

**THE DOOR IS ONLY AJAR: THE
FUTURE OF GENDER STUDIES IN
AFRICA**

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***International Conference on Gender
Studies in Africa***

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INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

- Appreciation for the opportunity
- Hearty congratulations to the School, its leadership, and the leadership of Makerere University on this growth.
- Appreciation to the varied actors:
 - Initiators, pioneers and supporters
 - Others in various gender studies units and for a in Africa & beyond
- Special welcome to participants from outside Uganda, particularly to Prof. Amina Mama

ASSUMPTIONS

Gender Studies in Africa now has footprints in academia

Numbers of units in varied forms –
Schools, Departments, Centres

Forms of delivery undergraduate, graduate and/or as
course components in conventional disciplines

Numbers of trained graduates serving at different levels governments
and related agencies, private sector, development fields

Impacted on policies and laws of home countries, as well
as regional and continental bodies

Provided evidence - which in turn has enhanced
advocacy for gender equity and equality

ASSUMPTIONS (cont'd)

However, gender studies still face challenges, hence my choice of the title of my presentation:

THE DOOR IS ONLY AJAR - Looking to the future in line with the notion of a neighbour who can only carry out a conversation with you – standing in her/his doorway

CHOSEN TO TAKE THE PERSPECTIVE OF AN OBSERVER/CRITIC



SELECTED THEMES TO HELP US LOOK INTO THE FUTURE OF GENDER STUDIES IN AFRICA

Gender studies in Africa are versatile so I opt to consider a few selected themes within the framework of

(a) the role of a University, and especially an African University

(b) the uniqueness of gender studies in Africa



International
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ICGSA - 2022, Makerere
University

SELECTED THEMES TO HELP US LOOK INTO THE FUTURE OF GENDER STUDIES IN AFRICA

Theme 1: The Political Economy of Knowledge in Gender Studies

Theme 2: Research and Publications

Theme 3: The African-ness of Gender Studies

Theme 4: The Actors in Gender Studies

Theme 5: Special focus on the Education Sector

Theme 6: Advocacy and Marketing

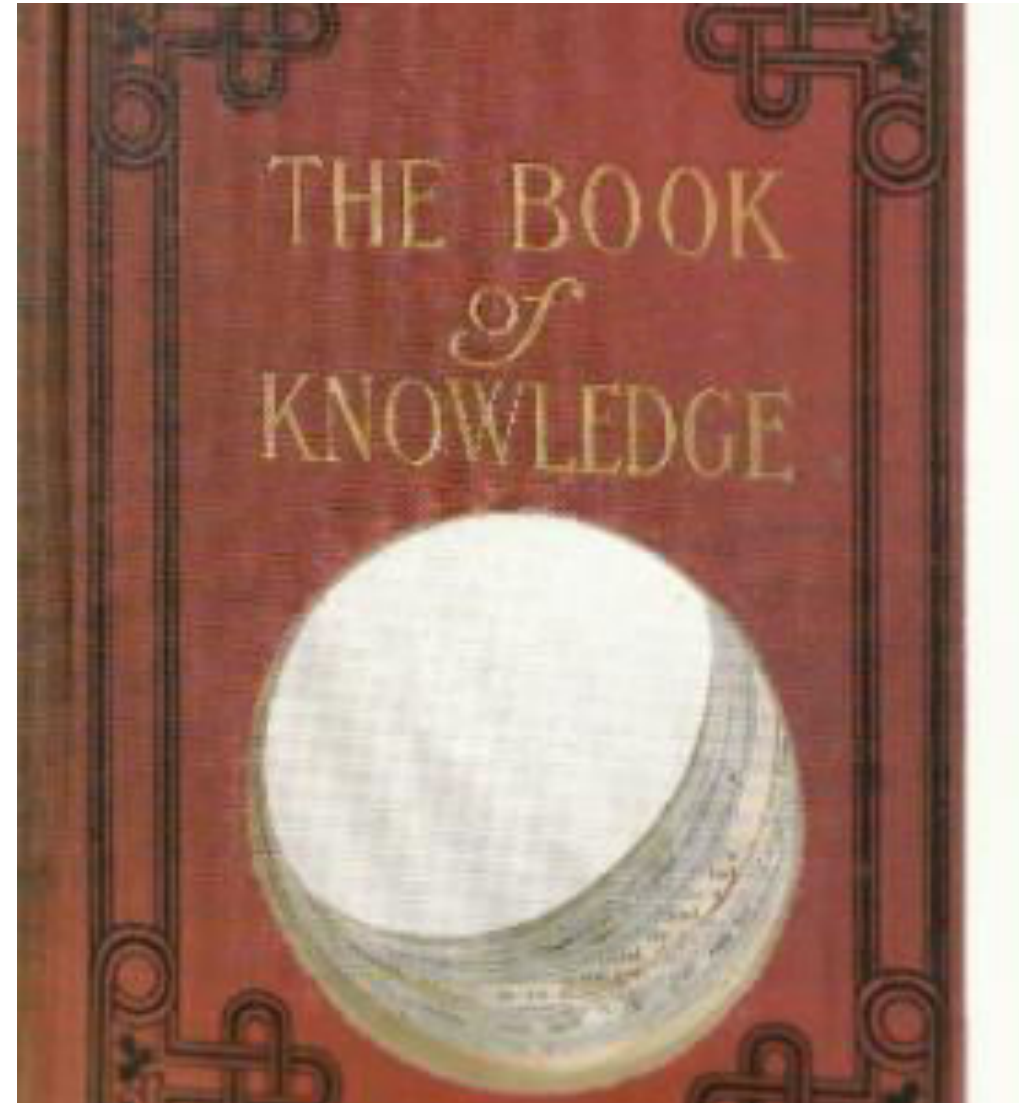
1. KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION

Strategies to address constraints in the field of gender studies at different levels:

(A) UNIVERSITY LEVEL

Form of the “institution”: Are GS part of the formal structure of the University (School, Department) or a loose network of interested scholars? This will determine the level of staffing, resources and remuneration.

To avoid ghettoization – which can make it a parochial field of concern. Reflect on early life of WGS at Mak.



KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION - Continued

- Gender Studies can be at the frontline for academic freedom, and to restore the waning role of an African university as an arena for thinkers, and innovators.
- Protecting and investing in this field is crucial for intellectual freedom.

WHY? Because already, Gender Studies positions intellectuals to offer alternative views on extant political, social, cultural and even moral order.

Think of the traditional role of Senate in a University, as opposed to official prescription of what should be taught.

Is the Learning and Teaching Environment inclusive? How are issues of gender discrimination, exclusion, and harassment addressed?

Is the provision only to help demonstrate good practices?

Gender studies go beyond academic engagements

If these are not in line, then acceptability of GS is at stake.

Examples of Gender Mainstreaming provisions
- COSTLY

KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION - Continued

(B) NATIONAL LEVEL

Gender studies cannot be confined to the academic arenas. For the future we need to look at the following:

National level involvement can help to confront patriarchal norms which underpin both nationalism and pan-Africanism

Open debates on self-determination – e.g. who speaks for men and women should be a future feminist project

Periodically execute research projects on effective representation. Already being done in some countries - but need regular analysis

Gender Studies experts to position themselves as reference point/commentators and to be sought out by policy makers

KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION Continued

(C) AT THE GLOBAL LEVEL

- **GS dominated by western narratives**, especially the different waves of feminism – often working in the service of Western liberal gaze – different from what we assume and experience.
- Reinforced by forces that do not see the rationale for gender studies.
- African feminism should look beyond the frontiers of these waves – and allow for epistemological expansion of key social categories and actors.
- For the future, therefore, new approaches are called for by actors in the field of GS. **This is explained further under Research and Publications**

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2. RESEARCH AND PUBLICATIONS

- Research and Publication underpin the different discourses / philosophies / theories that either promote or restrict intellectual advancement of gender studies.
- Often Western scholars treat Africa as a site of raw materials for theory building elsewhere. Locally derived theories and publications still relatively minimal as **demonstrated in many Ph.D and Masters dissertations.**



2. RESEARCH AND PUBLICATIONS

- Existing extractive model with regard to gender studies research (and African Studies in general) – mirrors many gendered division of labour
- Africa marginalized as a site of scholarly production (politics of journals or books in terms of access, global recognition and rankings)
- **Academic publications works therefore need transformation**



RESEARCH AND PUBLICATIONS -Cont'd

Reconfiguration: Strategies for research that will lead to theories and unravel causes of gender inequalities

Clear institutional research agendas

Researching, documenting, analyzing histories that relate to gender studies (on gender relations/division of labor, rituals such as birth, death, marriage; proverbs, stories, past feminists)

Longitudinal research projects that can help build home-made theories, on contemporary issues.

