

**Engendering the Public Sphere: Between Modernity and Tradition
The Dynamics of Shaping and Reshaping the Public Sphere with Reference to
Zimbabwe's Political Landscape**

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The African society is best described or understood as a *socialised phenomenon*. Ideologies and products of African societies all happen in the context of social construction and they become accepted by the people and with time they develop into the society's tradition(s). These African ideologies or traditions are premised on a particular thinking rooted in the divide between male and female. This sexuality divide is responsible for dividing the African society into two compartments, that is, the public sphere and the private sphere. This divide is never foreign to the African society but one that is defined by imagined roles for men and women which have become accepted. The underlying belief in the public-private dichotomy has more to do with the idea of exclusion and inclusion. The society has constructed its own determinants in terms of class, race, gender, sexuality and ethnicity and these determinants are the common denominators used to categorise one's role as public or private. The politics of the public sphere is not limited to masculinity and femininity alone but also extends to be a contestation between and/or among masculinities. Thus whatever dynamic changes the public sphere has gone through are a result of basically two factors, that is, firstly the criticisms that have been raised by feminist thinkers against gender inequality especially in areas like politics, economics, capitalism, etc which happen to be the public domain reserved for men. Secondly, the struggles between masculinities that exist in the society have tended to create avenues to accommodate women in areas previously considered the preserve of men. In these two factors, there exists an effect of

modernity which has vehemently stressed that tradition oppresses women and takes away their right to participate in important sectors of the society. Part of this modernity is reflected in the 2000 United Nations (UN) developed “Millennium Development Goals” (MDGs) which represent key development targets. Goal 3 of the MDGs points to the need to have efforts to address issues of gender inequality as it calls for the “promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women.” S. Meer and C. Sever commenting on goal 3 of the MDGs argue that although the target for this goal focuses on education, the indicators include the proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments because women’s participation is seen as central to development. (Meer and Sever, 2004: 14) This is the context in which the African public sphere has tried to engender itself in a puzzle involving modernity and tradition.

Defining and Understanding the African Public Sphere

The development of the tradition of the public and private spheres occurred within the parameters of the African culture. If one understands the African culture, it becomes easy to understand the concepts of public and private spheres. Culture has three traits which affect everything that has roots in it. The characteristics are: culture is a social construct and imagined; it is not neutral but gendered and it is dynamic. The role of this culture is to give value, meaning and interpretation which suit the society and the African public sphere should be understood within this premise. According to Levi Strauss “cultures are designs for living formed through historical process” and they are the means by which individuals adjust to social life. (Rosamund et al, 1991: 4) The African public sphere is a concept that developed out of culture because of its genderedness and due to a historical process. Because culture is gendered it gives meaning or interpretation to the relationship between men and women within the African society and it is out of this defined relationship that the public and private spheres have emanated from. According to

Rosamund et al, “that culture is gendered means it embodies and represents ideas, beliefs and practices about women’s and men’s roles, work and leisure and sexuality.” (Rosamund et al, 1991: 120) To understand the African public sphere there is need to understand the definition given to male and female as social groups with reference to their relationship with each other. This definition of relationship between men and women is the basis of gender exclusion in African tradition or culture because it is the one that outlines the inside and the outside. The whole issue begins within the household where gender roles and dynamics attached to it are shaped and reshaped by a traditional understanding of gender. As S. Meer and C. Sever argue, the public-private divide sees women’s gender roles and responsibilities as lying in the family, caring and child-rearing and men’s gender roles as to do with decision-making, formal politics, economics and the workplace. (Meer and Sever, 2004: 18) E. Gwaunza also points out that tradition and cultural beliefs seemed to define the proper role of women in society to be that of peasant farmers and housewives excluding them from a fair and equitable access to the employment market. (Gwaunza, 1998: 50) The main trait of this traditional thinking is that family honour and dignity is embodied in the reputation of women which is premised on the interactions between men and women. Thus African tradition defines the public sphere in a gendered dimension because of its understanding of the man as the breadwinner and protector of the family while the woman is the home-maker and mother. Tradition used women’s productive and reproductive roles to shun them away from the public domain because it presumes that they are born with their domestic skills already.

As the idea of globalisation began to gain momentum in the last decades of the twentieth century and the 21st century, there have been calls to engender the public sphere in general by allowing women’s involvement and representation in various sectors like economic participation,

education, sports and politics. This is seen and understood as a human right which women should enjoy and discrimination based on sexuality, race, age, creed and class should be abandoned at social, economic religious and political levels. This engendering of the public sphere is part of the process of modernity to address imbalances in power-sharing and decision-making that has been created by tradition and is a legacy of the past which continues to live in the present. Feminists and women lobby groups have emerged to challenge the belief in many societies viewing women as inferior and arguing for their involvement in the public domain. As noted by Pearson the mainstreaming of gender concerns in international policy has resulted in the formulation and reform of laws. (Pearson, 2000: 15) It is against this background that the African public sphere has become engendered in its bit to accommodate women. This transformation of the African public sphere has been shaped by issues to do with marked economic development and establishment of the so called democratic processes in African societies. Democracy seems to be engendered and it recognises and gives space for participation to everyone. Thus the African public sphere has tended to be moving towards gender equity as it tries to address and embrace ideas of the modern world.

