



Belgeo

Revue belge de géographie

3 | 2007

Feminist geographies around the world

Challenging contexts : Gender studies and geography in Anglophone African countries

Ontwikkelingen in gender en geografie in Angelsaksisch Afrika

Mariama Awumbila



Electronic version

URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/belgeo/11172>

DOI: 10.4000/belgeo.11172

ISSN: 2294-9135

Publisher:

National Committee of Geography of Belgium, Société Royale Belge de Géographie

Printed version

Date of publication: 30 September 2007

Number of pages: 261-274

ISSN: 1377-2368

Electronic reference

Mariama Awumbila, « Challenging contexts : Gender studies and geography in Anglophone African countries », *Belgeo* [Online], 3 | 2007, Online since 11 December 2013, connection on 22 May 2020.

URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/belgeo/11172> ; DOI : <https://doi.org/10.4000/belgeo.11172>

This text was automatically generated on 22 May 2020.



Belgeo est mis à disposition selon les termes de la licence Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International.

Challenging contexts : Gender studies and geography in Anglophone African countries

Ontwikkelingen in gender en geografie in Angelsaksisch Afrika

Mariama Awumbila

The author appreciates the assistance of the editors of this BELGEO special issue on gender in identifying material about gender studies in South Africa.

Introduction

- 1 Like elsewhere in the world, gender equity is increasingly gaining legitimacy in Anglophone African countries as an essential and critical dimension of sustainable development and cultural politics. Until the last two decades, however, feminist studies by geographers in this part of the world have not been very visible. Certainly, this situation was not peculiar to geography, but reflected national contexts where there was very little focus on gender in teaching, research and national development. By contrast, for a longer period, a substantial body of feminist writing on African women has circulated widely internationally, going back to the significant attention paid to African women in Ester Boserup's foundational text in development studies (1970). Since then, many works by scholars from North America and Europe have focused on gender issues in Africa. Importantly these include challenges to Western feminist interpretations, often by expatriate African scholars such as Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie (1994) and Oyèrónké Oyewùmí (1997). My emphasis in this paper, however, is on the work by scholars writing *within* Africa¹. My goal is explore ways in which the contexts in the Anglophone countries have influenced the development of feminist work. In addressing the discipline of geography specifically, I include case studies of Ghana and South Africa in order to demonstrate some aspects of the diversity within Anglophone Africa². In order to understand the contexts and challenges for feminist geography as a component of Anglophone African research and teaching, it is important to understand

that its development has been influenced by the history and status of higher education in the region and to see how gender studies have emerged across disciplines. I will begin with these themes, then turn to the situation in geography.

Higher education in anglophone African countries : considerations of time and place

- 2 The history of higher educational systems in Africa is important for an understanding of how issues concerning gender and equity have evolved. Education has long been regarded as a major route to liberation and development. As western and eastern African nations gained their independence from British colonial governance, institutions of higher educational were conceived of as crucial components in nation building and were avidly promoted by the new states, directed towards their specific development needs. Thus from the 1960s onwards, African governments undertook massive expansion of educational provision at all levels as an essential aspect of becoming a nation. As Mama (n.d.) has reported, over 300 universities were built during the first four decades of political independence in these regions. This contrasted with the pre-independence period when there were only a handful of universities, the majority of which were in South Africa, though in that setting racial segregation maintained educational inequalities. In east and west Africa, political strife, militarization, and the collapse of many national economies from the early 1970s with accompanying destabilization of social structures led, however, to prolonged crisis for many institutions, including the universities. Following the adoption of structural adjustment programmes from the early 1980s and their attendant sectoral reforms which imposed particular demands on higher educational institutions³, the situation worsened ; university budgets stagnated with serious impacts on all aspects of academic life (Manuh, 2002). As Mama has indicated, higher educational systems in Africa are the weakest in the world, serving a miniscule proportion of those qualified for entry. Only about 25 per cent of students are women, who also account for less than 20 per cent of the academic staff with much lower representation of women in the professorial ranks (Mama, n.d.).
- 3 The dynamics within South Africa have followed a different trajectory, with most dramatic changes coming after 1994 when the formal end of apartheid brought a rapid restructuring of higher education. The intention was to develop a unified system to replace the legacy of 36 institutions that had been divided by race and language. The goals were to widen and democratize access and to meet basic needs, removing the restrictions that had largely excluded Indian, “black” and “coloured” South Africans from studying in the “white” English and Afrikaans medium universities. These goals have created challenges for all institutions, as students shifted away from the former black universities towards the historically white ones, while faculty in the latter have remained primarily white (and male) (Mather, 2007 ; Fairhurst *et al.*, 2002.) Within a short time, however, new challenges arose as equity and redress issues were downplayed following a major shift in state economic policies towards neoliberalism and emphasis on preparing the labour force to be “globally competitive” (Magi *et al.*, 2002).

