution also puts in place community development workers who interact with local communities as a means of involving them in decision making. Devolution thus empowers both communities and local leaders to make and implement policy decisions. This implies breaking down the monopoly of the government while increasing political participation (Steiner, 2004: 11). This assumption is however questionable given the fact that several studies including this one have found out that in most cases participation in decision making by local communities is limited and if any, it is passive. In addition, there is a tendency for elected representatives who participate in decision making to make decisions that favour their interests and not those of the communities.

Improved service delivery

The conviction that decentralisation improves services is based on the premise that the shift of responsibility from government to the private sector implies that functions and/ or duties that used to be provided by the state are provided by the private sector (Cohen et al., 1979). Rondinelli et al. (1984) observe that in most cases, the private sector is more efficient and effective in providing public services. They add that delegating responsibility for planning to officials who are working closer to the problems helps overcome the severe shortfalls of multi-sectorial national planning and facilitates economic growth. Similarly, the UNPD (2000) argues that, significant benefits accrue when decision making is brought closer to those most affected by them. Indeed Uganda's key thesis for decentralisation was that, when those

closest to where decisions are made are empowered to make decisions and given ownership of results, better decisions will be made. This would result in increased efficiencies and an improved quality of social services. But Saito (2003) argued, there is no direct match between decentralisation and improved services delivery. The findings of this study also confirm this argument.

Therefore, whereas decentralisation facilitates decision making at local level, in the perspective of decision making involving local communities, the policy cannot be credited since there is no direct corroboration in this regard. In most cases, the idealistic assumptions attached to decentralisation do not match the practical situation on the ground. For such assumptions to yield positive results it requires statutory reforms that establish functional institutions that promote a system of checks and balances. This however, is not the case in most African countries. Several scholars on decentralisation have argued that the system has not yielded much (cf. Lambright, 2008; Rondinelli, 1989; Crawford and Hartmann, 2008). Moreover, democracy is not just about political pluralism, elections and participation. Falleti (2004) is right to argue that decentralisation reforms may take place in either authoritarian or democratic contexts, thus it should not be confused with democratisation. In Uganda for example and indeed in most African countries, weak formal institutions has limited participation to a small group(s) of actors and subjected ordinary citizens to being periodic electors. As a result, their involvement in policy decisions is minimal and passive, if any.

On the other hand, efficient and effective service delivery necessitates establishment of semi-autonomous organisations with a great deal of discretion in decision-making. But as Cheema and Rondinelli (2007) argue, in most countries, these organisations are non-existent and if they do, they are subject to heavy government control. The implication is that decision making in these organisations is highly influenced by government or state agents. Moreover decentralisation involves several stakeholders in many different fronts, which decision making has to take this into account. Crook and Manor describe it as 'a policy forced to carry an unrealistic burden of expectations regarding its ability to transform whole societies dominated by authoritarian or patronage politics' (Crook and Manor, 1998:302). Outcomes of this bold effort are often negotiated and bargained over how political power and material benefits are shared and contested. It is indeed a much bolder attempt to transform the wide range of social interactions among different stakeholders than what is often assumed in the literature, especially those adopted among donor agencies. In the case of Uganda, Saito observes that there are not much improvements especially measured on the fact that decentralisation was supposed to reduce poverty levels in the country by improving the essential public services like health, education, transport and environmental management (Saito, 2000). He adds that LG can barely perform locally initiated plans/ activities due to insufficient financial autonomy. Therefore, the perception that local governance labels the process of making decisions is far from reality. From this perspective, it is therefore generic to conceive government and in particular the process of decision making as one involving actors and institutions.

To this effect, Actor-Centered Institutionalism (ACI) provides a heuristic framework for understanding and analyzing actors and institutional interaction in government. Institutions are systems of rules that structure the course of actions that a set of actors may choose (Scharpf, 1997:38-39), while actors are players or agents in the policy-making process. They are characterised by their orientations (perceptions and preferences) and by their capabilities. ACI argues that, 'social phenomena are to be explained as the outcome of interactions among intentional actors—individual, collective, or corporate actors, that is—but that these interactions are structured, and the outcomes are shaped by the characteristics of the institutional settings in which they occur' (Scharpf, 1997:1). The approach seeks to explain these phenomena by examining how institutional arrangements structure interactions that in turn shape policy making across jurisdictions. ACI further argues that policy decisions are a result of how actors define a problem, their interests, orientations and capabilities and their interactions in a given policy environment and the institutional setting.

