

## Feature Article

### Exploration of a "Gap": Strategising Gender Equity in African Universities

Jane Bennett

*Quietly, unobtrusively and extremely fitfully, something in my mind began to assert itself, to question things and refuse to be brainwashed, bringing me to this time when I can set down this story. It was a long and painful process for me, that process of expansion. It was a process whose events stretched over many years and would fill another volume, but the story I have told here, is my own story, the story of four women whom I loved, and our men, this story is how it all began. (Tsitsi Dangarembga) [1]*

## Introduction

In the 14 years since Dangarembga published *Nervous Conditions*, a novel piercingly astute about the implications of education for black girls skewered within colonial architectures, the realities of gender for access to primary, secondary and higher education in African contexts have struggled for recognition within critical debates on democracy and development. The struggle has been driven by strong voices: N'dri Assie-Lumumba (1993), Mamphela Ramphele (1995a; 1995b), Rudo Gaidzanwa (1997), Marjorie Mbilinyi and Patricia Mbughuni (1991), to name a mere handful of the writers who have, in the past decade, sought to unpack the knots of gender, race, ethnicity, nation-building, and post-colonial economic urgencies which so complicate access to education on the continent.

The struggle has also been galvanised by the experiences of women not different from those loved by Tambudzai, the protagonist of Dangarembga's novel: her mother, loathing the separation between elders and children which followed a child's entrance into "education", and yet often fighting for her daughter's right to choose the desk; Lucia, who fearlessly crafts an independent route into "womanhood" without leaving her family and without access to class-mobility; Maiguru, with a Masters Degree in Philosophy and an emotionally abusive patriarch of a husband; and Nyasha, poisoned until near-death by the "bloody lies" (Dangarembga, 1988: 201) of history books written in English. These figures testify to the complexity underlying demands for gender equity as an integral facet of policies and positions dedicated to sustaining strong educational infrastructures within different African countries. For many of the women in Dangarembga's novel, "gender equity" is clearly much more than a neat phrase encompassing the notion of "balance" and the gesture towards redress in five syllables; it suggests the tale of something simply begun.

At a workshop on higher education in Africa, funded and initiated by the Ford Foundation in June, 2001, participants (many of whom were at an executive level within their own institutions) were asked to spend some time in silence, "dreaming" of the African University as it might be in fifty years' time. Participants were asked to speak to their "dreams", which were reported [2] as encompassing volatile and dynamic diversity (lecturers who are chiefs in traditional dress alongside computerised interconnectivity); flexible and ethical boundaries; the power of self-discovery and African-centered knowledge making; and - despite the "nightmare of the present" - the hope of self-reliance and good health. The dynamic most often highlighted by participants concerned the African-Northern axis of historical destabilisation and disempowerment. The only reported dream explicitly naming a relation to gender includes a daughter: "She's 57 years old and I accompany her to some of her classes. She's never been raped, she's never been abused...she's never been told she's too black...although she's 57 years old, she's not damaged and she's highly creative." [3] It is noteworthy that gender moves into the dream through rape, through a hint of the tensions inherent in entering a particular institutional context as a black woman, and through a longing for sustained creativity.

This paper reflects on the central themes of this dream by exploring some current thinking on the way in which dominant forces in African universities have opened up possibilities for strategising gender equity within institutional contexts, and considers the potential of policies on gender equity for actual transformational shifts within the consciousness and core business of different African-based universities. The first section of the paper, "Gender and African universities", describes the gendered nature of institutions of higher education within African contexts. The argument names the influence of globalisation and market-driven strategies on pedagogy, the management of education, and the formation of alliances with donor-driven research and policy programmes. The ways in which gender influences the possibilities of employment, knowledge-production, and identities are noted through an examination of the internal organising processes of universities, processes which - on the whole - elude quantification. These issues, while critical to an understanding of gender within institutional space, were not those first raised by gender activists in universities on the continent in the early and mid-1980s. Some of the analyses of these gender activists are noted, and the section closes with the suggestion that certain dynamics, usually central to the process of becoming gendered, have been given relatively little attention by theorists of equity. I demonstrate that the importance of heterosexual practices, and individuals' routes into masculinity, womanhood, and the family should be integrated into analyses of the way in which higher education interacts with local, and national contexts.

During the past decade, there has been rich review of the challenges for gender equity in higher educational sites in Africa. Much of this work highlights the poor ratio of women to men (especially at management levels), gender differences in student selection of courses and career paths, and the power of misogynies as complex and debilitating variables in institutional cultures. The description of some policy-based initiatives in different countries aims to address issues identified as problem areas for gender equity. The second section of the paper, "Strategies for 'gender equity' within higher education", seeks to summarise key conversations on the nature of gender equity policy interventions. I note in this section that these conversations concentrate on various forms of affirmative action (setting quotas for women students, crediting women students with extra course credit, or establishing "targets" for appropriate numbers of women staff, especially at management level), and highlight the variable impact of these interventions.

"The 'lens' of sexual harassment and sexual violence on campus", the last part of the paper, uses two case-study explorations of sexual harassment and sexual violence in particular African university settings to concretise the suggestion that problems of "gender equity" cannot be located simply within the demographics of institutions. The section also demonstrates the inadequacy of fixating on the national contexts that influence gender equity, and highlights the extent to which critical locations within national contexts, such as, for example, "poor", "urban", "nationalist", "man", "Muslim" or "Swahili-speaking" are negotiated long before any individual reaches the gates of a university. These are, in themselves, not new positions. The paper's more original contribution comes in its analysis of the politics of sexual harassment as a zone through which university staff and students can be seen, at various levels, to negotiate the genders they need for survival. That a woman's gender may continue, in many institutional settings, to create professional, personal and political vulnerabilities does not always translate into clear-cut consensus within institutional contexts that "gender equity" is a viable route towards employment, status, individual safety, or citizenship. Clearly, national and local institutional contexts have a dramatic impact on universities' approaches to realistic gender-equity. The paper concludes by considering ways in which such differences both complicate theory on gender equity within higher education and challenge those feminists who continue to advocate for a change in African universities' thinking about women and men.

