

Editorial

Violence, Gender, Power – The Politics of Feminist Research Methodologies

Charmaine Pereira and Jane Bennett

The theorisation of exploitative and dangerous systems such as patriarchy or colonialism has long been energised by the complex and evolving connections among gender, violence, and power. Research and activism that acknowledge such connections point to ways in which these systems often create normalised conditions of vulnerability, especially for people gendered within the “feminine.” Such theorisation has arisen most influentially in political work within civil societies that prioritises narratives of “abuse against women” as a starting point for redress, resistance, and revolution. The overwhelming focus on such abuses in African contexts has remained, however, on domestic violence and sexual assault. In the past decade, the focus has also increasingly included the narratives of people gendered as women who are caught up in conditions of war and refugeehood. At the same time, the political worlds in which, for example, Ellen Kuzwayo wrote *Call Me Woman* (1985, published midway through South Africa’s State of Emergency), or Nawal El Saadawi published her best-known book, *Woman at Point Zero* (1975 in Beirut),¹ have changed dramatically. Both books explore the multiple and interlaced abuses of women by husbands/fathers and state systems, but the narration of such interlocked abuses cannot be assumed to be the most insightful lenses for contexts some 50 years later.

It is safe to say in 2025 that notions of what “gendering” might involve have been radically deepened and re-organised through multiple debates. These later notions would be unrecognisable within the gender dynamics experienced by Firdaus, the protagonist of *Woman at Point Zero*, whose murder of her pimp led to her incarceration. Firdaus, for example, does not

experience how an inhospitable state might deploy social media against her, nor does she find synergies between events in her life and what might be happening in the lives of those experiencing sexual transactions outside the commerce of women paid (or not) for men's sexual gratification. Such deepening inevitably requires interrogating the connections between processes of becoming gendered and questions of power, and remaining vigilant about the categorisation and borderings of experiences as "violent." In 2025, African feminisms are as attuned to the capacity of digital technologies to create violent conditions of labour, in which gender dynamics are implicated, as they are to the possibilities of gross and state-tolerated assassinations of people living counter-heteronormatively. "Violence" has always been a difficult word, especially given projects of legislation and justice explicitly connected in post-colonial flag democracies with the prevention of violence against citizens, and in view of the need to redress historical violences. The integration of gendered dynamics into these projects seems to suggest that violence is exceptional even when historical context has not been considered, or sometimes, that "non-violence" is unrealisable.

In late 2022, *Feminist Africa* began a research project on 'Violence, Gender, and Power' with an explicit interest in renewing questions of the links among these terms in African feminist research. This has prompted questions such as:

- How are feminists theorising the links between structural inequalities and forms of violence against women in specific state contexts where people gendered in counter-heteronormative ways resist state regimes publicly?
- How do discourses that limit approaches to becoming gendered continue to circulate and retain power within popular and institutional space? How are such discourses resisted?
- How do feminists who are working to resist violence in institutional spaces – such as the law, religion, or education – become active in their commitment to feminist epistemologies and practices?
- How can we develop counter-hegemonic research approaches to understanding gender?

- From perspectives within African feminisms, how could we imagine methodology as a critical political process with regard to gender, violence, and power?

This project, which has included collective workshops for research participants, the encouragement of research created by teamwork, and individual support to researchers in whatever ways might arise, was intended to produce two journal issues between 2025 and 2026. This first journal issue concentrates on questions of knowledge creation, where the dynamics of violence, gender, and power circulate in multiple dimensions. It asks how methodologies themselves should and can be imagined in research spaces where great pain, vulnerability, and simultaneous resistance are experienced.

This editorial introduces the issue in three sections. The first offers some summary notes on the theorisation of violence, gender, and power. It is followed by a section that explores what it might mean to think of methodology as political feminist process, especially in relation to doing feminist research on issues of violence. The third section maps the feature articles, standpoints, in conversation and review contributions, and suggests editorial perspectives on the significance of the collation. Such perspectives are necessarily limited, and it is our hope that they will be read, challenged, and discussed by *Feminist Africa*'s readership.

Notes on thinking gender, power, and violence

Women, there is a common denominator in your lives: phallocratic violence. It is this violence which makes you think that you don't amount to anything on your own, without the other, the one who has got "something between his legs," the one with the phallus... This insidious, misogynous violence can, like a monster, present itself in different disguises. [...] This violence is the daily lot of all oppressed women throughout the world, whatever they may do. Illiterate or intellectual, none of them escape. It is not a metaphysical violence; it is real and concrete. It can be not only brutal but also subtle. However, this male violence remains, as distinct from revolutionary violence, the violence of a system of slavery, which desires the domination of the other, the woman. In this sense, it is a form of terrorism. (Thiam 1986, 123)

