


Pan-Africanism and Feminism

Possibilities for African Women's Liberation in the 21st Century

Zainab Monisola Olaitan 

Centre for International and Defence Policy,
Queen's University, Canada 
zainab.olaitan@queensu.ca

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Abstract

The systemic underrepresentation of women in politics, gendered economic inequality, high rates of maternal mortality, gender-based violence and femicide are some of the manifestations of the structures of power that limit African women. In the face of these limitations that hinder African women, questions arise about what can be done. Therefore, this article interrogates the possibilities that Pan-Africanism and feminism hold for African women in the 21st century. Using a qualitative methodology and a critical analytical framework, this paper argues that these ideologies can serve as an entry point to engage in consciousness raising for African women to foster their increased representation in society. It recommends the embrace of a Pan-African feminist thinking to liberate African women from restrictive structures of power that inhibit them from full self-actualisation and gender equality.

Keywords: 21st Century, African Women, Feminism, Liberation, Pan-Africanism.

Introduction

Pan-Africanism in the 21st century would have to answer the 'woman' question that it ignored during the era of political decolonisation in Africa. Abbas and Mama (2014) note that the Pan-African struggle for liberation on the African continent treated the 'woman' question as divisive, which led to a

deliberate negligence of the oppression African women faced. The deliberate jettisoning of the woman question not only fuelled the continued oppression of women in Africa but also led to the non-recognition of notable women who were involved in the Pan-Africanist movement, including Olufunmilayo Ransome Kuti, Gambo Sawaba, Andree Blouin, Adelaide Casley-Hayford. One of the most decisive implications is the importation of the colonial legacy of excluding and subjugating African women from the polity, such that they are not participating in the public sphere in post-colonial Africa. Most of the African society is constructed on a patriarchal system that privileges male dominance in public and private decision-making spheres (Tamale 2020). This system is further maintained by religious and cultural norms, traditions that treat women as inferior or secondary in status, the consequence of which manifests across different sectors of society (Mama 2019). The exclusion and underrepresentation of African women from public decision-making is a manifestation of this system. The system upon which this exclusion propagates harmful and restrictive attitudes concerning the place of women in society, results in gender inequality (Olaitan 2023a).

Gender inequality is pervasive in Africa, represented by the underrepresentation of women in public decision-making, the endemic gendered violence women face, and the gendered pay gap. When we discuss the place of African women in politics, for instance, we often have to argue for their increased participation because they are not duly represented in political offices – as of 2024, the average for women’s political representation is below 30% (Africa Barometer 2024). The widening gender pay gap on the continent is affecting the attainment of income equality between men and women workers in the labour sector (OECD 2021).

Several interventions to mitigate against the patriarchal system that inhibits the potential of African women have been implemented. Governments and international organisations have passed laws, adopted affirmative action measures, and ratified international conventions to advance women’s increased participation in the public sphere. For instance, the African Union (AU) adopted the 2003 Protocol to the African Charter on the Rights of Women in Africa to ensure the full participation of women in the public sphere. In 2004, there was a Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality as part of the AU’s commitment towards gender inequality in Africa. However, these measures are yet to yield the desired result due to several factors. For instance, even though African governments all agreed that there was a need

for women to participate in politics, only 45 African countries have targeted quota policies to facilitate this need (Olaitan 2023a). There is a disconnect between policy and action when it comes to addressing the exclusion that women face in Africa. This is because, as Horn (2020: para 1) notes, “systems of power want to stay in power, and they will make sure they stay in power using any means necessary.”

Drawing from the above, it becomes imperative to acknowledge that Africa is faced with another liberation struggle – freedom from restrictive structures of power and for gender equality. This article examines the possibilities that Pan-Africanism and feminism hold for actualising this struggle, considering that these two ideological praxes are integral to engendering gender equality in Africa. By asking, what possibilities does Pan-Africanism and feminism hold for African women in the 21st century? This article engages the nuances that arise from the relationship between Pan-Africanism, feminism, and African women in the 21st century. It utilises a desktop qualitative method and a critical analytical framework as its approach of enquiry and engages Pan-Africanism as both an ideology and a liberation movement to understand how it can aid in achieving gender equality. It presents feminism as a necessary theory and praxis for the dismantling of oppressive structures that limit women as a solution for achieving equality. To look towards Pan-Africanism and feminism creates ground for acknowledging the need for theoretical and practical measures that can address the woes African women are battling

