Women's moral agency and the quest for justice in Africa[1]

Puleng LenkaBula
Department of Philosophy and Systematic Theology,
University of South Africa, Pretoria, South Africa
Mpeane Makofane
Department of Christian Spirituality, Church History and Missiology,
University of South Africa, Pretoria, South Africa

Abstract

This article explores women's moral agency in post-apartheid South Africa and Africa by examining the intersections of governance and the public space; we shall also look at the agency of African women from the perspective of African feminist social ethics. The article begins by discussing the African post-colonial state. It then goes on to evaluate the portrayal of African women's agency in the dominant discourses of the human sciences, particularly as these are articulated in South Africa. The purpose of this article is to unearth how African women's agency is perceived, interpreted and understood. We also want to evaluate whether African women inhabit or reject the negative way in which they are portrayed. The second part of the essay identifies and discusses African women's agency and demonstrates the ways African women agitate for justice, and claim political agency and citizenship. The essay then calls for emancipatory and transformatory justice in the public sphere and in the human sciences; it rejects the objectification of African women, and protests against treating them as objects of research. Instead, it understands African women as subjects and agents in their own lives, including in the private and public spheres.

Introduction and situating the discussion on governance and the public sphere

This article[2] discusses governance and the public sphere in South Africa and Africa and their interface with African women's agency from the perspective

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[1] Revised version of a paper read at the CODESRIA Conference held from 7/12/08–11/12/08 in Cameroon.
[2] We are pleased to be able to contribute to this special issue of *SHE* in honour of Professor Simon Maimela who, through his publications, made an enormous contribution to Black theology. We are happy to draw on his legacy, this being the liberation of all people.

of African feminist social ethics. Amina Mama rightly notes that African feminist scholarship in the post-colonial state and its governance has to understand the link between the violence and destruction perpetrated by colonialism and the persistence of patriarchy in Africa.

She states:

> A feminist analysis of postcolonial states links the violent and destructive manifestations of modern statecraft with the persistence of patriarchy, in all its perversity. It approaches authoritarianism in a manner that draws insights of feminist studies, building on work that begins to explore the complex resonances and dissonances that occur between subjectivities and politics, between the individual and the collective. It offers a powerful rethinking of national identity, and opens up possibilities for imagining radically different communities.[3]

Mama, like many African feminist scholars, therefore suggests that, in order to understand the dynamic of governance in Africa, we must subject its evaluation to its linkages with violence, domination and the persistence of patriarchy in order to envision constructive and/or the just governance of the public sphere. These remarks are based on the fact that, often, African women and African women's scholarship tend to be relegated to the domestic. Focusing on African women's agency in relation to the governance of the public sphere is necessary in order to unravel the complex political configurations and cultural politics of the nation state "imbued by power imbalance shaped by race, class and gender".[4] It is an important epistemological task that aims at understanding how lived experiences and knowledge, shaped by the intersections of race, gender, place of origin, sexuality, ability/disability and social location impact on women's public presence, participation and agency in the political, social, economic and or educational spheres. Being attentive to gender and power in the governance of the public reclaims African women's agency in a milieu where African women "have long been constructed as objects of study".[5]

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[3]   Mama, Amina. Subjects: Gender and power in African contexts 2001, 7.
[4]   Kwok, Pui-lan. Unbinding our feet: saving brown women and feminist religious discourse 2002, 65.
[5]   Salo, Elaine. Making our voices heard: the politics of writing and publication in African Higher Education in <http// www.gwsafrica.org>.

Mamdani,[6] Mama,[7] and Olukoshi[8] point out that any constructive attempt to understand the governance of the public sphere in Africa has to take into consideration the complex experiences of the formation of the nation state in Africa. This is because the emergence of the state in Africa and its attendant governance systems developed out of a history of conquest, and in the context of a bifurcated colonial state whose legacies still largely remain evident in the post-colonial state. Because colonial power faced the problem of legitimacy, it reformed the pre-colonial governance systems and instituted "direct and indirect rule as the basis for consolidating its hegemonic rule in the African colonies".[9] Put differently, the bifurcations of the colonial state which included, among other things, racialised, ethnicised and gendered citizenship still characterise the governance systems of African states today. Understanding the historical and geo-spatial genealogy and/or the formation of the nation state is fundamental to understanding the nature, the struggles of the state, and governance systems today.

As Mamdani points out, the colonial state reorganised colonial power into two distinct authorities which used different legal regimes, "one civic and the other ethnic".[10] In this context, civil power resided in the state while ethnic power lay in the governance of the state through native authority tasked with the administration and implementation of customary law. The distinction between civic and ethnic power, suggests Mamdani, was accompanied by ethnically differentiated customary laws for each ethnic group. Customary law distinguished between indigenous and non-indigenous peoples, and based its governance and the distribution of socio-economic resources, especially land, on these distinctions. A clear example that attests to this theory is the history of conquest in South Africa. Apartheid government distinguished between the various ethnic groups and delimited their access to socio-political and economic rights, and prescribed their geo-political and spatial location. It created a racial hierarchy of settler people which placed caucasians on top and people of other descent (e.g. from Asia) lower down this hierarchy. South African citizenship was not only ethnicised through the creation of Bantustans, but a ranking system was put to order or position their inhabitants within society. These bifurcations resulted in a situation where, in many African countries, a person could be a civic citizen and yet only some enjoyed the privileges of ethnic citizenship.

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[6] Mahmood, Mamdani. Preliminary Thoughts on the Congo Crisis 1999:55 in social Text, 60, vol 17 no 3, fall 1999, 53-62.
[7] Mama, Amina. Subjects: Gender and power in African contexts 2001, 7.
[8] Olukoshi, Adebayo, Governance in West Africa: a survey of trends 2006:5 also in http://www.Codesria.com Accessed on August 20th 2008.
[9] Mamdani, Preliminary Thoughts on Congo 1999, 54.
[10] Mamdani, Preliminary Thoughts on Congo 1999, 54.

Olukoshi stresses the fact that the colonial state reconstituted the governance of most pre-colonial states through the delimitation process (drawing of maps) and "reconstituting many of them according to the imperialist calculations of opportunity and advantage".[11] This meant that

> Colonial governance was, in spite of various ideological justi-fication proffered for the European intervention, a project that was by definition replete with internal contradictions [which entailed] … the denial of the basic rights of the populace and the imposition of a systematic regime of racialised exploitation and exclusions on them that found its ramifications in the coer-cive nature of the colonial state system.[12]

Mama further elaborates on these contradictions by highlighting the gendered binaries which were also involved in the configuration of the nation state and governance by the colonial project stating that the majority of Africans, if not all, generally knew that women were and still continue to be pervasively governed by the dictates of patriarchal kyriarchy[13] of custom and community, to the extent that they were and are "less able to realise the rights afforded to citizens-in-general through the trope of civil law".[14] The implications have been that, for many African women, citizenship and governance are largely based on and draw from the colonial practice and its legacies which, Mcfadden rightly points out, "attached the status of a citizen to whiteness, maleness and to the ownership of property".[15]

> This is most obviously so where customary laws still afford women only minor status, and customary practices can be said to violate the physical and emotional integrity of women. What this means is that if the state is indeed bifurcated along tropes

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[11] Olukoshi, Adebayo Governance in West Africa: a survey of trends 2006:4 also in http://www.Codesria.com Accessed on August 20th 2008.

