

# Gender and geography in Africa: developments, challenges and trajectories for the future

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## Abstract

This paper provides an overview of current developments in the study of women and gender studies in general and in geography in particular in Africa. It begins by locating gender and women's studies in the context of international women's movements and examines the context of gender and women's studies in Africa. It also traces how gender has evolved and transformed in geography over the decades in sub Saharan Africa and outlines challenges and potential trajectories for future direction on gender and geography in Africa.

**Key words:** gender, geography, Africa, trajectories, challenges.

## Resum. *Gènere i geografia a l'Àfrica: desenvolupaments, reptes i trajectòries de futur*

Aquest article ofereix una visió àmplia de la situació actual dels estudis de les dones i de gènere, en general, i en geografia, en particular, a l'Àfrica. S'inicia amb la localització d'aquests estudis en el context dels moviments femenins internacionals i s'examina quin és el seu marc a l'Àfrica. Tanmateix, s'hi explica com el gènere s'ha desenvolupat i s'ha transformat dins la geografia al llarg de les darreres dècades a l'Àfrica sub-sahariana, i s'hi subratllen els reptes i les trajectòries potencials de cara al futur de la geografia i el gènere en aquest continent.

**Paraules clau:** gènere, geografia, Àfrica, trajectòries, reptes.

## Resumen. *Género y geografía en África: desarrollos, retos y trayectorias de futuro*

Este artículo ofrece una visión amplia de la situación actual de los estudios de las mujeres y de género, en general, y en geografía, en particular, en África. Se inicia con la localización de estos estudios en el contexto de los movimientos internacionales de mujeres y se examina cuál es su marco de referencia en África. Asimismo, se explica cómo el género se ha desarrollado y transformado en la geografía a lo largo de las últimas décadas en el África sub-sahariana y se subrayan los retos y las trayectorias potenciales de cara al futuro de la geografía y el género en este continente.

**Palabras clave:** género, geografía, África, trayectorias, retos.

**Résumé.** *Genre et géographie en Afrique: developpements, défis et trajectoires de future*

Cet article offre une perspective de la situation des études des femmes et du genre, en général et en géographie en particulier, en Afrique. Il commence avec l'encadrement de ces études dans le contexte des mouvements internationaux des femmes et examine quel est le cadre africain en particulier. Également, l'article commente le développement et la transformation du genre dans la géographie tout au long des dernières décennies en Afrique au sud du Sahara en soulignant les défis et les tendances potentielles face au futur de la géographie et le genre dans ce continent.

**Mots clé:** genre, géographie, Afrique, trajectoires, défis.

**Summary**

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**Introduction**

Gender equity has been acknowledged as integral and essential to the equitable and sustainable development of countries in Africa. Therefore the UN Millennium has as one of its goals the promotion gender equality and the empowerment of women as effective ways to combat poverty, hunger and disease to stimulate development that is truly sustainable. Since the early 1990's much work on issues of gender have been undertaken at various levels in various African countries. At the higher educational level, and specifically in the discipline of geography, some of these have been the introduction of courses on women and gender studies at undergraduate and graduate levels, increasing numbers of students undertaking undergraduate and postgraduate dissertations and theses on gender and place, and networking and research among feminist geographers as well as with other disciplines. At the national level geographers have made significant contributions to the national development discourse in the various countries. However these developments have not translated into the mainstreaming of gender into the diverse sub areas in the discipline. Until the last two decades, feminist geography was not very visible in Africa. This situation was not peculiar to geography, and was a reflection of the national level where there was very little focus on gender in teaching, research and national development.

This paper provides an overview of current developments in the study of women and gender studies in general and in geography in particular in Africa.

It begins by locating gender and women's studies in the context of international women's movements and examines the context of gender and women's studies in Africa. It also traces how gender has evolved and transformed in geography over the decades in sub Saharan Africa and outlines challenges and potential trajectories for future direction on gender and geography in Africa.

