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EDITORIAL

What do the 2025 G20 Decisions Mean for Africa?



SIPHAMANDLA ZONDI , TINUADE OJO  & JOSEF KEUTCHEU 
Editors

The 2025 G20 Summit held on 22–23 November 2025 in Johannesburg under South Africa’s presidency marked a turning point in how global financial and development issues are framed, particularly for Africa. For the first time, a G20 declaration is structured explicitly around *solidarity, equality, and sustainability*—principles that reflect long-standing African priorities. The declaration states that leaders commit to “*rebuilding a fairer, more inclusive and more resilient global economy*”—language that resonates deeply with African calls for an equitable global financial order. This framing empowers Africa to push for long-overdue reforms in development finance, debt restructuring, and access to climate finance.

One of the most significant outcomes for Africa is the G20’s commitment to **reform of the international financial architecture**, especially the multilateral development banks (MDBs). The declaration highlights the need to “*scale up affordable long-term financing for sustainable development and climate transitions*”. For African countries, which face the world’s highest borrowing costs, this commitment—if operationalized—could unlock new concessional finance, reduce debt vulnerabilities, and expand fiscal space for development. Moreover, the G20’s endorsement of **capital adequacy reforms** signals pressure on institutions like the World Bank and African Development Bank to lend more without increasing risk.

Equally important is the strengthened language on **debt reform**, where leaders recognise that “*debt vulnerabilities threaten sustainable development*” and call for “*timely, orderly and fair debt treatment for all countries in need*.” This aligns strongly with Africa’s advocacy for predictable, transparent, and equitable debt-restructuring mechanisms. Although the declaration does not fix the weaknesses of

the Common Framework, it pushes for expanding participation beyond the Paris Club and improving coordination among bilateral creditors—an essential win for African states frequently caught in prolonged negotiations.

On **climate change**, the declaration explicitly links climate, food security, water access and biodiversity—an interdependence at the heart of Africa’s development realities. The G20 pledges to “*accelerate adaptation finance and strengthen resilience across food, water and climate systems*.” For African countries that contribute least to global emissions but suffer the most from climate impacts, the renewed emphasis on adaptation and resilience financing is critical. The commitment to operationalize the **Loss and Damage Fund** also holds potential benefits for African communities already affected by floods, droughts, and extreme heat.

In digital governance and artificial intelligence, the G20 emphasises “*bridging digital divides and ensuring inclusive access to digital infrastructure*.” For Africa, where digital exclusion still limits development opportunities, this creates political space to demand investment in connectivity, data infrastructure, and digital sovereignty. The recognition of Africa’s young population as an asset for the future global workforce provides additional momentum for skills development initiatives funded by G20 and MDB partners.

Finally, South Africa’s presidency elevated Africa’s voice within the G20, leveraging its leadership of the AU as a **permanent G20 member**. The declaration repeatedly recognises the priorities of the Global South—especially in food security, industrialization, and climate justice. For African stakeholders, the 2025 G20 outcomes represent progress in shifting global governance debates toward equity, inclusion, and

development. But the real test will be implementation. Africa must now mobilize its diplomatic, academic, and civil society networks to ensure that commitments made in the declaration translate into concrete action and resources on the continent.

This journal edition is dedicated to the historic G20 Summit 2025 in that it was held in November 2025, taking place in Africa for the very first time in history. It naturally had to foreground African interests. But how these decisions translate into programmes of action is a question that will linger on for years to come. It is about leadership and accountability. Some of the decisions above are critical for Africa's attainment of economic sovereignty.


Articles in this edition cover a range of subjects. We are particularly pleased by the gendered perspectives, the focus on education, discussion of the rights of the child, and the discussions on the making of the state /nation in Africa.

We dedicate this second edition of 2025 to authors, hard-working reviewers, and the book reviewer.

Siphamandla Zondi
Editor-in-Chief
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Parliamentary Oversight over the Policing of Gender and Women's Concerns in Cameroon

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Abstract

Countries have long advocated for gender equality, emphasising the importance of women's representation in parliament. The prevalent belief that women can more effectively represent women's concerns than men is subject to debate. Globally, women are underrepresented in all levels of socio-political hierarchies and are often distant from decision-making processes. These challenges persist in social, economic, and political structures, including parliamentary systems. This research specifically delves into the challenges faced by parliamentarians in addressing gender issues and women's concerns in the CNA. The study was conducted at the Cameroon National Assembly (CNA) located in Yaoundé and focused on the members of parliament (MPs) who served during the 2013-2019 Parliamentary session, constituting a total population of 180 MPs. This research employed a qualitative methodology that encompassed both descriptive and explanatory elements. The researchers utilised convenience and purposive sampling techniques, leading to the participation of 5 female MPs and 4 male MPs in the study. According to Johnson (2006), it is noted that saturation typically manifests around 8 participants within a homogeneous group; hence, the intentional inclusion of 4 men and 5 women MPs aimed to achieve saturation and depth in the study. The primary method of data collection involved using semi-structured, open-ended interview guides and tape recordings to ensure comprehensive data acquisition from the respondents. The identities and real names of the respondents were deliberately omitted from the presentation of findings. The results revealed that gender issues are not effectively addressed in parliament. As a result, most policies enacted and projects undertaken by members of the CNA remain mostly gender neutral/blind, with gender issues often going unrecognised or being dismissed during sessions. Therefore, it is highly recommended to raise awareness among MPs in the CNA and build their capacity to be more gender sensitive and responsive in discussing topics during sessions and other parliamentary activities.

Keywords: Parliamentarians, Gender, Policing, Gender Issues, Women's concerns

Introduction

Countries have long been advocating for gender equality between men and women. This has been the subject of many debates and discussions. However, gender disparities between men and women still exist in every sector, including political life (Tefera, 2010). This disparity is manifested, among other things, in terms of political representation, in which most women are still under-represented in parliament and other political spheres. Several studies conducted by UN Women (2014: 2) in global political relations indicate that women's parliamentary representation is at 21.8% globally. In specific cases, it is 42.1% for Nordic countries, 25.2% in the Americas,

18.9% in Asia, 13.4% in the Pacific, 17.8% in Arab states, and 22.9% in Sub-Saharan Africa; Cameroon experienced a slight increase of 31.1%. Women's representation in parliament is desired for many reasons, the major one being that women are human beings, and they deserve to participate in all aspects of life destined as human beings (Tefera, 2010). The other major reason is that women have a different experience from men. Likewise, women and men differ in terms of their gender roles, and, therefore, women's voice needs to be represented almost equally in parliament. Also, of importance is that women constitute more than half of the world's population, and the legitimacy of the liberal political theory of states requires that women be part of the seats in parliaments.

Women's Concerns and Parliament: Literature Survey

The discussion thus far hangs on the assertion that women can represent women's concerns better than men. While this statement might have truth, the notion is open for debate. From a feminist perspective, it seems that the question of women's representation is not the question of the physical presence or descriptive representation of women in the parliament. Rather, having women in the parliament is a question of whether the interest of women, which needs to be well represented and well recognised in all decision-making, are taken into account. Concerning this standpoint, Mateo (2005) reported that men, although different from women in terms of their sex, can represent gender issues as long as the interests of women are well understood and included during parliamentary sessions.

Many African governments have adopted gender equality to improve their international image and secure development assistance, but they do not necessarily enforce gender equality in their laws. Instead, gender equality is often used as a way for a select few elite women to advance their careers. For example, in Cameroon, the number of women Parliamentarians (MPs) has increased from 13.3% to at least 31.1%, which shows progress. However, women still have limited influence in decision-making during parliamentary discussions in the Cameroon National Assembly (CNA). Women worldwide at every socio-political level are under-represented in parliament and far removed from decision-making levels. While the political playing field in different countries has its peculiarities, one feature remains common: it is uneven and not conducive to women's participation. Worldwide, women face barriers to participating in politics (Abdela, 2000). These barriers are found in prevailing social and economic spheres and even in existing political structures, including the parliament (Thanikodi & Sugirtha, 2007).

In many societies, traditional values continue to prioritise women's roles as mothers and homemakers, often reinforcing gender-segregated responsibilities. These cultural norms can impede women's advancement and involvement in political processes (Thanikodi & Sugirtha, 2007). The underrepresentation of women in parliament often stems from the patriarchal belief system concerning power dynamics between male and female MPs (Paxton, Pamela & Kuvotich, 2003). This imbalance limits women's active participation in influencing and voting on legislation related to gender issues and women's concerns. Furthermore, Krook (2010). Note that most women members of Parliament, especially the first-timers, are often unable to get support to police gender in parliament from their male colleagues on most occasions. The high-level intrigues and political manoeuvring which characterise business in parliament and other political forums serve to discourage many women who otherwise have a lot to offer. Most of the women legislators in parliament are solid professionals in various fields, and they bring a wealth of knowledge and leadership skills to the house; however, they never find the space for this to show.

Women's lack of confidence, as identified by Katy and Shipman (2014), is a significant factor contributing to their under-representation in formal political institutions such as parliaments,

governments, and political parties. With confidence and determination, women can attain top positions in the political process. Women must believe in themselves and dispel the widespread notion that men should be their only leaders. Women possess equal potential to men and should advocate for their rights, issues, and concerns (Abdela, 2000). Lack of confidence is described as fear on the part of women; “*being exposed or being afraid of making themselves look stupid*” hampers women from articulating gender issues and women’s concerns in parliament (Razak–Abubakari et al, 2014). Nevertheless, research carried out by Clavero & Galligan (2005) revealed that women politicians interviewed cited lack of confidence as a barrier, and were keen to stress that in their personal experience, this was not a problem for them. Respondents also tended to qualify the claim that lack of confidence constitutes a barrier to the supply and not the demand of women politicians, pointing out that this problem does not affect women who succeed in entering the world of politics.

Another barrier to the articulation of gender issues and women’s concerns in parliament relates to the treatment of women MPs by men MPs. Women MPs remain targets of dismissive remarks from male colleagues, MPs often wilfully ignore their female colleagues when they want to speak in meetings, and are the subject of patronising and disrespectful behaviour. The following quotation illustrates an experience by a female MP in research by Clavero & Galligan (2005; 988).

During various discussions, everyone spoke up, I stood up and raised my hand ..., and I continued to be unnoticed. In the end, I stamped my feet ... But with a weaker personality, one can feel so less important ... They [women politicians] feel that they are not being noticed and choose to resign.

Another obstacle facing women MPs is what Bauer (2010: 64) notes as the “*blame the victim*” syndrome, which holds that it is women’s fault that there are so few of them in decision-making positions. Women remain constantly reminded that they are the majority of the population and the majority of the voters. Thus, the reasoning goes, women should be able to elect women. In a study carried out by Bauer (2010; 64), a woman activist in Botswana reported that President Ian Khama said to her: “*Why don’t you (Women) go and elect yourselves?*”

Both women and men MPs are often unable to police gender issues and women’s concerns in parliament because they are gender blind/insensitive. Policing gender issues in parliament entails steps and actions taken by MPs in recognising gender gaps and gender discriminatory laws that place women and girls in subordinate positions both in the public and private spheres (Estlund, 2008). Equally, policing women’s concerns in parliament also requires actions by MPs in defending and upholding legislative laws and realising projects strictly related to women’s special needs, which are a result of their differences in their sexual reproductive roles (Celis, 2006).

According to the theory of Critical Mass as presented by Norris & Lovenduski (2001), the attainment of a critical percentage of women elected to Parliament, typically ranging from 25% to 30%, triggers a transformative impact on the institutional culture, political discourse, and policy agenda concerning gender-related issues and women’s concerns. In contrast, liberal feminists argue that the subordination of women stems from entrenched customary and legal restrictions that obstruct the entry and active participation of female MPs in parliamentary processes. They posit that when both male and female MPs possess equal opportunities and rights in parliamentary decision-making, women will assert greater influence over issues affecting them and broader societal concerns.

In Cameroon, Parliamentarians are interested in responding to party interests, neglecting gender issues and concerns, while women remain passive recipients rather than active participants in

parliament. Mrs Abena Ondoa née Obama Marie Thérèse, Minister of Women's Empowerment and the Family in Cameroon (MINPROFF), during an interview on the Cameroon Radio Television (CRTV) during the 54th session of the Commission of the Status of Women in New York on March 2010, complained: "Women in parliament sit as passive recipients and not active participants in decision-making during parliamentary gatherings" (CRTV, 2010; Cameroon Election, 2013).

Proponents of critical mass noted that as the number of women increases in decision-making, women are more likely to influence their male colleagues to accept and approve policies and programs promoting women's interests in parliament. Assessment of the articulation of gender equality and women's empowerment by parliamentarians has to go beyond numbers to encompass the complex relationship between power and participation. It is therefore important to determine how both men and women parliamentarians handle gender-related issues during parliamentary deliberations

Cameroon is a signatory to most international conventions such as the Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), Africa Union (AU) Agenda 2063, and the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) to mention a few, promotes women's empowerment and emancipation in all ramification, it remains questionable if women's concerns and gender issues are deliberated and defended in Parliament. This research focuses on the challenges faced by parliamentarians in the policing of gender issues, Gender Issues and Women's Concerns in the CNA.

Study Approach

The study was conducted at the Cameroon National Assembly (CNA) based in Yaoundé. Cameroon is a Central African nation in the Gulf of Guinea, bordered by Nigeria, Chad, the Central African Republic, the Republic of Congo, Equatorial Guinea, and Gabon. French and English are the official languages. The country is often referred to as "African in miniature" because of its geological and cultural diversity (African Studies Center, 2015). Yaoundé, nicknamed the "*City of Seven Hills*", hills: Akok Ndoue, Mbog Ndum, Minloa, Embaminala, Messa, Mbakol, and Febe. These hills are situated at the three distinct mountains that tower over the city, namely: Mbam Minkom (1295m), Mount Nkolodom (1221m), and Mount Eloudem (1159m). This study was done in Yaounde, the capital of Cameroon, located between latitudes 3°47' and 3°56' North of the Equator and between longitudes 11°10' and 11°45' East of the Greenwich Meridian of Yaounde in the Centre Region of Cameroon has a population of more than 2,440,462 inhabitants as of 2011. Yaoundé is a hilly and undulating city at 750m above sea level. Yaoundé lies at the centre of Cameroon at an elevation of about 750 metres (2500 ft) above sea level (Oben & Ndi, 2017).

This research is qualitative, and it adopts a descriptive research design. Based on the purpose of this study, the population for this study is members of parliament (MPs) in the Cameroon National Assembly (CNA); therefore, the total population is 180 members of parliament. Women MPs occupy 56 (31.1%) seats while men occupy 120 (68.9%) seats in the CNA. This research targets men and women MPs of the CNA of the 2013–2019 electoral mandates. The researchers selected the respondents through a list of all MPs of the 2013–2019 electoral mandates that was compiled using the CNA website. The compiled list comprised 56 female Members of Parliament (MPs) and 124 male MPs, totalling 180. The rationale behind this list was to ensure a comprehensive representation of both genders in the study. The study specifically honed in on MPs who had served in the CNA for a minimum of 3 years, as these individuals would have had substantial involvement in session or committee meetings, directly or indirectly addressing gender issues and the concerns of women in the nation.

The study employed two sampling techniques: convenience sampling and purposive sampling. Convenience sampling was selected based on the availability and accessibility of respondents, while purposive sampling was applied to ensure the representation of the total population. The sample consisted of 5 female MPs and 4 male MPs from both Anglophone and Francophone regions of Cameroon. According to Johnson (2006), saturation typically occurs around 8 participants in a homogeneous group; hence, the decision to include 4 men and 5 women aimed to achieve saturation. Moreover, to surpass the saturation threshold and provide complementary data, 9 participants were included in the study. The researchers set out to understand how members of parliament from different regions and genders voiced gender-related issues and women's concerns in parliament, as well as their positions on gender-related bills. Despite the notable prevalence of over 30% female Members of Parliament in Cameroon, certain regions lack female representation. The primary data collection method involved using semi-structured open-ended interview guide tape recordings to ensure comprehensive data acquisition from the respondents.

Given the bilingual nature of Cameroon and the use of English in this research, the interviews were audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed. Interviews conducted in French were translated into English and transcribed to facilitate analysis. The data was conscientiously represented using standardised methods, including distinct words, punctuation and capitalisation to improve clarity. Initial themes were carefully identified and cross-referenced with the transcripts to ensure a comprehensive understanding of themes. Subsequently, codes were developed based on these themes and applied to each transcript, following a thematic framework that directed the qualitative data analysis process. This systematic approach was crucial for organising open-ended interview data and combining it with other qualitative data for the current study.

To uphold confidentiality, the identities and real names of the respondents were deliberately omitted from the presentation of findings. Each respondent was assigned a letter of the alphabet from A to I for discussions and data presentation. It was communicated to the respondents that their participation was solely for academic purposes and to ensure research ethics. They were guaranteed the right to withdraw at any point during the research.

This research was carried out during the peak of the ongoing Anglophone Conflict in Cameroon, as such carrying out this research during this period was difficult for the researchers since the population for the study was scared to give out information for the study due to the fact they were scared of the unknown, most of the respondents for the study at the time had fled away from their constituent to seek refuge in Yaoundé. The fact that many top legal, legislative, government officers and local chiefs were targeted, killed, or ruthlessly beaten and abducted for ransom was the reason parliamentarians feared the unknown and, as such, were unwilling to release information needed for the research. One of them told the researchers: "... don't you know this is the wrong time for this exercise? You should wait until after the crisis before you can carry out this research."

The researchers had to travel to Yaoundé to meet the respondents with proof of authorisation from the Department of Women and Gender Studies at the University of Buea; to carry out research with MPs in the CNA, the researchers equally assured them of anonymity and confidentiality with regard to the information they got from the respondents.

Analysis of Parliamentary Oversight over Women's Concerns

In an in-depth analysis of the challenges related to the oversight of women's issues and gender-related concerns within the parliamentary activities of the CNA, survey respondents expounded on the impediments that hinder the effective monitoring of gender issues and women's concerns. A

majority of the respondents conveyed that gender issues are inadequately monitored in parliament due to the limited participation of women, a circumstance linked to the structural composition of the CNA. Consequently, despite the significant representation of women in parliament, their ability to actively engage and influence decision-making during parliamentary sessions and other activities is restricted. Respondent “E” stated: “...the structure of the house has an impact on decision making during the voting of bills as men influence decisions more than women MPs”.

A few respondents expressed the view that cultural stereotypes play a significant role in impeding the progress of women MPs. According to the respondent “A”, differences in social values and behavioural patterns between male and female MPs, with cultural limitations on women’s participation in meetings with men, pose a significant challenge. Respondent “I” emphasised that gender issues are often overlooked in parliament due to ingrained societal values and behavioural norms. On the contrary, a female participant believed there are no obstacles for women in parliament, asserting that male and female MPs have equal rights and opportunities for participation and decision-making in the CNA. Detailed analysis of the findings, revealed that the majority (6 out of 9) respondents think that the political manifesto of the various political parties of MPs in the CNA hinders MPs from policing gender in parliament; in the voice of respondent “F”, “We are all required to strictly adhere to the party’s manifesto and not to vote or debate based on our personal preferences in Parliament,” stated Respondent A. They also mentioned, “Our priority is to support our political manifesto over our interests, and unfortunately, our political manifesto rarely includes women’s interests.”

Another half of the respondents (55.5%) equally complained that stereotypes and culture are another challenge MPs face in policing gender in Parliament. In the words of respondent “B”, who said, “At times I feel like, to most women MPs it is right for men MPs to speak while we observe,” and in corroboration, respondent “E” said, “Most women MPs think men MPs should be the ones to influence and make decisions in parliament”.

Another substantive proportion (44.4%) pointed to the challenge associated with a limited number of women in parliament, which makes it difficult for gender issues/women’s concerns to be policed in parliament. The reason why respondent “I” affirms “the number influences voting results when bills are voted” and in corroboration, respondent “C” affirms that “There are not enough women to influence bill voting”. Only one respondent thought that most MPs are not gender literate; respondent “D” asserted that “Most of us MPs have little or no knowledge of gender and its importance.”

The study also revealed that the establishment of common routines and cultures within the National Assembly (CNA) contributes to the stereotyping of male and female Members of Parliament (MPs). These labels hinder the progress of promoting gender issues and women’s concerns in Parliament. The CNA culture is patriarchal, which significantly affects the socio-political aspects of passing gender-sensitive bills in Parliament. Supporting this claim, 55.5% of the respondents expressed that stereotypes and culture pose challenges for MPs in addressing gender issues in Parliament. One respondent, “B,” remarked, “At times, I feel that most women MPs think it’s more appropriate for male MPs to speak while we observe.” Additionally, respondent “E” stated, “Many women MPs believe that male MPs should hold the influence and make decisions in Parliament.” The aforementioned results are in line with the assertion made by Mrs. Abena Ondoa née Obama Marie Thérèse, Minister of Women’s Empowerment and the Family in Cameroon (MINPROFF), during an interview on the Cameroon Radio Television (CRTV) during the 54th session of the Commission of the Status of Women in New York on March 2010, complained: “Women in parliament sit as passive recipients and not active participants in decision-making during parliamentary gatherings” (CRTV, 2010; Cameroon Election, 2013).

Conclusion and Recommendation

The result revealed that gender issues are not policed in parliament; consequently, most policies/bills enacted and projects carried out by members of the CAN are often gender neutral, the CNA remains mostly gender neutral, so gender issues are not recognised as such, and are often waved or shelved. The lack of policing or very little policing is associated with who is responsible or better suited to do policing. Women MPs believe men MPs ought to police because they constitute the majority representation in the CNA and are better placed than women MPs; they equally find it wrong to speak or challenge men, a common phenomenon in most cultures in Cameroon. Implicitly, the structure and culture of the parliament seem patriarchal and may not be gender friendly to discuss gender issues and foster gender equality. Judging from findings, it is not just the number of women vis-à-vis men parliamentarians in the CNA that hinders the articulation and policing of gender issues; it was discovered that most of the MPs were not gender literate. In addition, most MPs have little or no knowledge of how and why to pursue and promote gender equality and women's empowerment. Which challenges male hegemony and power relations? The findings in the study equally revealed that women's empowerment is not actively promoted in parliament, although Cameroon is a signatory to AU 2063, SDGs 2030, GESP, etc. It is clear that issues of women and their empowerment are often not proposed or discussed in Parliament during committee meetings, sessions, or other Parliamentary activities, and if brought up, they are often waved away or shelved.

It is therefore of utmost importance to raise the awareness of MPs in the CNA by building their gender capacity in a bid to ensure they are gender sensitive/responsive in topics raised during sessions or other parliamentary activities. The building/enhancement of the knowledge, skills, and attitude on gender issues would enable MPs to respond to the Practical Gender Needs and Strategic Gender Needs of women and men; remove the barriers to women's full participation; ensure operations and resources are used effectively towards promoting gender equality; ensure parliament has no substantive, structural or cultural barriers to women's full participation; set standard for other parliamentarians. More so, since MPs show their allegiance to party manifestos during parliamentary activities and Cameroon has ratified several international conventions on fostering women's empowerment and gender equality, engendering party manifestos is a logical way of getting more MPs to police gender issues and women's concerns in the CNA.

This work is based on the premise that party manifesto and gender-blind/neutral bills/policies and projects of members of parliament are the reason for MPs' inability to police women's concerns and gender issues in the CNA, as such, the study is relevant in the fields of gender studies and political science, because it provides knowledge on an evaluation of the right theories and mechanisms researchers in the aforementioned fields and social science in general need to address and agender political issues on Politics and MPs and their various constituencies in Cameroon.

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Freedom Denied: Unravelling the Paradox of Zimbabwe's Post-Independence Struggle for Liberty

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Abstract

This paper delves into the absence of freedom in post-independent Zimbabwe, questioning prevailing notions of freedom. Motivated by recent social movements in Zimbabwe, it explores the realities of freedom in this context. The main research question is, “To what extent can the freedom of Zimbabweans in the post-independence era be assessed?” The study draws on Western and non-Western political philosophy and includes narrative interviews with Zimbabweans. While existing literature debates the nation’s freedom status, this study, grounded in pan-African perspectives, asserts that Zimbabwe, like other African nations, has yet to achieve genuine freedom despite the presence of freedom-enabling elements. The crux lies in the predominantly Western lens through which freedom is viewed. Western conceptions, insufficient in an African context, overlook key aspects of African culture—communality and economic freedom. The paper challenges the universal applicability of Western notions of freedom in Africa, positing that understanding freedom requires appreciating Zimbabwe’s distinct cultural and economic paradigms. The article concludes that without a representative definition, freedom in Zimbabwe cannot be accurately assessed. To move towards true freedom, Zimbabwe and other African countries must decolonise the concept of freedom, focusing on reducing social and economic gaps to enhance communal and economic freedom.

Keywords: Freedom, Zimbabwe, Pan-Africanism, Political Philosophy, Decoloniality, Economic Freedom.

Introduction

Zimbabwe attained independence from the British Empire on April 18, 1980, marking a significant milestone accompanied by aspirations for heightened freedom. However, reflecting on the past forty-four years, it is evident that Zimbabwe has not fully realised a state of complete freedom. This observation is substantiated by an examination of the actions undertaken by the independent government and the subsequent reactions manifested through protests or social movements in Zimbabwe. Considering freedom is universally regarded as one of the most important human principles, it is worth exploring why Zimbabwe has struggled to attain true freedom and how this can be remedied. The central argument of this paper posits that the ongoing struggle for genuine freedom among Zimbabweans is rooted in the inherent definition of freedom itself. Following independence, Zimbabwe instituted political systems grounded in Western philosophies, with freedom being a cornerstone. However, the application of these Western ideologies has proven incongruent within the African context because these ideologies are rooted in Western liberalism. Consequently, Zimbabwe, along with other African nations, grapples with advancing freedom

while attempting to conform to a framework ill-suited to the unique social, cultural, economic, and historical contexts of these countries. Driven by the limitations imposed by prevailing and normative definitions of freedom, the primary research question guiding this paper is “To what extent can the freedom of Zimbabwe in the post-independence era be assessed?” To address this inquiry, this article will explore the promised and granted freedom at the time of independence, delving into the Western paradigms that influenced Zimbabwe. The analysis will reveal that the contemporary evaluation of freedom in Zimbabwe is hindered by the persistent application of Western perspectives. In dissecting the deficiencies of the existing notion of freedom, the paper will draw insights from Pan-African literature to identify more pertinent conceptualisations of freedom for Zimbabwe. These alternative notions will account for Africa’s communal nature and its strong emphasis on economic security.

This article begins by elucidating the relevance of this topic within broader African philosophy and politics. It then details the approach employed to address the central research question. Subsequently, the article presents evidence that freedom is indeed lacking in Zimbabwe. The discussion then transitions to an analysis of the current understanding of freedom, highlighting its strong roots in Western liberalism. Through an examination of prominent Pan-African literature, the need for a decolonial definition of freedom is articulated, along with what such a definition might entail in the context of Zimbabwe. Finally, the article concludes that freedom cannot currently be adequately assessed in Zimbabwe due to the absence of an appropriate understanding of freedom. It recommends that to advance the quest for freedom, African countries like Zimbabwe must decolonise their philosophical frameworks.

Approach

This article uses two methodological frameworks to tackle the question at hand. The first is a desk-based review of existing literature. This method was split into two fields: academic literature on political-philosophical conceptions of freedom and African political literature on freedom and identity. The second method used is supplemental to the research collected and qualifies as a qualitative research method in the form of informal open narrative interviews. These interviews were conducted as semi-formal conversations with Zimbabwean citizens to understand their perceptions of freedom in the country. The interviews were conducted with a small sample of six Zimbabweans of different races, genders, social classes and ages. Although a small number of Zimbabweans (no matter how diverse the group) cannot represent the perceptions of the entire population, due to the contemporary nature of this topic, there was value in acquiring input from Zimbabweans. All interviews were conducted in accordance with ethical standards approved by Utrecht University (UCR). Each participant provided informed consent, and anonymity was ensured to protect their identities. All collected data has been securely and confidentially stored. These interviews supplement the main premise of this paper, that Zimbabwe is not in a state of freedom.

Using both methods, the paper confronts the use of dominant political theoretical understandings in academia with a more embedded understanding of these notions’ characteristics in Zimbabwe. The combination of approaches, varying from analytical-conceptual to political-historical and semi-formal conversations, helps balance the tensions between what has been experienced in the post-independence context and the promise of freedom in these countries. Upon undertaking an exhaustive review of the extant literature on freedom in political theory, it becomes evident that prevailing theoretical frameworks predominantly emanate from and cater to Western societies. Notwithstanding the normative nature of this paper on how freedom ought to be viewed in the African context, due consideration must be afforded to existing definitions of freedom. This

discernment is indispensable for comprehending the genesis of prevailing systems within African states. Looking back at Western philosophers, a large number of philosophers and political thinkers have debated the concept of freedom. Yet, upon a closer examination of the conceptions that have endured through the epochs, it emerges that negative liberty, positive liberty, and republicanism stand out prominently within the corpus of Western philosophical discourse.

The dichotomy between negative and positive liberty, albeit most notably articulated by Isaiah Berlin in his seminal lecture, “Two Concepts of Liberty” (1958), predates this articulation. Aristotle, hailing from the Classical era circa 350 BCE, propounded a form of positive liberty tethered to the acquisition of knowledge and the advancement of individual reason, thereby constituting a paradigm grounded in the autonomy of self. This Aristotelian conception has been echoed by other philosophers such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1762), Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1807), T.H. Green (1882, 1883), John Christman (1991), and the very articulator of the dichotomy, Isaiah Berlin (1958).

The trajectory of Rousseau and Christman’s philosophies is particularly noteworthy, however, as both scholars transitioned from a purview of positive liberty rooted in personal progression to a later conceptualisation aligned with political choice. They argue that, since governmental decisions and policies exert an inordinate influence on an individual’s life, veritable freedom can only be realised through an agency that exercises control over the shaping forces of governance. The alignment of these perspectives, manifested in a Platonian or Hegelian philosophical orientation, underscores the necessity for an intimate nexus between personal values and collective rationality within the framework of a politically liberated existence (McDonald & Hoffmann, 2010 and Christman, 2009). The development of this thought will provide the basis of the republican understanding of liberty.

Republican liberty, popularly supported by Philip Pettit (1997), is a concept of freedom that emphasises participation in self-governance and the absence of arbitrary domination. Unlike negative liberty, which focuses on the absence of interference, republican liberty insists that true freedom requires a political community where citizens have a say in the laws and policies that govern them (Pettit, 1997). This form of liberty is rooted in the idea that individuals are free when they are not subject to the will of another, whether through laws imposed without their consent or through unchecked power. As Pettit (1997) explains, a structural feature of republican thought is that these elements of collective protection are seen not as opposing but as related elements of the dynamic of freedom.

In parallel, negative liberty is defined as the absence of external constraints or interference on an individual’s actions (McKinnon, 2019). In this context, freedom is realised when individuals are free from coercion, interference, or restrictions imposed by others, particularly by the government or other institutions (McKinnon, 2019). Advocates for negative liberty are prominent figures such as Montesquieu (1748), John Stuart Mill (1859), and Isaiah Berlin (1958).

Further elaboration on these three branches of liberty will be presented later in this essay, as they form the foundational understanding of freedom in the Western world and, by extension, in their ex-colonies. However, while these concepts may be considered all-encompassing in a Western context, they fall short in an African context. As articulated by Martin Asiegbu (2016), contemporary African philosophers have introduced innovative perspectives in their approach to philosophical inquiries. Diverging from their predecessors, a distinct school of African philosophers has emerged, emphasising dependent and culture-oriented philosophical frameworks. This paper centres its focus on scholars belonging to this paradigm, who assert that

philosophy is inherently rooted in cultural backgrounds, rendering all philosophical conclusions contingent upon cultural contexts.

Therefore, this essay also incorporates arguments presented by prominent Pan-Africanists on the concept of freedom, who argue for a culturally informed understanding of freedom. Scholars focusing on Pan-African approaches in general, such as Kwame Nkrumah (1964), Franz Fanon (1963), and Achille Mbembe (2001), contribute to the discourse that explores why an African conception of freedom is necessary. It is generally explained by these and other Pan-African scholars that an African understanding of freedom is needed because Western philosophical conceptions fail to include the unique historical, cultural and social contexts of African societies (Oyedola, 2016). Consequently, as Oyedola (2016) explains, the failure of African leaders to foreground African political thought has resulted in the continued colonisation of concepts such as freedom. This highlights an urgent need for decolonising ideas to ensure Africa's future development. Pan-African thinkers, including those mentioned above, argue that philosophy serves as a powerful tool to liberate the African mind and foster self-determination.

In exploring Pan-African perspectives on freedom, the concept of Ubuntu emerges as a central and distinctive element within African philosophy. Ubuntu, which translates to "I am because you are," encapsulates a communal ethos that contrasts with the individualism often emphasised in conceptions of freedom. As scholars like Colin Chasi (2014) and Elspeth Huxley (1960) argue, Ubuntu represents the collective aspect of freedom that has historically underpinned African societies. This communal framework, as explained by Gyekye (2002), suggests that an individual's fulfilment comes from the well-being of the community as a whole. In this sense, Pan-African thinkers argue that freedom in an African context must be prioritised, recognising that individuals are deeply interwoven with the social fabric. Thus, understanding freedom through Ubuntu reflects the unique ways African societies organise themselves, underscores the importance of decolonising communal well-being as essential to Africa's socio-political future.

Additionally, the perspectives of authors such as Tetteh Kofi (1967) and Julius Nyerere (1987) shed light on the concept of African Socialism, which they argue is essential to a comprehensive understanding of freedom in Africa. These thinkers illustrate how African Socialism, though variably defined, offers a framework focused on collective well-being and shared responsibility. This essay draws upon their views and those of others to underscore the importance of African Socialism in contexts like Zimbabwe, where communal values are central. Despite differences in approach on the argument of African Socialism—ranging from Kwame Nkrumah's Marxist, anti-colonial stance to Nyerere's *Ujamaa* model—Pan-African thinkers converge on the belief that African economies should prioritise communal welfare over individual gain. This shared foundation of African Socialism guides the analysis presented in this essay, highlighting it as a vital lens through which to examine economic and social structures in Africa.

Zimbabwe serves as a compelling case study in this analysis, illuminating the tangible manifestations of freedom within ex-colonial states. As a result, extensive consultation of the literature about Zimbabwe is a cornerstone of this study. This study draws upon a wealth of secondary sources, including reports, journal articles, and book chapters. The scholarly insights harnessed for gauging the state of Zimbabwe emanate from respected voices in the academic discourse, such as Martin Adelman (2004) and A.S Mlambo (1998, 2013, 2014). Though spanning different contexts, these scholars converge on a central theme—political decay and the imperative for transformative change in Zimbabwe. Both authors provide a historical and contemporary picture of the manifestations of freedom in Zimbabwe.

This comprehensive exploration has traversed the landscape of freedom, transcending temporal and cultural boundaries. From the foundational theories of Western philosophers to the emergence of distinct African philosophical perspectives, the discourse on freedom is revealed as multifaceted, evolving, and context-dependent. In contemplating the future trajectory of this discourse, there is a call to further investigate and embrace the African philosophical foundations of freedom. The complexities and intricacies uncovered in this exploration pave the way for continued research and dialogues that engage with the intersections of culture, politics, and freedom, not only in Zimbabwe but across the diverse landscape of the African continent.

Zimbabwe and the Quest for Freedom

Post-independence Zimbabwe has not progressed as anticipated in terms of freedom. The initial hope that Zimbabweans would experience genuine freedom was quickly overshadowed by reports of significant freedom violations starting as early as the 1980s. These violations primarily concerned freedom of expression and democratic governance, manifesting in politically motivated massacres. These events underscore the urgent need for a more contextually suitable conception of freedom that could better address the specific needs of Zimbabweans, guiding both political leaders and scholars in their efforts. By examining the current state of freedom in Zimbabwe, it becomes clear which aspects of freedom are currently lacking. The following sections will demonstrate how existing frameworks fail to encompass these critical considerations. All six interviewees of this study answered negatively to the question “Do you currently feel free in Zimbabwe?” While they all stated slightly different reasons as to why they did not feel free in Zimbabwe, there were clear themes that are impeding freedom in Zimbabwe. These themes are economic capabilities and political freedom. Each of these themes will be discussed in greater detail below.

The Economy

As mentioned by John Friedman (2011), in many parts of Africa, “conversations about food are often conversations about politics.” This is the exact case in Zimbabwe, where the availability of food is a conversation about good governance and freedom. At independence, Zimbabwe inherited an advanced economy, with strengths in agriculture, mining, and a robust manufacturing sector (Mlambo, 2014). The black majority sought equitable economic benefits while hoping to maintain the economy’s strength from the colonial era. However, as early as 1997, there was an economic crisis ensuing, where the currency was losing 74% of its value per day (Adelmann, 2004). Economic crises severely impede freedom by exacerbating unemployment and poverty. As of 2024, Zimbabwe’s extreme poverty rate stands at 44% (African Development Bank Group). Additionally, hyperinflation peaked at an astronomical 80 billion per cent in 2018, accompanied by rampant unemployment (BBC, 2018).

Interviews with Zimbabweans reveal a common sentiment that poverty equates to unfreedom. One upper-class Zimbabwean articulated, “My idea of freedom is being allowed to work, contribute and be provided with resources to do that. That to me, is freedom” (Interview 05, 493 - 495). This perception was echoed by the other Zimbabweans who were interviewed. This points to the fact that the economic turmoil in Zimbabwe has left people in a state of unfreedom.

Political Freedom

Adelmann (2004) elucidates that economic crises in Zimbabwe have also precipitated severe violations of political freedoms. The widespread discontent stemming from economic decline fostered the rise of political opposition, most notably the Movement for Democratic Change

(MDC). Founded in 1999 by Morgan Tsvangirai, the MDC aimed to restore democracy in Zimbabwe, countering the increasingly authoritarian tendencies of ZANU–PF. By the early 2000s, the MDC posed a significant electoral threat to the Mugabe regime, reflecting widespread dissatisfaction with the socio–economic state of the country. This political threat precipitated a severe breakdown in the rule of law and political freedoms.

