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## **A struggle for liberation**

### ***Discussing concepts of African Feminism in Theory and Literature***

#### **Abstract**

This review deals with the topic of academic research about African feminist debates. By dividing the paper into three chapters it examines theories and methodologies, resulting with research gaps. It will be emphasised that the notion of gender research is by no means unified throughout the globe, but rather a subject to dynamic challenges and interrelated dependencies. African feminism, or feminisms as argued along the paper, confronts the notion of transnational decontextualisation and unification of feminist research and activism, seeking to establish a framework to contribute its own distinctly unique experiences and findings for the overall goal of gender equality in modern societies.

#### *1. Introduction*

The process of globalisation has opened up a variety of ways of interaction and interrelation, which affect and shape modern societies in their very foundations by forming new transnational networks and institutions. These developments go hand in hand with the construction and reconstruction of identities in response to global trends. The old established power and opportunity, in terms of societal options, structures work and transform on a global level, especially due to the rising impact of non-governmental and social formations. Among the later, women's movements are among the most crucial and mobilised ones, having the agenda of a gender-based reorganisation that is an integral part of global structural change itself. The term 'feminism' is a purposeful reconsideration of identities, since it refers to the women's activist strive for gender equality through fundamental social change (Ferree 2006). 'Internationally, feminists argue that (...) the gendered social subject is never simply "woman" or "man", but always a gendered subject with other overlapping identities (...).

These multiple identities highlight the different experiences of women and the power relations that are naturalised within the feminist mainstream' (Hendricks; Lewis 1994: 61).

However, the recent years have also brought up discussions about the understanding and perception of feminist identity in the Global North and Global South. While European researchers address whole areas under unified terms of categorization, they in fact reproduce 'Eurocentric notions of culture under the sign of global feminism' (Shohat 2001: 1269).

Exemplary for this, the African continent is, from a western academic point of view, often united in a stereotypical perspective of a multitude of countries solely struggling with their postcolonial heritage and 'Third World' status. The actual efforts of African feminist researchers towards restructuring the patriarchal and breaking down deadlocked structures by creating a transnational forum and raising awareness for the concerns of specific African gender perspectives is often placed into side frames of secluded area studies (Shohat 2001). With African regions compiling their own, diverse backgrounds and social structures for generating goals and opportunities for feminism and women's movements, the paper argues along the premise that any kind of contributing gender analysis 'has to begin from the premise that genders, sexualities, races, classes, nations, and even continents exist not as hermetically sealed entities but, rather, as part of a set of permeable, interwoven relationships' (Shohat 2001: 1269).

It must be noted, that the following review leaves out regional specifics of African societies and the distinct features of their feminist movements and rather intends to frame the discussion within a global context. With regard to the multiplicity and diversity of concepts, the review of African feminist thought in academic research is the main theme of this paper that shall be observed from a broader perspective and be detached from western notions. Focusing on the sub-saharan African countries as a cultural entity, the following chapter will review theories and concepts, methodologies and research gaps within the respective field of studies, including the work of scholars of African and non-African origin. With the intention to outline the African feminist landscape as broad as possible, it has been decided not to focus on distinctive main authors, because it would in many ways disregard the complexity of the research area. Furthermore the paper does not discuss the content within a temporal chronological order, but rather focuses on contextual conjunctions, since African feminisms have been emerging parallelly and are strongly interconnected.

However, historical approaches are exceedingly important to understand the notion of gender in an African context, especially when taking into account the colonial past and its crucial impacts on African societies, and African women in particular. The pan-Africanist theorist and former president of Burkina Faso Thomas Sankara has addressed this topic by referring to the African women as 'the slaves of a slave society' (Sankara 1987). Nevertheless, it is by no means an objective of this paper to picture the female population of Africa as helpless victims of structural injustice, but rather to introduce their own strategies of liberation and the

creation of a feminism *sui generis*. In contradistinction to the Western and African American feminism, African women have developed alternative concepts to find their own ways of liberation, not only with regards to female discrimination within their countries of origin, but also concerning the categorisation within the old established forms of feminism that they have been subordinated to. In many African languages, there is no synonym for the term ‘feminism’ that could be regarded as an equivalent to the Western definition. However, African women do indeed practice the concept of group activities among females, that is oriented towards the common good in terms of social, religious, political and cultural concerns. There, women find solidarity support for instance with family disputes or financial issues (Kolawole 1997: 27). These networks of women constitute the foundation of African feminisms, without allowing it to label them as ‘feminist’ in the classic, western understanding.

## *2. Theoretical approaches and key concepts of African feminisms*

The following chapter will outline findings regarding the theoretical framework of African feminism. When reflecting upon the theoretical framework it is first and foremost important to clarify that it would be actually more precise to speak about African feminisms in the plural form, since there is no such thing as a uniform or standardized ‘African feminism’ that all concerned commonly agree on.

The first part of the chapter discusses the influential role of *economic development* and *patriarchy* in order to contextualize the different theoretical approaches of African feminism. It will unfold main characteristics of these concepts and examine the role they play within the respective field of study. While working out the main theories, different perspectives were taken into consideration. The next section will then examine different theoretical approaches that persistently occur in African feminist literature. As a first step, it is relevant to take a look at *African feminisms in relation to Western feminism*, since the Eurocentric understanding of Feminism has been subject of controversial discussions. As a next step the notions of *Transnational and Black Feminism* shall be explained. Even though the approach was originally developed by African American feminists it provides an important groundwork for African feminisms. In the final stages the chapter examines an African feminist theory, which aims to set itself apart from the already established forms of feminism and the post-colonial framework. The theoretical concept of *Womanism*, introduces a new

name to deliberately distance itself from the term 'feminism', which is associated with the old established Eurocentric perspectives. Throughout the chapter the analysis of the main literature in African feminism will provide with a global overview of how the debate around African feminisms is being addressed.

## *2.1 Key features that influence African Feminist Thought*

### *2.1.1 Patriarchy and long-established institutions*

Institutions like the female circumcision, forced marriage without a fair divorce law or polygyny are still ingrained in many African societies, even if many countries are making efforts to put a stop to these patriarchal structures. However, campaigns against female oppression and feminist concepts that aim at a liberated living situation for women are often exposed to mockery and political persecution (Arndt 2001: 24). Men, who are in favor of polygyny, argue that monogamy is imposed on the African people and in fact 'imported from European culture in an attempt to make women equal to men' (Ly 2014: 36). Especially the autonomously developed transformatory and radical feminist African concepts vehemently challenge the patriarchal hierarchies and structures in African societies, describing them as the 'root cause of oppression of women in all spheres of life' (Phiri 2004: 16).