Be that as it may, there is need to analyse and understand this idea of gender equity and what it is all about in the African public sphere. Gender equity generally is about equal opportunity, representation and involvement in critical sectors of the society like economics, politics, development, employment etc for both sexes. A.M. Goetz argues that gender equity is a welfare issue and it is about enhancing the quality of human and social reproduction through women's improved education or health. (Goetz, 1998: 242) She goes on to point out that it is a matter of social justice and social transformation aimed at redistributing resources and social value more equally between women and men. (Goetz, 1998: 242) This concept of equal

representation between the sexes is the one that has seen the employment of the affirmative action and the argument of human rights in the public sphere. The African sphere today especially in Zimbabwe is targeting a 30-50 % women representation and involvement in all areas previously dominated by men particularly politics. The cycle begins with the opening up of education to women at all levels and the use of affirmative action in enrolment processes. Education is the base or the spring-boat to critical areas of decision-making such as politics, ministerial posts, Member of Parliament (MP), etc.

The starting point to deal with is defining and understanding what affirmative action is, its origins and how it is meant to function. Affirmative action originated in a specific context in one country, the United States in the 1960s and that is where the phrase “affirmative action” was first used and applied. (Sykes, Brunner)¹ The Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy defines affirmative action as positive steps taken to increase the representation of women and minorities in areas of employment, education and business from which they have been historically excluded.² Sykes sees affirmative action as a set of public policies and initiatives designed to help eliminate past and present discrimination based on race, colour, religion, sex or national origin. (Sykes; *see reference 1*) These definitions give the general understanding of affirmative action but ones which are particular to the American context with relation to the African-Americans and Hispanics. Affirmative action was introduced to deal with past imbalances that has seen African-Americans and Hispanics not benefiting much and being excluded in terms of education, economic participation etc but the major point is that this affirmative action was not about boosting women representation and participation but boosting African-American and Hispanic involvement in the American economy and politics. The underlying issue here was to do away with the discrimination that was based on race. With the passage of time especially in

the context of Africa, affirmative action has become associated with opening up opportunities for women to redress past discrepancies and reach parity in terms of participation in all relevant sectors of the society or state. The argument behind the implementation of affirmative action is that the playing field is not level between the sexes hence this was seen as some sort of remedy by the American leaders to try and incorporate all Americans whatever their colour, creed, race, gender etc and this is the idea which some African governments have adopted but without taking into consideration that the cultural setup and history of the United States is different to theirs on the practical level. As V. Valian points out no American of African descent doubts the existence of race based discrimination (Valian, 1998, xvi), the question then is what sort of discrimination do women in African countries know they experience and do they believe that such discrimination exist?

As the idea of gender equity is a welcome development in the African public sphere, it however leaves a number of issues floating. Engendering the African public sphere as modernity wants is an imagined concept and a social construct just as tradition did and the question is what changes are happening to the binary opposites of women and men as espoused by African tradition. The other issue relates to the socialised beliefs and understanding of maleness and femaleness as defined in masculinity and femininity thinking. As one Kenyan man said, “as men we are socialised into assumptions of overall superiority (fighters and controllers) of our maleness and hence whenever we find ourselves in situations that are out of control, we feel we are not masculine enough.” (Ntarangwi, 1998: 23) As this problem of masculinity troubles men, I think the same happens to women as their socialised femininity catches up with them in their involvement in the public sphere. This would tally with what Valian’s thesis in her book, *“Why so slow?”* that a set of implicit or non-conscious hypotheses about sex differences plays a central

role in shaping men's and women's professional lives where she argues that men and women hold the same gender schemas which they acquire from childhood. (Valian, 1998, 2) Another crucial thing concerning gender equality is that it is concerned with equality between men and women forgetting the inequalities that exist in women as a class which hinders gender equity from being achieved. All these are issues that shape and reshape the African public sphere which need to be analysed. The African public sphere in the 21st century has produced and reshaped its binary opposites, that is, modernity and tradition not as a replacement of women and men but as a complicated expansion and the two are in continuous contestation because both are imagined concepts though tradition has its strength in the socialisation process that characterise the African society from time immemorial and has become accepted. It is within this context that this paper examines how engendering the African public sphere has fared with the binary opposites of men and women, and modernity and tradition and outlining the dynamics accompanying the process of shaping and reshaping; making and remaking of the African public sphere.