As the 2002 elections approached, it became apparent that ZANU–PF risked losing power. In response, the government resorted to voter intimidation and electoral fraud, effectively stripping citizens of their freedom to engage in civil and political processes. Teachers, in particular, were targeted and accused of “corrupting the minds of the children.” A stark illustration of this repression was provided in a 2000 meeting of the U.S. House of Representatives: “Teachers have been dragged from their classrooms. Teachers have been stripped naked in front of their students and forced to chant pro–ZANU slogans. Teachers have been beaten unconscious” (Committee on International Relations, House of Representatives, 2000). ZANU–PF supporters were systematically attacking and beating individuals perceived as opposition sympathisers.

In recent times, the government has resorted to cutting the internet to prevent citizens from practising their rights to free speech and prevent protest movements from spreading (Al Jazeera, 2019). Not only has this silenced the voices of the people, but it has also taken away their autonomy in their own country. Other forms of silencing citizens under the current regime have included extreme torture and incarceration.

The expectation in a representative democracy is that free and fair elections allow citizens to collectively authorise the exercise of executive power. This power, in turn, is supposed to uphold laws that protect citizens from arbitrary domination and safeguard their personal, social, and political liberties. However, in Zimbabwe, political liberties have been systematically undermined, preventing citizens from freely expressing their political views or participating in civic life. These ongoing violations underscore the critical need for comprehensive political reforms to restore democratic governance and protect citizens’ freedoms.

Zimbabwe’s journey towards genuine freedom remains fraught with significant challenges, despite the initial promise at independence. The interplay of economic turmoil, political repression, and severe human rights violations has perpetuated a state of unfreedom for many Zimbabweans. The economic crises have not only impoverished the population but have also been intertwined with political manipulations to suppress democratic freedoms and human rights. This state of affairs highlights that freedom is more than a philosophical concept as understood in Western societies. Removing colonial domination was not enough to ensure freedom for African countries like Zimbabwe, indicating the need to re–examine and reconceptualise freedom in the African context.

The Western Blueprint: Imposed Concepts of Freedom

Zimbabwe, a former British colony for 90 years, is deeply influenced by Western ideologies. The initial foundations of Zimbabwe’s ‘new order’ were rooted in Western ideals of freedom, independence, and democracy. Since Zimbabwe inherited British ideologies in the wake of independence, the conception and expectations of freedom were framed on Western ideologies. Therefore, this essay will delve into the nuanced Western understanding of freedom during this period to understand the expectations of freedom in Zimbabwe in 1980. In 1958, Isaiah Berlin delivered his renowned speech, “Two Concepts of Liberty,” which expounded upon the dichotomy between negative and positive liberty, encapsulating the prevalent Western perspective on freedom at the time. It is imperative to acknowledge that both notions of freedom were inherently tethered to Western liberalism.

Negative liberty, as articulated by Berlin, denotes freedom from external impediments and the absence of constraints impeding individual actions (Berlin, 1958). This encompasses safeguarding individual rights, privacy, and upholding the rule of law. The complexity arises in striking a delicate balance—affording a sufficiently broad area of freedom for personal development while avoiding encroachment upon the freedom of others (Berlin, 1958). Principles of negative liberty have been used to build numerous Western and ex-colonial political systems. For example, Montesquieu's (1748) exploration of the separation of powers and the idea that political liberty is best preserved by dividing governmental powers into different branches greatly influenced the design of modern democratic systems. Yet, the interwoven nature of human lives makes it challenging to lead a 'free' life without inadvertently affecting others. In the context of Zimbabwe, negative liberty faces unique challenges. Societal progress often takes precedence over individual liberty, highlighting a departure from the individualised and minimalistic understanding of freedom grounded in Western liberalism. This deviation raises questions about the applicability and relevance of such concepts within the Zimbabwean context.

Examining the post-colonial transition, one could argue that negative liberty was a pertinent theoretical framework for the black majority, given the dismantling of racial barriers imposed during the Rhodesian regime. Theoretically, independence removed these obstacles, granting Zimbabweans the ability to engage in actions previously impeded. However, citizen perspectives reveal a nuanced reality; the absence of interference by the colonial regime alone does not equate to a sense of freedom. For example, as explained by a 50-year-old Zimbabwean woman who was interviewed, she felt that her overall quality of life was better before 1989 because the colonial government provided citizens with more free goods, e.g., food and school supplies (Interview 01, 62–76). Another Harare-born middle-class woman's perspective also sheds light on this disparity, defining freedom as the ability to access necessities such as healthcare, food, and shelter. While the current government may not impose overt barriers akin to racial segregation, its failure to provide conducive conditions for citizens to easily access these necessities undermines the perceived freedom of the majority.

The concept of positive liberty offers a nuanced perspective, focusing on the capacity of individuals to realise self-fulfilment through the pursuit of their aspirations. Distinguished from negative liberty, positive liberty centres on the presence of opportunities and resources enabling meaningful choice and control over one's life (McKinnon, 2019). This seems more aligned with Zimbabweans' sentiments above. However, Rousseau's early formulation of positive liberty underscores a tension between the state and individual freedom, as state actions may both limit and secure personal autonomy (Rousseau, 1762). While this dynamic is present across both Western and African contexts, African perspectives often emphasise the state's role in promoting communal freedom alongside individual aspirations. In Zimbabwe, for example, state involvement is often perceived as integral to achieving collective progress and addressing socio-economic disparities. Thus, while the state is critical to the realisation of freedom in both contexts, African ideologies may frame this relationship more directly in terms of communal and cultural responsibilities. Therefore, a solely liberal positivist definition of freedom would not work in an African context. In addition to this, as most African countries are marked by socio-economic disparities, positive liberty becomes contentious. While higher classes may perceive themselves as positively free due to material autonomy, lower classes lack access to essential resources such as education, healthcare, and economic opportunities, hindering their ability to flourish.

The last major Western conception to be considered is Republican liberty. Republican liberty captures a form of freedom which encapsulates both negative and positive liberty because it rests on a dual approach which focuses on different aspects of freedom. The first (negatively) understands

freedom as the antithesis of slavery, and the second understands freedom (positively) as political participation and civic virtue (Pettit, 1997). The first branch can be traced all the way back to Cicero, who states that liberty was life without a master (Sellers, 1998). According to Philip Pettit as well, as long as an individual has to consider another's arbitrary power in decision making or has to consider the doings of a 'master', then he or she is not free (Pettit, 2000). This is one of the two elements of the basic philosophical understanding of this branch of republican liberty. Ian Carter articulates the second element. For citizens to be free in the republican sense, they need to "participate in institutional arrangements that guarantee non-interference" (McKinnon, 2019). This element is focused on the active democratic participation of citizens. Cicero also considered this an important aspect of republican liberty in that he mentioned people can only be free if they have virtuous magistrates and laws (Sellers, 1998). Thus, a just and chosen leader is needed to secure the freedoms of all citizens. While this idea may have been hinted at in the theory of positive liberty, the difference is that with positive liberty, democratic participation is for the benefit of the autonomous individual rather than the society as a whole. Therefore, this understanding is more in line with the Zimbabwean case because of the communal nature of Zimbabwe. The addition of the importance of institutional arrangements in the republican understanding of freedom also makes it a more applicable understanding. As gathered from the various interviews, Zimbabweans believe in the importance of the rule of law, governmental organisation and institutional frameworks, and they believe that freedom can only be achieved when these institutional arrangements serve and benefit the people (e.g., Interview 03, 271-274).

While republican liberty offers a broader scope than other Western conceptions of freedom, it still falls short in the African context for two key reasons. First, republican theory does not account for economic conditions and the standard of living. Though it includes positive elements such as civic and political participation, it overlooks economic security as a component of freedom. This omission creates a gap, particularly significant in African societies, where economic stability is essential to a comprehensive understanding of freedom. For example, interviewee number 3 understands freedom in Zimbabwe as encompassing socio-economic capabilities, specifically "the ability to get healthcare, food, and shelter" (Interview 03, 210-213). Other interviewees echoed this socio-economic basis for achieving freedom in Zimbabwe. Thus, without addressing these fundamental needs, republican theory cannot adequately serve as a framework for freedom in an African context.

Secondly, despite its broader considerations, republican liberty is still based on classical Western liberalism. Ultimately, all Western conceptions of liberty, including positive and republican forms, are rooted in liberalism, which prioritises individual rights and limited government intervention. However, these principles often clash with African cultural norms, emphasising communal well-being over individual autonomy. As such, Western conceptions of liberty do not provide suitable frameworks for understanding and promoting freedom in African contexts.

The African Philosophical Perspectives

The persistence of the concept of freedom in African discourse reflects a historical struggle for identity dating back to the era of colonisation. Despite the dominance of Western liberal conceptualisations, exemplified by Zimbabwe's adoption of such frameworks, prominent Pan-African thinkers, including Kwame Nkrumah (1964), Franz Fanon (1963), Kwasi Wiredu (2010), Achille Mbembe (2001), and W.E.B. Du Bois, advocate for context-specific interpretations of philosophical and political terms within African states. This essay delves into the exploration of freedom, particularly focusing on the suitability of Pan-African conceptions within an African context.

Employing paradigms of positive liberty, negative liberty, and republican liberty, it appeared unequivocal that independence would yield greater freedoms for Zimbabweans. However, the reality belies these assumptions, prompting an examination of the very concept of freedom and the frameworks necessary to actualise enhanced freedom for Zimbabweans. Franz Fanon's seminal work, *The Wretched Earth* (1963), elucidates the genesis of the dilemma. During decolonisation, the colonisers sought alliances with African elites to perpetuate Western ideals. These ideals, rooted in Western liberalism, were entrenched in the post-colonial landscape, facilitated by collaborations with the political elite. Fanon highlights that the masses, preoccupied with tangible changes like land redistribution, overlooked philosophical ideals, enabling the political elite to institutionalise Western philosophical tenets.

All that the native has seen in his country is that they can freely arrest him, beat him, starve him: and no professor of ethics, no priest has ever come to be beaten in his place, nor to share their bread with him.” – the only slight moral concern is getting out of a cycle of abuse with the colonizer; however, not much thought is given to how each citizen will relate to one another after independence (Fanon, 1963, p. 43).

The absence of concern for philosophical ideals during decolonisation underscores the urgency for African scholars to proffer indigenous philosophies reflective of unique cultural contexts. While acknowledging the diversity of individual interpretations of freedom, a collective conception tailored to Zimbabwean cultural and historical backgrounds is imperative for societal progress. As posited by Asiegbu (2016), philosophical notions should inherently be culturally specific and context-dependent because philosophical beliefs are formed under the guise in which the philosopher lives. Philosophy is an extension of human thought and, by definition, context-dependent. When looking at the cultural dependence all philosophical thought has, it seems shocking that African countries are still trying to fit into the mould of Western development ideologies.

While Fanon describes how African elites upheld Western ideals after decolonisation, Achille Mbembe (2010) further elucidates the psychological and cultural effects of this inheritance. In *'Out of the Dark Night'* (2010), Mbembe contends that colonialism left enduring legacies that continue to shape African societies, limiting their ability to fully break free from Western frameworks. He argues that despite political independence, African nations like Zimbabwe are still profoundly influenced by colonial modes of thought and governance, which do not align with indigenous cultural realities. According to Mbembe, ideal African freedom would mean a complete transformation, enabling societies to reclaim their cultural autonomy and foster ways of life that prioritise communal flourishing and self-creation. This continuation of Western structures links to Fanon's observations of elite complicity, revealing how deeply ingrained these systems remain. Mbembe's insights also pave the way for Nkrumah's call for a distinctly African conception of freedom—one that transcends colonial impositions and emphasises collective well-being and economic autonomy as central to genuine African liberation (Nkrumah, 1962). By examining the necessity of shedding colonial frameworks, Mbembe underscores the urgency of Nkrumah's vision for a unified and self-determined Africa.

In exploring these African cultural and philosophical landscapes by the above authors, however, two pillars emerge as foundations for African philosophical evolution in the concept of freedom: Ubuntu and African socialism. These frameworks offer pathways to reimagining freedom within African contexts.

Ubuntu

A fundamental contrast between prevailing Western ideologies and predominant Pan-African perspectives, elucidated by Okaneme (2013), lies in their ideological foundations: Western liberalism versus Pan-African communal values, epitomised by the concept of Ubuntu. Ubuntu, a moral philosophy originating from Bantu-speaking Africans, encapsulates the essence of communal identity, as encapsulated in the isiZulu axiom, “umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu,” translating to “a person is a person through others” (Chasi, 2014). This axiom underscores the intrinsic interconnectedness of individuals within society, positing that one’s significance derives from their communal ties. Central to Ubuntu is the conviction that actions are morally judged by their ability to foster cooperation and solidarity among community members (Chasi, 2014).

The concept of Ubuntu derives its principles from longstanding cultural norms prevalent across many African societies. While its origins trace back to Bantu-speaking Africans, its principles resonate universally throughout the continent. Wiredu (2010) illuminates this through the lens of the Akan people of Ghana, where communal bonds supersede individual pursuits. Emphasising the interconnectedness of humanity, African cultures often espouse a belief in a shared origin from a divine source, fostering a collective consciousness referred to as the “life principle” (Wiredu, 2010). Additionally, kinship ties, embodied in the “blood principle” and the “charisma principle,” further reinforce communal cohesion by delineating societal roles and obligations based on familial lineage (Wiredu, 2010). These principles elucidate the foundational elements of Ubuntu and underscore African societies’ prioritisation of communal advancement.

In African conceptualisations, the primacy of relationships and community transcends individual interests, shaping the perception of freedom as a collective endeavour rather than an individual pursuit. This perspective emanates from the conviction that societal well-being directly correlates with individual fulfilment. Thus, the attainment of freedom in African societies is contingent upon ensuring its equitable distribution among all members of a society. As Okaneme (2013) asserts, embracing Ubuntu acknowledges that true freedom in African contexts necessitates the fulfilment of basic freedoms for every member of society. As has been mentioned in the case of Zimbabwe, the state of rampant poverty in the country has led to huge socio-political rifts, where this vision of communal freedom cannot be realised. In addition to this, targeted human rights violations also point to the fact that the communal good is not being seen as the paramount concern in Zimbabwe’s strive for total freedom.

However, Zimbabwean perspectives underscore the paramount importance of communal well-being over individual liberties. For example, some Zimbabweans even express willingness to tolerate a dictatorship if it ensures a basic standard of living for all citizens (Interview 03, 265-278). Even among those with more Westernised outlooks, such as an upper-class white Zimbabwean interviewee, freedom is defined within the parameters of societal harmony and cohesion (Interview 04, 198-201). The concept of Ubuntu illuminates the intricate interplay between communal values and individual freedoms in African societies. Its emphasis on interconnectedness underscores the collective pursuit of freedom, challenging conventional Western paradigms centred on individual autonomy. Acknowledging Ubuntu’s significance fosters a more nuanced understanding of freedom in African political discourse, highlighting the imperative of prioritising communal well-being in the quest for societal liberation.

African Socialism

Economic freedom holds significant importance within the African context. African societies must reconsider their economic systems on two levels. First, at a granular level, they should embrace

socialist principles to ensure the economy meets communal needs rather than individual ones. Second, on a systemic level, they must challenge the dominant Western capitalist hegemony and adopt socialist economic principles to achieve economic success on a global scale. Given the communal nature of African societies, African economic ideologies are inherently incompatible with capitalist thinking and instead should adopt a socialist orientation. As Losch (1990) notes, many Africans see socialism as the most suitable model for African development due to its emphasis on collective economic activity and grassroots democratic decision-making. This perspective argues that pre-colonial African societies embodied these socialist values and that post-independence, Africans should return to these roots. Losch (1990) suggests that socialism has always been intrinsic to African ways of living, with the term 'socialism' merely borrowed from Europe. African socialism, therefore, reflects and promotes values of communality and egalitarianism, essential for true freedom in African states.

Furthermore, widespread poverty across African states must be addressed when considering the state of 'freedom' in Africa. Living in extreme poverty undeniably strips individuals of their freedom. The current social arrangements in African states, which align with capitalist and individualistic values, are often cited as contributing factors to rampant poverty. These arrangements lack principles to protect citizens from impoverishment and ensure fair distribution of resources. Adopting African socialist principles could be a crucial strategy to overcome these challenges to freedom. Kofi (1976) asserts that Africa must extricate itself from the Western economic system to forge its own path. Under the Western capitalist framework, African states have historically and will continue to be subservient. The continent has consistently been disadvantaged by capitalism. As world systems theory posits, African countries are peripheral nations exploited by Western states for wealth accumulation. Thus, it is untenable for African countries to model their societies on liberal, capitalist ideals.

This perspective is vividly captured by a Zimbabwean interviewee: "It would be one thing if the West were coming in and taking, but the country was gaining, but they're taking and exploiting without any benefit to us. I feel like we're still trying to run according to a Western system when they have economies that we don't. The influence is there, but the current state of our country doesn't align with the way they function" (Interview 03, 332 - 337). This statement underscores that Zimbabwe, and other African nations, are constrained by a system that does not serve their interests, reinforcing the necessity for a non-capitalist development trajectory. For African nations to attain true freedom, they must embrace "African Socialism." Despite Western disapproval, most African countries resonate more with communist principles, such as freedom from economic and social inequalities, than with capitalist ones. For example, in its post-independence era, Zimbabwe's government made economic decisions rooted in communist ideologies while attempting to conform to the international capitalist framework. This ideological dichotomy led to significant economic turmoil, primarily because Zimbabwe could not fully detach from the capitalist system, resulting in a detrimental mixed approach. This led to the many economic issues mentioned above that Zimbabwe still faces now. Hence, it is imperative to explore how a distinctly African economic ideology could better serve Zimbabwe's populace.

Prominent Pan-African thinkers like Blyden, Dubois, Nkrumah, and Padmore have long championed an African economic ideology (Kofi, 1976). They contend that Africa must reject Western economic models and cultivate its own, reflecting the unique cultural context of African societies. Blindly adhering to a capitalist system without considering what best suits their societies is a strategic misstep. Leopold-Sedar Senghor offers a distinctive Pan-African perspective on African socialism. He asserts that socialism in Europe emerged to address issues in industrialised societies, whereas in Africa, socialism should serve pre-capitalist societies lacking strong economic infrastructures

(LeMelle, 1965). Senghor contends that European socialism and other Western systems address European-specific challenges; hence, African nations must establish structures rooted in African traditions. While Senghor emphasises an African tradition-based socialism more than his Pan-African contemporaries, he concurs that prioritising collective over individual progress should be foundational to African Socialism. In line with this argument includes other Pan-African thinkers like Sékou Touré, who also argue for an anti-colonial, self-reliant African socialism based on African traditions of communality (Schwab, 2004).

Although I am not an economist and cannot expound on the specificities of African socialism, it should be predicated on principles such as communal economic security, cooperatives, price controls, robust business regulation, and societal equality (Losch, 1990). Embracing African socialism can liberate nations like Zimbabwe, fostering both individual and collective prosperity on the global stage.

The pursuit of genuine freedom in African nations such as Zimbabwe necessitates a profound re-evaluation of inherited Western frameworks and a reorientation towards African philosophies and economic systems. By embracing Ubuntu and African socialism, African states can foster a more equitable and interconnected society that prioritises communal well-being over individual gain. The arguments presented by Pan-African thinkers underscore the importance of culturally specific ideologies that reflect the unique historical and social contexts of African nations. For countries like Zimbabwe, true liberation and economic prosperity will be realised only by disentangling from Western capitalist paradigms and cultivating local systems that resonate with African values of solidarity, equality, and communal progress. Through this transformative approach, Africa can chart a path toward a more just and self-sufficient future, ultimately achieving a more authentic and sustainable form of freedom.

Conclusions and recommendations

This paper proposes a normative framework for understanding freedom in the African context. As Hountondji (1976) suggests, Africans possess robust ontological philosophies that inform daily decision-making. However, due to a lack of non-Western educational development, these philosophies have not been formally recognised as African philosophical beliefs. Principles such as Ubuntu and communal economic capabilities are foundational in African societies. These principles can serve as the basis for an African conceptualisation of freedom. As such, this article shows that freedom cannot currently be assessed in Zimbabwe because there is currently no useful framework to do this with. Therefore, it shows that the understanding of freedom needs to be re-worked before freedom can be assessed in Zimbabwe. An understanding of freedom based on the principles mentioned above gives politicians and policymakers a defined direction for what needs to be changed in these societies in order to reach higher levels of freedom. African nations must break free from their structural and cultural dependency on Western notions.

Encouraging the development of African political thought that considers the unique cultural context of Africa is essential. Pan-African scholars should be encouraged to research beyond Western frameworks, paving the way toward understandings that help African nations comprehend and assess their contexts and develop within them, rather than attempting to solve Africa's problems through a Western lens. Although shifting this is challenging after a century of Western dominance over the African psyche, Africa must begin this shift to better serve its people.

It is important to note that while no single country exists in a state of total freedom, some countries are further along in their attainment of freedom than others. This paper contends that countries advancing in freedom do so because the framework utilised considers their unique

histories and cultural contexts. While all African states cannot be generalised as having the same conditions, Pan-African thought argues that African states do share enough basic ontological understandings that they can collaborate on a shared future. To move forward, educational reforms are essential, including decolonising curricula to integrate African political philosophy and history, and promoting African thought by encouraging academic institutions to support research exploring African political and philosophical frameworks.

With regards to recommendations regarding freedom in Zimbabwe, economic policies should focus on equitable resource distribution, recognising economic freedom as essential to overall liberty, and supporting communal economies through initiatives that strengthen communal economic practices rooted in principles like Ubuntu. Political reforms are also necessary, including strengthening democratic institutions to ensure free and fair elections, protecting freedom of expression, and combating corruption, as well as encouraging local governance structures that reflect communal decision-making processes and cultural values. Additionally, international collaboration is crucial, with efforts to build alliances with international organisations and other nations that respect local contexts and avoid imposing external ideologies, while enhancing Pan-African solidarity by fostering collaboration among African nations to share strategies and support efforts to redefine and achieve freedom on the continent. By embracing these recommendations, Zimbabwe and other African nations can construct a framework for freedom that is true to their unique cultural and historical contexts, paving the way for genuine progress and liberation.

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The Perceived Successes and Failures of the Privatization Process in Zambia's Third Republic

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Abstract

Different views have been expressed on privatization implementation in Zambia. However, there is no consensus on this subject. Some scholars have indicated that Zambia has the most successful story on privatization in Sub-Saharan Africa (World Bank, 1996; Buchs, 2003). Still, others have rejected what one would state as the success of the programme in Zambia. This paper aimed to determine some of the successes and failures of the privatization process in Zambia, spanning 1991 to date. The research is based on a secondary literature review and a desk-based study. A number of data sources have been reviewed to show the successes and failures of privatization in Zambia and they include books, research articles, Parliament Acts, newspapers, and online databases. Among the perceived success stories associated with the privatization process in Zambia include an increased flow of investments into the country, employment creation and promotion of competition among the different players in the industry. The study established some failures that came along with the privatization process, which include lack of transparency, adequacy of the arrangements for ensuring that ownership of the advertised companies is broadly distributed to Zambian citizens and failure to generate the desired economic growth and reduce poverty, in fact, the privatization process led to an increase in poverty levels. It is also associated with mass redundancies, unpaid pensions, unfair competition, poor tax system and abandonment of public services. The study further established that privatization led to increased social inequality, loss of cultural heritage, and loss of control and sovereignty. It also has an impact on Indigenous Communities. Despite different views being advocated by neo-classical economic theorists, liberal theorists and radical scholars, this study concludes that privatization in Zambia seems to have benefited only a few who have been its proponents and that its impact on the environment and social well-being of Zambians has been adverse.

Keywords: Privatization, Theoretical exploration, Perceived successes and failures

Introduction

Different views have been expressed about the implementation of privatization in Zambia. However, there is no consensus on this subject. It is important to note that some scholars have indicated that Zambia has the most successful story on privatization in Sub-Saharan Africa (Sawaya, 1996, p. 3, Buchs, 2005, p. 1). Still, others have rejected what one would state as the success of the privatization programme. This paper aims to determine some of the successes and failures of the privatization process in Zambia spanning the period 1991 to date. To achieve the above objective, the paper comprises of the following sections: Section One is the introduction, Section Two is the theoretical framework, Section Three explains the methodology used in this study, Section Four presents the justification for this study, Section Five discusses the Privatization Process in

Zambia (1991 – to – date), Section Six is an analysis of the perceived successes of the privatization process in Zambia’s third republic (1991 – to – date), Section Seven is an analysis of the perceived failures of the privatization process in Zambia’s third republic (1991 – to – date), and Section eight is a discussion of the findings. The paper will further draw conclusions on the successes and failures of the privatization process in Zambia based on the three schools of thought. The conclusion is presented in section eight. Let us begin by adopting a working definition of the concept of privatization.

Privatization has been defined as the ‘incidence or process of transferring ownership of the business, enterprise, agency or public service from the public sector (government) to the private sector.’ (Mwanamwalye, 2009, p. 22). It has also been defined as the transfer of ownership and control of productive assets from the public to the private sector (Fundanga and Mwaba, 1997, p. 1). The transfer of assets can be total, partial, or functional, with the sale being implemented by methods such as private sales, leasing arrangements, employee buyouts, and share issues. Other scholars have defined privatization as ‘a form of public-private partnership in which ownership rights to an operational government asset, facility or facilities are transferred to a private sector company by a government agency either by sale or long-term lease.’ (Banda, 2010, p. 10) In this paper, privatization is used to relate to the transfer of ownership rights from the state or public enterprise to the private sector. Having defined the concept of privatization, we can now focus on the theoretical framework guiding this study. Salimu (1999) has argued that there are three schools of thought dominating the debate on privatization. These are:

The Privatization Process in Zambia (1991 – to – date)

The Movement for Multi-Party Democracy (MMD) came into power in 1991. Upon being voted into office, MMD immediately adopted a comprehensive, rapid liberalization strategy. This means that the role of the government was to be limited to that of providing the right political, regulatory and economic framework for the private sector to operate in. The government’s position on privatization was made clear by the then Minister of Finance, who, in his January 1992 budget address, argued that ‘the MMD government’s intention was to promote the private sector and divest itself of investment in parastatals. The Minister further argued that privatization was to proceed expeditiously and that revenues generated will be put in a special fund to supplement the government capital budget’ (Fundanga and Mwaba: 1997:7). The minister’s words came to pass as attested to by the number of public enterprises privatized between 1991 and 1997. According to Mwinga (2003:10), ‘the period between November 1991 and December 1997 has been described as one that marked a distinct move towards a more private sector driven environment as this period saw a total of 187 state-owned enterprises (SOEs) being privatized out of a total of 280’. In order to privatize these parastatals effectively, the Privatization Act (No: 21 of 1992) was passed by parliament (Fundanga and Mwaba, 1997, p. 2, Mwinga, 2003, p. 12). The Privatization Act led to the establishment of the Zambia Privatization Agency as the major institution responsible for the privatization of state enterprises (Government of the Republic of Zambia (GRZ), 1992, p. 5). Well-thought-out objectives were articulated under the Zambia Privatization Act, but the extent to which these objectives were met is a source of concern among different scholars. According to Chanda (2009), among others, the following were the objectives of the Act:

1. To reduce budgetary expenditure in investments and subsidies to loss-making enterprises,
2. To attract private investments in sectors that had been crowded out by state enterprises,
3. To promote competition and improve the efficiency of operations of enterprises,
4. To improve management standards,

5. To create employment and to produce quality goods and
6. To encourage wide ownership of shares (Chanda, 2009, p. 2)

Mwinga (2003) observed that, between 1997 and 1999, the Zambia Privatization Agency (ZPA) was very successful in privatizing most of the country's state-owned mining assets with the exception of the two largest divisions of Zambia Consolidated Copper Mine (ZCCM), which are Nchanga and Nkana. The reasons for not privatizing Nchanga and Nkana between 1997 and 1999 were twofold: Firstly, these were the major sources of foreign exchange for the country. For example, 'Zambia's mining and quarrying activities accounted for about 5% of real Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and 80% of merchandise exports. Secondly, the mining sector was a strategic employer of the nation. This is evidenced by about 38,500 jobs, or about 8% of total employment, found in this sector' (Mwinga, 2003, p.12).

In December 1999, a consortium, which was made up of First Quantum Minerals Ltd of Canada and Glencore International AG of Switzerland, won the bid to ZPA to acquire ZCCM's Mufulira Division and selected Nkana Division assets. Thus, Mopani Copper Mines PLC first started its operations in April 2000 (Mwinga, 2003). This was not the end of privatization implementation under the Chiluba regime. In October 1999, Zambia Copper Investments Ltd (ZCI), which was owned by Anglo American Plc, acquired the Konkola and Nchanga Divisions, and this agreement was finalised in March 2000 (Mwinga, 2003).

It must be noted that the privatization process in Zambia has been ongoing. For instance, in 2007, we saw the privatization of Zambia National Commercial Bank (ZANACO) to Rabobank of Netherlands and Zambia Telecommunications Company Limited (ZAMTEL) to Lap Green though when the Patriotic Front (PF) government came to power in 2011, they had to reverse the privatization of ZAMTEL. According to Chanda (2009), two compelling reasons were advanced by the MMD government for the privatization of ZAMTEL. The first reason was that privatization was the policy of the MMD government and that the divestiture of ZAMTEL was consistent with the mandate for which it had been elected to government. Secondly, the operations of the corporation were threatened by insolvency due to a myriad of problems, including poor management and a poor balance sheet, which had constrained the corporation from accessing investment and working capital. There was a strong public reaction to the government's intentions to privatize ZAMTEL. As can be noted here, Zambia has been engaged in the privatization process since 1991. Therefore, one would ask what the perceived successes of this process in Zambia are. The next section responds to this question.

Analysis of the perceived successes of the privatization process in Zambia's third republic (1991 – to – date)

In this section, we discuss some of the perceived successes of the privatization process in Zambia. As we shall establish, privatization led to an increased flow of investments into the country, it had a positive impact on the country's fiscal policy, employment creation, and increased levels of competition. These success stories are presented in the following paragraphs.

Increased flow of investments into the country

A case in point is Chilanga Cement. When Chilanga Cement was privatised, Fundanga and Mwaba (1997) noted that Commonwealth Development Corporation increased their shareholding, and the company became the first to be listed on the Zambia Stock Exchange. They further stated that 'the privatization of Zambia Breweries also proved to be a successful operation as it has also gone to the higher phase of offering shares to the public through the Zambia Privatization Trust

Fund. In addition to this, the case of Zambia Sugar clearly attests to the fact that privatization increases the flow of investments into the country. For example, when Zambia Sugar was bought by Tate and Lyle and Commonwealth Development Corporation, it received an injection of US Dollars 28 million with further additional planned investments of up to US Dollars 40 million' (Fundanga and Mwaba, 1997:7). Other scholars have argued that close to US Dollars 1.4 billion was invested into the mining industry for refurbishments of plants and purchases of spares and machinery (Fraser and Lungu, 2007, p. 48). These are not the only investors who came as a result of the privatization process in Zambia. There were other small investors from the neighbouring countries who were interested in investing in the agricultural sector. As a result of this increase in investments brought about by privatization, production also increased, especially in the mining industry. For example, 'by 2004, the production of minerals was at 400,000 tons, a figure slightly higher than that obtained between 1991 – 2004' (Fraser and Lungu, 2007, p. 19). This increase in production probably created jobs for people in the mining towns. The increased investments in the country have also led to the opening of new mines. A very good example is the Lumwana mine, which is in North Western province. Konkola Deep Mining Project is also a case in point.

It is very clear that privatization increased the flow of investments in the country, as shown above. Though this is the case, one wonders the extent to which this increase in the flow of investments impacted positively on Zambians. The question is whether the increase in investments has reduced the country's poverty levels. Furthermore, it should be noted that not all new mines have been able to invest hugely in the mining sector by purchasing new machinery. Others have preferred to keep previous operations running on old plants and old systems and, at the same time, extract huge profits as quickly as possible, which they externalize.

Impact of privatization on the fiscal policy

Privatization has had a positive impact on the country's fiscal policy. According to Fundanga and Mwaba (1997:12), 'modest gains have been made in that direction. For example, total receipts from privatization amounted to about US Dollars 25 million in 1995 when the process started, and by the end of 1996, the program had generated about US Dollars 200 million. By 2005, the mining industry's representative body, the Chamber of Mines, claimed that the mining companies were putting in over US Dollars 350 million a year. Thus, from such revenue gains, it was highly anticipated that the government's fiscal position would improve due to the successful privatization of mines (Fraser & Lungu, 2007). The privatization of ZANACO is another success story that has impacted the country's fiscal policy. It has been noted that the banks' regulatory capital had more than doubled from the time Rabobank bought the majority shares, and at the same time, profitability had improved substantially (Sinyangwe, 2009, p. 4). The regulatory capital was K263 billion compared to that of Barclays Bank, which was K260 billion as of June 2009 (Sinyangwe, 2009). Sinyangwe (2009) further reported that the capital position of Rabobank improved from being the lowest of the major banks in the country to being the highest. Therefore, the financial position that the bank has attained, especially after privatization, has helped shape the country's fiscal policy.

Impact of privatization on employment creation and labour rights

It can be stated that the privatization process in Zambia has had positive and negative effects on employment creation. Fundanga and Mwaba (1997) point out that in several ways, companies which were privatized created new jobs and, at the same time, preserved the existing jobs. One can quickly mention that privatization has a positive effect on employment. An improvement in employment levels is most likely to result in reduced poverty levels as more people are expected to

have an income. Crime levels and other negative social vices are also likely to reduce, as Mwinga (2003) argued. Though it has been argued that privatization in Zambia led to the creation of employment, other scholars have noted that it reduced employment levels. An illustration of the staff establishment at Zambia National Insurance Brokers (ZNIB) attests to this fact. According to Salimu (1999), at the time of privatization, ZNIB had a total workforce of 116. 'In the period after privatization, the total workforce came to 57' (Salimu, 1999, p. 57). The situation was similar at NIEC Overseas Agencies Ltd (NIECOS), which had a total workforce of 122 at privatization. After privatization, this was reduced to 51 (Salimu, 1999, p. 74). The point to note is that privatization, in this case, led to the reduction in staff establishment at both ZNIB and NIECOS, regardless of the reasons which have been advanced. Furthermore, Fundanga and Mwaba (1997) have argued that there are instances where privatization has impacted employment negatively in Zambia. They claim that in most situations, job losses are at the level of management, and this is probably due to the fact that the new owners prefer to infuse fresh personnel at this level rather than implement such a strategy at middle or lower levels.

Though it has been stated that privatization has contributed to the creation of new jobs, one would question the nature of these jobs and the conditions attached to them. Thus, it is important to clearly define the kind of jobs created and the employees' satisfaction levels. On the other hand, it is also important to consider employees' welfare when the state owns these companies. According to Mwinga (2003), state-owned enterprises had a large manpower level, yet they were not financially viable on their own to meet their expenditure in areas such as employee salaries. Furthermore, the state-owned enterprises depended heavily on government subsidies as a source of funds to generate income.' Thus, one can easily conclude that, before privatization, conditions of service were very poor and could not be sustained from company resources.

As already alluded to privatization processes also result in job losses. In addition to that, it leads to reduced wages and weakened labour protections. This can lead to the exploitation of workers, violations of labour rights, and challenges in ensuring decent working conditions and fair compensation.

Privatization led to increased levels of competition

It has been noted that privatization tends to promote competition among the different players in the industry. Mwinga (2003:16) notes that 'competition brings about efficiency in the production of goods, improvements in the quality of goods and services, and ultimately if a company can compete effectively, a rise in the revenues due to the fact that sales volumes rise while production costs decline'. Competition can also eliminate monopolies by ensuring that companies operate efficiently in a market threatened by competition from efficient producers who can enter the market and start producing at a low cost, undercut the incumbents' prices, and acquire market share. A case in point is what happened in Zambia's telecommunication industry, which was at one point dominated by ZAMTEL. Service provision was very pathetic. It was not until the liberalization of this sector that service provision by ZAMTEL started to improve, probably due to competition from other players like AIRTEL and MTN. Another case worth mentioning is that of ZESCO, an electricity-producing company in Zambia. Service provision by ZESCO has been very poor and characterized by massive load shedding. It is very difficult to understand the operations of ZESCO, especially in this era where modern technology is everywhere. Therefore, the argument presented is that if such companies like ZESCO are privatized, they are likely to become more competitive, thereby improving the provision of goods and services.

One of the objectives of the Privatization Act of 1992 was to improve the quality of goods or products. Zambia scored better on this objective. Since privatization, many new products and

services have been introduced in the various sectors of the economy. For example, in the telecom industry, we saw the introduction of cell phones in the Zambian market. Modern computers, iPods and other communication devices also flood the Zambian market. Thus, Zambians no longer need to be stationed in one place to make or receive a call using a landline since they have modern communication devices. In the banking sector, privatization has come along with the use of Internet banking. For example, after privatization, ZANACO introduced XAPIT, a service that enables customers to check the status of their accounts or transact wherever they may be at that particular time using their cell phone. The introduction of Automated Teller Machines (ATMs) is another important service of great benefit that has come along with the privatization process in Zambia. Other innovative services have been introduced, such as mobile banking and the use of ATMs to deposit money.