Written in 1978,² nearly half a century ago, Awa Thiam's ferocious analysis of the medusa-like "monster" interested in the annihilation of people gendered as women strikes one as simultaneously magnificent and theoretically weak in its emphasis on phallocratic violence. Thiam's analysis was deeply embedded in a very particular moment of writing, such as that by Frantz Fanon and Amílcar Cabral on anti-colonial and anti-imperial revolutionary struggles for Africa's transformation. Meanwhile, the assumption that women suffered "common oppression" by patriarchy, proffered predominantly by white feminists in the global North (e.g., Morgan 1984), ignored unequal global relations and the implications of multiple structures of power for women elsewhere in the world, including Africa. Thiam's writing wrestled with African women's vulnerability to the nexus of violence, gender, and power, and presented her Africa-focused theorisation as revolutionary. The fury, the essentialisms, and the demand for a revolution (Thiam's title for the source of the quotation) assume specific meanings for the terms *gender*, *violence*, and *power*. There is a causal logic at play: "gender" systems entail the presence or absence of "something between your legs"; such systems **cause** intensive and "concrete" suffering for those without access to phallic resonance, in the form of "violence," especially within the home – a terrorism, a slavery. Thiam saw this violence as an anti-revolutionary force in an era when the concept of the revolutionary still evoked Cabral, Senghor, or Machel, all of whom approached black women's power seriously. Machel went so far as to say that "the liberation of women is a necessity for women" (in the same year that Thiam's book was published). For Thiam, the connections among gender, power, and violence which render all "women" subject to forms of oppression (her words) are precisely those that any actual revolution for African freedom must, with vehemence, renounce.

Forty-seven years later, the language and hopes of revolutionary men (indeed, people) about socialist and independent modes of economic and cultural dynamics possible for African countries have, for the most part, been eviscerated by ever-evolving forms of capital. The most recent of these is financial capitalism. Many new/digital forms of assault are largely untrackable due to density, interconnectivity, and constant evolution. It is now no longer possible to see the "something between your legs" as implacably and uniquely

responsible for the multiple forms of assault against human *being* in which gendered dynamics, amongst others, are implicated.

A unidimensional theorisation of the relationship among gender, power, and violence – which understands violences experienced by women as more than likely to be due to patriarchal norms, discourses, and practices – has been overwhelmingly attractive due to its simplicity, capacity to universalise, and cross-contextual application. In a presentation at a South African conference on religion, gender, and violence, one of us drew on the work of the American white working-class lesbian, Andrea Dworkin, a writer/activist located very far from the context. Dworkin gave a talk at a men's conference in 1984, in which she asked the mostly masculine audience for a “truce:” 24 hours without rape. Dworkin's invocation in the South African presentation had been intended as a minor step on the way to a discussion of how to imagine futures, but the response was so overwhelmingly strong (applause, ululation, requests for the words to be repeated, a chant developed on the spot out of Dworkin's words) that the whole panel session was disrupted. At the time, this reaction seemed extraordinary: the contextual differences between Dworkin and the audience of young, mostly black, South African women relishing her words were immense. But the participants were responding to the notion that “men,” by the power they accrued through their gendering, formed one terrifying/sexually violent cohort of abusers.

Such a clear conviction is always troubled by the presence of loved sons, transmen, fathers, sexual partners, friends or other masculine beings who do not conform to the patriarchal norm. Yet this conviction is the purest logic at the heart of survivorship after sexual/domestic assault from (nearly always) a “man.” Such a logic creates rage, courage, movements, and solidarities defiant of a connection among gender, violence, and power experienced by unquantifiable numbers of people, in which it is predominantly men who are the perpetrators of violence and women who are the targets.

A considerable amount of feminist scholarship has pointed to the colonial inventions of race as an epistemological, economic, and political weapon (Gqola 2015; Tamale 2020; Okech 2020; Kessi and Boonzaier 2018). Feminist analyses of violence and power impelled by this recognition

have long insisted on theorising the vulnerability of “women” to “men” as deeply embedded in the dynamics of racialised conditions of labour in African (and other) contexts. In a recent essay, Lyn Ossome argues that,

for feminist political theorists, a fundamental problem lies in the fact that it is practically impossible to think of ethnicity separately from its articulations in gender, class, race, sexuality, and so on. This is the gendered legacy of the colonial mode of incorporation of natives. It is a legacy of violence and brutality that had been the primary force that made the incorporation of natives into the state itself possible. (2024, 54)

Locating colonial violence in the formation of “natives”, the post-colonial state can be deemed to be rooted in structural violences, which (one could extrapolate) makes contemporary connections among violence, gender, and power inextricably bound up with post-20th century dynamics of extractivism, financial capitalism, and state corruption. There are, however, critical differences in the modalities of colonial settlements across time. For centuries prior to European-dominated colonialisms, Islam shaped practices of governance, the creation of social norms, and ways of understanding the human in many African contexts.