Given its exploratory nature, the paper ranges broadly over the terrain of universities in different African contexts. Limited by constraints of length, language, and experience, [4] I have been conscious in writing of the possibility of over-generalisation and of the risks of a wide-angled lens: limited knowledge of critical detail, concentration on one landscape, simplistic comparison, and thin (as opposed to "thick") description. Because of the number of excellent researchers in the field, I am, however, assured of correction where it is needed. The paper is thus offered as a route towards further discussion of the implications of taking gender seriously within university buildings and bodies.

## **Gender and African universities**

In 1995, Katherine Namuddu challenged African-based academies to accelerate radically their approaches to addressing the massive gender gaps in students and staff on most campuses. Her proposals were concrete: ensure that women are granted admission into courses through predetermined quotas; head-hunt women for advertised academic and management positions; where necessary, design capacity-building programmes for women; introduce and implement policies on sexual harassment; identify, track, and nurture strong women students for development; ensure that good women candidates for higher positions are duly promoted (Namuddu, 1995: 56). The definitive call for affirmative action spoke to nearly two decades' work on the recognition that gender had a profound impact on the educational experiences of women and girls and that the intellectual environment was permeated with barriers, androcentric analyses, and depletion.

While Namuddu focuses on the ratios of women to men and the need to increase the number of women and girls in education, others have drawn attention to the ingrained structural, social and political factors that constrain this increase. Key voices in the articulation of gender inequities within African higher education have always embedded their analysis in consideration of the numerous legacies and circumstances that have shaped formal institutions, ranging from primary schools through to universities, colleges, and technikons. For example, Rudo Gaidzanwa's (1997) exploration of the poor ratio of women to men academics and students at the University of Zimbabwe in the mid-1990s links "gender gaps" to a range of factors: colonial legacies of education at all levels of society; nationalist forces which led to democracy in 1980; the impact of structural adjustment programmes on government budgets, and the mercurial dynamics of gender itself. In the context of a post-Chimurenga discourse that powerfully embedded gendered identities in citizenship and familial identity, women and girls (whose options and roles had in many cases been radically transformed during the war years) were coerced back into conservative domesticity. They therefore seemed to be less welcome in educational zones after 1983 than they were before and during the war of liberation. In her recent book, Joy Kwesiga restates and tables the statistics of ratio to conclude: "Sub-Saharan Africa has the lowest enrolment rates in the world at all levels of education for both males and females, with females' rates being lower than the males"(2002: 48). She goes on to review theory on the meaning of educational access and covers issues at three interlocking sites: the family, the state, and the educational institution itself.

The impact of poverty links all three sites. Statistics prepared by the Forum of African Women Educators for the Conference in Beijing in 1995 suggest that poor families hesitate to pull children from potential wage labour into schooling, especially where the children are girls. State economic policies which privilege privatisation, and tend to obliterate small-scale subsistence operations of agriculture and trade, offer no resources to cash-strapped households. Masculinities are more readily adaptable to new modes of agriculture. For example, men are targeted as development groundbreakers and tend to control the terms of seed-purchase and crop-sale, while most women are still expected to bear the burden of reproductive subsistence as well as contributing to cash-crop delivery and trading. Mobility

across the border of poverty is impeded for all children by state failures to subsidise education, transport, health care and food, but girls are especially vulnerable to family care-taking responsibilities and culturally-rooted expectations about their identities and roles within reproduction. Kwesiga (2002) thus opens her discussion on educational access by exploring the fact that poverty paralyses opportunity, and that ethnic or religious marginalisation can also impact negatively on children's hopes for schooling.

Discussion of gender disparities therefore deserves to be connected to context-specific histories of the interplay of class, ethnicity and race. The clearest examples of the explanatory power of detailed histories come from analyses of educational systems in South Africa, Zimbabwe, and Namibia, where national educational policy explicitly drew on crude categorisations of race and ethnicity to manage education at all levels, including university level. Within every context, the impact of gender will be negotiated through multiple variables, each responsive to the particular global, national, and local forces influencing basic questions of resources in one locale. While questions of male-female ratios tend to dominate broad-based research on gender and African higher education (driven often by advocacy and policy interests), context-specific studies illuminate the "gender-gap" as a narrative shot through with the complications of rural/urban divides, competition for location within elites established by colonial and/or post-"democratic" pockets of huge privilege, and the demands of markets whose priorities respond to Northern economic trajectories and interests. There is no doubt that within most African-based universities, women students are outnumbered by men, [5] that staff - particularly at management levels - are overwhelmingly men, and that participation in disciplines tends to correspond to outdated scripts about gendered professionalism. Which women students are outnumbered, *which* men are retaining disproportionate levels of power within different institutions, and *why* ameliorative and affirmative action policies make so little headway remain questions well worth much deeper analysis.

Connections between the shape, accessibility, and policies of primary and secondary schooling and universities in different countries are clearly heavily implicated in any discussion of gender and higher education. [6] The history of the higher education system is, in itself, worth brief description for an understanding of how imperatives concerning gender and equity find themselves battling for self-sustainability in the face of urgent concerns about the current state of many universities. In the past forty years, linked to the overthrow of colonial regimes, the establishment of national agendas for new state formations under the ever-watchful eyes of Northern policy-makers (located within multilateral donor agencies and within the state), higher education has rapidly expanded. In 1960, sub-Saharan Africa boasted 13 universities, 7 of which were inside South Africa. In 2002, there are about 300 universities on the continent; this figure excluding teachers' training colleges, technical colleges, agricultural colleges, colleges of nursing education and diploma-granting institutions offering skills in business administration, media, computer programming and management, and creative arts. A cadre of African intellectuals has consistently monitored, interrogated, and analysed this expansion, taking note of the unravelling tensions between local resources and globalisation, between the need for African graduates and the increasing difficulty of assuring employment for those graduates, and between the epistemological need for contextually-driven knowledge and the lure of North-centric analyses of science, labour, government, society and identity. [7] During the past few years, in countries where government resources cannot begin to address higher education's needs, privatised universities have begun to be established, deepening class and often religious divides, and creating zones of education relatively impermeable to policies on equity.