Contexts for women and gender studies

- 4 Developments in African gender and women's studies can be understood within the above contexts in combination with the emergence of international feminist activism. The upsurge in feminist organizations across the world in the 1970s (Mohanty *et al.*, 1991) and the related international conferences, particularly in the 1980s, offered a forum for African women to articulate their perspectives and their distinct concerns and interests (Pereira, 2002). The mainstreaming of women into development discourse started during the UN Second Development Decade which emphasized equity, redistribution and meeting people's needs. Such frameworks gave impetus to the formation of the Women in Development (WID) movement leading to the 1976-1985 UN Decade for Women declaration. The influence of forums and organizations such as the Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN), the Association of Women and Human Rights in Development (AWID), the Convention for the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Beijing Platform of Action, and the many international networks of researchers and activists created new political spaces for feminist work towards engendering development. Such organizations and political spaces provided a platform for women's critical voices as they demanded engagement with the content and processes of policy development (Ogundipe-Leslie, 1994, Pereira, 2002).
- 5 The establishment of the Association of African Women for Research and Development (AAWORD) in Dakar in 1977 marked the beginning of steps to institutionalise gender and women's studies on the continent. Its role has been outlined by Pereira (<http://www.gwsafrica.org/knowledge/pereira.html>). Among its key aims have been to facilitate research and activism by African women scholars. AAWORD was among the earliest women's organizations of the South to adopt a critical approach to research and to challenge Eurocentric paradigms from a feminist and post-colonial perspective. As early as the mid 1970s, it called for the de-colonization of research and established a critical research agenda. Workshops held by AAWORD took up such themes as methodology (1983), the crisis in Africa (1985), reproduction (1992) and gender theories and social development (2001). From this thinking an intellectual movement developed during the 1980s and 1990s led by women of the South that challenged essentialist notions of womanhood and insisted on recognizing and interrogating difference. Crucial to this task was the need to understand how the social location of women is determined by race, ethnicity, class, status and access to privilege (Mohanty *et al.*, 1991 ; Imam *et al.*, 1997).
- 6 Following the lead of AAWORD, other women's resource and documentation centres and networks were established in various African nations, all of which drew the link between knowledge and power, and saw research, analysis and dissemination of information as key activist strategies, viewed as liberatory and therefore as political. Over time, many of these centres began to offer gender training as a way of developing gender competence beyond their own ranks, initially within communities, but increasingly to address the needs expressed by government and development agencies seeking to include gender (usually a "gender component") in their projects. The offering of short courses and training thus rapidly became instrumentalised in the context of endless development needs.

- 7 It has been suggested that because educational work on gender began in women's groups, gender studies in Africa did not begin in the universities and that struggles to establish institutional spaces within them only came later. The real growth in academia began at the end of the 1980s⁴, with most current courses being developed in the 1990s (Mama, n.d.) A review by Mama (1996), however, shows that women's studies in Africa is not necessarily linked to the broader women's movement but was motivated by other forces such as development initiatives, national and sub-regional political conditions and the crisis in African education, as well as by donor initiatives. Nevertheless, gender and women's studies in African universities have maintained a close and reciprocal engagement with feminist activism. Mama (n.d.) suggests that this may be because there are so few women in higher education in Africa, the same ones are often simultaneously engaged across the arenas of academia, activism, research, policy making and development work. It is also the case, however, that African intellectual traditions have not afforded much space for purely academic or theoretical work. In sum, it can be said that the institutional and intellectual political conditions within which gender and women's studies have spread within African academic institutions are related to both African women's movements and the internationalisation of feminism. Much research remains to be done, however, to document women's participation in post-colonial African movements.

Teaching and research on gender studies

- 8 Strategies to introduce gender studies in Anglophone African universities have been varied. Clustered in particular locations and scattered across disciplinary divides, scholars have concerned themselves with both the institutionalisation of gender equity policies and the establishment of gender studies.
- 9 Initially most research on gender was about numbers, ratios and gaps. Several studies challenged universities to accelerate radically their approaches to addressing the massive gender gaps in student numbers and staff. There were calls for affirmative action based on the recognition that gender had a profound impact on the educational experiences of women and girls and that the intellectual environment was permeated with barriers and andocentric analysis (Bennet, 2002). Other studies drew attention to the ingrained structural, social and political factors that constrain increasing representation of females in higher education (Bennet, 2002 ; Gaidzanwa, 1997 ; Kwesiga, 2002). Bennet (2002) has argued that an important element was the intellectual challenge presented by the almost complete absence of gender analysis as a key tool of social research in curricula and research. The trivialization of women's experiences and the indifference to calls for research which acknowledged the power of gender led to the formation of independent research and advocacy networks. These included, among others, women in Nigeria (WIN), women's groups in the University of Dar es Salaam concerned with research and AAWORD. The absence of gendered realities from the core business of many universities formed a central platform for activism in the mid 1980s.
- 10 Gender activism on campuses in the 1990s also centred on reproductive labour. Oloka-Onyango (2001) reveals how women academics carry a dual burden of traditional and academic obligations which affects their freedom to operate and articulate issues in the academy. Yet another important theme in theory and activism concerning gender and

higher education is the issue of sexual harassment and sexual violence as critical sources of injury to women on campus (Bennet, 2002). It is important, however, that descriptions of gender and higher education encompass more than the narrative of gaps, but also dwell on negotiations of gender, ethnic and class identities. Chagonda and Gore (2002) show that negotiating access to marketable masculinity and womanhood is as much a part of the educational terrain as battling for access to actual space in a lecture hall, office or at a management desk.