[12] Olukoshi, Adebayo Governance in West Africa: a survey of trends 2006, 4.

[13] Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza coined the neologism patriarchal Kyriarchy in theological scholarship to describe the notion that patriarchy is not only hierarchical organisation that values men and devalues women, but it is a socio-political and historical hierarchy based on Lordship and domination of men. Patriarchal Kyriarchy therefore refers to the rule of the emperor, master, Lord, father over his subordinates. It also equates the perceived 'subordinates' as the property of the master/lord, man or father. An example that demonstrates or clarifies patriarchal kyriarchy for example, is the practices of human trafficking for sexual exploitation with or without consent, or the systematic erosion of the dignity of people which occurs with the commoditisation of all life, based on control, dominion of all life and of women.

[14] Amina Mama, Subjects: Gender and power in African Contexts 2001, 7.

[15] Mcfadden, Patricia. Becoming post colonial African women changing the meaning of citizenship 2005, 4.

of civil and customary legal systems, the implementation of
both are also deeply gendered.[16]

Mama points out that, because of this, African feminist/women's scholars
and activists, particularly in feminist jurisprudence, has involved activism
seeking and enabling more gender justice and equitable access to civil law as
integral parts of just governance, as well as some of the vehicles of African
women's agency, "the protection of women's rights and the realisation of
their citizenship".[17]

A concurrent point highlighting the fact that women have not always
been treated as equal citizens and have been marginalised from governance
and decision-making processes of their countries, even after independence, is
also underscored by a white, feminist scholar from Algeria reflecting on the
post-independence state. She suggests that, unlike many African men, many
African women generally lack the opportunities to express and act on their
gender-specific grievances. They are generally inhibited from governance
structures because they are often treated as legal minors in many of their
communities. Their related absences from early decision-making processes,
including form decisions regarding the leadership of revolutionary organisa-
tions and/or states, particularly with regard to "their absence from the circle
of intellectuals drafting positions papers and advising organisations on poli-
cies",[18] have continued to exclude them and their insights from the public
space. African women's exclusion from the public space and from informing
the governance policies of their countries, has also been perpetuated through
the centralisation of masculinities and the entrenched patriarchal-kyriarchy
that characterises certain customary elements of governance. These, she
suggests, can be seen as elements that continue to disable and inhibit African
women from active citizenship, access and participation in the public, politics
and economy in the post-colonial state. For example, she states,

> With militarised masculinities intact – and in public office –
> most states sideline women's issues after the revolution, retain
> discriminatory customary law as part of their legal systems,
> support cosmetic legislative reforms that are not enforced,
> facilitate changes in the electoral systems that increase only a
> token number of female parliamentarians, reward a few high
> ranking women combatants in government positions, and

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[16]   Mama, Amina. Challenging Subjects: Gender and power in African context 2001, 6.
[17]   Mama, Amina. Subjects: Gender and power in African contexts 2001, 7.
[18]   White, Aronette. All the men are fighting for freedom; all the women are mourning their
      men but some of us carried guns: Fanon's psychological perspectives on war and African
      women combatants. Boston Consortium on Gender, Security and Human Rights, Working
      Paper No 106 (unpublished). 2003, 13.

> engage in other symbolic gestures that do not essentially
> change structural gender inequities.[19]

The liberation struggles of many African societies which gained indepen-
dence before South Africa, argues McClintock, made it obvious to many
South African women, even before the dissolution of apartheid, that the
emancipation of women was not always a clear or direct product of national
struggles for democracy, liberation or socialism and that such inequities or
injustices had to be addressed by "the mass democratic movement and the
society as a whole".[20]

Thenjiwe Mtintso, the former deputy general secretary of the African
National Congress (ANC) has also reiterated the importance of the agency
and thus the participation of women in the public sphere and governance. She
has argued that women's participation ought not to be limited to the domestic
and/or private space only, but ought to become a constitutive and critical
aspect of inclusive democracy, citizenship and governance:

> Without gender equality in politics, there is not democracy.
> Only when political parties and national legislation are decided
> upon jointly by men and women with regard to the interest and
> aptitude for both halves of the population will democracy in
> southern African assume true and dynamic significance.[21]

In order for the public sphere to become vibrant, dynamic, balanced and to
seriously attend to the needs and aspirations of citizens, the state structures,
publics and governance ought to allow and not inhibit women's decision
making process within the government and public space. It equally requires
that gender justice and equality be embedded in public processes, institutions
and systems.

It is important to note, therefore, in the light of the fact that the
African nation-state emerged as a bifurcated state, in which the bifurcations
have, to a large extent, influenced the shape of the public space, and citizen-
ship and governance, that it is equally important to identify and understand
how these have influenced governance today. We should also ask precisely
what are some of the current challenges to governance of the public sphere so
that we can imagine just and life-affirming governance for the public, for
humanity and even for the environment. Olukoshi, in a report developed for
the evaluation of governance in West Africa in 2006, suggests that the
challenges to governance are not only limited to colonial and post-colonial

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[19]   While all the men are fighting for freedom; all the women are mourning their men but some
       of us carried guns 2003, 23.
[20]   McClintock quoted in McEwan 2000, 5
[21]   Mtintso, Thenjiwe quoted in McEwan, Engendering Citizenship 2000, 6.

bifurcations, but are also exacerbated by a number of factors that require radical and constructive formulation of interventions. These challenges include, among others, the following:

(a)   the persistence of the political systems marked by the 'hegemony of the ruling party' where, in most countries in Africa, the ruling party is so strong and dominant that it ends up coopting or subverting key opposition, sometimes through the use of persuasion, and sometimes through the use of direct and indirect violent harassment;

(b)   the challenges of the executive and legislature, particularly the principles of the separation of powers central to the consolidation of democratisation. In many countries, the legislature as an autonomous system that exercises an oversight role has encountered many problems;

(c)   the prevalence of political violence and insecurity marked by numerous incidences of political conflict;

(d)   the contradictions of military and civil relations;

(e)   the contradictions within policing and security systems, which are crucial to governance and yet fraught with problems, including extortionary practices and the abuses of power;

(f)   judicial independence requiring urgent attention as one of the pillars of state governance;

(g)   the media;

(h)   the challenges of centralisation and decentralisation of governance;

(i)   the politics of succession;

(j)   the electoral system;

(k)   deficits in social citizenship and social injustices – in particular, the problem of poverty and peace.[22]

Although this list is not exhaustive, it summarises some of the most evident and pressing challenges in the political sphere in Africa. These issues urgently point to the need for a citizen's agency in transforming governance and influencing governance of the publics for a better life for Africa's peoples and ecologies.

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[22]   The listed challenges to governance in Africa, are adapted / gleaned or drawn from Olukoshi, Adebayo Governance in West Africa: a survey of trends 2006:8-17 also in http://www.Codesria.com Accessed on August 20th 2008.

