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## The SABPP Women's Report 2019: Women and politics

Anita Bosch (Editor)  
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# The SABPP Women's Report 2019

## **Women and politics**

*Prof. Anita Bosch (Editor)*



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# Foreword

In a general election year and with political upheaval in national as well as provincial politics, this year’s women’s report is dedicated to the topic of politics as it relates to women. Power is one of the main constructs in gender relations, and therefore also in gender politics. When power is exercised with impunity and without regard for the impact it has on others, a social imbalance is created.

While temporary imbalances form part of the ebb and flow of life, when these imbalances lead to the formation of norms, an order, or a state of being, these influence the way things are viewed and done in society, and lead us to accept that there are certain ‘rules’ that cannot be changed. In our minds, we feel obliged to act according to the confines of the order that is disguised as ‘normal’ or even ‘the natural order of things.’ Gender inequality is created through the imbalance between the social powers that men and women enjoy in society. We, ourselves, create and reinforce it.



The use of power and influence is a key ingredient of politics, whether at national or workplace levels. Through power and influence, politics can open and shut doors in business, careers, government, and in personal lives. Amanda Gouws reflects on how women politicians are faring in taking up their positions of power in South Africa. Ideally placed with an NRF Research Chair in Gender Politics, she critically analyses women's representation in government and the South African electoral system. Her reflections on feminist institutionalism and how young women are filling the gender redress void left by women currently in power in government, appeal to South Africans to consider the future of gender equity. The gains that have been made regarding gender equality in the past, including those in the workplace, rest on advances in legislation, together with the political will to execute existing legal mechanisms. Our work is not yet done.

Desiree Lewis adds a thought-provoking chapter, complementing Amanda Gouws's chapter, in which she explains how the political and economic systems of South Africa are built on liberalist notions. Whilst these have served our economy in the past, she questions whether we are on the right path, and brings to our attention the hidden structural elements embedded in a neo-liberalist framework. Desiree explicates the economic and political outcomes of working-class women and links between patriarchy and gender violence at work, which culminate in physical and emotional outcomes.

She provides numerous examples of women working in different industries to illustrate how assumptions about 'normality' in workplaces obviates us from understanding differences between women and men. Her chapter provides an explanation of the struggles of women at work and how these may be entrenched in the economic model that we are accepting without reflecting on its outcomes.

Taking Chapters 1 and 2 as a backdrop to workplace outcomes from a national system perspective, Nthabiseng Moleko reflects on the National Gender Machinery. She details the incidence of violence against women, and provides shocking figures illustrating the depth of the problem. She makes suggestions on how we can draw on existing resources to better monitor gender outcomes at a national level. When gender violence is curbed nationally, the positive effects spill over into the workplace and the economy. Gender-based violence

gives us an indication of the levels of patriarchy and toxic masculinity that validate hyper-competition, such that the phenomenon of a queen bee at work – a woman who purposefully excludes other women from entering senior roles and from having workplace influence – is a manifestation of the acceptance of violence and toxic masculinity. In this regard, Charlene Gerber and Anton Schlechter conducted a study on the prevalence of Queen Bee Syndrome (QBS) amongst a sample of women. They make a compelling case that QBS may not be as common as is reported. In addition, they call on us to consider why the syndrome might exist in contrast with similar behaviour seen in men. From their study, my conclusion is that aggressive and hyper-competitive behaviours have been normalised for men at work. Such behaviour is referred to as organisational politics. However, when women display similar behaviours, it is labelled a syndrome – an anomaly and something to be treated.

In this, the ninth year of the publication of the Women's Report, I feel privileged to have been able to convince women and men to pen informative and thoughtful articles, written with the intention to positively influence workplace outcomes. I trust that the predominantly national focus that is provided in this year's report will make us reflect on gender outcomes at work and consider how societal machinery might complicate the creation of egalitarian systems and practices at work.

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## CHAPTER ONE

# The state of women's politics in South Africa, 25 years after democratic transition

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Thoughts in this chapter include those stated in the author's published papers<sup>123</sup>

Twenty-five years ago, there was reason for South African women to be optimistic about the benefits of the transition to a democracy that would change conditions of gender inequality and gender injustice. Apart from the Women's Charter that was championed by the Women's National Coalition – a groundswell women's movement – women put their faith in institutions of the state to promote gender equality. These structures collectively became known as the National Gender Machinery, which, through feminist activism, was institutionalised as a comprehensive, multi-locational set of structures driven by femocrats (feminists in the state). This, combined with a 30% ANC quota for women's representation in parliament, sounded like a winning recipe. Yet, over the years, the optimism about the state as a space and instrument of change has waned.

In this chapter, I give an overview of women's representation in South Africa, as well as feminist institutionalism, to elucidate waning feminist activism and a general perception among South African feminists that the state is not to be trusted with gender equality.

## Women's representation in government

During transitions to democracy, the first order of business for women is to get a sufficient number of women appointed to the legislature to reach a critical mass to change male-dominated institutional cultures. Earlier thinking was that about 30% would be the tipping point. Yet, it has become clear that this is not necessarily the case, and that what is needed are critical actors: women – and men – who act as change agents and who put gender issues on the legislative

1 Gouws, A. (2016). *Women's activism around gender-based violence in South Africa: Recognition, redistribution and representation*. *Review of African Political Economy*, 43 (149): 400-415. DOI: 10.1080/03056244.2016.1217838.

2 Gouws, A. (2017). *Feminist intersectionality and the matrix of domination in South Africa*. *Agenda*, 31 (1): 19-27.

3 Gouws, A. (2019, forthcoming). *Feminist institutionalism, women's representation and state capture: The case of South Africa*. *Feminist institutionalism in Africa*. London: Zed Books.

agenda. However, having women in the legislature in large numbers or descriptive representation is important, because the visible presence of women changes women's participation for the better<sup>4</sup>, also called symbolic representation.

When gender issues are put on the agenda for legislation or policy-making, we move from descriptive representation to substantive representation. Substantive representation is based on the assumption that women represent other women by raising issues pertinent to gender equality. In male-dominated cultures, a range of contextual or institutional factors need to be considered, such as parliamentary rules and practices, as well as masculine legislative norms that will have an influence on the inclusion of women<sup>5</sup>. Feminist consciousness improves the prospects of substantive representation, and it is therefore important to include women who are feminist activists and have strong relationships with women's movements and organisations that can help them set an agenda for women.

All three types of representation (descriptive, substantive, and symbolic) are dependent on how the electoral system functions and whether the rules of the electoral system make it possible for women to be elected.

### The electoral system

Feminist institutionalism cannot be separated from either women's representation in government or women's participation in politics. In order to increase women's descriptive representation, many countries have accepted a quota system for women, combined with an electoral system. The proportional closed-list system works best. Proportional representation entails that a party gets the number of seats in the legislature in relation to its proportion of the vote. With a closed list, seats in the legislature are filled from the top of the list, and, if women are put at the top, or every second name is that of a woman, more women get seats. The quota system is called a "fast track"<sup>6</sup> for women, and has led to significant increases in women's representation

globally. In African post-conflict conditions, quotas were also very successful in ensuring the inclusion of women, e.g., Rwanda now has the highest number of women in legislature in the world – 62%.

Quotas can be voluntary party quotas, legislative quotas, or Constitutional quotas. South Africa has a 50% voluntary party quota of the ruling party, the ANC, with 42% women in parliament. Greater descriptive participation leads to expectations of greater substantive representation. In this regard, the relationship between women in government and the women's movement is important in order to get important issues onto legislative and policy agendas<sup>7</sup>. However, the biggest problem with the closed-list system is that women become accountable to the party leaders who put together the final lists, requiring their approval, and not that of the constituencies the women are supposed to represent.

No other South African party has a quota with the official opposition, the DA, making the liberal argument that women should get into positions on merit, merit being measured by male standards, without due consideration of the care duties related to children and family that often limit women's political participation.

### Feminist institutionalism

Prior to the transition to democracy, a women's movement uniting women across race, ideology, and party lines – the Women's National Coalition – campaigned for the inclusion of women in the party delegations and inclusion of gender issues in discussions. It also managed a single-issue campaign, which meant a campaign around the single issue of the creation of a women's charter. During this campaign, one million women at grassroots level were consulted regarding their demands for such a charter. The proposed charter was handed over to President Mandela in 1994.

