

Africa's Natural Resources amid Old and New Imperial Relations: What Implications for Gender Justice?

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Abstract

This article highlights the significance of imperial relations in shaping competing transnational interests in Africa as a site for land and natural resource extraction. Accounts of China leading the scramble for land and other natural resources in African countries obscure the dominance of the US and European countries in such extraction. Extractivist engagements by three of the principal countries in the original BRICS grouping – China, India, and Russia – should be viewed against this backdrop. The analysis points to varying manifestations of violence, often sexualised, that women experience amid the immiseration and displacement that all community members face as a result of extractivist activities. Feminist initiatives against such relations strive to expose and undo the confluence of extractivism and militarisation in the structuring of such violence. The revisioning of the role of the state that such a shift requires is integral to transnational and regional feminist struggles for gender justice.

Keywords: extractivism; militarisation; violence; feminist struggles.

Introduction

Africa is rich in natural resources – hydrocarbons, minerals, land, and more. At least half, if not more, of the world's reserves of key minerals are to be found on the continent (Bassou 2017). On the agribusiness front, community lands across West and Central Africa have been assailed by multinational companies working together with local elites and development banks to obtain large-scale concessions for oil palm plantations. Land deals covering a total of roughly 2,74

million hectares have been transacted with 37 different companies in an almost uninterrupted stretch of the continent, from Guinea to Zambia (The Alliance against Industrial Plantations in West and Central Africa 2019).

The first colonial scramble for Africa had severe impacts on the continent, leaving African economies structured in ways that were primarily oriented towards providing raw materials for Europe's industrialisation (Hormeku-Ajei and Goetz 2021; Rodney 1988). The variegated forms that colonialism took in different parts of the continent altered existing hierarchies in profoundly gendered ways, mediated in different contexts by relations of class, race, sexuality, ethnicity as well as religion. Among the more enduring features were the securing of economic and political domination of African societies and polities by ruling men, generally in complicity with officials of colonial states, while reinforcing African patriarchal systems (Lewis 2002; Mama 2014).

Following the 9/11 attacks on the US by al Qaeda, the War on Terror entailed a shift in the conception of Africa as a humanitarian case to a new notion of the continent as a zone of conflict in which terrorists would launch their activities. This was accompanied by increasing surveillance of Africa and an expansion of US military bases across the continent, culminating in the formal establishment of the US Africa Command (AFRICOM) in October 2008. Deep reservations from most African countries have precluded the location of AFRICOM's headquarters on the continent (Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Ojaborotu 2010). AFRICOM represents the post-Cold War re-militarisation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation's (NATO) strategy in Africa which is intimately related to establishing a monopoly over Africa's energy resources (Moyo et al. 2019).

Although contemporary international relations are shaped by a history of imperialism and the ensuing persistence of unequal global relations, this reality is generally silenced by mainstream media, obscuring the significance of the historical trajectory (Paterson 2016). In 2012, the top three countries with the highest absolute levels of foreign direct investment (FDI), and as a proportion of the total FDI stock in African countries, were the US (9,3%), the UK (9,0%) and France (8,8%). In the same year, the combined FDI of all the BRICS¹ countries comprised roughly *one third* (9,4%) of the total FDI in Africa (Carpintero et al. 2016; my emphasis). Africa's status as "disputed territory" among these powers

should not obscure the fact that “the European Union and North America are still the dominant foreign powers in the continent” (Carpintero et al. 2016, 191-192). The key drivers of the scramble for land and natural resources in Africa are Western monopolies and their state patrons, not China (Moyo et al. 2019).

The renewed scramble for Africa’s natural resources takes place against the backdrop of multiple crises in global capitalism (e.g. see Pereira and Tsikata 2021). In Africa, resource-based conflicts, increasing militarisation, and violence are recurring features of the contemporary order (Tana Forum 2017). Across the continent, war and militarisation have resulted in a proliferation of armed conflicts and increasing violence against women and marginalised groups in public as well as domestic spaces, while deepening the conditions that sustain gender inequality before, during, and after conflict (Mama 2014). The institutions, ideologies, and processes constituting militarism promote and legitimise, in varying ways, associations between aggressive constructions of masculinity and the practice of violence (Madlala-Routledge 2008; Mama 2014).

This brief sketch of the contemporary geopolitical context in which Africa’s natural resources are being extracted points to the endurance of old imperial relations. The next section of this article addresses newer imperial relations involving the three principal BRICS countries – China, India, and Russia – and their extractivist activities in Africa. This is followed by a discussion of the overall impacts on communities and their responses through a broad literature review of work carried out by feminist scholars and activists in this field. The final section involves a critical feminist analysis of the implications of the above for gender justice, examining specific feminist mobilisations towards this end.