Local government in Uganda

Uganda's decentralised LG is structured in five levels known as Local Councils (LC). The lowest is called LC1 (village) and often comprises 300 people. This is followed by LCII (parish), LCIII (Sub County), LCIV (County) and LCV (district) which is the highest level of local government. It is important to note that despite this structure, only LCIII and LCV constitute what is known as LG while other structures are considered administrative units. The official name of LG is District Local Governments (DLG). DLGs are structured differently depending on their location, that is, city, urban or rural³. Uganda has only one city which doubles as the capital city and is equivalent to a district. Local governments in rural areas consist of the district council and the subcounty councils. In urban areas with a municipal it includes the municipal council, the municipal division council and where there is no municipal it consists of a town council. Institutionally, there are rules and regulations governing each structure. Being the highest political authority within its area of jurisdiction, the council has both legislative and executive powers which are to be exercised in accordance with the constitution and the LGA (LGA, 1997:581). This mandate is however limited to only decentralised functions. This

³ Unless otherwise, all the following information is taken from the LGA (CAP 243)

mostly cover primary services such as primary and secondary education, primary health care, environment sanitation and vector control among others. All matters pertaining national policies for example on arms, ammunition and explosives, defence and security, banks, banking, promissory notes, currency and exchange rates control, taxation policy, citizen immigration, emigration, refugees, deportation, extradition, passport and national identity cards as well as policies on health, education, judiciary and agriculture are—the responsibility of government (LGA,1997:696-700). The district council is the decision making body within its area of jurisdiction. The district is headed by a chairperson who is the political head of the LG and is directly elected by adult suffrage. The district also has a District Executive Committee whose duty is to monitor the general administration of the district, monitor the implementation of council decisions, oversee performance of persons employed by government to provide services in the district and to monitor the provision of-government services or the implementation of projects in the district and be answerable to the council. The fact that decentralisation brought in more actors into LG means that the locus of decision making became wider and more complex. The following sections present empirical evidence to this effect.

THE CREATION OF POWER CENTRES AND POWERFUL ACTORS IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Power is ‘the probability that one actor in a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his will despite resistance, regardless of the basis on which this probability rests’ or the possibility to impose one’s will upon the behaviour of other persons (Max Weber, 1925; Reinhard, 1962: 290; Parson and Henderson, 1962:290). Considering that power is sometimes associated with those seen to dominate the policy environment or those well-known to the locals, it is inevitable that political power is exercised within a political system and can be used to change or control the behaviour of another actor (Birch, 2001). Thus its exercise does not occur in a vacuum, but within an organisational structure. Just as North (1990) argues, institutionally defined situations institutions are rules defined in relation to stable configurations of actors with particular identities and interests. The restructure of LG yielded voluminous improperly defined power centres and corresponding powerful actors whose duties often lacked clarity. Currently, LG consists of the district chairperson (LCV) who is political head of the district, the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO), then District Internal Security Officer (DISO), Resident District Commissioner (RDC) who represents the president and is in charge of security. These are all new powerful offices in addition to the traditional positions like the District Police Commander, Criminal Investigations Department chief extra.

‘There are a lot of power centres at the district; you have the RDC, you have the district chairman, you have the CAO; so all these, who take precedence over the other is not clear and on the district the chairman who is overseeing the implementation of projects is not clear. We do not know whether it is the district chairman or it is the RDC. The RDC essentially is for security, isn’t it—representing the president at the district and ensuring security and mobilising people for the ruling party. Now the district chairman is an elected leader, what is his role now,—isn’t it also political supervision? So you find that this is also political supervision in addition to political supervision. There is clashing between the RDC and the chairman over who takes precedence in the district’ⁱⁱⁱ