At the time, feminist activists and academics, many involved in the Women's National Coalition, made submissions to include a range of structures in the state that would be responsible for promoting gender equality. This campaign led to a highly integrated National Gender Machinery that compared well with those in the global North. It included an Office of the Status of Women in the Office of the President, a Joint Monitoring Committee on the Quality of Life and Status

4 Childs, S. & Krook, M.L. (2009). *Analysing women's substantive representation: From critical mass to critical actors. Government and Opposition*, 44 (2): 125-145; *Women in parliament: Beyond the numbers, 1998/2005*.

5 Franceschet, S., Krook, M.L., & Piscopo, J. (2012). *The impact of gender quotas*. Oxford University Press.

6 Dahlrup, D. & Freidenvall, L. (2005). *Quotas as fast track for equal representation for women. International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 7 (1): 26-48.

7 Stetson, S. & Mazur, A. (1995). *Comparative state feminism. California: Thousand Oaks*.

of Women (which would monitor all state departments), a Women's Empowerment Unit in the Office of the Speaker, a multi-party gender caucus in parliament, gender desks in all civil service departments (on national and provincial level), and the autonomous Commission for Gender Equality. Feminists deliberately avoided a Women's Ministry, because of enough evidence from other countries (especially in Africa) that women's issues become ghettoised in a ministry that becomes a dumping ground for any and all gender concerns<sup>8</sup>.

In the first five years of South Africa's democracy, a strong relationship existed between women members of parliament (many of them entering parliament as feminist activists in the Women's National Coalition as part of a 30% quota of the ANC). The most progressive and comprehensive women-friendly legislation was tabled during this period. Women introduced and shepherded laws through parliament, such as the Domestic Violence Act (Act 116 of 1998), the Maintenance Act (Act 99 of 1998), the Recognition of Customary Marriages Act (Act 120 of 1998), and the Choice of Termination of Pregnancy Act (Act 92 of 1996). Many feminists left parliament after the first five years, and were replaced by women who thought of themselves as professionals without a feminist commitment<sup>9</sup>. Feminists' beliefs stood in tension with President Mbeki's AIDS denialism and the weapons scandal that occurred during his tenure. Pregs Govender, MP, one of the leaders of the Women's National Coalition and the Chair of the Joint Monitoring Committee on the Quality of Life and Status of Women, was forced to resign because of her criticism of Mbeki<sup>10</sup>. Feminists who work in the state also have to contend with what Gisela Geisler<sup>11</sup> calls the Women's League Syndrome – when liberation movements become government, they expect women's participation to be passive and women's issues not a central concern. Women's auxiliaries of liberation parties and women's leagues are often quite conservative, and they promote women's interests within a very narrow agenda that will not alienate the men in the party.

Women in the South Africa's ruling party (which has by far the majority of women, due to the 50% quota system – an increase from 30% to 50% occurred in 2007) have the ability to mobilise through the women's auxiliary,

the ANC Women's League<sup>12</sup>. Many of the women MPs are members of the ANC Women's League, and have been put on the electoral list under its auspices. Many Women's League members have been positioned in key positions in portfolio committees, cabinet, and the Commission for Gender Equality. Members of the Women's League are recruited on grounds of party loyalty and political mobility, not because of gender interests<sup>13 14</sup>.

Nationalism frames women and women's liberation in certain ways, most often as reproducers of the nation. As Hassim<sup>15</sup> points out, the Women's League's work was hampered by its inability to respond to demands that challenged the hierarchies that supported the political power of men, because it was "defined within the authorising frame of nationalism." While women in the Women's League may have a feminist consciousness, nationalism imposes a hegemony on the very women it mobilises<sup>16</sup>.

Women's auxiliaries in the African context also use a strategy of creating large state-run organisations that mobilise women outside the auxiliary. In the South African case, the Progressive Women's Movement is an example of the state mobilising women through the ANC Women's League. This strategy has specific implications for independent civil society organisations' mobilisation. They can choose to become participants in state-run organisations, or they can operate with limited resources. Joining state-run organisations limits women's access to existing gendered/feminist networks, and state co-optation becomes a *sine qua non*<sup>17</sup>. After transitions, political parties develop particularistic goals, often ignoring women's concerns. Women's leagues often become the only voice on the national level, framing women's demands in very conservative

8 Gouws, A. (2006). *The state of the National Gender Machinery: Structural problems and personalised politics*. In S. Buhlungu, J. Daniel, R. Southall, & J. Lutchman (Eds.), *State of the Nation, 2005-2006*. Cape Town: HSRC Press.

9 Britton, H. (2010). *Women in the South African parliament*. Champaign-Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

10 Govender, P. (2007/2017). *Love and courage*. Johannesburg: Jacana.

11 Geisler, G. (2004). *Women and the remaking of politics in Southern Africa*. Uppsala: Nordic Africa Institute.

12 Makhuga, L. (2015). *Elite patriarchal bargaining in post-genocide Rwanda and post-apartheid South Africa: Women political elites and post-transition African parliaments*. Unpublished PhD dissertation, Wits University.

13 Hassim, S. (2014). *The ANC Women's League*. Johannesburg: Jacana.

14 Gouws, A. (2011). *Women's representation in government: Quotas, substantive equality and self-interested politicians*. *Transformation*, 77: 80-99.

15 Hassim, S. (2014). *The ANC Women's League*. Johannesburg: Jacana: 15.

16 Hassim, S. (2006). *Women's organizations and democracy in South Africa – contesting authority*. Scottsville: UKZN Press: 40.

17 Fallon, K. (2008). *Democracy and the rise of women's movements in sub-Saharan Africa*. Baltimore: John Hopkins Press: 51.

ways<sup>18</sup>. The ANC's march to the Union Buildings in 2015 with the slogan Hands off our president<sup>19</sup> (Zuma) is a case in point. Rather than demanding government intervention for women, they protected a disgraced president.

The ANC Women's League claims 'motherhood' and 'wifehood' as platforms of action. In order not to alienate their core constituencies, the Women's League needs to vocally reject feminism. The Women's League's previous president, Angie Motshekga, publicly denied that the Women's League was a "feminist organisation" that was "hostile" to male leaders<sup>20</sup>. The discourse around motherhood is linked to a nationalist understanding of women as 'mothers of the nation' reproducing for the nation. This reluctance to represent women's issues in a feminist way causes a lack of substantive representation.

### Discourse as a tool to disarm feminist struggles

During Jacob Zuma's term of office, the structures of the National Gender Machinery were dismantled and replaced by a Ministry for Women, Youth and People with Disabilities, negotiated by the ANC Women's League during the 2007 elective conference of the ANC. When these identity groups were lumped together in one ministry, a discourse of vulnerable groups was created, to ensure that these groups were protected by government. It eliminates the notion of agency and women's empowerment, and, instead, makes them seem dependent on protection by men —ironically, often their own abusers. In the same light, the discourse of the Women's League around gender-based violence and intimate femicide is equally problematic.

In demanding incarceration of sex offenders ("Rapists must rot in jail"), one of the main strategies of the ANC Women's League is to attend bail hearings and court cases of alleged perpetrators. When Anene Booysen died after a brutal gang rape, the Women's League made a point of being visible at the bail hearing of her alleged rapists in Bredasdorp. The Minister for the Ministry for Women, Youth and People with Disabilities at the time, Lulu Xingwana, personally attended the hearing, and made a plea outside the court for the rapists to "rot in

jail" with her fist in the air (the author was present at the hearing). This increases feminists' fear of the carceral state where incarceration is the main strategy to deal with gender-based violence, rather than engaging with the social problems and cultural attitudes that cause the violence in the first place.

Makhunga<sup>21</sup> calls this the "palliative care" around gender-based violence, which is the inability to locate such violence in a wider narrative of a failure of socio-economic rights and show that gender-based violence is a manifestation of male domination and a symptom of much deeper systemic issues. A typical response of the Women's League is that gender-based violence is a moral issue, and that moral restoration and the restoration of family values will diminish violence. The events and appearances at court cases are the 'performativity' of care, which, in Makhunga's words, is like putting a plaster on a broken arm. Talking about the 'scourge of violence' makes the agents of violence invisible and a disease visited upon women<sup>22</sup>.

### Undoing the feminist institutions in the time of state capture

Institutions develop what Chappell<sup>23</sup> calls "the logic of appropriateness" – routines and practices that are enforced through informal means (varying from disapproval, social isolation, to threats, and even violence). As a consequence, actors behave in ways that may promote or inhibit gender outcomes. Feminist institutionalism is a way of understanding feminist action in government.