In some recent threads of African feminism, decoloniality has been explored as an approach towards an analysis of epistemologies, institutions, state formations, and “cultural traditions”. Such approaches highlight the persistent influences of colonial systems on African-based thinking. This exploration has included engagement with the work of Maria Lugones (2016), an Argentinian philosopher, which suggests that concepts of gendering, as binary, hierarchical, and immutable, are part and parcel of colonial approaches to being human. For activists and researchers, this approach may offer an exciting way of engaging “gender-based violence” as discursive and embodied acts of deliberate, often sexual harm that are not predictable through notions of “men” and “women”. Instead, they become fluid, all pervasive, and mutable as invested moves towards the rekindling of colonialities in multiple ways. To “fight rape,” therefore, to put things more simply, is, within this paradigm, to resist neoliberal and extractivist (the development of capitalist colonialisms of the 18th and 19th centuries) notions of human living.

Decolonial theory thus brings to questions of violence, gender, and power, formidable challenges about what we understand by gender, how we categorise “violences”, and what strategies we devise to condemn and resist these, collectively. Historically, in vast areas of Africa, European colonialisms have had, and continue to have, much less influence on questions of the modern state, labour systems, and human identity than did powerful, ancient, and globally interlinked Muslim cosmologies, militarisms, and economies. Decolonial theory tends to sidestep this ordinary fact. Instead, “the religious” is simply relegated to an adjunct of the colonial, thus rehearsing notions of the secular which simply do not serve, analytically, to grasp the gendered realities of diverse African citizens (or African struggles for citizenship).

Fatou Sow (2018), writing on gender and fundamentalisms, points out that notions of the appropriately feminine are deeply situated within Abrahamic religions (Islam, Christianity, and Judaism). These notions constitute generative ground for the emotional and discursive construction of surveillance over gender identities. Within fundamentalisms, this construction, termed “religious,” may flow into powerful technologies for the making of “women”, bound to servitude, and “men”, who command obedience. Sow argues that such fundamentalisms renew the dynamics of gender in a material way: funds flow towards the institutionalisation of a contemporary masculinity which may evoke “ancient teaching” but actually thrives within contemporary neoliberal economies. Sow’s theorisation of the conversation between gender, violence, and power thus refuses the relegation of “religion” to a sphere separable from the contemporary, showing how a fundamentalism is birthed from within and sustains the state’s desire for “women” whose labour is readily extracted, especially in the reproductive sphere.

As issue editors, our interest in designing a research space in which the interplay among violence, gender, and power could be opened up beyond the conventional (although important) focus on domestic violence, trafficking, and rape, led us to acknowledge that theorisations of this interplay are multiple, and sometimes destabilising. They include the need to constantly re-define “violence” – which can span actions as different as cyberstalking and wage-labour under coercive conditions – or to visualise the simultaneity of such diverse forms of attack on people gendered as women. But perhaps the most destabilising, for the majority of African feminists, comes from the

interrogation of gendering in and of itself. Lugones may have theorised conventional notions of gendering as colonial (and therefore violent). Yet, it is the sustained, intricate, and often so beautiful narratives of people living “outside” conventional gendered/sexual norms in African contexts that have rendered notions of rigid “masculinity/femininity” too vacuous for any profound commitment to human/social liberation.

A very wide set of ideas about how to imagine violence, embodiment, sexuality, and solidarities has been created by activism and allied research/writing that centres the experiences of people unrecognised within state-legal-religious frameworks of how “manhood” and “womanhood” should work and be put to work. There are at least two core challenges to much of African feminism arising from this work. The first is that the possibility of including the experiences of “queer” African-based thinkers, activists, and indeed people, within “feminist” analyses of gender as a “minority” – an umbrella group whose knowledges of violence matter – simply *extends* feminists’ grasp of how state, economic, and political violences can constitute themselves. This kind of extension-practice – of merely “adding” the insights of those living counter-heteronormatively to well-worn understandings of violence – leaves the feminisms involved rooted in their own binary-based theorisation and simultaneously compounds the multiple legal, social, and political hostilities shown widely towards counter-heteronormative life/lives.

The second challenge is allied to the first: some of the most profound and influential thinkers and activists within African feminist work have engaged essentialist concepts of “women” and “men” without reflection on the (perhaps contextual) motivation to choose this approach as a way of understanding gender. Others, of course, have not done so – one thinks of Sylvia Tamale, Jessica Horn, Hope Chigudu, Asanda Benya, and many more. African feminisms therefore span a range of positions on the value of thinking beyond the binary, but this range is rarely named, let alone explored, placing renowned writers and activists, who are very differently positioned in terms of their engagement with counter-heteronormativity, side-by-side within projects that celebrate African feminists and their work. One side-effect is the likelihood that those theorising and strategising against binary-infused

concepts of gender, sex, and sexuality are not likely to turn to African feminisms as ready partners in critical solidarities – this is a loss.

For this *Feminist Africa* project, we were open, as issue editors and facilitators of research support to project participants, to listening to experiences and allied theorisations of violence, gender, and power that emerged from the contexts that researchers choose to explore. The histories of feminist responses to a vast array of potential violences are so rich, complex, saturated with debate, and infused with courage, that “a single story” would be not only reductive but impossible. This section’s “Notes” function as a background to research writers’ interest in the project, but in no way seeks to contain it.