### **The context for women and gender studies in Africa**

In the African contexts the emergence of gender and women's studies can be located within a feminist intellectual tradition. The importance of gender in African development can be traced to the upsurge in feminist organizations across the world in the 1970s. The broader international women's movement and various conferences particularly in the 1980s offered a forum for African women to articulate their perspectives and their distinct concerns and interests (Pereira, 2002). At the international level, conscious efforts at mainstreaming women into development discourse started during the UN Second Development Decade which emphasized equity, redistribution and meeting people's needs. This coincided with feminist work towards social transformation in terms of development and gender through Boserup's 1970 path breaking work on «Women's Role in Economic Development». Such frameworks gave impetus to the formation of the Women in Development (WID) movement which led to the 1976-1985 UN Decade for Women declaration. The influence of forums and organizations such as GAD, DAWN, AWID, CEDAW, The Beijing Platform of Action, the Millennium Development Goals, and the many international networks of research and activists created new political spaces for feminist work towards engendering development. Contributions by these forms of organization and political space provided struggles for critical voice, representation and resources by women for women as they demanded engagement with the content and processes of policy development (Pereira, 2004).

In Africa, the establishment of the Association of African Women for Research and Development (AAWORD) in Dakar in 1977, marks the beginning of steps to institutionalise gender and women's studies on the African continent. One of AAWORD's central aims was to set the agenda for feminist work in Africa by facilitating research and activism by African women scholars. AAWORD was among the earliest women's organizations of the South to adopt a critical approach to research and to challenge Eurocentric paradigms from a feminist and post-colonial perspective. As early as the mid 1970s, it called for the de-colonization of research and established a critical gender research agenda. Some of the workshops held by AAWORD were on themes such as methodology (1983), the crisis in Africa (1985), reproduction (1992) and gender theories and social development (2001). It was followed by the establishment of other women's resource and documentation centres and networks, all of which drew the link between knowledge and power, and saw research, analysis and information work as a key activist strategy, pursued

because it was viewed as liberatory, and therefore as political. Over time, many of the women's resource centres began to offer gender training, as a way of disseminating information and developing gender competence beyond their own ranks, initially within communities, but over time, increasingly to address the needs expressed by government and development agencies seeking to include gender (usually a «gender component») in their projects. The offering of short courses and training thus rapidly became instrumentalised in the context of endless development needs. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s feminist scholars in the South led an intellectual movement that challenged essentialist notions of womanhood and insisted on recognizing and interrogating difference. Crucial to this task was the need to understand how the social location of women is determined by race, ethnicity, class, status and access to privilege.

The fact that educational work on gender began in women's groups has led to suggestions that gender studies in Africa was initiated outside the universities and only later were the struggles to establish institutional spaces within them pursued. Although a course on «Women and Society» was established at Nigeria's Ahmadu Bello University as far back as 1979, the real growth of gender and women's studies began at the end of the 1980s, with most courses being offered currently having been established in the 1990s. However a review by Mama (1996) shows that women's studies in Africa is not necessarily linked to the broader women's movement but was motivated by other forces such as development initiatives, national and sub-regional political conditions and the crisis in African education, as well as by donor initiatives. Despite this, there is evidence to suggest that gender and women's studies in African Universities have maintained a close and more reciprocal engagement with feminist activism. Mama (2002) suggests that this may be because the pool of women with tertiary education in Africa is so small, with the result that the same women are often simultaneously engaged in academia, activism, research, policy making and development work. However, it also relates to the broader African intellectual tradition, which has simply never afforded much space to purely academic or theoretical work.

### **The teaching and research of gender studies in Africa**

Strategies on gender in Africa have been varied. Clustered in particular locales and spattered across disciplinary divides, scholars concerned with gender have concerned themselves with both the institutionalisation of gender equity policies and the establishment of gender studies.