Jacob Zuma's term of office initiated the dismantling of the National Gender Machinery. Some of its structures were already dysfunctional at the time, due to a lack of resources and feminist commitment. It was also the slow start of the period of the hollowing out of the state by Zuma's patronage networks, which culminated in what is now called 'state capture' in the South African context. Such clientelist networks are dominated by men, and are factionalised in a way that often excludes women.

18 Geisler, G. (2004). *Women and the remaking of politics in Southern Africa*. Uppsala: Nordic Africa Institute: 88.

19 Ngobeni, T. (2015). ANCWL wants "hands off our president." <https://rekordeast.co.za/69629/ancwl-wants-hands-off-our-president/>

20 Seale, L. (2013). *SA not ready for a female president – ANCYL*. City Press. <https://www.iol.co.za/news/politics/sa-not-ready-for-female-president-ancwl-1589121>

21 Makhunga, L. (2014). *South African parliament and blurred lines: The ANC Women's League and the African National Congress's gendered political narrative*. *Agenda*, 28 (2): 40.

22 Gouws, A. (2015). *The public discourse on rape in South Africa*. In M. Verwoerd and C. Lopes (Eds.), *Sexualized violence in the national debate*. Cape Town: Heinrich Bohl Stiftung: 66-75.

23 Chappell, L. (2006). *Comparing political institutions: Revealing the gendered 'logic of appropriateness'*. *Politics & Gender*, 2 (2): 223-235.

Through various commissions of inquiry, such as the Zondo Commission and the Mokgoro Inquiry, South Africans are now exposed to the depth and breadth of state capture<sup>24</sup>. If feminist institutionalism means spaces in the state where women can insert women's interests and issues, it is unavoidable that state capture will have an impact on these structures.

Chipkin and Swilling<sup>25</sup> distinguish corruption from state capture by defining corruption as individual action, and state capture as systemic and well organised by people who have an established relationship with each other, with repeated transactions on an increasing scale. Whereas corruption bypasses rules, state capture aims to change the formal and informal rules, legitimising these, and opening the way for those who are allowed to play the game. Chipkin and Swilling<sup>26</sup> call this "the repurposing of the institutions of state" regarding the way institutions are structured, governed, managed, and funded, giving them purposes different from their formal mandates.

The Zuma government was instrumental in rolling back the progress made by women, evident in the systematic closure of institutions of the National Gender Machinery and replacing women inclined towards feminism with compliant women. In addition, the creation of a Ministry of Women where issues of women, children, and the disabled were lumped together repurposed the National Gender Machinery, diluting its focus and, therefore, its effectiveness. These events showed the repurposing of ministries to be compliant with the state capture process. Since 2009, there have been four Ministers of Women, all loyal to Zuma. Lulu Xingwana, the second minister, was supposed to establish a Council on Gender-based Violence to combat the escalating sexual violence against women.

There was a demand by civil society for this council after the death of Anene Booysen in 2013. Xingwana failed to accomplish this, as did Susan Shabangu as Minister of Women in the Presidency (who replaced Xingwana)<sup>27</sup>. The fourth minister, Bathabile Dlamini, was retained in cabinet after the cabinet reshuffle in 2017, as Minister of Women, after serious allegations of incompetence as Minister of Social Development. Women in civil society called Dlamini's appointment a disgrace<sup>28</sup>.

Dlamini was retained as a Minister despite her inability to appoint a new service provider to distribute social grants to about 17 million South Africans and her lack of accountability in the Life Esidimeni tragedy, in which 143 mentally disabled patients died after being moved from government-funded institutions to non-governmental organisation that were not fit to deal with the patients' needs<sup>29</sup>. Dlamini's retention was due to the ANC keeping a balance between the Zuma and Ramaphosa factions (with Dlamini being a Zuma ally) and her position as Chair of the ANC Women's League.

Currently, the ANC is blurring the separation between state and party, thereby alarmingly undermining the separation of powers. This party-state fusion started under Mbeki, but escalated significantly under the Zuma presidency. African liberation movements are infamous for resistance to change from liberation movements to political parties, and the ANC is no exception. Factionalism is rife within the ANC, and this influences nominations during elections on both regional and provincial levels.

As Booysen<sup>30</sup> puts it: "[T]his has far-reaching implications for governance and the fiscus. They protect their executive political handlers – keeping them out of court, shielding them from uncomfortable questions, moderating succession contests." Booysen<sup>31</sup> also argues that there are privileges beyond the formal rules of the state for those who operate on the right side of the ANC president (then Zuma), especially if they helped to protect him over time. In these conditions, the only way for women to survive in parliament is to join a faction, and this limits their ability to put gender issues on the agenda, effectively making them as self-interested as the men<sup>32</sup>.

At its core, state capture is a political project to "repurposes state institutions to suit a constellation of rent-seeking networks that have constructed and now span the symbiotic relationship between the constitutional and shadow states"<sup>33</sup> in which state structures are repurposed. The repurposing of state structures shows how informal rules have the power to circumvent the purposes of the original architecture and formal rules, as well as the policy intent of institutions.

24 Commission of Inquiry into State Capture. <https://www.sastatecapture.org.za/>

25 Chipkin, I. & Swilling, M. (2018). *Shadow state*. Johannesburg: Wits University Press.

26 Chipkin, I. & Swilling, M. (2018). *Shadow state*. Johannesburg: Wits University Press.

27 Sonke Gender Justice. <https://genderjustice.org.za/project/policy-development-advocacy/stop-gender-violence-national-campaign/>

28 Herbst, D. (2018). Bathabile Dlamini: A disgrace to the women of South Africa. <https://briefly.co.za/9404-bathabile-dlamini-a-disgrace-women-south-africa.html#9404>

29 Holmes, T. (2018). #LifeEsidimeni – How did more than 140 mental health patients lose their lives at the hands of the state? <https://bhekisisa.org/report/special-report-lifeesidimeni-how-did-more-than-90-mental-health-patients-lose-their-lives-at-the-hands-of-the-state>, Bhekisisa.

30 Booysen, S. (2015). *Dominance and decline – the ANC in the time of Zuma*. Johannesburg: Wits University Press: 29.

31 Booysen, S. (2015). *Dominance and decline – the ANC in the time of Zuma*. Johannesburg: Wits University Press: 30.

32 Gouws, A. (2011). Women's representation in government: Quotas, substantive equality and self-interested politicians. *Transformation*, 77: 80-99.

33 Chipkin, I. & Swilling, M. (2018). *Shadow state*. Johannesburg: Wits University Press.

Feminist institutions are very vulnerable to repurposing, because they are institutionalised through the goodwill of male-dominated governments.

Feminist institutionalism takes place in the Constitutional state according to formal rules, and feminists/women who are not included in male-dominant networks are excluded from the informal spaces of the shadow state where most important decisions are taken. The lack of attention to women's issues therefore manifests as a lack of political will. The logic of appropriateness of how institutions operate disappears when the state is captured. Where state capture is rife, most actions are clandestine.

### The women's movement

After political transitions, the activism that drives a women's movement disappears when women have to engage the state or institutional politics, and they become locked into the legislative schedule (if activism is aimed at addressing new laws). Where the Women's National Coalition was an umbrella body that was united around a single issue, the way women's organisations now operate is in a sectoral fashion, often united around a piece of legislation, to make submissions or to fight against gender-blind legislation. This type of mobilisation took place around the Sexual Offences Act (the Shukumisa Campaign) and the very gender-discriminatory Traditional Courts Bill (the Alliance for Rural Democracy). I call these "local temporal movements"<sup>34</sup> that disappear after they have reached their goals. While these organisations are invaluable, there is currently no umbrella women's movement on a national level to unite women or to pressure government on issues such as, for example, gender-based violence.

### # Campaigns

The most recent visible feminist activism came from young women students in 2015/2016 with the #RhodesMustFall, #OpenStellenbosch, #EndRapeCulture, and #FeesMustFall campaigns. Women students claimed a feminist identity that they expressed as an intersectional, radical, African feminism. Drawing on the theories of Franz Fanon, the

Algerian psychiatrist who wrote about the brutality of French colonisation of Algeria, and Steve Biko, the father of black consciousness philosophy in South Africa, they expressed black pain as a consequence of exclusionary institutional cultures in tertiary institutions. The discourse of pain connected oppression directly to the black body and the materiality of bodies. Race was the central identity construct that was used in the first months of these campaigns<sup>35</sup>. Drawing on experience is also an important feminist strategy that invokes the notion of 'the personal is political'<sup>36</sup>.