Although the constitution empowers the president to appoint his district representative, the appointments are not subject to any sort of parliamentary approval or any other legislative body. The RDCs thus serve as the president’s watchdogs on the ground. As indicated in the above quotation, there have not only been conflicts between the RDC and the LCV, but they have also been accused of using their office to penalise those seen as non-supporters of the regime through fabrication of information which they presented to the president depicting the victims as wrong elements working against the system.^{iv} Responding to complaints about the behaviour of RDCs, state house spokesman aptly said that some RDC appointments were only meant to please or give jobs to certain people because of their earlier contribution to the regime.^v Due to weak formal institutions to enforce checks and balances, such behaviour is not reprimanded. Sections of the Ugandan public are convinced that the creation of power centres was intentionally designed to frustrate the opposition, but has nothing to do with the betterment of LG practices as presumed by devolution.^{vi} At subcounty level (LCIII), friction between the LCIII chairperson who is the political head at that level and the SAS who is the technical head have become the norm to the detriment of LG’s daily operations. The assumption of more power by councils has enabled them dictate over issues even when they are not knowledgeable about them.^{vii} The creation of power centres was perceived as enhancement of the concept of subsidiarity contained in decentralisation and although these structures are constitutionally constructed, the different actors report to different authorities whose leaders equally often harbour individual interests. What this tells us about LG in Uganda is that, power centres are not only a gateway to politics, but also facilitate the exercise of this power. In the process of carrying out their duties, actors with LG recreate, defend and modify micro-hegemony. In the face of many institutions of governance, there is bound to be duplication of duties as well as actors engaging in power struggles. This suggests that policy decisions are shaped and moulded by the challenges and options available to actors at local level. In other words, they are drawn to use their formal positions as a source of power to enhance both their individual interests as well as those of their bosses.

Historically, sub- county chiefs now known as SAS were very powerful persons who exercised their authority to ensure implementation of LG policies. However, the new design, shifted power to political leaders causing antagonism between the two wings. The restructure of LG can then be said to have yielded a new form of power appropriation, paved way for the rise of the 'powerful' and the consequent exercise of micro-hegemony. It has meant reconstruction of the power map. Since this power comes from formal positions, the constitution serves as an avenue for power appropriation, which power has become a major factor determining public policy decisions. Power centres can thus be perceived as systems of domination of policy decisions. As such decisions are based on individual interests and how best one can utilise his/her formal position. As Locke (1960) rightly put it, 'it is not names that constitute governments but the use and exercise of those powers that were intended to accompany them (cited in Lasswell and Kapland, 1976).

The Exercise of Micro-Hegemony and its Impact on Policy Decisions in LG

This article conceives micro-hegemony as manipulation of political power and authority by policy actors in the different levels of government. Empirical evidence from Uganda shows that micro-hegemony can be displayed and/ or exercised at different levels of government so long as the structures therein accord actors some sort of power. The exercise of micro-hegemony in the process of public policy decisions often surpasses constitutional provisions. It is a daily practice that informs the political order in Uganda's LG. The amalgamation of actors through decentralisation implies that decision making is a complex process mainly because different actors represent different interests which require making choices; this is where powerful actors come to the top. Micro-hegemony is conducted by those in the political domain who often perceive themselves as being in control of resources hence influence on public policy. In LG, micro-hegemony often presents itself in human resource recruitment, finance, public procurement and policy formulation at local level. Decision making around these areas provides an avenue through which actors assert their respective power to influence policy decisions.

On personnel recruitment, devolution and the respective establishment of the District Service Commission (DSC) enables LG to recruit and confirm appointments of its employees. This was meant to shorten the duration of the exercise and minimise the often bureaucratic tendencies that characterised government recruitment and above all build competitive staffing. The exercise was to be conducted within the legal provisions contained in the LGA. In the course of this study, it came out that recruitments to LG were politically influenced and was a privilege of powerful actors. In most cases, the district chairman had an upper hand and because of his position he was the one to nominate members of the DSC, he was in charge of nomination of technical staff, had the vetting power thus he decided who got the job and without any objection from the commission. Moreover, members of the commission are equally appointed by the district chairperson. This implies that they were at his mercy. This gave him the possibility to recruit his relatives, friends or associates irrespective of whether or not they were qualified. In such instances, even the CAO whose technical competence was necessary to identify qualified people played no major role.^{viii} After recruitment the same power was extended to control them. Through this control, clear lines were indirectly drawn between the boss and a junior worker. But above all recruits were subject to orders of the one who recruited them and not to formal provisions contained in the LGA. Accordingly, politicians often used their positions to direct things their way. In order to avoid confrontation with their bosses and risking their jobs, technocrats had opted to comply and/ or make decisions that lined with the interests of powerful actors.^{ix} Such practices of micro-hegemony suggest that the viability and neutrality of the DSC are severely undermined by powerful actors. On the other hand, government had reverted the policy on recruitment of CAOs to public service. In all the sampled districts, CAOs argued that the decision was meant to enable government have more control over them. Although the decision did not go well with LG, CAOs themselves welcomed it arguing that it has relieved them from local forces^x.