Emerging Powers and their Extractivist Engagements in Africa

Unfortunately, the BRICS countries have also “played active roles in serving imperial interests through their predatory engagement in extractivism”² (Pereira and Tsikata 2021, 40). Gendered violence is ubiquitous in these extractivist operations (Cunha and Casimiro 2021; WoMin and CNRG 2020; RADD et al. 2019; WoMin 2013), as I will highlight later in this article, raising the question of the implications for gender justice. This section focuses on key ways in which

the governments of China, India, and Russia, and corporations headquartered in these countries, are involved in appropriating natural resources from Africa.

The Role of China

The One Belt One Road network, known internationally as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), is China's vision for recrafting its engagements with the rest of the world. The BRI was launched in 2013.

The end state of One Belt One Road is the building of a “Community of Common Destiny for Mankind” [...], defined as a new global system of alternative economic, political, and security “interdependencies” with China at the center [...]. For this reason, Chinese leaders describe One Belt One Road as a national strategy [...], with economic, political, diplomatic, and military elements [...], not a mere series of initiatives. (Nantulya 2019, para. 2)

By 2019, 34 out of 49 African countries (roughly 70%) had signed MOUs or officially expressed support for the BRI (Nantulya 2019). China is investing in ports along the coastline from the Gulf of Aden to the Suez Canal, through to the Mediterranean Sea. According to Nantulya (2019, para. 13), “Africa’s importance to China in this regard stems from its location in a maritime area in which Beijing hopes to expand its presence and power projection.” The Maritime Silk Route (MSR) is a major feature of the BRI, which operates on land as well as sea. East Africa is a pivotal hub of the MSR, with a number of finished ports, pipelines, railways, and power plants, as well as more planned. Completed projects include a Standard Gauge Railway (SGR) from Mombasa to Nairobi as well as an electric railway from Addis Ababa to Djibouti, the location of China’s first overseas military base (Nantulya 2019).

China’s major projects in Africa (49 countries) are carried out in four sectors: connectivity; energy; industry; and infrastructure. Connectivity projects (around 20% of all projects) are used to link industrial and energy initiatives in inland areas to infrastructure projects along Africa’s coastline. Overall, nearly 45% of projects have to do with infrastructure. The energy sector, mainly oil and renewables, comprises 15% of all projects, while the industrial sector, which includes minerals processing, constitutes ten per cent (Lokanathan 2020).

Not all projects are initiated by China, however. The planned rail line connecting the east and west coasts of the continent, linking Sudan, Chad, Nigeria, Niger, Mali, and Senegal, was first proposed by the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation in 2005. China is nevertheless supporting the building of the Sudan and Chad sections of this railway (The International Schiller Institute 2017). The Mombasa-Nairobi SGR project was conceptualised by Kenya and is intended to connect Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, and South Sudan in order to promote international trade and investment in East and Central Africa (Kanaka n.d.). Many pre-existing infrastructure projects were subsequently incorporated into the BRI and branded as such, although African countries were not formally part of the initiative until 2017 (Chiyemura et al. 2023).

The question of whether China's projects in Africa represent a model of "interdependencies" (Nantulya 2019, para. 2), in other words "win-win" cooperation, looms large. The ultimate aim of the MSR is to move raw materials – phosphate, copper, cobalt, gold, iron ore, cocoa, bauxite, coal, lithium, steel, granite, and sand – out of Africa to China, and to bring finished goods and, in some instances, labour (predominantly male labourers), from China to Africa. The benefits to China include the direct purchase of key energy and commodity assets from African sources, allowing China to bypass international market prices. Infrastructure projects are also of benefit to China, offsetting its overcapacity in the steel, iron, and cement sectors (Lokanathan 2020).

Chinese businesses in countries with BRI projects are very diverse, "ranging from large central and provincial state-owned enterprises (SOEs) building airport terminals and hydropower plants to small businesses operating in informal and even illegal areas" (Shieh et al. 2021, 2). Bidding processes by SOEs are opaque, and often involve bribes. Local elites thus have greater opportunities to benefit from these contracts than local populations, which can lower people's trust in government institutions (Martorano et al. 2021). The SGR project in Kenya, for example, "sparked controversy around its economic viability, corruption, opaque contracting practices, financing arrangements, and community and labor issues" (Kanaka n.d, 4). The new railway altered rural routes and negatively affected women's ability to collect water and fuel as well as engage in agricultural activities (Constantine 2023). Many such connectivity, energy, and industrial projects result in the relocation or resettlement of local people.