African Women in the 21st Century: Issues and Challenges

The African Gender Equality Index report (2024) notes that while gains have been made in the political and social dimensions towards closing the inequality gap in Africa, these gains are neutered by the regression in the economic and financial spheres. This is because women in Africa continue to face a variety of obstacles that hinder their equal participation across all sectors of society. Women’s rights are frequently violated in both the public and private arenas and in a wide variety of ways (Olaitan and Taiwo 2025). Private violations, such as those involving family, property, and domestic abuse, for which customary law is the relevant legal system and which are frequently viewed as private concerns in which the state should not meddle (OHCHR 2016). The underrepresentation and low participation of women in society are obvious across different spheres of society.

There are high rates of maternal mortality and morbidity that can be attributable to both more distal factors, like gender inequality, and proximal factors, like haemorrhage, sepsis, and unsafe abortion. This includes denying women the autonomy to access sexual and reproductive health, denying them access to contraception, and denying them access to education, particularly sexual health education (OHCHR 2016). It is also tied to more general problems, such as a lack of access to water and sanitation, which are essential for maintaining good health, notably during pregnancy, as well as a lack of proper infrastructure to ensure that women can actually enjoy their health rights. The high rates of maternal mortality and morbidity are a result of weak health systems, gaps in quality of care, such as drug stockouts or insufficient human resources among health professionals. Even after women have access to health facilities, they may still experience issues and unwarranted delays. Due to specific stigmatisation, some populations are discouraged from seeking out sexual and reproductive health care (OHCHR 2016). Despite widespread epidemics in many countries, research has shown that young women are particularly vulnerable to HIV. Structural reasons, including stigma, discrimination, partnerships between young women and older men, which are linked to low condom usage, violence, and other human rights abuses that women experience, contribute to the high HIV incidence and prevalence among women and girls. In addition to making women more susceptible to contracting HIV, these human rights violations also discourage them from using HIV prevention, testing, and treatment services (OHCHR 2016).

Across the world, women's labour force participation is much lower than men's. Despite having similar qualifications, African women are less likely to get employment on the official job market (UN Women 2022). Across all educational levels, men tend to have more career opportunities than women in the workforce, as men outnumber women by 37% among people with a secondary education (UN Women 2022). Ojo and Olaitan (2024:10) contend that the low educational participation of girls in sectors like information and communication technologies, science, technology, engineering, and math, as well as their less frequent use of digital tools, may lead to wider gaps and higher inequality. Often, because of the assumption that technology is only for boys, which is expressed in restrictive societal narratives, girls are prevented from using it. The bulk of informal jobs in Africa are held by women, who also endure low productivity in the agricultural sector (Akpa et.al 2024). They argue that there are significant gender disparities in access to agrarian knowledge

and agricultural training, which impede women's participation in agricultural extension services (ibid:2).

The discussion of women and peacebuilding in Africa frequently centres on the underrepresentation of women in peace processes as well as their agency during conflict and peace. This serves as the foundation for the call for increased women's participation in peace and security. Olaitan (2023b) notes that women's participation in all aspects of peacebuilding in Africa is low. Chauke (2022) argues that just 19% of jobs in the information and communications technology sector are held by women, because women have much less access to employment prospects in the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) sector, and there are fewer women working in these positions. In comparison to their male counterparts, women who are employed in the sector receive low earnings. Malinga (2020) adds that the gender pay gap and gender inequality in the ICT business result in women earning up to 25% less than men in the technology sector. So, unless adequate steps are taken to adopt sustainable digital policies relating to gender, the gender gap will continue to increase in the ICT sector.