The emphasis on the salience of gender in strategic research and advocacy in African higher education may, in the mid-1990s, have become wrapped into a quantitative tale of numbers, ratios, and "gaps". On this score, it is worth noting that where initiatives arose to challenge

local institutions on questions of gender, they were rarely initially articulated as concerns about sex ratios on campuses. Overwhelmingly, despite the disparities of nation, colonial heritages, independence trajectories, and locale among different African universities, analysis of gender dynamics within these institutions suggests that three issues catalysed outrage, theory, and activism.

The first was an intellectual challenge to the almost complete absence of gender analysis as a key tool of social research in curricula and research. The trivialisation of women's experiences, the implications of the absolute conflation of the term "person" and the word "man", and the staggering 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 at the University of Dar es Salaam concerned with research [8] and the Association of African Women in Research and Development (AAWORD), founded in 1977 to counteract the hostility and isolation faced by African-based women researchers, scholars, and writers continentally. The absence of gendered realities from the "core business" of universities (the work of knowledge production) formed a central platform of activism in the mid-1980s. [9]

A second issue highlighted by gender activism on campuses in the 1980s centred around reproductive labour. Sylvia Tamale and Joe Oloka-Onyango state the case boldly: "Women academics carry a dual burden that directly affects their freedom to operate and articulate issues in the academy. This burden is that women must pursue both their academic obligations while meeting traditional obligations" (2000:5). "Traditional obligations" entail labour-intensive child-care, household management, support for the elderly, and so on. Fifteen or so years earlier, it was primarily on campuses where there were sufficient women employed as academics (rather than as poorly paid, and institutionally powerless, administrative staff), that the "dual burden" could become an advocacy issue. This happened at the University of Dar es Salaam, and also within some South African universities. At the University of Cape Town, for example, an "ad-hoc" group of women, spearheaded by activism from feminist academics, insisted on the provision of a crèche on campus. At the University of the Western Cape, a Women's Internal Committee was formed, seeking to rally all women on the campus - administrative staff, faculty, and students - around the issues of maternity leave, child care facilities, and benefits which could accommodate family needs for health and housing. [10] This trend of activism and the accompanying analyses of gender dynamics within the institution evoke new questions about the "core business" of universities. Gendered distress around women's structural disadvantage (built into conditions of service, ignorance of reproductive labour, and the impossibility of research-based creativity under expectations of "dual labour") indicates that the "core business" of institutional practice involves segregating academic work from family networks, producing scholars and teachers without knowledge of the complex world of social reproductive labour, and ensuring the "masculinisation" of people within the academy. [11]

A third theme in theory and activism concerning gender and higher education both complicates and resonates with problems illuminated by calls for gender analysis in research and demands for institutional recognition of women's "dual labour". It is rare to find a discussion of gender and higher education in Africa which does not mention sexual harassment and sexual violence as critical sources of injury to women on campus. Most of these discussions tend to draw on particular incidents. Some of these, such as the story of Levina Mukasa at the University of Dar es Salaam (see Yahya Othman, 2000), have been narrated often enough to be invoked as shorthand references for conditions of vulnerability, fear, confusion, and abuse faced by survivors of sexual harassment and sexual abuse in many different contexts. [12] Sexual harassment on campuses is explored in more depth in the third section of this paper. It is raised here as a way of considering what gender analysts and activists who prioritise sexual harassment as an institutional issue are revealing about

"the core business" of universities. If sexual abuse is prevalent within institutional cultures, the interests of such abuse demand exploration. The drive against the recognition of reproductive labour and towards a particular "masculinisation" of students, faculty, and university managers interacts with institutional climates of intimidation where some forms of assault are realised through gender difference [13]. Different manifestations of these gendered assaults are explored by T. Chagonda and A. Gore (2000), R. Pattman (2001; 2002) and M. Mbilizi (2001). As these commentators on masculinities often show, "womanhood" and "femininity" are systematically policed by peers and authorities, independent women are overtly threatened, and non-conformity to local gender norms is regarded as legitimate grounds for physical and psychological assault.

Over-generalisation will lead to naïve conclusions; nonetheless, it seems legitimate to suggest that the "core business" of most universities involves, first, support for gender dynamics through which reproductive labour can continue to be unpaid. Secondly, it entails the promotion of the idea that some citizens can have double or triple loads of work demanded of them if they are to be identified as worthy of employment, promotion, authority, and value. Thirdly, it revolves around the surveillance of women's bodies as a legitimate concern of institutional authority, embodied in student associations as much as in deans.

In a paper given at a conference on Gender Equity, Democracy and Human Rights, hosted at the University of Zimbabwe, Chagonda and Gore (2000) address issues of masculinity on the campus. They cite shrinking resources and class-based realities as the ground from which to make sense of the way different men students are categorised by one another. "The SRBs (Severe Rural Backgrounds)" come from working-class or peasant backgrounds, and are expected to be conservative, upholding ZANU positions and "tradition" (Chagonda and Gore, 2000: 14). "Born Locations" are from the townships, and "cannot afford" the lifestyle of the "Nose Brigade", students who have attended multiracial, former whites-only schools and speak English with a very particular accent, or the "UBAs - University Bachelors' Association" (Chagonda and Gore, 2000: 15-17). SRBs and Born Locations squat in others' accommodation, cannot afford transport, and often have to work part-time to support families. UBAs live in residence, and pride themselves on being super-intelligent, anti-authoritarian, and aggressively heterosexual (preferring to date women who are not university students or graduates). The paper - which caused controversy at the conference - dramatically suggests the complexity, tension, vibrancy, and difficulty of "becoming a man" at the University of Zimbabwe, a task clearly as much a facet of a student's life on campus as coursework, assignments, and examinations.