According to Allan Johnson, patriarchal societies are characterised by three main aspects. Firstly they are shaped by a male domination, meaning that the man plays the most influential and decisive role within the society. Secondly, patriarchal structures imply control by means of violence while at the same time idealising the male notions of protection and supervision. Thirdly, male attributes are commonly regarded as more valuable, which can eventually be reinforced by the media and public opinion by shifting their focus on men mostly (Gray 2013). Furthermore, male African politicians partly adopted western patriarchal notions to restrict women's rights or female involvement in the public sphere. It is argued that Traditional African approaches would have included women more in economic and political activities. As a consequence, the 'New feminism' appears to be rejected by most African governments, since their vacancies are still mostly dominated by men (Mikell 1997: 333f).

By examining the history of humanity, Diop's (1959/1990) outlines that African countries maintained matriarchal societies simply because of the naturally rich environment. Within this concept, women and men perceive each other in a non-hierarchical complementarity.

Another feature of an Afrocentric perspective is the high appreciation of motherhood, which he connects to a loving and caring role that can also be transferred to men (Dove 1998: 520f). Nevertheless, African-feminist Authors consider that women should be given the opportunity to define themselves not only through motherhood and being a wife. It must be noted however, that it is not an aim of African feminists to ignore their own socio-cultural roots. The often unfair realities that they have experienced, accompanied by the knowledge of the respective cultural identity that they were born into, have led African feminist scholars and writers to develop their very own ways of liberation. Generally dealing critically with the cultural, political and religious backgrounds and norms of their countries of origin, they also insist on the idea, that 'African tradition' shouldn't be reduced to the stereotype of female circumcision or polygyny (Arndt 2001: 25).

### *2.1.2 Economic development*

Over the course of the last years there has been an intensified debate about the relevance of economic investing in African women and girls. During the Women Deliver Global Conference 2016, Dean Karlan, professor of Economics at Yale University, defended the assertion that an increasing amount of micro credits to women would help to solve a large amount of what is referred to as 'third world women problems'. However, this perspective is once more mainly representing the opinion of Western institutions, such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, as it reflects their economic and political objectives. In this context, many women's organizations and movements are risking to become accomplices of masculine or elitist institutions, being absorbed by a patriarchal and capitalist system, which steps away from feminist goals (Lewis 2012: 9).

Concerning this matter, Theo Sowa, CEO of the African Women's Development Fund, assertively stated that without Women's Rights any development project is a vain attempt of improvement. She argues against the perception of African women as victims or mere recipients of 'western aid' and criticises the lack of acknowledgement from the North towards all of the outcomes of community work (Sowa 2016). According to Lewis, this approach is solely designed to increase the productivity of African women in relation to a global economy that is promoted by patriarchy and capitalist agendas. Palmer takes a similar perspective by stating that gender is constantly taken into account to integrate it within an economic framework (Lewis 2012: 5). Pepe Roberts claims, that the primary focus on the interconnection between women and capitalism fails to portrait the whole dimension of

economic development as long as it leaves aside women's subordination to men on the labour market (Turshen 2010). In fact, capitalism profits from the social construction of the woman as a 'domestic housewife', because it structurally legitimises the fact that they are being chronically underpaid (Hesse-Biber 2012: 14). Undoubtedly, patriarchal structures and neocolonialism have been reinforced by a profit-oriented globalisation process that is shaped by neoliberal economic policies and further increasing the imbalance of powers (Bahati 2009: 270).

*'While gendered divisions and inequalities already existed in pre-colonial African societies to varying extents, the colonial superimposition of Western patriarchy and capitalism widened the gender gaps and increasingly oppressed indigenous women'* (Bahati 2009: 267).

Especially the Marxist-oriented feminists do not only challenge the gender dispositions in African societies, but rather include all transformation processes of societal structures. Especially the concept of the so-called triple oppression, which was introduced by African American feminists, constitutes a main point of discussion. The term triple oppression refers to the trinity of race, socioeconomic status and gender as the base structure of an intentional radical change of social and economic disparities and unfair structures. However, the Marxist approach is often criticised to be not applicable to African feminist objectives, because the African socio-historical background is too complex to be explained in a reductionist manner. Coming from countries that have experienced colonialist arbitrariness, followed by neo-colonial military regimes, poverty and years of war, African feminist thought generally opposes the cultural imperialist models that are coming from the West (Arndt 2001: 26).

## *2.2 African feminism in relation to Western feminism*

To a great extent African feminisms distance themselves from Euro-American concepts of feminism, and 'accuse the latter of ethnocentrism, racism, and a blind transfer of Western notions of emancipation and liberation to Africa' (Shirin 2006: 141). The feminist writer Amina Mama criticises Western feminism's claim for universality, particularly with regard to the colonial past, where Europe induced a 'four-hundred-year history of violence on women before it judiciously posed as a heroic protector and uplifter of women arriving in the colonies' (ibid. 141). African feminisms comprehensively demand the acknowledgement of

the 'specificity of the context of issues pertaining to the lives and choices of African women' (ibid. 140). The distinction between the Western understanding of feminism and African feminisms must be emphasised, as their ideologies and their objectives diverge vastly. The Western understanding of feminine ideals, such as the 'power woman' or the conception of motherhood are far from representing realities of African gender identities. Polygyny is another example of the differing socio-cultural perceptions of African countries and the West. Whereas some African feminists acknowledge especially the socioeconomic dimension that polygyny has, Western feminism tenaciously condemns this practice (Shirin 2006: 141).

According to that Oyeronke Oyewumi also criticises European and American conceptualizations by taking up the notion of 'gender' itself. She argues that the concept has western origins and it will therefore not be useful in an African context, stating that interpretations that refer to Africa must evolve out of an African context. This idea can be further explained picking up the concept of the nuclear family. In an Euro/American framework it represents the foundation of gender hierarchies as they are organizing and structuring the family. However, the nuclear family as a Euro/American concept is not applicable to african notions of family (Oyewumi 2002: 2). Furthermore, Chandra Talpade Mohanty elaborates the main critique that African feminisms are built around the notions of Western feminism, referring to the fact that Western feminism reduces fundamental complexities and conflicts. Thus, lives of women of different classes, religions, cultures, races and castes are homogenized and systematized, which goes hand in hand with the oppression of women in 'the Third World' (Mohanty 1986: 335). Mohanty insists on challenging the notion of 'women' as a homogeneous category of analysis (Mohanty 1986: 338). She defines the perception of 'third world' women as:

*'A group or category are automatically and necessarily defined as: religious (read "not progressive"), family-oriented (read "traditional"), legal minors (read "they-are-still-not-conscious-of-their-rights"), illiterate (read "ignorant"), domestic (read "backward") and sometimes revolutionary (read "their-country-is-in-a-state-of-war-they-must-fight!")' (Mohanty 1986: 352).*

The ahistorical and acontextual approach of what it means to be a woman is based upon a generalized notion of subordination instead of 'analytically demonstrating the production of women as socio-economic political groups within particular local contexts' (Mohanty 1986:

344). She finally argues, that there is a need for local political analysis which generates theoretical categories individually (Mohanty 1986: 345).