Establishment of departments / programmes on women and gender studies

- 11 Strategies to improve gender equity in African universities have differed depending on various factors. One strategy has been to place an emphasis on research and teaching which takes gender seriously and on the establishment of women and gender studies programmes, centres and departments. Many universities set up departments of women studies, initially in the early to mid 1990s, which later changed to women and gender studies in line with paradigm shifts in the global agenda. The rationale behind the change in designation was that a conceptualization from a women in development (WID) perspective tended to focus on the practical needs of women and was focusing on women in isolation rather than on addressing the unequal gender relations between men and women which was at the heart of the development challenge.
- 12 A number of critical initiatives of the early 1990s included establishment of an array of programmes, among them the Development and Women's Studies Unit (DAWS) at the University of Ghana, through the Gender Unit at Eduardo Mondlane University in Mozambique, the Women's Research and Documentation Project at Dar es Salaam, the Women and Gender Studies Department at Makerere University in Uganda, and programmes at the University of Ibadan in Nigeria and the University of the Western Cape in South Africa. In some universities, initiatives were pursued by scholars within particular departments, such as Women and Law in Southern Africa which originated from the Law Faculty in the University of Zimbabwe. On other campuses, such as the University of Natal in Durban, South Africa, efforts to initiate gender studies courses on campus took place hand-in-hand with the development of nongovernmental organization (NGO) projects outside campus structures. In Kenya, the Centre for Gender Studies in Kenyatta University was set up as a result of concerns about sexual harassment and rape on university campuses and the realisation that policy makers and practitioners lacked the skills in gender theory and analysis to address these issues. Kasente (2001) locates current policies at Makerere University in Uganda on gender mainstreaming within the establishment of a Women's Studies Department in 1991.
- 13 Several programmes illustrate the clear linkages between the academy and the wider society. At Makerere, the Department functioned as "located activism", driving teaching programmes and simultaneously engaging with national policy makers, university managers, donors and extra-campus women's movements constituencies. In Nigeria, Women in Nigeria (WIN), founded in 1982, argued that research, advocacy, and the dissemination of information were critical in challenging the subordination of women ; it became a significant force in the 1980s (Pereira, 2004) Working within but also across national boundaries, the African Gender Institute, founded at the University

of Cape Town, South Africa in 1996, set as its goal offering intellectual support and resources for teachers, researchers, and activists across the continent. It has offered a pan-African Visiting Associates Programme and established publications including the journals *Agenda* and *Feminist Africa* and diverse online resources, though some of its efforts have focused on South and southern Africa (<http://www.gwsafrica.org>).

- 14 Many of these Gender Studies departments seem to toe a middle road, often not totally discarding efficiency-based arguments about the importance of gender equity to sustainable development or the impact of gender inequalities on the attainment of macro objectives, but also highlighting unequal gender relations (Ahikire, 2002). This has meant that they have generated a substantial literature on the situation of women, while the adoption of gender as a concept has highlighted the nature of gender systems in Africa. Such information is crucial for policy and project-based interventions to address practical problems of development and the dire situation of the majority of African women (Ahikire, 2002). The courses taught, as well as the broad research areas covered, reflect this particular focus, geared to achieving a proper understanding of the African context and development challenges at large.

African feminist contributions to gender research

- 15 As the conceptualization of place has become more nuanced in recent geography, so also has the definition of gender. The transition in work in Britain and North American from an emphasis on the material inequalities between men and women to new interests in language, symbolism, representations and meaning in the definition of gender is well known (McDowell, 1999). Similarly, African studies also have questioned basic terms and concepts. Mama (n.d.) points out that it is necessary for African scholars working on gender to develop their own usages of basic terms and concepts, grounding them in local realities, in order to make them more meaningful tools for addressing the oppression and subordination of women and challenging gender relations (Mama, n.d.). In this regard, Pereira (2004), noting the work of feminist scholars such as Amadiume (1987) and Oyewùmí (1997), points out that gender is not necessarily a foundational category in African societies. Ifi Amadiume (1987), in her book *Female Husbands, Male Daughters*, examines the ideology of gender in socio-cultural systems among the Igbo of south East Nigeria from the 19th century through to the post-independence era. She argues that the dual sex principle behind social organization in the indigenous society was mediated by a flexible gender system of traditional culture and language. Biological sex was not always synonymous with ideological gender. Amadiume points out that this flexibility allowed women to play roles usually monopolized by men or to be classified as “males” in terms of power and authority over others. Thus the flexibility of Igbo gender construction “implies that daughters can become sons, and consequently male, just as women can marry wives and thus become husbands, i.e., in relation to their wives” (Amadiume, 1987, p.15). Amadiume’s work is thus useful in destabilizing unilinear conceptualizations of sex and gender, it has been criticized, however, for not interrogating the ways in which flexibility and relations of domination were configured (Pereira, 2004).
- 16 In a similar vein, Oyewùmí (1997) questions the assumption that African societies are structured by gender in the mode of Euro-American societies. She argues that it is social positioning determined by seniority, rather than gender, that orders and divides

Yoruba society in Nigeria and therefore that the concept of gender is not useful for understanding that society. Among various criticisms, her work is heavily faulted for seeing seniority as the only significant dimension of power and for its lack of consideration of the intersections of diverse modes of power as they actually operate and are experienced by different social categories of people.

