IN/THROUGH THE BODIES OF WOMEN: RETHINKING GENDER IN AFRICAN POLITICS

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The Central argument of this paper is that the history of African social and political thought has been a male centred project discursively and symbolically mediated through bodies of women. As a result, in the history of African social and political thought, the female body, and female sexuality in particular, provided a symbolic space through which asymmetry power relations between African men has been discursively articulated, secured and contested. Frantz Fanon unwittingly confirms the centrality of womens bodies to the male centred colonial contest between colonized African men and their white male colonizers when he said : the look that the native turns on the settlers town is a look of lust, a look of envy; it expresses his dreams of possession-all manners of possession : to sit at the settler's table, to sleep in the settler's bed, with his wife if possible (Fanon: 1963, 39). I argue that the colonial contest between white patriarchal colonizers and their colonized African men, included, a contest over the possession of women's bodies (Mama:1995; McClintcok:1995; Mohandram: 1999).

In the process of constituting African nationalist/anti-colonial literature, the female body provided a powerful symbolic space through which pristine, pre-colonial African culture and racial purity can be imagined. In this way, African female body was symbolically represented as passive, pristine space acted on by active men of letters to carry out the urgent task of creating national culture. In the process of constituting national identity based on ethnic purity, the second task for women was to produce the sons of the nation and the agents of the body politic. African nationalist literary and political narratives are rife with female sexual metaphors, allegories and images. I argue that African nationalist/anti-colonial narratives often employ supposed prior A natural biological division of labour between men and women, A natural division of labour in which women were exclusively identified with their reproductive capacity as mothers and wives. Consequently, in the nationalist literary and political imagination, African women were, in the most cases, not thought of as active participants in the struggle against colonial imposition.

As a result, African women entered the nationalist literary and political imagination, not as subjects with political goals of their own but as mothers of the nation's children and wives of men who are the real political subjects. This does not

mean that, in actuality, African women have not participated in the struggle against colonial imposition nor does it mean that African women have not substantially contributed to African culture and politics. However, in my view, African political and literary discourses have been dominated by the interests and the aspirations of African men. Focusing on the interests and aspirations of the African men in African social and political thought, in turn, means that African women's political and cultural contributions to the African political, intellectual and cultural institutions must be denied or at least marginalized (Mama:1997; Zeleza:1997 Imam:1997; Sow:1997). And in the few cases, where African women's participation in the collective struggle for national liberation such as in Algeria and South Africa have been acknowledged, their inclusion have been conditional, tactical manoeuvres in the service of narrowly conceived military or political aims, and as such, have not led to full participation of African women in the public sphere. I argue that the history of African social and political thought, in the colonial and its post-colonial moment, has been dominated by mainly male Africanists and their African male counterpart, who, to a large extent, based their rendition of African society on western notions of politics, law, ethics and culture.

One of the central western import to African thought is alienation of men from nature, men from women and knowledge from the knower, public life from the private life. This dualist turn has had and still has profound and destructive epistemological, political and cultural implications. Rethinking African politics must include overcoming this dualist turn. To show the close connection between this dualist turn and the current prevailing masculinist political ethos in Africa and else where, it is necessary to first interrogate the western dualist epistemology and masculinist ethos. In her important book, *Reproducing the World,* feminist and political theorist, Mary O'Brien, describes some of the characteristics of *western dualist epistemology* and its kindred spirit, *masculinist prerogative*.

As far as knowing is concerned, we are taught that there are two important things about it. It is cumulative (like profit), and it is objective (like the market choices). Perhaps the *second* thing which most forcibly strikes women who enter the knowledge market is the *abstract* nature of knowledge. This has come to be known in feminist discourse as the problem of dualism, the knowing of the truth of any one thing by its separation from and its epistemological reliance on its opposite (O'Brien:1989,7).

In my view, whatever else they may differ, most Africanists male scholars share implicit presuppositions with their European masculinist thinkers about the basis of politics. And, if, as O'Brien and other feminist political theorists forcibly argued, that the history of western political thought has been synonymous with maleness, women must stand ontological and epistemological opposition to politics. So far, critical engagement with western masculinist prerogative from the perspectives of colonized peoples has been largely in terms of race. For example, in his important book, *Fanon and the Crisis*

of the European Man (1995), Lewis Gordon argues that Fanon embodied ontological and epistemological crisis of the European racist science and political thought in that, if the white man is to be both colonizer and the Universal Man, then, the Black Man must lack the universal ontology of the White Man. Gordon argues that this ontological reciprocal exclusivity has been the source of European colonialism, militarism and racism. Fanon, he argued, not only aptly noticed this central pathology in western philosophical and scientific racist thoughts and practices, but more importantly, he sought to find a solution for it (Gordon:1995,9). I agree with Gordon that Fanon's intellectual and political enterprise included, not just disalienation of the colonized black ontology, but equally alienated ontology of the white man whose only weapon in the face of his violent acts was the denial of the humanity of those he oppresses. Fanon insists that alienation of the colonized men cannot be overcome without tearing off the white man's masks: science and reason!