### *2.3 Transnational and Black Feminism*

Black feminist movements originally arose in the United States and can be regarded as an example for the questioning of 'all systems of domination' (Boyce Davies 2014: 82), uniting the struggle of class, race and gender at the same time. According to Frances White it is this unity of both marginalisation - gender and race - that drives the political force of this movement (White 2001: 25-80). Furthermore, Boyce Davies points out that there have been several examples of women, who co-identified with pan-Africanism and feminism within the course of the 20th century. They 'lived the conjuncture' (Boyce Davies 2014: 79) by for instance traveling to the first Pan-African Congresses in the early 20th century, maintaining transnational networks as well as campaigning for women's issues in their home countries. Therefore, Boyce Davies argues to not only place them in a pan-african feminist framework but also consider them as transnational black feminists (ibid. 78-81). Black feminism focuses more specifically on the role of race as an organising principle that interacts with other forms of structured inequality to shape the social construction of gender (Ampofo et al. 2008: 2). Still, it is related with transnational feminism since it investigates how race interacts with national and transnational border crossing (ibid. 2). Boyce argues, that 'transnational feminism arises from two basic assumptions: that working across borders and cultures is an essential feature of our contemporary world, and that our own specific locations and identities must be part of the bases of our analyses' (Boyce Davies 2014: 90).

The interest of the academic world in black women and women of colour that are dealing with the special features of women's lives from various backgrounds through different perspectives on gender, race and class is steadily increasing (ibid. 89). In the context of globalization, progressive feminism needs to take into account transnationality and helps to understand earlier feminist works as a relational approach. Communist feminist groups for example, have been precedently building international connections between women and were thus able to provide the foundation for an extended critique of imperialism (Boyce Davies 2014: 89f). Several African scholars would refer to Marxism and Anti-imperialism as negative or biased perspectives for 'their dismissive and hostile treatment of feminists and issues of gender in the effort to emphasise the importance of economic class contradictions'.

They emphasise the lack of feminist approaches within the discussion that would help to resolve the existing gender subordination (Ampofo et al. 2008: 10). Ampofo, Beoku-Betts and Osirim likewise deal with transnational and black feminism, emphasising the importance of historical legacies and contemporary political, economic, racial, and cultural processes that affect women's lives. They stress the importance of diversity on distinct feminist movements agendas. Both perspectives focus on politics of solidarity and anti-capitalist, anti-racist and anti-colonialist social movements (Ampofo et al. 2008: 1-2). The authors state that the relevance of transnational feminism increases within a globalized context and analyse the impact of these circumstances on women's lives from a global and interdisciplinary perspective (ibid. 2).

#### *2.4 African feminist theory*

Sinmi Akin-Aina intends to define African feminisms by adopting a critical approach on the process of colonization and post-colonialism. She refers to African feminist theory as a continuous flux that interacts and engages with its context and steps away from the distortions and misinterpretations of Western Feminism, which does not represent the subjective African experience (Akin-Aina 2011: 69). As an example she poses *Maendelo Ya Wanawake*, Kenya's oldest and largest women's organization, which played a central role in shaping the understanding of African feminism and which has been rejective to label itself as 'feminist' (Akin-Aina 2011: 88). This demonstrates that African feminists remain skeptical towards the idea of a 'global sisterhood', which is enhanced by the fact that the relation with Western feminism has been plagued by power asymmetries, distortions and co-optations (Akin-Aina 2011: 67). In an attempt to find a global consensus on the definition of feminism, Akin-Aina suggests to define it as a concept 'in which participants explicitly place value on challenging gender hierarchy and changing women's social status, whether they adopt or reject the feminist label' (Akin-Aina 2011: 65).

Obioma Nnamekea also aims to break down the monolith perception of African feminism, which underscores the heterogeneity of the continent by arguing with the particular consideration of a plural context. She brings the term nego-feminism into the discussion, which is based on the principles of negotiation and shared values and also stands for a 'no ego' feminism (Akin-Aina 2011: 69-70). Regarding to that she asserts: 'We are the only ones who can set our priorities and agenda. Anyone who wishes to participate in our struggle must

do so in the context of our agenda' (Akin-Aina 2011: 73). Authors such as Chandra Talpade Mohanty, who are in favor of this perspective, advocate that 'only through such context-specific differentiated analysis does feminist theorizing and practice acquire significance' (Mohanty 1986: 347).

### *2.5 Womanism*

The Womanist movement is characterised by a rather differentiating but at the same time dynamic, innovative and open position towards feminist thought. It stresses the intrinsic value of the feminist ideas but also insists on developing a concept *sui generis* that emerges out of the own socio-cultural context. Akosua Adomako Ampofo, Josephine Beoku-Betts and Mary J. Osirim (2008) elaborate on the concept of womanism, describing their experiences and perspectives to establish a certain distance with the term 'feminism' and its Eurocentric connotation. 'African feminist thinkers have also maintained a guarded distance from "feminism" and chosen "womanism" in its place to focus on a more holistic view of women's needs, an approach that includes men in the struggle for an equitable configuration of social relations' (Shirin 2006: 141). Within the anti-apartheid context womanism was developed out of black feminist ideas, reflecting the struggle against the repression by the white and male supremacy (Essof 2001). Although some authors, such as Simphiwe, recognize Western feminism as the predecessor of Womanism; others such as Koyana define Womanism as an Afrocentric movement (Simphiwe 2009). It is argued, 'that womanism, is a self-rooted and self-identified concept and provides a single gendered, single racial space for solidarity and struggle among black women' (Essof 2001: 125).

In accordance to this perspective, Kolawale stresses the importance of feminisms in Africa and its moldability to African culture. In addition to that, Lewis claims that Womanism seeks women's rights from African cultural values, while opposing to false conceptions of a culture that is solely based on patriarchal structures. Furthermore, Gqola takes into account political, economic, historical, social and cultural factors. She portrays womanism as a 'celebration of black roots and the ideals of black life, while giving a balanced presentation of black womandom' (Simphiwe 2009: 214). The argumentation proves the will of African-centered feminists to use a different framework and terminology than the one produced in the global north, in order to emphasise their own story (Ampofo et al. 2008: 4-5): 'African women have long devoted time to confronting economic and political challenges. They have been deeply

involved in liberation struggles even if their presence has largely been undocumented' (Ampofo et al. 2008: 7). By critically analysing the cradle of humankind and thus culture as a social concept, Cheikh Anta Diop contributes to African womanist theory with the idea of the European submission of African countries being in fact the 'conquests of matriarchy by patriarchy' (Dove 1998: 523).