- 17 Despite these criticisms, these two examples show that efforts to conceptualise gender in African contexts need to go beyond showing that gender has not been constructed historically in the same way as in the West. The significance of these African conceptualizations of gender expand the possibilities for diverse categories of women and men. They also show that African women's experiences are diverse and are structured by multiple lines of power and division other than gender, such as age, class, ethnicity (and race, especially in South Africa), religion and region. Each of these is grounded and changing in differing ways according to time and place. Some studies of the state have gone especially far in extending theoretical and empirical material questioning restrictive notions of development and enlist a much wider range of theories and subjects than those examined in traditional anthropological accounts (Aidoo, 1995 ; Manuh, 1991). In the sphere of economics, Adepoju and Oppong's *Gender, Work and Population in Sub-Saharan Africa* (1994) draws together a range of case studies in which women's work is explored with detailed reference to gender roles, kinship, conjugal relations and the connections between reproduction and production. Collectively it shows how governments and donor agencies, ignoring women's labour, usually base development programmes on skewed notions of what this labour actually entails. It thus provides a critique of liberal women in development approaches and also implicitly questions traditional gender biases.

Gender in the discipline of Geography

- 18 Until the 1970s, women remained invisible in the analyses of social space in much of the world, including in geographic work in Anglophone Africa. In this section I offer two examples of the ways in which gender issues have come into contemporary geography in Anglophone Africa. I first examine the situation in Ghana, focusing on the interconnections between geographical perspectives and feminist approaches at the University of Ghana and then review recent work published on gender themes by geographers within South Africa.

Gender in Geography in Ghana

- 19 The University College of the Gold Coast, now the University of Ghana, was first established as a College of the University of London in 1948, when Ghana was a British colony. Geography was one of the earliest disciplines to be introduced and was strongly influenced by British traditions. Since the mid 1960s four other public universities have been established in Ghana, all of them having academic programmes in geography. Initially, in line with the British tradition at the time, geography exhibited a limited methodological reach, following the view that the unique contribution of the geographer was the holistic approach to the relationship between people and their environment.

- 20 With independence in 1956, and especially after the attainment of full status as a university in 1961, geography in Ghana was transformed both in terms of paradigm shifts that have affected the nature of the discipline and in line with developmental needs of the country. Curricula have been revised and several new courses introduced, especially focusing on problems such as urban and regional development, environmental issues, tourism development, poverty and development, migration studies, population and development and spatio-temporal aspects of health.
- 21 Although many geographers have undertaken studies of development issues, there has not been much focus on how gendered attributes of development are socially constructed, how femininity and masculinity vary over space and time or on the range of variations in the social relations between men and women. Neither have feminist perspectives been introduced into substantive geography core courses. A course on the Geography of Gender and Development in Africa was only introduced in 1994 as an elective third year offering in the Department of Geography and Resource Development. Despite the popularity of the topic among students, no courses have been initiated to focus on gender at the postgraduate level. Examination of other course outlines reveals that they contain very little by way of a gender component. Mainstream geography in Ghana has yet to acknowledge gender divisions as a key axis of social differentiation on a par with, for example, class, ethnicity, or place of residence. It is too often assumed that gender is an attribute of femininity and therefore only of interest to women scholars and students. Until recently, with the exception of a few studies (see, for example, Songsore & McGranahan, 1993 ; Benneh et al., 1995), there has not been a significant amount of research focusing on the intersection of gender and socio-spatial praxes. Research reports are likely to mention gender is response to donor demands, but without undertaking substantive gender analysis. There are signs of change, however, with research projects beginning to incorporate gender dimensions. The New Faces of Poverty Project focuses on the interconnections between gender, poverty and health in Ghana. The environmental research group has incorporated gender dimensions into studies of household environmental problems in the Greater Accra Metropolitan Area (Songsore and McGranahan, 1993). A significant amount of work has also been undertaken on gender and the environment (Ardayfio-Schandorf, 1993 ; Awumbila and Momsen, 1995). With the establishment of a Center for Gender Studies and Advocacy (CEGENSA) in 2005 at the University of Ghana, it is hoped that feminist approaches in mainstream geography as well as other social sciences will see increasing attention.
- 22 The Ghanaian case study points to the fact that geography in African academic institutions has been slow to take up the challenges of feminist approaches and has offered relatively little collegial support or appropriate institutional resources. Very few gender and women's studies faculty, across disciplines including geography, have had the opportunity to study issues of pedagogy itself, though the number of women and gender studies teaching centres has been increasing as has student interest in studying gender or applying a gender perspective to their various research projects.

Gender in Geography in South Africa

- 23 The emergence of gender research in South African geography is basically a phenomenon of post-apartheid reconstruction. In the 1970s, the discipline exhibited

relatively conservative approaches, tied to positivist research and modeling, not significantly challenging the racially-divided state. During the 1980s, particularly stimulated by the perspectives of geographers who had encountered more radical approaches during their studies abroad, calls were published for politically-engaged research that would be more critical and inclusive ; understandably concerns focused on race (Magi et al., 2002 ; Mather, 2007 ; Ramutsindela, 2002). The challenges identified were multifaceted but gender issues were not visible in the discourse at this time. Further, not only were there the difficulties of working within the apartheid state, but South African geographers faced marginalization from international colleagues by academic boycotts (Rogerson, 1990). By the early 1990s, however, momentum for change had grown. Calls for integration of gender began to be raised, with arguments against male dominance in geography (Robinson, 1990, cited in Bob and Musyoki, 2002). An early piece of sustained research, the doctoral dissertation by Joan Fairhurst, not only introduced gender but attended to differences among women as she studied the daily lives of economically-active single mothers, comparing black, white, “coloured” and Asian women in an urban setting (Fairhurst, 1992).