A deeply ingrained patriarchal system, in which public decision-making authority is perceived to be the domain of men, is fundamental to the limitations that women face. Sadie (2005) argues that "traditional beliefs and cultural attitudes especially as regards women's roles and status in society remain strong, particularly in rural areas" (cited in Mlambo and Kapingura 2019:5). In most African communities, roles and the distribution of labour are still distinctly gendered. Women find it more challenging to transition from their traditional domestic responsibilities to public roles outside of the home due to these social standards. This is due to the fact that women's gender identity is primarily perceived as having a domestic aspect and prevents women from entering the public domain (Kangas et.al. 2015). A society that prevents the self-actualisation of women is patriarchal because it privileges male dominance and hinges authority in both the private and public spheres on masculinity.

Pan-Africanism: An Ideology and A Movement for Liberation

Adi (2018:2) defines Pan-Africanism as "the efforts to promote the political, socio-economic and cultural unity, emancipation and self-reliance of Africa

and its diaspora.” Geiss (1967:720) defines it “as an intellectual or political movement among Africans or people of African descent that saw Africa, Africans, and people of African descent as a unit.” It includes ideas that see Africa as a whole and support its political independence, the economic, technological, and social modernisation of African society through the establishment of some political unification or close political cooperation among African countries. Nangwanya (2016) asserts that Pan-Africanism is an ideology and a movement that encourages Africans to work together globally in order to free themselves from racial oppression, (neo)colonial dominance, and imperialism.

Africa is at the centre of Pan-Africanist ideology, with a focus on both the continent and a global Africa. Adetula et al. (2020) corroborate this notion by explaining that Pan-Africanism is a movement, an ideology, and a geopolitical initiative aimed at emancipating and unifying Africans and members of the African diaspora worldwide. The idea that an independent and enhanced economic, social, and political African destiny may be built via unification is at the core of this statement. At the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) inauguration event in Addis Ababa in 1963, the first president of Ghana, Kwame Nkrumah, said: “We must unite to achieve the full liberation of our continent” (Adetula et.al 2020:1).

Pan-Africanism’s history as a movement to promote cooperation and understanding between people of African descent dates back to the mid-19th century/early 20th century. However, it was not until after World War I that the movement started to have the ultimate goal of agitating for the liberation and self-government of enslaved and colonised African people. Logan (1962) traces its history to 1900 when a Young West Indian Barrister, H. Sylvester Williams, initiated the concept for the Pan-African Conference, which convened in London in July 1900. Adebajo (2021:4) explains that the concept of Pan-Africanism developed amid the sweltering oppression of slavery in the Caribbean and the Americas and was transported back to Africa by its students who went to study in the US and Europe. And when the struggle for Africa’s independence and decolonisation gained momentum, the political side of Pan-Africanism experienced a significant upheaval. The history of the Pan-Africanist movement must include the Pan-African Congress that was held in Paris in 1919 as part of efforts to formalise Pan-Africanism in the early twentieth century. A number of well-known African nationalists, including Kwame Nkrumah and Jomo Kenyatta, were instrumental in the success of

the fifth Pan-African Congress, which was held in Manchester, England, in 1945. Adetula et.al. (2020) report that this conference signalled the transition of Pan-Africanism's leadership from African-Americans to Africans. It goes without saying that the early formulations and expressions of Pan Africanism occurred mostly in North America and the Caribbean, outside of Africa.

The term Pan-Africanism describes a philosophy that advances the notion of a unified Africa and the people of African descent. Although the ideas changed throughout the course of many historical periods, the emphasis on the unity or oneness of Africa persisted. Malisa and Nhengeze (2018) argue that the growth of Pan-Africanism as an intellectual movement connected to the ambitions of people of African heritage in many regions of the world has been largely possible in part because its conceptualisation took place at universities. Armah (2010) posits that while Pan-Africanism is both a philosophical and intellectual movement, it was also a political movement or organisation with the aim of liberating and uniting Africa, particularly in the wake of slavery and the introduction of modernity. Fergus (2010) points out that Pan-Africanism was a concept that enabled previously enslaved Africans to see their similarities as victims of racism and imperialism. In other words, they understood that their similar racial lineage and origin on the same continent had made them the subject of slavery; hence, Pan-Africanists equated freedom with the African continent. According to Gebrekidan (2012), Pan-Africanism encouraged individuals to struggle for the emancipation of their native continent of Africa. The fundamental idea was that, wherever they lived in the world, individuals of African descent went through identical circumstances. Slavery, racial injustice, and colonialism were a few of these experiences (Padmore 1956; Malcolm 1992).

