

## *Feminist Africa*

### **Violence, gender and power: feminist struggles around violence against women**

#### **Call for Proposals to Join a Research and Publishing Consortium (modified)**

**Deadline for Submissions: 31<sup>st</sup> July 2022**

African feminists have been engaged in struggles around violence against women for decades. As one of the most longstanding themes of feminist concern, the subject has been a focus of theory as well as activism across the continent. Awa Thiam's<sup>1</sup> ground breaking research across West Africa highlighted the varied forms of violence that women endured at the hands of husbands, fathers, brothers, other family members and other women. Thiam's analysis located the normalisation of such violence within interlocking axes of power – sex, race, and class – which needed to be subverted as a whole, rather than prioritising one over the others. In the 1980s and subsequently, although the question of violence against women was widely viewed as socially taboo, the work of a number of organisations and scholars ensured that the subject was placed on the political agenda. Since 1988, the Tanzanian Media Women's Association, (TAMWA) had been engaging the public through their magazine *Sauti ya Siti* (Women's Voice) on the numerous challenges that women faced on social, reproductive as well as economic fronts. TAMWA was the first organisation to set up a Crisis Centre in Dar es Salaam to take up the cases of women who had faced sexual harassment, violence and discrimination.<sup>2</sup> December Green's<sup>3</sup> research drew attention to the range of struggles that African women were engaged in, opposing gender violence through formal as well as informal power structures. Green conceived of gender violence in terms of multiple layers operating in the domains of the family, the economy and the state.

At the global level, women's organising around violence against women has targeted the UN system and has culminated in formal agreements to address gender injustices and work towards greater gender equality. At the regional level, the Maputo Protocol emerged out of extensive lobbying of governments by women's rights organisations in Africa. Nationally, women in several African countries have engaged in advocacy to enact laws prohibiting patriarchal violence. There is a long tradition of African women using collective power to target the state in efforts to eliminate violence against women.

More recently, very different feminist struggles against patriarchal violence have manifested in a wide array of actions combining physical and online presence and mobilisation: outrage expressed in street protests and marches, such as the #TotalShutDown protests in South Africa and the #StateOfEmergencyGBV movement in Nigeria, social media campaigns which name and shame alleged perpetrators of violence, as well as audio visual productions and engagements on themes relating to sexual autonomy and consent. Whilst the internet and digital

technology enable new forms of struggle, cyberspace has simultaneously become the site of new forms of violence and intimidation, resulting in some young women committing suicide.

Contemporary feminist struggles around violence against women are taking place against a backdrop of crises in the current neoliberal order, marked by deepening social and economic fractures and inequalities within African countries and across the continent. Violence related to land and the extraction of natural resources is widespread in rural areas. The precarity of many women's livelihoods, located so often in the informal economy, leaves them open to multiple forms of abuse and exploitation. Malgovernance, corruption and conflicts over scarce resources have resulted in the increasing use of violence by state agents, corporations and societal actors, with women's bodies as the battlegrounds on which overlapping patriarchal battles for control are fought.

Whilst violence against women has been generally recognised as an abuse of gendered relations of power, the question of *rethinking* the relations between gender and violence was posed in *Feminist Africa* 14, in 2010. Jane Bennett's<sup>4</sup> article highlighted the point that work on the theme of gender and violence, whilst consistently addressing the needs of women survivors of patriarchal violence, also covered a range of other kinds of work, which tended to operate in silos. The latter included work on LGBTI rights, masculinities in Africa, and sexual violence in contexts of increasing militarisation and conflict. What was clear from the disconnections among these diverse fields of work was that prevailing conceptions of gender generally did not address their connections to sexualities, particularly heteronormativity, either theoretically or politically, in terms of solidarity.

Although the predominant pattern of male perpetrator and female target of abuse is clearly identifiable, it is evident that this pattern does not exhaust the relations among gender, violence and power. Yet the extent of violence targeted at *women*, does not seem to have abated and in many instances, appears to have intensified. The question of how to think through the links between violence and interwoven dimensions of power, such as class, ethnicity, race, religion, as well as gender and sexualities, in specific contexts, remains. *Feminist Africa* intends to open a conversation on this theme, in recognition of the significance of feminist theorising not only for deepening our understanding of what is at play, but also because theory is necessary for informing strategy. How do feminists make choices between different strategies in specific contexts, and how do they determine which are more appropriate and/or more effective?

We are calling for expressions of interest in participating in a consortium to carry out original research and write for a series of FA issues on the theme of 'Violence, gender and power: feminist struggles around violence against women'. We are particularly interested in zones of violence against women that have received less research attention, such as economic and political violence, as well as newer sites of violence, such as cyberspace and social media. Through empirical research in relation to these sites, researchers are expected to identify and explore specific feminist struggles around violence against women and address the following questions, among others, in their grounded research:

- How are feminists theorising the links between structural inequalities and the forms of violence against women that may be observed in specific contexts, whether public or private? What is the role of the state in relation to such violence?

- How are feminists conceptualising the interrelations among gender, sexuality, class and other structures of power in diverse instances of violence against women? Is heteronormativity viewed by feminists as implicated in these instances? What would be more effective approaches to theorising these interrelations?
- What are the internal dynamics and theoretical blind spots, in terms of class, generation, disability and other axes of power, of feminist struggles opposing violence against women? How have these internal dynamics and blind spots shaped their responses to such violence? And how can the blind spots be overcome to form more effective responses?
- What strategies are feminists using to resist/disrupt/campaign against different forms of violence against women? In the process, how are feminists positioned in relation to diverse actors in the state, and in the society? What alliances do feminists in these struggles seek to make? How are these alliances affecting/influencing struggle strategies?
- In what ways do feminists organise to question/critique/destabilise existing norms of masculinity and femininity? Are feminists including heteronormativity in their critiques of such norms, and if so, how? If not, why? How are feminists theorising and analysing same-sex intimate violence?
- What are the prevailing discourses among feminists regarding the prevention of gendered violence? What examples of action in this sphere can advance theory as well as practice?

**The deadline for submissions is the 31st<sup>th</sup> of July 2022.**

Please submit a short proposal of no more than 2,000 words under the following headings:

a) introduction, b) background and context, c) problem statement and research questions, d) methodology, e) workplan covering the 36 months of the project starting from October 2022, and f) budget. Selected proposals will be supported with a small grant of up to US\$6,000 for research and writing costs over two years. A separate CV of no more than 1,000 words should be included in the application dossier.

A panel constituted by *Feminist Africa* will select six proposals for the Project. Researchers who join the project will be expected to participate in an inception workshop, other project-wide activities and submit three manuscripts for possible publication in *Feminist Africa* over a three-year period.

All submissions and enquiries should be emailed to: [contact@feministafrica.net](mailto:contact@feministafrica.net) and copied to Charmaine Pereira [charmainepereira19@gmail.com](mailto:charmainepereira19@gmail.com) and Titilope Ajayi: [titilope@titilopeajayi.com](mailto:titilope@titilopeajayi.com)

## Endnotes

1. Thiam, Awa. 1978. *La Parole aux Nègresses*. Published in English in 1986, as *Black Women Speak Out: Feminism and Oppression in Black Africa*. London: Pluto Press.
2. TAMWA. 1993. "Violence against Women in Tanzania," *Review of African Political Economy* 56, 111–16.
3. Green, December. 1999. *Gender Violence in Africa*. New York: St Martin's Press.

4. Bennett, Jane. 2010. ““Circles and Circles”: Notes on African Feminist Debates around Gender and Violence in the c21.” *Feminist Africa* 14 Rethinking Gender and Violence, 21-47.