Furthermore, Chinese labour is often imported on a large scale in public projects sponsored by government agreements, in which the politicians awarding the contracts are concerned with scheduled deadlines. In the case of large and medium-scale Chinese companies, on the other hand, a high proportion of jobs (89% on average) go to local people, but most skilled and upper-level management positions tend to be filled by Chinese personnel (Ofosu and Sarpong 2022). Moreover, labour rights abuses have been reported on the part of Chinese mining companies in the DRC and in Zambia (Ofosu and Sarpong 2022). As a result, China's projects have faced pushback in a number of countries. Local protests have taken place in Nigeria, Uganda, Tanzania, Madagascar, Kenya, Cameroon, and Chad (Lokanathan 2020). In addition, there are rising concerns about debt in Kenya, Djibouti, DRC, Zambia (Ofosu and Sarpong 2022), and Uganda (Muhumuza 2019).

Attention is increasingly turning to the ways in which African state and non-state actors negotiate, mediate, and implement engagements with China. In Tanzania, for example, elite political agency exercised in an autocratic developmental state under the late President Magafuli gave rise to fierce contestation over the terms and conditions of Chinese investment in the planned Bagamoyo megaport and special economic zone. Since these terms were deemed inimical to the country's national interests, negotiations were ultimately shelved. In Kenya's Lamu Port project, unlike the top-down approach in Tanzania, it was local governance actors engaging with Chinese contractors who, with the support of civil society organisations and vocal individuals, insisted on raising concerns and grievances. This, along with resistance in the form of public protests and litigation, led to renegotiation of the project and the inclusion of community interests – job openings and other opportunities – in the national development agenda (Chiyemura et al. 2023).

The Presence of India

India adopts similar strategies to China to gain access to hydrocarbons in Africa, offering soft loans in the form of economic and infrastructure support in exchange for access to energy resources. In terms of oil resources, largely offshore, high-quality crude is sold on favourable profit-sharing terms to Indian

companies. In Nigeria, the Indian company ONGC Mittal Energy Limited signed a six billion dollar infrastructure deal in 2005 in exchange for extended access to oil production blocks. In Sudan, OVL, the overseas division of ONGC, obtained a 25% stake in the Greater Nile Oil Project, despite resistance from China's National Petroleum Corporation which has a 40% stake in the project. Indian Oil Corporation acquired an offshore oil block in Cote d'Ivoire, and Angola's state oil company, Sonangol, signed an MOU with ONGC, in which both companies agreed to advance co-operation on exploration and refining. In Burkina Faso, Equatorial Guinea, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, and Senegal, Indian oil companies have bought stakes in oil and gas blocks (Dadwal 2011).

Indian land investments take place through an alliance between African ruling classes and Indian investors. Most African states make policies that promote the 'ease of doing business' without protecting the rights of local people. They allow Indian companies to acquire local subsidiary companies, thus allowing these companies to gain an advantage without making even minimal investments in infrastructure or job creation in the country concerned. In general, the legislative framework is loose and facilitates such deals while, in many cases, existing laws are bypassed (Jha et al. 2019).

In Ethiopia, land deals by Indian companies, the largest investors in the country, amount to 600,000 hectares for agro-industrial projects. India's premier export finance institution, the Export-Import Bank, gave the Ethiopian government a credit line of \$640 million to develop the sugar sector in Lower Omo (Mittal 2013). Sugar plantations have devastated local communities and livelihoods (The Oakland Institute 2023). In 2009, the company Karuturi Global obtained a 50-year renewable lease to produce food crops in Ethiopia on a total of 100,000 hectares of land, with an option for expansion to 300,000 hectares. The project caused deforestation and other negative environmental impacts, local people were displaced, and there were no contributions to local or national food security. Although Karuturi received various tax incentives, it provided minimal income to the country and no decent jobs for local people. Workers' salaries were delayed, there was no safety equipment or medical treatment, and no proper residence facilities. By 2015, Karuturi's land allocation was reduced to 1,200 hectares due to inadequate development of the land. The company demanded compensation for this reduction and threatened legal action. In 2018, most

unexpectedly, Karuturi announced that it would be withdrawing its legal case against the Ethiopian government and signing a fresh lease for 25,000 hectares. Karuturi was able to retain rights to a portion of its original land concession following the Indian government's interventions with the Ethiopian embassy in India (ASO et al. 2019).