The psychoanalysts say that nothing is more traumatizing for the young child than his encounters with what is rational. I would personally say that for a man whose only weapon is reason there is nothing more neurotic than contact with unreason (Fanon: Black Skin White Masks, 1963, 118, quoted in Lewis Gordon's Fanon and the Crisis of the European Man, 1995,7).

According Gordon, however, European philosophers from Edmund Husserl, (who first posed this question not as crisis of the European Man but the Crisis of the European Science), to the current western social critics such as Richard Rorty, Jürgen Habermas and Charles Taylor, just to name a few, felt this crisis but have been unable to cure the malaise (Gordon:1995). I argue that crisis of the modern project that Fanon, Gordon, Husserl, Habermas and other male theorists attempted to articulate in their different ways, have, whatever else they may differ, one particular principle in common: all of them posed their questions with respect to the crisis of modernity within male centred trajectory, and for that reason, they have been unable to see that the problem of ontological alienation of both the European men and the black men requires also overcoming masculinist epistemology that identifies humanity, science and political thought with masculinity.

Dualist epistemology and male prerogative has informed the works of modern political theorists as well. It also formed the lenses through which in the era of colonial encounter European scientists, philosophers, and literary figures organized their views on colonized peoples. Hence, one of the aims of this essay is to make the connection between, on the one hand, male centred dualist epistemology and male prerogative and the specific ways that it was deployed in Africa in the hands of the European colonialists, and, how, this turn of events affected African systems of thought and practice.

To this end, I bring into my current analysis challenges, insights and critiques western, and African feminists levelled against the male centred history of western political thought because we cannot comprehend the history of African social and political thought in abstraction from the history of colonial encounter between European colonial conquest and African society.

I argue that European imposed African colonial rule in Africa had been founded on four closely related themes: dualist epistemology; white male prerogative; denigration and dehumanization of the African female body and feminization and colonization of the African space. In order to envision progressive African political theories and practices, we must first trace the history of the twin precepts of dualist epistemology and masculinist prerogative central to western history of ideas and practice and their colonizing impact on African cultures, modes of knowledge production and political institutions. But, we must first identify some of the specific characteristics of western notions dualistic epistemology and masculinist prerogative. O'Brien describes them this way:

The question is whether these two - the dualism and the masculinity - are related. It does not take long to discover that the "big things" are dualistic in a particular way: mind (abstract), body (material); culture (abstract), nature (material); science (abstract), common sense (material); public life (abstract), private life (material); intellectual work (abstract), manual or domestic labor (material); money (abstract), poverty (material); art (abstract), experience (material) (O'Brien:1989.7)

In the history of western social and political thought, men have been identified with the first of each of these dualistic concepts. This dualist framework informs the history of western political thought from Plato and Aristotle to enlightenment thinkers such as Thomas Hobbes to Rousseau and Marx. All these thinkers excluded women from active participation in the public sphere on the basis of prior epistemological and ontological differences between men and women (Sydie:1994; O'Brien:1989). In the are of European colonial conquest, colonized people were excluded from the ethical and moral considerations on similar ontological grounds by representing white men, as the sole agents with moral standing while denying such moral standing to colonized men and women who were claimed to lack the capacity for rational and moral judgments as a result were rendered, to Charles Mills apt phrase *subpersons* (Mills:1998). In my view, while formidable literature have been written on the history of western colonization of African peoples and cultures as well as the need to extricate ourselves from colonial imposition, very little has been written on the specific ways that western gendered sexist epistemologies, methodologies and philosophies impacted on African modes of thought and political discourses in particular.

In the current work, I interrogate the specific ways through which western dualistic epistemology and masculinist prerogative impacted the history of African political thought from its initial colonial encounter to the present. One of the central arguments of this paper is to trace close historical connection between colonizing the female body as a site of male domination in western male centred dualist epistemology and particular modes through which African female body figured both materially and discursively in the European colonial domination of African cultures and people including women. In her important book, *Imperial Leather*, Anne McClintock (1995), forcibly argues that European colonial encounter with Africa as well as with the rest of the non-European world has been informed by deeply held racist believes but also deeply held anti-women misogynistic impulse. McClintock's work is pertinent to my current work because it shows the close link between violent European colonial conquest of Africa landscape, and colonization of African female body. I begin my analysis with a long quote from McClintock's *Imperial Leather* (1995).