It is in the light of the above that a discussion about governance, the public sphere, African women's agency and the quest for justice is so essential. An assertion of African/black women's agency in this context (described above) runs the risk of being associated with the very complex and systemic injustices it seeks to contest and/or overcome. It is a risk worth taking, since it is a component of the quest for justice in relationality and the production of knowledge in Africa. It is aimed at a constructive and sustained effort to untangle the complex relations of oppression and injustices which have marked the public sphere and governance. This is particularly true in the context of South Africa, where the legacies of apartheid oppression and expressions of domestic patriarchal kyriarchies are still evident. Participating in social structures and/or influencing the governance of the public sphere constitute some of the structural features of active political agency. It involves, among other things, the right to participate in the decision-making process in the social, economic, cultural, political and ecological sphere. It is a component of justice, in which people utilise their agency or subjectivities within and for social citizenship, public participation and/or their governance.

On governance, the public sphere and African women's agency

The articulation and assertion of African/black women's agency and black women's naming of their marginalisation in political power are counter-cultural to mainstream human sciences, particularly theological and ethical epistemologies that tend to make these absences normative. Focusing research on the agency of African women is often an ambiguous process that is often fraught with academic risks of isolation and/or censure. This is because an African woman that seeks to engender justice for all can easily be reduced to an oppositional attack on white women and/or African male academics who write about black women. It can also be taken as a dismissal of analyses of processes and generic discourses that have sought to present a common front about women's experiences in sexist and patriarchal cultures or African experiences of oppression and dispossession during colonialism and apartheid, or in the context of globalisation, particularly in its current form with its attendant abuses and marginalisation of Africans/blacks. It is therefore important to then understand how governance can be promoted in a fractured and bifurcated public sphere and how governance, as well as women's agency, can influence good/just governance that facilitates the wellbeing and fullness of life for all citizens in the public sphere.

The public sphere is used in this essay to describe a variety of spaces and expressions of governance, citizenship and politics in which people express their ontologies and insights to express themselves, formulate opinions and collaborate on processes related to their society, community and the world. The state or government is central to the concept of the public

sphere, since it is upon the sphere of governance or the creation of demo-cratic spaces that democratic societies emerge, and are maintained or nurtured. Where the freedom of citizens is limited, the ability of the public space to manage governance, and/or the agency of people also becomes limited.

The governance of the public sphere is necessary for the promotion of more effective and equitable public spheres within the nation-state in Africa and in the world. It includes the provision of frameworks for the just admini-stration and implementation of justice, including justice in the following areas:

(a)   the advance, provision and distribution of opportunities;
(b)   vibrant democratic processes;
(c)   social justice;
(d)   economic development;
(e)   the care of the earth (ecological wellbeing);
(f)   the development and creation of equitable and effective public spheres;
(g)   legitimate, free and just governance which supports citizens;
(h)   the assistance and or preferential option for the poor and marginalised, unheard and or muted voices, including those of African women;
(i)   the development and support of deliberative systems/structures that enable life (rather than collapsing social systems that condemn and dispose of African life);
(j)   the promotion of just and fair interactions between the powerless and the powerful, poor and rich and bifurcated citizens; and
(k)   the development, recognition and engagement of broad citizenship in which civil society, government and the private sectors, as well as diverse members of society, work for the betterment of society and are allowed to thrive.

In order to promote a vibrant, transformative public sphere that encourages the active agency of citizens, creative, just and life-affirming governance must be developed and nurtured. "Governance" generally refers to the exer-cise of political power in the management of the affairs of state. In its broader sense, governance entails numerous processes relating to leadership, such as the formulation of laws, policy-making, the protection of people's rights, the relations among and between the public, private and civil sectors, as well as transparency and accountability in the exercise of power. Governance can thus stretch beyond the parameters of the nation-state to include interna-tional/global relationships.

It is also important to note that, whilst some scholars want to limit the discussion of governance to its relationship with the state, other scholars have

tended to use its broader explanation, which includes the distribution of leadership or exercise of political power within and outside the government. For instance, some scholars suggest that the context of economic globalisation in the 21st century has, to a large extent, pressed human and social scientists to include governance to terms of international and multilateral relations, and transnational discourses where political power is interrogated broadly. This, it is argued, has come about because many African governments are now being pushed by the coercive, domineering and imperialistic forces of globalisation to transfer policy functions and political authority to supranational entities (e.g. the United Nations (UN), financial institutions such as the World Bank (WB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and multilateral organisations such as the Word Trade Organisation).

In the context of economic globalisation, African governments are not only pressured by the "empire" to devolve some powers to the powerful multilateral institutions such as the WTO, WB and the IMF, they are also being squeezed/pushed to hand some responsibilities sideward, to the private sector and some not-for-profit actors through neoliberal socio-economic reforms, especially liberalisation, privatisation and deregulation, etc. For instance, many African countries, including South Africa, have been heavily coerced to embark on adjustment measures, including structural adjustment programmes of the 1980s, the poverty reduction strategies, and lately, through the NEPAD processes, liberalisation and other measures to adopt governance strategies that are prescribed. Sometimes these coercive conditionalities are used to enforce implementation of neoliberal economic measures even without regard for their failures in Africa. The pressure to liberalise many responsibilities which have in the past been understood to be central to the public role of governments, has to a large extent posed its own challenges to many African countries.

When the governance of the common good is removed from the nation-state, and rests to a large extent on private entities, it creates governance contradictions for the publics that are fraught to challenges, including the pervasive marginalisation of the poor, those who fall through the cracks of life, and women in particular, as stated in the above. In contexts where the humanity, dignity and wellbeing of citizens are undermined, whether by the abrogation of responsibilities, privatisation of state functions, or the ascent of economic ideology that commercialises all life, then political agency and the quest for justice for all, and for women in particular has to be encouraged or propelled.

Agency, whether in the social, political, ecological, and economic spheres, is generally understood to entail some aspect of moral consciousness, awareness that "something is wrong somewhere and it has to be transformed". Moral agency refers to a "state or capability to determine oneself and one's own action in an individual, collective, or otherwise social

sense".[23] It describes the condition of being present or active in community despite any system which disregards or excludes this ability. It also entails the performance of socio-political, religious, ideological, philosophical selfhood or being. As a conscious state of activity or being, agency suggests a distinct yet culturally variable impulse toward self-consciousness with the intention to subvert or undermine socio-economic, ecological, gender and or political oppression. Agency is "power or potentiality for action".[24]

In ethics, agency is described as capacity for the transformation of selves in, through, and for the transformation of individuals, communities, society and or social structures that govern their lives. Young defines social structures as multi-dimensional space of differentiated social positions, systems, institutions, and or processes among which a population is distributed. "The social associations of people provide both the criterion for distinguishing social positions and the connections among them that make them elements of a single social structure."[25] A further point that she makes is that,

> Social structures are not merely the actions and interactions of differently positioned persons, drawing on the rules and resources the structures offer, take place on the basis of past actions whose collective effects mark the physical conditions of action; these actions and interactions also often have future effects beyond the immediate purposes and intentions of the actors.[26]