Contrary to the rhetoric of 'South-South' co-operation, Indian firms in Ethiopia behave very much like predatory transnational corporations. Land acquisitions take place without any meaningful consultations with, or compensations of, community members and companies rely on the state's brutal displacement of local farmers in order to set up plantations. State security services have been involved in many atrocities during violent dislocations of communities, including the rape of local women and the threatening, assault, and arrest of protesters in general. Indian firms have also been resisting the creation of workers' unions, in violation of Ethiopian labour laws (Kalpavriksh et al. 2012).

Russia's Involvement

During the liberation period, Russia provided active support to many African countries but subsequently retreated due to unfolding processes in the Soviet Union. By the early 2000s, however, Russia showed a renewed interest in establishing its presence in Africa to secure access to natural resources and energy reserves, in competition with the intensified involvement of the US, China, India, as well as Brazil, in Africa. The focus of most of Russia's recent engagements with African nations is "almost exclusively on the arms trade, military training, and resource extraction" (Matusevich 2019, 38). Minerals, diamonds, and oil contracts are generally negotiated by parastatals like Rosneft and Lukoil, but their details are rarely transparent. Russia has natural resource deals with around 20 African countries (Siegle 2021). In addition, the Russian state arms vendor, Rosoboronexport, supplies arms to several African countries. The largest regular buyers are Algeria, Burkina Faso, Egypt, Ethiopia, Morocco, and Uganda. In 2021, Rosoboronexport contracted new deals with Angola, Cameroon, Central African Republic (CAR), Nigeria, and Tanzania (Mensah and Aning 2022).

The Wagner Group

According to Mensah and Aning (2022, 54), “[T]he private security/military company (PS/MC) known as the Wagner Group is perceived to be the main actor through which Russia is exporting its version of military co-operation and partnership”. Apart from being a PS/MC, the Wagner Group also includes a network of political influence operations and economic bodies such as mining companies (Stanyard et al. 2023).

Russia has denied the existence of the Wagner Group, even as it has supported the group and relied on it for implementing its strategic objectives. As a “semi-state” actor, the Wagner Group can act without Russia being held accountable. Some of the group’s actions include massive human rights violations. In the CAR, for example, the United Nations (UN) documented over 500 instances of extrajudicial killings, torture, and sexual violence by the group in 2020 (Richardson 2022).

The Wagner Group has been active in a number of African countries, including Libya, CAR, and Sudan. In each case, “the Russians supported a beleaguered leader facing a security challenge in a geographically strategic country with mineral or hydrocarbon assets” (Siegle 2021, 82). Russia offers these African leaders military cooperation that provides resources to secure their power domestically, including a mercenary force and arms, while gaining revenues from resource deals and fomenting relations of dependence with the leaders involved (Siegle 2022). In CAR, the Wagner Group has provided military and political support in exchange for access to mineral resources, predominantly diamonds and gold. In Sudan, meanwhile, companies linked to the Wagner Group have been located primarily in the gold sector and there is evidence that the group has also engaged in large-scale gold smuggling. Stanyard et al. (2023, 14) conclude that the Wagner Group “is an example of where crime, business and politics converge in Russia’s projection into Africa.”

The intensity of extraction of Africa’s natural resources by multiple actors raises questions about the impacts on communities and the responses to such incursions, which I turn to next.

The Impacts on Communities and Responses

What form does the nexus of “extractivism, militarisation, securitisation and violence against women” take in diverse African countries? This question lies at the heart of a series of studies carried out in 2018 by WoMin and its partners – Centre for Natural Resource Governance (CNRG) in Zimbabwe, Justiça Ambiental (JA) in Mozambique, and Network Movement for Justice and Development (NMJD) in Sierra Leone (WoMin and CNRG 2020, 2). In Zimbabwe, for example, the discovery of diamonds in 2005 brought the armed forces down on informal miners and affected communities in Marange, rendering it one of the most militarised mining areas in the country.

Despite the backdrop of violence in such communities at large, women small-scale and artisanal miners are present in considerable numbers in this sector. In the minerals sector across Africa, women are mostly to be found in artisanal and small-scale mining (ASM), due to their exclusion in many contexts from large-scale mining on the basis of law (Baiyewu 2021), or discrimination in many contexts. South Africa is an exception; women worked in asbestos mines until the 1980s (McCulloch 2003) and since 2004, have been hired by mining houses to work full-time underground (Benya 2023). Women, however, face several further barriers to entering as well as working in ASM. They are typically allotted the least lucrative sites and discriminated against on the basis of patriarchal social and cultural beliefs. Moreover, since much of artisanal mining is considered illegal, the risk of violence by security personnel is ever-present for these women (WoMin and CNRG 2020).