There is not much work available in a similar vein, especially in Western and Eastern Africa. Perhaps, however, it would be possible to speculate that descriptions of gender and higher education in Africa need to encompass more than the narrative of "gaps". A paper such as Chagonda and Gore's hints at the titanic negotiations of gender, ethnic and class identity with which students are engaged in the interests of economic and personal survival. It makes it clear that negotiating access to marketable "masculinity" and "womanhood" is as much a part of the educational terrain as battling for access to actual space in a lecture hall, office, or at a management desk. A gender analysis of university systems leads researchers into complex and exciting questions about the intersections of global and national, culture and sexuality, identity and class on the African continent. It is not surprising that - difficult as statistical data is to collect - numerical indices of sex ratios have dominated advocacy positions. Work such as that suggested by Mary Mboya (2001), or that accomplished on the Nigerian university system by Charmaine Pereira (2002), is harder to undertake; its choreography is dense, theoretically sophisticated and deeply feminist. It is, however, this level of analysis that will best inform strategies for gender equity, and enable explanations for resistances to strategy.

## **Strategies for "gender equity" within higher education**

Policies on equity are clearly driven by agendas capable of engaging with history. Such capacity is often limited by ideological and economic interests, and its boundaries are determined by deeply contextual issues. The principle of redress, harnessed within the term "equity", assumes policy-based willingness to understand and change historical conditions conducive to exploitation and oppression. Given the dependence of many African states on Northern aid, the foreign demands for "democracy", and the ferocity of internal politics, these assumptions remain idealistic. While it is true that some governments have taken principles of equity firmly on board at constitutional levels, implementation of programmes designed to change the lived experience of the poor, of "minority" populations, or - in South Africa and Namibia - of people who are black, is weak.

In South Africa, educational imperatives post-1994 primarily involved racial redress, and debates on equity and affirmative action were (appropriately, for many) dominated by questions of race. What happened to black women through apartheid-designed education systems has been explored by Cheryl de la Rey (1997), Mamphela Ramphele (1994), Carla Sutherland (1994), Pamela Reynolds (1994) and in the Report of the South African Gender Equity Task Team (1997). But what were called "transformation" policies and processes largely concentrated upon changing the racial demographics of students, staff, and management, especially in "white" universities. [14] "Transformation" programmes on "white" campuses usually involved the establishment of top-level forums, changes to mission statements, aggressive recruiting of black students, some attention to finding new funding opportunities for students who were poor and black, concentrated trainings around institutional cultures in residences and elsewhere on campuses, and - on at least one campus - high-profile battles around positions in university leadership. The success of these approaches has been variable; while black student population on these campuses has increased, black faculty members are few and far between. Much more importantly, perhaps, the content and direction of university curricula has not been demonstrably influenced by different constituencies, except for subterranean debates on the need for "bridge years", or "academic development" (see Mabokela and King, 2001).

In universities, named by national policy as "Historically Disadvantaged," where most staff and students are black, institutional equity issues have constellated around student poverty, with "financial exclusion" being the equity issue galvanising most student protests. At a management level, battles have been fought for nationally-driven policies and resources to ensure reasonable competition with richer, and more globally-linked, campuses.

Case studies of some South African campuses suggest that, while there have been some changes in overtly racist institutional cultures, there has also been backlash. (For example, certain students at the University of the Free State have insisted on racially segregated residences.) Studies of black women and black men's experience on "transforming" campuses indicate an on-going sense of being discriminated against, academically and culturally (see, for example, Fish, 1996 and Ndinda, 2000). Some suggest that language inequity is the strongest historical force continuing to marginalise black students both within historically "white" institutions and within global research and scholarship.

Questions of poverty, and of the rights of marginalised populations within a country, have animated equity debates in other countries. In Uganda, for example, national policy on higher education demands that access criteria include attention to potential students' ability to fund their education, and the region in the country in which their families are based (Ahimbisibwe and Muhwezi, 2002). At the University of Zimbabwe after 1980, equity policies considered "mature" and "special" entry options as a route to offering war veterans access to higher education. Demands for "gender equity" thus negotiate with other discourses on

historical exclusions, and it is only rarely that equity strategies fully integrate the meaning of being gendered into broad-based commitments to "democracy" or "transformation".

There is no narrative on the pathway taken by "gender equity" advocates and policy-makers common to all African universities. Contextual influences of state, institutional leadership and ideology, pressure from women's groups in and outside a particular university, and the dominant economic and political urgencies within a context determine the different choices possible regarding "gender equity" on campuses. In universities where some research has been done to document and evaluate gender equity (such as the University of Dar es Salaam, Makerere University, or the University of Cape Town), it is clear that even the term "narrative" is too straightforward for the kind of long-term, intricate, political negotiations a single campus may engage with over many years. While the presence of extraordinary individuals within and beyond one campus can always be detected, the detailed interactions of formal and informal bodies of influence cannot be imagined without substantive, local research (and autobiography).

The most common form taken by formal gender equity policies has been the development of affirmative action opportunities for women students. In each context where such policies have been implemented, there is a particular, state-based, story to be told about the way in which such policies became accepted by national legislators, university managements, and various constituencies within universities. The story frequently involves government relations with the World Bank, and Northern aid, and the active pressure of women's movements and national machineries on women. Since 1990, the Ugandan Ministry of Gender (and the fledgling Department of Women's and Gender Studies at Makerere University) proposed the following: "All girls who complete 'A' level and apply to join university are eligible for the scheme and they have to obtain minimum qualification for university entrance in order to qualify for the scheme. They are then given a 1.5 point bonus over the points they have scored through examination results" (cited by Kasente, 2001: 4). This scheme was legally endorsed in 1995 by Article 33, Section 5, of the Ugandan constitution, which specifically grants women the right to affirmative action.