Initially most research on gender in African universities was about numbers, ratios and gaps. Several studies challenged African Universities to accelerate radically their approaches to addressing the massive gender gaps in student numbers and staff on most campuses. There were thus calls for affirmative action in universities based on the recognition that gender had a profound impact on the educational experiences of women and girls and that the intel-

lectual environment was permeated with barriers, andocentric analysis and depletion (Bennet, 2002). Other studies drew attention to the ingrained structural, social and political factors that constrain increase in females in higher education (Bennet, 2002; Kwesiga, 1997). More recently, analysis of gender dynamics within African universities suggest that three issues dominate discussions on gender. The first according to Bennet (2002), was an intellectual challenge to the almost complete absence of gender analysis as a key tool of social research in curricula and research. The trivialization of women's experiences, and the indifference to calls for research which acknowledged the power of gender led to the formation of independent research and advocacy networks. These included women in Nigeria (WIN), women's groups in the university of Dar es Salaam concerned with research, the association of African women in Research and Development (AAWORD) founded in 1977, among others. The absence of gendered realities from the «core business» of universities (the work of knowledge production) therefore formed a central platform for activism in the mid 1980s.

A second issue highlighted by gender activism on campuses in the 1990s centred around reproductive labour. Oloka-Onyango (2001: 5) shows how women academics carry a dual burden of traditional and academic obligations which affects their freedom to operate and articulate issues in the academy. A third theme in theory and activism concerning gender and higher education is the issue of sexual harassment and sexual violence as critical sources of injury to women on campus (Bennet, 2002). However it is important that descriptions of gender and higher education need to encompass more than the narrative of gaps, but also dwell on negotiations of gender, ethnic and class identities.

Strategies to improve gender equity in African universities have differed depending on various factors. One strategy to improve gender equity in universities has been an emphasis on research and teaching which takes gender seriously and on the establishment of women and gender studies programmes, centres and departments. The demand to counteract and transform knowledge production within academic institutions was one of the most powerful calls for gender equity in the late 1970s and the 1980s in Africa. Then, equity was perceived as epistemological, what needed redress was, at the core, an approach to philosophy, history, social science, politics and culture, all of which fundamentally obliterated women in Africa. The major concern of feminists was about access, but access in relation to the gendered realities of the «core business» of teaching and research universities, rather than access for its own sake (Bennet, 2002; Mama, 1996).

Many Universities in Africa set up Departments of Women Studies initially in the early to mid 1990s, which later changed to women and gender studies, in line with paradigm shifts in the global agenda. The rationale behind the change in designation was that a conceptualization from a women in development (WID) perspective tended to focus on the practical needs of women and was focusing on women in isolation rather than on addressing the unequal

gender relations between men and women which was at the heart of the development challenge.

Critical initiatives were established in the early 1990s at the University of Ghana's Development and Women's Studies Unit (DAWS), at Ibadan University in Nigeria, through the Gender Unit at Eduardo Mondlane University in Mozambique, Women's Research and Documentation Project at Dar es Salaam, at the University of the Western Cape in South Africa, and the Women and Gender Studies Department in Makerere University in Uganda. In some Universities, this equity strategy was pursued by scholars within particular departments, e.g. Women and Law in Southern Africa (WLSA) originated from the Law Faculty in the University of Zimbabwe. The strategy was also developed within units affiliated with the campus. The Gender Research Project both initiated important work on trading, sexual harassment and made contacts with Faculty in the University of Botswana. On some campuses, such as the University of Natal in Durban, South Africa, efforts to initiate gender studies courses within campus took place hand in hand with the development of NGO-projects outside campus structures. The establishment of the journal, *Agenda*, reinforced university focused strategies and offered an independent route towards the promotion of feminist knowledge in South Africa.