Women in rural areas often play leading roles in defending their communities from the incursions of mining companies, which places them at particular risk of intimidation. In South Africa, Nonhle Mbuthuma, community member and spokesperson for the Amadiba Crisis Committee that was set up to oppose mining activity in Xolobeni, Eastern Cape Province, stated in 2018, “I know I am on the hit list... If I am dying for the truth, then I am dying for a good cause. I am not turning back” (groundWork et al. 2019, 1). Community activist Mama Finkile Ntshangase, was brutally gunned down in her own home (Centre for Environmental Rights 2020). At the time of her death, she was Vice Chairperson of a subcommittee of the Mfolozi Community Environmental Justice Organisation,

which resisted the Tendele Coal Mining company's intimidatory efforts to expand their mining operations into her village in KwaZulu-Natal Province. In their discussion of women's experiences of violence in Marange, Zimbabwe, WoMin and CNRG (2020) point out that the extractivist model of mining exposes women in general to highly oppressive forms of violence, including sexualised violence, which should form the basis of an important conversation at a societal level. Teresa Cunha and Isabel Casimiro (2021, 83-84) argue, in the context of Mozambique's extractivist economy, that "it is crucial that we understand how this reality reveals the contradiction between capital and life [...] it shows the androcentric nature of contemporary extractivist political-economic rationality which favours and fuels violent, autocratic masculinities among both perpetrators and victims."

Not only is violence a common threat around mining communities, it is also a threat around industrial oil palm and rubber plantations (RADD et al. 2019). The first agro-industrial dynamic generating violence is enclosure: villages become encircled by industrial oil palm plantations once companies have taken hold of community land. This destroys women's livelihoods, generally forcing them to work on the plantations in order to feed their families. Subcontractors often demand sexual favours and women face other sexual predators, such as contractor heads, male superiors, 'security' guards, and co-workers. Girls and women who live in and around these plantations have no choice but to use the roads passing through the plantations to get to water sources, the nearest school, their kin in neighbouring villages, or the market. Key violators are men in positions of power – plantation managers and 'security' guards. Women whose plots are far from the plantations, or who may have rented land in neighbouring villages, have to walk long distances on lonely company roads with minimal traffic, exposing them to sexual violence and abuse (RADD – Cameroon et al. 2019).

A second dynamic that generates violence arises from plantation owners' efforts to appropriate all oil palm nuts, including those from community lands, as their exclusive property. Oil palms start fruiting around four to five years after being planted. From then on, women living inside and around the plantations, who use traditionally-produced palm oil from family groves for cooking or who process palm oil for sale, "are always at risk of being accused of having stolen nuts from the company plantations and of being searched, beaten, arrested

and sexually abused by company guards and police who accuse them of theft” (RADD et al. 2019, 7).

The third dynamic catalysed by the presence of industrial plantations is women’s resistance to plantation owners’ efforts to appropriate community lands. Women face violence when defending their land in conflicts with plantation companies. From Cameroon to Sierra Leone, the police and army personnel brought in to secure corporate oil palm plantations are often engaged in violent conflicts and clashes with communities (RADD et al. 2019, 8). After security forces working for SOCAPALM in the village of Mbonjo, Cameroon, had beaten women and young people for ostensibly stealing palm nuts, women’s demands to their village chief were, "We don’t want these soldiers behind our houses and inside our kitchens" (RADD et al. 2019, 8). Elsewhere, women in villages affected by Socfin plantations and the company’s occupation of community land identified the following as among the most painful consequences – sexual violence, teenage pregnancy, and early marriage.

...women of Sahn Malen have been calling on the government to *withdraw all armed security personnel* so that they can return to their communities. They are also *demanding that their land be given back* so they can return to their care of their families. "We want to see *our dignity as women* being restored. *Our young girls should remain as girls* and not mothers. *Our right to assembly, movement and food is all we ask for*", said one of the women involved in the women's struggle for the return of their land. (RADD et al. 2019, 8; my emphasis).

This extract highlights women’s concerns about not only their livelihoods but also the status of their existence – their desire to restore their dignity, protect their rights, and exercise certain freedoms. Women yearn to protect their daughters from the loss of their childhoods to sexual violence and forced motherhood as a result.

Despite women’s defence of community land in conflicts with plantation companies, they are very often excluded from land use decisions within families and communities. Such decisions are made by chiefs and community land owner committees. Women’s exclusion in this regard exposes them to violence and abuse when they resist the incursions of industrial plantation companies (RADD et al. 2019). Although women’s labour is crucial to producing food and reproducing

communities, the significance of this labour is ultimately denied by community actors when they exclude women from land use decisions (WoMin 2013).