In the opening pages of Henry Haggard's bestselling novel *King Solomon's Mines,* we discover a map. The map, we are told, is a copy of the one that lead three White Englishmen to the diamond mines of Kukualand somewhere in southern Africa. The original map was drawn in 1590 by a Portuguese trader, Jose da Silvestre, while he was dying of hunger on the "nipple" of the mountain named Sheba's Breasts. Tracing on the remnant of yellow linen torn from his clothing and inscribed with a "cleft bone" in his own blood, da Silverstre's map promises to reveal the wealth of Solomon's treasure chamber, but it carries with it the obligatory charge of first killing the black Awitch-mother, Gagool. In this way, Haggard's map assembles in miniature three of the governing themes of Western imperialism: the transmission of white, male power through control of colonized women; the emergence of the new global order of the cultural knowledge; and the imperial command of the commodity capital (McClintock:1995,1-3)

I want to take up at least five points raised in the above passage because these points illustrate the direct connection between colonialism, racism and sexism. First, by discursively locating the wealth and treasure on which white imperialists scientific progress and material affluence rests inside the body of an African woman, Haggard signals the centrality of African women's bodies to European colonialism. Second, the symbolic killing of the African wise woman, Awitch-mother, in order to plunder the treasures inside her body mirrors the actual harvesting of African women's bodies for physical labour as well for their reproductive capacity for the advancement of white supremacist imperialist enterprise. Third, killing the witch-mother, in the hands of conquering white men affirms the existence of African female centred social and political order in Africa prior to the white supremacist colonial imposition on African peoples and cultures. Finally, committing the murder of an African woman, Athe witch-mother, A makes a direct link between colonialism and violence against women. As a result, it is no

accident that the plunder of Africa's natural resources graphically celebrated in *King Solomon's Mines* started with the symbolic rape/killing of an African woman, Gagool, the wise woman and *the witch-mother.* In the colonial context, in addition to material resource, the African female body became a powerful discursive site through which conquering white male exercised their sexual fantasies and sexual violence. In the case of Haggard's *Solomones Mines,* we are told, the secret map that contains the key information about the location of the diamonds and gold treasures looks like a truncated, spread out female body. The three white Englishmen who got hold of the map entered Gagool through the Vagina but they exited out of the cave (Gagool) loaded with diamonds through the anus of Gagool as she lay dead. The graphic killing of Gagool in the search of diamonds and gold treasures promulgated the feminization of the African landscape and de-feminization as well as the dehumanization of the African female body. As a result, the feminized African landscape and defeminized and dehumanized African female body were discursively represented as ready and available for the penetration of the conquering white male imperialists. From Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* to Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines*, the imperialist conquest of Africa has been discursively mediated through the bodies of African women. In my view, the twin colonial precepts of the feminization of the landscape and the defeminization of the African women go hand-in-hand with their twin kindred spirits: dualist epistemology and masculinist prerogative. To illustrate this point, I quote from McClintock's analysis of Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines* in *Imperial Leather (*1995) again.

On the map, the female genitalia are called the three Witches. If the Three Witches signal the presence of alternative female powers and alternative African notions of time and knowledge, these challenges to imperial power are denied by inversion and control. Haggard wards off the threat of a resistant female and African power, not only by violently dispensing with the powerful mother figure in the narrative but by placing alongside the Three Witches on the map the four points of the compass: the icon of Western reason, technological aggression and the male, militarized possession of the earth. The Logo of the compass reproduces the spreadeagled figure of the woman as marked by the axes of the global containment (McClintock:1995,3-4)

In this way, Haggard's map abstracts the African female body as a geometry of sexuality held captive under the superior technology of imperialist social and political order. And, in our own times, the rhetoric of the impeding calamities of population explosion, which must be controlled with all means necessary, seeks to abstract the female body from call to the governments to control their population growth rate, for controlling population growth rate requires, in the final analysis, the controlling and the surveillance of the bodies and reproductive capacity of particular women, especially, poor, black and other women of colour. In her important book, *killing the black body*, Dorothy Roberts notes how an alleged hyper-fertility of African American women is

currently contested by, on the one hand, the United States government which represents, in the main, the real and perceived interests of the white middle class, and which as a result, seeks to delimit the fertility of the African American women through state regulations and the leaders of the African American community who want to maximize the reproductive capacity of the African American women in the interest of increasing the black population in America (Roberts:1997,56).

Similarly, in Africa and elsewhere in the southern hemisphere, the current discourse on overpopulation, which, in reality, means the overpopulation of those who are not white, women's bodies and women's reproductive capacity have entered the western hegemonic discourse as the need for states to control their population. As a result, African and other third world governments have now official policies on population control. However, the language of population control often evades the fact that population control by the state undermines women's sexual, political, social and economic autonomy. In this context, western state authorities deal directly with the heads of states in poor countries such as Africa. In so doing, the state in African has become an apparatus, the most effective means to control women's bodies, sexualities and reproductive capacity. In turn, the western heads of states, often pledge financial as well as political incentives to those states in poor countries who cooperate with the west and enforce austere population control policies. It is interesting to note that while heads of western states are busy in devising policies which stand to undermine the African women's self- autonomy and bodily integrity, the same heads of western states, have, at the same time, been the foremost supporters of a new discourse on non governmental organizations. NGO's, which are often financed with money from mainly western based foundations, endowments and state financed agencies, now speak with the language of women's self-autonomy and human rights! And, yet, by weakening the state's ability to set internal policies, the new discourse of women's rights, in reality, denies the African women the ability to utilize the state apparatus for the transformation of the African society, including, the male dominated political space. Currently, in Africa, it is not the state that speaks about the need for civil society, it is western based non governmental organizations that speak the need for civil society! In my view, however, having human rights makes very little sense if the social and political institutions through which rights can be demanded and exercised are absent.