RESEARCH AND PUBLICATIONS -Cont'd



All this is aimed at **DECOLONISING GENDER STUDIES, BUILDING CONFIDENCE AMONGST AFRICAN SCHOLARS**, while expelling the notion that feminist and/or gender studies are a Western Agenda.

3. ACHIEVING THE “AFRICAN-NESS” OF GENDER STUDIES



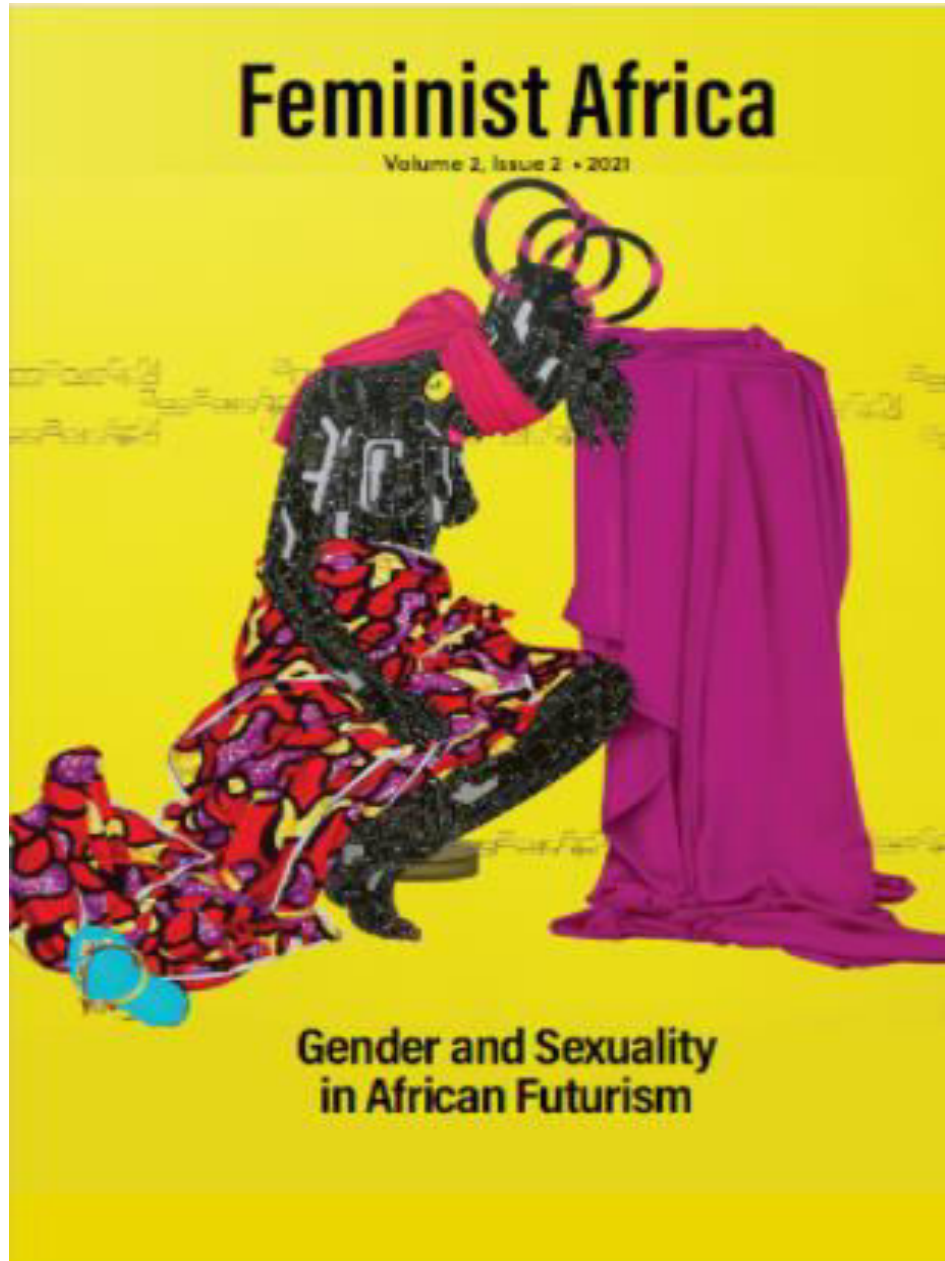
GS in Africa is in line with the aspirations expressed during the Independence period of the 1960s –**leaders agreed African Uni had to be different**

Some success then - e.g. introduction of African Literature and notion of African pre-history

This is a uniqueness of Gender Studies that requires to be strengthened and escalated for the future.