Gender identity became central when an African woman student was raped in a building that was occupied by the #RhodesMustFall students. The first cracks in the solidarity with black men started to show, and intensified when the Rhodes University Reference List was published. This was a list of the names of 11 alleged rapists against whom Rhodes University (now called UCKAR – the University Currently Known As Rhodes) did not want to take action. This was the beginning of the #EndRapeCulture campaign. African women students mobilised around pervasive gender-based violence and institutional cultures that normalise such violence through lack of action. The campaign also focused on race, gender, and sexuality, as well as the surrounding dynamic and fluid relations.

In topless marches, women students attempted to reclaim the body that, through the male gaze, had become objectified and subjected to sexual violence. They were also angry about the lack of solidarity shown by men students whom they had supported throughout the # campaigns at different campuses.

The importance of the student revolts of 2015/2016 is that women students embraced a feminist identity and made the high levels of gender-based violence on South African campuses visible. It was also an indictment of older-generation feminists who did not take a younger generation seriously enough.

In August 2018, women across generations took to the streets in the #TotalShutdown campaign to force government to listen to the voices of women on sexual violence and intimate femicide<sup>37</sup>. Women demanded that President Ramaphosa attend this national meeting

34 Gouws, A. (2016). Women's activism around gender based violence: Recognition, redistribution and representation. *Review of African Political Economy*, 43 (149): 400-415.

35 Gouws, A. (2018). #EndRapeCulture campaign in South Africa: Resisting sexual violence through protest and the politics of experience. *Politikon*, 45 (1): 3-15.

36 The personal is political origin. <https://www.thoughtco.com/the-personal-is-political-slogan-origin-3528952>

37 The total shutdown: Intersectional Women's Movement against GBV on Facebook. <https://www.facebook.com/WomenProtestSA/>

on gender-based violence, which he did, and he made commitments on behalf of government to intervene and put a stop to sexual violence. An independent study done by KPMG to calculate the costs of gender-based violence (injuries, trauma counselling, lost productivity, costs of interdicts, and court procedures, etc.) showed that gender-based violence costs the country between R28 billion and R42 billion per year<sup>38</sup>.

## Conclusion

In order for women to participate in democracy in a meaningful way, they have to be able to access the state. The access is facilitated by women representatives in government. Another form of engagement is through the National Gender Machinery or feminist institutionalism. Processes of participation are facilitated by active women's movements.

While South Africa had all these elements in place after 1994, a slow erosion of women's representation in the state, the dismantling of the National Gender Machinery, and a weakened women's movement have conspired to destroy the gains women have made since 1994.

Amid extremely high levels of gender-based violence, a younger generation of feminists took to the streets to give life to feminist demands to stop the violence. This may be a new chapter in the story of women's engagement with the state, 25 years after democratic transition.

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<sup>38</sup> KPMG (2014). *Too costly to ignore: The economic impact of gender based violence in South Africa. Report*, [www.kpmg.co.za](http://www.kpmg.co.za)

## CHAPTER TWO

# Neo-liberalism, gender, and South African working women

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Neo-liberal expansion in South Africa has been considerable. Many compare this to the relatively slow evolution of neo-liberalism in other African countries. As Patrick Bond argues, South Africa exhibits “a homegrown structural adjustment”<sup>1</sup>, in contrast to the externally imposed structural adjustment in other African countries.

Structural adjustment in much of post-colonial Africa followed national programmes of capitalist or quasi-socialist transformation. These processes involved strong state control (often through one-party rule) over national resources. The phase of state-controlled post-apartheid economic and social development in South Africa was brief. Only two years after 1994, the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), initiated in the immediate post-apartheid period, was replaced by macro-economic restructuring through the Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) programme. Through this, the new government prepared to lead the country into a future of open markets, unregulated foreign capital flows, and citizens facing a tide of global capitalism. This meant increasingly little state protection from the exploitative and homogenising effects of global capitalism. South Africa's development since the introduction of GEAR therefore ushered in the stark economic and classed implications of neo-liberalism.

Neo-liberalism has also affected gender transformation in South Africa, especially for the most economically and politically vulnerable women in the country. In her assessment of the political alienation of poor and unemployed working women in the Western Cape, Mary Hames<sup>2</sup> critiques “paper rights”, arguing that neo-liberal democracy formally grants rights to “all” South African women, while also preventing the most disadvantaged from benefiting from these. Neo-liberalism has also affected working and political environments for middle-class and professional women. It does so by normalising gendered values of individual competitiveness as keys to success, empowerment, and “freedom.” Some middle-class and professional women may thrive economically under capitalism. Yet, the fiercely competitive conditions under which they work reinforce androcentric leadership, values, and work relations. Neo-liberal capitalism therefore entrenches value systems and interpersonal relationships that mirror patriarchal

<sup>1</sup> Bond, P. (2001). *Reflections from South Africa: Breaking the chains of global apartheid*. *Socialist Review*, 18 (July-August).

<sup>2</sup> Hames, M. (2006). *Rights and realities: Limits to women's rights and citizenship after 10 years of democracy in South Africa*. *Third World Quarterly*, 27, 7.

ones, subjecting those who function within these to an ethos of normalised aggression.

Neo-liberalism has also affected the character of gender discourses. This is evident in the language in which gender politics is now articulated, the work of NGOs dealing with gender issues, and gender-related education and training. As a system of governmentality, neo-liberalism presents itself as being 'above' ideology. It institutes the law of the market as a rational and inevitable route for personal, political, and social growth, as well as everyday behaviour. As a result, legacies of feminist politics in organisations and education can be displaced or depoliticised. Even the articulation of gender transformation in universities and NGOs can become a routine technology for achieving economic efficiency, the productivity of citizens, and harnessing knowledge to the market.

In addressing the themes above, this chapter deals with three sites of neo-liberalism. The first is labour, which reveals how neo-liberalism intensifies many women's economic vulnerability. The second is the masculine work environment and institutional culture that it naturalises, and the third is the impact of neo-liberalism on activism, education, and training. In each of these sites, gender hierarchies interact with economic systems to reinforce patriarchal and heterosexist subjectivities, interpersonal and power relations, and institutional cultures.

### Working-class women and neo-liberalism

The shift from the RDP to GEAR in 1996 had tremendous implications for the labour conditions of many South African women wage workers. It led to them being placed at the mercy of a global market ever ready to exploit labour in the global South. Through escalating investment and trade liberalisation, as well as flexible labour markets, one projected aim of GEAR was to generate steady annual employment growth. It was believed that extensive new investment would support rapid growth and generate new employment opportunities. Economic growth would also support expanding social services and infrastructure. Yet, the market-friendly liberalisation policies pursued in the wake of GEAR did not benefit those who had suffered most under apartheid. In fact, of the three pillars of the new macroeconomic strategy (growth, employment, and redistribution), only growth increased.

One of the most glaring indications of this is the situation of women farm workers in the Western Cape. South African women farm workers have a history of violent exploitation under apartheid. The legacy of this haunts labour relations in the present. Smythe and Parenzee<sup>3</sup> highlight the extent to which farming contexts have been affected by neo-liberal legislation. Requirements for a flexible workforce comprising small groups with brief contract periods have led to widespread unemployment (especially seasonal) and displacement for many women farm workers.

Although women have always played an important part in agriculture, their contributions are not valued, and their social status is especially low. The National Legal Manual for Counsellors of Raped and Battered Women provides extensive reasons for the high vulnerability of women to abuse on farms<sup>4</sup>. Among the most important of these is the belief that women belong to or are extensions of men. This means that women often obtain only seasonal work or work without contracts. They do not have the bargaining power or rights that men have. It also means that women without male partners do not receive housing. This can lead them to seek random partners or remain in highly abusive relationships with men, including employers. Limited educational opportunities and skills or illiteracy can constrain their efforts to find alternative employment. This makes them highly vulnerable to continued abuse and exploitation.