It is very difficult to refute the claim that the privatization process in Zambia has led to producing quality goods and providing new services. On the contrary, one is prompted to question the extent to which these companies have provided these services effectively and efficiently, as well as the impact on the intended target, in this case, the Zambian public. For example, ZANACO introduced a new service called XAPIT, but there is often no network to offer this service. Furthermore, this service can only be used by people with adequate knowledge about phone use. Thus, the service is not user-friendly; it cannot be used by the majority of Zambians who are residing in shanty compounds as they lack the necessary education to understand how this service can be managed. The same applies to the use of ATMs. Most Zambians have lost money through cybercrimes due to lack of knowledge or understanding of how to operate ATMs. Those who fail to operate ATMs have ended up asking for help from any nearby person, thereby exposing their ATM PIN codes to strangers, and this has contributed to the loss of money in people's bank accounts. The point is that, in as much as privatization has introduced new technology in Zambia, the technology seemingly is not user-friendly.

Regardless of all this, the privatization process in Zambia is widely seen to be a success, especially at the international level. According to Campbell and Bhatia (1998), Zambia's programme was the most successful and provided many examples of best practices that should be followed by other countries. This conclusion was made after an examination of the privatisation programmes pursued in ten Sub-Saharan African countries and evaluated them on the basis of eight indicators (Campbell and Bhatia, 1998, p. 10). Zambia was deemed to have outperformed the other countries with six scores of 'high' and two of 'medium' (Craig, 2000, p. 359). The author now looks at the failures of this process in Zambia.

Analysis of the perceived failures of the privatization process in Zambia's third republic since 1991

From the local scene, the process of privatization in Zambia has not been seen as a success. There are contrasting views with regard to the success of privatization among some NGOs, scholars, and main Zambian opposition parties. The opposition parties have generally accepted the principles of privatization, but their argument has been against its implementation, and this is a point stressed by Craig (2000). According to Craig (2000), the United National Independence Party (UNIP) argued that the programme was designed to benefit the then Movement for Multi-party Democracy (MMD) leaders and foreign enterprises rather than the majority of Zambian citizens. The failures associated with this process in Zambia are presented in the following context: lack of transparency, ownership distributions of privatized companies to Zambians, Social Inequality, Impact of privatization on the environment and heritage sites, and redundancy, privatization and Unpaid Pensions and unfair Competition, Privatization vis-à-vis Undervaluation of privatized

companies, and the Zambian tax system, Impact of privatization on Indigenous Communities, Privatization vis-à-vis loss of Control and Sovereignty, and Right to Development, Privatization, Service provisions and Service Quality Concerns. We now address each one of these beginning with lack of transparency in the privatization process.

Lack of transparency

This is one of the criticisms advanced against privatization in Zambia. The argument is that the implementation process lacked transparency, and special reference was given to the acquisition of enterprises by members of the government and the ruling party. The argument presented by Craig (2000) is that while the Privatization Act did not prevent a political leader or public official from acquiring an enterprise, it did require that they disclose their intention to bid. This has not been the case, though a number of political party leaders and government officials, especially during the MMD reign, were implicated in the acquisition of privatized public enterprises. This clearly shows a lack of transparency in the implementation process. It should, however, be pointed out here that the acquisition of assets by political party leaders during the Chiluba regime was not unregulated. On several occasions, ZPA acted to repossess assets from government ministers who defaulted on payments (Craig, 2000).

Ownership distributions of privatized companies to Zambians

Scholars have also criticised the adequacy of the arrangements for ensuring that ownership of the advertised companies is broadly distributed to Zambian citizens. Craig (2000, p.360) has argued that 'while it was originally expected that at least ten enterprises would be privatized through the majority of shares sold directly to the public, no enterprises were sold using this method. Though this is the case, agreements had been reached in at least fifteen cases of privatization for a minority interest to be made available to the Zambian public through the Zambia Privatization Trust Fund'. It is clear from this argument that privatization has not benefited the majority of Zambians. In other words, it has benefited only the few who are its proponents. This is the same point stressed by Chanda (2009), who argues that the privatization of large-scale enterprises, such as ZAMTEL, in Zambia has become synonymous with foreign takeover of national assets with minimal participation by citizens. Chanda further argues that the economy is seen to have been returned to foreign control, and the full economic benefits of operations of such enterprises do not accrue to the national economy. The case of ZAMTEL and ZANACO presents a clear testimony of a situation where foreigners have used the privatization process to take over national assets with minimal participation by Zambians. ZAMTEL's shareholding structure at the time of privatization was as follows: '75 per cent of the shares were sold to Lap Green, while only 25 per cent remained in the hands of the Zambian government' (Zinyama, 2010, p. 2). With regards to ZANACO, the shareholding structure at the time of privatization was as follows: The government was to own '25 per cent, 29 per cent was to be owned by the public while 49 per cent was owned by Rabo Bank of Netherlands' (Sinyangwe, 2009, p. 4). It is clear from these shareholding structures that the Zambian public has had very little ownership rights over the privatized companies. In other words, the objective of the Privatization Act, which required that there should be wide ownership of shares, was or has not been fully met.

Impact of Privatization on Social Inequality

Privatization can exacerbate social inequality by increasing disparities in access to essential services such as healthcare, education, and utilities. It has been argued that, after privatization, the objective of State-owned enterprises (SOEs) tends to focus on profits instead of the social-

welfare and citizens interest, thereby affecting poverty and inequality (Cuadrado-Ballesteros and Peña-Miguel, 2017, p. 167, Greer and Doellgast, 2017, p. 202). Furthermore, there is a perception that privatization increases prices of commodities due to the removal of subsidies and private owners tend to raise prices to cover costs (Cuadrado-Ballesteros and Peña-Miguel, 2017, p. 167, Greer and Doellgast, 2017, p. 202). In addition to that, privatized services may become unaffordable for marginalized populations, leading to a lack of access to basic needs. Scholars like Mittleman has argued that privatization has failed to generate the desired economic growth and reduce poverty, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa (Mittleman, 1994, p. 11, Alayed et al., 2024, p. 129). With regard to Zambia, the levels of poverty have increased. For example, the incidence of poverty in 2015 was estimated at 54.4% compared to 60% in 2022 (Zambia Statistics Agency, 2023, p. 6) This increase in poverty levels has been accompanied by a wide income disparity between the rich and the poor. Thus, the benefits of privatization have not trickled down to the poorest Zambians.

Impact of privatization on the environment and heritage sites

Some scholars argue that the Zambian government has not done enough to make sure that foreign investors are held accountable for polluting the environment. According to Simpere (2010), the regulatory dispositions for the mining sector are so weak that they do not deter polluters, and as a result of this, the Copperbelt is seriously polluted while the Kafue National Park, which has the most endangered wildlife species is threatened by the pollution of the Kafue River running through it (Simpere, 2010, p. 3). Simpere (2010) further adds that pollution also affects the local communities, which are exposed to toxic waste. This, in turn, has adverse effects on traditional activities such as agriculture, livestock, farming, and fishing. The point to be stressed is that, during the era of ZCCM, mining activities had environmental effects, but what has changed today is the rate at which the environment is being polluted and the slack legislation on those polluting the environment.

Privatization is also a major driver of Loss of Cultural Heritage. Privatization of cultural assets or heritage sites can result in the commodification of cultural resources, potentially leading to the loss of cultural identity and heritage preservation (Boniotti, 2021, p. 36, The Getty Conservation Institute, 2003, p. 36). In fact privatization has been defined as a potential problem and a threat to cultural heritage (Ponzini, 2010, p. 516). “The debate over private involvement in heritage sites is often associated with commercial and ethical issues. The closeness of corporate advertisements and structures to heritage sites can be highly controversial, especially if a company generates profits from its proximity to the site without contributing the conservation activities” (Abdou, n.d., p. 60, Benedikter, 2004, p. 373). It is imperative to note that the significance of heritage is equal to other themes in society such as education and health care. This viewpoint underscores the value of preserving cultural heritage which if not taken care of or left in the hands of the private sector could engender numerous benefits for all members of society instead of a specific group (Abdou, n.d., p. 61).

Impact of privatization on redundancy

The privatization process in Zambia has also been associated with mass redundancies. According to Fraser and Lungu (2007), the total workforce in the mines as of 1991, when the privatization started, stood at 56,582. By 1997, employment levels had fallen to 31,000, and by 2001, total employment dropped to 19,145. Thus, it can be argued that the privatization process has tended to reduce employment levels in the country, and the Mopani Copper mine is no exception. Simpere (2010) argues that in 2008 and 2009, Mopani cut over a thousand workers in just a few months.

The reason for this job cut was the financial crisis, which caused copper prices to drop. One may argue that this was reason enough for Mopani to reduce its workforce, but an analysis of the copper price on the international market during the 2008 and 2009 financial crisis helps us to reject the above-given reason. For example, 'during the crisis, the price of copper was in excess of US Dollars 2,000 per ton, which was higher than the price of copper when Mopani bought the mine. In fact, after experiencing record prices of close to US Dollar 9,000 per ton from 2005 to 2007, Mopani Copper Mine preferred to freeze operations until they became more profitable again' (Simpere, 2010 p.16). Clearly, the levels of employment, especially in the mining sector have been dropping since the start of privatization process in 1991 and the effects of this cannot be overemphasized due to the fact that most families in Zambia are dependent on the father of the house, who in most cases is provider. Therefore, if the father is laid off, as has been the case under the privatization process, the whole family structure is changed. Thus, with all these job cuts in the mining industry, who then was employed to replace those declared redundant? Most of the new investors embarked on casualization and payment of poverty wages. According to Frazer and Lungu (2007), since privatization, almost all the growth in employment in the mining industry has been for those employed by contracting firms, and this number increased from 2,628 in 2000 to 11,536 in 2004.

Privatization and Unpaid Pensions and unfair Competition

Privatization did not only lead to massive redundancies but also led to unpaid pensions, especially in the mining industry. This is probably due to the fact that the new company owners did not take on labour liabilities that were under ZCCM. It should also be noted that there were some new investors who were ready to pay, but in most instances, the retrenchment package was very little, as noted by Fraser and Lungu (2007).

Another criticism advanced against privatization is that it introduces unfair competition among the different players in the economic sector. Mwinga (2003) argues that privatization seems to create unfair practices in that local investors and contractors do not have the same kind of incentives that are given to foreign investors and contractors. This unfair competition has led to a situation where local companies have closed down their operations as they have failed to compete with foreign companies. Though this is the case, one thing to note is that competition is not synonymous with privatization, and in many cases, privatization on its own does not result in increased competition.

Privatization vis-à-vis Undervaluation of Privatized Companies, and the Zambian tax system

It has been argued that most of the privatized companies were undervalued by ZPA. For example, Simpere (2010) claims that in 1991, experts estimated the minimal value of privatization of the mines to be 3 billion US dollars. Though this is the case, all ZCCM's mining assets, divided into seven units, were sold to various private consortiums for a total of US Dollars 627 million. ZIMCO, which was the company given the mandate to manage parastatals, demanded that there should be a representation of the owners of the parastatals at all levels of negotiations. It is for this reason that ZIMCO was reluctant to deal with ZPA (Fundanga and Mwaba, 1997). In other words, ZIMCO argued that ZPA was at the forefront in propagating the undervaluation of parastatals in Zambia.

Another area that requires attention in view of the privatization process in Zambia has to do with the tax system. There is a serious problem when it comes to the collection and control of tax over multinational companies, including mining companies, by the Zambian tax administration. Simpere (2010) has noted that the Zambia Revenue Authority (ZRA), a body tasked with the responsibility of collecting taxes on behalf of the Zambian government, acknowledges that the

size of the firm and the complexity of its operations make its mission of tax collection a real challenge. Furthermore, ZRA lacks resources and usually finds itself in a position of weakness when faced with a huge corporation that operates internationally and is highly skilled in tax optimization. Furthermore, Simpere (2010) observed that out of the twelve (12) mining companies in Zambia, only one (1) paid tax on its profits, as the others show no profits in terms of the tax legislation in force. With regards to other taxes, ZRA considers that the mining sector contributes no more than 10–15 per cent of the country's tax revenue, and most of this tax is from the income paid by the mines' employees (Simpere, 2010). Clearly, this situation is less desirable and makes for a sad reading, as the taxes collected are of little benefit to the development of this country.

Impact of privatization on Indigenous Communities

In many African countries, privatization can disproportionately impact indigenous communities who depend on natural resources for their livelihoods. Privatization of land or resources can lead to displacement, loss of cultural heritage, and violations of the rights of indigenous peoples. This has been supported by Prust (2021). For example, Nestle has been buying land in tiny rural villages all over the world. Once land has been bought, Nestle taps into the aquifer and bottles and sell a million litres of water, and this trend continues until aquifers are effectively dried up (Prust, 2021, p. 2). This has serious implications on the local people as they are left without water for their crops, there is also a risk of food shortages and economic collapse if no crops are in areas that were once important crop producers (Prust, 2021, p. 2). Clearly, this stifles the areas progress especially in underdeveloped countries like Zambia

Privatization vis-à-vis loss of Control and Sovereignty, and Right to Development

Privatization may lead to a loss of government control over key sectors of the economy, potentially compromising national sovereignty and decision-making authority in critical areas like healthcare, education, and infrastructure. In Latin American privatization programmes, preference was given to private investors to take control of the large state banks. 'In all these cases, the abuse of resources for private purposes led to brutal financial crises which forced re-nationalization of most these groups' (Bortolotti and Perotti, 2007, p. 3). The Russian case is also instructive in how captured privatization programmes can lead to loss of state control (Bortolotti and Perotti, 2007, p. 3).

Privatization policies that do not prioritize human rights and public welfare can hinder sustainable development efforts in Africa. Ensuring that privatization initiatives align with human rights standards is crucial for promoting inclusive development and protecting the rights of all individuals on the continent. Privatization affects human rights of individuals in a number of ways, for example, the privatization of social protection often results in the poor being subjected to more underfunded public sector (United Nations, n.d., p. 1). This is usually the case because the model of training social workers to recognize the specific social, psychological, economic challenges faced by individuals is replaced by a model that is driven by economic efficiency concerns (United Nations, n.d., p. 1). Regarding infrastructure projects, these are attractive to private providers where significant user fees can be charged. On the other hand, the poor are not able to pay, thus, cannot afford to use many services like water, electricity, roads, transportation, education and healthcare (United Nations, n.d., p. 1).

Privatization, Service provisions and Service Quality Concerns

Private companies may prioritize profit over service quality, leading to a decline in the quality of essential services such as water supply, electricity, and healthcare (Alayed et al., 2024, p. 131).

This can negatively impact the overall well-being of the population, especially those who rely on these services. In the health sector, privatization is undertaken with a view to improving the quality of care through increased market competition. However, literature shows that increases in privatization corresponds with worse health care outcomes for patients (Goodair and Reeves, 2024, p. 199, Radić et al., 2005, p. 13). When the health care is privatized, provision of health services becomes the responsibility of the private entity, entailing that the government has little or no control over the provision of the said service. With regards to the Zambian case, during the days when mines were run by ZCCM, the company took care of most of the public services in the neighbouring communities, that is, schools, hospitals, recreational facilities for children, maintenance of infrastructure as well as activity centres for women. After privatization, private companies, especially those in the mining industry, discontinued or abandoned most of these social activities, and they have not been taken over by the state or municipal authorities. According to Simpere (2010), roads in the mining towns are now badly damaged due to a constant flow of trucks to and from the mines, and they are not even repaired. In addition to this, hospitals and schools now charge fees. The next section will now discuss the above findings

Discussion

The central focus of the neo-classical theory is that a free market economy without state intervention will lead to economic prosperity that will trickle down to the poorest members of society. This ideology has not helped the Zambian government in addressing the many pressing issues facing the country. The increasing gap between the rich and the poor is a case in point. In other words, the privatization programme has not addressed the problem of social inequality, but it has exacerbated this problem. It should also be mentioned that privatization even makes it more difficult for the poor to access the privatised services, as these services become more expensive. For example, there are a number of private entities that have been providing quality health care in Zambia and these are Pearl of health, Teba hospital, Mums clinic, Dr. Argawal, Trust hospital and many others. Accessing quality health care from these private entities has always been the preserve of the elite class not until the Zambian Government intervened to introduce a national health insurance which is managed by the statutory body, the National Healthy Insurance Management Authority (NHIMA).

As in the Zambian case, before privatization, emphasis was mainly put on employment maximization and other non-economic investment choices. The neo-classical school of thought has been criticised for putting too much emphasis on profit maximization. The argument is that, most private owners have ended up exploiting Zambians in the quest to maximize profits. For example, most of the privatized companies embarked on a program to reduce the workforce in the newly privatized companies. One would have hoped that after reducing the workforce, the newly privatized companies would have improved the working conditions of the workers, for example, paying them good salaries. This has not been the case. Furthermore, most of those retrenched were not paid their pensions. On this front, the neo-classical school of thought is rendered invalid. Though this is the case, this school of thought is noted for promoting efficiency and productivity at the place of work. As shown in the Zambian case, productivity in most privatised companies seems to have increased, as is the case of ZANACO.

On the contrary, this apparent improvement in the performance of privatized companies is a source of concern for most liberal scholars. The argument presented by the liberal scholars is that improvement in the performance of privatized companies is not a direct product of privatization, there could be other factors at play which could have contributed to improved performance, and these could be leadership style, organization structure, as well as the environment in which the

newly privatized companies were operating from. It should be made clear that liberal scholars do not reject privatization outrightly but that other factors should be taken into consideration when analysing the benefits that come with privatization.

The radical school of thought rejects privatization and its perceived benefits. These scholars argue that privatization does not only increase the level of poverty, as is the case in Zambia but it is also accompanied by wide income disparity between the rich and the poor. This author supports the stand taken by the radical scholars. As noted in this paper, privatization has negatively impacted most Zambian citizens. In other words, privatization in Zambia has benefited only a few who have been its proponents but its impact on the environment and social wellbeing of Zambians has been adverse. Furthermore, it's not true that a country needs to privatize state-owned companies for it to develop. There are countries in the world that have intervened in the market economy, and these countries have been very successful, contrary to the views presented by neo-classical and liberal scholars. The Asian tigers are a case in point here. These countries achieved their breakthrough with strong state intervention in the economy. Zambia could also be cited as a case in point. When the Zambian government introduced the national health insurance, most Zambians have been able to access quality health care from private-owned hospitals. Of course, one would argue that the introduction of the insurance has created inefficiencies in private-owned hospitals due to the long queues that clients have been subjected to. However, this challenge could be addressed if more private health care givers get accredited to NHIMA. One thing to note is that private companies will only invest where they know that they will make profits, whilst the government will make an investment with the view of benefiting the general population. The government will construct roads even if the area may not bring any economic benefits to the country. Thus, uniform development can only be achieved if the state intervenes in the economy, and this is the point advanced by this author. What is needed is for state-owned enterprises to be reformed so that they operate like private companies. They should adopt principles applicable in the private sector and use them to run these enterprises effectively and efficiently. Principles of motivation, leadership, group management, decision-making, and information management are central to the attainment of organizational goals. If these principles are applied to the public sector, the provision of goods and services by the public sector will be efficient and effective. It can, therefore, be argued that despite the arguments for privatization and the perceived benefits as presented by neo-classical scholars, privatization tends to lead to a situation where essential services such as health and education are not provided to the community. Though this author supports the stand taken by radical scholars on privatization, this does not mean that privatization per se is bad in its totality. As highlighted in this paper, there is a success story to the privatization process in Zambia, and this is an important point that requires the reader's attention.

Some of the strategic development areas identified in the Eighth National Development Plan (8NDP) for Zambia are: economic transformation and job creation, and environmental sustainability. Clearly, privatization may not lead to the creation of the desired number of jobs; in fact, it may contribute to job losses as the private company might be in a hurry to maximize the profits. The same is true of environmental sustainability. Very few private companies have managed to take care of the environment where they operate from. Most of the private firms have actually polluted the environment. Therefore, Zambia's quest to effectively implement its 8NDP will largely depend on massive investments in state-owned enterprises (SOEs). Reforms ought to be introduced so that SOEs focus on meeting the economic objectives for which they were set up as opposed to social objectives. Assigning economic and social objectives to an SOE has been a source of concern and confusion for scholars and managers of these institutions.

Conclusion

Despite different views being advocated by neo-classical economic theorists, liberal theorists and radical scholars, this study concludes that privatization in Zambia seems to have benefited only a few who have been its proponents and that its impact on the environment and social well-being of Zambians has been adverse. Zambia is still faced with a number of challenges including climate change, the energy crisis, high unemployment levels and high poverty levels. These challenges can only be ameliorated through state intervention in the economy. Privatization might just exacerbate these problems. It is on this basis that radical thinkers reject the notion of privatization.

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Should South Africa Embrace a Feminist Foreign Policy to Respond to Gender Inequality?

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Abstract

This qualitative study seeks to critically examine whether South Africa can adopt a Feminist Foreign Policy (FFP) that speaks against biphobia, transphobia, homophobia, sexism, inequality, and patriarchy. The authors argue that South Africa should consider adopting a feminist foreign policy that is gender inclusive of women, children, and gender non-conforming persons. Currently, South Africa does not describe its policy as feminist but rather as having women on the foreign policy agenda, i.e., women's representation in parliament. We argue that the state has failed to oppose all forms of gender dominance and oppression. During the second Presidential Summit on Gender Based Violence and Femicide (GBVF) in November 2022, President Cyril Ramaphosa reiterated GBVF as the first pandemic in SA, as we continuously see the increase of rape and murders against women, children, and the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex (LGBTI) community. This study, therefore, sought to critically unpack the possibility of a safe and inclusive South Africa for women, children and gender non-conforming persons through the adoption and implementation of a feminist foreign policy. The first country that implemented the feminist foreign policy was Sweden. The goal of Sweden's policy implementation in 2014 was to address the country's gender disparity issues, and as a result, they also sought to consider all gender perspectives in all policy creation and decision-making. The researchers reflect on Sweden's foreign policy from a feminist perspective as possible lessons for South Africa and attempt to clarify South Africa's position with regard to gender emancipation and whether this could serve as a platform to implement a feminist foreign policy.

Keywords: South Africa, foreign policy, feminism, gender equality, patriarchy

Introduction and background

The origins of a Feminist Foreign Policy (FFP) date all the way back to Sweden, the country that pioneered efforts to promote peace and development through transnational feminist solidarity. As Sweden places such a strong emphasis on the concepts and practices that support women's utilisation of their human rights, it does not view these challenges as women's or gender-related, but as human rights-related. Through feminist foreign policy, we can effectively oppose the violent global power systems, such as patriarchy, racism, cultural nationalism, imperialism, and militarism, which keep the majority of the population in a perpetual state of vulnerability and despair. This is feasible due to the fact that feminist foreign policy provides a potent lens through which these power systems could be combated. When the Swedish government announced it would pursue a feminist foreign policy, its objectives were also established.

These objectives are commonly known as the "three Rs." The letter R represents "rights" first. The purpose of rights, according to Egnell (2017) and Regeringskansliet (2015), is to "protect the human rights of women and girls and combat all forms of violence and discrimination based on gender" (Egnell, 2017:573; Regeringskansliet, 2015:13). The objective of representation is to increase the number of women involved in decision-making at all levels. Resource allocation is the pursuance of a gender-balanced distribution of assets and resources. Occasionally, a fourth R is added to the conclusion of the phrase. A genuine and contemporary understanding of women and their circumstances is one of the objectives of reality. The agenda calls for the promotion of sustainable peace and development, as well as the implementation of Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security (Wallstrom, 2015:7). Work toward a tranquil and prosperous future for all people is also on the agenda. A feminist foreign policy is first and foremost a new perspective and practice through which gender equality is methodically and consistently incorporated into all aspects of the foreign policy agenda. According to Lackenbauer (2016:14), this strategy will be implemented in international politics through promotion, dialogue, cooperation, and negotiation, among other means.

Research on Sweden's feminist foreign policy is rare since it is a phenomenon that is still relatively young. The study seems to have focused mostly on clarifying its goals, obstacles and what it actually means (Egnell, 2017; Lackenbauer, 2016). This is likely due to the confusion and doubts that it initially raised when it was first introduced. The controversy between ideology and practice stems from the fact that feminism is incompatible with some of Sweden's political pragmatism. Critics of the policy mostly point out a few issues that keep coming up: the fact that it is likely to face opposition from other countries because some of its goals are seen as controversial, like promoting SRHR; the idea that a feminist foreign policy is the same thing as soft power and will not be enough to solve some important security problems; and the disagreement between theory and practice. Therefore, even though feminist foreign policy has been called into question and opposed (in addition to being acclaimed), it has not yet been studied in the context of South Africa.

This study attempts to answer the following question: "Is it possible for South Africa to adopt a feminist foreign policy to reduce the widespread gender inequality that exists in the country?" This inquiry is framed in accordance with the premises of the feminist foreign policy theory known as the "4 Rs". The incorporation of feminist approaches to foreign policy into this research has the potential to shape gender equality legislation in South Africa. The discussion on feminist foreign policy is mostly focused on two questions: What exactly do the terms "feminism" and "feminist foreign policy" mean? What kind of thing should it be? How can we assess the feminist foreign policy that governments are actually implementing in light of both its own objectives

and broader feminist viewpoints? After the political activity, academic efforts to clarify concepts and create theory have followed, building on feminist methods in a variety of fields of study. The purpose of this study was for the researchers to attempt to elucidate South Africa's position with regard to gender liberation and to determine whether or not this may act as a foundation for the implementation of feminist foreign policy.

Feminist Foreign Policy: Explained

The Centre for Feminist Foreign Policy (CFFP) describes feminist foreign policy (FFP) as a multidimensional political framework designed to rethink traditional foreign policy by approaching the hierarchical global system with an analytical lens, navigating it through a gendered lens and centring the well-being of marginalised people within its policy.



Figure 1: Evolution of Swedish Feminist Foreign Policy. Source: own data

Figure 1 depicts the evolution of FFP since Sweden first proclaimed its intention to implement the new policy. After Sweden's announcement, think tanks such as CFFP were established, and nations, including Canada, the United Kingdom, France, Luxembourg, and Mexico, declared their intent to adopt FFP. The Swedish government adopted a progressive foreign policy in 2014. Sweden's Prime Minister described the transition to a distinctively feminist foreign policy as the country becoming more courageous, stating that "it is about standing against the systemic and global subordination of women" (Nordberg, 2015; Aggestam & Rosamond, 2019). Aggestam and Rosamond (2019) contend that the implementation of feminist foreign policy in Sweden was largely attributable to the domestic "pro-gender values" that have been ingrained in Sweden's pursuance of feminism abroad and in the state since the 1970s.

The feminist foreign policy of Sweden was initiated from the top down and refined through consultation with the entire Swedish Foreign Service. Before implementing a feminist foreign policy, the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs requested input from all departments on how it could be implemented in each department. With close to a hundred responses, ideas, and suggestions, the initial plan for instituting feminist foreign policy in all of Sweden's foreign

affairs departments was developed. Sweden's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2019:34) identifies this process and unambiguous leadership during the implementation of its feminist foreign policy as success factors (Sweden Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2019).

Since Sweden's feminist foreign policy is still a comparatively new phenomenon, research on it is limited. Due to the confusion and questions, it sparked when it was first introduced, research appears to have primarily focused on delineating what it actually means and what its objectives and challenges are (Egnell, 2017; Lackenbauer, 2016). Criticism of the policy focuses primarily on a few recurring issues: the international resistance it is likely to encounter, as parts of its agenda can be perceived as controversial (such as the promotion of SRHR); the assumption that a feminist foreign policy is equivalent to soft power and will be insufficient to address some pressing security issues; and the controversy between ideology and practice, implying that feminism is incompatible with some of Sweden's political practices. Consequently, even though feminist foreign policy has been questioned and criticised (as well as celebrated), it appears that the issue of its applicability to the African context has been rarely raised. Given South Africa's reputation as one of the world's most progressive countries, it is difficult to disregard this policy.

Motivations behind the Feminist Foreign Policy in Sweden

Women have participated in diverse ways in the development and implementation of foreign policy initiatives. Several women have held the position of chief of state, including Margaret Thatcher in the United Kingdom, Golda Meir in Israel, and Sirimavo Bandaranaike of Sri Lanka (Mintz & DeRoue, 2014:143). In addition to serving as chiefs of state, women have held important positions in international decision-making, including Condoleezza Rice, the former national security advisor and secretary of state of the United States, Ann Linde, the current minister of foreign affairs of Sweden, and others. Angevine (2021) indicates that women in high politics "have a history of expanding the policy agenda to address the political interests of women as a group", which is frequently implemented in foreign policy.

Angevine (2021) argued that the shared experience of being a woman (between Congresswomen and women internationally) "fosters a global affective gender tie" due to international and domestic gender discrimination systems. Human rights violations are frequently cited as the underlying cause of domestic and international conflict by scholars of international relations. Sweden adheres to this principle, placing human rights at the forefront of its foreign policy and positioning women and LGBTQ+ individuals "at the center of its bilateral and multilateral relations" (Carlson-Rainer, 2017: 82). Sweden's diplomats emphasize that a nation that oppresses more than half of its population cannot support a democratic society (Carlson-Rainer, 2017).

Margaret Margot Wallstrom, the former prime minister for foreign affairs of Sweden and the person responsible for the establishment of a feminist foreign policy (Foster & Markham, 2023), discusses the implementation of the policy in an interview, explaining that she wanted to establish parameters that Sweden's embassies and diplomatic representation could use to create real change in the world. She desired that these adjustments in foreign policy be practical (Vogelstein, 2019). Sweden's implementation of a feminist foreign policy followed several years of the country's emphasis on gender equality and human rights. The motivation for advocating a sincere feminist foreign policy was "based on the conviction that sustainable peace, security, and development can never be achieved if half of the world's population is excluded" (Baylis, 2020).

Sweden's commitment to human rights and a progressive foreign policy is reflected in its foreign policy shifts with certain nations. Sweden was the first country to alter its aid policy toward Uganda when the death penalty for homosexuals became public knowledge in the early 2000s

(Terkel, 2009). Sweden severed a military agreement with Saudi Arabia in 2015, primarily due to Saudi Arabia's discrimination against women (Kouvo, 2019). During the first three years of Sweden's feminist foreign policy implementation, these new policies contributed to numerous global outcomes. In a communication released by Sweden's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, examples of results include an increase in the focus on women, security, and peace in the United Nations Security Council, an increase in publications on human rights situations in 135 countries, the adoption of legislation prohibiting the purchase of sexual relations in other countries, and the training of thousands of midwives in developing countries (Walfridsson, 2023).

As a result of Sweden's emphasis on resources for women and girls, analytical tools to assess the effects of trade on women and gender equality have been developed, raising awareness of the impact of trade policies on gender equality (Bergman Rosamond, 2020). Sweden prioritised gender mainstreaming in its grant management and pursued gender-responsive budgeting as a method of bilateral and multilateral cooperation to achieve economic parity. Sweden collaborated with the World Bank to survey and monitor discriminatory legislation in 173 nations, raising awareness of gender discrimination in countries other than Sweden. The support for women's organisations increased by 35 per cent between 2015 and 2016 as a consequence of Sweden's focus on resources for women and girls (Bergman Rosamond, 2020).

The six external goals of Sweden's feminist foreign policy are human rights, freedom from violence, participation in peace efforts, political participation, economic empowerment, and sexual and reproductive rights and health (SRHR) (Bergman Rosamond, 2020). According to research conducted by UN Women and the Inclusive Peace and Transition Initiative, not only the participation of women in foreign policy decision-making, but also their influence, increases the likelihood of international and domestic peace (Scheyer & Kumskova, 2019: 60). This study demonstrates the need to create a platform that elevates the diverse ideologies expressed by women at the table, rather than merely ensuring their presence at the table. Enloe (2014) notes the exclusions that diverse women face in international politics, describing these exclusions as a systemic issue that must be addressed in order to genuinely include women in foreign policy decisions. Women's contributions to international relations create a more diverse, progressive, and intersectional foreign policy that elevates the experiences of marginalised individuals.

Sweden's Shift Away from Feminist Foreign Policy in 2022

This section of the study unpacks some reasons why Sweden, after being the first country in the world to adopt FFP in 2014 to later dismantled it in 2022. There are varying voices and reasons as to why Sweden would have taken this stance. Unpacking and understanding these reasons will provide some sort of a lesson for South Africa to not fall into the same trap. In October 2022, Sweden formally discontinued its pioneering Feminist Foreign Policy (FFP), a move announced by the newly elected centre-right coalition government led by Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson. This decision marked a significant departure from the foreign policy paradigm introduced by the Social Democratic government under former Foreign Minister Margot Wallström in 2014, which had positioned gender equality and women's rights as central to Sweden's international engagements (Aggestam & Bergman-Rosamond, 2016). In the same vein, Walfridsson (2023) reveals that Sweden's FFP's revocation was "framed by a harsher political and security context, where the FFP was seen as at odds with Swedish interests and values – thereby signalling a step back from normative". As argued by these authors, Sweden's shift away from FFP can be attributed to a combination of ideological, strategic, and geopolitical factors. First, the change in government brought a reorientation of foreign policy priorities. The new Foreign Minister, Tobias Billström, stated that the government would not use the label "feminist" in its foreign policy,

arguing that “labels on foreign policy tend to obscure rather than clarify” (Reuters, 2022). This statement reflected a broader effort to depoliticise and rebrand Sweden’s diplomacy, aligning it more closely with what the government described as “Swedish interests and values” rather than ideological commitments.

Second, the decision to abandon FFP reflects a shift toward *realpolitik* and pragmatic diplomacy. Critics of the FFP had argued that its ideological framing occasionally generated diplomatic tensions, such as in 2015 when Sweden condemned human rights violations in Saudi Arabia, leading to a temporary breakdown in diplomatic relations and the cancellation of a major arms deal (Wikström, 2015; Aggestam et al., 2019). By de-emphasising ideological commitments, the new government aimed to recalibrate its foreign relations based on strategic and economic considerations. Third, geopolitical developments, particularly Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in early 2022, further influenced the recalibration of Sweden’s foreign policy. The government of Sweden is argued to have prioritised its North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) accession process and the enhancement of regional security cooperation, particularly within the Nordic-Baltic context (Smith, 2022). Notably, these developments necessitated a foreign policy framework focused more on security and defence alignment than on value-based diplomacy.

Finally, domestic political dynamics played a crucial role in shaping the new foreign policy direction. Wolf (2022) notes that the inclusion of the nationalist and anti-immigration Sweden Democrats in the governing coalition, albeit informally, brought to the fore political actors with limited commitment to gender-focused international agendas. As such, the abandonment of the FFP, therefore, can also be seen as a reflection of changing ideological preferences within Sweden’s political establishment. With all these varying reasons, it should be stated that Sweden has insisted that the abandonment of the FFP label does not equate to a rejection of gender equality. Rather, officials have claimed that issues related to women’s rights and gender remain integrated into Sweden’s foreign aid and diplomatic efforts, albeit without the explicit feminist framing (Billström, 2022). The authors of this study argue that South Africa should adopt an FFP to curtail its escalating gendered violence problems. However, having seen Sweden abandoning its FFP commitments after having been the first country to adopt such a policy in 2014 can provide a valuable case study for South Africa in the contemplation of its own feminist-oriented foreign policy frameworks. Arguably, while Sweden’s FFP served as an influential model globally, its discontinuation also reveals critical structural, political, and ideological challenges that can arise in implementing and sustaining a feminist approach in international relations.

Can an FFP truly advance global gender equality?

While admiring the possibility of a global commitment to end gendered violence, there is a need to also offer a critique of how the FFP can enable readers, researchers, and policy makers, with South Africa as a case study in this research to have a clear picture of the policy as a whole and be able to consider and put into context effectively. Undoubtedly, the rise of FFP has marked a transformative shift in the normative orientation of international relations, particularly since Sweden first adopted the approach in 2014. FFP explicitly aims to place gender equality, women’s rights, and intersectional justice at the heart of diplomatic, development, trade, and security agendas (Aggestam, Rosamond & Kronsell, 2019). While the emergence of FFP has generated optimism about the potential for gender-just global governance, it has also provoked significant criticism and scepticism. This paper explores whether FFP can meaningfully advance global gender equality and outlines the major theoretical and practical critiques of the framework.

Advocates argue that FFP offers a radical reimagining of international relations by challenging patriarchal, militarised, and state-centric approaches to global politics. Unlike traditional foreign

policy, which often marginalises gender as a secondary concern, FFP re-centres power, agency, and justice from a feminist lens. Aggestam et al. (2019) argue that FFP aims not only to promote gender equality but to transform the structures that reproduce gendered violence and exclusion. Feminist foreign policy also draws upon intersectional approaches that consider race, class, sexuality, and colonial histories, thus broadening the scope of diplomatic justice (Thomson, 2023).

In practice, FFP has led to tangible policy shifts. Sweden, under FFP, redirected development aid to support sexual and reproductive health rights, implemented a feminist trade policy framework, and increased women's participation in peace processes (Schulz & Yeung, 2021). Mexico and Canada have incorporated feminist principles in peacebuilding, indigenous diplomacy, and aid delivery. These efforts demonstrate that FFP can create institutional entry points for marginalised voices, particularly in areas traditionally dominated by masculinist paradigms such as security and defence (Enloe, 2014). However, despite its normative aspirations, FFP faces substantial critiques both in theory and in practice.

One notable critique stems from the postcolonial feminist perspective, which cautions against exporting Global North definitions of feminism to the Global South. There is concern that FFP can reproduce imperial logics by positioning Western states as saviours and framing women in the Global South as passive victims in need of rescue (Mohanty, 2003; Acharya, 2018). In that regard, it is argued that without meaningful partnerships with local feminist movements and contextual sensitivity, FFP risks becoming a top-down, technocratic intervention rather than a collaborative effort for justice. While taking this critique into cognisance, the authors argue that SA has a strong history of feminist movement organising, coupled with solid domestic legal frameworks championing gender equality. Therefore, an implementation of FFP in SA can be an integration of a long-standing intersectional and genuine commitment to peace and gender equality. For SA, we argue that the future of FFP depends not only on who adopts it but how it is implemented, who it serves, and whose voices are centred in shaping its goals, embracing an intersectional lens.

Why does South Africa need to consider Feminist Foreign Policy?