- 24 Following regime change in 1994, gender equity was articulated as state policy within South Africa, though as Khosa (2002) has pointed out, gender inequalities (as well as those of race and class) have continued to shape the lives of most South Africans. Yet near the end of the decade, Bob (1999) indicated that documents proposing curriculum reform, especially in relation to teaching of geography in the schools, continued to pay little attention to gender and that educational documents and texts, if they dealt with gender at all, did so only in very vague or stereotyped ways. She also noted that even progressive South African geographers omitted gender as an essential area for attention. Reports on the status of subfields within the discipline prepared for the International Geographical Congress in Durban in 2002 were for the most part not attentive to gender (e.g., Christopher, 2002 ; Rogerson, 2002a ; Maharaj and Narsiah, 2002). Still, there was by then sufficient commitment to gender concerns and enough work to include a review of research on gender by Bob and Musyoki in the special issue (2002). A considerable proportion of their report is devoted to making the case of the importance of attending to gender, drawing on the work of British and North American feminist geographers. They outlined an array of topics where some studies had been conducted and others which they saw as potentially important and as needing to emphasize development and empowerment issues. Topics on which research was noted include livelihood strategies and development, poverty differentials, policy issues, migration (internal and cross-border), environment and resource issues, and planning. Other themes mentioned as needing attention included gender and violence, cultural studies, access to services and the gendered impacts of neoliberal macro-economic policies introduced post-apartheid under the Growth, Employment, and Redistribution initiative. In addition to the summary by Bob and Musyoki, it is important to note that the review on population geography (Makhanya and Moodley, 2002) also called for attention to women and gender, arguing “there is a dire need for research on discrimination against women using subjective and objective indicators... [with focal areas including] women’s status and fertility, women’s access to resources, violence against women, and ways to empower women (p.111). Its authors also recognized the links between gender and poverty, health (including HIV/AIDS), and youth issues.

- 25 Examination of selected “mainstream” edited collections of recent years indicates some recognition of differential experiences and perceptions of women and men, especially in relation to economic development matters such as provision of infrastructure (e.g., paved roads, public transportation) and in sectors such as tourism planning and manufacturing (Khosa, 2002 ; Rogerson, 2002b ; Rogerson, 2005). Papers with a gender focus by South African geographers also appear intermittently in international geographical journals and edited feminist collections. The topics range from questions of development, including technological innovations (Bob, 2004) and industrial decentralization (Fairhurst and Phalatse, 1999) to political geography (Fairhurst et al., 2004 ; Maharaj & Maharaj, 2004 ; Davis et al., 2004). A recurring theme in these papers is the limited progress that has been made over the decade in implementation of policies that would meet the goals of gender equity enshrined in the country’s post-apartheid constitution. Additionally, both the gender studies and the references to women in other general works have tended to focus on poor (and black) women, both rural and urban and on material problems with occasional exceptions, such as Dirsuweit’s (2005) study of subjectivity and bodily performances in a women’s prison.

Challenges for the future

- 26 Teaching and research in gender studies, both within geography and other disciplines, faces several challenges within Anglophone Africa. First and foremost full legitimacy is yet to be achieved. As a relatively young discipline, gender studies needs to go the extra mile in terms of not only filling the gap in knowledge about relationships between men and women but also to have a conscious struggle in terms of fundamentally restructuring processes in the production of knowledge.
- 27 At the level of knowledge creation and transformation, one of the questions that gender studies has yet to deal with is that of moving beyond stereotypes. For example, many studies often begin with the stereotyped declaration of how women are oppressed and suffering, casting them as sufferers of pandemics such as HIV/AIDS, and worst hit in situations of armed conflict. These stereotypes or negative representations, which Harding (1987) calls “victimologies”, have therefore tended to breed a kind of discourse, or create an identity of womanhood that seems to suggest that women are totally incapable of defining their destiny. This orientation has tended to make the field of gender sound very simplistic. While the disadvantaged position of women cannot be refuted, there is the need to go beyond identifying and describing problems to seek explanations that could prompt efforts of social transformation.
- 28 Some exceptions to the victimology stance exist. While, for instance, writings about structural adjustment policies (SAPs) and how they have hurt women abound, there is also emerging evidence that some changes under adjustment programmes may be of relative benefit to women. It is noted that liberalization of food markets has, for instance, enabled women to earn more money and has thus increased their power (Kasente *et al.*, 2000, p.3). Mensah and Antoh (2005) in their study of women’s organizations in two districts in Ghana conclude that “despite the debilitating impacts of patriarchy, poverty, and illiteracy, women in both districts have managed to use their grassroots organizations to improve the socio-economic circumstances of their members in particular and their communities in general” (p.82). Earlier works by Obbo (1980) also present us with a picture of women’s agency and their struggle for

independence. Yet there are not enough such studies exemplifying the challenges that gender studies face as a young discipline in African contexts. It is therefore crucial to invest more in research and publication to fill the current gaps and advance new knowledge.