Agency is influenced by the ontologies of people as rationale and feeling human beings. It is also propelled by human beings' yearning or making decisions that affect their lives and or surroundings. In some situations though, agency arises out of the anger against pervasive injustices and power relations within a community, society and *politia* which generally marginalise women and others from access to the resources, processes, institutions and structures that enable life in its fullness. In other words, African women's agency is sometimes spurred by their refusal or resistance against structural injustices. Young suggests that

> Structural injustices exist when social processes put large categories of people under a systematic threat of domination or deprivation of the means to develop and exercise their capaci-

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23 Ortiz, Lisa, M. Encyclopaedia of Postmodernism (2000), 6.
24 Ryan, A. Maura "Agency" Dictionary of Feminist theologies edited Russell, L., M., and Clarkson, Shannon, J. (Kentucky, Westminster John Knox Press 1996), 4.
25 Young, Iris. Marion responsibility and global justice: a social connection Model 2006, 112.
26 Young, Iris. Marion responsibility and global justice: a social connection Model 2006, 114.

> ties, at the same time these processes enable others to dominate or have a wide range of opportunities for development and exercising their capacities. Structural injustices are a kind of moral wrong distinct from the wrongful action of an individual agent or the wilfully repressive polices of a state.[27]

Resistance to oppression and political agency by African women can also be attributed to their dissatisfaction with the passive roles that are assigned them in scholarship, public spheres and life. It is the expression of countercultures and the pursuance of alternatives to the dominant conceptualisation of governance of publics and theories of citizenship based on marginalisation, oppression, exploitation and injustices. It prompts women to explore and manifest their potentialities, epistemological insights and being in order to ensure that formal and informal publics, as well as knowledge production are productive. It is underscored by among other things, the principles of justice and the understanding that African women's identities are never outside social structures and thus require them to continually "interrogate political practices for exclusions and omissions that may be obscured by our social location".[28] This implies therefore, that agency is a component of active citizenship which stretches beyond civic duties and human relations, but also inclusive of right relations with the web-of-life, which is inextricably bound to what it means to be human.

A constructive understanding of moral agency therefore in the context of South Africa and Africa involves resistance to discourses and praxis that undermine others, no matter whether these are based on social location, place of origin, gender, sexuality, race, ability and economic status. Such an approach locates strategies of subversive representation which "challenge norms and conventions by showing how their constitution and organisation are social and hegemonic, rather than neutral or natural".[29] Agency is a critical component of the pursuance of justice whenever and wherever is not done.

The quest for justice marked by active agency involves among other things, the development of constructive cultures of creative justice and resistance to oppression. It does not simply consign those pursuing justice to adaptive mechanisms but embodies creative impulses and praxes which counter life-denying and oppressive production and reproduction, and value systems. In essence, agency is the critical and corrective knowledge production and ontological manifestations, critical of the oppressors as well as of the

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[27]   Young, Iris. Marion responsibility and global justice: a social connection Model 2006, 114.
[28]   Applebaum, Barbara., "Social justice education, moral agency and the subject of resistance", Educational Theory 54, no 1(February 2004), 59-72.
[29]   Applebaum, Barbara., "Social justice education, moral agency and the subject of resistance", Educational Theory 54, no 1(February 2004), 59-72.

internalisation of oppression that Fanon referred to as *"epidermalisation of inferiority"*,[30] by those who are marginalised, silenced or limited from being and or utilising their talents and knowledge. Agency is thus akin to what the Kenyan feminist linguist and theologian, Kanyoro describes as the "active quests for justice".

An often cited example in South Africa, which exposes agency in the public sphere especially relating to the constitution and governance of the state, relates to the attempts by women, and feminist activists and scholars to claim space, mobilise and campaign for national liberation, and mainstreaming of gender discourse for transitional arrangements for the democratisation process. One incidence that took place which attests to the quest for inclusive governance, and the pursuance for justice, including gender justice, relates to an incident that took place, during negotiations for democratisation, known to many south Africans, is told my McEwan, She writes,

> In March 1993, in a little publicised event, ANC women's activists stormed the negotiations and blocked the talks until women were allowed into the negotiations. Amazingly, all 26 parties accepted a gender quota, a decision that, as Seidmen notes, reflected the extent to which women on all sides had already raised issues of gender and representation in the construction of democracy. The result was that one in every two person team of negotiators had to be a woman, which meant that women constituted half of the negotiators' new constitution.[31]

The agency of women, and their confrontation of the sexist, patriarchal exclusion, not only ensured that, the constitution was gendered, it also propelled the different political parties that were involved in the negotiation processes, to ensure guarantees against gender and sex discrimination to be inscribed in the constitutions, albeit, with the resistance of the traditional leaders, especially, council of traditional leaders in South Africa (CONTRALESA). Equally important, is the fact that it forced the political parties represented in the negotiations to constitute the representation in ways that assured gender equality and justice.

Reflections on the agency of African women, if they are to be transformational, ought not to only be limited to the public as the private patriarchal-kyriarchies, to a large extent, often limit women's access or parti-

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[30] Frantz Fanon quoted in White, M. A. All the men are fighting for freedom, all the women are mourning their men, but some of us carried guns: Fanon's psychological perspectives on war and African women combatants Working Paper No 106 Unpublished (2002-3), 3.

[31] McEwan , Cheryl, Engendering Citizenship : Gendered spaces of democracy in South Africa 2000, 6.

cipation in the public. For example, if women want to access the public space but are exposed to high levels of violence in the home or locale, they may find it impossible or uncomfortable to speak out, hence the feminist affirmation that, the domestic impacts on the public and vice-versa.

Precisely because the "personal is political", it is also essential to examine those aspects of life, which inhibit women's agency, and thus contributes to the systematic marginalisation from the public sphere. An examination of black women's agency is in the private and public spheres is as it calls for women to be seen, understood and treated as whole people, who are diverse, and in their actual complexities as individuals, human beings, rather than as a monolithic, homogenous and undifferentiated or one of those problematic but familiar stereotypes. Reflecting on African women's agency not only asserts their full humanity, it also promotes scholarship that is not complicit to unjust representations or relationships. Keeping silent would result in the negation of African women's responsibility to proclaim justice and to resist collusion with knowledge systems and ideologies which undermine our ontology and sacredness. For the reason that stereotypical representtations and traditional conceptions of moral agency can "distort the way people interpret the basis of social inequality and what they choose to attend to take seriously, remember and act upon",[32] it is imperative to demonstrate black women's agency where such agency has been denied, especially in contexts intransigently committed to their trivialisation.

The next section in this essay therefore attempts to evaluate the ways in which African women in particular are depicted, represented and or perceived in the dominant discourses, on the public or governance in South Africa and Africa. The rationale behind this is to demonstrate the intersections of public and private experiences of marginalisation and agency, in order to demonstrate that these concepts are not always as clearly demarcated in lived contexts and they may be, when conceptualised.