The farming context exposes how central women farm workers' economic precarity is to their vulnerability to violence. Lisa Vetten<sup>5</sup> argues that the poverty + unemployment = violence equation is usually examined in relation to perpetrators, rather than those subjected to violence. However, as the domestic violence affecting women on farms illustrates, being poor, seasonally employed, or unemployed makes women very vulnerable to harm or victimisation. Women farm workers typically earn less than men, experience greater rates of unemployment, and are concentrated in the lowest-paying sectors<sup>6</sup> of the farmwork industry. As a result, "finding a man and then sticking to him, is often as much a matter of economic necessity as it is a romantic choice."<sup>7</sup>

3 Smythe, D. & Parenzee, P. (2003). *Domestic violence and development: Looking at the farming context*. Cape Town: Institute of Criminology, University of Cape Town.

4 See *The national legal manual for counsellors of raped and battered women*. Johannesburg: Tshwaranang Legal Advocacy Centre, 1999: 375.

5 Vetten, L. (2000). *The economics of domestic violence*. Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation. <https://www.csvr.org.za/media-articles/latest-csvr-in-the-media/2173-the-economics-of-domestic-violence>

6 Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation. [www.csvr.org.za](http://www.csvr.org.za)

7 Vetten, L. (2000). *The economics of domestic violence*. Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation. <https://www.csvr.org.za/media-articles/latest-csvr-in-the-media/2173-the-economics-of-domestic-violence>

The web of economic and patriarchal domination for many poor, underpaid, or unemployed women farm workers clearly reveals their disempowerment under neo-liberalism. A woman's dependence on her partner significantly limits the autonomy that citizens are assumed to have in democracies. Effective policing, gender-sensitive legislation, and severe forms of punishment of perpetrators also do not automatically lead to an improvement in these women's quality of life. Vetten concludes: "Placing people in situations where they are expected to choose between living in abusive circumstances, or circumstances of economic hardship, is a form of coerced decision-making. As things currently stand, women can expect little or no state aid in this regard."<sup>8</sup>

In the wake of the massacre of mineworkers at Marikana in 2012<sup>9</sup>, protests against their extreme exploitation exploded among farm workers in the Western Cape. Many of these demonstrated women farm workers' specific concerns. Co-ordinated by the organisation Women on Farms, workers responded to the multiple injustices unleashed by neo-liberalism: severe economic exploitation, the abuse of human rights, and gender-based violence. Certain critics of labour and land in farm areas focus on women farm workers' vulnerability to seasonable unemployment as the main obstacle to their economic well-being<sup>10</sup>. The implicit argument here is that measures should be taken to ensure that neo-liberal labour exploitation functions more 'justly.' Women farm workers, however, have insisted that rights to land (and significant redistributive policies) will ensure sustainable and long-term goals for their economic independence and improved quality of life<sup>11</sup>.

A 2017 Women on Farms report<sup>12</sup>, based on extensive consultation with workers, described the gendered dimensions of their economic exploitation and rights violations. For example, the lack of sanitation and toilet facilities in the vineyards where they work for the entire day meant that they were obliged to use the bush – of particular concern for women who felt vulnerable to

sexual abuse. Women farmworkers also experienced educational disadvantages, and were alienated from the masculinised political sphere in rural areas, which is characterised by high levels of domestic patriarchy. Consequently, many did not have opportunities to learn about their rights. Even though some had signed contracts, a number did not receive copies of theirs.

Women's right to health care was also compromised, since requests for sick leave or hospital or clinic visits were dismissed. For many, illness meant no pay. Women also experienced pesticide poisoning in the form of respiratory or skin ailments, since it was mainly men who were provided with protective clothing. The gendered subordination of women workers also led to them being coerced to meet unreasonable targets during the season. The dehumanising perception of women workers as disposable and easily replaceable labouring bodies led many employers to treating them with contempt.

It is clear from the testimonies of workers that they had little or no recourse under the law to assert their rights to dignity and fair labour practices. Workers felt unprotected by the government, and many claimed that the Department of Labour inspectors rarely conducted visits to inspect farms. As the Women on Farms report reveals, neo-liberal democracy creates the impression of efficient economic processes and of rights-based and fair labour practices. Yet, the gross violation of women's rights on farms, the extreme economic exploitation, and the gendered violence that accompanies their economic precariousness indicate how neo-liberal globalisation affects wage-earning women throughout the global South.

Today, large numbers of poor women in South Africa experience exploitation, not only in formal work environments such as farms, but also in the informal sector. The belief that neo-liberal capitalism spontaneously generates employment opportunities is belied by the employment trends of women in South Africa. In fact, Nombulelo Siqwana-Ndulo's research established that, "in Sub-Saharan Africa, the informal sector accounts for up to 60% of the economy .... an important role of informal trading is its ability to absorb unemployed people, young and old."<sup>13</sup>

As is the case elsewhere in Southern Africa, the large number of women in South Africa's informal sector bear the brunt of gendered role divisions and patriarchal ideology. They are usually responsible for unpaid care work alongside the hard work expected of those in the informal economy. Irrespective of the work they

8 Vetten, L. (2000). *The economics of domestic violence*. <http://www.csvr.org.za/articles/artrec3.htm>

9 It is significant that the state supported capital in acting against workers striking for wage increases and sided with neoliberalism and not poor citizens.

10 See Visser, M. & Ferrer, S. (2015). *Farm workers' living and working conditions: Key trends, emergent issues, and underlying and structural problems*. Pretoria: ILO. [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---africa/documents/publication/wcms\\_385959.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---africa/documents/publication/wcms_385959.pdf)

11 Claim made in memorandum from Women on Farms to the President and Minister of Rural and Land Reform on 21 March. See <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2019-03-22-farmworkers-demand-their-rights-while-20000-in-drakenstein-municipality-face-evictions/>

12 Devereux, S., Levendal, G. & Yde, E. (2017). *The farmer doesn't understand who makes him rich. Understanding the labour conditions of women in the Western Cape and the Northern Cape, South Africa*. Oxfam. [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---africa/documents/publication/wcms\\_385959.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---africa/documents/publication/wcms_385959.pdf)

13 Siqwana-Ndulo, N. <https://www.polity.org.za/article/the-informal-sector-in-south-africa-women-street-traders-in-durban-part-1-2013-05-13>

perform, women are also situated lower in the informal work hierarchy, with this reflecting their status in the home. In the workplace (often public spaces such as city streets or transport interchanges characterised by violent masculinity), harassment, bullying, and discriminatory treatment are often constant problems. Homeless women market traders and street vendors regularly face challenges of personal security, and are more vulnerable than men to physical and sexual violence and crime in the markets and streets in which they work<sup>14</sup>.

Local and provincial government rarely make provision for the ablution, shelter, or storage facilities that would be commensurate with these workers' significant contributions to the economy. In a study of Durban women street traders, for example, Nombulelo Siqwana-Ndulo<sup>15</sup> shows that, although they contribute significantly to the economy, their needs are entirely ignored by town and development planning. Because neo-liberal urban planning assumes normative ideas about 'the city', street vending is neither supported nor encouraged, and women traders' lively participation in local economies is ignored. Siqwana-Ndulo remarks on the difficulty that Durban's women traders have with accommodation, showing that many have to travel between their homes in rural areas and the cities to trade. She argues that it is only through efforts to organise "self-employed survivalist women in the informal sector" in the form of the Self-Employed Women's Union (SEWU) that women's distinct challenges in the informal economy are being addressed.

Women survivalist workers in the informal economy cannot appeal to the Department of Labour, because of their informal work. The existing networks and organisations for informal sector workers are often heavily male-dominated. Moreover, women's need for basic security and support is not addressed by the starkly androcentric policy environment in which neo-liberal capitalism is located. Overall, women's structural positions within intersecting networks of discrimination are not addressed in normative policy prescriptions. Lynn Ossome therefore concludes that they are effectively stripped of their status and rights as citizens: "At present, one of the foremost demands of neo-liberal capitalism is its preoccupation with legal formalism, which not only undermines associations and labour practices not formally recognised by the law, but ensures that 'legality' determines who enters the market and what, more or less overtly, the market itself has come to signify – the very basis of citizenship claims...