Women and the Zimbabwe Public Sphere: An Engendered Political Landscape

The African public sphere has undergone several changes through its historical epochs categorised simplistically as pre-colonial, colonial and post- independence. Throughout these epochs the public sphere responded according to the needs and demands of the time. Of importance is the phase that saw African countries engaging in liberation wars in the second half of the twentieth century in which Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Guinea Bissau, Angola, Algeria, etc. got entangled in. During this phase women's inferiority was swept aside and their participation became of great significance causing a shift in gender relations from the pre-colonial times. However that shift was not practically translated into giving women political space after attaining independence and their marginalisation continued except for the case of South Africa.

Signe Arnfred writing about women in Mozambique argues that in their normal daily lives women are subordinated to patriarchal authority and their gender role is defined by their position in the family. (Arnfred, 1988: 5-6) Arnfred further points out that before the war in Mozambique men and women led separate lives with different rules of conduct but during the war they came together on equal terms as Mozambicans in the struggle against the Portuguese. (Arnfred, 1988: 6) From this analysis, there is present a shift in terms of gender relations from the time before the war and after the war. A similar scenario was present in Zimbabwe's liberation struggle as a lot of women; the likes of Joyce Mujuru, Stembiso Nyoni, Opah Muchinguri, Margaret Dongo etc became equal participants and pillars in Zimbabwe's independence. Though women's contributions during the wars of independence was of crucial significance, the period after the war brought a different African public sphere that required specific skills of control and authority which again saw masculinity reclaiming back its position if not with multiplied powers and gender inequality. Geisler argues that the emergence of post colonial African states from the 1950s onwards repeated and entrenched gender policies of colonialism and reversed promises of women equality. (Geisler, 2004, 24) She further illustrates this showing that from Ghana to Zimbabwe (1957- 1980) women were not represented in legislatures, party hierarchies and government positions but instead were dressed in party regalia singing and dancing praise songs for the male leadership. (Geisler, 2004, 24) According to Arnfred fighting a liberation war is very different from building a nation state; the focus would no longer be popular mobilisation and collaboration with the peasantry but the creation of national institutions and structures of economic and political power. (Arnfred, 1988: 7) The post- independence period presented a complicated scenario of double binary opposites defined in real terms as one, that is, men versus

women and modernity versus tradition but both enshrined in the masculine-feminine dichotomy but one that needed specialised education for its structures and its survival.

This paper begins its analysis of the Zimbabwe public sphere in 2000 because of two basic reasons. Firstly 2000 came after Zimbabwe had appended its signature to several gender platforms and agreements and secondly the Zimbabwe political landscape envisaged the arrival of a powerful political opposition party that completely changed Zimbabwean politics. In the Zimbabwean document entitled National Gender Policy (NGP), it is specified that Zimbabwe has acceded to and ratified the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Convention of Civil and Political Rights (CCPR) etc and Zimbabwe is a signatory to the Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action of 1999. (National Gender Policy, 1) The NGP document makes it clear that, “our (Zimbabwe) society is described as highly unequal in terms of race and gender” and that women lag behind men in political and decision making position and in education. (NGP, pi, 1) This gender inequality in Zimbabwe is measured in terms of access, control and ownership of resources where Zimbabwe is ranked number 109 in the global gender related development index. In Zimbabwe women constitute 52 % of the population but their involvement and participation in decision making positions, politics and the economy has remained marginal and suppressed. In the 1995 elections of the single chamber House of Assembly, twenty- two Members of Parliament (MPS) were women out of the 150 member- Zimbabwe Parliament representing about 14.7 %.³ During the period 1995- 1999 there were also 3 cabinet ministers with portfolios, 3 ministers of state and 3 deputy ministers from women and by then Zimbabwe African National Union- Patriotic Front (ZANU- PF) was **the** political party. In 2000 the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) came to the scene and became a formidable political force on the Zimbabwean political landscape. In the June 2000

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House of Assembly elections, ZANU- PF won 63 seats with about 8 seats for women and the MDC won 57 with 6 seats for women.⁴ Thus women obtained a 10.6 % representation in Parliament, a drop from their 1995 percentage point of 14.7.

The Zimbabwe parliament up to until amendment number 18 of 2007 of the Constitution of Zimbabwe, had 120 directly elected MPs with 12 being appointed by the president, 8 seats for provincial governors and 10 seats for chiefs chosen by their peers. In the 2005 House of Assembly elections ZANU- PF won 78 seats with 14 directly elected women plus 3 appointed by the president and MDC got 41 with 5 seats for women. (MPs Calendar, 2006) In 2005 women got 17 % of the total composition of the single chamber House of Assembly, an increase from the 2000 percentage mark.⁵ The growth of a strong opposition political party saw the reintroduction of the Upper House of Assembly (Senate) in November 2005 after it had been dismantled in 1990. In November 2005 Senatorial elections were held in Zimbabwe and the Senate consisted of 66 members of which 50 were directly elected, 6 appointed by the president and 10 seats for traditional chiefs.⁶ The November Senatorial elections produced 24 seats for women of which 23 were ZANU- PF (22 directly elected and 1 appointed) and 1 for MDC. (Senators Calendar, 2006) Women's Senatorial seats managed to surpass the 30 % mark reserved for women as they gained 36 % representation.⁷ Of importance to note is the number of women appointed by the president as non- constituency members in the lower and upper house in 2005. In the lower house out of 12 presidential appointees, women got 3 seats and out of 6 upper house appointees women got 1 seat. These figures of women representation and participation in politics and decision making are not commensurate with the percentage they hold in the country's population although the percentage of the active women age is not clear because reference to the total population might be misleading. The Zimbabwe public sphere after the war and after the