Representations of African Women's Agency in the Dominant Human Sciences Discourses in/about Arica

The dominant conceptions of democracy and or citizenship have tended to separate the private and public. The public sphere is often generally perceived as the sphere of justice where everyone is treated equally, and the private is often understood as the sphere of the family where citizens live out their personal ideas and or expression of their notions of what it means to be human. This contrast between the public, private and or domestic, to a large extent, sometimes negates the fact that, in real life, the rape of a woman in a

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[32]   Applebaum, Barbara., "Social justice education, moral agency and the subject of resistance", *Educational Theory* 54, no 1(February 2004), 59-72.

home, for example, is a public or governance issue that has to be addressed by the juridical system, which is public, or using another example, the violation of the rights of a child, through for example, trafficking, or being subjected to under-age labour, is or ought to be a concern for the public. These examples, whilst not detailed, demonstrate the reason why these must be held together, like a mosaic, which differentiates but is connected. The notion of democracy and or citizenship separating the public and private as described in most social sciences literature, has also and must continue being one of the foci of feminist criticism. This is because, in spite of claims to justice and fairness for all people, women still appear to be second class citizens. This criticism has propelled the quest for multi-dimensional theories of governance, citizenship and agency of citizens which include social citizenship, civil, political etc. articulated by a number of feminist theorists.

Despite the active initiatives and agency by African women in the private and public as demonstrated to some extent in the above, and their quest for justice and for the fullness of life in their lives in Africa and South Africa, the dominant human sciences discourses have tended to negate, limit and or discount, to a large extent, their agency. This has been promoted through a depiction of African women, in male-stream and white scholarship which presents African women's agency as nominal, lacking, absent or sometimes dependent on white women or black men. As agents socialised in an age of apartheid, post-apartheid/colonial period (late 20th and 21st century), it would be impossible for African women to be unaware of, or be influenced by exclusionary racist, colonial, and sexist discourses.

An urgent concern for the social sciences in the context where the agency of African women's is discounted, or presented as lacking, absent, nominal and or inadequate, is therefore to ask, how and what strategies would be viable to allow African women (as well as others who are on the underside of production of knowledge and publics), who have previously been silenced or silent, to claim their voices, agency, spaces and publics in order to move from repression, silence and obscurity to active participants in life and public? How do human sciences and or research sites enable marginalised groups, or those whose voices have been muted for long to affirm and assert their full ontologies, creative knowledge? How might these be enabled and sustained? It would seem to me that a response to these questions would necessitate processes and openness to unearth the voices that remain neglected, marginalised or outright forgotten, such as the voices of African women, particularly "black women's voices and ways they have and continue to shape their subjectivities".[33]

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[33]   Motsemme, Nthabiseng Gendered experiences of blackness in post-apartheid South Africa August 2002 <http://www.wiserweb.wits.ac.za.

Carby notes that black women's critique of sexist or racist knowledge has not only involved us in coming to terms with the absences of black women in human sciences knowledge production and or political spheres, but it has also made African women "outraged by the ways in which it [sexist, racist and colonial discourses] has made us visible, when it has chosen to see us".[34] The tendency is often to trundle African women to the stage "only to perform as victims of barbarous, primitive practices and barbarous primitive societies."[35] This is often entailed in depicting or representations of black women in the works of mainstream and male-stream social sciences scholarship in direct or indirect ways, the views that, black women are unable to account for the changes in their lives, they are dependent on black men and white women for their liberation; they are survivalist; servant like situations; etc.

An example that can be used to demonstrate the above, is reflected by an article dealing with women's development and theology "Gender, Development and Faith". In this article, Haddad a feminist theologian in South Africa comments on the results of her empirical research and interactions with black women she was conducting research on, in Nxamalala in Vulindlela, Kwazulu Natal, South Africa. She writes that women in Vulindlela "literally attribute their survival to God. In times of dire need they are unable to ʿexplain' how they managed to provide meals for their children or to pay their school fees. For them, God provides these material needs".[36] In addition she remarks that black women are survivalists who often live their lives without fully accounting what and how their lives are sustained. For instance, she records that, one of the women shared that, "my husband passed on in 1988, I worked and I lost a job but God always gives me food to eat … I am at home, I'm not working … here are the children they go to school, but God always help me to get food to eat … Janet Nzimande, 27 may 1999, Nxamalala".[37]

One other view that is made in support of, or in limiting black women's agency in knowledge production and or full participation in citizenship, is the idea that African women are dependent, irresolute people who are unable to choose whether to be in solidarity with other feminists in the struggle against patriarchy and sexism or whether to align themselves with black men because of a shared history of racism. In their book, *Women,*

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[34]   Carby, V. Hazel. White woman listen! Black feminism and the boundaries of sisterhood. (Routledge 1997), 45.

[35]   Carby, V. Hazel., White woman listen! Black feminism and the boundaries of sisterhood. (Routledge 1997), 50.

[36]   Haddad, B. "Gender, development, and faith: the church and women's struggle to survive", Missionalia 31:3 (2003), 441.

[37]   Haddad, B. "Gender, eevelopment, and faith: the church and women's struggle to survive", Missionalia 31:3 (2003), 441-442.

society and church Kretzschmar and Van Schalkwyk make the following comment regarding black/African women,

> Black women are often faced with the difficult choice of either seeking support from white women (gender loyalties) to overcome oppression, or seeking the support of black men (racial loyalties). If black women take sides with white women, their men accuse them of "diluting the struggle", or "betraying the cause". If they take sides with black men, they are faced with the question whether a patriarchal society will release power into the hands of women.[38]

Kretzschmar and Van Schalkwyk in a covert manner present black women as indecisive and unable to liberate themselves.

They further ask,

> [S]hould black women in South Africa, for example, seek strategic alliances with white, "coloured" and Indian women, and jointly expose and resist gender discrimination and abuse, or should they look to black African men to grant them full equality, both in law and practice?[39]

Subsuming the experiences of African women within the works of African male-stream scholarship under the guise of generic language use such as "man" to refer to human beings and in the works of white women's or feminist scholarship continues to perpetuate their marginalisation from the public's, and a perpetual domestication of their works, thoughts and being. It also creates an impression that black women are not moral agents on their own.

Apart from presenting black/African women's agency as nominal, dependent, as inactive in their transformation or subjectivities, dominant human sciences discourses present black women's places as limited to the domestic, private and thus not publics. This is eloquently articulated by Carby when she states that "ideologies of black female domesticity and motherhood have been constructed through their employment (chattel position) as domestics and surrogate mothers to white families rather than in relation to their own families".[40] In South Africa, for example, the limiting of

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[38]   Kretzschmar, Louise & Van Schalkwyk, Women, society and church" (University of South Africa 2003), 36.

[39]   Kretzschmar, Louise & Van Schalkwyk, Women, society and church" (University of South Africa 2003), 35.