Developed in the late 1980s, the term 'Africana Womanism' was first utilized by Clenora Hudson-Weems to distance African feminist movements and ideas from Western feminism not only by their actions but by definition (Hubbard 2010: 33; Dove 1998: 551f). Dove criticises white and black woman theories to not go beyond Western frameworks. Despite of her critique of European societies, improvements for the social role of women are still inspired by Europeanized paradigms (Dove 1998: 515). Therefore, a truly Afrocentric theory, as developed by Hudson-Weems (1993) is necessary. In a process of re-Africanization, African people reclaim their cultural heritage to delimit from imposed European ways of thinking and institutions. In this way, African womanist theory constitutes a fundamental part of the Afrocentric framework (Dove 1998: 516f) which goes hand in hand with 'Womanism' as a concept being defined by its African-centeredness (Hubbard 2010: 33).

## *2.6 Islamic Feminism*

Even though this paper puts an emphasis on feminisms of sub-Saharan Africa, it must be noted that Islamic feminism also plays a major role in Africa and shall therefore be mentioned briefly. While perspectives like womanism focus on feminism within an African context, Islamic feminism focuses on the problems faced by Muslim women in the different spheres of their daily life in Africa and elsewhere (Shirin 2006). Badran claims that Islamic feminism is characterised by the interpretation of gender perspectives within religious texts, aiming to create an egalitarian Islam. In favor of this perspective Shaikh adds his understanding of Islamic feminism as a process of regenerating equity and equality (Nuraan 2014: 313). As opposed to that, scholars such as Rizwana Habib Latha and Margot Badran argue that feminism should be laic, which would contradict the justification of an Islamic feminism (Lewis 2012). So far, Islamic feminism has not reached a consensus regarding the relation between Islam and feminism. Fatima Seedat (2013: 7) summarizes the perspectives of this debate into four categories. The first category separates feminism from Islam, and states that a unification between the two is not possible. The second group merges Islam and

feminism under the label 'Islamic feminism'. The third school is based on the scholars that do not agree on categorizing their work under the feminist label, even though the content could be described as feminist. The last group of theorists states that there is actually no debate about the existence of an Islamic feminism, since the omnipresence of the Islamic belief, no matter in what conjunction, should be taken for granted (ibis).

### *2.7 Conclusion of Theoretical approaches*

Generally, it can be observed, that 'most writers who identify themselves as black feminists, womanists and African feminists argue that women's socially-inscribed identities in Africa take very different forms from women acquisition of gender identities in the West' (Lewis 2012: 6). Reviewing a brief selection of African feminist concepts and theories has proven, that the respective field of study delivers a variety of different approaches, with many of them still being processed. The history of African women has not only been shaped by a destructive colonial past and structural patriarchal institutions but also by cultural imperialism and the subordination of their autonomy from Western definitions. Eventually, African feminisms do not only criticise the patriarchal structures or inequalities within their own sociocultural context, but rather strive for own forms of liberation, that are detached from Western definitions and labels. The aim is not to eliminate traditions that carry the cultural heritage, but to allow the traditions to evolve with the time and further enrich society and culture.

### *3. Methodology*

This literature review analyses a selection of authors and key academic theories on African feminist thought. By summarizing and relating them, it aims to give a brief overview on the topic. Taking up a critical stance towards the universal applicability of Western feminist concepts, this paper attempts to discuss the bias and limitations that are reinforced by the global north. Literature sources were mainly secondary and tertiary and were found in the following databases: Roskilde University library, University library Bayreuth, Summon, Google Scholar, JSTOR, and Scopus. As this project work is based in the subject Global Sociology, the literature review primarily focuses on scholars with a social sciences background. It must be recognised that 'the very notion of feminist methodology is an elusive concept because we have been trained to think in terms of a positivist schema which equates

the term “methodology” with specific techniques for gathering and analyzing information’ (Cook 1986: 1).

### *3.1 Methodological approaches in social science and feminist theory*

Using tools of social science, quantitative and qualitative research, Marjorie DeVault (1990) points out the ongoing discussion about what the proper methods for feminist research are. Researchers like Joey Sprague and Mary Zimmerman (1993) argue for feminist research contributions that unify perspectives on quantitative and qualitative research, and reject ‘dualisms’. Other authors like Cannon, Higginbotham, and Leung (1988) remark the biased perspectives of small-scale qualitative research methods in comparison to quantitative ones because they reproduce class biases in the process of selecting participants. As a more common perspective, researchers like Oppong (1982) and Eichler (1988) aim to liberate standard procedures of quantitative researches from cultural biases, especially with regard to gender related topics. Other authors, such as Greenhalgh and Li (1995) point out a variety of methods that go hand in hand with the cross-national collaboration of different researchers. DeVault’s argument for an open approach towards the understanding of feminist methodology was emphasised before by researchers like Judith A. Cook and Marie Margaret Fonow (1986), who consider ‘feminist methodology as incorporating a critique of social science which includes reflections on the sources and potentials of possible knowledge’ (Cook; Fonow 1986: 4). The resulting goal of feminist methodology, as identified by L. DeVault (1996), is to shift away the research focus from standard practices of social sciences. Eventually, that approach aims to limit damage and control throughout the research process, which is usually characterised by hierarchical structures. The approach should intend to provide a methodology that can be valuable for women by resulting in a beneficial social change. DeVault states that ‘the concern with change, like the call for research that does no harm, is shared by researchers working in critical traditions. What makes practice distinctively feminist is its emphasis in changing women's lives and the systems of social organization that control them’ (DeVault 1996: 34). With these goals in mind, DeVault argues that there should not be a distinctive definition of feminist methodology.

### *3.2 Delimitation to Western Feminist Theories*

Hesse-Biber (2012) states that in recent years researchers have become increasingly aware that the goals and basics of feminist methodology are not commonly applicable in a global

context, especially while regarding contexts that are influenced by colonialism, imperialism and postcolonial identity. Historian Deniz Kandiyoti (1999) stresses the tendencies of some ‘Western feminists to “universalize” disciplinary concepts, ignoring the ethnocentrism that lies deep within constructs such as patriarchy’ (Hesse-Biber 2012: 14). Undoubtedly, many scholars deliberately withdraw from Western perspectives and seek to develop the specificities of non-western approaches. Akin-Aina for instance intends to examine non-mainstream responses ‘to certain dominant trends emerging from conventional Western feminism’ (Akin-Aina 2011: 68). Her research is mainly based on content analyses, literature reviews and the examination of secondary sources that profess this counter-canonical trend with the aim of outlining the differences and enrich the analysis of the broad range of alternatives that constitute the feminist movements (Akin-Aina 2011: 68).