call for gender equity still has a lot to be desired. Women's contribution during the liberation struggle has not counted much in the aftermath of the war. According to S. Tamale, women remain grossly under-represented in institutions that make decisions for their nation state (Tamale, 2000: 8), even though they are the majority in the nation state. She further argues that African women were active participants in the struggle for political independence but in spite of these contributions, women in Africa still represent a very small minority of state national legislators. (Tamale, 2000: 8) Zimbabwe is one such country that has made a lot of political noise about women's crucial role in the liberation of the country yet despite that contribution and their numerical superiority in population that has to translate on the ground to show gender equality in their involvement in politics and decision making institutions like the Zimbabwe Parliament. In Zimbabwe after independence only one woman, Joyce Mujuru managed to be appointed minister running the ministry of community development and women affairs and the rest of ex-combatant women remained outside government structures relegated to party positions especially in the women's league. It was only in the 1995 House of assembly elections that the first woman independent MP, Margaret Dongo came into professional politics as a true politician denouncing the male dominated ZANU-PF political culture to which she had been attached but was expelled from, in 1995. (Geisler, 2004, 31)

Apart from these in-roads made in the Zimbabwe Parliament, it is worth noting that women in Zimbabwe also hold other important decision making positions. Although Specioza Wandira- Kazibwe became the first woman to the second highest political position in Uganda, Zimbabwe has not lagged behind as it has since December, 2004, appointed a woman, Joyce Mujuru to the position of the second vice-president, the highest political position women have in the Zimbabwe state. Now with the inclusive government in place in Zimbabwe, women have

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also gained the position of the second deputy prime minister. Other higher posts women hold are that of deputy speaker of the lower House of Assembly and that of President of Senate. Both positions were held by Edina Madzongwe (ZANU- PF) after March 2005 elections (now it is Nomalanga Khumalo, {MDC}) and then Madzongwe moved to the Senate after November 2005 Senatorial elections where she was elected as Senator and became the president of the senate, a position she still holds with the inclusive government in place. In addition to that two women are provincial governors (resident ministers) of Matebeleland North and South and these are Angela Thokozile Mathuthu and Angelinah Masuku respectively. As far as MDC is concerned, after its split in 2005, the faction of MDC led by Morgan Tsvangirai has Thokozile Khupe, a woman as its vice- president. Although women have landed important decision making positions, their involvement and participation has remained nailed to party politics and class and coupled with that their voice has not been coming out strong hence their leadership capability and talent have not been coming out clean. This has been caused by how the African public sphere has responded to calls for gender equity and the right of women to participate in positions of power and authority, be it economic or political. Women have also held several cabinet posts since 1980 but only 2 were noticeable, that is, Joyce Mujuru and Victoria Chitepo.⁸ Most women started to be roped into cabinet after 1990 but what is disturbing is that only the same and familiar names continued to be recycled over the years to date.⁹ In the inclusive government women hold about 11 posts covering ministers with portfolios, deputy ministers, deputy prime minister and vice presidency.

What the African public sphere has done is not to oppose but accept calls for gender equality, political participation and representation of women in influential economic and political positions and in decision making but the practical translation has remained wanting and an

illusion. Women Parliamentarians in Zimbabwe launched in October, 2001, the Zimbabwe Women's Parliamentary Caucus (ZWPC) in response to Southern African Development Committee (SADC) Parliamentary Forum which called for the fulfilment of the 30 % women representation in Parliament. The aim of ZWPC is for women parliamentarians to rise above party politics and address issues of common concern as women.¹⁰ The management committee of ZWPC from 2005- 2007 was made up of 8 ZANU- PF women and 4 MDC women. Among some of their achievements include the inclusion of a clause in the Sexual Offences Bill which makes marital rape an offence which attracts a prison sentence, they lobbied the passing into law of the Domestic Violence Bill and fought for an increase of women in decision making positions to achieve 30 % women representation and for a quota to be reserved for women during the March 2005 parliamentary elections.¹¹ Although the 2005 parliamentary elections did not produce the desired results, the subsequent November 2005 Senatorial elections obtained 36 % women representation in the Senate. This analysis however does not prove that Zimbabwe has done much in terms of gender equity in decision making bodies.