Different processes facilitated the founding of gender and women's studies sites in Africa. The histories behind the establishments of these centers narrate the story of knowledge production about women and gender in Africa as well as critical engagement with existing knowledge about African gender relations. In Kenya, the Center for Gender Studies in Kenyatta University was set up as a result of concerns about sexual harassment and rape on university campuses and the realisation that policy makers and practitioners lacked the skills in gender theory and analysis to address these issues. The African Gender Institute in South Africa was initiated to provide intellectual support and to create appropriate resources for teachers, researchers and activists on the continent, as well as to support indigenously based knowledge of gender relations. Kasente (2001) locates current policies at Makerere University in Uganda on gender mainstreaming within the establishment of a Women's Studies Department in 1991. The Department functioned as «located Activism», driving teaching programmes and simultaneously engaging with national policy makers, university managers, donors and extra campus women's movements constituencies. A survey of 24 African Universities shows that 18 of these have dedicated gender units which energise teaching, research and contribution to equity work on campus. In Nigeria, the Women in Nigeria (WIN) was founded in 1982 and was a significant force in challenging the subordination of women in the 1980s in Nigeria. In Ghana, the Ghana Federation of women, a non-political organisation was formed in 1953, but later metamorphosed into the women's wing of the ruling CPP party.

The expansion of gender and women's studies in Africa reflects the growing realization that the struggle for gender justice is central to the social and

political transformations of the region. The teaching, training and research activities that make up gender studies are the intellectual backbone of a political struggle dedicated to the transformation of gender relations. The study of gender in a situation of dependence, deprivation or poverty, and marginalization must entail a real face to face challenge with the empirical reality and in particular, the situation of women. Thus many Gender Studies Departments in Africa seem to toe a middle road, often not totally discarding efficiency based arguments highlighting the developmental benefits of gender equity or the impact of gender inequalities on the attainment of macro objectives, while also highlighting the unequal gender relations (Ahikire, 2002).

The focus on gender and women, as a middle road, has meant that many departments have generated enormous literature on the situation of women, while the adoption of gender as a concept has highlighted the nature of gender systems in Africa. Such information is crucial for policy and project based interventions to address practical problems of development. Thus many Departments in Africa (the Department of Women and Gender Studies of Makerere University for example) hold a double faced mandate, that of the academic understanding and analysis, coupled with a politically motivated stance to highlight the dire position of the majority of women in Africa (Ahikire, 2002). Thus the courses taught as well as the broad research areas covered reflect this particular focus, geared at achieving a proper understanding of the African context and developmental challenges at large.

### **Conceptualizing women and gender in geography: African feminist contributions**

How has the study of gender been received within academia in Africa and especially within the discipline geography? As an intellectual subject that is explicit about its relationship to social transformation, studies on women and gender simultaneously combine political as well as intellectual practice. This section examines some contributions of African gender thinking to feminist theorizing in general and in a broader perspective to social science.

As the conceptualization of place has become more nuanced in recent geography so also has the definition of gender. The focus of western feminist geographers has changed from a dominant emphasis on the material inequalities between men and women in different parts of the world to a new convergence of interest in language, symbolism, representations and meaning in the definition of gender (McDowell, 1999). The need to re-examine the basic terms and concepts used in gender and gender studies in Africa have been raised. Mama (1997) points out that it is necessary for African scholars working on gender to develop their own usages of basic terms and concepts, grounding them in local realities. The idea would be to develop existing concepts, thereby making them «more meaningful and effective tools for analysing and comprehending the oppression and subordination of women and the nature of gender relations in Africa» (Mama, 1997). One of the key texts on research on gender is

*Female Husbands, Male Daughters* by Ifi Amadiume (1987), who examines the ideology of gender in socio-cultural systems among the Igbo of south East Nigeria from the 19<sup>th</sup> century through to post independence era. Her research indicates that the dual sex principle behind social organization in the indigenous society was mediated by a flexible gender system of traditional culture and language. Biological sex was not always synonymous with ideological gender. Amadiume points out that this flexibility allowed women to play roles usually monopolized by men or to be classified as «males» in terms of power and authority over others. Amadiume's work is thus useful in destabilizing conceptualizations of sex and gender by showing that gender is not shaped by sex in a unilinear fashion in Igbo. However her work is criticized for not interrogating the ways in which flexibility and relations of domination were configured (Pereira, 2004).