Global advancements in the promotion and protection of women's rights have occurred over the past few years. Even though there is still much work to be done, there have been significant milestones that should not be ignored. For instance, the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the 2000 United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security are both landmark events for the global promotion of gender equality. The UNSC Resolution, also known as the WPS agenda, requests that all UN member states "ensure the participation of women and the inclusion of gender perspectives in peace negotiations, humanitarian planning, peacekeeping operations, and post-conflict peacebuilding" (Thompson et al., 2021).

In addition, the resolution urges all parties to take special measures during armed conflicts "to protect women and girls from gender-based violence, particularly rape and other forms of sexual abuse" (Resolution 1325 of the General Assembly). 98 UN Member States have issued national action plans to implement the agenda since the implementation of the resolution, and several foreign ministers have sought to advance the resolution (Jutta, 2022). Consequently, the implementation of an FFP by some nations could be regarded as a step forward for gender equality, as expressed in UNSC Resolution 1325. This is supported by authors such as Aggestam and True, who have stated that in recent years, an increasing number of states have taken the initiative in promoting gender equality in global affairs. Through its constitution, the South African government has defined the advancement of women's issues, representation, gender equality,

empowerment, and leadership as diplomatic and economic prudence. New research indicates that increasing women's participation in peace processes as delegates and representatives, as well as in politics and civil society initiatives, can lead to a world with fewer conflicts (Thompson et al., 2021). Considering this, the implementation of an FFP appears to be the correct step towards a more gender-equal and inclusive world.

Due to the novelty of the FFP concept, there is presently no internationally accepted definition for it. Therefore, each country that has implemented an FFP has done so according to its own interpretation of feminism. This entails establishing their own priorities and strategies, while maintaining common principles and goals. FFP does not arise from a fixed definition of feminism in various contexts, and this presents both opportunities and challenges as the agenda continues to evolve. As a result, South Africa has the chance to define and redefine its own direction concerning rape and homicides against women, children, and the LGBTQI community.

South Africa and Sweden's 4Rs

As the Swedish example demonstrates, a feminist foreign policy is a comprehensive foreign policy that seeks to eliminate all forms of gender dominance and oppression as well as gender stereotypes. It also aims to provide women with the opportunity to participate in decision-making, represent the state, and execute "tough" issues about a country's external relations and status (van Wyk, 2019). Thus, a feminist foreign policy requires both abolitionism and democracy: the abolition of male dominance and patriarchy and the facilitation and maintenance of women's access to power at all levels. To accomplish this, norms, numbers, and practices must be coordinated. Haastrup (2020: 199–216) has examined gender in the context of South African foreign policy by concentrating on commitment, substance, and practice—aspects on which this contribution expands. These factors align with the 4Rs of the Swedish feminist foreign policy: rights, representation, resources, and reality.

The South African Constitution expresses the country's normative commitment to women's rights, empowerment, and gender equality. In addition, Chapter 9 of the Constitution established seven 'state institutions supporting constitutional democracy', including a Commission for Gender Equality (van Wyk, 2019). Contradictions have emerged between the law, society, and reality in relation to the concepts and definitions of woman, gender, and feminist/feminism, despite the laudable nature of this commitment to women's rights and representation. Legally and socially, a woman in South Africa is primarily identified by her heteronormativity. The terms *woman* and *gender* are frequently used interchangeably, resulting in contradictory policies, squandered resources, ineffective responses, and unfavourable results (reality). Moreover, in South Africa, gender-based violence (GBV) is viewed primarily as violence against women, highlighting the disregard for the nuances of women and gender. President Ramaphosa, speaking on National Women's Day in August 2022, equates gender-based violence with only violence against women (Ramaphosa, 2022). This presents an occasion to discuss the protection of other vulnerable groups, such as LGBTIs.

In his first address to the South African parliament as president, Cyril Ramaphosa acknowledged the existence of gendered and racialised disadvantages in South African society. This is, although South Africa has adopted and ratified significant international commitments to gender inclusion, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). Similarly, South Africa ratified the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol), presently one of the most progressive and feminist legal frameworks. Moreover, South Africa led the UN Human Rights Council (HRC) in 2011 to adopt Resolution 17/19, the organisation's first resolution challenging

it to consider discrimination against Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Intersex (LGBTI) peoples seriously (Jordaan, 2017). CEDAW and the Maputo Protocol should link South Africa's internal propagation of pro-gender justice norms with its actual actions. Specifically, if the domestic ostensibly affects the international, it is worthwhile to consider the extent to which domestic constitutional protections have been effective in practice.

South Africa, like every other society, contends with gender inequality. In this context, gender inequality is typically viewed as a dichotomy between women and men, in which women and femininities remain subordinate to men and masculinities. Despite this, there is an acute awareness of the need to address these binary inequalities, which has led to the creation of the Commission on Gender Equality. Since 1994, more South African females have completed secondary and tertiary levels of formal education. Nonetheless, inequality exists in terms of employment rates and types of employment, with more men employed and a persistent gender pay disparity (International Labour Organisation, 2018).

Aside from this, it is well known that South Africa has a very high rate of gender-based violence, including femicide against women and gender non-conforming individuals. The South African Police Services (SAPS) recorded 49,455 sexual offences in 2017 — a record low. South Africa has a persistent gender problem within its borders (Cold-Ravnkilde, 2019). Posel (2004) observes that many of the debates surrounding sexual violence are frequently reactionary, as opposed to demonstrating a consistent commitment to a feminist policy against sexual violence. Despite the rhetorical and some material investments in gender equality, state interventions have not been viewed as diminishing these. Despite domestic conditions, South Africa's foreign policy trajectory suggests a different path for foreign policy.

The ANC's 1997 foreign policy outline states:

“An African Renaissance should be primarily characterised by a commitment to gender equality and the abolition of women's oppression, as well as a vision of gender equality. This necessitates that South Africa and our movement in particular play a significant role in these struggles globally and on the continent, including the revival of a pan-African women's movement. No renewal can occur in Africa so long as gender inequality remains entrenched on the continent and worldwide. The development of perspectives and approaches to international relations that emphasise gender equality and women's emancipation is crucial in this regard” (ANC, 1997).

It is reasonable to assert that the apartheid state was distinguished by its militarised heterosexual masculinity, which was enacted as the opposite of the feminised liberation movement (Conway, 2008). In the ANC, explicit feminist concerns about the distribution of power and the impact of gendered hierarchies were acknowledged but subordinated to class and race discourses. Possibly, the organisation of South Africa in the twenty-first century has been affected by the gendered conditions of society and the absence of response.

Lessons from the past implementation of Feminist Foreign Policy in Spain and Canada

The most important thing to do is to identify the problem which needs to be fixed. The problem identification ensures or directs the implementation of FFP.

Table 1: Routes to FFP

	Sweden	Canada	Spain
Nature of the problem	Gender inequality	Global poverty	Gender inequality
Solution to the problem	Strengthen all women's and girls' rights, representation and resources based on the reality they live in (4Rs)	Eradication of poverty through the empowerment of women and girls	Closing global gender gaps: -Making gender equality a priority in the Spanish External Action -including a gender equality focus in all areas of foreign policy
Outcome	FFP	FFP	FFP

Source: Own data

Table 1 illustrates the various routes countries have taken to develop and implement their feminist foreign policies. While Spain and Sweden share a common concern regarding the nature of the problem, as gender inequality, Canada faces a unique challenge, designating global poverty as its primary concern. The identification of the issue is a crucial initial stage in the formulation of foreign policy. Therefore, it is essential to have a problem closely related to feminism. Feminism is “a movement advocating for women’s social, political, legal, and economic rights to be equal to those of men” UN Women, n.d.). Therefore, for a policy to be considered feminist, it must, at least, seek to advance the equality of women’s and men’s legal rights.

The identification of gender inequality as a problem already demonstrates that women and men are unequal. As feminist policy, it can be assumed that the foreign policy will seek to advance the social, political, legal, and economic rights of women to promote gender equality (Parisi, 2020). The Canadian identification of the issue as global poverty diverges from that of Spain and Sweden. Although poverty affects women more than men, and therefore, battling poverty may help promote gender equality in some economic respects, it ignores other factors. Poverty is only one way in which women are discriminated against (Millar, 2018). By emphasising global poverty as the primary issue, Canada ignores the fact that women experience inequality in numerous other ways.

The comparison of these three nations in relation to the problem’s classification reveals that Spain and Sweden have policies consistent with the definition of feminism. This is because they identify gender inequality as the issue, and feminism seeks to achieve equality between men and women in their economic, social, political, and legal rights. As a result, this section’s analysis helps us comprehend how South Africa will need to define its feminist foreign policy.

Towards a Sustainable South African Feminist Foreign Policy

South Africa, like Sweden, Canada, Spain, and Norway, has consistently supported the nine Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) resolutions adopted by the United Nations Security Council over the past two decades. As with other nations that assert a feminist foreign policy, the focus of implementation has been on the Global South, particularly Africa, as part of its Africa-first foreign policy. A feminist foreign policy prioritises the advancement of gender equality, gender non-conformity, and women’s rights. Locally (South Africa), regionally, and globally, a feminist foreign policy aims to draw attention to international peace institutions where women and other gender non-conforming individuals can participate in peace process agreements promoting gender equality. It should be noted that feminist foreign policy is relatively new, and Sweden is

well-known for implementing this policy. Therefore, South Africa, as a democratic progressive nation, may capitalise on feminist foreign policy to emancipate women. The feminist foreign policy aims to advocate for the amplification of voices opposing gender bias, which would aid in the gradual elimination of exclusive masculine agencies. South Africa can implement a feminist foreign policy that provides equality to people of all genders and sexualities, deconstructing the entrenched patriarchal mindsets that continue to prevail among men and women. It is no secret that gender norms and stereotypes continue to obstruct the path to equality, as evidenced by the rapidly increasing number of cases of gender-based violence and femicide in South Africa. South Africa must be deliberate in its pursuit of gender justice, recognising that there is an urgent need at this juncture to examine its development and foreign policies through the lens of gender, aiming for a transformative and rights-based approach across all its national policies. The reimagined South African feminist foreign policy should aim to have a translation solidarity to fight against:

- Gender based violence and femicide.
- Hate crimes against gender non-conforming citizens.
- The trafficking of women and children
- The promotion of education for women, girls and gender non-conforming individuals
- Economic emancipation for women and gender non-conforming citizens
- Endorse women's leadership in politics, royalty and decision-making.

Today, international relations specialists with expertise in intersectional gender analysis are urgently required to evaluate socio-cultural, economic, and political matters. This will foster a more profound understanding of the gender-specific effects of reactions to both current and emerging circumstances. Feminist foreign policy seeks to confront the global system of labour division that marginalises women by relegating them to repetitive and poorly compensated positions. Spain has introduced a feminist foreign policy as part of the implementation of the Action Agenda in 2021. This policy acknowledges that the active involvement of women is crucial for democracy, peace, prosperity, and social progress. The objective of feminist foreign policy is to promote an anti-racist and decolonising approach. The concept of feminist foreign policy and feminist diplomacy, rooted in transnational feminist solidarity efforts from 1975–85, draws inspiration from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) (Foster & Markham, 2023). It urges states to actively promote values and adopt effective measures to ensure gender equality and the protection of women's human rights through diplomatic relations and practice.

The Swedish foreign feminist policy has undertaken the same initiative, intending to achieve gender parity in diplomacy through the elevation of women's representation in the role of ambassadors. The global community must prioritise this as a duty in accordance with our international obligations as well as a necessary step towards achieving a wider foreign policy agenda focused on promoting peace, security, and sustainable development. Therefore, it is crucial to interpret this universal understanding through an intersectional feminist lens that considers the socio-cultural context shaped by post-colonialism, the power dynamics in international relations, and the real-life experiences of citizens. Nations possess varied perspectives, and it is imperative to incorporate a feminist viewpoint in global affairs. This entails dismantling dominant power structures and institutions that perpetuate policies favouring minuscule minority groups on Earth. Therefore, it is crucial to confront the patriarchal system characterised by inequity, marginalisation, and oppression. It is crucial to acknowledge that patriarchy has a significant role in shaping our perceptions of gender, which in turn impacts our self-perception, relationships, and worldview.

Hence, by adopting a gender perspective, we can exert influence on policies at the local, national, and international levels, thereby shaping our developmental and revolutionary agendas.

Conclusion

The adoption of a feminist foreign policy is pertinent to the worldwide efforts to combat gender inequality. Nevertheless, the lack of a widely recognised definition can lead to confusion and uncertainty among nations. Therefore, it is essential to establish a specific set of defining features that can operate as a reference for distinguishing the primary elements of an FFP. South African policymakers can discern challenges that impact the country by employing a bottom-up approach that magnifies the difficulties experienced by its population. While this study has provided suggestions, it is important to note that these are not a definitive solution or cure. A thorough and practical consultation is necessary. According to Irwin (2019), countries must create explicit rules for the practical implementation of feminist foreign policy when adopting it. In addition, Irwin contends that nations adopting feminist foreign policy should proactively guarantee that gendered perspectives are integrated into the daily lives of foreign service personnel through integration and assistance. It is crucial to promote gendered thinking within households at the state level to adequately implement a feminist foreign policy.

To effectively combat gender-based violence and femicide, hate crimes against gender non-conforming individuals, human trafficking of women and children, and to promote education for women, girls, and gender non-conforming individuals, as well as economic empowerment and women's leadership in politics, royalty, and decision-making, South Africa and other countries must enhance their domestic policies to align with these objectives. By doing so, they can strive to achieve similar outcomes as those seen in Sweden. The FFP employs a human rights framework that focuses on advancing and safeguarding the human rights of women and marginalised groups in the community. The FFP in South Africa should strive to provide the complete fulfilment of fundamental liberties and individual freedoms for all. Presently, there is a slow rise of unforeseen opposition, nativism, and populism directed towards vulnerable communities, including the LGBTQ. The primary objective of the South African FFP should be to advance and safeguard the fundamental human rights of these neglected populations. The primary objective of the FFP is to integrate the endeavours of all civil society organisations and advocate for human rights. Hence, the excluded groups are entitled to the benefits of the FFP due to the presence of dispute resolution mechanisms integrated into the decision-making process.

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Inclusion Financiere Des Femmes Entrepreneures Sud Africaines

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Résumé

Le papié examine le sujet de l'inclusion financière et de l'autonomisation des femmes en Afrique du Sud. Hormis la techiqualité et. qui affectent l'inclusion financière des femmes, l'étude analysera les mesures existantes du gouvernement sur l'inclusion financière pour déterminer si cette dernière contribue à l'autonomie socio-économique des entrepreneurs en Afrique du sud. L'étude utilise la perspective de l'économie politique féministe pour comprendre l'exclusion historique de la femme en Afrique du sud et en ce qui concerne l'équart des sexes comme résultat. Les effets du colonialisme en Afrique du Sud sur l'inégalité des sexes, structurelle, psychologique et de la dégradation culturelle, et de la manière dont ces derniers ont affecte la participation dans les relations sociales et économiques dans le secteur de finance du pays, font parti des efforts pour comprendre l'inclusion financière et l'autonomie des femmes. Le ressentiment, l'exclusion et la contrainte sont des consequences inévitables de la pauvreté et l'inégalité après l'apartheid en Afrique du Sud. Malgré les efforts concertés mis en place par l'Etat pour résoudre ce problème, y compris assurant que la femme et la fille ont accès au finance et l'égalité des sexes, dans les droits constitutionnels (comme contenu dans la politique nationale), le problème reste inchangé. Utilisant l'approche de la method qualitative, base sur la recherche d'attitude de nature exploratoire, l'étude esperait de mieux comprendre, venant des littératures disponible, aussi bien des reponses des repondants, dans l'inclusion/exclusion financière, et comment ceci impacte l'autonomie des femmes en Afrique du Sud.

Mots clés: Inclusion Financière, Développement inclusive, économie politique, L'autonomie des femmes, Afrique du Sud.

Introduction et Contexte

Plusieurs études ont énoncé la corrélation de l'inclusion et exclusion financière comme un outil intégrale pour l'éradication de la pauvreté, du développement inclusive et de combler l'écart d'inégalité entre les homes et les femmes entrepreneurs dans n'importe quelle économie (McKinsey & Company 2009; O'Dell 2014; OECD 2012; PCI 2017; Revenga & Shetty 2012; RSA 2017; UN-Women 2017).

Malgré que la socio- économie et les systems financiers en l'Afrique du Sud ont fait bénéficié plusieurs femmes en augmentant les femmes fiancièrement indépendantes et entrepreneurs. Cependant, la connaissance de la liberté financière en terme des investiments à long- terme qui donne des rendements de capitals substantiel et mitige les risques, reste un défi parmi les femmes entrepreneures. (Rashiq & Cyprian 2017: 99). Graduellement, les femmes Sud Africaines gagnent leur revenue à court- terme et jouent le rôle des chefs de famille mais elles ne sont

pas aussi engagées comme elles devraient être dans leur plans à long-terme tel que retraite et investissements, lesquels elles laissent à leurs partenaires de gérer (Glänzel & Scheuerle 2015: 1641).

L'inabilité de s'engager dans un investissement à long terme crée le sentiment d'impuissance dans la détermination de leur standard de vie, et ajoute la vulnérabilité quand le conflit ou une catastrophe naturelle frappe (Glänzel & Scheuerle 2015: 1641).

Selon le baromètre international de l'intelligence financière des femmes Visa 2013, les femmes sud africaines ont été évaluées et classées parmi les moins financièrement éduquées dans le monde (Khumalo 2017: np). Le classement des femmes Sud Africaines était 23 sur 27 nations échantillonnées pour la sélection (Khumalo 2017: np).

À la lumière des explications ci-dessus, il y a un besoin de créer un éveil sur la problématique des épargnes et investissements pour encourager et créer un développement inclusif et un environnement durable pour les femmes entrepreneurs. Actuellement le pays fait défaut et les femmes sont toujours sujettes d'une pauvreté absolue, l'inégalité et l'insécurité par sexe féminin.

Selon les statistiques de l'Afrique du Sud, la majorité des femmes sont responsables des finances de leur foyer sur différentes raisons comme les femmes vivent plus longtemps que les hommes (Khumalo 2017: np). Les statistiques démontraient que 43% des foyers en Afrique du Sud sont gérés par les femmes sur lequel six millions et neuf cents mille (6,9 million) des femmes sont actuellement dans un emploi qui font d'elles responsables du budget de leurs familles (Khumalo 2017: np).

Malgré que l'importance et le besoin d'accès aux services financiers n'étaient pas énoncés dans les objectifs de développement du millénaire (ODM) et objectifs de développement durable (ODD), l'accès à la finance est un facteur de base et convaincant qui contribue directement ou indirectement à la réalisation des objectifs de développement durable (Fanta & Mutsonziwa 2016: 1). Le quatrième objectif de l'égalité des sexes de ODD place un accent sur les femmes qui ont un accès direct aux opportunités financières comme il leur promet de devenir entrepreneurs, des géantes financières, des philanthropes indépendantes et des décideuses dans la famille et communauté.

La plupart des études sont focalisées sur l'exclusion des femmes pour les services financiers au lieu de travail et au niveau personnel comparées à leurs homologues hommes (Fanta & Mutsonziwa 2016: 1). Selon l'analyse politique féministe, l'écart des sexes excluant les femmes des activités financières et contribuant à la croissance socio-économique du pays est inquiétant. L'écart leur prive de leurs droits humains et également de participer à leurs responsabilités (Fanta & Mutsonziwa 2016: 1). Les femmes en Afrique du Sud comparées aux femmes du monde occidental placent leur priorité financière sur les besoins de leur foyer plus que l'investissement et les épargnes (Glänzel & Scheuerle 2015: 1641). Elles n'ont pas d'égards aux conséquences financières qui peuvent probablement affecter leur future.

Les femmes sont principalement des victimes des crises économiques et les plus coupées du budget publiques. Dans les pays en développement de l'Afrique et les régions de l'Asie du Sud, à chaque unité (faillite, commune et groupe) les plus fragiles et les plus exposées sont les femmes et les filles dû à leur inabilité d'être éduquées, protégées, l'accès aux bons soins de santé, au foyer, engagées dans la capacité d'entraînement qui implique les compétences d'apprentissage et du développement, d'être des participantes dans la prise des décisions et d'accéder aux ressources et droits (Rashiq & Cyprian 2017: 100).

L'étude analyse le sexe et l'inclusion financière, la théorie de l'économie politique féministe, l'exclusion historique en catégorisant les classes et l'inégalité des sexes, des valeurs de la famille, l'autonomie financière sur les femmes entrepreneurs ou la classe travaillante en Afrique du Sud comme une arme d'accomplissement du développement financier inclusive et d'allegement de pauvreté dans le pays en mettant en évidence l'impact ou le rôle de l'exclusion financière des femmes en Afrique du Sud .

L'études s'adresse aux objectifs suivant et la recherche des questions d'étude.

Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were eight international development goals for the year 2015

Sustainable development Goals (SDGs) are collection of 17 global goals designed to be a "blueprint to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all".

L'inclusion ou l'exclusion financière en Afrique du Sud

Selon IMF et Klapper et al (2017), chaque pays essaye déjà d'apporter des mesures différentes pour initier et planter l'inclusion financière pour une société durable dû à la croissance de la population et de l'économie dans toutes les nations. Cependant, le gouvernement de l'Afrique du Sud et les institutions financières n'ont pas encore pris en considération d'intégration des femmes pour accéder au finance comme une stratégie effective par l'autonomie de femmes. En dépit des législations et du support de la constitution à l'accès équitable aux droits humains, le plan de développement national publié en 2012 avant les objectifs de développement durable

Le NPD ignore les contributions des femmes à l'économie en ce qui a trait à la résolution des obstacles financiers, sociaux, culturels, religieux et éducatifs à l'entrée des femmes sur le marché du travail ; l'expansion des infrastructures sociales pour réduire le chômage des femmes en offrant des droits fonciers aux agricultrices, pour ne citer qu'elles (Gumede, 2016 ; Habib, 2013). Le rapport publié par le Département sud-africain des affaires féminines en 2015 indiquait que 72 % des femmes vivaient encore en dessous du seuil de pauvreté, car les femmes qui travaillent en Afrique du Sud gagnent moins que leurs homologues masculins (Department of Women 2015 : 115).

Selon le baromètre international 2013 de Visa sur la littératie financière des femmes, les femmes sud-africaines ont été notées et classées parmi les moins alphabétisées financièrement au monde (Khumalo 2017 : np). Le classement des femmes sud-africaines était de 23 sur 27 nations échantillonnées pour la collecte (Khumalo 2017 : np). La mesure dans laquelle cela a un impact sur les niveaux de sensibilisation aux services financiers (épargne et investissements) pour créer un environnement durable pour les femmes entrepreneurs n'a pas encore été pleinement analysée. Actuellement, les femmes continuent d'être soumises à une pauvreté abjecte, à l'inégalité et à l'insécurité parmi le phénomène de genre malgré l'existence de services financiers et de politiques d'autonomisation des femmes. Les raisons à cela peuvent résider dans une analyse solide de l'inclusion financière en tant qu'outil d'autonomisation des femmes et de la manière dont cela a fonctionné ou non jusqu'à présent. Il a déjà été démontré que cela peut avoir un impact sur l'ensemble de la société. Par exemple, il a été établi que l'exclusion des femmes mesurée en termes de taux élevés d'inégalité et de pauvreté ; la 'fortification de classe' et la déconnexion des élites dirigeantes et économiques du sort de la majorité historiquement opprimée provoquent des conflits, une instabilité politique et des bouleversements économiques dans la société sud-africaine » (O'Manique & Fourie, 2016 : 106)

L'état de l'exclusion financière en Afrique du Sud

L'écart financier entre les femmes persiste à l'échelle mondiale malgré les efforts mondiaux de chaque économie pour relever ce défi (Klapper et al., 2017 ; Cornish, 2018 ; Ngwenya, Pelser & Chivaura, 2018 ; Sahay & Cihak, 2018 ; Taejun, 2018). L'exclusion financière des femmes est inquiétante car elle empêche les femmes de participer et de contribuer aux activités sociales et économiques au sein de la société. Dans la région de la SADC, les femmes sont moins bancarisées que les hommes avec un écart de 6 %. C'est l'inverse en Afrique du Sud, car les femmes sont plus incluses financièrement que les hommes en termes de propriété bancaire. Cependant, Fanta (2016 : 5), a fait valoir que la raison du pourcentage plus élevé sur Les femmes sud-africaines sont la propriété de la Mastercard de

National Development Plan (NDP) 2030 is a policy document drafted by South African government in 2012 on the national plans towards year 2030.

l'Agence sud-africaine de sécurité sociale (SASSA) qui a été utilisée pour aider les bénéficiaires les moins privilégiés à retirer de l'argent à n'importe quel guichet automatique et à glisser dans n'importe quel magasin. Sur la population totale, ceux qui ont des comptes bancaires individuels représentent 64 % tandis que ceux qui ont une Mastercard SASSA sont 77 %, y compris le nombre de ceux qui ont des comptes bancaires à leur nom, tandis que seulement 13 % n'ont qu'une carte SASSA (Fanta 2016 : 5).

Un autre fait souligné par Fanta (2016 : 10) est que bien que la plupart des femmes en Afrique du Sud soient financièrement incluses, seulement 28 % des femmes ont des comptes bancaires actifs tandis qu'une proportion relativement plus élevée ont soit une boîte aux lettres, soit des comptes inactifs. Selon UNCDF 2016 (voir Fanta 2016 : 5), les comptes bancaires peuvent être classés en trois phases ; « un compte utilisé » qui enregistre au moins trois transactions en un mois ; tandis que le «compte de boîte aux lettres» subit des transactions comme deux fois par mois et le «compte dormant» qui ne subit aucune transaction au cours d'un mois.

South African Social security Agency (SASSA) Mastercard is an initiative implemented by South African Department of Social development for the poor and disadvantaged in the country to access financial funds provided by the government.

UNCDF acronym for United Nations Capital Development Fund.

La figure 1.2 présente le pourcentage de femmes épargnantes en Afrique du Sud, seulement 14 % épargnent de manière formelle, 6 % ont une autre forme d'épargne et 14 % épargnent de manière informelle. La principale préoccupation qui justifie l'importance de cette étude est le pourcentage élevé de non-épargnants, comme en témoigne le chiffre de 65 %. Les statistiques donnent une indication claire de la nécessité de rechercher et d'analyser les plans d'intervention pour accroître la culture de l'épargne et de l'investissement à long terme chez les femmes en Afrique du Sud. D'après l'explication donnée ci-dessus, nous pouvons nous rapporter au fait que la plupart des femmes, bien que financièrement incluses en termes de propriété bancaire en Afrique du Sud, ne sont pas financièrement actifs et n'utilisent pas les produits ou services financiers accessibles par les prestataires de services financiers de l'étude.

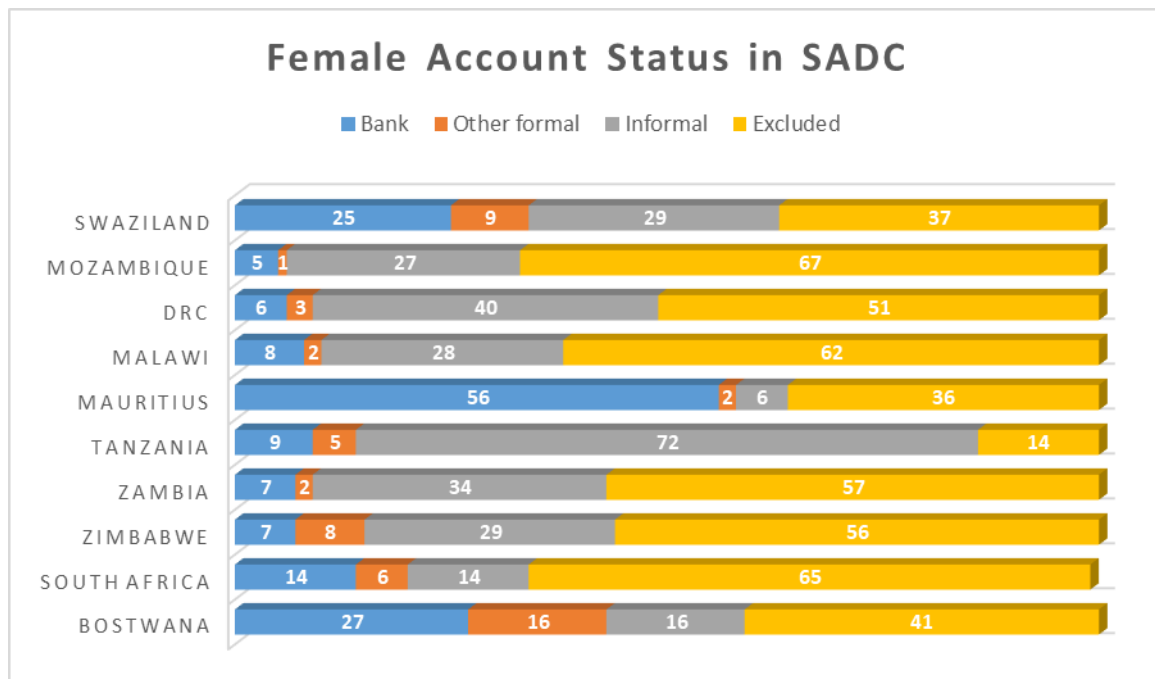


Figure 1.2 Statut du compte bancaire par sexe dans la SADC. Source : Fanta (2016 : 11).

Cadre théorique

Théorie de l'économie politique féministe

L'analyse politique et économique féministe (FPE) continue d'être un concept de débat depuis le début du 21^e siècle (Riley 2008, Nkenkana Akhona 2015, Nkealah 2016). L'économie politique féministe est ancrée dans la théorie féministe qui analyse le statut des femmes et des hommes dans la société et les moyens d'opérer un changement vers la subordination des femmes causée par les inégalités de genre dans les sociétés patriarcales (Diop et al. 2017 : 4). Akhona (2015), Sjoberg (2015), Nkealah (2016) et Milazzo & Van De Walle (2017), ont écrit sur les théories féministes qui abordent les questions d'inégalités de genre, de discrimination ethnique, de ségrégation, de pauvreté, d'analphabétisme de genre et les solutions proposées pour aborder leur. D'autres chercheurs tels que Ogundipe et Leslie (voir Nkealah 2016 : 7364), réitèrent que la position du pouvoir féminin sera celle des représentantes des femmes dans tous les secteurs alors qu'elles s'efforcent de maintenir l'inclusion et la transformation sociales et politiques en Afrique. Selon Peterson (2005, 2012), il a réitéré que la théorie féministe a accru les connaissances sur les expériences de genre relatives aux identités, aux désirs, aux attentes, aux connaissances, aux compétences, au travail, aux salaires, aux activités et aux expériences entre les moyens de subsistance des femmes et des hommes. Il a en outre soutenu que malgré les succès des femmes dans la formation d'associations professionnelles, la promotion d'un enseignement critique et transformateur, la conduite de recherches sur le féminisme, il existe toujours une exclusion persistante des femmes dans la structure de l'économie politique, en particulier dans les régions en développement (Peterson 2005 : 3). Tous les contextes mentionnés ci-dessus dans la littérature expliquent les contextes quotidiens sur les moyens de subsistance et les expériences des femmes dans l'économie.

Dans les économies en développement telles que l'Afrique, Nkealah (2016 : 7364), a raconté les expériences quotidiennes d'une femme africaine typique, elle a déclaré que les femmes africaines subissent des injustices sur la base de la race, de la classe, du groupe ethnique, de la langue et

de l'état matrimonial. En outre, elle a réitéré que l'impact de la colonisation a accru l'exclusion des femmes au développement, car les femmes à l'époque coloniale se sont vu refuser l'accès à l'éducation et aux privilèges civils. Et le résultat est que, jusqu'à aujourd'hui, les femmes manœuvrent encore pour se mesurer à leurs homologues masculins en termes de développement personnel, d'éducation, de carrière professionnelle et de gestion de l'État (Nkealah 2016 : 7365).

Les critiques ont argumenté contre les théories féministes, il est rapporté que les théories féministes se concentrent davantage sur la politique sexuelle, l'indifférence au racisme, l'attitude nonchalante envers les hiérarchies de genre colonisées. En fait, les critiques du féminisme africain ont fait valoir que la théorie féministe en Afrique n'est pas bien articulée et n'est pas justifiable (Diop et al. 2017 : 6). De leur côté, les critiques du féminisme occidental ont fait valoir qu'il existe une large marge entre la théorie féministe occidentale et la théorie féministe africaine (Diop et al. 2017 : 6). La raison en est que la théorie africaine est basée sur les valeurs historiques et culturelles de chaque contexte africain tandis que la théorie féministe occidentale est superficielle, car elle soutient que seules les sociétés dominées par la domination masculine reflètent la subordination, l'exploitation et le contrôle total des femmes (Diop et al. 2017 : 6). Les chercheurs africains sur le féminisme soutiennent le contraire, car ils soutiennent que le féminisme occidental ne peut pas comprendre pleinement les complexités du féminisme africain, car l'économie politique africaine était basée sur la résistance des femmes au colonialisme, à l'impérialisme et à l'hégémonie occidentale (Diop et al. 2017 : 6). Ce point a été soutenu par Opara (2013, voir (Diop et al. 2017), qui a déclaré que l'économie politique féministe africaine n'est pas seulement de nature historique et culturelle, mais est éclectique et supprime toute forme d'oppression dans le corps féminin.

Ces théories justifient l'importance de cette étude, car elle se concentre sur l'écart entre les sexes dans l'inclusion financière des femmes sud-africaines. Sakue-Collins (2017 : 1), a soutenu cette affirmation en déclarant que l'indépendance de l'Afrique repose sur l'indépendance de chaque femme africaine dans chaque société. En fait, l'un des avantages de la recherche sur les femmes dans le développement est d'improviser différentes manières d'inclure les femmes dans les pratiques et les avantages du développement, car cela améliore l'économie politique de la société.

Méthodologie

L'étude a utilisé une recherche qualitative, basée sur une recherche attitudinale de nature explicative pour identifier les contraintes de genre limitant l'inclusion financière des femmes en Afrique du Sud. La recherche qualitative contient un petit échantillon de recherche qui recueille des données approfondies et de qualité auprès des répondants, contrairement aux méthodes quantitatives qui impliquent des échantillons plus grands dépassant 100 répondants et traitent des mesures (Hague et al., 2016). Des exemples d'instruments de recherche qualitative sont les entrevues, les groupes de discussion, l'observation et l'ethnographie. À l'aide d'un échantillonnage raisonné, les résultats ont été recueillis auprès de 30 femmes entrepreneurs du Gauteng en Afrique du Sud. La raison du choix de Gauteng est que c'est le cœur du pays et que les organisations les plus importantes et les plus prospères sont situées dans Cette région. L'étude juge approprié d'utiliser des entretiens approfondis pour cette étude, car cela aide à démêler et à présenter des expériences et des conclusions approfondies et à comprendre l'état actuel de l'inclusion financière des femmes

Imperialism represent a policy of extending a country's power and influence through colonization via use of military force and any other means.

Western hegemony symbolizes values and culture of different classes of people in the economy.

dans le pays. Afin de comprendre leur point de vue sur l'économie politique du genre en Afrique du Sud et cinq (5) responsables gouvernementaux / décideurs clés dans différents départements gouvernementaux de la province. À l'aide de la boule de neige et de l'échantillonnage raisonné, le chercheur a délibérément trouvé les critères d'échantillonnage appropriés et identifié les participants qui possèdent les bonnes compétences et expériences pour répondre aux questions de recherche grâce aux références des gardiens.

La méthode d'analyse des données qui a été engagée était l'analyse thématique, qui consiste à regrouper des informations similaires dans différents thèmes qui seront employés (Ritchie & Lewis 2011 : 228). Le but est de permettre au chercheur de se concentrer sur chaque concept afin que les détails et les thèmes qui s'y trouvent soient débattus.

L'étude a en outre engagé différentes sources d'informations telles que «des bibliothèques, des archives, des sources en ligne, des rapports scientifiques, des sites Web gouvernementaux et des livres». L'essence de l'utilisation de plusieurs sources était de permettre un processus de triangulation qui peut parfois révéler certaines incohérences dans les données (Gaudet, Stéphanie & Robert, 2018). Des documents pertinents au contexte de l'étude ont été explorés et analysés et une analyse de documents a été menée sur des publications gouvernementales telles que le Plan de développement national, les objectifs de développement durable, le rapport Findex 2017, les rapports de la Banque mondiale, l'Agenda 2030 et d'autres documents pertinents sur l'inclusion financière (Hague et al. , 2016 ; Inyang, 2018).

Résultats

Les résultats ont été recueillis auprès de trois groupes de participants afin de comprendre l'économie politique actuelle de l'inclusion financière des femmes en Afrique du Sud. Le premier groupe de participants était composé de 30 femmes entrepreneurs de Gauteng en Afrique du Sud. Les conclusions portent principalement sur les défis auxquels elles ont été confrontées en tant que femmes entrepreneurs les empêchant d'épargner et d'investir dans le pays.

Conclusions sur les défis des femmes entrepreneures en matière d'inclusion financière pour les femmes en Afrique du Sud

Une question a été posée sur l'état de l'inclusion financière des femmes sud-africaines sur le marché des capitaux. À partir des données recueillies, la chercheuse a découvert que l'inclusion financière des femmes présente un énorme fossé, qui n'a pas encore été résolu en Afrique du Sud. Chaque participante a donné sa propre opinion sur les défis rencontrés en tant que femme entrepreneure par rapport à leur homologue masculin.