Over the past five years, there has been a significant decline in the number and total area of land deals for industrial oil palm plantations in Africa, from 4,7 million hectares to a little over 2,7 million hectares. Only a small fraction of this area, 220,608 hectares, has been converted to oil palm plantations or replanted with new palms. *Strong resistance by communities* has been key to slowing this expansion of industrial oil palm plantations in the region (The Alliance against Industrial Plantations in West and Central Africa 2019; my emphasis).

Simultaneously, conflicts around the control of other natural resources proliferate while military engagements and interventions in conflicts lead to the increasing presence of a range of actors with access to arms, violence in society at large (Downey et al. 2010), and violence against women in particular (WoMin 2013). Unfolding social, political, and environmental crises have been poorly acknowledged, however, and the destructive ecological consequences of natural resource extraction – such as soil depletion, deforestation, flooding, reduced biodiversity, freshwater contamination, and degraded air quality – are all too often glossed over (Acosta 2011).

As a result of transnational competition for Africa's land and natural resources, rural communities have been increasingly marginalised and displaced from the countryside. Meanwhile, underlying and deep-seated problems of food insecurity, unemployment, and poverty are not addressed (Moyo et al. 2019). Tsikata (2016) illustrates how insecurity of land tenure and landlessness are the consequences of diverse changes affecting rural development since the colonial period, with deleterious results for women's land interests within households as well as beyond. The disappearance of common property resources – the commons – has a major impact on women's livelihoods, particularly in poorer communities, depriving them of fuel and foodstuffs. Not only do women experience a loss of convenience and entitlements, but new costs are incurred, such as transport, given the need to travel further into neighbouring villages, which also incurs the risk of conflicts (Tsikata 2016).

In general, women in communities affected by extractivist activities lose livelihoods from land-based work, such as farming, fishing, and gathering forest

products. Their roles in conservation and protecting biodiversity are devalued and there is a loss of ancestral and traditional knowledge of agroecology practices and traditional medicine. Moreover, women's participation in decision-making about economic survival and everyday realities is restricted, even as they deal with increased care burdens from families and communities and the gender-based violence surrounding the militarisation of megaprojects (Anderson et al. 2022).

Examples of Counter Initiatives

So, what can be done in the face of the destructive impacts of extractivism on local communities? The state plays a critical role in organising extractivism (Acosta 2011), despite its differential power relative to the global forces of capitalism (Nygren et al. 2022). In this section, I highlight three initiatives from different quarters with a similar objective, namely, revisioning the role of the state. The first addresses the history of natural resource extraction in Africa and is part of a series from Post-Colonialisms Today “recapturing progressive thought and policies from early post-independence Africa to address contemporary development challenges” (Post-Colonialisms Today 2020). To this end, yesteryear's struggles against colonial forces over Africa's resources must be reinvigorated against transnational corporations today (Hormeku-Ajei and Goetz 2021).

The second initiative is the “African Feminist Post-COVID-19 Economic Recovery Statement” (FEMNET 2020) addressed, in July 2020, to the Special Envoys mandated by the African Union to garner international support for African countries' efforts to address the pandemic. Over 340 African feminists and feminist organisations signed this agenda-setting statement which outlined the character of the COVID-19 pandemic and the expansive possibilities it heralded for rethinking Africa's economies and societies. Among the far-reaching recommendations in the statement is a call for a reformed and forward-looking state which prioritises policies that strengthen the rights of those most marginalised by existing policies and therefore more likely to suffer the consequences of COVID-19. These include women and all those experiencing interwoven dimensions of structural division, such as class, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, and HIV status (FEMNET 2020).

The third initiative is a pan-African programme with a focus on social policy. The Gender Equitable and Transformative Social Policy for Post-COVID-19 Africa (GETSPA) programme historicises existing social policy with a view to promoting gender equitable and transformative social policy through research, capacity building, policy engagement, and networking. Covering 31 countries in ten country clusters, the initiative is grounded in the principle that knowledge is necessary, but not sufficient, to bring about change; what is required is an ongoing process of building constituencies, changing mindsets, and achieving a new consensus on the social contract between state and society (Tsikata 2023).

The question of how to shape a new social contract requires, among other things, engagement with women and men's understandings of their lived realities, and potentially shared justifications for abiding by social, political, and legal rules. As Akua Britwum (Britwum and Mama 2020, 9-10) puts it:

How do we get people to frame their conditions and what accounts for them? I think that this is what is missing. I think education and the political discourse around alternatives are really very important. In short, it needs to begin with activists and intellectuals—intellectuals not necessarily based in universities, but who are interested in real change. We need to create spaces, in both rural and urban communities, where we can hold these discussions.