- 29 There is also the need for “home-grown” theory, particularly in view of the fact that the experiences of African women may differ from those of Western women. While it is important to draw on the theories formulated elsewhere, it may be necessary to re-operationalise some of the basic concepts used in women’s studies so as to ground them in our own experience and local conditions (Mama, 1996), and to take our own realities as the starting point for articulating perspectives or even entirely new theories that emanate from our particular conditions and concerns.
- 30 Part of the problem of gender studies is also that publications of African gender studies are not readily accessible. Although many meetings and discussions have been held, few of them have resulted in books and, even if published, these books are difficult to come by and only obtained locally. In Ghana, for example, several workshop and research reports are only available on departmental and NGO bookshelves. Pereira (2002) also points out that several small booklets published by the Network for Women’s Studies in Nigeria discussing issues of importance to African Gender studies are only available in Nigeria.
- 31 In many African higher education institutions, the research agenda on gender tends to be determined by external priorities and policy orientations that reinforce the re-colonization of African social science. In the light of economic difficulties and tight budgets, many universities rely on donor-driven and donor-sponsored research which can undermine academic programmes. In this regard Mama (n.d.) discusses what she terms a “United Nations” feminism, as a bureaucratized version of feminism and the ways in which the donors’ push for WID projects has created huge institutional needs for WID expertise and with it generated a bureaucratic discourse on women in development framed largely within the practical exigencies of conducting rapid rural appraisals and developing policies and project proposals. There is an uneasy relationship between WID activities, women’s movements and feminist studies. Although the women’s decade with its focus on WID activities has been important in many African countries setting up structures for women at national levels, it is important not to mistake the high profile WID programmes for a women’s movement or with women’s studies (Mama, n.d.).
- 32 The situation mapped above raises the importance of strategising for feminist capacity-building and research on a number of levels. Of importance here are not only efforts to enhance the quantity of feminist work on the continent, but also the need to develop capacity-building and networking projects that address the problems discussed. Already a number of collaborative and networking initiatives exist that contest the legacies and elements reviewed above. Development organisations and research networks such as the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA), the Southern African Regional Institute for Policy Studies (SARIPS) and the Association of African Women for Research and Development (AAWORD) and the African Gender Institute, with its feminist studies network organised around a listserve, have been hugely influential in shaping regional intellectual, cultural and political agendas. CODESRIA has particularly played a leading role in widening the

scope of discussions on “engendering” as well as “Africanising” a whole array of social science (see Imam *et al.*, 1997).

- 33 Other policy and structural problems inhibit building a sustained body of gender research. While the conditions that eventuated under SAP conditions have been noted above, local policies can also hinder how research develops and is rewarded. As South African geographers have noted (Maharaj & Narsiah, 2002 ; Nicolau & Davis, 2002 ; Ramutsindela, 2002), neo-liberal policies encouraged scholars to move towards applied and consultancy work rather than pursuing theoretical and conceptual advances. Yet current policies in South Africa, that assign more status to “internationally significant” research militate against locally-relevant geographical studies that are less likely to be considered “significant” by international scholarly journals more attuned to theoretical writing (Mather, 2007). In the current institutional and intellectual cultures, barriers and resistance to change persist. In geography, despite the introduction of teaching and research on gender themes, those who do contribute to gender research and teaching often combine this interest with an array of others, so that work is sporadic and the development of community of gender scholars inhibited. Despite these shortcomings, gender studies scholarship has registered great strides in Anglophone African countries. Once a field unknown, it has become legitimized, grown and is producing its own knowledge base which is relevant for local development and has the potential to enhance international advances in the discipline, especially as feminist scholars attend to the significance of context and to issues of diversity among as well as between women and men.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

AIDOO A. (1995), “Women in the history and culture of Ghana”, in PRAH M. (ed.), *Women’s Studies with a focus on Ghana : Selected Readings*, Schriesheim (Germany), Books on African Studies, pp. 42-60.

ADEPOJU A. & OPPONG C. (1994), *Gender, Work and Population in Sub-Saharan Africa*, Oxford, James Currey Ltd.

AHIKIRE J. (2002), “Ten years of teaching gender studies : registering achievements, addressing challenges”, in DEPARTMENT OF WOMEN AND GENDER STUDIES (ed.), *Celebrating Ten Years of Existence, Department of Women and Gender Studies*, Uganda, Makerere University, pp. 23-36.

AMADIUME I. (1987), *Male Daughters, Female Husbands : Gender and Sex in an African Society*, London, Zed Books.

ARDAYFIO-SCHANDORF E. (1993), “Household energy supply and rural women’s work in Ghana”, in MOMSEN J.H. & KINNAIRD V. (eds.), *Different Places, Different Voices*, London, Routledge, pp. 15-29.

AWUMBILA M. & MOMSEN J.H. (1995), “Gender and the environment : women’s time use as a measure of environmental change”, *Global Environmental Change*, 5 (5), pp. 337-346.