Currently, the tension caused by, on the one hand, the inability of the African societies to maintain stable as well as effective social institutions, and mounting evidence that western economic exploitation and political interferences have created unbearable situation in African, has been bridged through symbolic deployment of African female body. It seems, currently, the western powers's main objectives in Africa are not so much the economic and political domination of the continent as enforcing human rights of the African women. Today, it seems, the west has discovered for itself

new universal cause, *the oppression* of the African women! As a result, it is the white men's and the white women's burden to rescue these women from their barbaric culture! Today, western feminists of all strips and persuasions, CEO's of transnational corporations and the leaders of the world Bank and IMF are in agreement that African women suffer terribly injustice in the hands of their men! Consequently, the discourse of FGM (Female Genital Mutilation) and other forms of violence against African women saturates the western popular imagination. In this endeavour, African female scholars and social activists are encouraged by our sisters in the North to show our outrage, by, among other things, confessing in public the terrible things our mothers did to us! In this way, we can wear the signs of our mutilated bodies as warrior marks! But, one must be careful for the warrior marks in the western discourse have double meaning: (I) as evidence of embodied knowledge of the African women; and (ii) as a sign of our barbaric, backward, savage African culture.

And yet, African women's need for reproductive freedoms does not have the same currency with the crusaders against FGM. In my view, the politics of FGM represents a clear example of the ways in which African women's bodies have been used as strategic deployment of power relations which has very little to do with African women's sexuality and self-autonomy. African and Africanist male theorists who historically as well as currently dominated African political discourse have also discursively employed the African female body to elaborate, their, other wise, male centred narratives on African politics. For example, in an attempt to minimize the impact of colonialism in African societies and cultures, including the institutions of the state, Jean-Francois Bayart, insists that European encounter with Africa has been haphazard, un-organized event rather than preconceived ideologically coherent imperialist enterprise. To corroborate his claim, Bayart insists that Europeans who went to Africa, included among others, AProtestant missioners who were combatting the practice of female circumcision (Bayart:1993,13). But, since Bayart has not addressed the history of African women's sexuality, including the complex nature of the practice of female circumcision or the relation between African women and colonizing white men in the text, it is not clear why and when these Protestant missioners took interest in preserving clitorises of colonized African women and girls! This is because it s not clear from Bayart's text whether the same Protestant missionaries had concrete views on African women's sexuality.

Contrary to Bayart's claim that western interest in female circumcision in Kenya had more to do with enforcing colonial rule than support for Kenyan women's bodily integrity and self-autonomy. In her important book, >*Ngaitana (I will Circumcise myself)'* Lynn Thomas (1997) offers a rigorous account of the complex ways in which the female body and the female circumcision in particular, figured in the history of colonial contest in Kenya. She forcibly argues, among other things, that during the height of the Mau Mau nationalist rebellion against the British colonial imposition in Kenya, the colonial authority

took interest in the roles young women and young men played in the Mau Mau led anti-colonial resistance. Thomas traces how in the 1920, and 1930 in Kenya, enforcing ban on female circumcision came to mean loyalty to the British colonial rule. Thomas argues, that the 1956 ban on female circumcision, and the ensuing resistance of the ban by young girls of Meru registers a clear instance where the female body became a potent site where class, gender and race relations in the colonial context converge (Thomas:1997,18). In Meru, young women, in defiance of their parents and elders, circumcised each other as a sign of their rejection of the colonial imposition, but also as a way of protecting their bargaining power within their community.

In Meru in the 1950s, where adolescent initiation of males and females constituted the pivotal moment in the construction of an influential age group system, female defence of clitoridectomy must also be viewed as an effort to maintain processes which differentiated females of various ages. Initiation transformed girls into women, and mothers of initiates into figures of authority within the community (Thomas:1997,18)

It is not my aim to support female circumcision, for I am against the practice. However, Thomas's rigorous analysis clearly shows that female circumcision gave the young women of Meru an access to power and privileges that came with partaking in the practice.

It was no accident that in Meru and else where in Kenya, the ban on female circumcision was supported by mainly Kenyan men who directly or indirectly stand to gain politically and financially for supporting the ban. The women of Meru as the direct target of both the practice and the ban were not consulted by the enthusiasts of the ban on female circumcision.