Oyewumi makes a similar point on the rejection of Western and white feminism. Her objective is a fusion of gender and similar concepts in a common frame, based on African cultural experiences and epistemologies. She aims to build a better interconnection as an informative body between academic research and local concerns, while at the same time integrating these local experiences into the efforts of general theory conception. This shall be achieved despite of the inherent structural racism in global systems and networks, which Oyewumi further confronts through emphasising on the conception of family households where women are reduced to the role of wives (Oyewumi 2002: 2).

### *3.2.1 Universality and Cultural Relativism*

Mohanty (1986) claims that Western feminist research applies a wide range of methodologies to present that ‘male dominance and female exploitation’ is taking place on a cross-cultural scale and can therefore be perceived as universal (Mohanty 1986: 346). To illustrate that there is no such thing as a universal statement in women’s subordinate position, she points out three methodological moves that can be identified in feminist cross-cultural work (Mohanty 2003: 349). The first method used by western scholars can be explained on the example of women that are wearing the veil. The overall argument is based on the notion that the use of the veil goes hand in hand with the subordination of women and sexual segregation. The role of the veil is portrayed as a universal instrument for sexual control over women. In stating so, the author takes the veil out of its historical and cultural embedding. Besides from being analytically and theoretically reductive, this assumption is also ‘useless when it comes to political strategizing’ (Mohanty 1986: 347). The second methodology is

related to concepts like the sexual division of labor, the family, household, reproduction, marriage and patriarchy. These institutions are generally used in a global context without taking into account their specific location, culture and history. These concepts attempt to provide explanations for a supposed universal subordination of women. However, it is not possible to refer to 'the sexual division of labor when the content of this division changes radically from one environment to the next, and from one historical juncture to another' (ibid. 347). In addition to that, the concept of nuclear family households should not be taken for granted. Mohanty argues that it reduces women to wives from a Western perspective, which is not appropriate for many African realities because it skips race and class as variables that additionally influence the family (ibid.). The third method is contextualized in relation to the second method and aims to organise the universal system of representations. Categories such as male and female, containing smaller categories within them, are too generalised. This methodological universalism fails to make a distinction between concepts such as "woman" and "women" (ibid. 349). Mohanty argues that this derives in in the construction of 'monolithic images of "Third World Women"' (ibid. 349). Hence, there is great confusion in terms of gender studies. The homogenisation of the socio-historical particularities and the cultural context does not lead to a unified global sisterhood but to a false perception of the struggles and forms of oppression that women around the globe have in common (ibid. 348).

Sanusi (1999) likewise points out that the previous focus on the oppression of women implies a non-existing homogeneity. The gender criteria has been ranked above other important parameters such as class or ethnicity, resulting in an 'incomplete method' (Sanusi 1999: 188). However, disadvantages and discriminations resulting from these factors need to be taken into account to provide a coherent law that protects women's rights (ibid. 188). Practices in customary law for instance, are justified by designating the practices as being based on long-lasting cultural values such as the appreciation of communitarianism over individual rights (ibid. 204f). According to Sanusi the application of 'Cultural Relativism' on female concerns, in this case the human rights law, is not leading to change in favor of the women but rather to stagnation that is justified with culture. While existing discriminations in law are not challenged they will continue to marginalise Black women (Sanusi 1999: 22, 205, 215). Therefore the author states that 'Essentialism must include an African perspective in order to be truly effective since implementation can only take place at the domestic level' (ibid. 22). As 'Cultural Relativism' can be a powerful instrument to retain the course of the dominant part of a society, it is crucial for researchers in gender studies to be aware of who is

establishing and protecting cultural customs. At the same time the blurriness and fluidity of the concept of 'culture' needs to be kept in mind in order to meet the complex notions and meanings of culture in multiple contexts (Sanusi 1999: 207).

### *3.3 Qualitative approaches*

The growing interest in the discipline of feminism and gender studies has also reinforced its complexity. The field has been reshaping over the last two decades, shifting the focus from the above mentioned homogenized notion of women towards an interconnection of 'race, class, sexuality, ability, ethnicity, nationality, and globalization' (Adomako et al. 2008: 1). African feminist scholars address the challenge of balancing universality and Cultural Relativism by prioritising qualitative approaches; particularly interviews, life stories and other narrative forms. Eventually, qualitative analytical approaches are more likely to dive into the realities and experiences of a specific focus group (Adomako et al. 2008: 10).

#### *3.3.1 Historical approaches*

Keeping in mind that gender is not only a social concept but has been constructed through historical processes, many scholars approach their investigation from a historical perspective. This point gains even more relevance within the African context, since Western frameworks often see gender as transhistorical (Oyewumi 2011: 1). Historical methods, such as oral history, autobiographical and biographical studies are increasingly applied. With that approach, women's voices are brought into the analysis which is redefining conventional understandings of various historical events and processes. These studies are challenging the tradition of the global north in which social space and gender are constructed in contrasts of public versus private spheres, which has never accurately reflected the historical and cultural realities of the African experience. Many studies on female life biographies show the distinctive ways in which women exercised agencies during the pre-colonial and colonial periods by subverting conventional understandings of appropriate gender relations (Adomako et al. 2008: 10). By focusing on the period between 1974-1991, Berhane-Selassie intends to point out the views of women during a time of state transition (Berhane-Selassie 1997: 182). Her historical comparative case study illustrates several challenges of women in different professional areas. Nevertheless, she comments that her research was restricted by the guidelines that the research team of the Ethiopian Ministry of Agriculture established, which eventually restricted her autonomy (Berhane-Selassie 1997: 201f). Her research methods

mainly consisted of an 'evaluative sample survey', which was composed by a questionnaire in order to conduct 'short formal interviews' (Berhane-Selassie 1997: 201). Therefore, she is one of the few scholars applying quantitative data such as educational states or literacy rates of rural Ethiopian women. White (2001) uses a descriptive approach, trying to assess the historical role of black women while proposing not to ignore the fact that mainstream feminism also includes black female members such as the black liberation movement involved women. This way she searches for answers to the problem of inclusion of black women apart from the obvious role they play in black feminism (White 2001:32). By 'connecting the dots' she looks at the what, where and when instead of the why, which is characteristic for descriptive methodology (Bhattacharjee 2012: 5).