[40]   Carby, V. Hazel. White woman listen! Black feminism and the boundaries of sisterhood. (Routledge 1997), 47.

the agency of African women to the domestic sphere, and of white settler women to domestic governance, are evident in the lingering image of an "iconic figure of the white madam and her garden boys and the maids remains a forceful image in both the past and the present".[41]

One other prism in which black women are portrayed is through the imagery of the suffering matriarch. Motsemme observes for example that, during the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the TRC privileged African/black women's experiences as victims. This, she asserts, was apparent in Antjie Krog's book, *Country of my skull.* In this book, Krog declared that "she was in awe of this African woman who cares endlessly… sitting behind the microphone, dressed in a beret or *kopdoek* and her Sunday best, everybody recognises her. Truth has become the woman. Her voice distorted behind her rough hand has undermined man as the source of truth yet nobody knows her".[42]

In summary, stereotypical and or the negation of African women's agency by the dominant human sciences discourses contribute in the following:

(a)   reinforcing the gross stereotypes which negate their vitality, veracity and the diverse experiences they go through in life;

(b)   encourage static understandings of African women's experiences and subjectivities;

(c)   distort and entrench the negative imagery of black woman;

(d)   obscures the acknowledgement of the complicity of those in the mainstream to process of injustices and oppression;

(e)   and disables social sciences scholarship from being engaged and organic, in the sense of addressing the silences and marginal discourses of those who have systematically dehumanised and or relegated to the underside of knowledge construction and praxes and public.

Addressing the negative representations of African women's agency

Heldke suggests that writers who are over-privileged, such as white feminist theological or ethical scholars in South Africa and African males ought to "do more than read and report on the ideas of others. They should begin to unlearn the belief and value systems that make them feel as though their over-privileged positions are 'natural and inevitable'".[43] This is so that they

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[41]   Motsemme, Nthabiseng Gendered experiences of blackness in post-apartheid South Africa August 2002 <http://www.wiserweb.wits.ac.za.

[42]   Krog quoted in Motsemme, Nthabiseng Gendered experiences of blackness in post-apartheid South Africa August 2002 <http://www.wiserweb.wits.ac.za.

[43]   Lisa , Heldke., On being a responsible traitor: a primer (Routledge 1998), 93.

can begin to deal with their complicity with oppression. Evading an evaluation of privilege, by negating or discounting the agency of black women are not constructive and do not contribute to the pursuance of justice in production of knowledge and the wellbeing of humanity as they are, they are grounded in powerful ideological structures that ensure that people, those who have no prejudice or intention to harm "are innocent of any responsibility in sustaining systems that constitute and marginalize others".[44] This, she argues, is important for cultivating and agency of solidarity with those who live and are denied their fullness by injustices and oppression in the quest for justice. It is also important for the promotion of radical African feminism which is predicated on "opposition to all forms of oppression including class exploitation, racism, patriarchy, homophobia, anti-immigration prejudice, and imperialism".[45] This is because "gendered patterns of exclusions interact with other axes of social division such as class, race, disability, sexuality and age in ways which can be either multiplicative or contradictory, and which shift over time".[46]

Motsemme argues that negative portrayals of black women which refuse to ground and contextualise their experiences of marginalisation by an oppressive system, and disconnects them by presenting them as individuals and or strong people who can endure suffering and be pitied, is destructive as it exploits "black female trauma and strategically uses it to construct a nation born out of tears".[47] This portrayal, then spurs Motsemme to ask:

> What kind of truth is a black woman's truth? Is it one that is negotiated, consensual and collusive with patriarch or a women's truth defined on its own terms? [She contends that] ... Simply elevating the black women's voice to truth fails to open the production of knowledge that deepens our understanding of her historical expulsion. Fixing and framing her feminine in this way fetishes and institutionalizes her marginality, once again eroding her agency.[48]

Stereotypical representations of African women in human sciences represent what Donalson refers to as "epistemic violence". According to Donaldson,

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[44] Applebaum, Barbara., "Social justice education, moral agency and the subject of resistance", *Educational Theory* 54, no 1(February 2004), 59-72.

[45] M.A. All the men are fighting for freedom, all the women are mourning their men, but some sf us carried guns: Fanon's psychological perspectives on war and African women combatants Working Paper No 106 Unpublished 2002-3, 6.

[46] Lister, Ruth *Citizenship: Toward a feminist synthesis* 1997, 38.

[47] Motsemme, Nthabiseng *Gendered experiences of blackness in post-apartheid South Africa* August 2002 <http://www.wiserweb.wits.ac.za.

[48] Motsemme, Nthabiseng *Gendered experiences of blackness in post-apartheid South Africa* August 2002 <http://www.wiserweb.wits.ac.za.

"epistemic violence describes one of colonialism's most insidious yet predictable effects: violating the fundamental way that a person or people know themselves".[49] Discourses which stereotype 'the other' tend to function in similar way to colonising and colonial ideology which tends to "camouflage the violence and brutality of colonialism by sugar-coating it as a form of social mission".[50] Epistemic violence which discounts and undermines the agency of black women, confronts black women in human science, particularly ethics and theology, to rethink and reconstruct conceptions of black women's moral agency in their diverse forms. They, according to Dube, asserts that "colonizing frameworks are still, by and large, in place and unless one deliberately chooses to be a decolonizing feminist, one is likely to operate within these oppressive paradigms and consequently reproduce them".[51]

As it has been stated before, the quest for justice and transformative epistemologies by African women occurs within the context of a "struggling states" where citizenship is bifurcated. As Mamdani has rightly pointed out, in spite of the postcolonial states' attempts to deracialised civic identity and promote civic citizenship which stopped recognising any difference based on race or place of origin, it continued to promote and "reproduce African identity as ethnic, and therefore resulting in a "double bifurcated citizenship; one civic the other ethnic".[52]

While Mamdani makes a good point that enables us to understand the marginalisation of "the other", based on ethnicity, place of origin and as well, on the promotion of dual governance, that is, civil and customary law in the formation of citizenship and or state he remains silent about the marginalisation of women in citizenship. The silence regarding the marginalisation of women from citizenship through customary and civil law, with its consequences of bifurcation, ought to be attended to by feminist scholarship, as Mama, McFadden, Mtintso and others have stated in the earlier sections of this article.

In South Africa, key institutions and organisations which have promoted the momentum of ensuring that gender justice in the public is evident, (at least in the law) are the Commission on gender equality, the Human Rights Commission. Although they are state sanctioned institutions, their work is collaboratory and strategic, and thus help in monitoring government policies to ensure that the law is not contravened, either in the private spaces

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[49] Donaldson, L.E. The Breast of Columbus: a political anatomy of postcolonialism and feminist religious discourse (Routledge 2002), 51.

[50] Kwok, Puilan. Unbinding our feet: saving brown women and Feminist Religious Discourse (Routledge 2002), 62.

[51] Dube, Musa, W. Postcoloniality, feminist spaces, and religion. (Routledge 2002)104-105

[52] Mahmood, Mamdani Preliminary Thoughts on the Congo crisis 1999:55 in Social Text, 60, vol 17 no 3, fall 1999, 53-62.

or public. Equally, there have emerged numerous advocacy and or policy making and monitoring organisations, such as the women's budget or the people's budget initiatives, which promote the flourishing and expansion of access to public spaces and or positions that women would otherwise be excluded or were excluded from, thus ensuring that meaningful participation and activism is understand as a component or process of extending and enriching democracy.