Methodology as political feminist process

How can one engage in feminist research on gender and violence in ways that acknowledge the complexities of power relations in research enquiries, the methodologies adopted, and the challenges faced in feminist research processes? This question lies at the heart of this issue of *Feminist Africa*.

A key challenge for African feminists remains the need to create knowledges which both emerge from the diverse and complex contexts in which we live and work, and speak to such contexts with sufficient resonance to sustain innovative and transformative action. Designing research methodologies capable of addressing the questions which compel us constitutes a politics in its own right, demanding a re-evaluation of received approaches and sophisticated reflection on the intersections of theory and practice as researchers and writers. (Bennett 2008, 1)

Feminist approaches that acknowledge the inevitability of inequalities of power among research participants, research producers, and users of feminist research in this field are central to the overall project, as is the recognition that there is a vast difference between actual experience and the modalities with which we negotiate to represent such experience. This is always an exercise in partial failure – no images or words can replace or renew “experience” as it occurs. The representations themselves are intimately political. Theorising the politics of research methodologies has meant for us describing and analysing such experiences, that is, acknowledging and addressing disparities of power

explicitly. For researchers, this entailed examining, in a granular manner, how power relations were configured in their various modes of producing feminist knowledge about gender and violence.

Recognising violence within a given situation entails drawing on feminist scholarship that theorises how meaning is embedded in the contextual dimensions of knowledge. This process refers to questions such as what is understood or recognised as knowledge, i.e. the domain of feminist epistemology and methodologies. Feminist epistemology highlights the intimate relationship between theory and methodology – how researchers theorise dimensions of violence, gender, and power has implications for their methodological approach. What methodologies have been used, by whom, and with what effects? Countering received approaches to knowledge production, such as positivism or even “progressive” social science that is nevertheless masculinist, may take the form of critique or of asking counterfactual questions, for example, what would scholarship on Africa look like if African feminist knowledge were to be taken seriously (Pereira 2002)? A researcher may ask what theories of knowledge – positivist or social constructivist or some other – have been used in researching gendered violence.

Feminist objectivity – unlike the “scientific” objectivity of positivism – is necessarily partial, not neutral, makes clear its positionality, and acknowledges accountability for the knowledge produced (Haraway 1988; Bhavnani 1993). This raises the question of what accountabilities, and to whom, specific methodological choices uphold. Feminist researchers generally view their accountability for their methodological choices, to those who are the focus of research, as part of the political process. This accountability also involves being clear about the limitations of methodologies. Only by producing knowledge in a manner that is accountable to the assumptions of the research can its methodology be considered ethical (Bhavnani 1993). Accountability also applies to questions of access to the research and circulation of the knowledge produced. With whom, and how, will the knowledge be shared?

The geographical, historical, political, economic, and socio-cultural context in which the research is being carried out is a second aspect of

contextualisation (see e.g., Mampane 2022; Cunha and Casimiro 2021; Okech 2020; Mupotsa 2011). These features shape national, regional, continental, and international conditions and circumstances affecting the dynamics of gender, such as whether conflict or warfare is ongoing or how “peace” may be experienced by feminised persons. Multiple authority sources – state, religious, community, and family – will have their own approach to histories of work on gendered violence in a specific context. There may be a range of work within women’s organisations and civil society more generally that addresses gender and violence, each with its own focus and priorities. There is the larger question of language and, in multilingual contexts, how any given language refers to issues of sexuality, violence in public and domestic spaces, and the specificities of visibility and denial regarding gendered violence (see e.g., Chilisa and Ntseane 2010). This complexity underscores different dimensions of the question of which assumptions need revisiting in any new research project.

The positioning of the researcher is a critical feature of feminist research. Whose gaze does the research rely on – an outsider’s, within or outside? An insider’s, within or outside? A whole spectrum of placements could be implicated. These questions highlight some of the ways in which feminist researchers treat positionality, that is, how the researcher is positioned in relation to the research theme (Mampane 2022; Undie 2007; Pereira 2005; Morsy 1988). Positionality has often been treated as synonymous with intersectionality, influenced by Kimberlé Crenshaw’s (1991) use of the term to refer to the differential treatment of women by the US legal system, depending on their racialisation as “white” or “black,” with black women facing greater burdens than white. Power was forced to flow in intersecting ways through categories of “identity,” specifically race and gender. From a different perspective, positionality has been treated as centrally addressing power relations, *not* identity (Bhavnani 1993). Thus, what is important for the researcher to highlight are the power dynamics – overt and covert – inherent in the research process. This entails reflection on multiple layers of power relations – what features make the researcher powerful, or conversely, relatively powerless in particular research encounters. Avoiding the reinscription of prevailing powerlessness is a key feature of feminist research practices (Bhavnani 1993), which requires engaging with

the micropolitics of research relationships. Reflexivity is paramount here, including engagement with the research process as a means of documenting its subjective aspects, such as the decisions taken at each stage (see e.g., Mohlakoana-Mosala 2013).