This is part of the ideological assault of neo-liberalism: the fact that it is through the market (commodification of labour) that individuals become legible to the state as citizens."<sup>16</sup>

### Patriarchy and violence in workplaces<sup>17</sup>

Clearly, working-class women have fewer choices and are more vulnerable to economic exploitation and social injustice than professional and middle-class women. At the same time, harassment, bullying, and other forms of gender-based violence indicate how hostile working environments remain for many professional and middle-class women. This surfaced in the context of global #MeToo campaigns, which involved many South African women speaking out about working environments of patriarchal entitlement and abuse. In 2018, the South African print and social media covered numerous stories of sexual harassment in the academic and public service sectors. Both are defined as sites in which the rule of reason and justice reign over the messiness of emotions and irrationally cruel inter-personal relationships. However, the recurrence of sexual violence in these domains exposed how patriarchal entitlement continues to thrive in seemingly democratic environments. The cases show that, within everyday working relations, established academics and professionals or activists acquire authority as custodians of moral, political, and intellectual wisdom.

Their powerful positions are legitimated by moral and intellectual authority, and relations of structural power are entangled with ties of intimacy and trust, as well as roles based on tutelage and mentorship. Activism and media coverage during 2018 revealed that both academia and the public service sector privilege patriarchal entitlement, normalising everyday brutalities in their institutional cultures and working relations. These are situated in networks and physical spaces that create deep intimacies among subjects and bodies. Among these are one-on-one consultation sessions, travel involving close colleagues, and work collaboration that is often outside working hours and working spaces. Often, this is on the basis of socially determined statuses, for example, between women and men, black and white, younger and older employees, students and their teachers, and interns or mentors and their mentees.

<sup>14</sup> African Gender Institute, University of Cape Town.

<sup>15</sup> Siqwana-Ndulo, N. <https://www.polity.org.za/article/the-informal-sector-in-south-africa-women-street-traders-in-durban-part-1-2013-05-13>

<sup>16</sup> Ossome, L. (2015). *In search of the state? Neoliberalism and the labour question for pan-African feminism*. *Feminist Africa*, 20.

<sup>17</sup> Parts of this section draw on previously published work. See D Lewis (2018), *Violence against women and the politics of feminism*, in *Amandla magazine*, 60, 1.

The anger and distress of women who seem cushioned by their relatively privileged status as academics, university students, or professionals reveal how neo-liberal environments can normalise insidiously corrosive gendered injustices. While these may not take the form of explicit persecution or harm, they evidence how working women in professional and middle-class environments continue to be affected by patriarchy. The #TotalShutdown campaign in 2018, involving women throughout and beyond South Africa protesting against ongoing rates of violence against women, indicated various women's outrage at the misogynistic environments in which they live and work. Symbolically, the shutdown was also a powerful indictment against the dominant neo-liberal working world – forced to a standstill by the campaign – which seems to remain blind to the daily trauma to which South African women are subjected.

Another important consequence of neo-liberal institutional cultures is that work stress and physical exertion can severely affect women's mental, emotional, and physical health. Significant work has been done on women in the mining industry, where the rise of women employees seems to be positive evidence of women challenging hitherto male-only work preserves. In a study of women in core mining positions, Doret Botha and Freek Cronjé<sup>18</sup> examined how mining companies meet equity targets and employ women in high-risk environments. Sadly, companies do this without putting into place the gender-sensitive working conditions or policies that women's health and well-being require. This may indeed serve as a general example of the way in which women in working environments are obliged to adapt to policies and work conditions set up for men. These gendered arrangements then come to be seen as normative.

The occupational health challenges of working environments with high performance requirements and little interest in supporting employees' wellbeing reveal one set of consequences for women in the contemporary South African workplace. Another concerns ways in which competitive working environments privilege gendered norms that can severely affect employees' mental and physical health. The neo-liberal university is one of these environments. For example, Margaret Thornton<sup>19</sup> has shown that universities' processes of auditing now follow businesses' bureaucracies for regulating productivity and efficiency. Within the

current regimes, academics are often expected to police one another and to prioritise quantifiable tasks and achievements. Universities have always been elite institutions that have historically encouraged exclusivity, individualism, and competition, but the obsession with outputs, achievements, and productivity under the present audit culture encourages unbridled and ruthless competitiveness<sup>20</sup>.

Work traits and behaviours that are encouraged within South African society are often the subject of anecdotal or incidental commentary. Research for this chapter uncovered quantitative psychological studies on women's work-related illness and stress by, for example, the Medical Research Council and postgraduate theses within industrial, organisational, social, or clinical psychology. There is, however, a paucity of work on the multi-causal social and political reasons for women's stress-related illnesses in the workplace. Such analyses would explore, for example, the raced and gendered criteria for success and work eligibility for women in managerial or leadership positions. It would also confront the way that naturalised patriarchy in the home burdens women who are expected to be high achievers at work. Feminist qualitative analysis would also analyse the dominant institutional cultures and values that neo-liberalism sets in place. Very often, these may be presented as normative, inevitable, and necessary. Yet, a closer consideration of leadership styles or spatial arrangements in workplaces and offices, norms for communication, and relationships among employees reveal something different – that which is often seen as 'neutral' is, in fact, highly masculinist and androcentric.

Some men and women perform extremely well within flattened structures and through collaborative and consultative processes. However, in contexts where 'firm' leadership, hierarchised control, and individualised competition are prioritised, their strengths become 'weaknesses.' This may be the case even if it can be demonstrated that 'alternative' approaches to work might be more productive. Neo-liberalism, then, does not establish work norms and relations that are necessarily more effective; its norms are based on particular discursively constructed ideas about what constitutes and is required for success and good performance. It is therefore important to understand and critique the gendered values and cultures of neo-liberalism alongside understanding gendered experiences in contemporary neo-liberal working environments.

18 Botha, D. & Cronjé, F. (2015). Occupational health and safety considerations for women employed in core mining positions. *South African Journal of Human Resource Management*, 13, 1. <https://sajhrm.co.za/index.php/sajhrm/article/view/652/899>

19 Thornton, M. (2009). *Universities upside down: The impact of the new knowledge economy*. Australia National University College of Law Research Paper No. 10–13.

20 Lewis, D. (2018). *Neo liberalism and feminism in the South African academy*. In Kahlert, H., *Gender and the new academic governance*.

## Gender and neo-liberal education and policy<sup>21</sup>

If the situation of women (both wage earners and middle-class or professional) is often bleak under neo-liberalism, what can be said of the discourses and educational practices that set out to address this? South Africa has a long and vibrant record of feminist activism, one that strongly informed the transformation to democracy, the Constitution, and the range of policies and legislation set in place by the late 1990s. Overall, there has been a triumphant growth of policy-making, teaching, and research on gender, sexuality, and development in South Africa. The country has now become a powerhouse of gender expertise on the continent, with NGOs such as Gender Links and Gender Dynamix, and, within academia, the African Gender Institute at the University of Cape Town having become pioneering sites for gender and sexuality activism, research, and teaching in many parts of Africa. Many sites, as well as individual consultants in this country, export their expertise to guide social welfare, gender justice, and sexuality work throughout the continent.

What do we make of the narrative of post-apartheid success with regard to gender policy and education? A concern that warrants attention here is the way gender transformation is often reduced to a matter of ensuring compliance with legislation. Presently, an extremely blunt vocabulary around gender exemplifies this. Formulaic terms such as 'gender-aware', 'gender sensitivity', 'gender focal point' and 'gender disaggregated data' have succeeded terminology that gestured towards processes, towards what is complicatedly social and humanistic. The formulaic language is being reinforced by a global system in which information is increasingly processed as digestible soundbites, segments of directly useful information that can be quickly registered, applied, and then forgotten. In this process, gender knowledge and research within the holistic context of theory, epistemology, and radical practice are increasingly being side-lined<sup>22</sup>.

Often in very direct ways, the much-celebrated 'new media' enlisted in the service of very recent gender and sexuality work entrench the research tendency towards dehumanising research subjects. In particular, the trend of defining research subjects (even when they are categorised as participants) as the passive vectors of disease, or the victims of poverty and violence, reinforces the idea of research that uplifts and saves 'others.' For example, policy and academic research often repeats

images of South African women as the needy survivors of poverty, disease, and the violence of local men. Today, many media photographs, as well as digital storytelling, documentaries, and websites related to rural and peri-urban working-class women, teenage pregnancies, women living with HIV/AIDS, or women survivors of gender-based violence, reinforce messages about Southern African women's unrelenting victimisation. The flood of Internet images of the feminised face of poverty and disease in the country has reinforced this. Similarly, the proliferation of documentaries and research about gender-based violence in the region has sedimented impressions of gendered bodies as signs only of trauma, disease, and the violence inflicted by others. What is disturbing is not only the reductive emphasis on subjects as victims who have no agency, but the inbuilt agenda of neo-liberal developmentalism: the idea that South African subjects must be made to serve global capitalist progress.