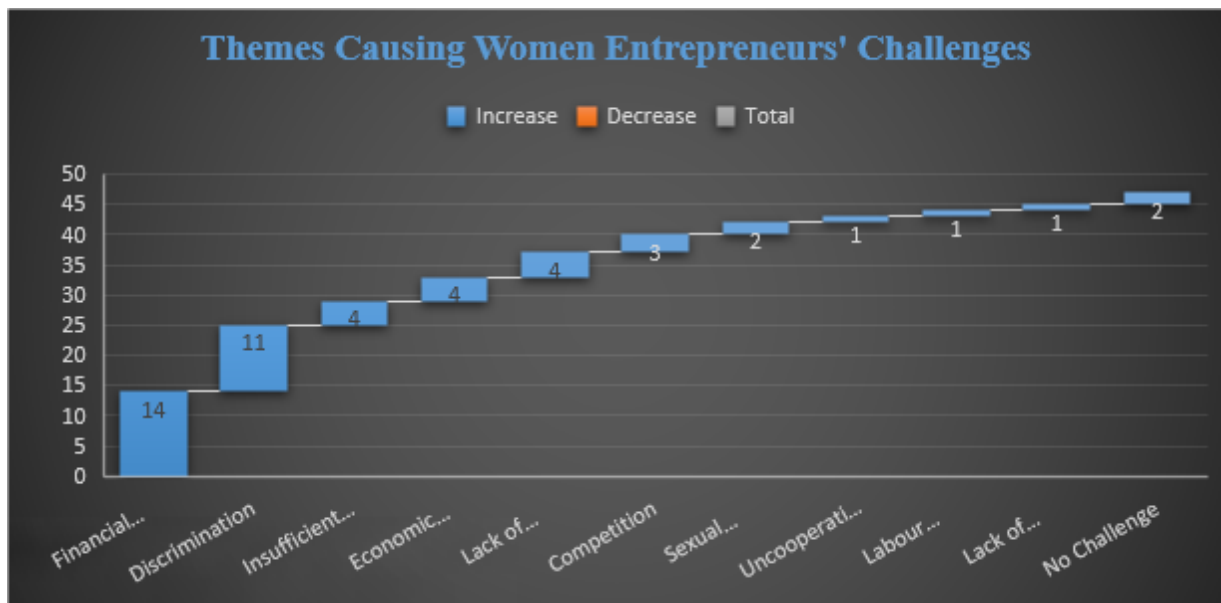


Figure 1a: Diagramme à barres représentant les thèmes à l'origine des défis des femmes entrepreneurs. Source : (Ojo, 2020).

De la figure 1a. Des thèmes communs sont présentés causant des défis aux femmes entrepreneurs en Afrique du Sud. Le premier thème a été identifié par 14 participants sur les « contraintes financières », cela se rapporte aux conclusions discutées dans la littérature sur les contraintes affectant l'inclusion financière des femmes. La plupart des femmes entrepreneurs ont du mal à accéder aux services financiers et ont dû s'associer à un représentant masculin avant d'être entendues. Le deuxième thème avec le nombre le plus élevé est la « discrimination » dans laquelle 11 participants (37%) ont indiqué qu'ils se sentaient toujours discriminés dans leurs industries. Quatre (4) participants (13 %) ont indiqué « un réseau insuffisant et un manque de collaboration » comme le défi qui les contraignait ; 4 autres participants (13 %) ont indiqué « les situations économiques et les mauvaises entreprises comme un défi ». 4 autres participants (13 %) ont déclaré que le « manque de compétences/analphabétisme » était un défi qui les contraignait, tandis que 3 participants (10 %) ont indiqué que la « concurrence » était un défi majeur pour leur accès aux services financiers. En outre, 2 participants (7 %) ont indiqué que le « harcèlement sexuel » qui se produit avec des partenaires commerciaux est un facteur contraignant ; et 1 participant (3 %) a indiqué « partenaire non coopératif » comme un défi. 1 participante (3 %) a indiqué que les « questions liées au travail » étaient un facteur contraignant, une autre participante (3 %) a indiqué que le « manque de confiance » était un défi et qu'elle se sous-évaluait le plus souvent. Les 2 derniers participants (7%) ont indiqué qu'il n'y avait pas de défi qui les contraignait.

Recommandations des femmes entrepreneurs pour les interventions du gouvernement.

Les résultats ont donné différentes perspectives sur l'intervention gouvernementale qui peut être mise en œuvre pour aider l'inclusion financière des femmes en Afrique du Sud. Les résultats reflètent cependant qu'il n'y a pas de sensibilisation aux connaissances sur les initiatives gouvernementales. Chaque participant a suggéré ce que le gouvernement devrait faire pour assurer la réduction de l'écart financier entre les sexes.

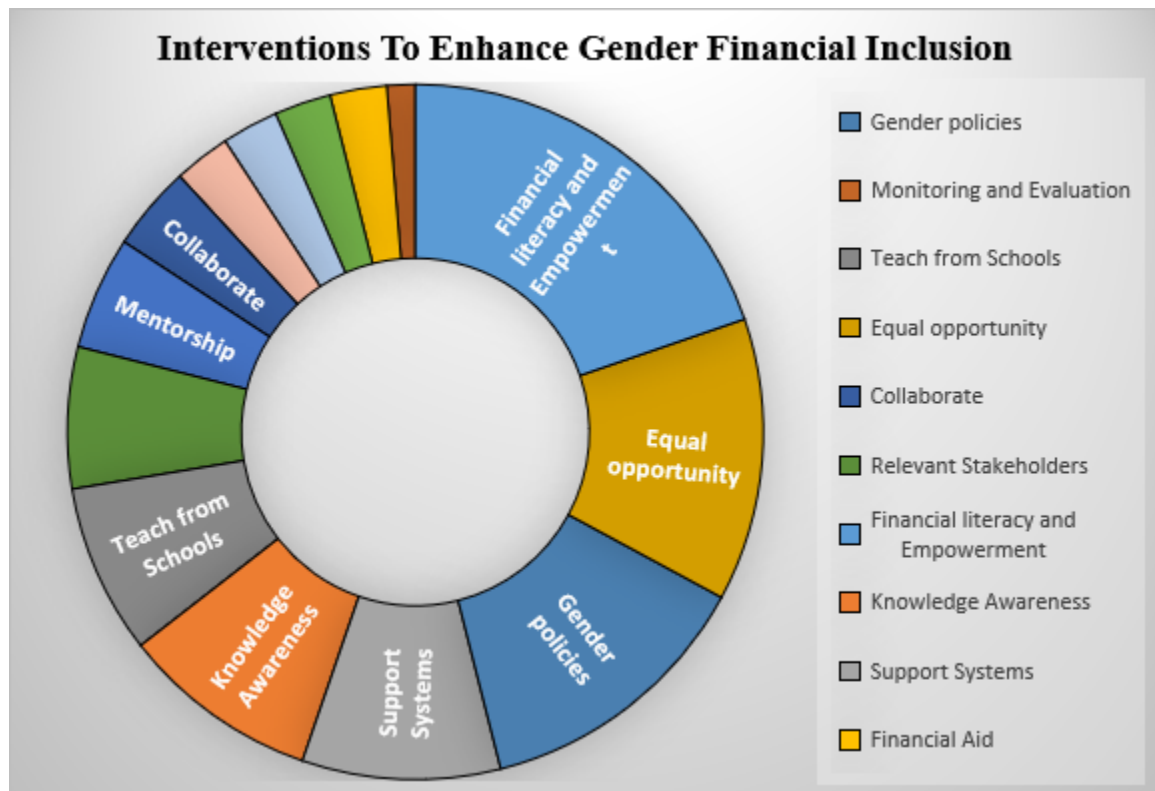


Figure 1b: Diagramme à barres représentant les interventions du gouvernement pour améliorer l'inclusion financière des femmes.

D'après la figure 1b ; les conclusions ont présenté les interventions qui devraient être mises en place pour améliorer l'inclusion financière des femmes. Les thèmes communs identifiés sont; « politiques de genre », dont 10 participants (33 %) ont indiqué que le gouvernement devrait mettre en œuvre des politiques stratégiques et de travail qui s'adressent spécifiquement aux femmes. Un participant (3 %) a indiqué la nécessité d'un « suivi et d'une évaluation » ; 6 participants (20 %) ont indiqué la nécessité « d'enseigner depuis les écoles » comme un facteur contraignant. Dix participants (33 %) ont déclaré que le gouvernement doit offrir « l'égalité des chances » aux femmes entrepreneurs dans le pays, tandis que 3 participants (10 %) ont indiqué que les femmes entrepreneurs devraient « collaborer » les unes avec les autres. Cinq participants (17 %) ont indiqué que les « parties prenantes concernées » devraient être embauchées et impliquées dans les politiques d'intégration de la dimension de genre, en particulier les politiques relatives à l'inclusion financière des femmes. En outre, 15 participants (50 %) ont indiqué qu'il devrait y avoir des interventions telles que « la littératie financière et l'autonomisation » pour les femmes entrepreneurs ; 7 participantes (23 %) ont indiqué que la « sensibilisation aux connaissances » est très importante pour que les femmes entrepreneurs puissent accéder aux opportunités financières. Il est primordial d'attraper les plus jeunes dans les écoles et de les aider à leur enseigner des compétences entrepreneuriales. Sept participantes (23 %) ont indiqué que des « systèmes de soutien » sont nécessaires pour les femmes entrepreneurs ; 2 participants (7 %) ont indiqué le besoin d'une « aide financière » ; tandis que 4 participants ont indiqué que le « mentorat » était un guide important pour les femmes entrepreneurs. Deux des participants (7 %) ont en outre indiqué un « changement d'état d'esprit » contre les femmes et, plus important encore ; deux autres participantes soulignent la nécessité pour les femmes entrepreneurs d'être « autonomisées » par elles-mêmes et de rechercher des connaissances et des opportunités et enfin 2 participantes (7 %) ont indiqué qu'elles n'avaient « aucune idée » de ce que le gouvernement peut faire pour promouvoir l'inclusion financière des femmes.

Conclusions des représentants des institutions financières sur l'accessibilité à l'inclusion financière pour les femmes

Les cinq institutions financières participantes ont donné une perception différente de l'inclusion financière des femmes et de l'accès des femmes entrepreneurs aux services financiers. Tous les participants ont indiqué qu'il existe un énorme fossé en matière d'inclusion financière pour les femmes en Afrique du Sud. La participante 31 a soutenu qu'«il n'y a pas de véritable sensibilisation ou d'éducation appropriée sur l'inclusion financière des femmes ou les services financiers» (Entretien avec P31, 10 janvier 2020). Les institutions financières sont un système capitaliste et ne travaillent qu'avec des entrepreneurs rentables (Entretien avec P31, 10 janvier 2020). Même ainsi, le secteur financier travaille avec tous les clients et ne sépare pas les services financiers pour les femmes séparément car les politiques, règles et réglementations s'appliquent à tous. La dernière participante a résumé la question en déclarant que «... de mon point de vue, l'inclusion financière des femmes en Afrique du Sud n'a pas été correctement abordée, en raison de notre position historique où les femmes subissent l'oppression (race, sexe et classe) et de notre idéologie patriarcale. Non, tous n'ont pas un accès égal en raison des facteurs mentionnés précédemment » (Entretien avec P35, 8 janvier 2020).

Conclusions des décideurs politiques sur l'accessibilité des femmes entrepreneures aux services financiers en Afrique du Sud

L'accès des femmes aux services financiers en Afrique du Sud est une autre notion qui a été soulevée pour comprendre les points de vue des représentants du gouvernement sur l'inclusion financière des femmes. Les points de vue ont souligné que les femmes ne sont pas prioritaires actuellement, comme mentionné dans la section précédente. Selon les participants, il y a un accès au financement, mais toujours pas d'accès à l'information, car des incitations telles que le CIS, le BBSDP et l'IEDP sont mises en œuvre par les parties prenantes gouvernementales pour que les femmes accèdent aux services financiers. Cependant, seuls quelques privilégiés sont au courant de ces incitations, et la majorité ignore les initiatives d'accessibilité. La participante 37 a déclaré que «bien que le département développe un nouveau programme pour aborder l'inclusion financière des femmes, bien qu'il ne soit pas encore légitime, la politique est encore loin d'être atteinte en Afrique du Sud» (Entretien avec P37, 25 décembre 2019). «De plus, l'homologue masculin reçoit plus de salaire même s'il est au même niveau que les femmes et fait toujours le même travail. Les femmes ont accepté les écarts tels que les responsabilités familiales, une taxe noire qui les empêche d'épargner et d'investir pour la famille » (Entretien avec P37, 25 décembre 2019). Cette opinion a été soutenue par la participante 36, qui a déclaré : « L'inclusion financière des femmes est encore loin d'être atteinte en Afrique du Sud. Et les femmes semblent avoir accepté les écarts tels que les responsabilités familiales, la taxe noire, l'inégalité au travail comme un mode de vie normal » (Entretien avec P36, 10 janvier 2020). Les points soulevés par la participante 40 confirment l'importance de l'inclusion financière pour les femmes. Il a déclaré que «les femmes sont en première ligne dans le pays et elles contribuent au PIB du pays» (Entretien avec P40, 8 janvier 2020). Malgré les disparités en termes de revenus, le gouvernement est conscient de l'écart entre les sexes et essaie de fournir des marchés sur la façon dont les femmes peuvent être autonomisées. Selon lui, 70% des femmes sud-africaines sont financièrement incluses, car la plupart des femmes réseautent et collaborent constamment entre elles sur la façon d'épargner et d'investir pour subvenir aux besoins de la famille. Même s'il y a quelques élus qui n'ont pas accès aux services financiers » (Entretien avec P40, 8 janvier 2020). Elle a en outre suggéré que le gouvernement a tendance à accorder plus d'avantages et d'incitations monétaires aux hommes entrepreneurs, car le marché et le gouvernement n'ont pas confiance dans les femmes entrepreneurs. De plus, les femmes s'inquiètent davantage sur les risques dans les entreprises que leurs homologues masculins, ce qui les décourage des produits

et services financiers. Toutes ces raisons sont les facteurs qui affectent actuellement l'état de l'inclusion financière dans le pays.

Financial inclusion incentives provided by the Department of Business Development, of which women are major beneficiaries.

Black tax means sharing income with extended struggling family members and not earning enough to save and invest. Usually common in black communities.

Les observations soulevées par toutes les catégories de participants amènent le chercheur à considérer les commentaires de Gumede (2016) et Habib (2013) sur le NPD sud-africain. Selon les deux universitaires, le NPD ne tient pas compte de la contribution des femmes à l'économie en ce qui a trait à l'élimination des obstacles financiers, sociaux, culturels, religieux et éducatifs à l'entrée des femmes sur le marché du travail, à l'expansion de l'infrastructure sociale pour réduire le chômage des femmes, à l'octroi d'un emploi aux agricultrices, à la en citer quelques-uns (Gumede, 2016 ; Habib, 2013). Le principal point qui a émergé est qu'il existe encore un écart dans l'inclusion financière des femmes en Afrique du Sud qui doit être comblé.

Débats et conclusions

L'inclusion financière des femmes est un énorme problème qui n'a pas encore été résolu en Afrique du Sud. La plupart des femmes entrepreneurs ont eu du mal à accéder aux services financiers et ont dû s'associer avec un représentant masculin avant d'être entendues. Les défis communs auxquels sont confrontées les femmes entrepreneures ont été présentés. Thèmes connexes tels que « contraintes financières », « discrimination », « réseau insuffisant et manque de collaboration », « situations économiques et mauvaises affaires », « manque de compétences/ analphabétisme », « concurrence », « harcèlement sexuel », « partenaire non coopératif » », « questions liées au travail », « manque de confiance » sont des contraintes qui ont fait surface dans cette étude. Ces contraintes ont été identifiées comme une limitation importante du développement socio-économique des femmes en Afrique du Sud. Comme mentionné dans le chapitre 2, Kehler (2001 : 43) affirme que l'accès aux ressources et aux opportunités fondé sur la race, la classe et le sexe est un facteur déterminant de toute inégalité politique, sociale et économique. La classe est définie comme le contexte d'une relation sociale fondée sur l'accès aux ressources telles que la production, l'échange, la distribution et la consommation de biens et de services (Kehler, 2001 : 43 ; Badat, 2011 : 129).

En outre, selon Verdier-Chouchane (2016 : 56), l'inégalité entre les sexes est façonnée par différents facteurs tels que les défaillances du marché, les arrangements institutionnels tels que les structures familiales patriarcales, les normes et coutumes concernant la terre, la culture, la discrimination sur le droit du travail et la pratique. Le concept peut être abordé s'il y a un changement dans les croyances sociales et culturelles sur les capacités et les responsabilités des femmes dans le ménage, les marchés et les normes générales de la société (Verdier-Chouchane 2016 : 56). Une autre question dans les facteurs socio-économiques limitant l'inclusion financière des femmes était la notion d'éducation et de pauvreté dans le pays. Tous les participants ont convenu que l'éducation et la pauvreté sont des facteurs importants qui affectent l'inclusion financière des femmes en Afrique du Sud.

Les participants sont d'avis que le système financier lui-même est conçu de manière à favoriser les hommes plus que les femmes, et ils ont suggéré que les raisons de l'exclusion financière des femmes sont les normes patriarcales et sociétales, puisque les femmes sont supposées être moins responsables financièrement. Selon elles, les femmes sud-africaines n'ont pas assez

d'économies et un grand nombre d'entre elles sont bénéficiaires de la bourse. Leurs revenus suffisent à peine à leurs besoins mensuels. Par conséquent, pour les femmes, l'épargne et l'investissement ne peuvent être possibles que si l'économie du pays change. Culturellement, certaines femmes n'ont accès aux finances et à leurs comptes qu'au décès de leur mari, et elles en deviennent bénéficiaires. Le manque de compétences est également un problème pour les femmes entrepreneurs, car les femmes n'ont pas suffisamment de professionnels, d'experts et de mentors dans le monde des affaires pour guider les futures femmes entrepreneurs. Le plus souvent, les femmes entrepreneurs qui réussissent n'ont pas de digne successeur à qui passer le relais une fois à la retraite. De plus, une fois que les femmes entrepreneurs prospères prennent leur retraite, elles sont confrontées à des responsabilités domestiques, contrairement à leurs homologues masculins, qui offrent toujours des services de conseil même après leur retraite. Ces facteurs rendent les hommes entrepreneurs plus pertinents, et ils disposent d'un système de soutien adéquat. C'est un défi considérable pour les femmes entrepreneurs. Toutes les perspectives liées au concept de l'étude qui ont été présentées sur l'écart entre les sexes en matière d'inclusion financière pour les femmes en Afrique du Sud étaient perspicaces, car la plupart des participantes ont déclaré que la question est un débat actuel que le gouvernement n'a pas encore mis en œuvre dans le système.

Même ainsi, les résultats présentent la recommandation que l'État doit sensibiliser sur la question de l'adoption des services financiers (épargne et investissements) pour créer un environnement durable pour les femmes entrepreneurs. Actuellement, le pays est en défaut et les femmes continuent d'être soumises à une pauvreté abjecte, à l'inégalité et à l'insécurité parmi le phénomène de genre. L'exclusion financière des femmes est inquiétante car elle empêche les femmes de participer et de contribuer aux activités sociales et économiques au sein de la société. Pour parvenir à une inclusion financière durable pour les femmes, il faut aborder les services qui facilitent le développement inclusif. Cela favorise et comble l'écart entre les sexes en ce qui concerne l'accès aux services financiers pour les femmes entrepreneurs. (a) Les institutions financières devraient modifier leurs systèmes commerciaux pour permettre aux citoyens des classes inférieures d'avoir accès aux produits financiers. Plus particulièrement, les produits bancaires doivent être réduits à la moitié des frais/coûts initiaux ; (b) Le gouvernement devrait mettre en œuvre des politiques qui allégeraient les réglementations compliquées dans le secteur financier et encourageraient l'utilisation des services financiers ; (c) Toutes les parties prenantes et la société civile doivent assumer la responsabilité de fournir des mesures adéquates pour l'inclusion financière ; (d) Le gouvernement doit mettre en œuvre des programmes qui clarifient la situation dans le secteur financier, qui identifie également la cause profonde de l'exclusion financière, et mettre en place des programmes de soutien pour y remédier.

Pour parvenir à une inclusion financière durable des femmes, il faut tenir compte des services fournis par les institutions financières (offre), des attentes des consommateurs (demande) et du soutien apporté par les différentes parties prenantes (secteur public et privé) aux services financiers.

Étant donné que l'étude a engagé une recherche qualitative pour l'étude, elle est sujette à un certain nombre de limitations telles que la fourniture d'informations limitées en termes d'objectivité, certaines informations peuvent ne pas être disponibles et les résultats peuvent être très imprévisibles. Par conséquent, l'étude encourage la recherche sur le terrain à l'avenir pour des résultats pertinents et précis sur le sujet.

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The Rise and Fall of Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF): Postcolonial Rethinking of Ethnic and Language-Based Federalism in Africa

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Abstract

The Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) emerged as an ethno-nationalist political movement on February 18, 1975, initiating an armed struggle primarily based in Dedebit, North-western Tigray. The movement's initial political program was rooted in pro-Albanian socialist theory and included the establishment of a Republic of Greater Tigray. However, shifts in the global geopolitical architecture, particularly the dissolution of the Cold War order, significantly altered the movement's objectives and provided a strategic avenue for the seizure of central state power. Following a seventeen-year insurgency against the socialist military government known as the Derg. The predecessor was also a socialist military junta that deposed Ethiopia's last Emperor, King Haile Selassie. The TPLF successfully overthrew the Derg junta in 1991. Subsequently, the TPLF founded the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), a coalition that established a system of ethnic and linguistic federalism structured around a multiparty framework organised along ethno-regional lines. For three decades, the TPLF served as the dominant force within the EPRDF coalition, consolidating control over the nation's political, military, and economic institutions. This sustained period of institutional capture and its attendant narrow political agenda precipitated widespread mass protests beginning in 2015. This grassroots mobilisation ultimately resulted in a significant internal political transition within the EPRDF coalition in 2018, leading to the TPLF's loss of control over the central executive authority. This study employs a rigorous qualitative, single-case study research design, framed within a critical postcolonial perspective. The primary objective is to undertake a systematic investigation into the confluence of postcolonial governance structures, tribal party politics, and ethnic-based federalism, examining their function as sources of conformity or contradiction and assessing their resultant impact on state stability and institutional resilience in Ethiopia. The article may be categorised as a historical trajectory and institutional analysis of ethno-federalism in Ethiopia.

Keywords: TPLF, Ethnic and Language Federalism, Tribal Politics, Ethiopia, Africa, and Ethnic Party Politics.

Introduction

For nearly three decades, the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) was internationally recognised as the ruling coalition of Ethiopia, presiding over what was often described as a unique political experiment in ethnic federalism. Emerging in the aftermath of the Derg's collapse in 1991, the EPRDF presented itself as a revolutionary coalition committed

to democracy, national reconstruction, and the accommodation of Ethiopia's diverse ethnic groups within a decentralised federal framework. To the international community, the coalition appeared to embody a model of post-conflict state-building and participatory governance in a deeply divided polity.

However, a critical examination of its formation, institutional structure, and operational logic reveals that the EPRDF was, at its core, a political construct and hegemonic vehicle of the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF). Rather than representing a genuine coalition of equal partners, the EPRDF functioned as an instrument of political domination, a carefully engineered mechanism to secure and legitimise TPLF control over the Ethiopian state. This article argues that the coalition's outward image of multi-ethnic inclusivity masked a hierarchical and asymmetric power structure, in which the TPLF occupied the ideological and strategic nucleus. Through the deliberate creation and manipulation of satellite organisations such as the Amhara National Democratic Movement (ANDM), the Oromo People's Democratic Organisation (OPDO), and the Southern Ethiopian People's Democratic Movement (SEPDM). The TPLF institutionalised a network of subordinate elites whose political survival was contingent upon loyalty to the Tigrayan core.

The Nature of TPLF and Major Setback

Epistemological inconsistencies and ideological incoherence in TPLF's ethnic based party politics. A critical examination of the TPLF's political philosophy, framed through the lens of **epistemological rationalism**, reveals profound **doctrinal inconsistencies** that have significantly perplexed both domestic and international observers for decades. The chasm between the organisation's political programs and the leadership's rhetorical assertions has been widely noted as a significant disconnect between theory and practice (Tadesse and Young, 2003).

The most irrational manifestation of this internal incoherence stems from the TPLF's adoption of a pseudo-Marxist-Leninist ideology and the claim of international proletarian **vanguardism** in the absence of a discernible industrial foundation or working class within the Tigray region. As Berhe (2009: 352) explains, the formation of the ultra-left Marxist-Leninist League of Tigray (MLLT), absent a proletariat, and the subsequent emulation of socialist Albania demonstrate a clear disregard for the socio-structural realities of the Tigrayan populace. This flawed model was then aggressively replicated throughout Ethiopia under the guise of 'solidarity,' fostering nationwide Marxist-Leninist organisations such as the Ethiopian Marxist-Leninist Force (EMLF) and the Ethiopian Proletarian Organisations Unity (EPOU) (ibid. 2009: 238). The TPLF's paradoxical nature, marked by philosophical and ideological divergence, has consistently characterised both its internal organisational structure and its trajectory toward national political ascension.

One can raise a fundamental philosophical question of how the TPLF reconciled the contradictions between ethno-nationalism and international proletarianism. According to Jowitt (1974:1176), socialist system-building is based on proletarian dictatorship and democratic centralism, both of which used the explicit and direct structural relationship between organisation and society as pre-Leninist political and cultural dispositions. Nonetheless, TPLF ethnocentrism leads to proletarianism, exacerbating the contradiction, given that nearly 98 per cent of Ethiopia's total population is subsistence farmers. [Although mainstream Marxists' ethnicity was thought to 'wither away' with the emergence of a class-conscious, worldwide industrial proletariat, the TPLF, nevertheless, since its inception, attempted to homogenise both the ethnic and the class ideologies for the entire duration of its struggle (Berhe, 2009:6)].

I find it difficult to fully concur with Berhe's interpretation that, from a socio-economic and societal development perspective, private ownership and control over the means of production were virtually non-existent in Tigray during the 1970s, due to the absence of a bourgeois class and limited industrial development, thereby providing the basis for class struggle. While this argument captures certain structural realities of the region, it overlooks the deeper historical and socio-cultural dynamics that shaped political mobilisation in Tigray. As McCracken (2004:185) and Young (1996:112) reaffirm, Tigray was indeed economically underdeveloped and territorially constrained, conditions that undermined both the feasibility of establishing the envisaged republic and the practical realisation of a classless socialist order.

Ethiopia's socio-economic and governance decline over the past five decades partly stems from a doctrinal misinterpretation of Stalin's (1929) definition of nationhood centred on language, territory, economy, and psychology (Kidane, 2018). African elites replicated Soviet and European governance models instead of developing endogenous systems. The TPLF/EPRDF's ethno-federalism mirrored Stalin's framework, disregarding Ethiopia's historical unity and multi-ethnic coalescence. This imposed structure redefined Ethiopia not as a single nation-state but as an aggregation of "nations," undermining centuries of integration and cohesion. Consequently, the model institutionalised fragmentation rather than national solidarity misrepresenting Ethiopia's reality as one nation with diverse ethnic communities.

The TPLF presented a fundamental ideological paradox that transcends mere political strategy and enters the realm of political philosophy. In a deliberate philosophical divergence from orthodox Marxist-Leninist doctrine, the TPLF consistently rejected a liberation struggle framed as a universal class conflict against entities like MEISON and the EPRP (Kebede, 2003, p. 13). This position, as Kebede (2003) elucidates, stands in stark contrast to the core Marxist-Leninist tenet, which positions the vanguard party as the exclusive guardian and representative of the working masses. By subordinating the primacy of class struggle, the TPLF revealed its foundational commitment to a particularistic ethno-nationalist project over a universalist proletarian revolution was a flawed.

This philosophical orientation manifested in a tangible contradiction between the Front's historical narrative and its own praxis. While its ideological discourse strategically framed Emperor Menelik II as an expansionist figure to legitimise its struggle against the Shewan dynasty, the TPLF's own exercise of power replicated a logic of territorial acquisition. Scholarly analysis, notably by McCracken (2004, p. 185), documents how the Front engaged in premeditated land annexations, including the **Wolkait and Telemt from Gondar and Raya from Wollo**. This disjuncture between its anti-expansionist rhetoric and its expansionist actions demonstrates a fundamental instrumentalisation of history and a realpolitik that ultimately privileged the consolidation of power over ideological consistency. Consequently, a growing body of scholarship, including works by McCracken and Young, examines the TPLF's trajectory as one marked by the perpetual subordination of a unified Ethiopian national interest to its own particularistic and strategic ends.

Among the many distractions perpetrated by the TPLF is the decision to make Ethiopia, with a population of above a hundred thirty million people, a landlocked country without seaports. The political alliance was cemented by mutually endorsing the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF)'s historical narrative, which posited the Ethiopian state as an external colonial entity and designated the Amhara elite as the primary internal hegemonic and oppressive power, thereby structurally institutionalizing animosity among Ethiopian nationals. The TPLF demonstrated a strategic political and ideological accommodation of the EPLF's agenda. This alignment required the TPLF to adopt a zero-sum political framing that characterized the Ethiopian state and its

central institutions as historically oppressive, thereby instrumentalizing ethnic grievance and fostering political antagonism within the broader Ethiopian polity (McCracken, 2004:185; Kebede, 2003:11; Hagmann, and Abbink, 2011:587; Ottaway, 1995:68; Young, 1996:106; Engedayehu, 1993:50). The TPLF's toxic political ideology has been exposed over time by opposition parties, intellectuals, and its own cadres who have left due to various factions. It is unfathomable that an ethnically based liberation movement that fought for the liberation of its/ethnic nation would not treat other nationalities or citizens with equality and respect once in power. Instead, introduce a scourge, whatever an outstanding personality he/she might have, maybe. Ethnocentrism is an ethos based on discrimination and favouritism; this has been a great challenge. It will remain a daunting task and a fundamental threat to national development and reconciliation among different ethnic groups in Africa, particularly in Ethiopia.

The Rise of TPLF and Analytical Reasoning

For a variety of reasons, the TPLF dominated the ruling party from 1991 to 2018 (Alamineh, Geremew, and Temesgen, 2021). To name a few: 'the fatigue of the Ethiopian public as a result of a thirty-year war between the Derg and various rebellious groups.' Furthermore, the central government's economic failure, the undemocratic nature of the Ethiopian Workers' Party (EWP), the assassination of professional military officers, and the global change of political orders, specifically the fall of the Berlin Wall and the Soviet Union, ideological change (Ottaway, 1995; Keller, 1992; Berhe, 2009; Seife, 2020). From the 1970s and continuing until the early 1990s, war and conflict engulfed Ethiopia in all its facets.

The period was characterised by a confluence of multifaceted conflicts that challenged the Ethiopian state's sovereignty. These ranged from an interstate conflict with expansionist Somalia in the Ogaden to a protracted secessionist war in the north waged by the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF). Concurrently, the TPLF pursued its own nationalist ambitions; while its public platform advocated for self-autonomy, its foundational objective remained the establishment of an independent Tigrayan republic, a secessionist agenda often veiled in strategic secrecy. This landscape of dissent was further populated by a fragmented array of insurgent groups, including the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party (EPRP), the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), the Sidama Liberation Movement (SLM), and the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF), all of which contributed to the erosion of the central government's authority (Mesfin, 2017). While this fragmentation of armed resistance was a significant factor in the Derg's eventual collapse, the TPLF ultimately held a superior strategic position. Its advantage was derived from a larger, more disciplined guerrilla force, an extensive militia network, and a cohesive political organisation that enabled it to capitalise on the weakened state and outmanoeuvre other contenders for power.

In 1991, Ethiopia faced a total shambles of civilian government and military command, and the political situation was out of control (Mjaaland, 2013). The TPLF was the only rebel movement that was more malevolent and well-organised to control the entire country. Except for the TPLF, the international community had no choice but to transform the country into a civil and democratic state. Furthermore, it became clear that the liberation movements could not work as a collective for a variety of reasons, including a narrow focus on village structure and a failure to consider the big picture. The TPLF was founded in 1975 as a pro-independence Tigrayan armed rebellion force with the political goal of securing self-determination (Berhe, 2009:99). When it began, self-contradictory political strategies were common among TPLF leadership and combatants.

The confusion distracted the Tigrayan rebellion as a secessionist force and the TPLF when they assumed a government role in Ethiopia until they were deposed in 2018. The TPLF has never attempted to transform itself into an Ethiopian force; from 1991 to 2018, it served as a liberation

front while administering the entire country. Meles Zenawi and Sibhat Nega were the core group that planned the formation of the Marxist Leninist League of Tigray (MLLT); they are regarded as a manipulator and inward-looking TPLF leader (Berhe) (2009:4). Meles provided a professional service to Ethiopia until his death while dreaming and working for an independent Tigray. George Orwell's 1984 expresses "war is peace, freedom is slavery, and ignorance is strength." There is a lesson that can be drawn from ignorance: the inability of citizens to subvert their will and recognise and accept the contradictions of an authoritarian regime's power.

Berhe (2009:4) describes the EPRDF as "unquestionably an interface of the Tigrayan front" but does not equate the TPLF with the Tigrayan people. The TPLF is a narrow and self-serving ethno-nationalist movement (ibid). Similarly, the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) had been covert and used as a cliché to confuse public opinion and the international community; otherwise, the TPLF was the driving force. Since there are no mechanisms to identify how far and deep the people of Tigray and political leadership are, the party systems harmonisation level remains subjective until such time makes a clear demarcation between party, citizens and government. The root cause of Ethiopian political leadership failure is the mistaken assumption that portraying the people is in sync with the leaders. Such attitudes have been entrenched since the overthrow of Ethiopia's last Emperor, King Haile Selassie.

The paradox of secessionist governance and doctrinal asymmetry needs to be examined through a different lens. The analysis of Ethiopia's governance structure must consider the philosophical challenge of political agency and destiny as articulated by Joseph de Maistre, who asserted the inherent futility of imposed constitutional engineering: "All these constitutions are vain attempts because it is a capital axiom... [that each nation has the government that it deserves]; thus, all that one can do for a nation... means nothing, has no effect, it only produces evil" (Upton, 2009: 154). This perspective highlights the epistemological chasm inherent in the TPLF's hegemonic projection, specifically the calculated effort by the ruling elite to collapse the distinction between the goals of the leadership and the collective identity of the Tigrayan populace.

A critical point of inquiry must address the doctrinal asymmetry that permitted a political faction primarily dedicated to secession to achieve and maintain control over the central authority of the state it fundamentally sought to dissolve. This scenario presents a profound paradox of political legitimacy, defying conventional theoretical uniformity in state-building and nationalism. Furthermore, the distortion of political ideals, once applied to the volatile reality of a multi-ethnic state, echoes the warning of Plato (2005: 231) concerning the corruption of the *Ideal State*. When the nurtured ideal becomes a delusion, the resulting political reversal can generate profound confusion, leading to widespread injustice, political cowardice, and systemic vice. This philosophical context suggests that the TPLF's failure to reconcile its foundational separatist ideology with its realised role as the central national government created an internally conflicted state apparatus, prone to systemic failure.

It remains a critical issue to evaluate the overall situation favouring the TPLF to control Ethiopian politics' upper ladder and sustain the ascendancy for twenty-eight years. It is illogical to suppose that the power source is merely a question of chance. Undeniably, the TPLF developed a critical political and military force capable of striding and confronting the central government over time. Though the TPLF was undeniably a formidable adversary that had developed capabilities over time, additional factors accelerated and favoured control of the central government in the shortest possible time. Keller (1992:624) and Ottaway (1995:73) analysed that the TPLF gains are prolonged war, non-existent or fragile opposition parity, disgruntlement of the Ethiopian population, and a weak economy unable to support the war. Furthermore, it was alluded that the

people were deeply dissatisfied with the military dictatorship and that the end of the Cold War and the subsequent effect of political relations with the Eastern Bloc had a devastating effect.

The Ethiopian student movement has contributed a great deal of political consciousness to the general public. However, there is a broader belief that the movement was hijacked from land to tailor advocacy to impose socialism on the Ethiopian people. Ottaway (1995:69) underlines that TPLF had its genesis in the student movement that served as a hotbed of Marxist-Leninist indoctrination and Stalinist tendency. Nonetheless, the TPLF took it a step further, became a pro-Albanian movement and self-determination architecture all the way to secession. External pressure, particularly from the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF), ironically played a significant role in the TPLF's denial of secession as a programme.

Introduction of Revolutionary Democratic Centralism as an Institutional Mechanism

Democratic centralism is associated with socialism as a Leninist practice in which political decisions bind all party members coherently as the vanguard of a revolutionary approach. Berhe (2009:234) stated from the perspective of the TPLF elite leadership that the concept of 'revolutionary democracy' arose from Lenin's theses on 'Bourgeois Democracy and the Proletarian Dictatorship.' I agree that the importation of such an idea demonstrates the TPLF leadership's shenanigans and myopia, inability to understand the difference between the contexts of the Tigrayan peasantry population vs industrially developed Russian society. In the context of the TPLF/EPRDF, revolutionary democratic centralism is defined as a top-down ideology-driven policy-making process in which decisions were made at the politburo or federal officials' level and implemented at regions, zones, and woredas without questioning the decision's merit (Hagmann and Abbink, 2011:584). It is undeniably true that revolutionary-democratic centralism was a one-way ticket to fulfilling the TPLF/EPRDF's unchecked authoritarian decision-making process in Ethiopia.

Democratic centralism was a tool that interlocked mechanisms that forced ordinary cadres to be obedient without considering the consequences of implementing specific party decisions. Employing revolutionary-democratic centralism was the only way for the TPLF/EPRDF to succeed from anticipated stiff resistance from the old guard bureaucratic staff of the Derg regime and address existing institutional weaknesses (Berhe, 2018:178). To some extent, I am convinced that democratic centralism is required in a society like Ethiopia that has no experience in the industrial revolution to develop the conscientiousness that is adapted to contemporary approaches. The misguided strategy of the TPLF/EPRDF was to administer the public sector, academia, and security forces through revolutionary-democratic centralisation, which was challenging to unite them all under one command. The method was well-organised, and it was backed up by training and preparing core cadres to implement the strategy. The programme has played a critical role in national economic development and law enforcement by centralising coordination. The structural connection between government and society is essential to narrow the relationship gap between the elite and community levels as well as to develop political culture (Jowitz, 1974: 1174).