A few young Africans with advanced formal education and close ties to the mission societies assisted in the formulation of the 1956 ban. Older men of the *Njuri Ncheke* and African District Council unanimously supported the passage of the ban...For these older men whose local authority had become increasingly tied to the colonial regime during the 1930s and 1940s, a vote for the ban demonstrated their loyalty to the colonial government and their political distance from the Kikuyu'. For the colonial officers, the ban became a test to the older men's ability to control women and young men (Thomas:1997,19)

In the context of colonial contest, then, if the uncircumcised African female body represented an endorsement of the colonial regime the circumcised female body represented rejection of the colonial imposition. As a result, the colonial authority deployed sever disciplinary practices, including, surveillance and imprisonment of young Kenyan girls and their mainly young male supporters.

Historians have noted that women and young men comprised the bulk of Mau Mau fighters and supporters and , consequently, became the prime objects of rehabilitation

campaigns inside prison camps and beyond through state-sponsored women's groups, *Maedeloe ya Wanawake*, and Youth Training Schemes (Thomas : 1997,19)

In addition, Lynn Thomas's analysis shows the link between colonialism and gender in the politics of female circumcision in Kenya under the British colonial rule. Thomas's analysis clearly contradicts Bayart's account in that she demonstrates that Protestant missionaries interests in the practice of female circumcision in Kenya had more to do with reenforcing colonial rule than endorsement of Kenyan women's rights to bodily integrity and self-autonomy (Thomas: 1997, 18-34).

However, this is not the only occasion Bayart uses female body in the service of his Eurocentric male centred project. For example, in *The State in Africa: The Politics of Belly*, Bayart uses the female body as an allegory, an image (belly in the sense of pregnant woman), a powerful symbolic site through which he represents his account of the corrupted state of African political and social institutions. (Bayart:1993). However, in his analysis of the genesis of the current state of affairs in African social and political institutions, Bayart, for the most part, focuses on what men do by offering detailed description of how men use various organizational strategies, be it nationalism, tribalism, militarism, to gain and exercise asymmetry power relations in the public sphere (Bayar:1993). As a result, Bayart's Politics of Belly (1993) operates firmly within the prevailing masculinist political, epistemological and methodological itineraries. Consequently, he is unable to go beyond what men do and interrogate ways in which what men do in the public arena precariously rests on, often unacknowledged exclusion of African women from the public sphere. In the Politics of Belly, for the most part, Bayart is, silent about the history of African women, and, in the few places where he mentions women, his rendition of the role African women played and still play in African social and political institutions and culture raises more questions than it illuminates.

For example, Bayart claims that in the pre-colonial regimes in Africa, the Bamiléké tribe allowed some women to exercise power to own and dispense property such as land and other assets. However, Bayart also claims that this class of women, who were known as *ma-fo* (or mother-chiefs) acted in their public roles not as women but as men! In so doing, the class of women in question did not transgress the male exclusive prerogative to properties, including, the ownership of women's bodies. In no time, Bayart moved on to entirely different story. The history of this class of female chiefs, who supposedly shared public power and privilege with men of their time, was devoted to less then a paragraph! Bayart's dismissive treatment of the role of women played in the history of African political culture is not an aberration. Instead, it is the result of methodological and epistemological inadequacies inherent in the prevailing masculinist paradigms which dominate African social and political thought from the time of the initial colonial encounter. I argue that mainly male Africanist and male African theoreticians and practitioners of African social and political thought have not addressed the history of

women's role in African social and political formation, including, the formation of the state (Zeleza:1997). This is because these theoreticians and practitioners of African social and political thought often give little or no attention to what women do.

How focusing on what men do affects analysis in history of African social and political discourses is most evident in Mahmood Mamdani's recent influential book, *Citizen and Subject* (1996). In this work, Mamdani presents nineteen century European colonial enterprise in Africa as an outcome of two objectives: (I) European need for organized labour for the production of commodities such as cotton, a need made urgent in nineteen century by the end of western system of organized slavery and the American Civil War (Mamdani:1996,37). This in turn, meant putting into place new organized regimes in Africa for the constitution and maintenance of colonial social and political order. In addition, putting into place colonial social and political order meant undermining, by all means necessary, precolonial regimes in Africa. However, I show that Mamdani's analysis of the history of Africa's encounter with European colonial conquest is severely flawed. Mamdani's analysis is flawed partly because by taking the European account of the encounter without sufficiently interrogating both the implicit and explicit basis of the enterprise of European imperialism, his analysis remains firmly within the masculinist male centred/eurocentric paradigms. Through out his analysis Mamdani employs the dualistic paradigms, metaphors, allusions and concepts that obscure as such as they seek to illuminate. Following passage from Citizen and Subject shows how Mamdani uses dualist methodology. This dualist strategy allows Mamdani to advance his thesis that claims that African precolonial politics operated along centralized despotic relations. In this story, women enter the picture only as an after thought.

