

Gendered Leadership in Zimbabwe's institutions of higher learning: A call for decolonisation of equality and justice.

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Abstract: This article utilizes the Decoloniality theory to discuss the underrepresentation of opportunities in the appointment of women to positions of leadership in universities in Zimbabwe. Equality and justice are referred to in the research from the works of Ranciere and Rawls as themes and frameworks informing decoloniality. The arguments advanced in the research are that there cannot be democratization of opportunities if equality and justice frameworks are not subjected to decoloniality. The research discovered that out of fifteen state run universities, none of the universities has attained the 50% female representation in leadership and decision-making anticipated when the National Gender Policy was formulated in 2004.

Key words: Decolonisation, Equality Justice.

I. INTRODUCTION

This research emanates from the concern with the underrepresentation of opportunities in the appointment of women in positions of leadership in universities in Zimbabwe. Equality and justice are referred to in the research from the works of Ranciere (1997; 2000; 2004) and Rawls (1971) as themes and frameworks informing decoloniality. This means, decoloniality in this study will be explained in terms of equality of opportunities for women in universities in Zimbabwe. The theory of decoloniality was used. Ndlovu Gatsheni (2013), Mignolo (2000), and Maldonado-Torres (2007) to explain the underrepresentation of female academics in positions of leadership. The argument is that there cannot be democratization of education opportunities in Zimbabwe institutions of higher education if equality and justice frameworks are not subjected to decoloniality. According to Mbembe (2016: 30) there is need to decolonise universities systems of access and management as these are embedded in epistemic injustice that is rooted in gender prejudices.

Gender equality in higher education has been on the spotlight in Zimbabwe since independence in 1980. However, observations by Zvobgo (2015:61) are that universities have been concerned more about gender disparities in education focussing on student enrolment and performance at different levels of schooling. However, gender disparities in the management structures of schools and colleges has received little attention because representation of women in leadership positions remain disproportionately low. This is indicative of a gender leadership gap in Zimbabwe's higher education. The

other argument advanced in this study is that despite efforts and attempts by the government at gender mainstreaming, female academics remain underrepresented in leadership positions in Zimbabwe's institutions of higher education. Underrepresentation implies the perpetuation of gender inequality in higher education.

Study limitation and Positionality

In terms of my positionality as a researcher, I conducted the research as an interested party. The researcher has been a university lecturer for over 10 years but still hold the entry grade. At the university where I work, there are six faculties which are all headed by men. This limitation explains why the researcher provides a government centred analysis with special focus on unjust and oppressive systems. Personal experiences have been used to understand the dynamics over policy and practice exerted by government and university authorities.

II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study utilised a case study design. Case study design was appropriate for the interrogation of gender policies as well as systems and structures of universities in Zimbabwe. Four state universities were selected by order of their establishment and staff compliment. The first university was established in 1957 and the latest was established in 2015. Universities were established when gender mainstreaming and women empowerment was already taking a centre stage globally. A sample of randomly selected 55 participants was drawn from academic and administrative staff at four state universities. Four key informants were selected from top administrators in the universities. The study applied qualitative data collection techniques. Primary data was solicited through in-depth interviews, and observation, while secondary data was secured from document analysis.

Policy framework and Practice

Zimbabwe has always strived to achieve gender equality since its political independence in 1980. Over the years, in its continued commitment to removal of all forms of sex discrimination in the society, the government has alluded to several national and international gender declarations and conventions such as the SADC Declaration on Gender and

Equality, signed by SADC Heads of State and Governments in 1997 (Shava 2014). Locally, Zimbabwe, responded to addressing gender inequalities by coming up with a National Gender Policy 2004; 2006; 2016 as well as a Gender Policy Implementation Strategy and Work Plan 2008 which sets out priorities for gender mainstreaming and empowerment for the period 2008-2016 (Zvobgo 2015).

Among other aims, one of the objectives of the National Gender Policy (NGP) is “to promote equal opportunities for women and men in decision making in all areas and all levels” (National Gender Policy (NGP), 1992:3, 2004: 6). Other legislation put in place to compliment the NGP included, Equal Pay Regulations and Sexual Discrimination Removal Act of 1994 and amended in 2013. The above mentioned efforts are an indication that Zimbabwe’s law does not, as a general rule, expressly discriminate against women in the field of employment. For instance, Section 5 of the Labour Relations Act introduced in 1985 prohibits employers to discriminate against any employee on the grounds of race, tribe or place of origin, political opinion, colour, creed or sex.” (Constitution of Zimbabwe, 1979). It makes discrimination on the basis of sex unlawful.