Given the complexities in any specific location, researching gendered violence gives rise to political questions concerning the alignment of the researcher's study with previous and/or existing work. If the study is very different from existing work, will the research be considered suspect, and if so, how should the researcher address this issue? How will a researcher understand and deal with a context in which the dynamics of gender and violence are expressed in unfamiliar ways? How does the researcher deal with questions of difference? Choosing which feminist methodology to use in researching gendered violence requires a reckoning with the histories of influence of research in that field. Numerous questions arise concerning representation and legitimacy. Which kinds of representation – quantitative, qualitative – are valued and seen as more worthy of receiving resources? What is “legitimacy” with regard to feminist research methodologies? Some of the issues concerned include how the terrain has already been researched, which methodologies are considered authoritative in a particular context, and how the knowledge generated will be represented. Treating research methodology as feminist political process requires, among other things, analysis of which bodies of literature are viewed as important, relevant, or even necessary. Whose voices should be brought into the research process? Referencing and citation involve conscious political choices. Awino Okech (2020) highlights the significance of African feminist epistemic communities and the opportunities for reflection provided by instances of apparent failure in the course of research.

Internationally, there is considerable concern over gendered violence, its pervasiveness and increased visibility in certain circumstances, particularly during conflict. The call for quantification – the production of “data” on gendered violence – is loud in policy circles such as United Nations Women (see e.g., Maina and Rooney 2024). The World Health Organization maintains a Global Database on the Prevalence of Violence Against Women.³ The lack of “data” is seen as critical by policy actors and activists working to shape responses to gendered violence. While no doubt useful and important

in many respects, however, the emphasis on quantification does not necessarily illuminate how the “data” are constituted. What is being counted, using what methods and to what end? What is being left out? At its heart, quantification presumes the use of categories and/or occurrences of gendered violence and the possibility of counting such categories in a relatively straightforward manner. It also assumes that deciphering the meaning of responses to questions involving such categories is uncomplicated.

Recognising that research on gendered violence entails a commitment to surfacing the experiences of those who have been targets of violence is a deeply political process, one that entails recognition of multilayered complexity, affect, embodiment, and relationalities. Whose experiences and voices will the research address? Which actors enable the telling of the story of the research and which actors are invisibilised? Enabling survivors to find words for traumatising experiences that they may not fully grasp themselves is both painful and demanding. The notion that the import of experiences of violence can even be conveyed in a direct manner assumes that language, any language, is capable of such representation. This is quite apart from the multiple impacts that experiences of trauma may have on survivors’ ability to speak. How does a researcher build trust, support the sharing of stories, enable research participants to exercise “voice” in the research process, and open up space for new voices? Questions such as these are integral to reflections on the feminist political processes entailed in researching survivors’ experiences of violence.

Each survivor’s journey is a unique tapestry of trauma, resilience, and survival, making it imperative to move beyond statistical data and delve into the qualitative dimensions of their experiences. While quantitative data provides valuable insights into the prevalence and patterns of GBV, it often falls short in capturing the rich complexity of survivors’ lived experiences... (Diab and Al-Azzeh 2024, 3)

The process of listening to survivors’ experiences of violence gives rise to multiple ethical conundrums for feminist researchers. What, for example, are the implications for survivors of trying to speak about their own experiences of violation? Where do they begin, and where do they end? Will they be believed? Ethical guidelines are generally treated in media handbooks in terms of recommendations to prioritise safety and minimise risk; protect the rights

of survivors; ensure informed consent on their part; and safeguard privacy, anonymity and confidentiality during the reporting process (e.g., Impe 2019). While a number of these guidelines, such as prioritising safety, minimising risk, and supporting survivors' rights also apply to situations in which feminist researchers take listening to survivors seriously, the ethical conundrums that researchers are faced with tend to present themselves as less clear-cut.

The notion of informed consent is complicated in contexts of insecurity when much of the potential fallout from telling the story might be unpredictable. The context in which a survivor tells her story is likely to affect how believable she is seen to be, with the legal process manifesting multiple modes of eroding a survivor's credibility (see e.g., Bennett 2013). How risk might be minimised in research situations will vary for survivors, researchers, and family members. From their experience of carrying out large-scale surveys of gender-based violence in South Africa and Zimbabwe, Rachel Jewkes et al. (2000) point to a range of ethical issues in this domain. The fact of carrying out research on gender-based violence in itself exposes researchers and research participants to violence. Respondents as well as researchers face the risk of being traumatised as a result of recounting violent experiences, and researchers' own relationships are often affected by the impact of carrying out research on violence (Jewkes et al. 2000).

A critical ethical issue concerns how to create conditions for survivors to recount their stories in ways that do not entrench feelings of hopelessness or representations of victimhood. Using methodologies such as life stories enables feminist researchers to avoid "ideologically polarised discussions on victimhood and agency," as in the case of sex work (Guha 2019, 505). In settings of chronic insecurity, creating a safe social space for giving testimony, preserving memories, and contesting impunity provides new ways of listening to and learning from survivors (Riaño-Alcalá and Baines 2011). Highlighting the resistance of girls and women to gendered oppression and violence is another way of using feminist research to counter notions of victimhood. The use of context-specific and indigenous methodologies can provide a researcher with the opportunity to act ethically in a healing capacity by "allow[ing] research participants to name and share pain and to collectively

envision strategies for resistance, resilience and survival” (Chilisa and Ntseane 2010, 629).