Like all colonial powers, the British worked with a single model of customary authority in precolonial Africa. That model was monarchical, patriarchal, and authoritarian. It presumed a king at the centre of every polity, a chief on every piece of administrative ground, and patriarch in every homestead or kraal. Whether in the homestead, the village, or the kingdom, authority was considered an attribute of a personal despotism (Mamdani:1996,39)

There are three central conceptual problems with the above passage that I want to address:(I) to what extent did the precolonial African social and political order congruent or differed from this British model?; (ii) if as Mamdani' insisted that precolonial African history was, well, lost and that analysis of precolonial African history is more constraining than illuminating, then, it becomes a tautology rather than an argued position backed up with concrete empirical evidence that colonial narratives are somehow more illuminating for understanding the history of African peoples and cultures before, during and after European colonialism; (iii) by centring the claim that African political and social institutions were constituted by Europeans two centuries ago by enforcing tribal customs, Mamdani's analysis obscures the difference, on the one hand, European

colonial views that precolonial African social and political institutions were authoritarian, patriarchal, and despotic; European imposed system of subjugation on Africa, and complex and highly heterogeneous social and political orders in various communities in precolonial Africa.

For example, we need to know whether centralized despotism was the prevailing social and political order in precolonial Africa as Mamdani claimed or it was formulated by colonial authority as convenient strategy for the effective control of the colonized populations? Mamdani's notion of centralized despotism evades basic methodological, epistemological and ontological questions to how and why colonial authority was convinced that central despotism was the uniformly experienced in precolonial Africa? He does not offer credible account of how and through what method did the British and other colonial powers in African arrived at the knowledge that precolonial Africa lived under undifferentiated authoritarian violent despotic rule. Non of these questions were satisfactorily addressed in Mamdani's *Citizen and Subject*. Rather, Mamdani frames his analysis of the encounter in what Europeans thought was the case with respect to precolonial Africa: centralized despotism! It is important to point out that European colonialism had been backed up with popular European racist myth which says that Africans were colonized by Europeans partly because their despotic natural tendency was congruent to colonialism. Hegel, John Stuart Mill, Rousseau and Kant all held similar views (Mills:1997,1998; Eze:1997).

Mamdani's analysis of Africa's encounter with European colonial conquest suffers centrally because the he seeks to separate the forces, aims and ethos of modernity from those of colonialism. Modernity as white man's burden has been the basis of European colonial modernity. Consequently, white man's burden, colonial modernity or to use Mamdani's own phrase, bring the law to the savage races of Africa and elsewhere, formed parameters through which relations between colonized communities and cultures and colonizing European authority came to be organized and conducted. In this way, contrary to Mamdani's claim that from the outset European claimed to bring the law of Modernity to Africa but that Africans where not ready to take up the modern ways of doing things because, presumably, they were fixed in their backward ways, liberalism as modernity's definitive doctrine or cultural paradigm of self and society, morality and politics, played a foundational role in the process of discursively constituting, normalizing and naturalizing racial as well as cultural based colonial orders in Africa (Taiwo:1999; Nzegwu:1999). However, Mamdani's neither theorises nor problematizes the dialectic between colonialism and modernity. Rather he presents the official European myth that sought to justify colonialism, violence and conquest as benevolent acts of altruistic civilizing mission that some how gone wrong because Africans were not ready for taking modern ways of doing things. In this way, he limits his analysis on how the civilizing mission failed.

Colonialism claimed to bring the civilization to a continent where it saw life-to borrow a phrase from a context not entirely unrelated-as nasty, brutish and short. Civilization meant here the rule of law. The torchbearers of that civilization were supposed to be the colonial courts. The courts where intended neither just as site where disputes would be settled nor simply as testimony to effective imperial control; rather, they were to shine as beacons of Western civilization. Yet no sooner was this claim made than it lay in shreds as power was forced to find ways of controlling the multitudes on the ground. The history of that moral surrender was one of a shift in perspective and practice, from a civilizing mission to a law-and-order administration (Mamdani:1996)

There are at least three points in the above passage that I want to address: (I) colonialism, by its very act of subjugation abrogates the rights of the colonized and therefore generates the philosophical, ethical and moral grounds, not for the exercise of the law positively understood, but enable hierarchal based colonial rule of domination' (II) since Mamdani has not defined the specific sense he is using the term, the law it is not clear what sort of law he has in mind; (II) Mamdani's allusion to the famous Hobbesian allegory is unwarranted in the colonial context because in the Hobbesian sense, in the state of nature, life may be nasty, brutish, and short, but Hobbesian men in the state of nature possess rational capacity for self-interested judgements and on that central presupposition decided to form a political society by freely and mutually consenting the rule of a figure head as a sovereign power with the capacity and authority to make laws and enforce them on the basis of a social contract among free, autonomous and self-interested subjects. In the case of the colonial context, if the colonial conquest of Africa is be justified in terms of bring civilisation to savage population, the Africans must be represented as lacking the capacity to form political society. In my view, however, Mamdani's analysis of European indirect rule of Africa on the basis of ingenious customary laws appears on the colonial scene magically and colonizing forces, it seems , naturally and disinterestedly enforced undifferentiated primitive tribal customs!