### *3.3.2 Case studies*

Case studies go in depth on addressing the circumstances and issues on a specific problem or phenomena. The strength of this method relies on discovering 'social, cultural, and political factors potentially related to the phenomenon of interest that may not be known in advance' (Bhattacharjee 2012: 40). There is a wide range of case studies in African gender studies. Many scholars focus on a specific ethnic or social group to analyse how women negotiate their space in a local context. These intrinsic research results are then set in a broader image of general African women struggles. Coming from an anthropological background Gort (1997) takes an emic perspective by applying the immanent categories of the female Swazi healers. She uses an inductive approach within her case study giving five examples of traditional and modern healing practitioners in Swaziland (Gort 1997: 298-308). In contrast, Harris (1997) who is also writing about women in Swaziland, investigates female workers in Cottage Industries and Factories by using a deductive strategy. Whilst comparing and contrasting the results of different scholars she bases her article on previously existing academic theories (Harris 1997: 139f). Inductive reasoning, opposed to deductive approach, works the other way, moving from specific observations to broader generalizations and theories (Bhattacharjee 2012: 29). According to Mohanty the observation of various case studies is what makes up and enriches feminist scholarship. 'Only through such context-specific differentiated analysis does feminist theorizing and practice acquire significance' (Mohanty 1986: 347). With regard to the existing differences in terms of e.g. class, ethnicity, nationality or educational background case studies are taking into account the heterogeneity of African countries while still referring to a common understanding of African feminisms. For example Ogunbile situates her case study within Nigerian Islam by focusing on Alhaja

Sheidat Mujidat Adeoye who is the founder of Fadillullah Muslim Mission (Ogungbile 2011: 85f). Illustrating the individual religious experience of Alhaja Sheidat facilitates not only to understand her personal development but to set it in context '[...] within the Osogbo-Yoruba religio-cultural [...] framework' (Ogungbile 2011: 89). In doing so, the author achieves to exemplify gender specific characteristics of the Yoruba worldview.

### *3.3.3 Creative approaches*

It is remarkable that many authors within the field of African feminisms refer to pieces of local art like poems, theater plays or oral traditions (Gueye 2011; Adeeko 2011; Oyewumi 2011). Especially for the Yoruba in Nigeria several authors (Adeeko 2011; Oyewumi 2011; Badejo 1998) analyse linguistically their cultural heritage as there is a historical tradition of oral literature and a considerable amount of theater pieces, songs and poems. Bádéjo (1998) examines the oral literature of the Yorùbá and the Akan from a historical and anthropological perspective. Using content analysis she extracts and dismantles mythical-religious songs, poems, narratives and novels to point out their iconography as well as the agency for women's roles (Badejo 1998: 96-99). Approaching the female representations within art reveals the socio-psychological concepts of what it means to be a woman or man in Yoruba and Akan societies. As these concepts have been evolved in a historical process and therefore are deeply rooted within social and cultural parameters of Yoruba society, discourse analysis offers the opportunity for going beyond the obvious and diving in the unconscious and implicit characteristics of art. Thus, African women writers confront the heritage of imperial and male dominance by relying on fictional and autobiographical accounts. The analysis of these written texts offers possibilities to grasp and claim inherited self-narrated legacies of dominant societal groups, in order to reshape the notions of language, genres and writing processes. In this regard, first-person narratives deserve special attention, since they vividly address the self-representation of African women through refashioned language perceptions (Lewis 2012: 7). The rather uncommon approach of action research can also be counted as a creative methodological approach. Its main assumption is, that for a better understanding of a social phenomenon intervention or action is required. Activism or being a part of an organization provides the researcher with insights that can later be put on theory (Bhattacharjee 2012: 40). African feminist researchers apply this method by visiting conferences, workshops or bringing in their experiences from working in women's movements into research papers. An example is Amina Mama, one of the most outstanding

scholars of African feminisms, who is also part of different organisations, including a period on the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development. (Hakima 2014).

### *3.4 Conclusion of methodological approaches*

Concluding this chapter, it can be captured that there is no distinct methodology for feminist research. Most of the social scientists doing research on gender are applying interpretative and qualitative approaches. They base their analysis merely on subjective knowledge rather than extensive data collection, because it allows to approximate the complexity of African daily life and therefore draw a more differentiated picture of female African realities. Case studies appear to be the paramount method as they allow to investigate specific contexts. The impression comes up that there is a strong influence from Western methodologies, since scholars from African countries are basing their research projects upon them. Most African researchers feel the urge to vindicate the need for respecting particularities of local contexts, while refusing a universal global approach as applicable to all African women. Arguing against this universalism, several authors advocate for the use of historical approaches, which can be build up upon case studies, for instance. Thus, it becomes a priority to respect the differences but also appreciate similarities between methodological approaches. African researchers are aiming for a global conversation, where their history and experiences get an own autonomous space, without Western theories taking their realities out of context. However these one-sided perspectives are also prone to create research gaps, which will be the topic of the next chapter.

### *4. Research Gaps*

African feminist researchers struggle not just against the interference of Western societies, but also have to steer through an intrinsic network of institutions and agencies within their own societies, on a public as well as on a personal level. The following chapter will provide specific standpoints of researchers that correlate to an exposure of restrictions and obstacles that affect African research in restraining ways on a common basis. Following the arguments of Arnfred and Ampofo (2009) as a groundwork, the chapter is divided into subsections that address several points of interest on public levels, with regard to transnational academic tensions and funding dependencies and personal levels, especially when considering researcher identities through simultaneous roles as activists and academics.

#### *4.1 Framing African Feminist Research*

The previous section underlined the necessity for reflecting on the simple application of the notions of feminism in global terms. In this regard, providing a frame for different perspectives contributes towards two goals: providing an overview and an understanding of specific conditions and challenges of feminist research in an African global context while simultaneously underlining the complexity and diversity of African feminist research in specific regional contexts. Afterwards, the findings of various feminist researchers, in regards of research gaps, shall be applied to further emphasise the paper's argument of a broad array of diverse research works and its implications for future developments in the academic sector. Arnfred and Ampofo initially consider African feminist research to be confronted with 'a series of interrelated dilemmas' (Arnfred; Ampofo 2009: 5). These dilemmas mainly consist of the relation between economic dependencies of academical works and political dimensions of activism. Many African research facilities and institutions cannot provide for an independent fund for conducting research and therefore researchers have to rely on donor fundings or other additional employments like consultation to finance their work. This puts them into a position of losing the options of autonomous research conduction since they are often bound towards compliantly working along the agendas of donor agencies. Additionally, since many academic researchers are also assuming activist roles in regards of women movement's, the shifting balance of these two identities often leads into contradicting positions. While activists perceive academic theory to be lacking the lived experience of women and men and therefore assume it to be disconnected from real life, academic scholars perceive activists to lack the theoretical insight for future improvements in terms of gender equality (Arnfred; Ampofo 2009: 5-8). However, Arnfred and Ampofo put emphasis on the perception of empirical and objective research often applied, as addressed in the previous section, by western research. The argument of African feminist research regarding the notions of western scholars considers their research to be perceived as objectively speaking for the entirety of a society. In reality, it is solely based on knowledge generated from male experience alone, with additional disregard towards the cultural background of different societies. 'Positionality is important. All the authors argue that what is generally considered mainstream, "scientific" and "objective" is usually only "malestream"' (Arnfred; Ampofo 2009: 8). With this general frame set, the following sections place the work of different African feminist researchers into review, to contemplate appearing research gaps in

experience based challenges and conflicts they had to confront while conducting their research.