Oyewumi (1997) questions the assumption that African societies are structured by gender, as are Euro-American societies. Oyewumi argues that it is seniority rather than gender that orders and divides Yoruba society in Nigeria, and therefore that the concept of gender is not useful for understanding Yoruba society. Among various criticisms, her work is heavily faulted for seeing seniority as the only significant dimension of power and for lack of consideration of the intersections of diverse modes of power as they actually operate and are experienced by different social categories of people.

Despite the criticisms, these two examples show that efforts to conceptualise gender in the African context need to go beyond showing that gender has not been constructed historically in the same way in Africa as compared to the West. However the significance of these conceptualizations of gender in the African context expands the possibilities for diverse categories of women and men. It also shows that African women's experiences are diverse and are structured by multiple lines of power and division other than gender, such as age, class, ethnicity, religion, region etc. Each of these are grounded and changing in differing ways according to time and place.

Some recent studies of the state have gone especially far in extending theoretical and empirical material for understanding women and African politics. Tripp (2000), focusing on Uganda, examines postcolonial states in terms of gendered institutional structures, relations and cultures. In so doing they question restrictive notions of development and enlist a much wider range of theories and subjects than those examined in traditional anthropological accounts. In the sphere of economics Adepoju and Oppong's *Gender, Work and Population in Sub-Saharan Africa* (1994) draws together a range of case studies in which women's work is explored with detailed reference to gender roles, kinship, conjugal relations and the connections between reproduction and production. Collectively it shows how governments and donor agencies, ignoring women's labour, usually base development programmes on skewed notions of what this labour actually entails. It thus provides a critique of liberal women in Development approaches and also implicitly questions traditional gender biases.



## Geography and gender in Africa

Until the 1970s women remained invisible in the analyses of social space. Human geography was indeed just that (hu)man. It was only in the last two to three decades that western feminist geography began to challenge the implicit masculinity of the subject of geography. As occurred in the West, the study of gender has only been included within geographic discourse in Africa in the last two decades. This section discusses at gender issues in contemporary geography in Ghana focusing on the interconnections between geographical perspectives and feminist approaches at the University of Ghana.

The University College of the Gold Coast, now University of Ghana was first established as a College of the University of London in 1948, when Ghana was then a British Colony. The same colonial policy also gave rise to similar University of London Colleges being set up at Ibadan in Nigeria and Makerere in Uganda. At the University of Ghana, geography was one of the earliest disciplines to be introduced and the discipline was strongly influenced by the British tradition in Geography. Since the mid 1960s four other public universities have been established in Ghana, all of them having academic programmes in geography. Initially in line with the British tradition in geography at the time, was its limited methodological reach. As Stamp (1955) notes the unique contribution of the geographer was the «holistic approach» in which he sees the relationship between man and his environment... as a whole.

With independence in 1956 and especially after the attainment of full status as a University in 1961, geography in Ghana was transformed in line with paradigm shifts affecting the nature of geography and has found itself relating to other academic traditions in geography. In line with developmental needs of the country the curricula of geography as well as several other disciplines have been revised to meet these. Several new courses especially focusing on problems of development such as urban and regional development, environmental issues, tourism development, poverty and development, migration studies, population and development, spatio-temporal aspects of health etc have been introduced and the curricula revised.

Although many studies have been undertaken in geography on various development issues, there has not been much focus on gender. Significant geographical contributions to policy formulation on environmental issues, poverty reduction, regional and urban development planning etc have been made. However most of these contributions have not examined how gendered attributes of development are socially constructed and how femininity and masculinity vary over space and time or what range of variation there is in the social relations between men and women? These questions have not been asked much in mainstream geography. Neither have feminist perspectives been introduced into substantive geography core courses.