The dualism in legal theory was actually a description of two distinct, though related, forms of power: the centrally located modern state and the locally organized Native Authority. The hallmark of the modern state was civil law through which it governed citizens in civil society. The justification of the power was in the language of rights, for citizen rights guaranteed by civil law were at the same time said to constitute a limited on civil power. The key claim was that this form of power was self-limit on civic power. Against this description is the reality: the regime of rights was limited and partial. Citizen status was not conferred on all within the ambit of civil society. The primary exclusion was based on race (Mamdani:1996,109)

However, racial based legal dualism Mamdani is working with assumes the body to be the site through which racial difference is inscribed but this assumption is not entirely correct with respect to gender but also it excludes culture based forms of colonial

experiences in many parts of Africa. This is because, in the African continent, with the exception of South Africa, contrary to Mamdani's assertion that colonialism brought system of racial exclusion and cultural inclusion, the reverse was the case. In her important essay, *Colonial Racism: Sweeping Out Africa with Mother European Broom*, Nkiru Nzegwu (1999) makes this distinction clear. In this essay, Nzegwu elucidates the specific ways through which modes of colonial cultural racism and cultural subjugation were enforced as customary laws in colonial West Africa and Ghana in particular. In this work, Nkiku argues that colonial cultural racism affected African cultures, epistemologies and self and collective identity. In preindepedence West Africa,... the emphasis has been on the negation of African culture and cultural dignity (Nzegwu:1999,133). Nzegwu analysis is pertinent to my current work because it supports my claim that European colonialism in Africa impacted not just on African peoples physical wellbeing, but more importantly, had affected and continue to affect our systems of social and political thoughts. In my view, Mamdani's insistence that in precolonial Africa, political power was purely tribal goes hand- in- hand with the colonial thesis of Africa as dark space peopled by savages, cannibals where justice and rule of law, in the modern sense, had no place. In this way, Africa appears as primordial undifferentiated mass ruled by centralized despotic powers, centralized undifferentiated mass that positive, unrestrained colonial power unleashed in the form of *decentralized despotism*. Either way Africans are denied an entry to the modern project. It is this central modern/colonial paradigm that formed the basis through which European colonialism in Africa took the shape it did. One of the insterting points Mamdani makes in *Citizen and Subject* is that colonialism had improved the condition of the African women.

The beginning of colonial rule was marked by a combination of forces predisposed toward improving the position of women, even if each had its own reasons. Missionaries were appalled at the institution of polygamy and pride-price. Settlers, too, were convinced that polygamy allowed the native male to live in sloth and idleness and was at the root of their labor problem (Mamdani:1996,121)

But if as Mamdani claims that questioning native polygamy by the colonizing class indicates that, somehow, an improvement of the social and the material standing of African women within the colonial order, how did the direct use of African women's bodies as nannies, servants and sexual concubines by the colonizing class undermined the physical and emotional wellbeing of African women? And, to what extent did the supposed campaigns against native polygamy was informed by the needs of the colonizing class rather than concerns for African women? Mamdani's argument here is distinctly similar to one offered by Jean Francios Bayart with respect to the practice of female circumcision (Bayart:1996, 12, Mamdani:1996, 120-121).

Neither Mamdani nor Bayart asked how colonial authority exercised asymmetry power relations over the conducts including sexual conduct of African women and men.

In the colonial context, African sexualities that did not appear to benefit the objectives of the colonial project were thought of as pathological. In this way, European missionaries often spoke about the horrors of indigenous sexual practices such as polygamy and female circumcision but said very little about politically charged issue of sexual liaisons between colonized African women and colonizing European men as well as between white women and colonized African men.

In Conclusion

In my view, we need to ask how it is that one can speak about African identity, be it racial, ethnicity, clan, tribal or some combination of these without articulating how all these identities are based on possession of women's bodies? How can we challenge, contest or endorse these identities without addressing particular ways women resist, negotiate subordination in African societies? We also need to ask what other questions and possible responses are we missing by framing the analysis of African social and political history in and through male centred presuppositions, epistemologies and methodologies?

In my view, rethinking African politics requires not filling the gaps, by adding on what already have been said about African social and political thought and practice with concerns specific to women. Instead, we must construct new concepts, paradigms and research methods through which the current political, ecological and intellectual crisis in African societies can be effectively articulated. I strongly believe that any new and progressive paradigms, research methods and epistemological frameworks must overcome dualistic epistemology and masculinist prerogative. I strongly believe that overcoming dualistic epistemology and masculinist prerogative must include problematising the artificial boundaries between public, implicitly male and the private, implicitly female spheres of life. In order to include women as active agents for progressive transformation of African social and political institutions, we must turn our attention to where the majority of the African women are located. We must, for example, include feminist epistemologies, paradigms and methodologies, feminist epistemologies, paradigms and methodologies capable of representing the complex and, in many cases, contradictory lived experiences of African women. By African women, I do not mean homogeneous class of people defined by the category of gender only. Rather, I mean taking the lived experiences of women as entry point in the process of knowledge production for progressive African politics in the decades and the centuries to come. Many African male scholars in African politics often accuse African feminist scholars who insist on the need to interrogate the current prevailing paradigms in African social sciences as being under the tutelage of white western feminists. African feminist scholars who seek to contest the status quo of male centred social and political

discourses in Africa, are often accused of detracting the gaze from the real issues facing African societies to day: political/economic crisis.