Tondi (2005) states that there are several themes that can be seen in the development of Pan-Africanist thought and practice throughout the 20th century: Pan-Africanism as a means for people of African descent living abroad to return to Africa; Pan-Africanism as a sign of liberation; and Pan-Africanism as a call for the political unification of the continent. Maimela (2013) argues that it is a deliberate admission of the reality that, in the end, states cannot be fully united without the people, the overthrow of tribalism and limited territorial nationalism in Africa, freedom of movement for all people, and the restoration of the African personality.

As a movement, manifestations in Africa show that Pan-Africanism was used by African elites as a unifying factor during the early post-colonial state-building era, and it did indeed serve as a focal point for anti-imperial agitations and nationalist ambitions at the time. As African states gained political independence from colonial domination, Pan-Africanism's worth as a liberation philosophy became clear (Adetula et.al. 2020). Further embrace of Pan-Africanism is still dominant on the African continent as a tool for understanding and reacting against neo and post-colonial struggles of African people. It has been used to garner solidarity amongst African people and the diaspora against hegemonic Eurocentric and imperialist empires that seek to exploit Africa and its resources. The greater call for unity amongst Africans and Africans across the world is seen as a foundational base for the agitations against these structures.

While Pan-Africanism was instrumental to the political decolonisation of Africa, the movement treated the 'woman' question with ignorance and silence. This silence explains why notable figures in the movement are often men, while the women are left forgotten. The works of women like Andréé Blouin, Olufunmilayo Ransome Kuti, and Adelaide Casely-Hayford are instrumental to the success of the Pan-Africanist movement for liberation in Africa. Andréé Blouin was an adviser to prominent liberation figures like Patrice Lumumba, Kwame Nkrumah, Sekou Toure and was at the forefront of the struggle for political decolonisation in Africa, yet her story is rarely told in everyday history. Olufunmilayo Ransome Kuti was an important figure in Nigeria's agitation for independence and also a prominent member of the Pan-Africanist movement. Adelaide Casely-Hayford was an active member of the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), one of the influential Pan-Africanist organisations. These women were not just mothers and wives; they were critical members of the Pan-Africanist movement and were at the forefront of the struggle for liberation and political decolonisation in Africa. In responding to the woman's question, Pan-Africanism must acknowledge the agency and agentic role of women in liberation struggles.

Feminism: A Theory and Praxis for Women's Liberation.

Feminism is an ideology and movement that advocates for gender equality. It argues for equal rights for all genders in all spheres of life, including politics, decision-making, employment, and domestic responsibilities. Ackerly

(2000:17) notes that “feminism is a movement and scholarship that centres the lives of women in order to expose and challenge gendered power dynamics in society”. Vukoicic (2013:33) adds that “feminism is driven by the individual and collective experiences of women and is premised on the idea that patriarchal values in society lead to discrimination against women in both public and private life”. To eliminate this prejudice against women requires changes in the social, political, or cultural order (Jones and Budig 2008). Women’s rights activists have drawn attention to the historical assumption that there is an inherent difference between men and women and have examined how this difference has been given distinct social, political, and economic connotations in various countries and civilisations. They argue that one of these differentiations is that women have been given an inferior or secondary status in society because of the assumed natural sexual differences (Olaitan 2023b).

Asnani (2020) notes that feminism includes several socio-cultural and political groups that work toward achieving equality between men and women in terms of rights. Raj and Davidson (2014) argue that women do not have the same rights and opportunities that men do due to different societal restrictions. Anderson (2016:40) asserts that “feminist thought offers an approach for assessing social as well as environmental experiences of groups and individuals, regardless of sex or gender, while suggesting ways to change social and environmental factors. It also attempts to highlight proposed interventions for women’s intrapersonal and interpersonal concerns; millions of women have had their lives impacted by it”. Ratna (2004) observes that feminism is a means for women to advocate for their rights and that conflicts between stronger and weaker groups are intimately tied to gender differences. In order to promote gender equality, feminism has become a suitable theory and method (Enyew and Mihrete 2018). While there are different variants of feminism which permeate into different sociological, political, and moral philosophies, it focuses primarily on the economic, political, and social disparities that women face (Adawo et al., 2011). Gender is the primary focus of feminist theorising, which aims to advance gender equality in the world (Kaur and Nagaich 2019).