## *4.2 Challenges and Conflicts of African Feminist Research*

### *4.2.1 Lack of terminology and theoretical conceptualization*

One of the main features that define African Feminist research is their rejection of Western Feminism, which is perceived under imperialist and colonial experiences. A case example mentioned above was referring to the use of the term 'gender' (Oyewumi 2011: 2). Particularly, the study of gender is often considered a side of struggle in terms of properly addressing subjective matters, with highly normative inputs, fragmenting biases and the reproduction of decontextualized contents of African realities on both the sides of academics and activists, Western and African research. Josephine Ahikire points out that gender researchers in an African context have to deal with a broadly stretched number of representative roles and responsibilities as for them the line between academic and activist is fluid and thin. For Ahikire, the advancement of gender studies suffers from this, because researchers, especially underrepresented female academics, have to overstretch their competencies and as result lack the means and capabilities to make significant contributions towards African feminist research. Ahikire underlines the necessity of strategic management to centralise impactful intellectual content, with initiatives like the African Gender Institute (AGI) providing the first drafts of common exchange platforms for African feminist researchers (Ahikire 2005). African-centered researchers won't feel comfortable by using this term since it is build within a Western context and does not reflect on the realities in Africa. Another case would be the Kenyan organization *Maendelo Ya Wanawake*, who refuses the use of the term 'feminism'. Since they attribute negative connotations to it, they remain unwilling to subscribe to its label. This gives rise to the main challenge that African-centered scholars have to face while doing research: the difficulty of applying feminist concepts to express and analyze African realities, since western gender categories are presented as naturally inherent (Oyewumi 2011: 4). Thus, African-centered feminist scholarship has to address the problem of whether to accept some concepts created in the Global North, and how to name the understandings of African realities, so that they remain African-centered and 'feminist' (Ampofo et al. 2008: 5). This leads African feminists to try to step away from Western centered conceptualizations, which will make them face the lack of an own theoretical framework. This fuelled the post-colonial debate with critics towards the

acceptance of the use of this terminology and advocated for the creation of their own framework. Even though they are striving to build up their very own theoretical framework, as it can be seen on concepts such as nego-feminism, there is still a lack of content (Akin-Aina 2011: 70). As a consequence the asymmetrical power relations that prevail between the North and the South are further intensified. The Global South has been oppressed under Western dictates, limiting the possibilities of the South to create their own discourse, since their own framework and recognition is subjected to the Western understanding, which perpetuates a power relation. Thus we can extract that Western feminism is biased because by default it is not globally applicable since it cannot be extrapolated and applied the same way in every society. This a-historical and a-contextual application of Western feminism leads African feminism to argue against homogeneity and unification (Mohanty 2003: 335).

#### *4.2.2 Lack of methodology*

A similar critique can be done in relation to the methods used to carry the researches. African feminist research had to deal with global methodologies previously agreed upon in the Global North. Those imply a 'universal' rational application of specific procedures used to make researches. So the way researches have been conducted so far, were strongly influenced by Western methods. The way data was collected and generated and how it was analyzed was influenced and filtered through a Eurocentric perspective on feminism. It makes it difficult to step away from Western established methodologies, which leaves African researchers little room to decide on how to analyze the debate of feminism. This mode of feminist analysis erases marginal and resistant modes of experiences, by homogenizing and systematizing the experiences of different groups of women in these countries (Mohanty 2003: 352). Thus African research is forced to adapt their methodology to the West, which might frame their own development. The need to create a common acceptance of diverse methods emerge, in order to make more useful and precise analyses that are concerned with the local object of study. There is the need to create interconnectedness in order to reach a communal understanding of cultural, social and political diversity (Mohanty 2003: 344).

#### *4.2.3 Undocumented story of struggle and further research*

Another main difficulty that African feminists face is the lack of documentation of feminist movements. African women have been devoting for a long time, confronting economic and political challenges and getting involved in liberation struggles. Gender biases against women and their marginalization in the historiography needs to be addressed in order to redress the

gender-distortions and gaps in the 'production' of knowledge. It is well known that women were active in anti-colonial struggle. They made substantial contributions and faced many challenges working in male-dominated movements (Abbas; Mama 2014: 1). For instance, during the anti-colonial Mau Mau rebellion in the 1950s several women were imprisoned. Some of them participated in secret networks supplying food, weapons and medicines to the fighters. Another example that can be found earlier in history is in the 1920s in Kenya, where women fought and resisted against unfair labor policies by singing scurrilous songs while engaged in work. Other women joined the struggles and went into the forest to care for their families and to fight (Akin-Aina 2001: 75). Despite the amount of examples that fill their story, their presence has been largely undocumented. Recent studies are paying more attention to the complex relationship that 'women have with the state, issues of good governance, the nature of the state, and questions of participatory democracy and citizenship' (Ampofo et al. 2008: 7). But there is the need to deal with the fact that it is still a young field full of diversity and gaps. The fact that it is such a 'new' field, leaves an open door for authors to point out gaps in many areas and suggest on further research. Boyce Davis would signal that there is a gap on the intersection between left-thinking and feminism, which cultural feminist approaches often leave out. He also analyses the role of gender and class in African societies, which continues to be a critical conjunction (Davis 2014: 86-88). Whereas Mohanty would point out the absence of texts focusing on lesbian politics or the politics of ethnic and religious marginal groups in third world women's groups (Mohanty 2014: 352). Another breach in a different direction is signaled by Oyewumi, who's paper reflect the lack of research targeting elite women instead of 'poor african women'. With this frame she takes into account their agency and corrects the too often drawn picture of victimization (Oyewumi 2011: 2). In relation to this, Ahikire states that to support the planning of long-term and effective strategies to pursue feminist agendas, it is required to overcome these gaps between the interests articulated by women's movements and the interests of women who have entered in the political sphere (Ahikire 2014: 39).

Ahikire, found another breach referred to the need to re-claim language and reverse the tendency of reducing key political concepts into buzzwords. he advocates that this will require a conscious effort to re-popularise the use of the concepts of power and gender relations such as "engendering", 'gender mainstreaming', 'empowerment' or 'gender-sensitive'. They have to be re-problematised, and their use analyzed and contextualized. Ahikire rise awareness due to the fact that it might decrease donor funding and provoke a loss of support of mainstream policy-makers. Which he states as necessary for African Feminism

as an ideological force to be repositioned and in control of the process (Ahikire 2014: 17). African Feminist Research acknowledges its diverse character by emphasizing both similarities and differences as equally important.