In my view, that mainly male Africanists and African male theoreticians and practitioners who currently dominate the prevailing paradigms of African social and political thought think that democratization of African politics means finding equatable ways of sharing public power between men. By this I do not mean that there is conspiracy among male theoreticians and practitioners of African social and political thought to exclude women. Rather, its the very paradigms, epistemologies and research methodologies African male scholars of political theory and practice conduct their arguments that I call into question. I strongly believe that, in the main, whatever else they may disagree, Africanists and African male theoreticians and practitioners of African social and political thought share basic methodological, ontological and epistemological presuppositions. Therefore, what we need first is the recognition that historical as well as current male centred African social and political order rests, albeit precariously, on foundations that systematically exclude African women. As a result, we must thought out, new epistemologies, methodologies and paradigms capable of addressing the social, political and material implications of the historic as well as systemic suppression of African women and how the suppression of African women's perspectives in political discourse affected African society as a whole.

I strongly believe that the failure of the African state is the failure of the African women not because African women lack the knowledge necessary for playing critical roles in the public affairs, but because the men who dominate African social sciences, often, actively marginalize African women's influence in the social and political discourses. Currently, African women contributions to the social and political thought is systematically curtailed by the ways in which their voices are selectively incorporated into the prevailing male dominated discourses. African women scholars who wish to engage within the current male dominated African political discourse, often, act in their public roles manners similar to Bayart's Bamilèkèan *mother-chiefs,* behave-like men! In so doing, they are accepted as dutiful daughters, lovers and wives of the real scholars of the discourse-men. In this way, our potential for transformative and transgressive possibilities are effectively minimized. African female scholars who refuse to play the role of intellectual transvestite or the dutiful helpers of male thinkers, are often silenced as the agents of dangerous, un-African values such as feminism!

The current paucity of African female political theoreticians and practitioners is not an indication of lack of African female talent. Rather, it is the result of historical as well as current practices and polies that seek to delimit African female scholars who advance ideas, values and aspirations that contest the prevailing African social and political institutions and discourses.

In my view, rethinking African politics in the coming decades requires, among other things, reevaluation of not just political theories and practices, but more importantly, relations between political theories and practices and other areas of inquiry such as theories and practices in the natural sciences. In my view, African political scholarship has not made the connection between, on the one hand, degrading, exploitation of women, the rampant ecological destruction in continent, and the culture of militarism and violence on the other. The link between male centred African education curriculum and the culture of anti-women, anti-nature must be interrogated. In the west, feminists historian of the natural sciences, feminist philosophers and feminist political theorists forcibly made the connection between the western history of male supremacists natural scientists and male supremacists political theorists by showing and how these theoreticians and practitioners of these two disciplines reenforce each other to produce and sustain militaristic/ masculinist as well as imperialistic social and political order (Haraway:1991, Harding, Keller:1993). And, yet, African political theoreticians and practitioners of the social sciences, for the most part, have not made this connection.

In Africa, colonial education have created disjuncture between culture, which was often presented as primitive, and therefore regressive, and European education, which was considered as modern, and therefore progressive. Transforming African politics, requires overcoming this disjuncture as well. This, in turn, will require transforming other key areas of scholarship. I strongly believe that, one of the result of the historical disjuncture between social and scientific discourses in African culture is that mainly male theoreticians and practitioners of African social sciences have been unsuccessful in their attempts to accurately address some of the central reasons for the failure of African social and political institutions. Consequently, it is now fashionable for many African and Africanist political theorists to invoke pseudo-scientific claims of alleged African innate inability to take up modern ways of doing things, as the primary cause of the failure of the African political and social institutions. The recent urban violence and civil wars in many cities in Africa, where youth and the rural communities have destroyed, libraries, burned expensive Mercedes-Benz and looted consumer goods, have been read by many as clear indication of Africans innate inability to appreciate the values of modernity! However, many of these social and political critics and analysts do not often ask that, perhaps, African people see these symbols of modernity as tools of oppression. In my view, it is plausible to say that African urban youth may have burned libraries, computer labs and government offices, partly because these technologies were not made reflective of their lived realities. I end this essay by saying that any serious analysis to African social and political thought and practice must include gender analysis not as add on thing to what men have said but as central element to African social and political discourses. Gender analysis must be included centrally in any new African social and political theories and practices, because, I strongly believe that the only viable way get out of the

current social, political and economic crisis is collective struggle of the African women and men.

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