- BENNEH G., KASANGA R.K & AMOYAW D. (1995), *Women's Access to Agricultural Land in the Household : A Case study of Three Selected Districts in Ghana*, Accra, FADEP.
- BENNET J. (2002), "Exploration of a 'gap' : strategising gender equity in African Universities", *Feminist Africa*, 1, pp. 34-63.
- BOB U. (1999) "Engendering geographic education in South Africa : the need to put women on the map of South African geography", *The South African Geographical Journal*, 81, pp. 60-65.
- BOB U. (2004), "Rural women and technology in South Africa : case studies of KwaZulu-Natal Province", *Geojournal*, 61, pp. 291-300
- BOB U. & MUSYOKI A. (2002), "Gender geography in South Africa : Facing challenges and exploring opportunities", *The South African Geographical Journal*, 84, pp. 98-106.
- BOSERUP E. (1970), *Women's Role in Economic Development*, London, Allen and Unwin.
- CHAGONDA T. & GORE A. (2002), "Issues of masculinity among U.Z. students", in MATE R. (ed.), *Report of the Regional Conference on Gender Equity, Democracy and Human Rights in Institutions of Higher Education in Southern Africa*, Harare, Gender Studies Association, University of Zimbabwe, pp. 45-65.
- CHRISTOPHER A.J. (2002), "Trends in political geography", *The South African Geographical Journal*, 84, pp. 48-57.
- DAVIS N.C., HORN A.C. & GOVENDER-VAN WYK S. (2004), "Invisible women : making the case for supply-led, class-based, gender-targeted land redistribution in South Africa", *Geojournal*, 61, pp. 273-279.
- DIRSUWEIT T. (2005), "Bodies, state discipline, and the performance of gender in a South African women's prison", in NELSON L. & SEAGER J. (eds.), *A Companion to Feminist Geography*, Malden, MA and Oxford, Blackwell, pp. 350-362.
- FAIRHURST U.J. (1992), *A Time-Space Perspective in the Daily Lives of Economically Active Single Mothers*, Unpublished D.Phil. Dissertation, University of Pretoria.
- FAIRHURST U.J., DAVIES R.J., FOX R.C., GOLDSCHAGG P., RAMUTSINDELA M., BOB U. & KHASA M. M. (2002), "Geography : The state of the discipline in South Africa (2000-2001)", *The South African Geographical Journal*, 85 (2), pp. 81-89.
- FAIRHURST U.J. & PHALATSE R.M. (1999), "Industrial decentralization impacts on women as employees : the case of Ga-Rontuwa, South Africa", *Geojournal*, 48, pp. 237-44.
- FAIRHURST J., RAMUTSINDELA M. & BOB U. (2004), "Social movements, protests, and resistance", in STAEHELI L., KOFMAN E. & PEAKE L. (eds.), *Mapping Women, Making Policies : Feminist Perspectives on Political Geography*, London, Routledge, pp. 199-208.
- GAIDZANWA R. (1997), "Gender analysis in the field of education : a Zimbabwean example", in IMAM A., MAMA A. & SOW F. (eds.), *Engendering African Social Sciences*, Dakar, CODESRIA Book Series, pp. 271-295.
- HARDING S. (1987), *Feminism and Methodology*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press.
- IMAM A., MAMA A. & SOW F. (eds.) (1997), *Engendering African Social Sciences*, Dakar, CODESRIA Book Series.
- KASENTE D. (2001), "Popularising gender : a case study of Makerere", September, Nairobi, *University Paper Commissioned for FAWA and presented at 10th General Conference of the Association of African Universities*.

- KHOSA M. (2002), "Public transport in the changing South Africa, 1994-2000", in LEMON A. & ROGERSON C.M., *Geography and Economy in South Africa and its Neighbours*, Aldershot, Ashgate, pp. 146-168.
- KWESIGA J. (2002), *Women's Access to Higher Education in Africa : Uganda's Experience*, Kampala, Fountain Publishers.
- MAGI L., MAHARAJ B. & FAIRHURST J. (2002), "Guest editorial : In transition – Geography and South Africa at the dawn of the new millennium", *The South African Geographical Journal*, 84 (1), pp. 1-3.
- MAHARAJ N. & MAHARAJ B. (2004), "Engendering local government in post-apartheid South Africa, 1996-2000", *Geojournal*, 61, pp. 263-272.
- MAHARAJ B. & NARSIAH H. (2002), "From apartheid apologism to post-apartheid neo-liberalism : Paradigm shifts in South African urban geography", *The South African Geographical Journal*, 84, pp. 88-97.
- MAKHANYA E.M. & MOODLEY M. (2002), "Population geography in South Africa", *The South African Geographical Journal*, 84, pp. 107-115.
- MAMA A. (1996), "Women's Studies and studies of women in Africa during the 1990s", *Working Paper Series 5/96*, Dakar, CODESRIA.
- MAMA A. (n.d.), "Feminist Thought in the African Contexts : Developing Transformative Teaching for African Universities", <http://www.gwsafrica.org/teaching/amina%20essay.html> (accessed July, 20, 2007).
- MANUH T. (1991), "Women, state and society under PNDC" in GYIMAH-BOADI (ed.), *Ghana under PNDC Rule*, Dakar, CODESRIA Books, pp. 176-195.
- MANUH T. (2002), "Higher education, condition of scholars and the future of development in Africa", *CODESRIA Bulletin*, 3-4, pp. 42-48.
- McDOWELL L. (1999), *Gender, Identity and Place. Understanding Feminist Geographies*, Cambridge, Polity Press.
- MATHER C. (2007), "Between the 'local' and the 'global' : South African geography after apartheid", *Journal of Geography in Higher Education*, 31, 1, pp. 143-159.
- MENSAH J. & ANTOH E.F. (2005), "Reflections on indigenous women's organizations in sub-Saharan Africa : a comparative study in Brong Ahafo region", *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography*, 26, pp. 82-101.
- MOHANTY C., RUSSO A. & TORRES L. (eds.) (1991), *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press.
- NICOLAU M.D. & DAVIS N.C. (2002), "Restructuring South African geography", *The South African Geographical Journal*, 84, 1, pp. 12-20.
- OBBO C. (1980), *Women in Uganda : Their struggle for Independence*, London, Zed Press Ltd.
- OGUNDIPE-LESLIE M. (1994), *Re-creating ourselves : African women and critical Transformations*, Trenton, NJ, Africa World Press.
- OLOKA-ONYANGO J. (ed.) (2001), *Constitutionalism in Africa : Creating Opportunities, Facing Challenges*, Kampala, Fountain Publishers.
- OYEMWÙMÍ O. (1997), *The Invention of Women : Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourse*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press.