In contexts which clearly undermine and marginalise the production process of knowledge and ontologies of black and or African women in the private and publics, what is the role of human sciences, what methodologies are resourceful in spurring political agency and citizenship that is enabling and relevant to the fullness of life for Africans, their communities and ecology? What must African women do? Ought African women or feminist scholarship to limit itself to naming the ills of racism and or patriarchal kyriarchy which undermine their production and how would they do this without being caricatured or limited into small epistemological boxes to production of knowledge on gender and race only? How do we create "[a] worldview, a consciousness, an identity, a standpoint that … not only … opposes dehumanization but a movement which enables creative, expansive self-actualization? Opposition is not enough … the process of becoming subjects emerges as one comes to understand how structures of domination work in one's own life, as one develops critical thinking and critical consciousness, as one invents new, alternative habits of being, and resists from that marginal space of difference inwardly defined."[53]

The task of African feminist scholarship, whether on governance, the public and or private spheres, ought to claim and affirm their agency. Freedom and justice are often never granted, or sold, but they are claimed through actions of constructive transformation, corrections, resistance, and subjectivity. In the section below, we identify some of the ways in which African women claim their subjectivity, actively through public and small scale advocacy claim the private and public spaces and contest ideologies, practices and knowledge systems that mute and or discount their being and their scholarship.

Claiming and affirming African women's agency and justice

In the discussions on the inherited discriminatory practices and or life-denying aspects of citizenship in the post-colonial state, there are some concerns by African feminist scholars that in spite of the formal political processes, including democracy or votes, their deficiency is that they do not

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[53]   Bell Hooks quoted by Espin, Oliva *On knowing you are the unknown: women of color constructing psychology* (The Harrington Park Press 1995), 129.

to a large extent confer substantive political equality for all, including minorities and women. They tend to become rituals which continue to disproportionately contribute to vibrancy and viable social and or political sphere. African women recognise the importance of involvement at both the public, private, local, levels in order to challenge the remoteness of formal and or public politics.

It is precisely because of the reasons of exclusion, silencing and oppression which have been outlined in the various sections of this article that African feminist scholarship must problematise life-denying aspects of the abuses of the publics or political power and stereotyping of agency of African women in both male-stream scholarship or white women's scholarship in order to claim their own agency as scholars, citizens and full human beings. These include, expanding the sources of knowledge, creating knowledge systems attentive to the needs, experiences and lives of Africans, and of specific groups, including women, overcoming the divide of exclusion, and bifurcations based on gender, race, ethnicity, place of origin, social status, et cetera. By being active agents, African women provide their "self-expression" as subjects and not objects of history, as well as active players in the public and private spheres.

The notion of agency among the majority of African feminists/women is comprehensive, multi-layered exercise which "incorporates notions of rights and responsibilities as well as democratic accountability and political action, through both formal and informal channels".[54] An understanding of agency such as the above is able to overcome the polarisation or binaries of "the public-private", personal, political, formal and non-formal democracy, but as the interconnectedness of the web-of-life, in which private and public spheres influence and impact on each other. It includes historical, political and apolitical expressions of agency in public life, including politics, in ways that reflect the cultural, historical, contextual, ecological and contextual power dynamics and or issues between and amongst the or different social groups in society. Its creative potential does not only lie in contesting the limiting of African women's participation in the public sphere only, but in engenders active involvement constructive epistemologies, particularly social/human sciences. It aims at correcting internalised notions of oppressions which are entangled in colonising or colonial knowledge production in Africa, by destabilising sexist and racist knowledge systems, as centres and sources of African publics and or knowledge and it claims space in order to promote multiple and diverse voices in existing scholarship on and about Africa and the world.

As rightly stated, African women are not just docile objects, they are creative and active in contesting life-denying contexts and social structures.

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[54]   Lister, Ruth Citizenship: Toward a feminist synthesis 1997, 38.

One of the modes of being which is contested by their scholarship is the usurpation of the public space by the non-democratic, managerialist governances of the social and or public spaces and challenges the ascent of market supremacy over and above other values of life, such as wholeness and well-being, democratic participation, just and fair systems, processes and mechanisms of using and or sharing ecological resources and their benefits. Mama for example, states, it is important for African scholars to begin to analyse the depletion of the powers of the state. She states, "the 'market forces' quietly deplete the sovereignty of the state and corporate cultures infuse the public and the civic spheres of organisation with the style and ethos of a well knowledge 'global' fast food outfit, applying the same management systems, procedures and practices".[55]

African feminist or women's scholarship should therefore not be limited to the political sphere only, but must address the depletion of the state, alluded to in the above. This is due to the fact that, social goods such as education, health, housing et cetera, which are necessary for the wellbeing of African communities have tended to be compromised by the ascent of the market in the political economic planning of many countries. The result, according to brown is the restriction of access to the public or to the necessary resources that enable life. Instead, the public becomes the spaces or place for converting public goods and benefits to private hands, via a number of ways, including education.

The resistance of corrective discourse and praxes, such as reparations discourses, justice, community, wellbeing and ecological justice in liberal discourses, and the promotion of individualism, merit, which are undergirded by patronising ideologies, particularly by economic globalisation or the market system, also restrict African women's holistic access to the political sphere or justice. For instance Brown makes the following claim in concurrence to the vies stated in the above, when he says,

> The ideology of meritocracy has been superseded by the ideology of parentocracy; that is the market system of education dressed in the language of choice, freedom, competition and standards ... [with] education increasingly based on the wealth and wishes of parents rather than the individual abilities and efforts to students ... the emphasis on the market reforms in education reflects the constricting or constraining of access to public participation based on positional competition or conflict in a climate of insecurity and competitive individualism and

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[55]   Mama, Amina Challenging Subjects: Gender and power in African context 2001, 9.

concern about educational standards and public access espe-
cially for the poor and women generally get delimited.[56]

This situation also functions as or produces hierarchically delimited social
and or political spaces which limit and or apportions opportunities for access
or space in the public sphere. This situation consequently leads to the usurpa-
tion of the public or market space by the social élites who already play by
these rules, and who may not be willing to level the paying field.

The entrenched notion of the winner takes it all, that the ascent of the
market in governance and public planning in African states have promoted, is
also one of the forces of exclusions and marginalisation of women from the
public which require more rigorous and elaborate alternatives. The conver-
sion of the public and of politics to notions of private property is clearly
observable in the forces of economic globalisation which generally make it
difficult to promote social democratic alternatives to access and transforma-
tion of the public for the wellbeing of all citizens, including women.