According to Anne Goetz, there are more women in politics in Uganda and South Africa than in many more developed democracies. (Goetz, 1998: 241, a point also noted by Geisler with relation to South Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa in general; Geisler, 2004, 9) United Nations (UN) gender reports show that in Africa, South Africa has the highest number of women representatives and the first African country to achieve the 1995 UN target of 30 % representation of women in parliament. (Tamale, 2000: 8) It is true that at the time of independence African countries accorded, though theoretical in most instances, political and economic rights to women as part of their achievement of freedom. However as Tamale argues, at independence Africa inherited political ideologies and structures designed to consolidate male

privilege and power and women's subordination. (Tamale, 2000: 10) Not only that, these political ideologies and structures were one and the same thing with the African imagined public-private sphere divide from the pre-colonial days and the socialisation that came with the division of space between males and females. Africans were not passive recipients of colonial masculine institutions but players and modifiers of the inherited structures in their own right.

Dynamics in Engendering the African Public Sphere: Modernity versus Tradition

The public sphere as known today is punctuated more by modern ideologies like democracy, human rights, equality etc which make it an arena for the expression of modernity. Agnes Ku points out that the significance of the public sphere lies in it being an arena for democratic practices among citizens and it is the centrepiece around which debates are conducted. (Ku, 2000: 216) Because the public sphere should exhibit democratic principles it has therefore moved to accommodate both sexes on the basis of equality. Be that as it may, the African public sphere in as much as it has transformed to cater for gender equity, cultural beliefs and norms have continued to make their impact felt. As Agnes Ku argues, the public sphere is a sphere of cultural politics among citizens as it is an imagined category about citizen membership in both institutions of the state and civil society. (Ku, 2000: 217) What makes the African public sphere continue to be haunted by tradition is because it has continued to be an imagined construction. In addition to that, cultural socialisation is part of the African public sphere where African ideologies about femininity and masculinity have continued to entrench beliefs attached to the imagination of the African public sphere. Modernised imagination of the public sphere has left control and authority still defined on patriarchal lines. Geisler makes a good observation that even though political systems have changed, (including the introduction of new systems like IMF, World bank etc) patriarchal structures and attitudes have not. (Geisler, 2004: 173) Even

though women have found their way into the Zimbabwe parliament, cabinet or other higher posts, their presence there has not created an impetus in addressing gender equity in decision making in real terms because masculinity has continued to reign supreme and that the same names and faces continue to reappear on the political scene every time. Men in charge of these political institutions have a certain kind of political women they want to join their ranks which is in line with their cultural and gender expectations. This brings to Valian's idea of gender schemas which are part of non-conscious hypotheses about sex roles and differences and which are unarticulated. In African political parties especially in the Zimbabwean case for the ZANU-PF, women face quite a mammoth task on how to deal with men politicians because of these gender schemas. A point from Geisler makes this point clear where she argues that ambitious and outspoken women politicians have to deal with powerful male gatekeepers who favour the women's league type of women politician and they work to block the career advancement of women considered deviating from this ideal. (Geisler, 2004: 173) According to Staudt (as quoted by Tamale), in the context of globalised politics, the realities of African politics within the hierarchical world economic order mean that,

- at the top stratum which international movers of capital dominate,
- women are inconsequential and increased representation would not be
- likely to produce significant change. (Tamale, 2000: 11)

The African public sphere has tried to address the women question or gender equity by employing several methods like affirmative action and reserving quotas for women in decision making institutions. Quotas particularly in elections which are reserved for women are a recent phenomenon in Zimbabwe which started in the 2005 House of Assembly elections but prior to that only a negligible number of women in most cases same names have been allowed to take

part in politics and government structures. Such moves although they have benefited some African countries like South Africa and Uganda, their implementation in others have left a lot to be desired. In most cases, gender equity in the African public sphere has not been achieved because of poor economies, unequal educational opportunities between the sexes and the continued existence of attitudes of masculine supremacy. According to Nina Rao the inequality of women in most third world countries stems from mass poverty and general backwardness, a product of imperialism, colonialism and neo-colonialism and unjust economic relations in the international sphere. (Rao, 1985: 3) In most African countries and Zimbabwe in particular the introduction of Economic Structural Adjustment Programmes (ESAP) in the late 1980s and early 1990s reversed gains that had been made especially in giving women an opportunity to education, health and economic participation as ESAP eroded the achievements bringing men back into the driving seat as women got relegated to the private sphere once more, this time with much economic force. The African public sphere is not operating in an institutional vacuum but that global institutions surrounding it like globalisation, International Monetary Fund, World Bank, globalised democracy etc are themselves masculine in orientation and therefore can not be supported by institutions that are balanced. The questioning of the rationale of gender equality or equal access to economic and political opportunities will never seize unless and until the woman question is never dealt with by men because they would never do anything that threaten their masculine interests unless it works to their benefit. As Ntarangwi puts it masculinity is similar to capitalism, it is never something done once but has to be continually worked for, proven and reasserted. (Ntarangwi, 1998: 23) Ntarangwi further argues that there are men supportive of the feminist project ideologically and are involved in educating communities about gender equity but are unwilling to review their own personal practices and relations with women close to them or

those they interact with. (Ntarangwi, 1998: 27) This highlights the point that theoretically men believe in the gender equality but behind doors their gender schemas from childhood and culture whispers to them what the real situation should stand like in practical life.