Violence, gender, and power: feminist praxes for research

This issue of *Feminist Africa* collates a range of writing by scholars within our research collective, and all contributions grapple with methodological considerations as political and theoretical issues. Most of the authors will also share their work in another issue of *Feminist Africa* (planned for late 2026). In some ways, it is unusual to publish research devoted solely to peer reviewed writing on the politics of the methodologies used; as editors, we chose to do this for two reasons. Firstly, our project demanded that we find a way to build a cohort of thinkers and researchers, each team working with very different contexts and issues, so that immediate discussions could be held about dilemmas and difficulties that we all faced as feminist researchers. The politics of methodologies was an obvious focus, and moreover, one with which all project participants resonated. Secondly, the length limitations for peer reviewed contributions in *Feminist Africa* (and many other scholarly journals) tends to preclude in-depth reflections on questions of methodology as theory. And yet, as glossed in the previous section, feminist epistemologies are profoundly rooted in the analysis of methodologies. In much knowledge-making that is responsible for the erasure, stigmatisation, and/or hypersurveillance of people constrained under gender dynamics, it has been the methodology adopted that has caused more damage than the “assertion of a new ‘fact’”.

In this issue, Feature articles explore, from a range of perspectives, the politics of qualitative methodologies drawn upon by researchers with very different research foci. Stella Nyanzi and Annah Ashaba are both Ugandan feminist political activists who have very directly confronted the Museveni regime and been violently targeted by the state. They begin their exploration of the violence faced by women political fighters by invoking the potential – and danger – of “a conversation,” a cry for empathy and support from a fellow exile. The notion of conversation as an implacable call into thinking through the holographic and often perilous processes of listening with and for women in political exile offers a powerful starting point for the journal. The

interest in “conversations” expands through Ruth Nekura’s article on how feminist litigators, who work in the hostile and narrow waters of legal languages and argument, build an organic and intellectual solidarity with one another. Nekura suggests that “conversation” can be engaged as a research methodology whose contours are shaped by both ethical boundaries and a strong commitment to feminists working together where actual work-zones – courts, engagement with clients, aggressive counter-advocacies – may well seek to separate litigators from one another.

Enzo Lenine and Naentrem Sanca’s research interests lie in the ways in which violence against women in Angola, Cape Verde, and Guinea-Bissau conveys “messaging” that normalises connections between gender and power, which lead to women’s vulnerability. The researchers explore the delicacy, political nuances, and complexity of creating conversations with multiple interlocutors. Their Feature article reflects on the ways in which positionalities loop, sometimes along untrackable paths, both towards and away from their own capacity to make sense of the dialogues they have with survivors, researchers, government officials, civil society organisation workers, and others. As with the contributions by Nyanzi and Ashaba, and by Nekura, Lenine and Sanca’s article is fully alert to the mesh of pain, surprise, anger, and anxiety woven by research attuned to matters of violence. Lenine and Sanca simultaneously tackle the methodological question of how a hegemonic discipline (in this case, International Relations) can erase or marginalise what violence may mean once gender dynamics are taken seriously.

Nora Noralla’s Feature article thinks through the narratives of transpeople living in Egypt, where the need to live gendered in a way not predicted by birth sex-identity is highly pathologised in both religious and popular discourse, and access to medically supported transition is non-existent, legally. She is explicit that her interest is not in questions of her own positionality (although she knows the area as an “insider”), but rather that her commitment is to the representation of the experiences of those she encounters in her research journey. Doing so without reducing such representation to “data” requires the presentation of detailed context for the stories, and the desire, on her part, to step away from any authorial limelight. Noralla’s essay is the first trans-focused research to be included in a collation of Feature articles in *Feminist Africa*. We are very happy to have Noralla’s

Feature in this issue and we hope for a strengthening of the commitment demonstrated by *Feminist Africa* to theorisations of gender that centre the experiences of people erased by binary models.

The mapping of contemporary thinking on the multiple linkages among violence, gender, and power continues in a Conversation and two Standpoint essays. Mpumulelo Zamakuhle Zulu discusses the politics of research with non-governmental organisation (NGO) queer activists Katleho Mahlobo, Jessie Jabulisile Mdlalose, and Katlego Chibamba. “We are Not Just Data Sources!” is longer than most *Feminist Africa* In Conversation submissions and includes wide-ranging and sharp thought on the ways in which NGO-based researchers get positioned as “lesser” than university-based ones, and how knowledges derived from the work undertaken by NGOs are rarely foregrounded as “theory.” The contribution carries a wealth of arguments about the need to explode notions that stories are “data”. This concern is also explored by Blessing Hodzi and Yvonne Phiri in a Standpoint essay that traces their own movement from people culturally taught to be wary of women with disabilities to becoming researcher activists who focus on violences endured by women with disabilities in Zimbabwe.