PEREIRA C. (2002), "Between knowing and imagining : What space for feminism in scholarship on Africa ?", *Feminist Africa*, 1, pp. 9-33.

PEREIRA C. (2004), "Locating gender and women's studies in Nigeria : what trajectories for the future ?", in ARNFRED S., CHACHA B.K, GOUWS A., AHIKIIRE J., OGUNDIPE A., PEREIRA C., PRAH M., UKEJE C. & YIEKE F.A., *Gender Activism and Studies in Africa*, Dakar, CODESRIA Gender Series 3, pp. 1-26.

RAMUTSINDELA M.F. (2002), "The philosophy of progress and South African geography", *The South African Geographical Journal*, 84 (1), pp. 4-11.

ROGERSON C. (1990), "A new South Africa – A new South African Geography ?", *Geoforum*, 22 (3), pp. 227-229.

ROGERSON C.M. (2002a), "The economic geography of South Africa : international parallels and local difference", *The South African Geographical Journal*, 84, pp. 58-66.

ROGERSON C.M. (2002b), "Tourism – A new economic driver for South Africa", in LEMON A. and ROGERSON C.M. (eds.), *Geography and Economy in South Africa and Its Neighbours*, Aldershot, Ashgate, pp. 95-110.

ROGERSON C.M. (2005), "Inner-city economic revitalization through cluster support : The Johannesburg clothing industry", in NEL E. and ROGERSON C.M. (eds.), *Local Economic Development in the Developing World*, New Brunswick (USA) and London (UK), Transaction Publishers, pp. 161-182.

SONGSOORE J. & McGRANAHAN G. (1993), *Environment, wealth and health : towards an analysis of intra-urban differentials within the Greater Accra Metropolitan Area*, Stockholm, Environment Institute.

NOTES

1. The considerable amount of writing on gender themes by scholars not of African origins (especially by those in North America and Britain) is beyond the scope of this paper, though its complementary and contrasting nature is a topic that would be worthy of attention.
2. I recognize that people in these African countries are not monolingual in English; however, the bulk of academic writing and teaching are in the English language.
3. Under the educational sector reforms embarked upon as part of the SAPs, particular demands imposed on higher educational institutions included increased educational enrolments, while at the same time staffing levels and financial subventions were cut. Concurrently the state, as the creator and guarantor of employment for many graduates, had to cut jobs in the civil and public services.
4. A course had, however, been offered earlier (1979) on "Women in Society" at Ahmadu Bello University in Nigeria.

ABSTRACTS

Gender equity has been acknowledged as critical to the equitable and sustainable development of Anglophone Africa, with much work at various levels in the region since the early 1990s. In higher education, this has included the introduction of courses on women and gender, an increase in studies on gender and place, and networking among feminist scholars and activists. While geographers have made significant contributions to the discourse, these have not translated into the mainstreaming of gender into sub-areas in the discipline nor to an examination of how gendered attributes are socially constructed or to the nature of space-time variations in femininity and masculinity. This paper provides an overview of recent developments in Anglophone African countries in the study of women and of gender studies in general. It offers case studies of work in geography within Ghana and South Africa. In so doing, it locates gender and women's studies in relation to international women's movements and African contexts. It also traces how gender studies have evolved and outlines challenges and potential trajectories for future directions.

Het is bekend dat gelijkheid tussen de seksen cruciaal is voor een rechtvaardige en duurzame ontwikkeling in Angelsaksisch Afrika, waaraan sinds de vroege jaren negentig op verschillende niveaus binnen de regio is gewerkt. In het hoger onderwijs betrof dit de introductie van cursussen op het terrein van vrouwen en gender, een toename in het aantal onderzoeken op het gebied van gender en plaats, en het netwerken tussen feministisch researchers en militanten. Hoewel geografen een belangrijke bijdrage hebben geleverd aan het ontwikkelingsdiscours, heeft deze bijdrage zich niet vertaald in een erkenning van het belang van gender in de verschillende subdisciplines binnen de geografie. Er is geen aandacht voor de vraag op welke wijze de gender attributen van het ontwikkelingsproces sociale constructies vormen; evenmin is er aandacht voor verschillen in tijd en ruimte in vrouwelijkheid en mannelijkheid. Dit artikel geeft een overzicht van de recente ontwikkelingen in Angelsaksisch Afrika in het gender onderzoek in het algemeen, en in het bijzonder een aantal case-studies over geografie in Ghana en Zuid-Afrika. Op deze wijze exploreert het de relatie tussen gender onderzoek en de internationale vrouwenbeweging en plaatst het in de context van Afrika. Het laat bovendien zien hoe in de afgelopen decennia gender binnen de geografie is geëvolueerd en getransformeerd en schetst uitdagingen en potenties voor de toekomst.

INDEX

Keywords: gender, development, gender studies, geography and gender, Anglophone Africa

Trefwoorden gender, ontwikkeling, gender studies, geografie en gender, Angelsaksisch Afrika

AUTHOR

MARIAMA AWUMBILA

Department of Geography and Resource Development, University of Ghana, Legon (Ghana),
mawumbil@ug.edu.gh