Since 1997, the University of Dar es Salaam has also implemented policies which admit women into different departments and disciplines with lower qualifications than their men counterparts. At the University of Zimbabwe, government policy addressed racial imbalances in student enrolment through the "Black Advancement, or Africanisation Programme". According to Irvine Chivaura (2000), although beneficiaries of the Black Advancement Programme were mostly men, the Affirmative Action Programme was introduced at the university to address the low overall enrollment of women students and the "gender gaps" in science and technology in particular. The AAP set differential cut-off points for admission to faculties, with women's cut-off point being 2 points lower than men's.

Although analysts like Kwesiga (2002: 237) acknowledge that such concrete approaches to improving poor ratios of male-female students do have an impact on statistics describing student populations, the gendered costs of such approaches are clear. Resentment towards women students deepens, and misogynist ideas about the inferiority of women's brains are mirrored by formulations in official policy documents which suggest women's intellectual potential should be measured as automatically weaker than that expected from men. During the Women's Worlds Congress at Makerere University in Kampala 2002, a focus group [15] of students from different departments concurred that: "The 1.5 was meant to be a help for girls, something to encourage, but I feel it has turned into something else now." One man participant said, "At school it was always the girls who were better, it was my sister, she was my competition, now people say that girls only get in if you give them extra, it becomes teasing, I would not want to get in that way."

The deep-level backlash against affirmative action designed to increase women's enrolment seems logical enough when it is recognised that gender dynamics affect both women and men, and that gendered meanings ripple into society as a network of tension which everyone negotiates. In retrospect, some affirmative action policies seem naïve, and yet it must be remembered that facilitating access to higher educational space for women is essential, and that many activist agendas support such policies from informed convictions about the shape and ferocity of local and global patriarchies. It must also be remembered that the majority of African universities have no form of gender equity policy at all, let alone direct measures calculated to increase female student populations.

There has been much less policy focus on affirmative action when it comes to the employment of women academics, particularly at senior levels within the university. South Africans are enjoined by the Employment Equity Act to monitor appointments in order to redress "imbalances" of race and gender. Yet even here, relatively little weight is given to headhunting for appropriate women candidates for positions. At the University of Cape Town, a human resources officer responsible for equity management sits on every selection committee, but he or she has less formal authority than the faculty members and deans on the committees.

Another trend in strategies designed to improve gender equity in universities has been an emphasis on research and teaching which takes gender seriously, and on the establishment of women's and gender studies programmes, centres, and departments. The demand to counteract and transform knowledge production within the academy was, as noted in the first part of this paper, one of the most powerful calls for "gender equity" in the late 1970s and the 1980s. 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. Feminists active here were concerned 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 (see Mama, 1996).

Critical initiatives were established at the University of Ghana's Development and Women's Studies Unit, at Ibadan University in Nigeria, through the Gender Unit at Eduardo Mondlane University in Mozambique, the Women's Research and Documentation Project at the University of Dar es Salaam, and at the University of the Western Cape, in South Africa. In some universities, this "equity" strategy was pursued by scholars within particular departments. For example, Women and Law in Southern Africa (WLSA) originated in the Law Faculty at the University of Zimbabwe. The strategy was also developed within units affiliated with the campus but not formally merged with it. This was the case with the National Institute of Development Research and Documentation, situated on the campus of the University of Botswana, but until 2000, an independent organisation. The Gender Research project here both initiated important work on trading, sexual harassment, and agriculture, and made contacts with faculty within the departments of Sociology, Continuing Education, and others on the campus. 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.

Kasente (2001) locates the current policies at Makerere University on "gender mainstreaming" within the establishment of a Women's Studies Department in 1991. The department functioned as "located activism", driving teaching programmes hard to accommodate an increasing number of students, and simultaneously engaging with national policy-makers, university managers, donors, and extra-campus women's movement constituencies.

An on-going survey [16] of African universities which has, to date, received information from 24 campuses, reveals that 18 of these have dedicated "gender units" which energise teaching, research, and contribution to equity work on campus. At one level, the proliferation of gender and women's studies teaching departments seems questionable; in climates of radical cut-backs and increasingly tight strictures from many governments on the nature and direction of higher education, and given the fact that the quality of most African women's lives has not improved dramatically over the past 10 years, the growth of a "new" discipline is interesting. It implies that one would need to look at where gender and women's studies programmes are growing, and what support and pressures have influenced that growth in order to evaluate whether the presence of gender and women's studies programmes signals a clear shift towards gender equity. Much of this evaluation would need to take into account what such programmes actually teach, and what happens to their graduates. It would also be valuable to reflect on the quality of faculty members' lives and alliances. As Deborah Kasente shows in her article in this issue, many attest to conditions of gross overwork and a sense of frustration about the divides between the demands of "institutionalising" gender and women's studies and the need to be deeply engaged in local gender politics beyond the campus. Without such engagement, the pulse of campus-driven projects becomes weak, mis-aligned, and ineffective, and yet, the costs of transforming "dual labour" into "multiple labour" are mind-numbing.

In my limited survey of the available literature, two universities have committed themselves to projects of "gender mainstreaming": Makerere University and the University of Dar es Salaam. Their mainstreaming platforms are different, but both demand top-level commitment to gender equity, the retention of affirmative action policies (including those which would strengthen academic women's presence and research profile), regular, monitoring and reporting, on-going research and linkages with stakeholders beyond the campus, and attention to sexual harassment in the university.