Particularly unique is the participation in the development and government arenas - very specific to Africa – thus fulfilling another key area in the functions of a University.

ACHIEVING THE “AFRICAN-NESS” OF GENDER STUDIES – Cont’d



- Recognise efforts on the continent, e.g. the work led by Amina Mama
- Deliberately reach out to communities; to combine theory with practice; so as to achieve the kind of approach devised by ABSA Bank:

“Africanacity: A new word for our new purpose. There’s a way of doing things that’s unique to our continent. Of meeting every challenge with tenacity, ingenuity, positivity and creativity. At Absa, we call this Africanacity: the distinctly African ability to always find ways to get things done” Absa (Uganda) Bank Website.

ACHIEVING THE “AFRICAN-NESS” OF GENDER STUDIES – Cont’d

- Very different from Gender Studies in the West. How?
- Working with development promoters needs special attention and in African situations, these work hand in hand with GS scholars -
EXAMPLES:

- **Initiators of programmes/units, e.g. in Uganda – ACFODE and Uganda Association of University Women.**
- Consultants in terms of research and as trainers
- Influence on policy matters, e.g. gender budgeting; land matters; representation, etc.

ACHIEVING THE “AFRICAN-NESS” OF GENDER STUDIES – Cont’d

The chance here for AGS is to strengthen this approach, so that AGS experts become the first reference point to explain certain events, especially in time of crisis



THIS THREAD IS EITHER MISSING OR TOO THIN! Foreign consultants, and other local actors, e.g. CSOs are engaged.

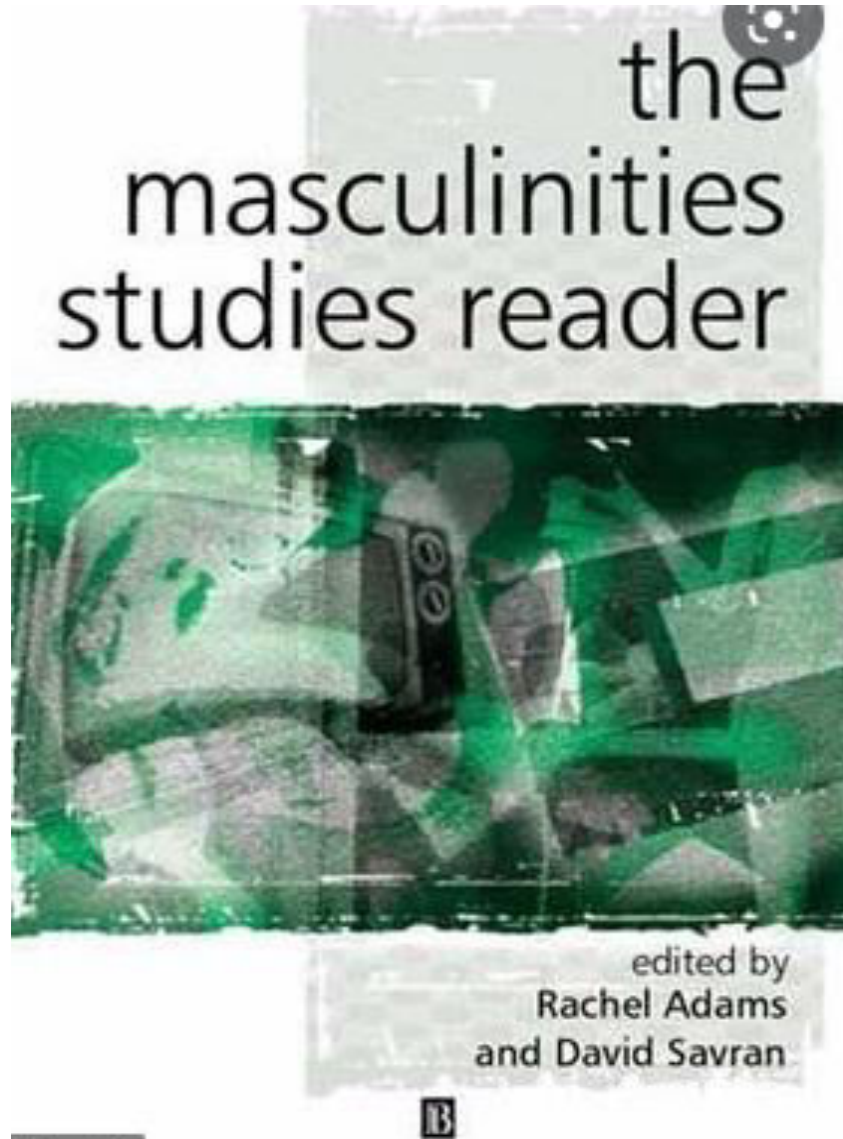
4: THE ACTORS IN GENDER STUDIES

- Different actors impact on the growth and quality of gender studies.
- In future, deliberate efforts to benefit from each interest group and power centres must be taken into account:

(a) Gender and Masculinity:

- We must work towards delineating WS and GS, as this raises debates about women vs men studies. With global trends, gender studies tend to take over – for inclusiveness (and acceptance)
- Development practitioners have long seen the value of including men in their advocacy work, and in practical terms in the field
- GS can help deconstruct constructs like patriarchy and masculinity thereby opening up a wider purview of social power, thus interrogating further the embedded influence of masculinity.

THE ACTORS IN GENDER STUDIES - Cont'd



- The study of masculinity is a must as it helps unravel negative aspects, such as hegemony, aggressiveness, jingoistic, invulnerability, etc. **even as baby boys**
- Resultant debates will be liberating to men and women and would remove constraints that limit expressions especially around human sexuality.
- Masculinity studies must be given more space, in curricula and in development discourses and practices.
- They have the potential of positively transforming GS, beyond the current minority groups of “male gender champions”

THE ACTORS IN GENDER STUDIES - Cont'd



(b) Identify and work with those at the power centres in society

- Decision-makers (political, cultural, religious, community levels).
 - Tools that provide evidence of what should change
- Increased involvement in and advocacy for policy formulation and implementation. GS experts must read, research, critique, advise and initiate policies.
- Must demonstrate knowledge and skills so as to become the first port of call for reference.

EXAMPLE - FAWE sought out by donor to investigate effects of COVID 19

THE ACTORS IN GENDER STUDIES - Cont'd

- **Top leadership:** Different strategies for different leaders - depending on the prevailing circumstances at:
 - Continental level
 - National level
 - Institutional level
- **The individual actor:** There is evidence of lip service - acting at the official level - behaving differently at family level, for instance.
- All will, in addition require facts, evidence, and articulating what is at stake, in different forms, including print, radio, television, social media, film, plays and story-telling.

5. SPECIAL FOCUS ON THE EDUCATION SECTOR

- So far, we look at gender studies mainly at university levels.
- The primary, secondary and lower tertiary institutions do not benefit
Yet attitudes, perceptions and practices are learned /acquired at this level.
- Strategies have to be worked out in collaboration with policy makers, teachers, and other stakeholders.

FAWE: Gender Responsive Pedagogy - working with this and other like-minded organisations can bring dividends to the field of gender studies.



6. ADVOCACY AND MARKETING

- Does an established discipline require advocacy and marketing?
- Despite their long existence, STEM subject still require marketing and promotion
- GSA relatively new and require advocacy strategies
- Even their establishments derive from advocacy work, e.g. in Uganda
- The need to go beyond legitimacy to acceptance - **experience of Makerere Women and Gender Studies in 1998**
- Resources (human, financial) and infrastructure require lobbying

SUMMARY/CONCLUSION

1. GSA are varied and their enhancement require both general and specific interventions

2. GSA have been legitimised but are yet to be fully accepted as a discipline in their own right

3. GSA offer an opportunity to change the academy - seize it up

4. There is need to cement the African-ness of GSA, derive home-made theories and solutions

SUMMARY/CONCLUSION

5. Curriculum reviews to emphasise transformatory areas (e.g. masculinity) are urgent

6. African-based research, publishing, and other forms of evidence are urgent

7. Record and know our history: it underpins our cultural norms and practices, and informs us about the origins of gender inequality in our specific environment

8. GSA need to include more collaborators and promoters - build synergies and become relevant

CONCLUSION - Continued

Short term interventions should take place during and/or immediately after the Conference

- Form networks along interests and specialties (education, health, economics, training, etc), regionally and even on linguistic basis
- Form an Africa-wide forum for sharing and promoting GS
- Agree on organising periodic conferences on a rotational basis
- Such organising will help to bridge the gaps identified, e.g. in research, publishing, levels and forms of intervention, etc.

CONCLUSION – Cont'd

Learn from experience of the 1995 Beijing International Conference on Women - a stimulant to GS and birth of many organisations that promote gender equality

THE CHALLENGE AHEAD IS TO OPEN THE DOOR FULLY, AND ENTER THE CORRIDORS OF POWER AND EQUITY

I THANK YOU