In the absence of a proper system of checks and balances, micro-hegemony is used to ensure that the one who recruited you directed your actions and this applies to both technical and political actors. In Pallisa and Mukono, two councillors confirmed this by arguing that, their ears were inclined to the district chairperson because he had elevated them to the position of vice chair. They listened to him and did whatever he said because he had the power to appoint and dismiss.^{xi} This evidence demonstrates how different actors utilise their positions to construct and apply micro-hegemony to influence policy decisions. In terms of recruitments into the system, personal relations other than technical skills are valued and decisions made accordingly. As a statutory organ the DSC is rendered powerless as its power is shifted to the person heading the structure. Whereas the LGA delineates civil servants as professionals who should apply their technical expertise in the implementation of LG programmes, the above experience shows that their technical expertise is often ignored by self-interest driven political actors. It can be argued that the civil servants are thrown into a quandary whereby they have to choose between letting their bosses have their way or risk their jobs by insisting on professionalism, which in most cases is seen as insubordination. Thus decisions depend on the person heading a given LG unit and how he/she chooses to exercise his/ her power. The practice undermines merit recruitment, poses a danger in the quality of technical staff and consequently performance is weakened. It falls short of recognising meritocracy as central in ensuring success of policy implementation and regulation including provision of services which is a major role

of LG (Olowu, 2000:133). Flouting meritocracy in civil service appointments is not only violation of formal institutions, but tantamounts to political interference which can be seen as nepotism. The amount of power bestowed on the district chairperson makes him feel so powerful within the LG setting. In terms of accountability, the practice of micro-hegemony subjects other political actors to be accountable to their 'boss' and not local communities, yet the LGA which put into effect decentralisation assumed that directly elected political leaders should be accountable to their electorates and to the council as the decision making body.

Concerning recruitment of the CAOs by government, it becomes clear that this was motivated by the fight over resource control since the CAOs are accounting officers. The decision did not only contravene the essence of devolution and undermine the autonomy and independence of LG, but also subjected CAOs to government influence. In the first instance, CAOs were subject to local forces hence listened to them and made policy decisions that matched their interests. In the second instance they were now inclined to government, which means that they now listened to government and decided accordingly. Power is indeed a strategy to influence policies without the exercise of violence (Laswell and Kaplan 1982). It is no different from Bayart's concept of 'big men' and 'small men' (Bayart 1993).

Concerning financial decisions, it all started with government taking over of recruitment of CAOs. Since CAOs are the accounting officers, it implied that having them under its control, government could directly influence their decisions.^{xii} In a country whose economic base is so weak, competition for the very scarce resources is high and indeed only powerful actors have the ability to exert control of these resources and consequently influence decisions pertaining resource allocation. Describing what control of resources had to do with LG, a politician stated that power was resources which LG did not have because all the money was at the centre. LG always had to 'kneel for it before they send, you cannot do anything'.^{xiii}

'you will plan to construct a road say from here to Gongonyo, first of all you don't have the money, somebody else is giving you the money to do it and you know the people who are using that road, need it to be motor able and even yourself as a leader you appreciate that it is not in a very good condition. But then having put out your work plan you don't receive the money so in that direction there is no achievement'.

Section 77 of the LGA enables LG to formulate, approve and execute their budgets and plans. The Act grants LG power to identify sources of revenue, levy and collect taxes and appropriate funds. In order to put this in place, the LGA establishes District Planning Committee (DPC) whose duty is to generate development plans that reflect the needs of the people in a given locality. In the context of decentralisation, a bottom-up approach should be used in planning and decisions should reflect people's needs. Nevertheless, with ninety per cent of LG funding coming from government this is almost unpractical. Moreover, eighty per cent comes in as conditional grants, ten per cent is equalisation grant^{xiv} and only ten per cent is unconditional grant. It is the duty of LG to locally raise the remaining ten per cent to fill up the funding. Conditional grants are meant to finance programmes agreed upon between LG and government and are expended for the purpose for which it is made in accordance with the conditions agreed upon (LGA; 83:3). This implies that in deciding how to execute these plans/duties, LG and government are at par; policy decisions are guided by legal provisions and reflect the interests of all parties. Empirical experience however, shows that this is not always the case. The use of power and the practice of micro-hegemony continue to dominate policy decisions.