The concern with sexual harassment responds to the third theme of theory and activism noted in the first part of this paper. In Southern African universities (and some technikons and teachers training colleges), issues of "gender equity" have been negotiated more through attempts to understand and challenge gender-based violence on campus than via any other single route. This is less the case north of the Zambezi, although the University of Dar es Salaam took a leading role in voicing protest against sexual harassment as early as 1984, and the Forum of African Women Educators (FAWE) has consistently supported a research focus on sexual harassment both in secondary and higher education. [17]

Strategies against the prevalence of sexual harassment and sexual abuse address "gender equity" at its core. It is impossible to perform competently as a lecturer, student, or administrator under conditions of abuse and fear: getting "access" to university space becomes meaningless as a form of empowerment. Similarly, it is impossible to conduct rigorous, creative, and dynamic research while combating targeted sexual hostility or menace: demands for new epistemologies may be a result of experiences of abuse, but they have no visceral currency in atmospheres of vulnerability and stress. The following section opens with a brief review of Southern African strategies aimed at developing sexual harassment policies on different campuses, and goes on to explore cases of "sexual harassment" as zones for deep analysis of the meaning of gender within higher education.

### **The 'lens' of sexual harassment and sexual violence on campus**

Over the past twelve years, sexual harassment and sexual violence [18] have increasingly been named as forces worth focused research within higher education, and, indeed, at other levels of education. A paper issued by African Rights, a London-based NGO in 1994,

collated diverse examples of severe abuse in African universities and schools. Examples were cited from newspapers, occasional papers, interviews, and workshop reports, and included 17 institutions in 12 different countries in its purview (see Hallam, 1994). Sketchy as some of its data was, the paper suggested an almost endemic problem of gendered hostility towards women and girl students and, in higher education, towards women staff.

In the early 1990s, several Southern African universities began to develop detailed research on the nature and practice of sexual harassment and sexual violence on their campuses. These included the Universities of Stellenbosch, Cape Town and Natal in South Africa, the University of Botswana through the National Institution for Development Research and Documentation, and the University of Zimbabwe. The first journal articles on sexual harassment, written by authors such as Thandabantu Nhlapo (1992) and Carla Sutherland (1991), were published in *Agenda*, and were followed by reports released from the University of Cape Town and the University of Natal, and a research-based article from the University of Stellenbosch (see Gouws and Kritzinger, 1995). [19] All these institutions initiated research as a conscious feminist strategy towards policy design, a process which in most cases, took nearly a decade to complete.

Since the early 1990s, more and more institutions have engaged with research on sexual harassment and sexual violence, seeking to link their findings with educational outreach and campus-based policy making processes. In an audit of resources for challenging sexual harassment within Southern African higher education (recently initiated, and not yet fully analysed), [20] it was noted that initiatives on sexual harassment rooted in early 1990s activism and research have become somewhat split from later engagement with the establishment of gender and women's studies programmes. This is not true of all campuses, but there is generally a tension between these two strategies for addressing "gender equity", a tension only alleviated by the presence of the same individuals in both strategic thrusts. The tension is complex: polarisations between commitment to differing zones of campus work occur (residence administration as opposed to the delivery of academic courses, for example), and there can be splits between management's concern about the language and institutional process of policy-making [21] and those "at the coalface" of student health and counselling services.

Without delving too deeply into the debates around defining "sexual harassment" as part of policy processes, it may be useful to note that, as a term, "sexual harassment" has been introduced to us by Northern (U.S., Canadian, Australian, and European) efforts to describe the type of gender-based violence that occurs within public spaces, particularly work spaces. Engagement was with forms of gender-based violence not already codified within criminal law (such as rape or sexual assault), forms of behaviour that demonstrably damaged people in psychological and physical ways, but which seemed to pass undefined as "violence" within their contexts. These forms of behaviour sexualised persons without their consent or engagement, and led to a huge range of actions: sexual touching, communication, teasing or bullying, threats and insults, practical "jokes", and so on. Many theorists suggested that such behaviours were part and parcel of cultural permission to violate women sexually, and created environments which increased the likelihood of rape. Location within a heterosexual culture, where men have more authority than women do, made it extremely difficult to distinguish between "normal" masculine (usually) modes of flirtation and courtship, and behaviour that was criminally offensive and abusive. A great deal of legal argument and social analysis has been dedicated to this difficulty. The burden of proof in Northern legislative policies for defining sexualising behaviour as violent and abusive (where it does not fall into categories such as rape and sexual assault) has lain with two concepts: the subjective experience of the person targeted by the behaviour and the degree to which the behaviour was unwelcome or unwanted by that person.

Both these concepts work within the logic of accepted legislation, but are problematic. The first means that there is a very high degree of flexibility around definitions of sexual harassment. What one person experiences as violent and offensive may not correspond to another's feelings about a similar experience. The second means that in order for behaviour to be found "sexually harassing", there must be proof that it was unwanted. Given that sexually harassing behaviour often happens without witnesses, the survivor's statement that she/he "said no" may not be found credible. In addition, many survivors, due to fear or intimidation and the hope that the behaviour will stop of its own accord, don't "say no" immediately. The fact that the survivor has been "compliant" once only encourages the perpetrator to try again.

One form of sexual harassment that has been easier to deal with from a policy perspective involves quid pro quo behaviour. This occurs where someone is offered employment, resources, access to opportunities, or other "favours" if they agree to have sexual relations with the person doing the offering. Because of the institutional power dynamics involved, this form of harassment is easier to litigate against. The place in which it becomes complicated in institutions of higher education concerns staff relations with students. All staff are in institutionally powerful positions over students; this should preclude all forms of sexual activity between them. There is fierce and on-going debate about the meaning of consent between a student and a staff member. On some U.S. campuses, such relationships are either prohibited or monitored by policy; on many, students continue to desire, have relationships with, and marry staff, especially faculty staff. Charmaine Pereira (2002) has suggested that it is critical to separate notions of "sexual harassment" from "sexual corruption". Her argument uses "sexual corruption" as a term which can describe (women?) students' "harassment" of (men?) lecturers, though forms of "soliciting" for marks, course entrance, or access to examination questions. Those who accept such solicitation are guilty, then, of "corruption", which "needs ... discussion, instead of being assumed to be just 'one of the perks' of the job" (2002: 134). Pereira's point is well-taken; the language of policy, however, cannot currently accommodate the difference between quid pro quo exchanges involving "a job" for "sex" and quid pro quo transactions where "sex" is accepted as barter for grades.