South Africa has drawn extensively on global and external models. Not only has it offered expert knowledge to neighbouring countries in Africa, it has also functioned as a powerhouse, a rallying point for the absorption and dissemination of developmentalist apparatuses and discourses, which, after the UN Decade for Women in the 1970s, were revived from the mid-1990s. As the Beijing Conference in 1995 revealed, 'gender mainstreaming' became the new international technology for 'processing' and understanding gender. In an article titled *Creating a world worth assimilating into*, Sunila Abeysekera<sup>23</sup> writes: "The original concept of 'gender' as articulated by feminist thinkers to mean the socialization of masculine and feminine difference ... has been shifted ... through the process of mainstreaming to mean sometimes something as simple and as ludicrous as the inclusion of men and male concerns into laws, policies and practices."<sup>24</sup> She also confronts the problem that gender mainstreaming now often implies adding women – either through symbolic or numerical incorporation – into existing systems, organisations, and structures that remain unchallenged. Gender mainstreaming, therefore, has nothing to do with social transformation, and everything to do with assimilation into the status quo.

The depoliticising of gender has affected higher education as much as policy. One obvious consequence of neo-liberalism affecting research and teaching is when gender teaching comes to be driven by the idea of packaging courses that provide 'gender expertise' for servicing various sectors. With the growing emphasis on education that is economically viable, increasing emphasis is placed on the directly functional value of

<sup>21</sup> This subsection draws extensively on a previously published article. See D. Lewis, *The politics of doing gender: Implications for social work* (2012) and D. Lewis, *Feminism and neoliberalism in the South African Academy*. In Kahlert, H., *Gender and the new academic governance*.

<sup>22</sup> LGBT Network, Denmark. [www.lgbtnet.dk](http://www.lgbtnet.dk)

<sup>23</sup> Abeysekera, S. *Creating a world worth assimilating into*. WACC online.

<sup>24</sup> Abeysekera, S. *Creating a world worth assimilating into*. WACC online

work that prepares students for particular jobs. Over a decade ago, Amina Mama wrote that, in the context of the development industry, what is presented as 'doing gender' can often leave a lot to be desired<sup>25</sup>. More recently, Charmaine Pereira<sup>26</sup> identified the following as constraints to independent gender-related research and teaching: servicing the state, where researchers participate in validating government projects that do not reflect their voices or agendas or those of the women's movement; donor-driven interests, where researchers are required to produce quick-fix, short-term solutions; and professionalisation, where the growth of course work and student numbers is increasingly determined by the need for qualifications and employment skills.

## Concluding remarks

In making sense of how gendered identities and power relationships are shaped by neo-liberalism, we need to understand it as both an economic system and a system of governmentality. As an economic system driven by GEAR macroeconomic strategy since 1996, it has promised to create work opportunities and better social conditions for women. South Africa's impressive gender-sensitive legislation and policies for the workplace have held great promise for this. Yet, the situation of many working women in South Africa reveals what feminist critics of neo-liberalism have exposed. Andrea Cornwall, Jasmine Gideon, and Kalpana Wilson put it in the following way: "Neoliberal policies have given rise to what critics call a 'feminisation' of labour, accompanied by a deterioration of working conditions – casualisation, flexibilization, violation of international labour standards and low wages."<sup>27</sup>

Beyond the fact that increasing numbers of women are entering the male-dominated neo-liberal economy is the fact that they do so under highly exploitative and often inhumane conditions. This reveals that the main beneficiaries of neo-liberal globalisation are elite groups. Neo-liberalism's impact on poor women therefore requires an intersectional understanding of how class exploitation is connected to historical racialised and colonial subordination, as well as gendered relations at the domestic, national, and global levels. An intersectional analysis would also help to create arrangements for working conditions and policies that address subjects who simultaneously experience raced, classed and gendered oppression.

Many existing conditions and policies are based on the needs of those with histories of privilege, even though these are often seen to be neutral or universal.

As a system of governmentality, neo-liberalism has had far-reaching effects in establishing norms about ethical work and political behaviour. As Hamann<sup>28</sup> puts it, "The neoliberal subject is an individual who is morally responsible for navigating the social realm using rational choice and cost-benefit calculations grounded on market-based principles to the exclusion of all other ethical values and social interests."

Neo-liberalism is therefore distinctive in persuading us that its laws are inevitable and neutral. It is not easily identifiable as a system of oppression. Consequently, its impact in normalising gendered values and behaviour is often opaque. The neo-liberal workplace of today, however, is emphatically gendered. It normalises individualism, aggression, and competitiveness in all work endeavours, and scorns work ethics and standards that are considered feminised. Collaborative, mutually reciprocal, and nurturing behaviours are rarely encouraged under the neo-liberal pressure to perform rationally and calculatedly. At the same time that both women and men are pressurised to embrace masculinised norms, many women – even those in senior and leadership positions – continue to be subjected to sexual harassment and bullying. While workplaces must put policies in place that make gender discrimination unlawful, recent outcries against harassment and bullying by many women against their male colleagues indicate how cultures of masculine entitlement and authority still position women as targets of sexual abuse and humiliation. The physical and mental health implications of this warrant careful attention and intervention.

Line managers and organisational HR practitioners should also be alert to some of the limitations of existing 'expert' knowledge about gender. From being rooted in critical and qualitative analysis of power, 'gender talk' is now often little more than a technocratic strategy for addressing social problems that interfere with neo-liberal economic development and bureaucracy. Those with decision-making power and mandates to create empowering work environments for others should therefore explore and draw on critical sources and models. Some of the information and policies that are in place do not necessarily achieve transformational goals and benefit those at the bottom of the social and work hierarchy.

25 Mama, A. (1997). *Moving from analysis to practice*. In Imam, A. et al., *Engendering African social science*. Dakar: Codesria: 413.

26 Pereira, C. (2004). *Locating gender and women's studies in Nigeria: What trajectories for the future?* <http://www.gwsafrica.org/knowledge/index.html>

27 Cornwall, A., Gideon, J. & Wilson, K. (2008). *Introduction: Reclaiming feminism: Gender and neoliberalism*. *IDS Bulletin*, 39, 6. [https://opendocs.ids.ac.uk/opendocs/bitstream/handle/123456789/8166/IDSB\\_39\\_6\\_10.1111-j.1759-5436.2008.tb00505.x.pdf;jsessionid=FBD16821C80CFB A8ECA5AE85FD879DE?sequence=1](https://opendocs.ids.ac.uk/opendocs/bitstream/handle/123456789/8166/IDSB_39_6_10.1111-j.1759-5436.2008.tb00505.x.pdf;jsessionid=FBD16821C80CFB A8ECA5AE85FD879DE?sequence=1)

28 Hamann, T. (2009). *Neoliberalism, governmentality, and ethics*. *Foucault Studies*, 6. <https://rauli.cbs.dk/index.php/foucault-studies/article/view/2471>

## CHAPTER THREE

# Do we have the tracking tools to monitor the National Gender Machinery?

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Statistical data on levels of domestic and sexual violence are as important as data on issues of economic empowerment, economic equality, ownership, welfare, health care, and education outcomes, as such data give an accurate reflection of the reality of the status of women in the country.

The Constitution of South Africa, legislated in 1996, underpins the right of the safety of the country's people, stating that everyone has the right to life. As expressed under Freedom and Security of the Person in the Bill of Rights, every person has the right to freedom and security. This includes the right to be free from all forms of violence, whether public or private. These being part of the Constitution clearly makes their enforcement an issue of political governance. This chapter looks at crimes against women and the link to an effective monitoring framework to measure policy impact and institutional performance.

In October 2018, on the eve of the last elections, a National Gender-Based Violence (GBV) and Femicide Summit took place to address the worsening violence levels against women. The National Summit was called under a banner of heightened frustration, an increasing incidence of GBV, and fear amongst the nation's citizens that we were not only regressing, but that conditions were rapidly worsening. It was further held that discrimination, inequality, violence, and oppressive patriarchal societal norms were, in fact, persistently worsening. Women across the nation protested, and some men joined in solidarity, but it was in the State of the Nation Address that the issue of GBV was finally pronounced a national crisis by the president.