It is appropriate to use democratic centralism as a method for the reengineering of businesses and the education of the people to boost production and patriotism. Berhe (2018: 308) defines 'revolutionary democracy' in the following way: ideology embraces a form of 'popular' or 'revolutionary' rather than 'liberal' democracy. Unified mass participation is valued over individually oriented pluralism. The contradiction remains the same as what TPLF/EPRDF could not divorce: the mix of Marxist-Leninist vanguard party introduced into ethnic politics. Similarly, the TPLF/EPRDF employed a hybrid of a developmental state and a pseudo-democratic regime,

making the Ethiopian people and political space a testing ground for anything and everything that crosses the minds of TPLF elites.

Ethnic Based Federalism and Its Divisive Impact in Ethiopia

In a nutshell, the TPLF/EPRDF designed and implemented Ethiopian ethnic-based federalism, which is still in use as a governance system by the current “Prosperity Party.” The federal arrangement is particularly absurd because it has become a source of conflict, discomfort, and insecurity for many Ethiopians. As a matter of academic exercise, it is necessary to investigate the ethnic federal model de jure, the motivating factors, and conformity or encounter with the fundamental principles of federalism. Berhe (2009:375) contends that the introduction of ethnic federalism was a pretext for universalism rather than a unitary state that valued diversity, a minority survival strategy for the TPLF in political and population spheres. The assumption also included managing ethnic conflicts by establishing distinct administrative spaces and determining how to respond to the “Ethiopian student movement historical question” of nationalities, including self-determination up to secession. In reality, none of the presumptions came true, and ethnic federalism contradictions became more common. It is relevant to evaluate ethnic federalism as a governance model and the ethnic and language dynamics.

A critical evaluation of the advantages and limitations of Ethiopia’s ethnic-based federalism necessitates situating the discussion within the broader theoretical framework of decentralisation and its conceptual challenges. In principle, the devolution of power from the centre to regional and local authorities is not inherently problematic; rather, it aligns with the normative rationale of bringing governance closer to the people and enhancing participatory decision-making at the community level. However, as Tafese and Erk (2017:9) observe, Ethiopia’s ethnopolitical federal arrangement has produced exclusionary outcomes, whereby citizenship recognition and rights are often mediated through ethnic affiliation as defined in regional constitutions. Consequently, individuals or groups not belonging to the dominant ethnic category within a given region frequently face political marginalisation and limited access to democratic rights.

This structural configuration has fostered a dual conception of citizenship, federal and regional, which, in practice, entrenches an “*us versus them*” mentality across the federation. The resulting fragmentation undermines national cohesion and perpetuates inter-regional suspicion. Berhe (2009:381) further contends that the reorganisation of administrative boundaries along ethnic lines has intensified territorial disputes and contestations over demarcation, reflecting deeper tensions between ethnic identity and civic citizenship. Thus, contradictions embedded within both the federal and regional constitutional frameworks have rendered the notion of citizenship ambiguous, contested, and a persistent source of intercommunal conflict in Ethiopia’s post-1991 political landscape.

According to Elazar (1987:84), the concept of federalism is thought to have realised some form of political assimilation based on self-rule and shared rule patterns. This includes a mutual recognition of each partner’s integrity. Federalism is a broad and fluid concept with no specific guidelines or formula to explain it explicitly. Firstly, we must consider how and why concept-stretching is required in federal systems. Whether they are coming together or holding together, federal systems are a governance structure through which you can conduct democracy and justice or otherwise (Stepan, 2005). From an African perspective, I see federalism in a negative light because it is associated with a Eurocentric governance model. However, this does not imply that federalism is a lousy concept in general; nonetheless, it is regarded as a covenant between two or more parties to form a governance system perspective.

The fundamental principle of coming together is incompatible for African countries, given the continent's historical nation formation. On the other hand, Ethiopian federalism includes a '**Nativisation**' component in addition to language and ethnic/tribal formula. Aside from constitutional differences between the federal and regional assemblies, there is a conflict between the approaches of symmetrical representation for "indigenous" and asymmetrical isolationist for none natives. Stepan (2005) alluded to a governance structure, whether federal or unitary, with no attachments to multinational democracies, and while the United States was a federal structure, African Americans were marginalised. Similarly, the United States of America and the Soviet Union USSR were federal governments, but their democratic robustness was incomparable; this meant that federalism is not a guarantee of democratic dispensation and wealth distribution.

Federalism, structural collapse, and policy diffusion need to be examined cautiously. While federal political systems are theoretically underpinned by the structural capacity to enhance citizen rights and facilitate economic development through the formal decentralisation of political authority and the equitable distribution of resources (fiscal federalism), their viability in many developing polities frequently succumbs to institutional collapse precipitated by deficient mechanisms of fiscal management. Successful federal architecture necessitates a robust framework for managing intergovernmental tensions, predicated on proportional financial and human resource contributions from all constituent units. Historical precedents underscore this structural fragility. The failure of the East African Community (EAC) federative project, for instance, is attributed to a confluence of factors, including leadership competition among Jomo Kenyatta, Julius Nyerere, and Idi Amin, intra-unit ethnic conflict, and inadequate budgetary support (Elazar, 1987: 241).

The core paradox of ethnic federalism, the model intended to structurally accommodate inter-ethnic tensions, is that it frequently becomes a source of heightened conflict, as tragically demonstrated by the experiences of Yugoslavia, South Sudan, and Ethiopia. Ethiopia's constitutional framework, which enshrined the right to secession and was explicitly derived from the Stalinist Soviet nationality theory (Tafese and Erk 2017: 9), served as a source of doctrinal policy diffusion. The TPLF subsequently promoted this model in structurally distinct contexts, notably South Sudan and Somalia. This policy diffusion is particularly incongruous in the latter case, as Somalia is largely homogenous in language and religion, with internal political dynamics predominantly structured by clan-based societies. The fundamental problem is the persistent application of a governance model rooted in Stalinist theory to African multi-ethnic states, where its structural and contextual compatibility is severely compromised.

The Stalinist conception of nation and nationality, as adopted in Ethiopia, has served as a significant impediment to the country's socioeconomic cohesion and national integration over the past three decades. The Ethiopian student movement of the 1960s, in its quest for revolutionary transformation, imported a reductive and ahistorical interpretation of Marxist-Leninist theories of national self-determination, failing to contextualise them within Ethiopia's complex social fabric and historical experience. This uncritical transplantation of Stalinist theory, devoid of a nuanced understanding of consociationalism or indigenous pluralism, produced an ideological framework that privileged ethnicity as the primary axis of political mobilisation. Consequently, this approach fostered ethnic polarisation rather than national solidarity, entrenching divisions that continue to undermine intercommunal coexistence.

The revolutionary narrative that posited the existence of an "oppressor" and "oppressed" nationality within Ethiopia was theoretically inconsistent and empirically unfounded. Historically, no single ethnic group exercised monopolistic control over the means of production, nor did Ethiopia's agrarian and feudal structures align with classical Marxist categories of class exploitation along ethnic lines. The notion of ethnic dominance thus constitutes a mythologised

construct, unsupported by the socio-economic realities of the time. As agrarian practices across Ethiopia were uniformly subsistence-based, rooted in smallholder farming and ox-driven cultivation, the material conditions for capitalist class formation were largely absent. Therefore, the binary revolutionary discourse advanced by sections of the student movement and later institutionalised in post-1991 governance structures represents a misapplication of dialectical materialism, one that distorted Ethiopia's historical and social realities and perpetuated enduring ethnic antagonisms.

The application of the Soviet model of nationalities, while a strategic response to the specific geo-historical circumstances of the USSR, proved to be a fundamentally flawed paradigm for Ethiopia and, by extension, many African states. The Soviet federation was conceived as a pragmatic framework to manage the "nationality question" within an existing multi-ethnic empire (Elazar, 1987, p. 151). In contrast, Ethiopia's adoption of this model constituted a profound misalignment of political theory, imposing an exogenous governance structure onto a historically continuous, multi-ethnic nation-state with its own distinct social fabric. While the patriotic impetus of the Ethiopian student movement is undeniable, its intellectual trajectory, as noted by Berhe (2009, p. 63) and Kebede (2003, p. 8), was characterised by a political radicalism steeped in Marxism-Leninism, an ideology that often framed its struggle in abstract terms of 'imperialism' and 'feudalism.' Although the movement's radical critique was necessary to challenge the **ancien régime**, its fundamental error lay in the uncritical transplantation of a class-based analysis and a rigid governance model. This approach failed to account for the unique contours of Ethiopian society. Ethiopia is home to a variety of tribes that fall under the Negroid race classification. Including its complex inter-ethnic relationships and pre-capitalist economic formations, which could not be neatly mapped onto a European-derived theoretical framework.

The concepts of identity and language become unacceptable for federalism to provide complete self-rule to a specific ethnic group at the expense of other minorities and residents. Elazar (1987:99) contends that in ethnic or tribal federalism, minorities cannot be outvoted by majorities; territorial divides of power can protect minorities. Post-colonial African leaders abandoned any "tribalist" nature of party and governance structure that created divisions within African countries (Basedau, Bogaards, Hartmann, and Niesen, 2007:630). Some African leaders are '**Pan-Africanists in the morning, nationalists by day, and tribalists at night**'. This demonstrates the TPLF leaders who came to power to demonise the historical glory of the interconnectedness of 'Ethiopianism' and Pan Africanism. Without reengineering ethnic and language-based federalism, the TPLF's successors, the "Prosperity Party," are content to continue with the same Eurocentric patterns that have demonstrated a divisive impact on the economic, political, and socio-cultural context.

Many Ethiopian citizens anticipate that the Prosperity Party (PP) will advance an inclusive political agenda and initiate constitutional reforms aimed at promoting the broader public good, though such expectations remain uncertain. Nevertheless, there are growing concerns that the PP may continue to exploit the existing ethnoregional framework for political expediency, thereby preserving entrenched power dynamics rather than transforming them. This pattern reflects a broader tendency among certain African political elites, such as Ethiopia's late Prime Minister Meles Zenawi, who strategically instrumentalised ethnic divisions as a mechanism for political consolidation and regime longevity. Yet, from a socio-anthropological perspective, the ethnic and tribal distinctions often emphasised in African political discourse are historically and biologically porous and intertwined. As Roychoudhury (1982:20) notes, there exist notable genetic and cultural linkages among diverse African communities, including the Sara Majangay of Chad, Bedik of eastern Senegal, Shangan of Mozambique, Amhara of Ethiopia, Tswana and

Kung-Debe (Bushmen) of Botswana, Hottentots of Namibia, and Pedi of South Africa, reflecting deep historical interconnectedness rather than isolation.

Furthermore, while the African continent is often subsumed under the broader Negroid classification, paleoanthropological and genetic evidence indicate that Africa's human populations are highly diverse and regionally interlinked, as demonstrated by fossil and genetic findings spanning Morocco, Ethiopia, and South Africa (Excoffier et al., 1987:152). This analysis contends that the ethnic and tribal narratives underpinning Ethiopia's federal system are analytically problematic and historically reductive. They obscure the shared genealogical, cultural, and economic interdependencies that characterise African societies and, in doing so, perpetuate divisive political identities rather than fostering a pan-African or civic national consciousness.

The dominance of in All Sectors of the Economy, Political and Security Apparatuses

The TPLF established a comprehensive system of hegemonic control over the Ethiopian state, exercising direct and indirect authority across the political, economic, and security apparatus. This dominance extended beyond formal institutions to encompass what can be characterised as a "deep state" network, ensuring that key decisions and resource flows remained under its ultimate purview. This control was operationalised through a sophisticated strategy of multi-level manipulation. Internationally, the regime skillfully managed diplomatic missions and lobbied intergovernmental and multilateral organisations to cultivate legitimacy and insulate itself from external pressure. Domestically, it engaged in strategic manoeuvring of both state and private media to shape public perception and control the political narrative.

As scholars McCracken (2004, p. 193) and Kebede (2003, p. 16) contend, while ethnic-based politics are inherently partisan, the TPLF/EPRDF regime distinguished itself through the systematic exploitation of state machinery. The coalition's structure, which incorporated ethnically-based parties, created a façade of inclusion while simultaneously enabling a unique form of resource extraction. The TPLF, as the hegemonic core, uniquely manipulated federal institutions to redirect national resources, thereby consolidating an economic empire that served its partisan interests over national developmental goals. Furthermore, this scholarship argues that the regime deliberately fostered an atmosphere of public distrust and inter-ethnic suspicion. Under the guise of promoting democracy and ethnic self-rule, this strategy was designed to fractionalize civil society and prevent the emergence of a unified opposition, thereby creating fertile ground to "ripen the revolutionary fruits" of its long-term political and economic dominance.

The TPLF constructed a massive business empire with a strategic goal in mind; they believed that control of the economic space eventually reflected and manipulated the political space adequately. However, the blunder did not include the priority to win the hearts and minds of the masses. Regardless, the economic dynasty that benefited from a manipulative and grid perspective was not intended to trickle down to the critical mass other than the political elite. Woldesenbet (2020:78) articulates that the nature of the TPLF business empire began while fighting with the central government. After gaining control of the government, power was registered as an endowment. The business empires continued and operated legally throughout the country at the expense of Ethiopians to benefit the TPLF elite. After the TPLF era ended, no one knew who would run this massive conglomerate, how and who would repay the illegally obtained capital, or who would be the legal trustee.

The opaque ownership and legal status of party-affiliated conglomerates, particularly those under the Endowment Fund for the Relief and Rehabilitation of Tigray (EFFORT), present a formidable challenge to Ethiopia's political and economic transition. Scholarly analysis indicates that

EFFORT's initial capital was sourced from international relief funds and loans from state-owned banks, establishing a problematic nexus between partisan interests, public finance, and private enterprise from its inception (McCracken, 2004, p. 206). This foundational ambiguity, coupled with allegations of systemic corruption and resource diversion, underscores what McCracken identified as a critical need for transparent investigations into these corporate practices.

The legacy of this structure raises profound questions of corporate governance and transitional justice. The unresolved nature of these entities' ownership, controlled by TPLF elites yet deeply integrated into the national economy, creates a legal and ethical quagmire. Core questions persist regarding the legitimate ownership and fiduciary responsibility for these vast corporate holdings, as well as the mechanisms for settling their substantial debts to public financial institutions. The dissolution of this party-affiliated economic model is a necessary step toward fostering a competitive private sector and eliminating the unfair advantages that stifled ordinary entrepreneurs. Furthermore, these concerns are substantiated by international audits; a Seife (2024) article documented extensive illicit financial flows, foreign currency manipulation, and embezzlement within megaprojects linked to individuals and EFFORT-affiliated firms, cementing the perception of an institutionalised kleptocratic network.

Political Space Obstructions and Restrictions

Ethiopia's modern political trajectory has been marked by a profound absence of democratic dispensation. The country's transition from a semi-feudal empire to a socialist republic was abruptly interrupted by the emergence of a military dictatorship, resulting in widespread repression and the tragic loss of thousands of lives. The subsequent overthrow of the Derg regime by the TPLF and its coalition, the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), in 1991 did not usher in the anticipated era of democracy. Rather, it replaced one form of authoritarianism with another, an ideologically rigid, highly centralised system that dominated Ethiopian politics until 2018.

The undemocratic character of the TPLF/EPRDF was embedded in its organisational formation and governance philosophy. As Berhe (2009:79) notes, the TPLF developed its political and military strategies around a Maoist-inspired guerrilla warfare doctrine, which emphasised hierarchical control, ideological discipline, and collective subordination under the guise of revolutionary democracy. This approach institutionalised "democratic centralism," a structure in which one cadre would supervise five subordinates, extending vertically across both the party and state apparatus. Such a system eliminated genuine internal debate and reinforced obedience rather than participation.

Moreover, the TPLF leadership's limited experience in state governance and overreliance on militarised socialist philosophy constrained its capacity to transition from insurgent movement to inclusive civilian administration. As Ottaway (1995:70) observes, in the absence of any real countervailing political power after 1991, the TPLF's command-style organisation evolved into a hegemonic political order that prioritised control over consensus. The enduring legacy of this guerrilla warfare mentality impeded the establishment of democratic institutions, weakened civic engagement, and perpetuated a culture of authoritarian governance under a revolutionary guise.

The TPLF clique never undermined any political rivalry and established a systematic exclusion mechanism, still effective today. McCracken (2004:202) stated that 'opposition parties' restrictions were numerous, rendering the right to freedom of expression unthinkable, as stated in the constitution, and those who revolted faced retaliatory actions. The Ethiopian government repression and mass killings, intimidation, including arbitrary arrests, and massive blockages

of opposition party operations were widespread. The doctrine of the TPLF/EPRDF was aimed at denying political space and narrowing an antagonistic movement, which worked until the opposition sparked within the party and advanced a change. Surprisingly, the TPLF survived repeated challenges by the Ethiopian people, including a decisive vote against the opposition parties, but it was skilfully manipulated and manoeuvred in its favour (Berhe, 2009:377). TPLF has implemented several elections and party politics-influenced mechanisms, including the formation of mushrooming replica political parties with no political agenda to confuse public opinion. The TPLF surprised the world by controlling 100 per cent of parliament seats in 2010 and 2015.

Critical Analysis of the TPLF Collapse

The paradox of organisational resilience and systemic decline. This new content provides a rigorous analysis of the TPLF's decline, connecting organisational culture, ideological rigidity, and systemic fragility. The failure of TPLF is predominantly associated with widespread economic embezzlement, political gridlock, and stagnant thinking. Among the many manifestations are leaders blamed for being bigots, disdain for other political partners, and an old guard mentality. On the contrary, the TPLF has a robust organisational culture that helped it survive for over four decades as a guerrilla fighter group and a ruling government. Kebede (2003:13) The TPLF unwaveringly rejected such relegation of national liberation struggle to ethnic struggle, and by doing so, succeeded in fending off these parties' infringement into Tigrayan society. There were symptoms of disconnected and disorganised party structures and government institutions; however, the party's secretive nature did not notice the fragility of the systems.

The nature of the TPLF can be understood through the lens of organisational pathology, characterised by opacity, doctrinal schism, malicious envy, and cognitive closure. The TPLF's internal culture was deeply entrenched in secrecy and ideological rigidity, which perpetuated a lack of transparency between the leadership and the rank-and-file members. As Berhe (2009:99) observes, this pervasive culture of secrecy obscured the internal conflicts between the leadership elite and ordinary fighters, fostering mistrust and internal fragmentation. During the guerrilla struggle against the central government, for instance, the TPLF maintained intermittent negotiations with a parallel group, the Tigray Liberation Front (TLF), with the ostensible aim of forming a unified front. However, the TPLF's insular and enigmatic organisational behaviour ultimately precipitated a doctrinal schism, revealing deep-seated divisions in political vision and leadership approach.

From a psychosocial perspective, the TPLF's trajectory and internal contradictions may also be examined through Adlerian psychology, particularly the dynamics of superiority and inferiority complexes. Fromm, E. (1959) contends that feelings of superiority often emerge as a defensive mechanism to counteract latent inferiority based on Adler prior study. As he notes, "we should not be astonished if, in cases where we observe an inferiority complex, we also find a hidden superiority complex and vice versa." This psychological framework is instructive in understanding the TPLF's collective disposition, in which a historical sense of marginalisation coexisted with an inflated perception of moral and political superiority. The resulting cognitive dissonance between perceived victimhood and self-ascribed exceptionalism contributed to the TPLF's internal misperceptions, strategic miscalculations, and eventual political decline.

Attempts to evaluate TPLF's three decades of dominance, the party ends up alienated through the internal dynamic and smooth process. The question remains unanswered. Among the various factors that contributed to a lack of organisational transformation, leadership inertia is of the utmost importance as it impedes the transformation agenda. The lack of gravitas

transformation that comes to the arrogance of political culture and ignorance of organisational dynamism, including impunity and unchecked political and economic dominance, encroached on the situation. The growth and widespread opposition to the TPLF/EPRDF is primarily related to the country's ethnic policy, which has resulted in inter-ethnic hostility and mass killings of members of ethnic and religious groups (Engedayehu, 1993:48). Seife (2021) indicated that the ethnic-based enclaves created a **“we versus them”** mentality that ‘allowed’ members of an ethnic group that does not belong because they speak a different language or have an ethnic identity of another group while being a citizen of the country to be distracted.

For three decades, the TPLF functioned as the hegemonic core and strategic command centre of the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front coalition. A comprehensive understanding of the party's trajectory, encompassing its ascendancy and eventual political crisis, necessitates a multi-dimensional analysis that integrates historical, socio-political, economic, and security perspectives. Ultimately, the regime's failure can be attributed to its inability to adapt to internal resistance and navigate profound political turmoil, a symptom of deep-seated institutional stagnation. This rigidity was rooted in a monopolistic power structure that systematically conflated the state with the ruling party. As Gudina, (1994) and Dibaba asserted that notes, the chronic and unresolved problem in Ethiopian governance has been the lack of a clear institutional demarcation between the government and the dominant party, a condition that suffocated political competition and rendered the state apparatus a mere extension of partisan interests.

Why TPLF Pulled out of the Central Government?

The period marked by the dismantling of the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) hegemony and the emergence of an internal counter-reformation is significant. The TPLF began to lose its legislative power and shifted towards the new reformist leadership within the EPRDF framework. Consequently, the reformist leadership became increasingly visible in its programs and activities, effectively alienating the TPLF from its previously established commanding position. The TPLF's historical role in providing political and economic guidance primarily benefited its affiliates rather than the broader nation. Recently, a pivotal moment occurred with a surprising fundamental shift in the struggle of Ethiopian students to establish an equitable society (Gudina, 1994).

Officially, the common reformist agenda of the Oromo People's Democratic Organisation and the Amhara National Democratic Movement (ANDM) aimed to mitigate the influence of the revolutionary-democratic party ideology. This decision effectively constituted a declaration of separation from the TPLF. The internal counter-reformation and erosion of TPLF hegemony strategically frame the power shift, the abandonment of “revolutionary-democratic” ideology, and the autonomous assertiveness of the former satellite parties. The subsequent step involved renaming both organisations to the Oromo Democratic Party (ODP) and the Amhara Democratic Party (ADP), reflecting a departure from revolutionary democratic principles and a transition towards liberal ideology. The satellite parties of the TPLF/EPRDF adopted a more assertive stance, making independent decisions without the approval of former commanders.

The 11th Congress of the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) was held in Hawassa on October 5, 2018. The re-election of Abiy Ahmed as EPRDF chairperson by a landslide was perceived as a consolidation of power and the conclusion of the TPLF era. The Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), which did not join the Prosperity Party (PP) as a ruling party, operated as an opposition party. While being an opposition party is not inherently harmful or illegal, the TPLF began to engage in illegal activities within the Tigray Region, contributing to a state of ungovernability in the country. Several significant incidents exacerbated the growing divide

between the TPLF-led Tigray regional state and the federal government. The Prosperity Party was inaugurated in December 2019, effectively dissolving the EPRDF without a formal party procedure. Following the assassination of prominent singer Hachalu Hundessa in June 2020, Ethiopia experienced widespread ethnic clashes.

A critical escalation in the conflict between the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) and the federal government commenced with the TPLF's recall of its representatives from federal institutions, signalling a formal withdrawal from the constitutional order. This was followed in September 2020 by the TPLF's administration of a regional election, an act the federal government deemed unconstitutional due to its contravention of a nationwide postponement prompted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The situation escalated into overt hostilities in November 2020, when TPLF forces launched a coordinated assault on the Northern Command of the Ethiopian National Defence Force. In response, the Prime Minister declared a state of emergency and initiated military action, characterising the conflict as a "law enforcement operation" against a "junta."

This descent into war is widely interpreted as the culmination of prolonged governance failures and the destabilising logic of ethnocentric politics. While both the TPLF and the ruling Prosperity Party (PP) maintain ethnic constituencies, the latter projects a comparatively liberal and centralised national vision. Forced from power, the TPLF retreated to its historic strongholds in the Dedebit and Kola Tembien highlands, re-adopting a guerrilla warfare strategy reminiscent of its insurgency origins in 1975, a move that framed the conflict as a zero-sum struggle for survival. While the TPLF's deep-rooted organisational structure and five-decade-long ideological socialisation within Tigray suggest a capacity for endurance, its nature has been fundamentally altered. The group has been transformed from a hegemonic national ruling party into a regional insurgency, indicating a profound and likely irreversible diminution of its political standing.

Conclusion

The conclusion underlines that from ethnic federalism to political fragmentation. The dismantling of hegemony and the quest for civic renewal in Ethiopia happened in distinctive problematic phases. The EPRDF was, in essence, the intellectual and political construct of the TPLF, a coalition whose formal inclusivity masked its deeply asymmetrical power dynamics. Structurally, the EPRDF functioned less as a federated coalition of equals and more as a centralised apparatus of TPLF domination. The party's ideological foundation institutionalised an ethnic-based federalism. An arrangement that, under the guise of self-determination, entrenched *chauvinism*, *ethnocentrism*, *parochialism*, and *tribal exclusivity*. These forces, systemically promoted by the political elite, fractured the moral and social fabric of Ethiopian society. The TPLF's period of ethno-authoritarian governance (1991–2018) presents an analytical paradox. It fostered deep-seated ethno-political antagonism and precipitated the secession of Eritrea (rendering Ethiopia landlocked), yet was concurrent with high rates of state-led economic development, necessitating critical inquiry into the equity and sustainability of this growth model.

The article attempted the crisis of ethnocratic governance in Ethiopia. The core of dilemma lies in the institutionalization of ethnic federalism and the resultant ethnocratic governance, which fundamentally replaced civic nationalism with a kinship-based political order. Philosophically, ethnocracy blurs the moral boundary between "civic" and "ethnic" identity, sharing a profound kinship with autocracy in its negation of individual freedom and ethical citizenship. The path toward renewal necessitates comprehensive constitutional and institutional reform, moving beyond flawed ideological binaries to cultivate a moral economy of coexistence that can repair the torn national sociocultural fabric. The philosophical task ahead is to cultivate a *new civic consciousness*, a political humanism that transcends tribalism and affirms the dignity of citizenship.

Ethiopia's future depends on transforming *ethnic federalism into an indigenous governance structure*, which is not Eurocentric, where diversity is celebrated not as a mechanism of division but as the foundation of unity. Only through such a reimagining can Ethiopia fulfil its historical vocation as *a moral polity and a spiritual civilisation*, not merely a state held together by force or fear.

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Electoral Participation and Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria: A Comparative Analysis of the 2015, 2019 and 2023 Presidential Elections

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Abstract

The quality of democracy is largely determined by the level and nature of citizens' political participation. In Nigeria, however, democratic participation continues to face challenges linked to institutional weakness, electoral malpractice, insecurity, and elite dominance. This study examines patterns of political participation in the 2015, 2019 and 2023 presidential elections to evaluate voter turnout, electoral competitiveness, and citizens' trust in the electoral process. Employing a comparative descriptive research design, the study drew on documentary and quantitative data from the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), national survey reports, and scholarly publications. Anchored on political participation and elite theories, the study explored how citizen engagement and elite control shape electoral behaviour and democratic outcomes. Findings reveal a consistent decline in voter turnout across the three election cycles, driven by widespread disillusionment, poor institutional credibility, and the perception that elections seldom influence governance outcomes. The study concludes that the sustainability of democracy in Nigeria depends on strengthening electoral integrity, deepening political accountability, and restoring citizens' confidence in electoral institutions. It recommends comprehensive electoral reforms, inclusive political processes, and civic education as key strategies for enhancing political participation and consolidating democracy.

Keywords: Quality of Democracy, Political Competition, Electoral Integrity, Voter Turnout, Political Trust

Introduction

Despite the global spread of democratic norms, contemporary democracies face declining levels of civic engagement, voter turnout, and political trust (Zittel & Fuchs, 2007). In Nigeria, this trend is particularly worrisome. The nation's electoral history is replete with irregularities, vote buying, political thuggery, violence, and institutional weaknesses that undermine citizens' confidence in the electoral process (Falade, 2014; Ojo, 2014). Elections have often served as flashpoints for national instability, as electoral disputes frequently escalate into crises with far-

reaching consequences (Anifowose, 2011; Anyaoku, 1997). Consequently, Nigerian politics is often perceived as corrupt, uncertain, and unresponsive to citizens' needs; conditions that reinforce voter apathy and alienation. Voter turnout in presidential elections has consistently declined since 2015, reflecting growing disillusionment with the democratic process. The persistence of this pattern across the 2015, 2019, and 2023 presidential elections raises fundamental questions about the depth of Nigeria's democratic consolidation. Hence, when citizens disengage from electoral participation, the foundations of democratic legitimacy weaken.

Against this backdrop, this study examines electoral participation and democratic consolidation in Nigeria through a comparative analysis of the 2015, 2019, and 2023 presidential elections. Specifically, it investigates patterns of voter turnout, electoral competitiveness, and citizens' trust in the electoral process under the administrations of Presidents Goodluck Jonathan and Muhammadu Buhari, extending to the 2023 post-Buhari transition. The study aims to determine whether political participation in Nigeria is deepening or declining and to identify the institutional and sociopolitical factors influencing these trends. To address this, the paper first reviews relevant literature and theoretical perspectives on political participation and democratic consolidation. After methodological discussion, it presents and analyses the data and findings across the three election cycles. It draws the implications for Nigeria's democratic development, and concludes with recommendations for strengthening electoral participation and consolidating democratic governance.

Elections in Nigeria

Elections are democratic instruments for holding politicians accountable (Powell, 2000; Rudolph & Däubler, 2015) as well as the indispensable tool of democracy (Annan, 2015). Elections and other political processes are pivotal to the quality of a country's governance and can either greatly advance or set back a country's long-term democratic development (USAID, n.d). The conduct of elections and electoral processes in the Nigerian Fourth Republic mirrored the historical context in which elections were conducted in Nigeria (Hassan & Yusuf, 2015). Political parties that contested the 1965, 1979 and 1983 elections had ethnic affiliations and were established to protect the political interests of their ethnic groups. The Nigerian political culture is parochial and shapes voting patterns along the lines of ethnicity, religion and sectionalism, which have continued to bedevil the successful choice of political leadership (Abdullahi, 2015). The political elites deploy kinship ties in forms of politicised ethnicity and religion to access state power because of their failure to deliver their responsibilities. Politics thus snowballed into a business venture (most lucrative investment) in Nigeria for primitive accumulation of wealth, thereby turning a 'do or die' affair, zero-sum and characterised by the use of all means (including the state apparatuses for force by incumbents) to secure power. At this instance, the state is captured and is in the hands of the populist elites and political brokers who care very little about the citizens (Chiamogu, Chiamogu, Nwokoye & Odikpo, 2021). Hence, election in Nigeria is marred with malfeasance, massive rigging, unbridled violence, manipulation of results and intimidation of opposition and their supporters using the apparatus of state security personnel and political thugs (Auwal, 2015). Anything and everything goes in Nigerian politics, including excessive use of money, where vote buying, godfatherism, bribery, corruption, overspending, violation of electoral rules and other irregularities have barely become conventional.

Presidential Elections in Nigeria: 1979–2023

Nigeria became a republic in 1963 and conducted its first presidential election in 1979, following the collapse of the First Republic and the civil war. Since then, Nigeria has conducted nine

presidential elections. The first two were held during the Second Republic (1979 and 1983), the third occurred in the aborted Third Republic in 1993, which was annulled by the military president, Gen. Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida, and the Fourth Republic has witnessed seven consecutive presidential elections: 1999, 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015, 2019 and 2023.

Table 1: Presidential Elections in Nigeria (1979–2023) Showing Winners and First Runners-up

Year	Party	Candidate	Votes Obtained	Party	Candidate	Votes Obtained
		Winner			First Runner Up	
1979	NPN	Alhaji Shehu Shagari	5,668,857	UPN	Chief Obafemi Awolowo	4,916,651
1983	NPN	Alhaji Shehu Shagari	12,081,471	UPN	Chief Obafemi Awolowo	7,907,209
1993	SDP	MKO Abiola	8,341,309	NRC	Alhaji Bashir Tofa	5,952,087
1999	PDP	Olusegun Obasanjo	18,738,154	APP/AD	Olu Falae	7,907,209
2003	PDP	Olusegun Obasanjo	24,456,140	ANPP	Muhammadu Buhari	12,710,022
2007	PDP	Umaru Musa Yar'Adua	24,638,063	ANPP	Muhammadu Buhari	6,605,299
2011	PDP	Dr. Goodluck Jonathan	22,495,187	CPC	Muhammadu Buhari	12,214,853
2015	APC	Muhammadu Buhari	15,424,921	PDP	Dr. Goodluck Jonathan	12,853,162
2019	APC	Muhammadu Buhari	15,191,847	PDP	Alhaji Atiku Abubakar	11,262,798
2023	APC	Bola Ahmed Tinubu	8,794,726	PDP	Atiku Abubakar	6,984,520

Source: Compiled by the Researchers from INEC Reports and Existing Literature (2023)

Since the return to democratic rule in 1999, presidential elections have become pivotal events in Nigeria. Unlike the turbulent political experiences of the First and Second Republics (1960–66 and 1979–83) and the aborted Third Republic (1993), the Fourth Republic has successfully conducted seven consecutive elections, enabling peaceful transfers of power and gradually deepening the space for citizen participation. Across these elections, four parties: National Party of Nigeria (NPN), Social Democratic Party (SDP), People's Democratic Party (PDP), and All Progressives Congress (APC); have won the presidency, while six parties: Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN), National Republican Convention (NRC), All People's Party (APP) in coalition with Alliance for Democracy (AD), All Nigeria People's Party (ANPP), Congress for Progressive Change (CPC), and PDP, have emerged as first runners-up.

Historically, the NPN dominated the Second Republic (1979–1983), the PDP held power for sixteen years (1999–2015), and the APC has led for ten years since 2015. The SDP never governed due to the annulment of the 1993 election. During the Third Republic, Gen. Babangida's adoption of a two-party system sought to mitigate ethnic and regional biases in politics. In contrast, the multiparty system of the Fourth Republic fosters political pluralism and offers the electorate broader choices, reflecting a more inclusive and competitive democratic environment.

Presidential Elections and Political Participation in Nigeria

Electoral competition has long been theorised to improve the selection and performance of politicians by creating incentives for political parties to select high-quality candidates to run in elections, and for politicians to perform well once in office, thereby raising voters' welfare (Shaukat, 2019). Invariably, citizens' participation in elections constitutes the cardinal pillar of democratic political systems (Omotola & Aiyedogbon, 2012, cited in Chiamogu & Chiamogu, 2019, p.133). Unfortunately, in younger democracies like Nigeria, the permutations and combinations

of the state guided by the ruling party and its agents have generated superheated electioneering campaigns with numerous candidates that, in turn, impede democratic development (Omodia, 2010; Kura, 2011; Innocent, Yusoff & Rajanthiran, 2017). The state has continuously been used and made to participate in elections in ways that set it for and against some interests, groups, parties and sections of the country. Elections that fall short of providing an ambience for greater citizens' participation as a basic ingredient of democratic standards undermine the processes of democratic consolidation. Hence, the nature and rate of electorate turnout and participation in electoral processes define, in significant terms, the credibility of electoral democracy.

Nevertheless, flawed elections have continued to erode trust, transparency, participation and public accountability tests of citizens in the democratic process. As aptly observed by Annan (2015), electoral violence clearly demonstrates "how elections, which are meant to promote stability and facilitate the peaceful transfer of power, can become divisive if the process is not handled professionally, transparently and with integrity". Thus, when elections are considered as a mere technical exercise enabling a person or a group to accede to or remain in power in an otherwise wholly undemocratic context, they quickly become a source of disillusionment and violence. While no election is ever perfect, citizens want their elections to be fair, credible and capable of offering genuine choices to the people. The challenge facing nascent and established democracies alike is to ensure that elections are couched in a democratic spirit and backed up by strong institutions that can ensure and sustain electoral integrity.

However, despite the prime position of elections in democracy, their conduct and organisation have remained a real challenge in Nigeria (Reynolds, 2009; Ashindorbe, 2018). The National Human Rights Commission Report (2007), as cited by Oni, Chidozie and Agbude (2013, p.51), stated that "political process leading to democratic governance has been misconstrued by the majority of Nigerians as an opportunity to better one's livelihood and consequently, politics is seen as the gateway to paradise on earth". As a result, electoral politics has become one of the major causes of a great number of deaths in Nigeria through acts of violence, thuggery, political assassinations and crimes that are linked with the quest for power (Animashaun, 2010). In the course of all this, many criminal offences are committed; security personnel deployed to maintain law and order during elections are often mobilised to harass or intimidate political opponents and voters or take sides in undermining free, fair and credible balloting (Idowu, 2010). The 1999, 2003, 2007, 2011 and 2019 general elections in Nigeria witnessed serial activities of electoral violence, malpractices and thuggery (Bekoe, 2011; National Democratic Institute, 2012). Election malpractices and violence have thus become a recurring decimal in Nigeria's political history and constitute an enormous concern to the survival of Nigeria's democracy (INEC, 2011).

What is more, something is critically awry with Nigerian democracy. Since the start of the Fourth Republic, the country has been deeply divided and unprecedentedly polarised in national elections and national policy directives. Somehow, except for the 2015 general elections, all other elections in the Fourth Republic of Nigeria are mere formal rituals; they are affairs of acclimation rather than intensely competitive contests that force conflicts over policies and ideologies to the surface and give voters meaningful choices (Pildes, 2006). This is true for presidential, national assembly, gubernatorial, state assembly and local government elections conducted from 2003, 2007, 2011 and 2019 under the watch of the PDP and APC, respectively. The conduct of the 2015 general elections, although suffering significant adept application of incumbency advantage (Chiamogu & Chiamogu, 2016), allowed greater freedom to the citizens and paved greater grounds for political competition, hence the unprecedented defeat of the ruling party in their elections. Countries with high democratic freedoms are more just, peaceful and stable—and their citizens

can fulfil their potential, while those with low political freedom have unresponsive governments that are alienated from the people.