Given the overall impacts of the scramble for Africa's land and natural resources on people and communities, what are the implications for gender justice? This is the focus of the final section of this article.

Implications for Gender Justice

Calls for gender justice grew out of dissatisfaction with gender mainstreaming and its depoliticisation. A central problem was the lack of fit between the technical project of promoting gender equality in policy, programmes, and projects, and the political project of overcoming structural inequality and advancing women's rights. Gender mainstreaming, far from being a means to the end of social transformation, became an end in itself. Gender justice, instead, is about highlighting the *political* dimension of subverting the existing gender order in diverse societal contexts (Mukhopadhyay 2007; my emphasis).

There are challenges, however, with normative understandings of gender justice. Some of the unresolved dilemmas include questions about whether absolute and universal standards can be set for determining what is right or good in human general relations; how the rights of the individual are to be offset against the needs of the family, community, 'nation', the territorial state; and what should be the appropriate role of the state and international community in promoting social welfare and human equality (Goetz 2007).

Celestine Nyamu-Musembi (2007) points out that the multifaceted terrain of gender justice in Sub-Saharan Africa spans several sites of norms concerning gender and sexuality. These include the sealed-off status of religion and custom; gender inequalities in property relations; gender inequalities in family relations; sexual and reproductive health and rights, in family planning, abortion, HIV and AIDS; and gender justice in economic liberalisation (Nyamu-Musembi 2007).

An important approach to gender justice involves exploring practical efforts towards its realisation. "Ideally, the issue of the meaning of gender justice would be established as a practical project – through democratic debate" (Goetz 2007, 29). This would involve making power-holders in domestic, community, and private arenas answer for violations (Goetz 2007), to which we may add power-holders in official and public arenas. Democratic engagement would also need to be held to new standards of what is just in human relationships, as well as include new actors, new methods of scrutiny, and new forums for accountability (Goetz 2007).

Advancing Gender Justice through Struggles for Alternatives

A number of feminist struggles for alternatives to existing gender arrangements have taken place at the global level. Towards the end of the 20th century, it became clear that the struggle in the global arena involved tensions between gender justice and other elements of social and economic justice (Sen 2005). Gita Sen's (2005) argument is based on the perspectives of feminists engaged in analysis and advocacy during the UN Conferences of the 1980s and 1990s – on the environment, human rights, population, social development, women, habitat, children, HIV/AIDS, small island states, food security, racism – and their five- and ten-year reviews. She points to a major contradiction at the international

level – between the policies and actions of the UN and the US. While the progressive agenda on gender and sexuality, and sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) received support from the West, the global economic policy terrain was completely subordinated to the neoliberal economic thinking promulgated by the Washington Consensus. Resources for creating or even addressing the conditions for SRHR did not exist. Sen's (2005) analysis focuses on the interplay between these two sets of forces while also addressing the implications for gender justice of the shift at that time to a unipolar world order and, especially, the movement from a neoliberal to a neoconservative era.

By the early 2000s, many feminists were intensely engaged in efforts to shape a new global development agenda to follow the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) once they expired in 2015. The Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID) was one of the organisations at the forefront of such mobilising. In the wake of multiple global crises, increasing inequality, and militarism, feminists emphasised the need for a paradigm shift, given the "historical opportunity to reshape global understandings of development in the struggle towards social, economic, ecological and gender justice" (Abelenda 2014, 117). A major criticism of the MDGs framework was its partitioning of development from the macroeconomic context, especially the global financial and economic crisis. As a result, neoliberal policies were normalised as the basis for funding and implementing the development agenda, as opposed to being understood as "*part of the problem*" (Abelenda 2014, 119; my emphasis).

In February 2014, a Feminist Strategy meeting was organised by a cluster of organisations – the Center for Women's Global Leadership, Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era, International Planned Parenthood Federation – Western Hemisphere Region, Realising Sexual and Reproductive Justice Alliance, and Women in Europe for a Common Future. These were representatives of feminist and women's rights organisations working on SRHR, the environment, agriculture, economic and social rights, peace and security, gender-based violence, and women's human rights. The aim of the three-day meeting was to produce a shared vision and strategy for implementation after the expiry of the MDGs in 2015. The meeting culminated in a joint statement "Gender, Economic, Social and Ecological Justice for Sustainable Development – A Feminist Declaration for post-2015" ("the Feminist Declaration") (Abelenda 2014).