A course on the Geography of Gender and Development in Africa was only introduced in 1995 as an elective third year course in the Department of

Geography and Resource Development. Despite its popularity among students, there are no courses focusing on gender at the postgraduate level. In terms of other courses, examination of course outlines reveals very little gender component. Mainstream geography in Ghana is yet to incorporate gender divisions as a key axis of social differentiation at par with for example class, ethnicity, or place of residence. It is too often assumed that gender is an attribute of femininity and therefore only of interest to women scholars and students. Until recently, with the exception of some research (See for example Songsore and Denkabe, 1995; Benneh *et al.*, 1995), there has not been a significant amount of research focusing on the intersection of gender and socio-spatial praxes in Ghana. Many mention gender in research reports in response to donor demands. However more recently many research projects are beginning to incorporate gender dimensions. The New Faces of Poverty Project focuses on the interconnections between gender, poverty and health in Ghana. The environmental research group has also incorporated gender dimensions. A significant amount of work has also been undertaken on gender and the environment (Ardayio-Schandorf, 1993; Awumbila and Momsen, 1995). With the recent establishment of a Women and Gender Studies Center at the University of Ghana, it is hoped that feminist approaches in mainstream geography as well as other social sciences will be improved.

The Ghanaian case study points to the fact that geography in African academic institutions has been slow to take up the challenges of feminist approaches and a number of women's organisations have taken up the challenge e.g. AAWORD, Zimbabwe Women's Resource Center, Women in Nigeria, Tanzania Gender networking project, the AGI in South Africa. But these have not brought about much change in the male dominated intellectual culture of African Academies.

Secondly, the experience of teaching about gender within African higher education has been, on the whole, one of isolation. Up until very recently, individuals have usually been located within disciplinary-based departments, and identified as the «gender specialist», responsible for designing and delivering courses without much collegial support and often without appropriate institutional resources. Very few gender and women's studies faculty have had the opportunity to study issues of pedagogy itself, and most have been trained as lecturing faculty simply through the experience of being students themselves or though conforming to the norms of teaching practice encountered in their own departments and universities. Despite this, there has been an increase in the number of Women and Gender Studies teaching centres and departments. What this suggests is the extraordinary commitment of those who have been teaching women and gender studies courses in African higher education institutions in the last two decades.

## Gender perspectives in geography: challenges and trajectories for the future in Africa

The teaching and researching of gender studies both within geography and other disciplines faces several challenges within Africa. First and foremost full legitimacy is yet to be achieved. As a relatively young discipline, gender studies needs to go the extra mile in terms of not only filling the gap in knowledge about relationships between men and women but also to have a conscious struggle in terms of fundamentally restructuring processes in the production of knowledge.

At the level of knowledge creation and transformation, one of the questions that gender studies have yet to deal with is that of moving beyond stereotypes. For example many studies on gender in Africa often begin with the stereotyped declaration of how women are oppressed and suffering, cast as sufferers of pandemics such as HIV/AIDS, and worst hit in situations of armed conflict etc. These stereotypes or negative representations which Harding (1987) calls victimologies, have therefore tended to breed a kind of discourse, or create an identity of womanhood that is so objectified that it would seem that women are totally incapable of defining their destiny. This has tended to make the field of gender sound very simplistic. While the disadvantaged position of women cannot be refuted, there is the need to go below the more empirical reality to seek explanations and hence point towards inroad for social transformation—to seek to explain gendered reality, rather than merely enumerate women's problems (Kwesiga, 1997).

A few exceptions to the victimology stance exist. While for instance writings about structural adjustment policies (SAPs) and how they have hurt women abound, there is also emerging evidence that some changes under adjustment programmes may be of relative benefit to women. It is noted that liberalization of food markets has, for instance enabled women earn more money and has thus increased their power (Kasente *et al.*, 2000: 3). Margaret Synder, in her study of women in African economies also notes that some of the successful business women in Uganda cited the fact that they own land as a key factor contrary to the often cited generalisation that women in Uganda and Africa in general do not own land (Synder, 2000). Earlier works by Obbo (1980) also present us with a picture of women's agency and their struggle for independence. Such studies are however few and can be identified as one gap that exemplifies the challenges that gender studies face as a young discipline in the African context. It is therefore crucial to invest more in research and publication to fill the current gaps.