The first hindrance to the practical realisation of true gender equity is the presence of men in institutions of decision making. Men's understanding and belief of their socialised superiority and maleness make women feel respected and honoured when allowed into the African public sphere. For example affirmative action is a project by institutions headed by men and women only come in to lobby and support such moves and after that become grateful to the same men thereby asserting and reasserting men's superiority over women. It is the men who can open the doors into the public sphere and deciding on the control of women involvement. This leaves people to question the calibre of women considered politicians, MPs or cabinet ministers. The continued existence and use of the terms men/women and male/female always carries an underlying gender bias and notions from the traditional imagination of what it means to be a man or woman. Valian argues that these terms woman/men distinguish people on the basis of their reproductive role and when speaking of gender it highlights the psychological and social perception of what it is to be a man or a woman and how they are expected to behave. (Valian, 1998: 10, 11) In Zimbabwe, party politics and liberation war credentials seem to play a major role in deciding who gets what position in ZANU- PF and in government and its structures. This development does not recognise in most cases talent and leadership skills and ability but patronage. Geisler offers a good example of the Zimbabwe case concerning women although it is in the early 1980s but the point she makes is commensurate with current actions within the government. According to her, in 1981 Zimbabwe offered a good example with the establishment of the ministry of community development and women affairs, the first in

Southern Africa offering professional women the opportunity to advise government on issues relevant to them. (Geisler, 2004:23) The work of the ministry was among other things to push for laws in favour of women some of which were progressive enough but the effectiveness of this ministry declined as it was downgraded and got tied closer to the party, ZANU-PF (Geisler, 2004: 117), in actual fact the ministry was considered an extension of the party's department in the government and therefore operated within the parameters of the party which were male defined and controlled. As if this was not enough appointees to government posts was done on the basis of loyalty to party principles and policies so that made or makes women vulnerable to patriarchal authority thus leaving the policy of affirmative action at the mercy of powerful male politicians. According to Tamale benefits to women from affirmative action are limited by that it is a top- down policy imposed by the state. (Tamale, 2000: 11) She argues that women need to stop thanking their governments for having delivered them from oppression. (Tamale, 2000: 11) In Zimbabwe, the women's league of ZANU- PF is characterised by such behaviour. Since 2000, their rhetoric has centred around one male figure, Robert Mugabe, the leader of ZANU- PF and government for having emancipated them from subordination. The rhetoric grew strong when Mugabe literally appointed Joyce Mujuru as one of his vice- presidents in 2004 and ZANU- PF women feel they owe their rise and numerical increase in decision making posts to his gratitude because Mugabe has appointed women as cabinet ministers, governors and as non- constituency MPs.

Such a situation has not in reality addressed the question of gender equality but has been used to strength and entrench not only Mugabe's hold to power but ZANU- PF men's power in general. To illustrate that there is no gender equality, if one looks closely at women who have been MPs or held cabinet posts in the Zimbabwean government are the same since 1980.

Examples include Joyce Mujuru, Olivia Muchena, Sabina Mugabe, Shuvai Mahofa, etc who have been ZANU- PF MPs in the same constituencies since 1980 save for Shuvai Mahofa who was defeated in the 29 March 2008 harmonised elections and Sabina Mugabe who did not contest because of ill-health. Looking at Zimbabwe's national gender policy, it outlines areas that the policy centres on, and these are land, agriculture and resettlement, water, industry, commerce and employment and mining, energy, environment and tourism in the economic sector and then education, health, democracy, justice delivery and human rights and lastly information and media in the social sector. (National Gender Policy, p4, 5) These areas have no relation with decision making and authority which shows that the desire is to continue with a masculine oriented Zimbabwean public sphere. This illustration shows how affirmative action is manipulable by men as they try to make the African public sphere only appear a smoke screen of gender equity whilst reshaping it to allow them to reassert their dominance over it. In Zimbabwe affirmative action in decision making political institutions is more about the politics of patronage and not talent because it is based on how many years you have been loyal to the party and your seniority also counts. In 1995 Margaret Dongo became the first independent woman MP after she was expelled from ZANU-PF for challenging its corruption practices, gender bias and male domination even though she was one of their renowned ex-combatants. Most women politicians try to use political parties to achieve personal goals like climbing up the social ladder or gaining access to state resources and services. Since 2005, Mugabe in the case of ZANU- PF has been very influential in declaring constituencies that are reserved for women during House of Assembly elections without the certification of party members or have women been able to question his reservations. Many women were put in constituencies that are strongholds of the opposition and few would be put in ZANU- PF stronghold. In some cases the party through

Mugabe appointed candidates to constituencies without the will of the people and this is one of the reasons why ZANU- PF lost most of its seats in its strongholds to the opposition in the 29 March 2008 harmonised elections because the electorate was disturbed by the decisions of their leaders. In other instances more than one candidate contested on a ZANU- PF ticket where in some cases it was men registering in constituencies reserved for women. All this struggle or arrangement is pinned on ideologies to do with femininity and masculinity; tradition and modernity as they take shape and contest in the African public sphere. The African public sphere has not been static but has responded to the dynamics presented by modernity through ideas of democracy, human rights, equal rights, and equal access to resources etc by redefining and reshaping itself to accommodate women but on terms preferable to men.