Concerning local revenue, the Act empowers LG to identify sources to fill up this gap in order to finance activities like facilitation and allowances for councillors. The challenge with this provision is that government reserves that right to decide which sources can be exploited, which taxes can be collected by LG or not and which taxes can be collected and retained or remitted to government. In addition economically vibrant sectors like fisheries and forestry are under government control even when they are located within the jurisdiction of LG. Using the case of revenue collected from Nile, it was observed that all the revenue collected from tourists went to the national budget from where it was unfairly distributed; thus not benefiting the LG where it is located.^{xv}

Some scholars have criticised this arrangement arguing that for one to conceive Uganda's decentralisation as real devolution it must be commensurate with financing of the devolved responsibilities, because without resources, LG cannot perform especially given the fact that the locally generated revenue is so minimal. Due to the feeling that they were being forced to do government work other than that of LG, policy actors at local level were reluctant to enforce implementation because it is 'not their project'.^{xvi}

Issues pertaining to local revenue generation therefore demonstrate that the practical political dynamics of the system are not necessarily consonant with the constitutional provisions. Subjection of LG depends on government funds; it implies that they (LGs) are forced to serve the interests of central government. In situations where the two levels of government have different interests, the end result is an endless debate and perhaps failure to achieve policy goals. The practice as manifested above reveals the exercise of structural power with government being the main actor determining rules of procedure and influencing the behaviour of actors as well as the decisions they make on policy.

Another manifestation of micro-hegemony often occurs in the process of tendering and project allocation. The establishment of the District Contracts Committee was to ensure that the process of public procurement in LG was conducted within formal provisions. This has however been taken over by individual actors who harbour particular interests and given their official status; they tend to use their positions to get the bargain as herein stated; 'the people who are at the top have special interests in some areas, either, they are born there, they have their projects or they stay there. So they feel that they should consider those ones very fast.'^{xvii}

In Pallisa, power was used to reject a proposal by the CAO to halt the revenue collection by a private firm because they had bridged the contract.^{xviii} In this particular case, the district political head used his position to direct the subcounty not to affect the CAOs decision. According to my informants, 'he had interest because they (politicians) were the people who took the tenders using shoddy companies.' Talking about shoddy companies, both the former minister of Refugees and Disaster Preparedness and the former Prime Minister acknowledged that functional constitutionalism in Uganda was far from reality because in most cases politicians were able to beat the system by opening up companies in different names and awarding themselves contracts against provisions of the LGA.^{xix} This according to them showed lack of balance between power and policy enhanced by the absence of control mechanisms and lack of oversight.

Some respondents saw this as nepotism, corruption and lack of political interest to fight it. Accordingly, administrators at local level were forced to adhere to their pressure.^{xx}

'I may say that this party here has satisfied all the requirements or conditions but because somebody heavier than me has interest, he will come up with somebody. These councillors have been mandated to control all these other issues. They control even the subcounty council with all the systems. So they can even decide to do anything with you. They can dissolve when they sit and you have nothing to do. When a council sits and says our chief here is doing this and this, they have a right to stop you'.^{xxi}

This is what is called micro-hegemony whereby government exercises power over LG and the district also exercises power over the subcounty—actors using their formal positions to influence policy decisions. This subjects the 'powerless' actors to giving up so as to avoid confrontation with the powerful actors. The feeling was that, 'it was a waste of time to do things knowing that no good use of it would be made'.^{xxii} The decision taken by technocrats impacts LG in terms of service delivery. This kind of practice is not only experienced by local civil servants. It is the kind of behaviour that seems to run around the whole country. In 2013 a presidential advisor resigned citing negligence of his advice. He argued that he was tired of advising president Museveni while he (president) does not listen to any advice—'the president is not advisable'.^{xxiii} Olowu (2006:125) argues that policy issues in society are complex; thus require professional and specialized experience. The Ugandan experience however, does not seem to observe this. Policy decisions follow a totally different dynamic—that of power and not formal procedures.