A wide range of specific actions and targets fall under the central concept of feminism. For instance, it aims to grant women the right to pursue employment and achieve financial and economic independence (Malinowska 2020). It also denotes institutional and community-based efforts to eliminate

gender-based discrimination in society. It serves to provide women equal rights in all spheres of life, including the economy, politics, and society, and it seeks to uncover the hidden reality of male dominance and female subordination and servitude in the world (Brunell & Burkett, 2019). Application of feminist theory to peace and security echoes the argument that women are on par with men in society, and that they are not just the victims of conflict but also active participants in peacebuilding (Olaitan 2023b). Holistically, feminism promotes a larger advocacy for women's emancipation from all forms of oppression, financial independence, the right to make informed decisions about their bodies, and the freedom to choose their own lifestyles and sexual orientation (Learner 1994). Most feminist variants advocate for the abolition of gender biases, sexual disparities, limitations, and oppression that women experience (Bryson 2007).

Feminist research and participation have perhaps been able to stake a claim in the global political and development debate more than any other social movement (Ahikire 2008). Notably, African feminism, which is a variant of feminism that focuses on the lived experiences of African women, has achieved significant achievements because of recurrent surges in scholarships and activism. When projected into the broader development field, the capillary influence of African feminist ideas is much more obvious. The significant gender rhetoric that now permeates African development discussions is a result of feminist agitations. Ahikire argues further that "this is demonstrated by the fact that some of feminism's most liberal offshoots, such as 'women in development', 'gender equality', and 'gender mainstreaming', have acquired acceptance and become standard practice in most national governmental arenas" (ibid:10). For instance, the policy discourse of the AU demonstrates the effectiveness of feminist advocacy. Feminism's effect may be seen in documents like the African Union (AU) Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa, which calls for a 50:50 gender balance in politics (Ahikire 2014:11).

Towards a Pan-African Feminist Pathway for African Women

Theorising Pan-Africanism within the context of feminism allows us to envision how African women can agitate for their liberation from the structural and institutional obstacles that hinder them. For instance, Osman (2014:43) states that "Pan-Africanism has inspired women's movements in Africa and generated

debate around many issues such as the role of women in the political process of their countries and the emancipation of women". This further attests to its importance for women's liberation from restrictive power structures. At the same time, understanding feminism as an equality-focused theory that seeks to address systems of power that discriminate against women consolidates these efforts. Therefore, both these concepts hold possibilities for African women to liberate themselves from oppressive systems of power. The possibilities they hold would be discussed around two themes - consciousness raising and advocating for their increased representation in the public sphere through gender mainstreaming strategies.

Consciousness raising: Towards a Pan-African feminist movement

The juxtaposition of Pan-Africanism and feminism can legitimise calls for the consolidation of a Pan-African feminism that caters to the issues that women in Africa face. This Pan-African feminist movement can borrow from African feminism(s), Afro-feminism and other feminisms that are focused on the struggles of African women. Atanga (2013:305) states that "African feminism considers the history and diversity of Africa, as well as colonialism. It is focused on the realities of the difficulties that African women face daily, which might be linked to historical injustices". Steady (2000, cited in Atanga 2013:307) argues that feminism is a method African woman have created and used to fight for their survival. She maintains that "feminism is the neglect of male protection and the development of resourcefulness and independence. Many of the black women in Africa and the Diaspora have developed these characteristics, though not always by choice". Tamale (2024) posits that African feminism provides a pathway for addressing contemporary challenges that African women face in the new normal.