Southern Africans, therefore, have moved into policy-making on sexual harassment largely through the language of Northern activism. While this language may offer valuable frameworks, it leaves us without contextually-grounded terms and concepts. Much research and, indeed, activist trainings, counsellings and educational work suggests the need for context-specific analyses of heterosexual cultures and identities within higher education; the language of most policies remains, however, akin to European Equal Opportunity Commission guidelines.

The following case studies, taken from recent papers on sexual harassment and sexual violence in universities, illustrate the possibility of reading the realities of gender-based violence on campuses as demonstrations of the complexity of gendered dynamics within the lived experience of students and staff. The first comes from a paper presented by Nomcebo Simelane at the 10th General Conference of the Association of African Universities in 2001:

*A female student visiting her boyfriend in his room is asked to iron his clothes. When she refuses to do so, he proceeds to assault her with the hot iron leaving several imprints of the iron on her body. She is taken to the Health Centre for treatment and formally lays an assault charge against him. Once he is charged she is pressured by him, his family and even her own family to withdraw the case. The justification for asking her to withdraw the case is that he will be expelled. She finally succumbs and withdraws the case. However, because of the nature of her injuries, the University proceeds to charge him and the*

*disciplinary court finds him guilty and he is expelled from the University. The female student completed her programme and later got married to the man!* (Simelane, 2001:9) [22]

When presented, Simelane's paper caused some tension; the fact that a case study concerning sexual abuse ended with a marriage between survivor and perpetrator was identified by some voices as inappropriate to the work of understanding the damage caused to survivors by such abuse, and as marginal to dominant narratives of women's experiences of harassment on campus. While it is true that the case study does not explore the effects of abuse very deeply, and that any kind of "happy" ending to abusive gender dynamics is rare, it is not so clear that the "domestic" and "romantic" threads within the case story are unusual. Another paper, "Sexual Harassment and Female Students in Nigerian Universities: A Case Study of Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago-Iwoye, Nigeria," presented by Mosunmola Imasogie at a seminar within the Associateship Programme at the African Gender Institute in July 2002, [23] offers case studies, all five of which describe versions of lecturer-initiated harassment. One reads as follows:

Lauren is a first-year graduate student who is also employed as a teaching assistant in one of Professor T's classes. Professor T, who is also Lauren's advisor, is a new faculty member who recently completed his postdoctoral studies. Sometime during her first semester at the university, Lauren and Professor T start dating. (Imasogie, 2002: 20)

The paper explains the quid pro quo implications of this case, despite its consensuality, and notes that there is a very widespread acceptance of men lecturers approaching women students for sexual relationships. Preliminary research conducted for the paper indicated that: "Some of the male students...stated they have been harassed and failed by lecturers interested in their girl friends...one of the lecturers interviewed wanted to know why the researcher is wasting her time on research on sexual harassment...the lecturer boasted that he has at least three girl friends at all the levels he is teaching" (Imasogie, 2002:22). Nigerian contexts are vastly different from South African ones, and yet this material is reminiscent of discussions on sexual harassment and sexual violence at a recent NETSH workshop, where participants from "HDU" campuses in the North of the country spoke of protest marches against "sexual harassment" being organised through men's student leadership on the grounds that men lecturers were creating "inequitable" environments by giving women students sexual attention and academic favours. [24]

It would be politically naïve to move away from analyses of sexual harassment and sexual violence which locate women as the most common survivors of such assaults, and which concentrate on the devastating effects of abuse perpetrated by men. However, in the same way that it is necessary to recognise that the most ferocious forms of abuse take place within the home and within local territories organised, through masculinities, into gang-terrain, it is critical to introduce recognition of the politics of heterosexual intimacy into understanding of campus life. [25] Men and women may be segregated on campuses, through residence architectures, student sporting organisations, hierarchies of authority, and disciplinary locations. They are, nonetheless, fundamentally engaged with one another in relationships of sexual economy, friendship, and within trajectories of identity which are often culturally valued as routes to kinship, citizenship and "a personal future". The shape of these engagements, in different contexts, demands research.

For many women, "a personal future" in African societies requires permanent, public, culturally legitimated, heterosexual liaison: marriage. All key theorists on women and girls' education in African contexts, such as Bloch, Beoku-Betts and Tabachnick (1998); Sen and Grown (1988); Dorsey (1989); Gaidzanwa (1997); Kasente (2001); Kelly (1987); Kwesiga (2002); Mbilinyi (1991); Mies (1988); Morley (2002); Rathgeber (1991); Snyder (1995) and Stromquist (1998) discuss in detail the impact of expectations about marriage on educational

opportunity. While contexts differ radically, Morley (2002) suggests that for many African countries immediately after independence, the "core business" of higher education involved national development goals. Conceived within nationalist public discourse as a need for new citizens committed to new political visions, the gendered nature of "the citizen" began to emerge in aggressive contestations about women in government, the meaning of the family, and in debates about education.