#### *4.2.4 Double Identities*

As stated earlier, African feminist research puts emphasis on the intrinsic relationship between academic research and activist experiences. Mansah Prah (2005) uses the historical state development of Ghana to explore how closely research and activism are linked together. Ghana underwent massive changes through colonial influence, with its pre-colonial culture providing public spaces of activities for women and acceleration of unified efforts against colonial dominion. However, the perspective of Ghana's pre-colonial society towards women underwent drastic changes, pushing women into the private sector, especially during the various military rules starting in the 1966s (Prah 2005). Starting from this period onwards, the generation of feminist knowledge slowly increased in Ghana, with Prah arguing for a naturally developing partnership between activists and academics. But she also points out that women who were involved mostly came from the middle class, therefore, the body of knowledge generated was based and shaped by the interests of this class (Prah 2005: 39). The research conducted here is in finding ways to address all societal classes, generating knowledge and solutions that are addressing gender equality on all societal levels. That this relationship between academics and activists can also be strained is exemplified by Amanda Gouws (2005) with her findings about Gender Studies in South African universities. During and after the democratic transition of South Africa, both parties made important contributions towards establishing concerns of gender as one of the main agenda of the state. The difference to the development in Ghana emerges here in the fact of non-unified efforts. Gouws states three reasons for this: 'Tensions between the two groups stemmed from (1) issues of representation and racism, (2) the perceived schism between academics and activists, (3) issues of experience' (Gouws 2005: 41).

The first point refers mainly towards the legacy of the apartheid regime, with academics mostly represented through white women from privileged societal positions and black activist women being marginalised and, especially in regards of language barriers, prohibited from higher education. This results in a common widespread of racial 'othering' and accelerating the tensions between academics and activists, with the latter proposing claims of a general lack of understanding through experience by the academic group. Black activists, 'grassroots

women perceived academic women as more privileged and disconnected from the lives of women who do not work in the academy. Academic women were perceived as talking on an abstract level without the necessary experience to 'understand' the lives of grassroots women' (Gouws 2005: 42). This perception of academic knowledge as being flawed, insufficient and under western bias and hegemony has led to the discarding of various contributions of non African feminist researchers, even those that may be of beneficial importance for the research of African feminist research itself (Gouws 2005: 42-44). Gouws further underlines the importance of the academic institutions like universities as sites of gender struggle, not just in regards of the relation of academics and activists, but also in regards of the inherent power hierarchies, knowledge norms and a dominating political dimension presented in these institutions. Gender and Women's Studies are a rather recent development starting back in the 1990s, with these studies being highly institutionalised but under resourced. Gouws once again names main problems in this context, rooted in academic institutions with a generally strong gender bias in hierarchies, academic content with a generally strong gender bias in the body of knowledge and political involvement in the academic sector with the resulting loss in autonomous research to market-driven and/or political goals (Gouws 2005: 44-50).

It requires a new approach of linking Gender Studies with local communities and activists in order to generate a academic discourse capable of organising broad, transnational measures that can counter the subversive influence of global agendas. The *African Gender Institute* (AGI) of South Africa already works towards creating a common forum for research conducted across the continent, but they have, as well as the academic institutions, 'to fight the challenge of limited institutional support and deliberate subversion from management on a continuous basis' (Gouws 2005: 50).

### 5. Conclusion

The paper addresses the main theories and methodologies of the African Feminist debate embedded within a global framework. At first, key elements characterising African feminisms and its framework have been approached. It is outlined that the concept of patriarchy transcends many parts of African society and by these means limits the scope of action for women. Besides, it is important to notice that previously international organisations such as the World Bank addressed women primarily in their economic role. So far this approach has not empowered women but rather absorbed them in a capitalist framework. From the increasing global interconnectedness in economic terms, the vast majority of

women in African countries is not only not profiting from it, but rather suffers its consequences.

Generally, feminist African scholars refuse Western feminism for not being suitable to their daily life experiences, criticising their racist and Eurocentric connotations. Specially, after the colonial and imperial period it became a highly concern for african feminists to distance themselves from the inherited western institutions and reclaim their own cultural heritage. This shows how the structure of Western dominance had and still has an impact on the modes of approaching intellectual and academic researches. It is therefore necessary to separate African feminisms from the Western perspective and create space for context-specific analyses generating African categories. This leads to the rise of African feminisms that open up discussions about theoretical approaches and methodologies developed according to an African context, and not imported or implemented from the Western world.

As major concepts in African feminist thought have been identified: Transnational and black feminism, African feminist theory, Womanism and Islamic Feminism. All of them, within their diversity and distinct features, try to disassociate from misconceptions coming from the Eurocentric perspectives while drawing connections to the African feminisms debate on a transcultural scale.

This leads to conclude the main findings extracted from the literature review, which can be compressed in three main points. Firstly, African researches had been and still are mainly dominated by West, as well as the categories that are being applied to African realities. Secondly, and as a consequence of the first, African researchers might apply Western assumptions about patriarchy, economics, cultural life, language, gender or family within African regions. This leads to bring up the third point, where the Western feminist scholars assumed a universal category of women as subordinated and powerless and that this constitutes a homogeneous group without differentiation (Davies 2014: 84-85). It creates an intersection where African researches have to decide whether to accept western patterns, leading into misconceptions of setting their own frame as a consequence (Ampofo et al. 2008: 5).

To meet the challenge of balancing Universalism and Cultural Relativism most scholars of African Feminisms choose qualitative research methods. By focusing on particular local contexts in each case they deliver a rather fragmented picture of female African realities and thus the field of African feminist studies stays. Gatherings and platforms to exchange ideas could open up opportunities for African women to unite common aims while still recognising the local specifics. Challenges and conflicts will emerge for African researchers during the process of contributing to the global discussion of feminism. They will struggle not only by creating their own framework where they can contribute at the same level as western scholars, but also with 'patriarchal' institutions in their own societies. The dynamics of power relation appear once more pushing from the West but also from their own societies. Additionally, this is taking place in a context where activists and academics clash. Activists would signal the lack of vivid experience and actual ground action of the researcher's, whereas the researchers would point out the lack of theoretical background of the activists in order to properly set up goals and strategies (Arnfred; Ampofo 2009: 5-8).

As African feminists have been largely concerned on writing against the imperialism of white western feminists in the last decades it is time to encourage cooperation. Meanwhile the focus seems to shift not only to a particular Afrocentric perspective but also to identifying commonalities with feminist ideas and struggles in Asia and Latin America. Despite different theoretical and methodological approaches the transcontinental networking and exchange of thoughts appears to be a characteristic of all global Feminisms. And it is within this current scenario that the debate about African feminisms is being developed and discussed, trying to reach a common understanding where all realities have its own voice within a global context.

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