Understanding Electoral Participation and Democratic Consolidation

Electoral participation is one of the clearest indicators of citizens' engagement in democratic governance. It encompasses all actions through which people try to influence political decisions, including voting, campaigning, and public debates (Verba, Scholzman & Brady, 1995). Among these, voting remains the most direct and widely practised form of participation, particularly in representative democracies like Nigeria (Norris, 2014). The regularity, inclusiveness, and competitiveness of elections thus reflect the health and vibrancy of democracy (Dahl, 1971).

Democratic consolidation, meanwhile, is about more than just holding elections; it is the process through which democracy becomes stable, legitimate, and resilient against authoritarian tendencies (Schedler, 1998; Diamond, 1999). Linz and Stepan (1996, p.7) argue that a consolidated democracy is one in which democratic norms are fully internalised by political leaders, institutions, and citizens: in other words, democracy becomes "the only game in town." In such a context, strong electoral participation signals citizens' trust and confidence in the system, while widespread voter apathy can indicate weaknesses in democratic practice (Levitsky & Way, 2010).

In Nigeria, however, the relationship between electoral participation and democratic consolidation is complex (Chiamogu, 2021; Chiamogu, Chiamogu, Nwokoye & Odikpo, 2021). Since the return to civilian rule in 1999, the country has witnessed repeated elections, yet challenges such as declining voter turnout, election malpractice, and weak institutional credibility persist (Omotola, 2010; Jinadu, 2019). These issues cast doubt not only on the legitimacy of elections but also on the overall sustainability of Nigeria's democratic project.

Patterns of Voter Turnout and Electoral Behaviour in Nigeria

Voter turnout is often used as a measure of citizens' engagement and confidence in democracy. In Nigeria, turnout for presidential elections has shown a steady decline: 53.7% in 2011, 43.7% in 2015, 34.8% in 2019, and around 26.7% in 2023 (INEC, 2023). This downward trend reflects an increasing disconnect between the electorate and the political class. Several factors contribute to this decline. Falade (2014, p.88) highlights political disillusionment, poor voter education, and the monetisation of politics as key drivers. Okolie (2018) and Ibrahim and Ibeanu (2009) further point to insecurity, logistical challenges, and manipulation of electoral processes as reasons why citizens increasingly doubt the impact of their votes. Even in the 2023 elections, innovations like the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) and the INEC Result Viewing Portal (IREV) could not fully address controversies over electronic results transmission and allegations of irregularities (EU EOM, 2023; Yiaga Africa, 2023). Voter apathy in Nigeria is therefore both systemic and psychological. Historical patterns of election fraud, the poor performance of successive governments, and the perception that votes rarely translate into tangible change contribute to what Resnick and Van de Walle (2013, p. 142) describe as "participatory fatigue." Nigerians, like many Africans, often begin elections with enthusiasm but grow frustrated when the system fails to deliver accountability and meaningful representation (Chiamogu & Chiamogu, 2018; Awopeju, Adelaja, & Udele, 2012; Omotola, 2010).

Voter Turnout in Nigerian Presidential Elections (1979–2023)

Voter turnout in Nigerian presidential elections has shown a persistent decline over the decades, raising concerns about the health of the country's democratic ethos. This trend suggests the emergence of a system where elections are held routinely, yet meaningful mass participation, the hallmark of democracy, is increasingly absent. Contemporary political leadership in Nigeria is often foisted upon the electorate because citizens have, at times, abstained from fulfilling their electoral responsibilities, reflecting a growing disconnect between the governed and the government.

The history of electoral participation since the Second Republic shows this decline. The 1979 presidential election marked the first time in Nigeria's history that all citizens of voting age exercised their franchise in a nationwide presidential contest. Out of 48,846,633 registered voters, representing 62.77% of the estimated population of 77,841,000, only 17,098,267 votes were cast, representing just 21.96% of the population (Ita & Edet, 2018; African Elections Database, 2011). By 1983, 65,304,818 voters were registered, representing 81.90% of the estimated population of 79,729,310; yet only 25,430,096 votes were cast, accounting for 31.89% of the total population.

Following decades of military rule, Nigeria returned to democratic governance in 1999, resulting in a brief revival of electoral participation. Voter turnout rose from 38.94% in 1999 to 52.26% and peaked at 69.08% in 2003 (Nwankwo, Okafor, & Asuoha, 2017). However, this upward trend was short-lived, with participation declining in subsequent elections: 57.49% in 2007, 53.68% in 2011, 43.65% in 2015, and 34.75% in 2019. This represents a 25.43% decline in voter engagement between 2007 and 2015 alone, signalling growing voter apathy and mistrust of the political process (Nwankwo, Okafor, & Asuoha, 2017).

The 2023 presidential election continued this downward decline. According to official Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) reports, only 26.7% of registered voters participated in the election, marking the lowest level of engagement since the return to democracy in 1999 (INEC, 2023; Yiaga Africa, 2023). Despite technological innovations such as the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) and the INEC Result Viewing Portal (IReV), the election was still overshadowed by allegations of irregularities and procedural challenges.

The historical pattern thus reveals a persistent disengagement of Nigerian citizens from presidential elections, reflecting both systemic and psychological factors, including electoral malpractice, insecurity, elite dominance, and a perception that voting has limited impact on governance outcomes (Awopeju, Adelaja, & Udele, 2012; Omotola, 2010). This trend underscores the urgent need for institutional reforms, civic education, and mechanisms that can restore citizens' trust and confidence in the electoral process.

Table 2: Voter Turnout in Nigerian Presidential Elections (1979–2023)

Year	Population	Registered Votes	VotingAge Population (VAP)	Votes Cast	Voter Turnout (% of Registered)	VAP Turnout (% of VAP)
1979	77,841,000	48,846,633	38,142,090	17,098,267	35.25	44.83
1983	79,729,310	65,304,818	—	25,430,096	38.94	—
1993	105,264,000	61,567,036	50,526,720	14,293,396	23.22	27.79
1999	108,258,350	57,938,945	52,792,781	30,280,052	52.26	57.36
2003	129,934,910	60,823,022	64,319,246	42,018,735	69.08	65.33

Year	Population	Registered Votes	Voting Age Population (VAP)	Votes Cast	Voter Turnout (% of Registered)	VAP Turnout (% of VAP)
2007	131,859,730	61,567,036	71,004,507	35,397,517	57.49	49.85
2011	155,215,570	73,528,040	81,691,751	39,469,484	53.68	48.32
2015	181,562,052	67,422,005	91,669,312	29,432,083	43.65	32.11
2019	200,962,417	84,004,084	106,490,312	28,614,190	34.75	26.87
2023	—	93,469,008	—	~24,900,000	~26.72	

Source: International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IIDEA) with some inputs by a Researcher from other Existing Literature

From Table 2 above, it can be observed that the 2023 presidential election recorded the lowest voter turnout in Nigeria's history, with only 26.72% of registered voters participating, followed by the 2019 presidential election at 34.75%. In contrast, the 2011 general elections had a significantly higher turnout of 53.68%, which was notably greater than the 43.65% observed in 2015. Similarly, voter turnout for the 2007 (57.49%), 2003 (69.08%), and 1999 (52.26%) presidential elections remained higher than in the subsequent elections of 2015, 2019, and 2023. Regarding the total number of votes cast, the 2023 presidential election recorded approximately 24,900,000 votes, making it the smallest in Nigeria's history in absolute terms. By comparison, the total votes cast in previous elections were: 28,614,190 in 2019; 29,432,083 in 2015; 39,469,484 in 2011; 35,397,517 in 2007; 42,018,735 in 2003; 30,280,052 in 1999; 14,293,396 in 1993; 25,430,096 in 1983; and 17,098,267 in 1979. These figures indicate that total votes cast were lowest in 1979, 1993, 2015, 2019, and 2023, while the 2003, 2007, and 2011 elections had relatively higher participation. This trend highlights a marked decline in voter engagement in the most recent elections.

Furthermore, it is notable that despite the increase in registered voters to 93,469,008 in 2023 from 84,004,084 in 2019, the number of votes cast decreased, reflecting growing electoral apathy. In fact, the votes cast in 2015 (29,432,083) and 2019 (28,614,190) were higher than in 2023 (24,900,000), despite the smaller pool of registered voters in earlier years. Looking at the broader historical context, from the 1999 general elections, which marked the start of the Fourth Republic, out of an estimated population of 108,258,350, 57,938,945 voters were registered, with 30,280,052 (52.26%) turning out for the presidential election. In 2003, despite a population increase to 129,934,910 and 60,823,022 registered voters, 42,018,735 (69.08%) participated. The 2007 elections, however, saw a significant drop in turnout, with only 35,397,517 votes cast from a population of 131,859,730 and 61,567,036 registered voters. Scholars such as Agu (2015, p.117) attribute this decline to the imposition of candidates and election irregularities, particularly by the ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP).

Since 2007, voter turnout in presidential elections has declined consistently. The 2011 general elections had 39,469,484 voters (53.68%) turning out, reflecting diminished confidence in the electoral process due to concerns over the continuation of previous election trends. By 2015, voter apathy deepened, with only 43.65% participation despite 67,422,005 registered voters. The downward trajectory continued into 2019 and culminated in the 2023 election, which saw the lowest turnout of just 26.72%, signalling a profound disengagement of Nigerian citizens from the electoral process. Overall, Table 2 and the 2023 data demonstrate a clear pattern of declining voter turnout, particularly from 2007 onwards, despite a steady increase in Nigeria's population and the number of registered voters. The trend suggests that geometric population growth has not translated into increased electoral participation, indicating critical challenges in voter mobilisation, public trust in elections, and civic engagement. From the data, Nigeria's

population, the number of registered voters, and the voting-age population (VAP) have generally exhibited a steady geometric increase over the years. However, the total number of votes cast in successive presidential elections has largely declined, except for the 2003 and 2011 elections. In most cases, particularly from 2011 onwards, the total number of votes cast has been less than half of the voting-age population. This trend suggests that more individuals may register to vote for socio-economic reasons rather than active participation in electoral processes. Another plausible explanation is the potential inflation of voter registration figures by political actors, despite the introduction of biometric verification systems, similar to historical manipulations observed during population censuses. Additionally, elite tendencies to manipulate figures for political survival and consolidation may also contribute to the disparity between registered voters and actual turnout.

Comparing Voter Turnout in the 2015, 2019, and 2023 Presidential Elections

Voter participation in Nigeria's presidential elections has exhibited a declining trend in recent cycles, despite continuous growth in the country's population and number of registered voters. In the 2015 presidential election, 29,432,083 votes were cast out of 67,422,005 registered voters, representing a national turnout of 43.65%. By 2019, registered voters had increased to 84,004,084, yet only 28,614,190 votes were cast—a decline of 817,893 votes from 2015. This corresponded to a turnout of 34.75%, or 26.87% of the voting-age population (VAP). Despite coordinated terrorist attacks on Election Day in Borno and Yobe States, turnout in the northeast exceeded the national average (EU EOM, 2019). Opposition parties alleged inflated voter figures in the north and voter suppression in the south due to violent incidents and security personnel's actions. The ruling APC, on the other hand, pointed to historical patterns of higher turnout in northern states and claimed effective measures had been taken to reduce electoral fraud in some southern areas. President Muhammadu Buhari (APC) was re-elected with 55.6% of valid votes, defeating Alhaji Atiku Abubakar (PDP), who secured 41.2%.

By 2023, registered voters had increased further to 93,469,008, yet total votes cast dropped sharply to 24,900,000, representing a turnout of only 26.7% of registered voters and 26.6% of the VAP. This pronounced decline relative to 2019, despite a larger electorate, indicates a deepening disengagement of citizens from the electoral process. The low turnout reflects a combination of factors, including widespread voter apathy, socio-economic pressures, heightened insecurity, and persistent perceptions of electoral malpractice. Compared to previous cycles, the 2023 election demonstrates a growing disconnect between voter registration and actual participation, suggesting that increases in the electorate alone are insufficient to boost meaningful democratic engagement.

Table 3: Voter Turnout Comparison (2015–2023)

Year	Registered Voters	Votes Cast	Voter Turnout (%)	VAP Turnout (%)
2015	67,422,005	29,432,083	43.65	32.11
2019	84,004,084	28,614,190	34.06	26.87
2023	93,469,008	24,900,000	26.64	26.63

Source: Compiled by the Researchers from Existing Literature

From Table 3 above, it is clear that between 2015 and 2023, Nigeria recorded a progressive decline in voter turnout despite a steady increase in the number of registered voters. Whereas registered voters grew by over 26 million (38.6%) within eight years, votes cast in Presidential elections dropped by over 4.5 million, from 29.4 million (2015) to 24.9 million (2023). Consequently, voter turnout fell from 43.65% (2015) to just 26.64% (2023), the lowest since Nigeria's return

to democracy in 1999. This pattern indicates deepening voter disengagement and widening disconnection between citizens and the political process.

Table 4: Registered Voters and PVC Collection for 2015, 2019 and 2023 General Elections According to Geopolitical Zones

Geopolitical Zones	No Reg. Voters			No Collected PVC			% No Voters with PVC		
	2015	2019	2023	2015	2019	2023	2015	2019	2023
South East	10,059,347	10,057,130	10,907,606	8,434,099	8,590,420	10,401,484	83.8	85.5	95.4
South-South	7,665,859	12,841,279	14,440,714	6,624,301	11,120,948	13,284,920	86.4	86.6	92.0
South West	13,731,090	16,292,212	17,958,966	9,250,041	12,814,246	15,536,213	67.4	78.7	86.5
North Central	10,648,883	13,366,070	15,363,731	8,230,685	9,472,404	14,603,621	77.3	70.9	95.1
North East	9,107,861	11,289,293	12,542,429	7,922,444	10,450,882	11,937,769	87.0	92.6	95.2
North West	17,620,436	20,158,100	22,255,562	15,999,398	18,231,193	21,445,000	90.8	90.5	96.4
Total	68,833,476	84,004,084	93,469,008	56,460,968	72,775,502	87,209,007	82.03	86.6	93.3

Source: Compiled by the Researchers from Existing Literature

The data show consistently high PVC collection rates across Nigeria's six geopolitical zones, with a steady national increase from 82.0% in 2015 to 93.3% in 2023. This means that by 2023, nearly all registered voters possessed Permanent Voter Cards, theoretically enabling them to participate in elections. Yet, despite these impressive collection figures, actual voter turnout has declined sharply, from around 44% in 2015 to less than 30% in 2023. This gap between PVC ownership and voter participation reveals several structural and behavioural challenges in Nigeria's electoral environment. *Ἰμπλιχίτης*, the data suggest a disconnect between electoral access and democratic participation. Nigeria's challenge is not voter registration but voter motivation and systemic credibility. Indicating that without restoring public trust and improving logistics, transparency, and security, high PVC collection will continue to mask low civic engagement. Electoral reforms must shift focus from merely registering voters to ensuring meaningful participation through civic education, institutional accountability, and easier, safer voting processes. In essence, Nigeria's electoral data (2015–2023) reveal a paradox: rising registration but declining participation. This pattern signals a crisis of political trust, inclusiveness, and engagement. Unless systemic issues of governance credibility, electoral logistics, and voter motivation are addressed, future elections may record even lower participation despite high registration figures.

Electoral Integrity, Institutional Weakness, and Elite Dominance

Electoral integrity or the adherence of elections to principles of transparency, fairness and inclusiveness, is essential for building citizens' trust in democracy (Norris, 2014). Yet, in Nigeria, elections are frequently undermined by institutional weaknesses, elite interference, and manipulation by powerful interests (Onapajo, 2014). This has created what Ake (1996, p. 57) famously described as "a democracy without democrats," in which political power is often used to serve narrow self-interest rather than the collective good. Elite theory offers a useful lens for understanding this phenomenon. It posits that a small group of political and economic elites dominate power structures, often marginalising mass participation (Pareto, 1935; Mosca, 1939; Mills, 1956). In Nigeria, the political elite manipulates institutions, including INEC and security agencies, to entrench their control (Jinadu, 2019). Omotola (2010, p. 536) refers to this as "electoral authoritarianism," where elections occur regularly but rarely lead to true accountability or responsive governance. The limited autonomy of INEC, constrained by reliance on federal

funding and susceptibility to political interference, further weakens electoral credibility (Ibrahim & Ibeanu, 2009). Practices such as vote-buying, intimidation, and ballot manipulation have undermined public trust, with long-term consequences for democratic legitimacy (Obiora & Chiamogu, 2020).

Political Trust, Accountability and Governance

Political trust, citizens' confidence in the fairness and responsiveness of institutions, is critical for sustaining democracy (Norris, 2011). When citizens trust that leaders and institutions act in their interest, they are more likely to participate in elections and civic activities (Hetherington, 2005). Conversely, corruption, insecurity, and ineffective governance discourage participation, often pushing citizens toward apathy or alternative, sometimes extra-legal, forms of political engagement (Dalton, 2004). In Nigeria, declining trust in electoral institutions is a key factor behind low voter turnout (Ojo, 2014; Falade, 2014; Chiamogu & Chiamogu, 2018). Afrobarometer surveys indicate that fewer than one in three Nigerians express confidence in INEC or political parties (Afrobarometer, 2022). This erosion of trust undermines political accountability and, ultimately, the process of democratic consolidation. Diamond (2008) emphasises that democracy thrives when citizens can hold leaders accountable through institutionalised mechanisms, with elections being the most critical of these mechanisms.

Political Inclusivity of the 2015, 2019 and 2023 Presidential and National Assembly Elections

Nigeria's 2015, 2019 and 2023 general elections were characterised by broad contestation, with multiple political parties and numerous candidates contesting for presidential, senatorial and House of Representatives seats. However, despite high numerical competitiveness, the level of substantive inclusivity, especially regarding gender, youth and persons with disabilities (PWDs), remains limited.

In 2019, 73 presidential candidates, 1,899 senatorial candidates, and 4,680 candidates for the House of Representatives contested under 91 registered political parties (European Union Election Observation Mission [EU EOM], 2019). By 2023, all 18 registered parties fielded presidential candidates. For the legislative elections, 1,101 candidates contested 109 senatorial seats, and 3,122 candidates contested 360 House of Representatives seats (International Centre for Investigative Reporting [ICIR], 2023). In total, about 15,309 candidates contested various federal and state offices, of which 91.7 per cent were men and 8.3 per cent were women (International Foundation for Electoral Systems [IFES], 2023). Of the 4,259 presidential and national-assembly candidates in 2023, only 381 ($\approx 8.9\%$) were women (National Accord Newspaper, 2023). Specifically, 92 women ($\approx 8.35\%$) contested for the Senate and 288 women ($\approx 9.2\%$) for the House of Representatives. Only one female presidential candidate was cleared to contest among the 18 parties (ICIR, 2023). Following the elections, women's success rates remained very low: only 72 women won at the federal and state levels out of 1,553 female candidates, around 10.1 per cent (OduNews, 2023). Youth participation remains uneven. Although the 2023 register showed that 39.65 per cent of voters were aged 18–34, their representation among candidates and elected officials was significantly lower (IFES, 2023). Persons with disabilities also remain underrepresented, with only 85,362 PWDs registered to vote and minimal data on their candidacy (IFES, 2023). While 18 parties fielded candidates in 2023, internal party processes for candidate nomination remain opaque, exclusionary, and financially prohibitive, particularly for women and youth (International Republican Institute [IRI], 2023).

Despite quantitative competitiveness, the inclusivity of participation, both as candidates and officeholders, remains weak. Women continue to be marginalised, and the proportion of female

candidates in the 2023 National Assembly elections ($\approx 9\%$) declined from about 12 per cent in 2019 (IRI, 2023). Youth and PWD representation is also minimal, highlighting a disconnect between Nigeria's largely youthful electorate and those occupying or contesting political office. The persistence of financial barriers, including multimillion-naira nomination fees, continues to exclude underrepresented groups. The fact that only one woman contested the presidency underscores enduring structural obstacles such as party bias, patriarchal norms, and limited institutional support.

Furthermore, the underrepresentation of women in elected offices, with only three women reportedly winning senatorial seats in 2023, weakens the diversity and responsiveness of the political system (Federation of International Women Lawyers [FIDA Nigeria], 2023). The 2023 elections demonstrated broad formal competition, but the process remains substantively exclusive. Political representation is dominated by men, older elites, and established party actors. The continued marginalisation of women, youth, PWDs, and internally displaced persons undermines democratic inclusivity and the representative character of Nigeria's electoral democracy. For genuine legitimacy and citizen trust, the electoral process must evolve toward equitable participation and representation of all social groups.

Comparative Insights and the Nigerian Context

The decline in voter participation is not unique to Nigeria; it reflects a global trend of democratic fatigue (Dalton, 2016). However, in more mature democracies, declining turnout is often balanced by alternative forms of engagement, including civic activism, advocacy campaigns, and online political participation (Norris, 2014). In Nigeria, these alternative avenues remain limited due to poverty, illiteracy, digital exclusion, and restrictive political culture (Resnick, 2019). Thus, Nigeria presents a paradox of "procedural democracy without substantive participation", where elections are held regularly, yet they often fail to produce meaningful representation or governance accountability (Omotola, 2010; Jinadu, 2019). This reinforces the argument that democratic consolidation depends not only on regular elections but also on genuine citizen engagement and credible institutions (Linz & Stepan, 1996; Schedler, 1998). The literature clearly underscores the critical role of electoral participation in sustaining democracy. Yet, much of the research on Nigeria focuses narrowly on individual election cycles, primarily the 2015 and 2019 elections (Falade, 2014; Okolie, 2018; Jinadu, 2019). Few studies systematically examine trends over multiple cycles, including the landmark 2023 elections, the seventh consecutive civilian transition. Moreover, there is limited exploration of how citizens' trust and perceptions of elite dominance interact to influence participation over time. This study addresses these gaps by offering a comparative, theory-driven analysis of voter behaviour across the 2015, 2019 and 2023 presidential elections, linking patterns of turnout and political trust to the broader process of democratic consolidation in Nigeria's Fourth Republic.

Theoretical Framework

This study is situated on two interrelated perspectives: political participation theory and Elite theory. Together, these frameworks provided conceptual lenses for understanding the persistent decline in voter turnout, weak political inclusion, and the dominance of a small political class in Nigeria's democratic process.

1. **Political Participation Theory:** offers a framework for analysing the level and forms of citizens' involvement in political processes. According to **Verba, Schlozman, and Brady (1995)**, participation encompasses all voluntary actions through which citizens influence the selection of political leaders and the policies they pursue. Similarly, **Milbrath and Goel (1977)**

view participation as a continuum, from the apathetic non-participant to the highly active political actor. The degree of participation, therefore, reflects the vibrancy and legitimacy of a democracy. Within this perspective, voter turnout is a key indicator of political engagement and democratic legitimacy. **Dahl (1971)** argues that a “polyarchy” thrives when citizens not only have access to political rights but also exercise them actively. Declining turnout, by contrast, signals a crisis of legitimacy and a weakening social contract between the state and its citizens. Empirical studies such as **Dalton (2016)** and **Norris (2014)** further link sustained voter apathy to declining trust in institutions, poor governance performance, and citizens’ perceptions that their votes do not influence policy outcomes. In the Nigerian context, despite formal opportunities for participation, such as universal suffrage and an expanded voter register, the consistent decline in voter turnout from 57.5% in 2007 to 26.6% in 2023 suggests a form of “participatory disillusionment.” This study adopts political participation theory to explain the paradox of high voter registration and Permanent Voter Card (PVC) collection rates but low actual electoral participation. The theory highlights how structural and perceptual barriers—ranging from insecurity and poverty to distrust of electoral institutions—reduce citizens’ motivation to vote, thereby undermining democratic consolidation.

2. **Elite Theory:** While political participation theory focuses on the behaviour of the masses, **elite theory** shifts attention to the concentration of power among a small, organised minority that dominates political and economic institutions. Classic theorists such as **Pareto (1935)**, **Mosca (1939)**, and **Mills (1956)** contend that in every society, a ruling elite inevitably emerges, controlling decision-making and preserving its dominance through manipulation of political structures and resources. In the Nigerian case, elite theory helps explain the monopolisation of the political space by a small class of wealthy and influential actors. Electoral processes are heavily shaped by elite interests through mechanisms such as the monetisation of party primaries, high nomination fees, vote-buying, and patronage networks. These factors create structural barriers that exclude women, youth, and marginalised groups from meaningful participation. As **Levitsky and Way (2010)** argue, such systems often evolve into “competitive authoritarianism,” where elections occur regularly but genuine competition is stifled. Applying elite theory to this study underscores how Nigeria’s electoral outcomes are less a reflection of popular will and more a contest among entrenched elites. Despite technological reforms (such as BVAS and IReV), elite manipulation continues to undermine public confidence in electoral institutions, contributing to the voter apathy and distrust observed in recent elections.

The integration of political participation and elite theories provides a comprehensive explanation for Nigeria’s democratic challenges. Political participation theory explains why ordinary citizens disengage; due to apathy, distrust, or disillusionment, while elite theory explains how systemic dominance by a few perpetuates exclusion and weakens institutional responsiveness. Together, they illuminate the paradox of Nigeria’s democracy: elections are regular and competitive on the surface, yet participation and inclusivity remain shallow. This theoretical synthesis guides the study’s analysis of electoral participation trends (2015–2023) and their implications for democratic consolidation.

Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive and analytical research design. This approach was suitable for examining trends in voter turnout, political inclusivity, and institutional credibility in Nigeria’s 2015, 2019 and 2023 Presidential elections. Both quantitative (statistical data) and qualitative (documentary review) methods were used to analyse the relationship between electoral participation and democratic consolidation. The study relied entirely on secondary data obtained from credible institutional and scholarly sources such as official reports from the Independent

National Electoral Commission (INEC), European Union Election Observation Mission (EU EOM), International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), and relevant academic publications, policy papers, and Afrobarometer surveys. Quantitative data such as registered voters, PVC collection, and turnout rates were complemented with qualitative information on inclusivity and institutional performance.

The research focused on federal elections (presidential and national assembly) held in 2015, 2019 and 2023. These were purposively selected because they best reflect national participation and democratic performance. The scope covered Nigeria's Fourth Republic, emphasising patterns of voter behaviour and institutional integrity across three electoral cycles. Data were gathered through documentary review of official statistics, observer reports, and peer-reviewed studies. Analysis involved descriptive and comparative methods, using percentages and tables to show voter trends and participation gaps. Qualitative content was thematically analysed around key issues such as voter apathy, trust, inclusivity, and elite dominance. The interpretation was guided by political participation and elite theories.

Discussion of Findings

The findings from the comparative analysis of the 2015, 2019 and 2023 presidential elections in Nigeria reveal a complex but consistent pattern of declining voter participation, persistent elite dominance, and weak institutional credibility, which together constrain the consolidation of democracy in the country.

1. **Declining Electoral Participation and Democratic Legitimacy:** The data show that Nigeria's voter turnout has been on a **steady decline** since 2007. From 57.49% in 2007 to 53.68% in 2011, turnout fell to 43.65% in 2015, 34.06% in 2019, and a record low of **26.64% in 2023**. Despite an increase in registered voters—from 67.4 million in 2015 to 93.5 million in 2023—the total votes cast fell from 29.4 million to 24.9 million within the same period. This pattern demonstrates a **crisis of democratic participation**, where electoral access (as reflected in PVC ownership of over 93%) does not translate into actual participation. This gap between registration and turnout reflects a profound **erosion of political trust** in Nigeria's democracy. Citizens increasingly perceive elections as inconsequential to governance outcomes, leading to mass disengagement from the process. Such disengagement undermines the **legitimacy of elected governments**, as leaders emerge from the votes of a shrinking minority. The results also reinforce Diamond's (2015) notion of a "democratic recession," in which formal democratic structures persist, but the substance of popular participation and accountability weakens.
2. **Political Trust, Institutional Credibility, and Voter Apathy:** The study's findings confirm that **low political trust** is a central factor driving declining voter turnout. Many Nigerians doubt the integrity of electoral institutions, especially the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), and the impartiality of political elites who often manipulate the process for personal or partisan gain. Afrobarometer (2022) data indicating that fewer than one in three Nigerians trust INEC or political parties supports this conclusion. Even with technological reforms in the 2023 elections—such as the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) and the INEC Result Viewing Portal (IREV)—citizens' confidence did not improve significantly. Allegations of irregularities and delayed results transmission deepened scepticism. Consequently, **technological innovations without institutional transparency** have failed to reverse apathy. This aligns with elite theory, which suggests that a small political class monopolises power and manipulates institutions to maintain control (Pareto, 1935; Mosca, 1939; Mills, 1956). In Nigeria, this elite capture is manifested in vote-buying, intimidation, and administrative interference, which distort the democratic process and alienate the electorate.

3. **Inclusivity and Representation Deficit:** While the elections appear competitive in numeric terms, they remain **exclusive in substance**. The 2023 data show that out of 4,259 presidential and national assembly candidates, only **381 ($\approx 8.9\%$)** were women. Specifically, **92 women** contested senatorial seats and **288** contested for the House of Representatives. Only **one female presidential candidate** appeared on the ballot. Post-election, women secured merely **72 elective positions** nationwide, about 10% of all contested seats. Similarly, youth participation remains marginal. Although young people (aged 18–34) constituted **39.65% of registered voters**, their representation among candidates was negligible. Persons with disabilities (PWDs) also remain underrepresented, with only **85,362 registered** and virtually no recorded elected officials (IFES, 2023). These trends suggest that Nigerian politics is dominated by older, wealthy men within entrenched party hierarchies. The prohibitive cost of nomination forms—sometimes exceeding ₦40 million—combined with opaque internal party processes, severely limits access for women and youth. Consequently, political participation remains **elitist rather than inclusive**, contradicting the constitutional and international commitments to gender equality and social inclusion (AU Protocol, 2003).
4. **Electoral Integrity and the Paradox of PVC Ownership:** Table 4 of the study shows that PVC collection rates rose steadily from **82% in 2015 to 93.3% in 2023**, indicating a high level of technical readiness among voters. However, the dramatic decline in actual voter turnout exposes what the study identifies as a “**participation paradox**”: high registration and card collection but low electoral engagement. This paradox underscores that Nigeria’s electoral challenges are **not rooted in access but in motivation and confidence**. Citizens appear willing to be counted as potential voters but unwilling to participate in an electoral system they perceive as corrupt, unsafe, and ineffectual. This aligns with Resnick and Van de Walle’s (2013) concept of “participatory fatigue,” in which repeated exposure to flawed elections fosters cynicism and withdrawal.

Implications for Democratic Consolidation

The data and analysis collectively indicate that Nigeria’s democracy remains procedural rather than substantive. Regular elections occur, but their capacity to express the popular will, ensure accountability, or advance inclusion is weak. The steady disengagement of citizens, especially among youth and women, erodes the social contract on which democratic legitimacy rests (Osondu, 2014). This trend has several implications:

1. **Legitimacy Deficit:** Governments elected with the support of only a small fraction of eligible voters risk losing moral and political legitimacy.
2. **Elite Entrenchment:** Persistent dominance of political elites undermines leadership renewal and limits the infusion of new ideas and actors into the political system.
3. **Erosion of Accountability:** As voter participation declines, leaders become less responsive to citizens, deepening corruption and governance failures.
4. **Democratic Fatigue:** The repetitive cycle of flawed elections and unfulfilled promises reinforces apathy and cynicism, threatening the long-term viability of democracy.

Comparative and Theoretical Context

While global democracies also experience declining voter turnout (Dalton, 2016; Norris, 2014), the Nigerian case is aggravated by structural and contextual factors: widespread poverty, insecurity, weak institutions, and a rent-seeking political culture. Unlike mature democracies, where lower turnout is offset by alternative forms of civic engagement, in Nigeria, political participation outside elections remains limited due to socio-economic constraints and repressive political environments.

From a theoretical standpoint, the findings corroborate both political participation theory (Verba et al., 1995; Norris, 2014) and elite theory (Pareto, 1935; Mosca, 1939). Electoral participation in Nigeria is shaped less by rational civic engagement and more by elite-controlled structures that determine access, competition, and outcomes. Thus, the consolidation of democracy requires not just regular elections but a transformation of the underlying political culture to empower citizens and reduce elite capture. The study's findings demonstrate that Nigeria's democratic project is at a critical juncture. The steady decline in voter turnout, the persistent exclusion of women and youth, and the erosion of trust in electoral institutions collectively point to democratic fragility. Electoral reforms, civic education, and institutional accountability are urgently needed to reverse this trajectory. Without deliberate efforts to rebuild citizens' trust, strengthen electoral integrity, and promote inclusion, Nigeria's democracy risks further degeneration into what scholars describe as "electoral authoritarianism"—a system where elections are regular but democracy is hollow.

Conclusion

The democratisation project concerns primarily the guaranteeing and enjoyment of civil and political rights by citizens. Democracies make these rights possible through citizen participation in elections and governance (Mahmud, 2015). Robust voter turnout and civic participation are fundamental to a healthy democracy. Voter turnout is one measure of citizen participation in politics expressed as the percentage of voters who cast a vote at an election. As low turnout is usually attributed to political disengagement and the belief that voting for one candidate/party or another will do much to alter public policy, voter turnout impacts the electoral process and its outcome. The history of voter turnout in Nigerian elections over the years reflects a significant dwindling of citizens' participation. At the inception of the Fourth Republic in 1999, its turnout was appreciable at 52.26% with prospects of increment as shown in 2003 at 69.08% but greatly declined in 2007 following militarised tendencies and flagrant abuse of the process by politicians. Overall, the electioneering processes of Nigeria over the years have been characterised by several undemocratic tendencies ranging from malfeasance, corruption, unmitigated violence, intimidation of both opponents and potential voters, state interference, and lack of ideological conviction of the ruling class, which necessitate apathy (Fagunwa, 2018). There is a low level of political participation in Nigeria. Many Nigerians are not committed to the electoral process and other political engagements. It is then clear that the decline in voter turnout is nothing but a reflection of the failing authenticity of democracy in Nigeria. Those saddled with political power are persistently destroying the system of majority rule by weakening the institutions of checks and balances, suppressing opposition and undermining the rule of law. They have captured the Nigerian state and are using the paraphernalia of state forces against the people. Democracy is truly in danger in Nigeria because the political leadership has risen against the principles of democracy in their bids to sustain their rulership and consolidate power. The concern was showing how this interplay, grounded as it is in a presidential environment, with electoral politics and process supported by weak institutions, was hastening the collapse of Nigeria's democracy.

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The Domestication of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in South Africa

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Abstract

The domestication of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in South Africa presents a critical constitutional commitment towards protecting the rights of children. The paper reflects on the right to basic education as provided in Section 28 of the Constitution of South Africa and related key policy frameworks. This research examines the extent to which the CRC has been effectively translated into practice, focusing specifically on access to basic education for orphans and vulnerable children in South Africa. Based on primary findings obtained through qualitative research, the study shows that while judicial and policy frameworks reference the CRC, systemic inequalities persist, and the efficacy of the process is undermined by systematic inequalities, poor infrastructure and resource allocation, and socio-economic barriers faced by vulnerable children. The situation is further impeded by a lack of monitoring mechanisms, effective enforcement, accountability and political governance from policymakers.

Keywords: Domestication, children's rights, basic education, Convention on the Rights of the Child, South Africa

Introduction

The right to basic education is universal and inclusive for all children (Tran & Mwanri, 2013; UNESCO, 2002). Researchers affirm that the right to basic education is one of the most complex rights in the context of international human rights law because it is an empowerment right that “*enhances all rights and freedoms*” while its violation “*jeopardises them all*” (Meskele, 2015; Kalantry et al., 2009; Tomasevki, 2001). Access to basic education is enshrined in various regional and international treaties, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC).

This paper examines the extent to which the CRC has been domesticated to support basic education for OVC in South Africa. This is critically important because the success or failure of any international human rights treaty should be evaluated in accordance with its impact on human rights practices at the domestic level (Odhiambo, 2005). Thus, the following objectives will be achieved in this study: firstly, identifying key provisions on the domestication of the CRC in

South Africa; secondly, analysing South Africa's constitutional and legislative framework on the right to basic education; lastly, documenting the challenges and progress made to domesticate the CRC, using the Eastern Cape province as a case study.

The study was conducted using a qualitative research design, in which 46 participants from 34 non-governmental organisations (NGOs), 9 primary schools and 3 government departments in the Eastern Cape province participated. The qualitative research design has been supported by various scholars as a naturalistic, holistic and inductive method, which allows participants to freely express their views (Lim, 2024; Bazen et al., 2021). The study employed the non-probability snowball sampling technique to select knowledgeable and experienced participants. Data analysis was conducted using the Atlas.Ti 9, a computer-aided software program.

Context of Basic Education in South Africa

Since the new political dispensation in South Africa in 1994, much emphasis has been placed on changing the society to provide equal education opportunities for all children (Muthukrishna, 2006; Ndonga, 2012). This suggests a commitment to the broad view of social inclusion and a strong commitment to the rights of a child, through two major pillars in particular, namely, the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996) and the South African Schools Act 84 of 1996.

Section 28(1)(c) of the Constitution of South Africa stipulates that every child has basic rights to education, nutrition, health care services and social services (Republic of South Africa, 1996). The implementation of the right to basic education under Section 28 has higher priority relative to other rights (Abrahams & Matthews, 2011; Boezaart, 2012). Section 28(2) of the Constitution of South Africa establishes that "A child's interests are of paramount importance in every matter concerning the children" (Republic of South Africa, 1996).