Ahikire (2014:8) argues that "the crucial part that gender plays in Africa's underdevelopment has been publicised due to African feminism". African feminism is understood to have its roots in several other movements; the colonial and post-colonial histories of Africa, African nationalist movements, as well as later developments and sociopolitical influences, are among them. The attention on gender equality has had the effect of putting patriarchal norms and ideals under some pressure. The discourse on African feminism allows for the utilisation of feminism based on African identity, and most importantly,

one that understands the multiplex problems that African women face. The implication of which is the ability to engage in consciousness raising to ignite the need for solutions to these multiplex problems. There is a need for a concept and ideology that understands the numerous problems that bedevil African women while also providing a framework to address them. African feminism focuses on the needs of women in Africa (Kamau 2014). This premise is why a group of African feminists convened to make the African feminist charter in 2006. The charter reads,

“We define and name ourselves publicly as feminists because we celebrate our feminist identities and politics. We recognise that the work of fighting for women’s rights is deeply political, and the process of naming is political too. Choosing to name ourselves feminists places us in a clear ideological position. By naming ourselves as feminists we politicize the struggle for women’s rights, we question the legitimacy of the structures that keep women subjugated, and we develop tools for transformatory analysis and action. We have multiple and varied identities as African feminists. We are African women – we live here in Africa, and even when we live elsewhere, our focus is on the lives of African women on the continent. Our feminist identity is not qualified with “ifs”, “buts” or “however’s”. We are Feminists—full stop” (African Feminist Charter 2016:3).

The African feminist Charter provides the framework and principles for African feminist advocacy and work. African feminist scholars like Amina Mama, Patricia McFadden, and Sylvia Tamale have noted the importance of building an African feminism that caters to the practical realities of African women, requiring its work to go beyond theorising. They focus on the impact of both the theory and praxis of African feminism for improving the well-being of African women.

By rallying around a common identity based on Pan-African ideals while pursuing feminist goals, African feminism can enjoy legitimacy amongst African women for its liberatory potential. This legitimacy can yield some form of awareness amongst African women on the factors that limit their participation and visibility in society. The recognition that they all face similar woes that feed discrimination against them enables them to acknowledge the need for solidarity. Solidarity of purpose is important to drive the agenda for gender equality and the advancement of women’s empowerment on the continent. The personification of the systems of power that discriminate against African

women can also assist with the strengthening of this consciousness. Just like the Pan-Africanist movement found purpose in agitating against colonial and imperial structures, a Pan-African feminist movement can direct its agitation against power structures that affect women. By echoing the need for favourable norms and institutions that acknowledge women as equal beings to men in the African society, we can begin to challenge the basis of these systems of power. Acknowledge that women have a place in politics, the economy, the labour sector, technology, etc. and must significantly participate and be represented in these sectors. However, this would not be possible if African women did not engage in consciousness raising to garner the needed solidarity towards the cause.

Advocating for increased representation in society

Following consciousness raising is the practical manifestations of the tenets of both Pan-Africanism and feminism, such that African women can be liberated from restrictive structures limiting them. It is important for African women to have an ideological basis rooted in their African and gendered identity for them to agitate for their equality. Gender inequality is an endemic and systemic menace that requires a continental drive to pull the needed strength. Challenging restrictive norms rooted in culture becomes not only the responsibility of women but of men who are beneficiaries of patriarchal systems of power. African feminists have done tremendous work in permeating development and policy spaces to drive emancipatory change. Atanga (2013) notes that African feminist theorists have been instrumental in the global networks that have fostered this development. The substantial presence of gender discourse in African development agendas is a result of African feminism and its activism. African feminism, which is motivated by the unique difficulties and problems women in Africa face, has given concerns of development and underdevelopment more momentum.

The crucial part that gender plays in Africa's underdevelopment has been widely acknowledged in development discourses. This could only be achieved after years of intensive research and activism that fought against male bias in development. The practical implementation of the Gender and Development (GAD) viewpoint, according to Ahikire (2014), is a necessary component of feminist participation. Given the significance of the development sector in the South generally and in Africa in particular, GAD as a methodology

gained acceptance as having the capacity to translate feminist concepts into practical actions that would alter the daily experiences of women. Africa, for instance, is a continent that struggles with development due to severe poverty, suffering, conflict, displacement, and global marginalisation. In this regard, GAD provided feminism, particularly African feminism, with a platform from which to address both the gendered aspects of development and its challenges. The issue of gender mainstreaming subsequently emerged as a major focus. The idea of gender mainstreaming and the entire sector of demanding policies and actions within government agencies, which in turn led to the demand for certain skills, was successfully popularised by African feminists. As a result, both GAD and gender mainstreaming have become two strategic measures that can be wielded to engage government, policymakers, and relevant stakeholders towards including women in spaces to increase their representation.