However, in spite of these measures, there appears to be insignificant impact between policy and practice. For example, in the tertiary education sector, there are far fewer women in positions of leadership than men (Gaidzanwa 1992; Shava 2007; Zvobgo 2015). According to Gaidzanwa (1992:10) “the University (of Zimbabwe) provided an atmosphere and opportunities for female academics with little experience to join in administration, but the higher levels of university administration remained male dominated”. Other research, conducted by Zvobgo in 2015, revealed that only 12.0% of senior public positions were held by women in Zimbabwe (UNICEF Update, 2016:3). This contradicts the liberal feminist theory that is based on the tenets women and men are equal and therefore should have equal rights equal and equal representation in public life (van den Brink et al., 2010). The liberals believe in human rights, gender justice or sexual equality, equal opportunities, equal access to resources, that is, males and females are equal and no-one should be discriminated against. However, despite the feminists’ movements, policy calls to equal opportunities and justice,

Research indicates that women remain discriminated in the workplace and are excluded from leadership and decision-making despite having the gender policy in place.

In an effort to redress gender inequity, universities in Zimbabwe have put in place equal opportunity regulations and adopted programs designed to increase the number of women in leadership in universities (Shava 2014). Similar to other universities in the region, Bindura University developed a gender policy in 2014, Midlands State University instituted a Gender Policy in 2006, Zimbabwe Open University formulated a policy in 2005 to guide individual universities in addressing issues related to gender. Zimbabwe has 15 state run universities and majority of them have made

commitments to promote gender equality as enunciated in various universities vision, mission and core values.

Some common goals outlined in universities gender policies include: to eliminate practices impeding equality and equity of sexes (MSU- Gender policy, 2006, p.3, ZOU Gender Policy 2005, p2). On the same note, some of the objectives are: to ensure gender balance in recruitment, promotion and retention of staff by 2012; and to ensure that at least 50 percent of decision makers at all levels are female by December 2012 (MSU- Gender Policy, 2006, p.3, GZU Gender Policy 2009, p5). The respective gender policies acknowledges that the increased participation of women in leadership and decision-making bodies can be achieved by employing strategies such as advocating for increased recruitment of women, promotion and retention of female staff as well as equitable funding for staff development of female and male staff members ((MSU- Gender Policy, 2006, p.3, GZU Gender Policy, p5). This research argues that, despite having gender policies in place, female academics in Zimbabwe continue to be discriminated in the workplace and are excluded from leadership and decision-making positions.

Decolonising equality and Justice

Decoloniality is defined by Maldonado-Torres (2017) as the dismantling of relations of power and conceptions of knowledge that foment the reproduction of racial, gender, and geo-political hierarchies that came into being or found new and more powerful forms of expression in the modern but colonial world. Decolonisation of higher education is predicated on the need to do away with what was colonised, it presents an endeavour to deconstruct and reconstruct norms, values, beliefs and thought systems that were disseminated during colonialism (Maldonado-Torres 2007). This entails that decolonisation remains an emancipator discourse in which forms of social oppression and prejudices are supposedly eliminated (Mbembe 2016). Therefore, the process of decolonisation includes the need to redress the oppressive structural, cultural and systematic colonial values that are deep rooted in Zimbabwe’s higher education. The relevance of decoloniality on Zimbabwe’s institutions of higher learning stems from its structural inequalities. For instance, there are 19 universities in Zimbabwe, 15 of which are state run institutions. The University of Zimbabwe, established in 1957 is the oldest highest institution of learning in the country. Ever since its establishment in 1957, the senior management of the university has been dominated by men. This also is true to all other state institutions which were established later to decongest the university of Zimbabwe. The thinking was/is that female academics are often depicted as somehow deficient in that they lack the cultural capital demanded in leadership (Afro-centric thinking). Women are framed as lacking the cultural resources necessary to run universities. Smit (2012: 369) describes this mindset as the deficit model because it only focuses on deficiencies and inadequacies, in this case, of women. Insights obtained from studies by Rawls (1971) and Ranciere (2000; 2004) aided to the appreciation of the need for best practice through decoloniality.

In the light of the above revelation, the goal of this research is to decolonize gendered leadership using Rawls' (1971) theory of justice and Ranciere's (1997) radical equality. Radical equality, in Ranciere's (1997; 2012) terms is the opening of all the imaginable possibilities and opportunities to everyone. Ranciere is a theorist of political philosophy and equality to whom the central question seems to be "the absent presence of the equality." (Dillon 2005; 430–431). To Ranciere, no social order neither guarantees nor creates equality; it cannot be required either. In other words, for Ranciere there is no such thing as equality. Radical equality means the opening of all the imaginable possibilities and opportunities to everyone. In the pursuit of radical equality, one must grasp the roots of the problem "and the root of the human being is a human being itself," This explains why the world is always in social conflict and epistemic violence. The examples of violence due to inequalities are the #RhodesMustfall, The Black lives Matter and many more. Furthermore, equality according to Ranciere is an origin for political and other action, not the other way around, since equality is always practiced and verified in social practices. This way it is ideal to understand Ranciere's thinking in educational processes and teaching methods as democratic exercise of power. This study argues that Zimbabwe as a developing country has not as yet internalised decolonization of opportunities as men continue to dominate senior leadership positions in institutions of higher education. This means that the frameworks that have been put in place by the government to dismantle inequalities in education have not fully materialised as inequalities in education still persist. From a historical perspective, the colonial era saw women being heavily oppressed without consideration for racial or gender equality in employment before independence in 1980. In alluding to historical factors, the research demonstrates that gender equality is a post-independence concern. These inequalities are rooted in history and have been advanced by the colonial government.