The questions of “insider/outsiderhood” that Hodzi and Phiri raise are also tackled in Eugenia Anderson’s Standpoint essay about possibilities for researching intimate partner violence experienced by women of faith within different Christian-based churches. As she explains, pastorship often recommends that pastors themselves should be the ones to give counsel and support to the women affected – who are not encouraged to use the police or NGO services in reporting their abuse. Anderson argues that being simultaneously an “insider” and an “outsider” afforded her some power and a route to investigate this challenge. She writes as both a woman of faith and a feminist who is critical of theologies that consider domestic violence against women to fall within a husband’s right. Although the voices and foci in the Standpoints and In Conversation are distinct, as editors we discern a compelling collation of questions about methodologies that arise from a passionate commitment to justice and from solidly engaged and invested life-work within the particular settings explored by contributors.

Three books are reviewed in this issue: Françoise Vergès' *A Feminist Theory of Violence*, by Charmaine Pereira; Annie Bunting, Allen Kiconco, and Joel Quirk's edited anthology *Research As More than Extraction*, by Margo Okazawa-Rey; and Imbolo Mbue's second novel, *How Beautiful We Were*, by Jane Bennett. It was difficult for us as editors to make choices of material to review from many possible pieces of writing. Those we selected seemed to complement the ideas highlighted through the issue: the complexity of imagining "violence" where gender and power are concerned. Where does it end? From where did it begin? What must we do, and how must we "be" in the face of what we have lived and come to know about such violence? How do we erase its futures? Then there is the salience of understanding the ways in which knowledges are collated, worked with, and how they change us as feminists in African contexts. Along the way, we would like to further the possibility of forging communities of writers and thinkers, accessible to more than ourselves.

The final contribution in the issue is Dzodzi Tsikata's tribute to Everjoice Win, who travelled into ancestry on 9 March 2025. Win was a woman so well-known continentally for her wit, presence, leadership, and generosity with African feminisms that her name, "EJ," was for some synonymous with everything integral, joyful, and deeply human about the movement itself. Tsikata's tribute glosses the very wide range of organisations and initiatives with which EJ was associated and the huge esteem in which she was held. This issue of *Feminist Africa* focuses on the work of very difficult research, and as several articles describe, this entails pain, sometimes confusion and a sense of not knowing where one is going. Those who worked with EJ never had that sense: she inspired, she offered purpose and hope in her ways of being and her ways of working. It feels very important to "end" this issue with a memory of EJ to ensure that feminist solidarities and the threads moving between so many different feminists, in time and context, in language and emotion, here in life and in death, can sustain so much.

Notes

1. *Woman at Point Zero* was first published in English in 1983 by Zed Books.

2. Awa Thiam's *La Parole Aux Negresses* was only translated into English in 1986.
3. <https://vaw-data.srhr.org/>

References

- Bennett, Jane. 2008. "Editorial: Researching for Life: Paradigms and Power." *Feminist Africa* 11, 1–12. https://feministafrica.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/fa_11_3_editorial.pdf
- Bennett, Jane. 2013. "'Jacketed Women': The Politics of Researching Gender and Sexualities in African Contexts." In *Jacketed Women: Qualitative Research Methodologies on Sexualities and Gender in Africa*, edited by Jane Bennett and Charmaine Pereira, 171–187. Cape Town: UCT Press/Tokyo: United Nations University Press.
- Bhavnani, Kum-Kum. 1993. "Tracing the Contours: Feminist Research and Feminist Objectivity." *Women's Studies International Forum* 16(2): 95–104.
- Chilisa, Bagele and Gabo Ntseane. 2010. "Resisting Dominant Discourses: Implications of Indigenous, African Feminist Theory and Methods for Gender and Education Research." *Gender and Education* 22(6): 617–632.
- Crenshaw, Kimberlé. 1991. "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color." *Stanford Law Review* 43(6): 1241–1299.
- Cunha, Teresa and Isabel Casimiro. 2021. "'Cinderellas' of Our Mozambique Wish to Speak: A Feminist Perspective on Extractivism." *Feminist Africa* 2(1): 71–98. https://feministafrica.net/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/fa_v2_issue1_Feature-article_Cinderellas_of-Our-Mozambique-Wish-to-Speak.pdf
- Diab, Jasmin L. and Dana Al-Azzeh. 2024. "Inclusive Inquiry: A Compassionate Journey in Trauma-Informed Qualitative Research with GBV Survivors from Displaced Communities." *Frontiers in Psychology* 15: 1399115. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2024.1399115>