There is also the need for «home-grown» theory particularly in view of the fact that the experience of African women may differ from that of western women. While it is important to draw on the theories formulated elsewhere, it may be necessary to re-operationalise some of the basic concepts used in women's studies so as to ground them in our own experience and local conditions (Mama, 1996), and take our own realities as the starting point for artic-

ulating perspectives or even entirely new theories that emanate from our particular conditions and concerns.

Part of the problem of gender studies is also that publications of African gender studies are not readily accessible. Although many meetings and discussions have been held few of them have resulted in books, and even if published these books are difficult to come by and only obtained locally. In Ghana for example there are several workshop reports only available in departmental and NGO bookshelves. Pereira (2002) for example points out that several small booklets published by the Network for Women's studies in Nigeria discussing several issues of importance to African Gender studies are only available in Nigeria

In many higher education institutions in Africa, the research agenda on gender tends to be determined by external priorities and policy orientations that reinforce the re-colonization of African social science. In the light of economic difficulties and tight budgets many universities in Africa rely on donor-driven and donor sponsored research which can undermine academic programmes. In this regard Mama (1997) discusses what she terms a «United Nations» Feminism, as a bureaucratized version of feminism and the ways in which the donors push for WID projects has created huge institutional needs for WID expertise and with it generated a bureaucratic discourse on women in development developed largely within the practical exigencies of conducting rapid rural appraisals and developing policies and project proposals. There is an uneasy relationship between WID activities, women's movements and feminist studies in Africa. Although the women's decade with its focus on WID activities has been important in many African countries setting up structures for women at national levels, it is important not to mistake the high profile WID programmes for a women's movement or with women's studies (Mama, 1997).

The situation mapped above raises the importance of strategising for feminist capacity-building and research on a number of levels. Of importance here are not only efforts to enhance the quantity of feminist work on the continent, but also the need to develop capacity-building and networking projects that address the problems discussed. Already there are a number of collaborative and networking initiatives that contest the legacies and elements reviewed above. Development organisations and research networks such as CODESRIA, the Southern African Regional Institute for Policy Studies (SARIPS) and the Association of African Women for Research and Development (AAWORD), the African Gender Institute, with its feminist studies network organised around a listserv, have been hugely influential in shaping regional intellectual, cultural and political agendas. Specialist networks and organisations dedicated to particular areas for women's empowerment, like Akina Mama wa Afrika (AmwA), the African Women's Leadership Institute, Femmes Africa Solidarite (FAS), which concentrates on peace-building, ABANTU for development, dealing with organisations and development, the Council for the Economic Empowerment of Women in Africa (CEEWA), Women in Law and Devel-

opment in Africa (WILDAF), Network for Women's Studies in Nigeria, Netright in Ghana etc have considerably strengthened the work of those formed in the eighties. These have allowed feminist scholars to «institutionalize their presence, to articulate agendas for African feminism by facilitating research and activism by African women scholars» (Mama, 1996: 6). These networks have also offered foundations for the much-needed debate and conversation likely to address the structural legacies traced above. CODESRIA has particularly played a leading role in widening the scope of discussions on «engendering» as well as «africanising» a whole array of social science (see Imam *et al.*, 1997).

## Conclusion

Despite these shortcomings, gender studies have registered great strides in Africa. Once a field unknown, gender studies have become legitimized as an essential component of scholarship. Gender studies in Africa has grown and produced its own locally relevant knowledge base. Despite this, both the institutional and the intellectual culture of the African academic institutions are proving resistant to change. In geography despite a focus of teaching and research on development issues, which views gender as critical to sustainable development, gender is yet to be mainstreamed into the diverse subfield of the discipline. As the various Women and Gender Studies Departments all over Africa become institutionalized, and build up the capacities of academics to integrate gender into research and teaching of various disciplines, and as the various research networks for women and gender studies increasingly begin to influence research agendas, it is hoped that feminist approaches will increasingly be incorporated into mainstream geography.

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