Regarding policy formulation at local level, empirical evidence suggests that policies were often formulated in a manner that served the interests of powerful actors. In Mukono and Wakiso, complaints about the RDCs' use of their positions to interfere with local policies was very pronounced, for instance; RDCs opposed the local council policy on school feeding which obliged parents pay for their children's feeding. The RDC's position was that Universal Primary Education (UPE) was free, but free education does not include free feeding. Similarly a decision to tax *Boda boda*'s^{xxiv} in order to raise local revenue was rejected by the president. When local authorities attempted to enforce, it, *Boda bodas* sought the intervention of the RDC asking him to talk to the president. The fear of the RDC as the president's representative gave him the power to influence LG policy decisions because any antagonism with him is seen as provoking higher authority (the president).^{xxv} In this case, the president's name symbolises power and use its usage grants and increases micro-hegemonic practices that heavily influence public policy decisions in LG.

Conclusion

This paper has explored the political orders of LG in Uganda departing from an examination of its day to day practices. It has analysed the creation of power centres and the consequent institution of powerful actors. The discussion demonstrates that actors within LG have transformed their offices/positions into sources of power. As such there has been a development of micro-hegemony exercised by actors to shape public policy decisions beyond constitutional provisions. The paper has shown that by decentralising and restructuring local government, the dynamics of public policy decisions in LG have also been restructured to capture the interests of powerful actors in the government apparatus. As a result, the façade of decentralisation enabling and involving local communities in decision making is far from reality, because as actors carry out their duties, they recreate, defend and modify micro-hegemony. This practice threatens constitutional order in the country. Therefore, public policy decisions in local government in

Uganda do not necessarily follow constitutional doctrines, but are shaped by powerful actors and how they (ab)use their power.

Conflict of Interests

The author has not declared any conflict of interests.

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ⁱⁱ For a detailed description of LG system in Uganda see Hansen, H. B. & Twaddle, M. (eds.) (1998)

ⁱⁱⁱ Interview with a professor Nuwagaba, 02.08.12 Kampala. His a consultant for Ministry of LG

^{iv} Interview with vice chairman Mukono 25.07.12, CAO Wakiso 20.08.12 Wakiso, Vice chair Pallisa 27.08.12 Pallisa and a Makerere university Lecturer 27.07.12 Kampala

^v See Daily Monitor 03.04.2013

^{vi} Interview with Entebbe Mayor 31.07.12 Entebbe

^{vii} Interview with a group of subcounty technocrats 28.08.12 Pallisa

^{viii} Interview with a group of subcounty technocrats 28.08.12 Pallisa

^{ix} Interview with a SAS in Karambi 03.09.12 Kabarole

^x Interview with CAO Mukono, Wakiso and Pallisa

^{xi} Interview with vice chairman Mukono 25.07.12 Mukono and Vice chairman Pallisa 27.08.12 Pallisa

^{xii} Interview with Makerere University Professor, 02.08.12 Kampala

^{xiii} Interview with district political head, 21.08.12 Wakiso

^{xiv} Equalisation grant is the money to be paid to local governments for giving subsidies or making special provisions for the least developed districts and shall be based on the degree to which a local government is lagging behind the national average standards for particular service.

^{xv} Interview with Mukono Mayor: 01.08.2012 Mukono

^{xvi} Interview with Entebbe Mayor: 31.07.12 Entebbe

^{xvii} Interview with Mukono Mayor: 01.08.12 Mukono

^{xviii} Interview group of subcounty workers: 28.08.12 Pallisa

^{xix} Interview with former minister: 10.09.12 Kampala & former Prime Minister: 30.07.12 Kampala

^{xx} Interview with councillors: 03.09.12 Wakiso

^{xxi} Interview with sub county civil servants 28.08.12 Pallisa

^{xxii} Interview with town clerk Fortportal 07.09.12 Kabarole

^{xxiii} See Daily Monitor 03.04.2013

^{xxiv} Boda Boda is a means of public transport using motorbikes. Those who operate them are called boda boda's. The term is said to have originated from the boarder districts where motorbikes were used as quick transport means across the boarder

^{xxv} Interview with Wakiso CAO: 20.08.12 Wakiso

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