In explicit terms, Section 29(1)(a)¹ of the Constitution states that everyone has the right to basic education. Roithmayr (2003) adds that this is an inclusive right for all, which is not subject to resource availability. In addition, Section 29(1)(b) states that everyone has the right to further education and that the state must make such education progressively available and accessible (Republic of South Africa, 1996; Robinson, 2003).

In response to the definitive challenges of basic education, the South African Schools Act of 1996 provided practical guidelines on basic education; specifically, basic education is and should be compulsory for all children from the age of 7 to 15 years or Grade 9, whichever comes first (Republic of South Africa, 1996; Murungi, 2015). Such statutory stipulations emphasise the right to basic education. However, in most instances, judicial action has had to be taken for the practical implementation of this right. In such cases, the court would have to define the parameters of the right, enforce adherence, and attempt to remove existing structural obstacles. The following case highlights how the right to basic education has been understood and operationalised by South African courts, especially with regard to its definition, access, and governmental responsibility.

Legislation

Domestication of the CRC treaty

Mendes and Lalonde-Roussy (2003) state that International law does not regulate the implementation of international treaties, and as a result, states have had to rely on their

¹ Section 29(1)(a) states that 1. Everyone has the right to a basic education

domestic and constitutional law for this, and this is where domestication comes into the picture. Domestication is described as a way of maximising the effects of an international instrument at the national level, which has to be made part of domestic law either by way of incorporation or transformation (Lusanjo, 2013; Deitrick, 1999; Setear, 1996). In application, the process will be based on translating international conventions into domestic legislation, thereby implementing projects which will advance the realisation of the aims of the conventions. The success of the domestication process helps to establish that provisions of the convention are more visible with tangible results in the country.

Doek (2006) entails the activities of the government to ensure that national laws and related administrative regulations are in full compliance with the CRC. As noted above, this is a continuous, ongoing process to assess whether the state is operating in compliance and is fully compatible with the proposed legislation. Furthermore, the state can implement additional measures, which include monitoring institutions and policy reforms. Domestication in the context of the CRC is advantageous because the obligation to legislate the convention rests on all levels of the government. In relation to this study, the right to education for all children has been mentioned very frequently in African constitutions. The main provisions for free and basic education are constitutionally entrenched in Article 28 of the CRC and can be found in several government Constitutions (Section 29(1)(a) in the case of South Africa), thus demonstrating more commitment towards protecting children's rights at the domestic level.

The evolving nature of domestication is the dominant political process contributing to an effective response to the education-related challenges of vulnerable children (Munzhedzi, 2016; Murungu & Biegon, 2011). Therefore, the domestication of international and regional treaties principally requires that constitutional and other legal provisions be enacted at the national level to give effect to the ratified treaties (Vilijoen & Precious, 2007; OHCHR, 2010). Following the ratification of an international Convention, state parties are obliged to align national laws to reflect the commitment in the treaties (Achilihu, 2010; Van Sant, 2000). In addition, the state is encouraged to establish measures to ensure that the terms of the treaty can be applied locally. This is when domestication is fully implemented and is achieved through the country's constitutional provision. Himes (1995) states that attention must be paid to a broad array of legislative, administrative, judicial, regulatory, and other measures at all levels of government to achieve the goals or attain the agreed standards (Olowu, 2009; Hanf, 2015).

The interpretation of Section 231(1) of the Constitution of South Africa provides critical discourse on the preferred system of domestication whereby the negotiating and signing of all international agreements is the responsibility of the national executive (Republic of South Africa, 1996). This subscribes South Africa to the dualists system, which regards international and domestic law as completely separate with different legal systems and characteristics; conversely, an exemption is given to the Head of State, who is the only state organ to represent the state both in domestic and international law (Wangari, 2013). This means international treaties do not automatically become law upon ratification. Researchers, Hovell (2022) and Park et al. (2020), assert that the main proponents of dualism are the positivists whose consensual views around international law naturally led to their conceiving of domestic law as a distinct system. Buergethal et al. (2002) purport that the dualist approach provides the opportunity for states to establish a legal regime that suits the state's unique circumstances. The practical disadvantages of dualism are diverse because there is always the danger that the national and the international legal situation drift apart due to national-centric interpretation, unincorporated treaties and the latitude of the national legislator in the sense of their willingness to incorporate the treaties (Lusanjo, 2013).

In the specific context of South Africa, the state follows a dualistic approach (Phooko, 2018 & Schlemmer, 2004). As elaborated earlier in the case of dualism, treaties are not automatically adopted but rather follow a dual process involving the role of the legislation. As such, treaties are not directly implemented within the state without parliamentary approval, as stated in the national law under Section 231(4) of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa states:

Any international agreement becomes law in the Republic when it is enacted into law by national legislation, but a self-executing provision of an agreement that has been approved by Parliament is law in the Republic unless it is inconsistent with the Constitution or an Act of Parliament (Republic of South Africa, 1996)

As reflected above, the domestication of international treaties is finalised by the approval of the parliament. The statutory enactment of international law in domestic law is the final step in the procedure triggering the applicability of international law in national law (Phooko, 2018; Mutubwa, 2019). In addition, Section 233 further mandates that courts should prioritise reasonable interpretations of laws that align with international law (Khangala, 2024), as it offers an unambiguous framework for interpretation. Section 39 of the Constitution also specifies that in interpreting the Bill of Rights, a court, tribunal, or forum is required to consider international law and may also consider foreign law. This suggests that the consideration of international law is obligatory.

From the above discussion, one can allude to the fact that domestication ensures that international human rights standards that protect children's rights are not just symbolic but legally binding and actionable within the country. This then allows for a wider definition of what domestication should look like. It can be concluded on that basis that domestication ought to extend beyond policy, case law and legislation. It must go a step further and be seen in active implementation through inclusive programmes, community-based interventions, among others (Kilkell & Liefwaard, 2019).

Research findings and discussion

To determine the extent of domestication of the CRC in the local communities in the Eastern Cape province, the study focused on key themes, including programs to promote the implementation of the CRC, the scope and nature of engagement on children's rights issues, challenges and solutions for the basic education sector.

Programmes to promote the implementation of the CRC

The participant responses certified that there were four main programmes implemented to support the CRC in the Eastern Cape province. These include children's rights awareness, family visit programmes, expert assistance and training workshops.

As indicated in Figure 1, 15 participating organisations indicated that children's rights awareness was their pivotal programme. This was reflected below:

So that we see the child as a holistic person, and not only looking at natural development versus just ticking boxes and then making things move. One of the things that critical programs have done is called "Bridges of Peace". The outcome of it was that we're trying to get children from an early age to understand, like, the concepts of empathy, Ubuntu and diversity (Participant 7, Educator, Alice).

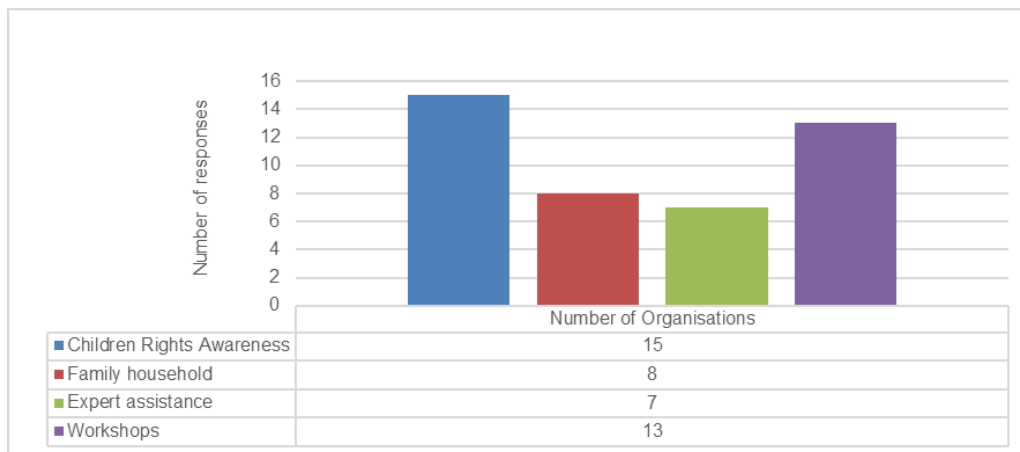


Figure 1: Programmes promoting children’s rights. Source: Compiled by the researcher

The response presents one of the key programmes on basic education, which helps to deal with the issues of discrimination in the Eastern Cape province. Mahaye (2018) asserts that “Education must create a consciousness among children to encourage and enable them to think positively”. The concepts of empathy, ubuntu and diversity are taught at a young age through the use of play-based programmes.

That is approximately 94,000 children. We have already trained 800 ECD Heads. There are 2350 classrooms in the Eastern Cape. We have already trained 1000 this year. In the next month or so, the other 400 will be trained, and they will start to implement it in their classrooms. Next year. We’re going to treat the other 1350 because we have created a pretty program that is replicable (Participant 10, NGO, Queens Town).

As regards children’s rights, some schools and NGOs conducted training on children’s rights, covering areas such as violence against children, discrimination, and cultural traditional practices forced on children, such as Ukuthwala² and illegal initiation practices. The Eastern Cape province is prone to several cultural practices which violate the rights of the child (Kugara et al., 2017; Mwambene & Sloth-Nielsen, 2011).

Scope of community and NGO engagement

Helliker (2006) contends that the role of NGOs includes empowering and capacitating grassroots communities. The presentation below reflects on the responses from the schools and NGOs.

Figure 2 indicates that 75% of the participants indicated that they engage with the community and NGOs on basic education initiatives for OVC. As stated by Roodt (2001), participation denotes an active connection between NGOs and the community on outcomes that affect their lives. The dynamics of community in this research included the involvement of family members, guardians, community leaders, traditional leaders, and community members at large.

In contrast, only 25% responded that they do not have direct contact with either the community or NGOs. These were, in most cases, communities in the most rural communities of the Eastern Cape province; for example, Matatiele, Nqanqarhu, and Nkwenkwezi, which had limited access to any NGOs working to support OVCs in their area.

² Cultural practise involves abducting young girls (below the age of consent) into forced marriages

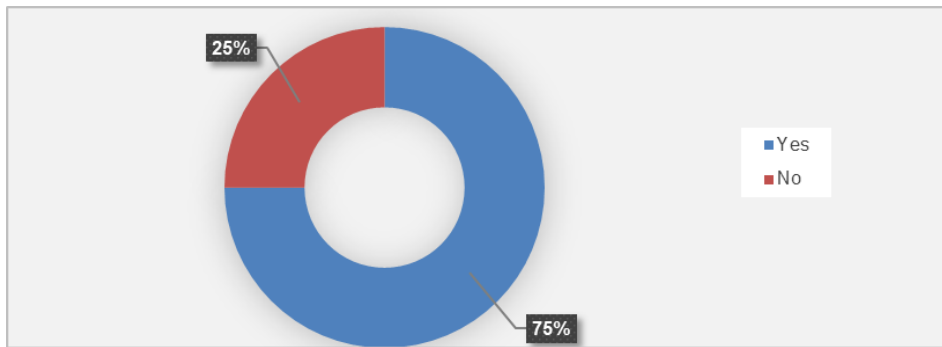


Figure 2: Engagement with community and NGO. Source: Compiled by the researcher

Nature of community and NGO engagement

McGee (2009) establishes that engagement refers more to public participation, which includes different ways that individuals engage in social activities with the capacity to take part in the decision-making process. This critical process promotes the active participation of community members.

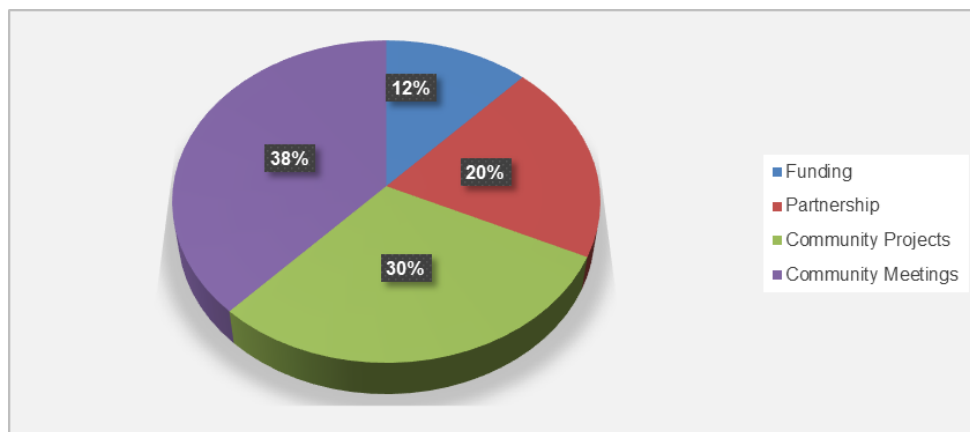


Figure 3: Nature of engagement. Source: Compiled by the researcher

The findings showed four main methods of engagement between NGOs and the community; namely, funding, partnership, community projects and meetings. The most prominent form of engagement was in the form of community meetings, constituting 38% of responses. This was referenced by a participant:

Sometimes we have, even through churches, parents hosting some workshops and information sessions about inclusive education for disabilities. So, we have different avenues of trying to reach our target audience (Participant 4, Community Leader, Alice).

These meetings were used to promote and educate participants on the rights of the child, and included traditional chiefs, community leaders, and teachers who also form part of the community. Researchers have suggested that there is a rising demand for community leaders in decision-making and government accountability (Barbaro, 2006; Herriman, 2011).

In addition, the participants reflected that 30% of their engagement was in the form of community projects. According to Baciu et al. (2017), the engagement process should create a shared vision

between the community and partners to benefit the community equitably. In support of this view, a participant indicated that:

Then, in January 2020, we facilitated the donation and installation of 160 streetlights in the township. So, the first time they had light, that was a very significant project for people living in the township, because they now see and night and feel safer. We collaborate with our local collaborators; they guide me on the projects to implement (Participant 12, Community leader, Mdantsane).

The participant highlighted the role of the community through the installation of streetlights to help create a safe learning environment when travelling to and from school. Another participant responded:

And then we work with the community to support the children with a healthy snack or first bread. And then every child gets a hot lunch. So, there's like a stew with soy. And there are always veggies in it. There's always protein in it. So yeah, they all get a hot lunch. And then in the hostel, kids get food (Participant 3, NGO, King Williams Town).

The example above demonstrates engagement with the community. The response showed how the organisation is continuously working with the community to support the OVC at their organisation to provide a meal for each child. These efforts are significant as Hall and Sambu (2017) indicate that 60% of children below 6 years' experience poverty, and half of them are exposed to food poverty.

Engagement with government

The aspect of engagement with the state, through provincial government institutions, is critical to this research, as the nature of engagement helps to express the extent of domestication of a treaty. Significantly, 98% of the participants stated that they have had engagement with the government, but as reflected in this research, the efforts have not translated to access to basic education.

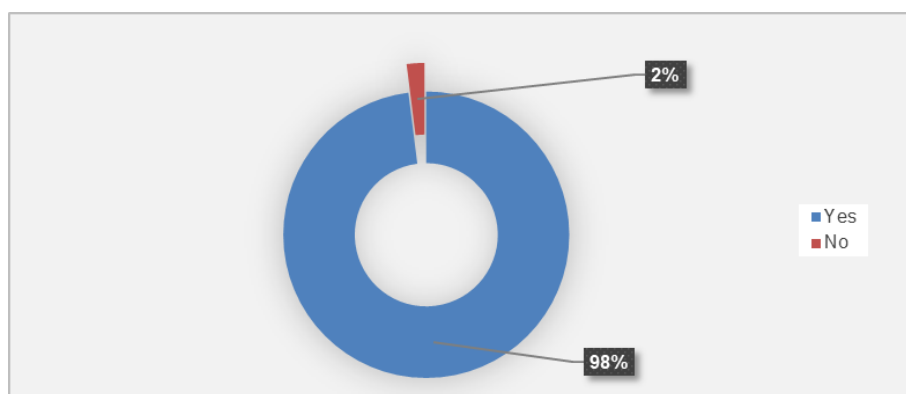


Figure 4: Engagement with Government Departments. Source: Compiled by the researcher

Significantly, the guidelines on periodic reports encourage governments to work closely with NGOs and the community in implementing the CRC, as articulated in Article 44(1)³ of the CRC

³ Article 44(1) of the CRC states: States Parties undertake to submit to the Committee, through the Secretary-General of the United Nations, reports on the measures they have adopted which give effect to the rights recognized herein and, on the progress, made on the enjoyment of those rights

and the guidelines from the CRC Committee.⁴ This is in the form of various forms such as policy feedback, administration, government agents and financial assistance. Only 2% of responses reflected no engagement with the government; these were either organisations that claimed they did not require government assistance or had given up working with the government, as there was no progress.

Nature of government engagement with the community and NGO

This engagement denotes the main roles of the government working with either the community or NGO to support OVC. In this section, the challenges and progress are detailed. The diagram below reflects these roles: namely, administration, policy feedback, periodic visits and expert assistance.

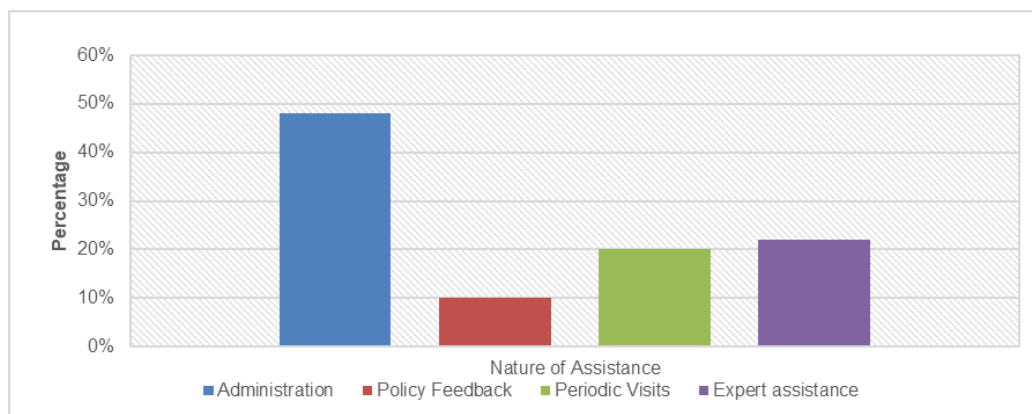


Figure 5: Nature of Government Engagement. Source: Compiled by the researcher

The responses from the participants indicated that 48% of primary engagement with the government was for administrative purposes. This involves either the registration of organisations or the registration of schools with the Department of Education. This also includes constant communication on plans, programmes and activities. In some instances, approval should be requested from the established government institutions' implementation:

Also, we engage with city parks in some programs when we need to use public space. In summary, we do try to engage them at different stages and levels as well (Participant 18, Community leader, Seymour).

In addition, other participants stated that:

Where we identify issues with a child that need to be addressed by the Department. I can say we are successful because when we started, we were working with ECD centres that were not registered with the Department of Social Development. We had identified 42 of them when we started, and currently have 18 ECD centres successfully registered (Participant 15, Government representative, Bisho).

However, only 10% of the participants mentioned the role of policy engagement and feedback with the government. In terms of the domestication of the CRC, this should be the principal form of engagement, scrutinising basic education policies and providing feasible legislative solutions. An example of policy feedback stated that:

⁴ OHCHR (2005) states that "[t]he States Parties should provide information on cooperation with CSOs, including non-governmental organizations and children's and youth groups, with regard to implementation of all aspects of the Convention".

We received the draft of the transport policy, I believe, last year, and we commented on it. Now, we are trying to campaign to ensure that the final draft is published (Participant 21, NGO, Fort Beaufort).

In the case above, dialogue was established on the school scholar transport policy to create a safe network of transport for all children and overcome barriers to education. Corruption Watch (2013) documents the transport challenges in the Eastern Cape province, which include backlogs in transport provision, and unroadworthy vehicles and roads. In addition, Machard (2014) and Mahlaba (2014) reflect on severe scholar transport issues which require immediate attention.

Furthermore, poor policy feedback and engagement with schools and communities have significant repercussions for the domestication of the CRC. Constitutionally, provincial departments are responsible for implementing the policy by translating it into such action as they, as implementers, consider best within their unique contexts (Sookal, 2005). It is for this reason that sufficient time must be invested in planning the implementation stages which follow policy initiation.

The intergovernmental nature of the South African education system, as reflected in Section 231 of the Constitution of South Africa, shows that implementation occurs at the provincial and institutional level while policy is at the national level (Republic of South Africa). Policies are therefore always mediated through minor or major adjustments within the context in which they are implemented, and are changed in the process (Fowler, 2000). Having recognised the power of implementers, it would be appropriate for policymakers to anticipate implementation problems to strategise, so as to minimise or influence the agents of the implementation process (Hogwood & Gun, 1984; Sabatier & Mazmanian, 1979).

Outcome of government engagement on the CRC

The aspect of government engagement postulates that there is continuous interaction between the government and NGOs or the community. Unfortunately, 62% of the issues raised during engagement with the government were not addressed from 2019 to 2021. These ranged from the transport scholar transport, nutrition programme and school infrastructure projects.

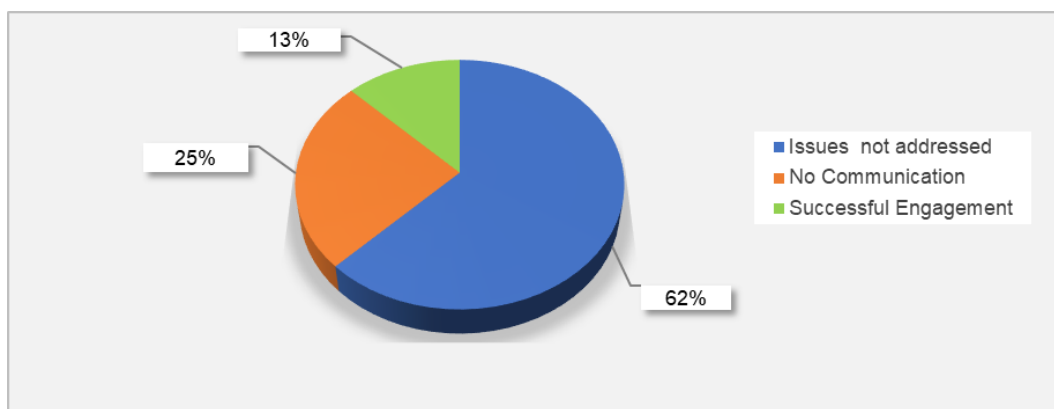


Figure 6: Status of Government Engagement. Source: Compiled by the researcher

Notably, the participants indicated that grant backlogs in 2019 were not a result of the COVID-19 pandemic in South Africa, as the first case of COVID-19 in South Africa was only recorded on the 5th of March in 2020 (Giandhari et al., 2021). However, COVID-19 was often used as a pretext for the poor state of basic education in the Eastern Cape province. The following were some of the key responses from the participants:

We talked to them about but it did not come to fruition because we have been given so many promises, but those promises are not putting anything on the table. Because even the students who come to school can be hungry, and we have to find something for them to eat in the morning. But imagine if the student has to be with us till 3 pm or 4 pm, they will still need something to eat (Participant 26, Educator, Middledrift).

In addition, the issue of poor communication was expressed by 25% of the participants. This mainly included instances of submitted reports with no feedback, no follow-up visits, and continuously rescheduled meetings with no attendance.

But in terms of our agreement with the Department, we are supposed to meet Quarterly, where we can raise issues that some of the schools are having. And this year (2021), we haven't had those Quarterly meetings. They have always been postponed. Concerning the Norms and Standards law, we are supposed to produce a yearly report of progress on infrastructure. So, we analyse reports. And if there are discrepancies, for example, in 2019, the Department did a copy-and-paste of the report. It is the same as the one they sent last year. And also, there is a lot of analysis of the reports, and there are a lot of discrepancies between what is sent to Parliament and what is in the Department reports (Participant 30, NGO, East London).

The remarks above provide a bleak picture of the lack of policy engagement and implementation. The participants indicated that dialogue meetings were continuously postponed and parliamentary portfolio responses contained copy-and-paste responses, which fail to reflect the issues on the ground. The “*copy-and-paste*”⁵ culture of reporting from Government departments has been noted in several United Nations CRC reports, which continuously indicate in their recommendations that these issues have to be attended to.

So, if you dig deep into your reports, even something as simple as sanitation, you will get different numbers across the different reports. One of the biggest or saddest things, I guess, for me is how, you know, if you look at social media, you know, all the schools that are highlighted are the ones that are in good form and everything looks all nice in 10 years, you'd never say that we have schools that have pit latrine toilets. So, for me, it's just a little sad that we were fixated on optics and not producing tangible results in education in the province (Participant 8, Educator, Mthatha).

The outcome of the successful engagement was expressed by only 13% of the participants. These highlighted that, to some extent, the issues raised have been or are being addressed.

Challenges to access to basic education

Cristobal-Fransi et al. (2020) state that primary schools in the Eastern Cape province are isolated and typically underdeveloped, and are characterised by widespread poverty, poor infrastructure for sanitation and lack of electricity. In their report titled “*Energy Racism*”, Maggott et al. (2022) refer to a systematic lack of electricity in the rural areas in the Eastern Cape province. The responses from the research reflected some of the challenges in the Eastern Cape province.

5 A form of reporting where no due diligence is given to details

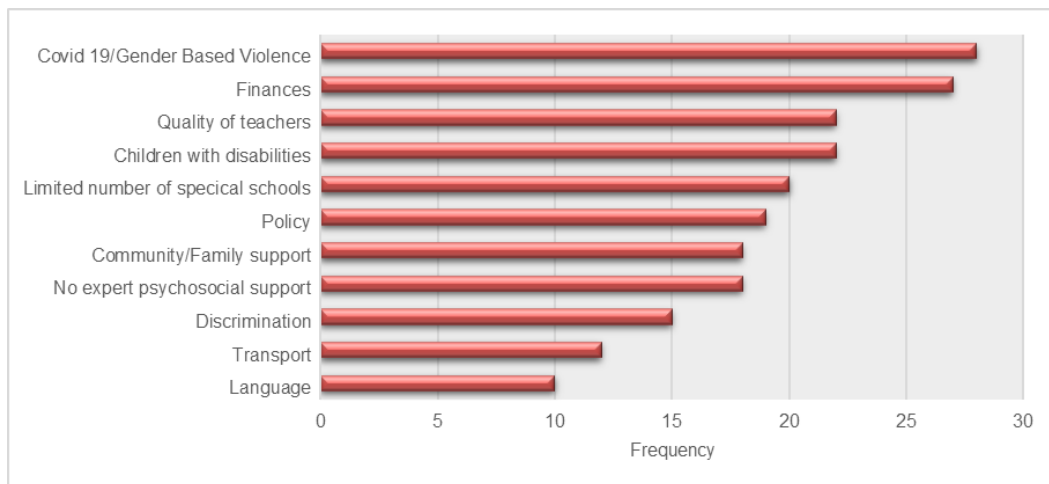


Figure 7: Challenges in Basic Education. Source: Compiled by the researcher

The study was conducted at the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic; accordingly, 28 participants mentioned that the pandemic was the major challenge, as most of the schools in the rural areas did not have access to online learning. Dube (2020) remarks that to this end, rural learners and teachers are seemingly helpless on how to approach online learning during the COVID-19 lockdown measures; therefore, the chasm between the “*haves and the have-nots*” gets ever deeper, especially when considering the socio-economic inequalities in South Africa.

It is worth taking note of the link between Covid 19 and the influx of gender-based violence (GBV) related cases, the psychological impact of GBV increased child vulnerability. In the case of South Africa, Uzobo and Ayinmoro (2021) state that Covid 19 and GBV are a “*double pandemic*”. Research shows that South Africa has one of the highest rates of GBV in the world; for example, every three hours on average, every three hours a woman is murdered, either through assault or rape (Sibanda-Moyo et al., 2017). On a global scale, WHO (2020) estimates that annually, 12.1 in every 100,000 women are victims of GBV in South Africa, which is five times the global average. Concerning OVC, this shows that many children are suffering, unnoticed, from exposure to such an extent of trauma and abuse.

The participants reflected on various challenges, and of worth taking note were the challenges faced by children with special needs. As reflected, 22 participants stated that the major issue is that there are few special needs schools, and in most cases, the children have to travel long distances to the nearest school.

We don't have enough schools, very minimal, especially for children with disabilities. Since we are here in Port Alfred, you will find that the nearest centre is far away (Participant 35, Community leader, Port Alfred).

For special schooling here, we only have 2 Government special schools in Gqeberha. Therefore, you can understand there's a massive waiting list, or sometimes, you know a child is on a waiting list. And obviously, there are specific criteria which you need to meet to be placed in a special school. Most children, or you know, are on waiting lists in stages. Not enough special schools to accommodate all our learners' needs. The waiting list of up to 550 learners per annum. Over 2500 children are still at home because they are intellectually challenged (Participant 11, Government representative, Bisho).

According to Miles (2000), inclusive education is concerned with removing all barriers to learning and with the participation of all students vulnerable to exclusion and marginalisation.

The Education White Paper 6: Special Needs Education: Building an Inclusive Education and Training System is the key framework for supporting an inclusive education system in South Africa. Despite the efforts to domesticate the CRC through the White Paper 6, the implementation of inclusive education in South Africa is slow and only partial (Donohue & Bornman, 2014; Dalton et al., 2012).

Conclusion and recommendations

The provisions in Section 231(4) of the Constitution of South Africa provide a comprehensive framework for the domestication of the CRC and other ratified treaties. However, despite these legal reforms, access to basic education, especially for OVC in rural areas in South Africa, is a form of “*silent exclusion*” whereby their rights are highly publicised but continuously violated. Whilst progress has been made to promote engagement and awareness on issues related to children’s rights, communities are still plagued with systematic inequalities, which manifest through a lack of educational resources, poor infrastructure, a limited number of available special needs schools, and experts trained to assist children with disabilities. Despite these challenges, the role of community leaders, NGOs working together with educators, has been critical to policymakers being accountable and to translating the policies emanating from the CRC into pragmatic projects to promote the right to basic education.

Recommendations for further research can explore other critical areas in relation to OVC and basic education, such as inclusive education for children with disabilities. Therefore, an analysis of the implementation of other relevant treaties, such as the CRPD, will provide a clearer analysis of the relationship between the treaty and domestic policies on children with special needs in South Africa. Furthermore, in line with decolonising knowledge production on children’s rights, specific research on African treaties, such as the ACRWC on children’s rights, will be highly beneficial, as it will reflect on the challenges and progress made towards promoting children’s rights. African perspectives will be crucial to reflect on the progress made towards the realisation of the children’s rights, including prevalent issues including child marriages and harmful practices in Africa.

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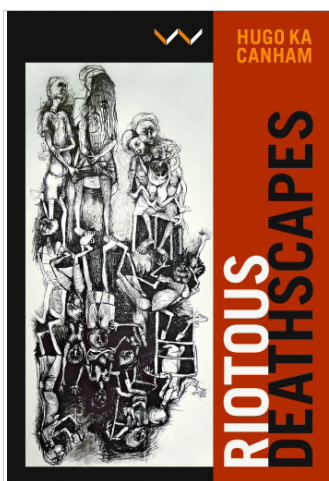
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Critical Narrative, Storytelling, and Black Psychosocial Analysis of Mpondoland

A review of Hugo Canham, *Riotous Deathscapes*



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The book 'Riotous Deathscapes' by Hugo Ka Canham proposes Mpondo Theory as both a black and indigenous way of understanding life and death. Canham writes with a deep sense of emotion. These are emotions that reveal the author's deep connections with Mpondoland. One is not surprised by this, seeing how the author has previously written on subjects such as protest and black rage in prior works (see Canham, 2017, 2018; 2024).

In essence, the theoretical and methodological approaches this book embodies qualify it as a protest text; one that is written with a deep sense of rage and all other indiscernible emotions. Canham steps into history, the present and the future, through the Mpondo heuristic as an intervention that can enable a deeper understanding of the Mpondoland people's resilience and survival. The book offers a gateway into alternative yet creative ways of thinking and writing, from a community existing at the margins of not only South Africa but the world. In this marginalised community, the natural world is considered a site of being and of resistance, yet also offering a place for the living and the ancestors to connect.

Canham's book is a firm contribution to black studies. In the book's introduction titled 'Mpondo Orientations', Canham provides an account of their connections with Mpondoland. Here, an account of the dire living circumstances from disease, alcoholism, crime, unemployment and poor infrastructure is highlighted. A personal recollection of how Canham's brother was involved in a car accident that led to amputation was, for the author, a moment of Kaffirization; that moment when the doctor places a plaster instead of suturing a vein (Canham, 2023). The author describes this moment as an instance demonstrating how rural life can be so cheap, 'it goes to the hospital to die' (p. 3). Captured in 'Mpondo Orientations' are events such as multiple dyings, among a defiant group of people who exist within temporalities that rub against colonial time. Canham writes with sophistication but remembers to bring everything home. Mpondo theory is described in this introduction as 'A way of seeing, knowing, being, and living with and against sedimented devastation' (Canham, 2023, p. 6). It involves intentionally looking backwards, presently and ahead.

In the first chapter, named 'Watchful Ocean Observer,' Canham interprets the ocean and mountain landscapes of Mpondoland as vibrant accounts of black, indigenous, and castaway histories. Employing the approach of looking askance at surfaces to reveal overlooked narratives, he explores how Mpondo identity arises from intricate relational connections among San and Khoekhoe forebears,

Bantu communities, enslaved Africans and Asians, as well as European shipwreck survivors. By exploring family history, oral traditions, and the interpretation of landscapes, he illustrates that the concept of blackness in Mpondoland is fluid, interconnected, and influenced by centuries of living together, escaping, integrating, and resisting. This chapter questions strict racial classifications, critiques colonial stories of purity and disappearance, and reinterprets the shipwrecks along the Wild Coast as spaces for interaction, shared change, and different ways of existing as human beings. In the end, Canham reintroduces Mpondo theory, this time as a framework for contemplating identity through connections, environment, and ancestral influence, providing a decolonial basis for comprehending African existence beyond the confines of colonial time and racial rigidity.

This idea reverberates into the next chapter. In 'Fortifying Rivers,' Canham explores the concept of Mpondo theory by utilising the imagery of the river, illustrating how water, ritual, and the body serve as avenues of resistance, memory, and strength against the forces of colonial and neoliberal oppression. Canham intricately connects three significant occurrences: the sinking of the SS Mendi, the prophetic journey and state oppression of Nontetha Nkwenkwe, and the Mpondo Revolt of 1960, to demonstrate how communities navigate trauma through ancestral cleansing rituals, collective resistance, and a worldview where the physical, spiritual, and ecological realms are intertwined. By engaging in a critical examination, the chapter reinterprets rivers and oceans as repositories of Black mortality and resilience, conceptualises fortification rituals as physical expressions of political action, and emphasises a queer interconnectedness that disrupts colonial temporality, conventional identities, and capitalist constructions of reality. Ultimately, the chapter contends that the life-making practices of the Mpondo, encompassing ritual, revolt, memory, and cosmology, represent a profound method of opposing Kaffirization and envisioning Black freedom throughout history.

Chapter 3, titled 'Riotous Spirits-Ukuphuka Izizwe', delves into Izizwe, which are ancestral family spirits the author considers pivotal in the formation of identity, the process of healing, and the preservation of continuity in Mpondo culture. Canham illustrates how these entities ascend during pivotal life events, leading individuals towards knowledge, compassion, and a sense of ritual connection. The chapter weaves together narratives of family migrations, illness, dreams, and a calling to spiritual work, showcasing how communities enliven daily existence, challenge colonial definitions of religion and psychology, and connect individuals to a vibrant lineage that transcends generations, landscapes, and physical forms.

In chapter 4 titled 'Levitating Graves and Ancestral Frequencies,' Canham delves into the ancestral aspect of Mpondo theory, illustrating how the Mpondo community perceives death as a source of life, connection, and enduring presence rather than mere absence. Employing a frequential, multisensory approach, Canham interprets Mpondo graves through sonic, visual, and haptic vibrations to explore how the deceased continue to influence black existence, memory, and social connections. By focusing on these nuanced frequencies instead of overarching stories, the chapter uncovers how Mpondo's deathscapes resonate with ancestral energy and shed light on histories of violence, continuity, and potential. This emphasis on the continuity between life and death among the Mpondo is an important rehashing of the meaning of life and death in black studies.

Chapter 4 is titled 'Rioting Hills and Occult Insurrections.' This chapter focuses on the hill as a significant ancestral and political location within Mpondo theory. The chapter explores how Mpondo communities engage in survivance, a manifestation of Black Indigenous existence that defies erasure amidst death, neoliberal violence, and historical dispossession. Through ukwakumkanya, Canham interprets occult practices, cannibalism, vampire narratives, and the violence of everyday markets not as signs of collapse, but as intricate strategies for survival, resilience, and liberation in the face of economic marginalisation and the harsh realities imposed on Black existence. Ultimately, the chapter uncovers how the Mpondo community manoeuvres through the ongoing interplay of life

and death, employing ancestral wisdom and unconventional methods of consumption to affirm their existence in a world designed to erase them.

In 'Future Dreamscapes: An Afterword,' Canham emphasises how the book is not in the past, but in the now. The afterword is a coming home of sorts. Canham reflects on their grandmother's dementia and how it represents a longing for her childhood home, one she has not revisited for at least 70 years. Here, Canham leaves us with a provocation. One described in the following words: "Tonight, she [my mother] will not sleep. Grief will wrack her body, pinning her to the floor. Accompanied by the wind's Mpondo blues, I lay awake and before me spreads a vast deathscape of ancestors who demand witnessing' (Canham, 2023, p. 211). Overall, Canham's book is a critical mix of narrative, storytelling and black psychosocial analysis of his roots in Mpondoland, and how, in black being, exists a productive pro-black way of developing theory. In Canham's case, that theory is the Mpondo theory.

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