The African public sphere has allowed for numerical increase of women involvement and representation in decision making institutions yet making them ineffective in the actual process of decision making. Gender quotas have been used to increase women numbers in politics and government and this has proved to be successful. However this has certain disadvantages for women which Valian describing the small difference in the evaluation and treatment of men and women being like interest on capital, advantages accrue and like interest on debt, disadvantages also accrue. (Valian, 1998: 3) The debate on women numerical increase according to Geisler contravenes principles of equal opportunity where women should stand for political office like men against the “equality of outcome or result” and the use of quotas seem to be undemocratic since they over-rule voter preferences. (Geisler, 2004: 34) Gender quotas make women to get into positions at the mercy of men and as Geisler puts it this decreases their credibility towards their male colleagues as they continue to be seen as unequal who need men’s help to rise to power. It has rather made women an appendage of men and is not working to favour the majority

of women who are themselves uneducated, poor and peasants in marginalised areas of the country. According to Goetz there is a difference between numerical increase in women representatives and the representation of women's interests in government decision making; the one does not lead to the other. (Goetz, 1998: 241) The African public sphere has capitalised on that difference. Women seem to be hungry to get into positions of power, so the public sphere has given them that opportunity but it has withheld women interests from being addressed at the instigation of women. Goetz further points out that all individual women cannot be assumed to be concerned with gender equity although women in Uganda and South Africa have taken significant steps to articulate women's interests in politics. (Goetz, 1998: 241) This could be the reason why ZANU- PF has had the same women MPs since 1980 with changes only occurring in the case of deaths or illness. The same seem to be happening with the opposition party, MDC since its formation in 1999. The problem of the same faces in parliament or elections is not only for women but also for men. Most MPs in ZANU- PF and MDC whether male or female have created their own traditional areas of representation and this development has not helped in terms of gender equity, equal access to economic resources and the observance and employment of women with leadership skills, talent and ability.

According to Tamale the affirmative action policy has perpetuated mainstream post-colonial politics which has excluded the voices of the largest section of the peasant population both men and women. (Tamale, 2000:12) In Zimbabwe, one would find that those women MPs, ministers or governors are the same people with powerful positions in their parties and women's leagues and thus creating a small cliché of women with some sort of influence. In actual fact it would be erroneous to talk of numerical increase of women in decision making institutions but rather to talk of their reduction by multiplication of posts. For example, adding new ministries

where men dominate although women might seem to gain posts in the new additions. One would find that in Zimbabwe some ministries like agriculture, communication, economics and finance are divided to produce more ministries where women would get one or two posts. On the surface women numbers in decision making posts would increase but if the representational percentage is calculated, it would have dropped. As this is done, the peasant majority's interests are not recognised and make no impact in policy formulation. Tamale in her research in Uganda points that, "Despite an increase in number of female politicians in Uganda, I found in my research that it is still difficult for women to achieve political autonomy" (Tamale, 2000: 12).

Tamale's conclusion about women politicians in Uganda is similar to what is occurring with women politicians in Zimbabwe. They still do not have clear political autonomy although they have representatives in the political institutions and this is how tradition has played its cards against modernity, that is, allow women representation and gain numerical increase but never allow them enough political autonomy. Political autonomy is masculine and traditional while women representation and their numerical increase are modern and democratic and it is this divide which the African public sphere has taken advantage of. A good example is when the Domestic Violence Bill was being debated in the second session of the 6th Zimbabwe Parliament, the women parliamentary caucus had to lobby political parties' caucuses, traditional chiefs (who are all men) and male parliamentarians to support the bill and the proposed penalties.¹² In addition the African public sphere has created a class division within women in addition to its gendered nature. Affirmative action has helped to entrench women class division where it has benefited only the better placed, educated and wealthy women or those attached to powerful men. Affirmative action is a concept that has come into Africa in general and Zimbabwe in particular from outside and in trying to keep with global trends African countries have started to