Gaidzanwa (1997) argues that women academics at the University of Zimbabwe, after 1983, found themselves increasingly gendered "away" from notions of "womanhood" appropriate within emerging discourse on the independent Zimbabwean citizen. Male students frequently voiced the view that a woman's primary role was to be a wife, and many women students agreed. Studies on Ugandan and Zimbabwean men students' heterosexual interests indicate, in different contexts, a similar preference for relating sexually to women without university education, and Kenyan research suggests that both men and women view higher levels of education as being dangerous to marriage (see Kanake, 1997; Amanyire, 1983; Pattman, 2001 and 2002; Chagonda and Gore, 2000 and Mookodi, 2002. Pattman's work (2001; 2002) also argues that a majority of University of Botswana men students take their dominance in heterosexual behaviour seriously, and are resistant to sexual behaviour from women partners who challenge this in any way.

Analyses of women's participation at public, high-status, levels of responsibility in other zones [26] suggest that attacks against such visible challenges to traditional gender roles come from both men and women in the shape of insults about "femininity", childcare responsibility, and sexual desirability to men. Sexual harassment occurs, but so too do chosen heterosexual liaisons of friendship, work partnership, and sexual interaction. The point is that, with or without explicit strategies naming "gender equity" as a social, economic and political goal, men and women negotiate "becoming gendered" through life-long processes of definition, experience, recognition, rebellion, desire or ambition. Surface profiles of clear-cut gender "complementarity" are usually retrospective over-simplifications of these negotiations, and serve particular political interests: nationalist, patriarchal, or religious. [27] It remains important to identify, theorise and act against patriarchal architectures; it is, however, also critical that analyses can address the variable, evasive, and complex ways in which both male and female bodies can come to serve these interests'

What acceptance of the gendered complexity within "case studies" (or autobiographical testimonies) of sexual harassment and sexual violence earns is a lens into institutional struggles around masculinity, womanhood, sexuality, and violence. Different men's responses to policies on sexual harassment, the refusal of many women to report instances of sexual abuse because of fear, the value of heterosexual "dating" relationships, and the willingness of some women to consent to quid pro quo exchanges all suggest that campus terrains are not simple sites that are "unbalanced" by gender ratios. They constitute one of a number of key zones for young (and older) adults, whose "core business" includes heterosexuality as a major route into resources, stability, identity and citizenship. The two case studies above illustrate instances of gross abuse of power, through sexual action, and they also hint at lives within institutions that are not easily permeable to policy-making. More research on this is needed before implications for strategies on "gender equity" can be definitively named, but the role of universities in the "core business" of "arranging suitable marriages", facilitating sexual opportunities for men (and women), and collusion with patriarchal interests around reproductive labour must form part of contextually grounded analysis of the conditions of "gender inequity" on African campuses.

**Conclusion:** "that is radical"

In a recent graduate class seminar on gender and violence, a course which explores contemporary research on gender-based violence, masculinities, and economic and legislative change in different African countries, [28] students were discussing the connections between options for class mobility and gender identity. On the table was Amy Stambach's article, "Education is My Husband": Marriage, Gender and Reproduction in Northern Tanzania"(1998). Exploring Chagga women's negotiation of schooling, marriage, and gender, Stambach writes: "A Chagga friend's comment has long intrigued me: 'Education is my husband,' she said, in response to a Chagga man's suggestion that she get married soon.... But Eshimuni (a pseudonym), a 27 year-old graduate who was herself a successful college teacher, assured him that she would never marry, yet she would (if she could) have children" (1998:187). One student's response to this paragraph suggested both admiration and some shock - "that is radical!", she said, using a popular South African colloquialism, indicating acknowledgement of a certain enviable enterprise and bravado. Radical, of course, carries other meanings; it can connote political ideas (in several directions) which run counter to dominant norms, and it can refer to a core, an origin, or root. This paper has argued that while the history of gender equity strategies in African higher education illustrates both complexity and courage, it is essential to engage with the radical implications of understanding gender within cultures, societies and institutions. For higher education institutions, this would entail a willingness to examine their interaction with "outside contexts" of marriage, faith, families and identity, a willingness to acknowledge the direction of their interests in gendered citizenship, and an excitement about the possibility of building a context in which gender does not have any predicative force over individuals' access to labour, to authority, to performative presence, or to sexual and reproductive options.

## References

Ahimbisibwe, J. and Muhwezi, D. 2002. "The Gains and Challenges of Sponsoring Women's Education in Public Universities in Uganda: A Case Study of Makerere University", Paper presented at Women's World Congress, Kampala 21-26 July.

Amanyire, M. 1983. "Attitudes of University Male Students Towards Marrying Graduate Women", Unpublished research paper, Makerere University (on file in archives of Gender and Women's Studies Department).

Assie-Lumumba, N. 1993. *Higher education in Francophone Africa: Assessment of the potential of traditional universities and alternatives for development*. AFTHR Technical Note 5, Human Resources Division. Washington, DC: World Bank.

Assie-Lumumba, N. 1995. "Gender and Education in Africa: A new agenda for development", *Africa Notes*, April.

Bloch, M., Beoku-Betts, J. and Tabachnick, R. eds. 1998. *Women and Education in Sub-Saharan Africa: Power, Opportunities, and Constraints*. Boulder and London: Lynne Rienner Publishers.

Bunting, I. 1994. *Legacy of Inequality: Higher Education in South Africa*. Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press.

Chagonda, T. and Gore, A. 2000. "Issues of masculinity among U.Z. students", in Report of the Regional Conference on Gender Equity, Democracy and Human Rights in Institutions of Higher Education in Southern Africa, written by Kujinga, K. and Chingarande, D., edited by Mate, R. (available from Gender Studies Association, University of Zimbabwe).

Chivaura, I. 2000. "Affirmative Action at the University of Zimbabwe", Paper presented at

Conference on Gender Equity, Democracy, and Human Rights, University of Zimbabwe, July.

Cooper, D. and Subotzky, G. 2001. *The Skewed Revolution: Trends in South African higher education, 1988-1998*. Bellville: Educational Policy Unit, University of the Western Cape.

Dangarembga, T. 1988. *Nervous Conditio*