A Pan-African feminist pathway offers opportunities for African women to agitate against systems of power that subjugate them. Igniting the awareness that patriarchal norms that restrict them from participating in public spheres are responsible for their continued underrepresentation in society. These norms also feed narratives that women are less than men, that gender equality is un-African, and that women should only be seen and not heard. Thereby culminating in systemic and institutional discrimination against women either in politics, the economy, the digital economy or peace and security, etc. The awareness translates to consciousness of their status, oppression, and subjugation, such that it unearths the necessity for action. Consequently, the necessity for action manifests in the form of agitation against systems of power, institutionalised processes of gender and development, and gender mainstreaming. All of which can facilitate the correction of harmful patriarchal norms, foster women's empowerment, and advance gender equality in Africa. African women must take charge of their fate to rise against the woes that hinder them from fully participating in public decision-making.

General reflection

How do we begin to address the systemic multi-dimensional discrimination that African women are exposed to without leaving them behind? By acknowledging their agency as both victims of systems of power and agents that can challenge these systems. The juxtaposition of Pan-Africanism and

feminism combines the liberatory and emancipatory praxes of these two movements to respond to contemporary challenges facing African women. It recognises the agentic role that African women can play in their own liberation from gender inequality. It centres the importance of framing a Pan-African feminist pathway hinged on African feminism that is based on the lived realities of African women and one that responds to the nuanced and intersectional structures of power that inhibit their self-actualisation. The advocacy for gender equality is based on the recognition that all beings are equal, making it concerning why African women are still fighting for equality years after Africa has achieved political liberation. The current state of gender relations in Africa requires targeted advocacy for equality, which a Pan-African feminist pathway can provide. Advocacy for equality would entail the demand for gender parity in political participation, income equality, equal participation of women in agricultural development projects, targeted policies to reduce gendered violence, and the erasure of gender stereotypes. These goals require the recognition of the intersecting structures of power around gender, class, sexuality, age, (dis)ability and how they impact women's ability to participate in public life equally. Pan-Africanism is an important liberatory ideology that holds much history and significance for Africans; its juxtaposition with feminism, an equality-focused ideology, can pave the way for gender parity in Africa.

Conclusion

African women have, over the years, been at the forefront of the Pan-Africanist movement for independence from colonial and imperial structures while pushing for a common African identity of people of African descent. The ignorance of the 'woman' question relegated their substantive contributions to almost nothing, which is why prominent Pan-Africanist Olufunmilayo Ransome Kuti is reduced to the first woman to drive a car in Nigeria. The tokenisation of the efforts women made to the Pan-Africanist movement fed into the continued oppression of women after most African countries gained political independence. Post-colonial Africa did not offer much prospect for women because they were still victims of discrimination. Discrimination that manifests in low political participation, income inequality, gender pay gap, etc., affects the overall empowerment of women. The quest for gender equality is another liberatory struggle that African women across the world

must embark on, as political independence does not mean much if women, who constitute half of the population, continue to be underrepresented within the system. To this end, this article explores how Pan-Africanism and feminism, as two emancipatory ideals, can aid in the advancement of gender equality in Africa.

This article argues that by embracing both Pan-Africanism and feminism, a legitimisation of African feminism becomes widespread, such that African women have a solidarity of purpose. This solidarity of purpose is based on the awareness of their collective woes and problems, while giving birth to a Pan-African feminist identity. The collective identity based on gender and being African offers strength to this solidarity, which would metamorphose into an action-focused consciousness. This article concludes that Pan-African feminist pathways offer limitless opportunities for African women to agitate against systems of power that discriminate against them. It is important for there to be consciousness amongst African women before they can advocate for gender equality. Without acknowledging the root of their problem, progress toward their empowerment cannot be made; this is where the juxtaposition of Pan-Africanism and feminism comes in. To drive gender equality in Africa, African women must take charge and assert their agency to challenge systems of power while collaborating with relevant stakeholders simultaneously.

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