The reproduction of male dominated administration is visible in all universities in Zimbabwe. For instance, there has been only one female Vice Chancellor in Zimbabwe between 1980 and 2017. This fits well with Mignolo's concept of coloniality. For Mignolo (2011:9) coloniality is a system of management and domination that affects the ways in which people are able to be in the world, based upon the social categories to which they have been allocated by birth, geography, or other circumstance. I find a strong resonance between Morrow's (2009) epistemological access and McCowan's (2007). They are both concerned about how education can be used as a vehicle to advance social injustices. The injustices in education are rooted in what Morrow (2009) refers to as epistemic deprivation. At one of the universities where I teach in Zimbabwe, there are six faculties run by academic deans who are all men. Positions of leadership in universities in Zimbabwe are political. Although posts are advertised, the final recommendation and appointment is a prerogative of the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education.

According to Rawls (1971), justice can only be realised if an egalitarian notion of justice as fairness is experienced. Rawls further uses the two guiding principles of greatest equal liberty and the principle of equality of opportunity and difference to substantiate his arguments on justice and fairness. This theory of Justice requires that if some people in society have more wealth, income or power than others, then those goods are the rewards for social positions they occupy that are open to all under the terms of 'fair equality of opportunity' (Rawls 1971: 60). According to the Difference Principle (DP), an inequality in the distribution of wealth, opportunities or income is unjust if it does not benefit the poorest and marginalised members of society. Although Rawls admits that the distribution of wealth and income needs not be equal, he further implores that the distribution must be to everyone's advantage (Rawls 1971:61). What this theory entails is that positions of authority and political offices should be accessible to all. In his *Theory of Justice* Rawls (1999), discusses justice as fairness. Fairness according Rawls is one of the features of justice because fairness is to think of the parties in the initial situation as rational and mutually disinterested, the individuals are conceived as not taking an interest in one another's interests. Rawls's (1999: 86) public reason describes how people engage with one another within the public sphere for the purpose of justice. Rawls views engagement as public reasoning that is conducted in a community of people who belong together. This engagement occurs in a just and fair manner. Rawls's (1999: 86) justice entails equal opportunities and redress as explicated in the principles of justice guiding the basic structure of society. According to Rawls, justice entails two different principles which are: firstly, equality in the assignment of basic liberty rights and duties, secondly that social and economic inequalities such as inequalities of wealth, authority and power, are just only if they result in compensating benefits for everyone, or specifically for the least advantaged members of society. These two principles by Rawls (1971; 1999) describe how public reasoning can be conducted to facilitate engagement, belonging and a sense of interaction. For to Rawls (1999: 86) justice has to do with the proper distribution of benefits and burdens among persons. In view of this observation, Rawls recommends equal citizenship rights, equality of opportunity in the distribution of authority, income, and wealth. Social values are to be distributed equally unless unequal distribution of any or all of these values is to everyone's advantage.

Rawls's arguments are relevant to the study's argument for decolonisation of equality and justice in Zimbabwe's institutions of higher education. I strive to argue for decoloniality of justice, an arrangement that can only be achieved if fairness, equality and equity are realised. Following Rawls's argument that justice should inform social transformation, I contend that higher education system in Zimbabwe should be a just arrangement and policy guiding higher education should be in line with principles of democracy and equality.

III. CONCLUSION

This research concludes that gender policies instituted by respective universities in Zimbabwe has not made any significant impact in promoting women leaders as women continue to be underrepresented in leadership positions. Leadership continues to be male dominated as males occupy the top positions as principal officers, deans/ directors, deputy deans/ directors and chairpersons. Data obtained from document study on university leadership in Zimbabwe indicates that out of fifteen state run universities, none of them has attained the 50% female representation in leadership and decision-making anticipated when the National Gender Policy was formulated in 2004. This research further observed that there are more educated women in Zimbabwe, the majority of who are more qualified than men sitting on most positions of leadership. This is why there is need to call for decoloniality and disengage the reproduction of inequalities and existing social order. Special privileges should be eradicated while opportunities provided should not be gender specific. The anomalies displayed in the unequal distribution of opportunities, and other disadvantages on the basis of gender, religion, colour or creed are qualities of capitalism and its schooling system.

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