use this concept without believing in it wholly as they continuously refer to sticking to African beliefs, customs and traditions. Class has stood as the major denominator of affirmative action in Zimbabwe as the political known and wealthy women are the ones who have benefited from it and the majority who are themselves peasants have no access to affirmative policy and has no impact on their political participation. According to Rao, class is defined as social grading by skills, income etc or convention, occupation or profession. (Rao, 1985: 4) In Uganda as Tamale discovered, affirmative action proved to be class-centric largely benefiting an educated elite minority among Ugandan women. (Tamale, 2000: 12) In Zimbabwe, the educated and better politically lined women have benefited from affirmative action and that has created a class of women who have political space and economic resources culminating in a huge gap between them and the marginalised. In addition to that women politicians in Zimbabwe seem to have operated on their own without cooperating with women movements because some of these movements are considered western influenced and carrying a hidden agenda. Women politicians, as illustrated by Geisler, have found themselves between a hard place and a rock facing serious problems both with their political parties and their relationship to women movements and the relationship between women activists and politicians have remained tense. (Geisler, 2004: 174, 13) Such organisational failures and misunderstanding between the two groups of women have acted as structural hindrances to women advancement in the public sphere especially in politics. These women activist movements have also remained largely sectional and class based hence their effect on promotion of the women cause has been minimal.

The Zimbabwe public sphere and the African public sphere in general has been shaped and reshaped; defined and redefined by masculinities fighting for control of political space. This paper agrees with Robert Morrell's argument that, in any society there are many masculinities,

each with a characteristic shape and set of features. (Morrell, 1998: 607) These masculinities are divided into two broad categories, that is, hegemonic and minor masculinities. According to Morrell, hegemonic masculinity in addition to oppressing women, it silences or subordinates other masculinities. (Morrell, 1998: 608) Thus the African public sphere is not only dominated by gender inequality but is also a locus of masculinity rivalry. It is these two issues particularly masculinity rivalry that would not let the African public sphere slice any significant autonomy to women. In Zimbabwe there are two major masculinities in the form of political parties, that is, ZANU- PF and MDC with totally different ideologies and orientation. These masculinities have since realised the power in women in terms of building a support base for their continual survival as political forces and have therefore opened up the public sphere to women. This opening up is a men initiative which makes women only pawns in the political game of masculinity rivalry as Zimbabwean women make the majority of the population. This is the sort of dynamism that characterise the African public sphere in its endeavour to remain patriarchal in nature. As Morrell argues hegemonic masculinity is not static; it is constantly responding to challenges, accommodating or repelling rival representations of masculinity and that it is a key element of patriarchy. (Morrell, 1998: 608- 609) The link between masculinity and patriarchy makes a parallel link to exist between the African public sphere and patriarchy as these are the axis of power and gender relations. The African public sphere has not done away with traditional characteristics of control and authority although it has accommodated ideas of modernity. A conclusion would fit well into Tamale's argument that: When women step over from the "private" sphere to claim their space in the public arena, traditional values provide ready tool for men to use to remind them of their "proper" place (Tamale, 2000: 12).

Conclusion

As this paper has shown, there is no doubt that great strides have been made in efforts to engender the African public sphere. These efforts are occurring within the context of global developments that have come to call for democracy, human rights and equal access to economic and political opportunities for both sexes. The African public sphere has witnessed a numerical increase in women representatives and representation in decision making institutions. The paper has argued that in Zimbabwe, although there is oscillation and vacillation in numbers of women representatives in parliament, efforts are directed at reaching the 30 % target set by UN and adopted by SADC for women representation even to the extent of obtaining 50% women representation. However, the paper has emphasised the point made by Goetz that getting 30 % or more women representatives is not getting representation of women or gender interests. It has argued that the Zimbabwean case shows that there is no competition between and among women politicians as the same faces have become traditionally recognised MPs for particular constituencies and are endorsed and stage managed from above the party structures. Such a scenario has taken away much of women agency in their performance of duty and involvement in politics or decision making. The paper has also argued that the African public sphere's engendering process is just but a smoke screen as masculinity has continued to reign. Traditional ideas about femininity and masculinity have not been replaced but that the African public sphere has simply redefined and reshaped itself along the changes of the time. Modernity and tradition are the two binary opposites in the African public sphere but tradition (masculinity/patriarchy) still holds its position in the public sphere. This is because the public sphere has remained dominated by imagined concepts and the changes being introduced there are masculine originated hence masculinity is entrenching itself in the public sphere in the guise of engendering

it. The existence of rival masculinities in the society has made the public sphere more masculine than feminine. Affirmative action has proved useful in increasing the numbers of women in political and public institutions but it is limited only to the politically connected who are the minority and the majority have remained outside the benefits of this policy. Its limitation is that it has been specifically directed at women as if they are the only ones who are disadvantaged yet there are other ethnic groups which have both women and men disadvantaged in accessing economic resources and political influence or who are not having equal access to education and health like other ethnic groups. In Zimbabwe, there is need to define affirmative action anew in relation to issues on the ground just like what happened in America where affirmative came onto the scene due to the imbalances that existed between the American races and this was not based on women as is being purported in some other countries.

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⁹ *Ibid*

¹⁰ “Zimbabwe women’s parliamentary caucus”

¹¹ “Zimbabwe women’s parliamentary caucus”

¹² “Zimbabwe women’s parliamentary caucus”