The Feminist Declaration (2014, para. 1) states that:

We seek fundamental structural and transformational changes to the current neoliberal, extractivist and exclusive development model that perpetuates inequalities of wealth, power and resources between countries, within countries, and between men and women. We challenge the current security paradigm that increases investments in the military-industrial complex, which contributes to violent conflict between and within countries.

At the level of the African continent, WoMin, the Gender and Extractives Alliance, along with Kebetkache Women's Development and Resource Centre, Home of Mother Earth Foundation, Centre for Children's Health Education, Orientation and Protection, and Environmental Rights Action brought together an Africa-wide gathering of over 60 women activists and some men. They met in Port Harcourt, Nigeria from the 28th of September to the 2nd of October 2015 "to deliberate on the negative social and environmental impacts of fossil fuels extraction, refining and combustion, and the cumulative effect of climate change on women's bodies, livelihoods and communities" (WoMin 2015, para. 2). The aim was to work at community and national levels to build a movement of African women, and "to unify our struggles through a women-led regional campaign for climate, energy, food and gender justice" (WoMin 2015, para. 4). The meeting culminated in the WoMin October 2015 Declaration, which locates gender justice within the following key domains: energy justice; food justice; and climate and ecological justice (WoMin 2015).

Feminists have increasingly recognised that gender justice is inextricably linked to equity in the social, economic, political, and environmental order. In epistemological terms, both the Feminist Declaration and the WoMin 2015 Declaration point to the production of feminist knowledge generated collectively among diverse constituencies and grounded in analyses of lived realities in affected communities. In doing so, both declarations conceptualise gender justice as interwoven among a range of economic, social, political and environmental dimensions of justice. As feminist initiatives, both declarations exemplify efforts to articulate the multidimensional normative contours of gender justice for agenda-setting purposes. The Feminist Declaration highlights, in broad terms, the intertwining of the neoliberal extractivist development paradigm with militarism and the need for profound structural transformation, specifying what

alternative economic models and development approaches are required. The WoMin Declaration focuses on the depletion of rural communities and the countryside as a result of extractivist activities, and envisions what an alternative paradigm would entail for gender justice to be realised. In ontological terms, the WoMin Declaration promotes interconnectedness as a basis for articulating alternative ways-of-being in the world.

Concluding Thoughts

This article highlights the significance of imperial relations in shaping competing transnational interests in Africa as a site for land and natural resource extraction. The dominance of the US and European countries in land and natural resource extraction from the African continent is obscured in portrayals, by the media and certain academic sources, of China leading the land grab and drive for natural resources in African countries. Moreover, the extent to which US military might is used to ensure free access to Africa's energy resources, while normalising such practice in the name of fighting a 'War on Terror' on the continent, is even less recognised.

This is the backdrop of longstanding imperial relations against which extractivist engagements by three of the principal countries in the original BRICS grouping – China, India and Russia – should be viewed. These three countries vary in their historical and political relations with African countries, the contours of their contemporary engagements in the continent, and capacity for destabilising local communities and populations. This raises the question of how African political and state authorities have exercised their agency in negotiating and implementing transactions in land and natural resources, particularly with transnational corporations. Allied to that is the extent to which organised groups in civil society have been able to contest the promotion of self-interests in such transactions by African political elites, even in the face of deals with destructive implications.

The analysis highlights the varying manifestations of violence that women experience amid the immiseration and displacement that they, along with other members of local communities, face as a result of extractivist activities. Women encounter violence in efforts to secure livelihoods and work; foraging, food

production, and food processing; and in the defence of community lands. Feminist mobilising against such relations strives to expose and undo the confluence of extractivism and militarisation in the structuring of such violence. More broadly, this would entail redirecting the continent's trajectory from supplying raw materials to external interests, towards establishing state control over natural resources. The revisioning of the role of the state that such a shift requires is integral to feminist initiatives addressing the social, economic, political, and environmental dimensions of transformation in efforts to realise gender justice on the continent. The multi-dimensional character of gender justice requires making feminist connections across these varied domains. Feminists have exemplified such connections, not only in exploring how gender justice may be understood, but also in transnational and regional struggles to articulate and advance gender justice.

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Notes

1. BRICS is a regional grouping of emerging powers originally comprising Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa.
2. Extractivism refers to wealth accumulation via the extraction of wide-ranging natural and human resources from colonies and ex-colonies in Africa, Asia, and the Americas, for export to centres of global capital (Acosta 2011; Ye et al. 2020). In the contemporary order, extractivism is linked to economic globalisation – the increasing interdependence of world economies – and the financialisation of capital, which heralds the global shift from industrial capitalism due to the increasing size and importance of a country's financial sector in the overall economy.

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