- El Saadawi, Nawal. 1983. *Woman at Point Zero*. London: Zed Books. Translated by Sherif Hetata.
- Guha, Mirna. 2019. “‘Do You Really Want to Hear about My Life?’: Doing ‘Feminist Research’ with Women in Sex Work in Eastern India.” *Gender & Development* 27(3): 505–521.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13552074.2019.1664045>
- Gqola, Pumla Dineo. 2015. *Rape: A South African Nightmare*. Johannesburg: MFBooks Joburg, an imprint of Jacana Media (Pty) Ltd.
- Haraway, Donna. 1988. “Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective.” *Feminist Studies* 14(3): 575–599.
- Impe, Anne-Marie. 2019. *Reporting on Violence against Women and Girls: A Handbook for Journalists*. Paris: UNESCO.
- Jewkes, Rachel, Charlotte Watts, Naeema Abrahams, Loveday Penn-Kekana and Claudia Garcia-Moreno. 2000. “Ethical and Methodological Issues in Conducting Research on Gender-Based Violence in Southern Africa.” *Reproductive Health Matters* 8(15): 93–103.
[https://doi.org/10.1016/S0968-8080\(00\)90010-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0968-8080(00)90010-7)
- Kessi, Shose and Floretta Boonzaier. 2018. “Centre/ing Decolonial Feminist Psychology in Africa.” *South African Journal of Psychology* 48(3): 008124631878450. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0081246318784507>
- Kuzwayo, Ellen. 1985. *Call Me Woman*. London: The Women’s Press.
- Lugones, Maria. 2016. “The Coloniality of Gender.” In *The Palgrave Handbook of Gender and Development*, edited by Wendy Harcourt, 45–61. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Maina, Sylvia and Lauren Rooney. 2024. “Gender Data Is Not Just Valuable; It Is Essential in Preventing and Responding to Gender-Based Violence. But There Are Gaps.” UN Women, Africa. Accessed 5 May 2025. <https://africa.unwomen.org/en/stories/op-ed/2024/12/gender-data-is-not-just-valuable-it-is-essential-in-preventing-and-responding-to-gender-based-violence-but-there-are->

[gaps#:~:text=The%20power%20of%20data%20in,well%2Dbeing.%5B1%5D](#)

- Mampane, Tumi. 2022. "This Field I Call Home: Black Feminist (Auto)Ethnography in Alexandra Township, South Africa." *African Identities* 22(2): 1–14.
- Mohlakoana-Mosala, Karabo. 2013. "Challenging Research, Researching Challenges: Feminism and Activism in Lesotho." In *Jacketed Women: Qualitative Research Methodologies on Sexualities and Gender in Africa*, edited by Jane Bennett and Charmaine Pereira, 23–35. Cape Town: UCT Press/Tokyo: United Nations University Press.
- Morgan, Robin. 1984. ed. *Sisterhood Is Global: The International Women's Movement Anthology*. New York: Anchor Press/Doubleday.
- Morsy, Soheir. 1988. "Fieldwork in My Egyptian Homeland: Toward the Demise of Anthropology's Distinctive-Other Hegemonic Tradition." In *Arab Women in the Field: Studying Your Own Society*, edited by Soraya Altorki and Camillia Fawzi El-Sohl, 69–90. New York: Syracuse University Press.
- Mupotsa, Danai. 2011. "From Nation to Family': Researching Gender and Sexuality." In *Researching Violence in Africa: Ethical and Methodological Challenges*, edited by Christopher Cramer, Laura Hammond, and Johan Pottier, 95–110. Leiden: Brill.
- Okech, Awino. 2020. "African Feminist Epistemic Communities and Decoloniality." *Critical African Studies* 12(3): 313–329. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21681392.2020.1810086>
- Ossome, Lyn. 2024. "The Colonial State and Postcolonial Feminist Predicaments." *Feminist Africa* 5(2): 42–62.
- Pereira, Charmaine. 2002. "Between Knowing and Imagining – What Space for Feminism in Scholarship on Africa?" *Feminist Africa* 2002: 9–33. https://feministafrica.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/fa_1_feature_article_2.pdf
- Pereira, Charmaine. 2005. "Zina and Transgressive Heterosexuality in Northern Nigeria." *Feminist Africa* 5: 52–79.

https://feministafrica.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/fa_5_feature_article_3.pdf

- Riaño-Alcalá, Pilar, and Erin Baines. 2011. "The Archive in the Witness: Documentation in Settings of Chronic Insecurity." *The International Journal of Transitional Justice*, 1–22. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ijtj/ijr025>
- Sow, Fatou. 2018. "Genre et Fondamentalismes en Afrique: Une Introduction." In *Gender and Fundamentalisms*, edited by Fatou Sow, 1–21. Dakar: CODESRIA publications.
- <https://doi.org/10.57054/codesria.pub.27>
- Tamale, Sylvia. 2020. *Decolonization and Afro-Feminism*. Ottawa: Daraja Press.
- Thiam, Awa. 1986. *Speak Out, Black Sisters: Feminism and Oppression in Black Africa*. London: Pluto Press. Translated by Dorothy S. Blair.
- Undie, Chi-Chi. 2007. "My Father's Daughter: Becoming a 'Real' Anthropologist Among the Ubang of Southeast Nigeria." *Dialectical Anthropology* 31(1/3): 293–305. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10624-007-9013-x>