The commodification of education, social services etc has been mono-
polised by the private sphere, a phenomenon that has to be attended to or
creatively addressed if women's agency and their quest for full life is to make
sense in Africa. This is primarily because, in the context of South Africa,
where neo-liberal prescriptions on governance have been applied, the results
have tended to exacerbate the exclusion of women, particularly the poor,
from governance and the distribution of resources that enable life. McEwan
rightly observes,

> The harsh economic reality in South Africa could be con-
> sidered a diminution of women's citizenship rights and anti-
> democratic, with some groups unable to participate beyond the
> ballot box. It could also be argued that unless these structural
> problems are addressed, democracy in South Africa will have
> little meaning to both men and women alike. There are had
> facts to support such contentions. Unemployment in parti-
> cularly hits women hardest. In 1997, 78 percent of African
> women and 65 percent of African men aged between 15 and 65
> did not have a job.[57]

African women have stated that citizenship and the public sphere encompass
more than formal political rights, and thus the acknowledgement of barriers
of socio-political, economic, religious exclusion with informally and formally

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[56]   Brown, Phillip, The Globalisation of positional competition? 2000, 643.
[57]   McEwan, Cheryl, Engendering citizenship: gendered spaces of democracy in South Africa
2000, 8.

exclude women, and certain groups should be tackled. In addition, they have not limited their agency to the call for gender justice only but substantive and broad notions and or expressions of justice in governance and in the public sphere. This is because justice is important in promoting non-exploitative, just and fair equitable sharing of resources and knowledge. It encourages the creation and promotion of the respect of the other. It is also central and essential to the sustenance of African communities and African ecologies.

Justice has variety of philosophical, social and ethical/moral expressions. It refers to a multiplicity and plurality of values. It includes concepts such as, fairness, freedom, liberty, equality, community, wisdom, impartiality and egalitarian relationships, freedom of opportunity, equality of benefits and equality of participation in societal life. Justice can also refer to, a variety of forms of sharing and distributing the material and ecological resources within and between societies. As well, it may also include the ideas, procedures, mechanisms and strategies that are used by societies to allocate social goods to all members of society.

Within the discourses of ethics, justice, agency and governance to a large extent, are understood as interwoven or interrelated concepts which allow citizenry to thrive, whilst the nation-state protects their being and their ecology. This implies that, not only the promotion of social and political participation is important, but the emancipation and freedom of humanity to pursue life and express their being are assured. Equally related to justice and governance, is the recognition that the nation-state, citizenry and their flourishing are related to the flourishing of their ecologies/earth. Put differently, the good governance of society will understand justice as an essential condition for the exercise of agency and freedom. Justice does not limit its concern with the present. It also concerns itself with the future and thus demonstrating an inter-generational threshold.

Just governance of the public in Africa facilitates constructive and harmonious relationships of citizenry and the state, civil society, and the private sector, and ensures that decisions about the meaning of life are aimed at the fullness of life for all, and not their marginalisation, oppression or injustice. When, for instance, communities and or life are threatened, justice seeks strategies, guidelines, principles and or value systems which set the legal and operational limits of life-denying activities, ideologies within the public. The intersection of governance of the public and the agency of women in the public, are justice concerns that entail philosophical and value systems including the moral claims that there is an overarching moral imperative for human beings to pursue what is "ecologically fitting and socially just, and to do so in such a way that each is supporting of each other"[58]

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[58]   Bakken et al (1995: xvi).

Conclusion

African women's scholarship encourages justice, multiplicity of voices and representations of women as "justice is undermined by domination not multiplicity".[59] Moreover, active quests for change, justice and multiplicity and equality do not centre only on "the oppressive situations which we [African women] seek to escape, but that piece of the oppressor which is planted deep within each of us, and which knows only the oppressors tactics, the oppressor's relationship".[60] Precisely because race and gender representations are contradictory for many African women, they remain an existential, ontological, political and socio-economic thorn, in the socio-political landscape of Africa which must be tackled to advance constructive transformation. African "women do not want to be attached onto human sciences and the publics as 'exotic sideshow',"[61] and or in tokenistic manner as colourful diversions to "real" problems. Human sciences have to be transformed they are to produce life-giving, constructive and ecologically sound knowledge systems, that seek the wellbeing and common good for all Africans. This has the potential to take place if African women are known, treated and respected "as equals in the task of building a new world for humanity. If we continue to be treated as objects when acknowledged at all, we will never be known by others and even perhaps by not even fully by ourselves.[62]

It is our contention that there is more to African women's agency and production of knowledge as well as public presence than it is accounted for in mainstream and male-stream dominant human sciences discourses. African women's academe and scholarship is thus, one of the strategies and or tools of means to re-define and challenge mainstream cultural production. The act of speaking out and reclaiming our agency is the manifestation that frees the creativity and contributions of women in the private and publics. It is an active expression of rage against injustice, humiliation and dehumanisation we have and continue to face. This, Kanyoro suggests, is important because "much of what has passed for theology from Africa for years was written either by men of all races or white women researchers ... The first hand experience of African women is still untold"[63] and that which has been told is not always listened to fully. Justice and agency therefore are resourceful in acknowledging the helpful tension between nihilism and hope in an attempt

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[59]   Flax, Jane. Displacing women: toward an ethics of multiplicity (Routledge 1998), 153.

[60]   Lorde, Audre., Age, race, class and sex: women redefining difference, in Frazer, E, Honsby, J., and Lovibond, S. (eds) Ethics: A feminist Reader Oxford: Blackwell (1992) 220

[61]   Aziz, Razia., Feminism and the challenge of racism (Routledge 1997), 70.

[62]   Espin, Oliva On knowing you are the unknown: women of color constructing psychology (The Harrington Park Press 1995), 129.

[63]   Kanyoro, Musimbi, "African women's quest for justice: a review of African Women's theology" Pacific Journal of theology no.1 (1996), 1.

to encourage emancipatory and transformative discourses which seek justice for all women and men in Africa.

Mcfadden beautifully conjures the importance of African feminist quest for justice in the human sciences, academe and political life when she says,

> African women do not want to be pitied; they do not want to be studied and interrogated as victimized subjects whose agency is rarely acknowledged, let alone politically supported, at the global level. What afraid women have wanted for the past half century since independence is the opportunity to create their futures and to define their own since independence is the opportunity to craft their own futures to define their own destinies ... cleaning up the mess of the past three hundred years of supremacist rule ... can not be easy or pleasant task however it is an opportunity that women are making the most of, a movement that is changing their lives forever.[64]

This has implied that, African women have spoken out, contested, acted in solidarity and spurred their agency as subjects and not objects. Subjectivity, has broadly been understood to include among others, the act of articulating and protecting one's being and that of African communities and biodiversity, a consciousness against all forms of oppression and exploitation and marginalisation and the search for justice, dignity, wellness and wellbeing for Africans, humanity and ecology.

This essay has sought to contextualise the relevance of the governance of the public sphere in Africa, by using as its framework, the evaluation of the roles in the public spheres, as well as the portrayal of African women's agency in mainstream social sciences. It provided examples of some of the dominant stereotypes which limit, undermine and discount African women's, agency. This was followed by the socio-ethical analyses of the impacts of negative stereotyping of African women's agency. Following this, the author identified strategies, processes and ways in which African women in the academe claim, reclaim and affirm their agency in their daily lives and in knowledge production. The essay was also conscious that a discussion of women's human agency might run the risk of presenting women as though they are homogenous, monolithic and the same, and thus reiterate the importance of avoiding universalistic generalisations.

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[64]   Mcfadden 2005:17 quoted in white 2003, 25.

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