The Summit, amongst other resolutions, recommended the establishment of a GBV council and several other interventions that require institutional mechanisms to mitigate and reduce the incidence of GBV and femicide. It was stated that clear political will must translate into budgeting interventions and institutional support for effective oversight roles in existing institutions, including the workplace.

As the GBV problem intensifies, we may find ourselves caught in the creation of a web of institutional mechanisms, which, if not properly established, will only lead to duplication and overlapping of roles, culminating in a repetition of the same mistakes. Therefore, the questions that have to be answered first are: Why have existing institutions failed to implement resolutions of previous Summits to address the issues indicated in GBV indices? Were those plans monitored through targets that would impact the real problem? Lastly, have the indices we do use to monitor (not only GBV, but also gender equality) and the data measurements of GBV been successful

in measuring the true extent of the problem and its trends? This chapter assesses the methodological constraints that are prevalent in monitoring women's safety and gender equality in South Africa. The chapter further outlines the history of attempts to improve gender equality and address GBV, as well as the tools that have been used to monitor the changing patterns.

As South Africa grapples with the high incidence of violence against women and children, media reports and statistical data point towards a heightened incidence of GBV. Year on year, the situation has worsened in comparison to the global average over the last decade with regard to the occurrence of femicide, reported rapes, and physical and sexual violence against women. It has been reported that more than 1 in 5 women experience physical violence, and, in poorer households, this worsens to a shocking 1 in 3<sup>1</sup>. Femicide is 5 times higher than the global average, and 3 women die at the hands of their partners on a daily basis<sup>2, 3</sup>. The most concerning phenomenon, according to SAPS data in the report, is that, of the 117 811 sexual offences reported during 2016–2018, more than half were against children. An additional 11 518 were listed as assault and crimen injuria. The CSVR Country in Crisis (2017) reports posit that violence is persisting without waning, and that South Africa now has the world's highest rape level, with an estimated 138 per 100 000 women raped in the last financial year<sup>4</sup>.

Many civil society groups use the term 'rape culture' – the normalisation of men forcefully taking power over women. These men feel entitled to the use of women's bodies, resulting in devastating numbers of femicide and rape. The statistics point towards a government and society crippled by an inability to protect women and, especially concerning, children. It is clear that we need to develop more than just reactive slogans and media responses to the incidence of such systemic violations and tragedies. The emphasis should rather be on monitoring the effectiveness and impact of interventions.

In 2014, the National Gender Summit, a gathering of activists, civil society, and academics assessed the progress on matters of gender transformation

and gender equality. In order to achieve women's emancipation, several interventions were ordinarily recommended, and, in addition, implementation of several laws and policies related to institutional transformation were outlined as a key focus. It was reported in the Summit Report (2014) that South Africa's gains towards attaining gender equality include an institutional structure and arrangements such as the parliamentary portfolio committees and Chapter 9 institutions such as the Commission for Gender Equality. In addition, the report argues that the existing policy framework is an advantage, citing the Constitution and various bills and Acts<sup>5</sup>. However, the effectiveness of these institutions is marred by a lack of cohesion, co-ordination, and duplication of mandates and roles in the various institutions within the National Gender Machinery. Furthermore, the report makes specific recommendations on the development of a standard monitoring framework that will enable measurement of performance of interventions, key trends, and the incidence of GBV<sup>6</sup>. This requires the development of standard performance indicators, as well as data collection on these indicators, to inform specific interventions.

With regard to equity, bureaucrats within the state, organisations, and Chapter 9 institutions are tasked with ensuring that gender goals are achieved; however, certain indices indicate that we are faced with deeply embedded patriarchal ideologies and norms in our society<sup>7</sup>. Institutions therefore need a strategy to reduce the negative trends displayed in certain indices and institutional performance within departmental annual performance plans, and national plans need to be measured against those indicators.

## Stakeholders

The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa and the Bill of Rights mandate certain bodies' and authorities' key roles in the promotion of gender equality. The Commission for Gender Equality was established as an independent statutory body with the mandate to promote, protect, and develop tools to eradicate of all forms of gender inequality. Its mandate was derived from the Commission on Gender Equality Act of 1996, under which it has powers to raise public awareness, investigate gender-related complaints,

1 Sibanda-Moyo, N., Khonje, E., & Brobbey, M.K. (2017). *Violence against women in South Africa: A country in crisis*. Cape Town: Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation.

2 Commission for Gender Equality (2014). *Reviewing the Gains and Challenges Facing Gender Equality After 20 Years of Democracy: National Gender Summit Report*. National Gender Summit, 9–11 April 2014, Ekurhuleni, SA.

3 Sibanda-Moyo, N., Khonje, E., & Brobbey, M.K. (2017). *Violence against women in South Africa: A country in crisis*. Cape Town: Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation.

4 Sibanda-Moyo, N., Khonje, E., & Brobbey, M.K. (2017). *Violence against women in South Africa: A country in crisis*. Cape Town: Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation.

5 *Employment Equity Act, Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act, Women Empowerment, and Gender Equality Bill*.

6 Commission for Gender Equality (2014). *Reviewing the Gains and Challenges Facing Gender Equality After 20 Years of Democracy: National Gender Summit Report*. National Gender Summit, 9–11 April 2014, Ekurhuleni, SA.

7 Indices indicating the proportion of women on boards and executive or CEO roles in listed companies, managerial representation in government, data on sexual offences, number of rapes, and on the labour market, such as unemployment levels, inequality, etc.

conduct research, and monitor policies, laws, and practices in all institutions, towards the attainment of gender equality. The Commission for Gender Equality operates within a constitutional democracy where the judiciary plays a pivotal role in the implementation and enforcement of laws. The National Gender Machinery is comprehensive, with established legislative and policy-making institutions at the executive, legislative, and administrative level within government. Its institutions include the Ministry of Women in the Presidency, the former Joint Monitoring Committee on the Improvement of Quality of the Life and Status of Women, the Office on the Status of Women, the current Portfolio Committee on Women, Children, Youth and People with Disabilities, the parliamentary multi-party Women's Caucus, SALGA Women's Commission, the former National Council on GBV, and the Commission for Gender Equality. The Ministry of Women has since been moved back to the Ministry of Women, Youth, and People with Disabilities, with the first change occurring when the Office on the Status of Women within the Presidency was made a ministry. The conundrum of measuring the effectiveness of all these institutions that form part of the National Gender Machinery has yet to be resolved, and this chapter will recommend practical interventions that would drive National Gender Machinery institutions towards the fulfilment of this goal.

It is agreed in various literature sources that there are no standard, clear, or common criteria for measuring the effectiveness of institutions and interventions<sup>8</sup>. The document measuring effectiveness concluded that, with more than ten institutions, this sphere is highly influenced by the functioning of the justice cluster, the role of traditional leaders and faith-based organisations (which are predominantly churches in South Africa<sup>9</sup>), and civil society<sup>10</sup>.

In response to the 2018 National Summit, the formation of a GBV council to formulate a national strategic plan towards eliminating all forms of GBV was recommended. It is not clear how an effective strategy will be developed in the absence of indices and disaggregated data to measure impact. Within the existing National Gender Machinery, one of the 2014 Summit resolutions remains the development of a national standard monitoring framework, which is usually accompanied by appropriate performance indicators.

8 Commission for Gender Equality (2014). *Reviewing the Gains and Challenges Facing Gender Equality After 20 Years of Democracy: National Gender Summit Report*. National Gender Summit, 9–11 April, 2014, Ekurhuleni, SA.

9 Statistics SA General Household Survey 2013 reported that 84% of South Africans are Christians.

10 Schoeman, W. (2017). *South African religious demography: The 2013 General Household Survey*. *Theological Studies*, 72: 2. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v73i2.3837>

## Issues that require urgent attention

An alarming feature of the incidence of GBV is the heightened linkage to children<sup>11</sup>. This brings to the fore the relationship between exposure to violence and sexual relations amongst teenagers. Various studies have shown that the effects of GBV in relationships, particularly amongst young women, lead to higher levels of HIV and pregnancy, due to these women's inability to negotiate the conditions of sexual encounters<sup>12</sup>. Jewkes et al. further posit that those in violent relationships are more likely to contract HIV and other STDs, as well as suffer mental health problems, and are more likely to be economically dependent on family<sup>13</sup>. In order to address GBV, young men and women all need targeted interventions to curtail this behaviour and children's exposure to its negative effects.

The unbalanced power relations between men and women are further linked to teenage pregnancies. The increasing numbers of teenage pregnancies is cause for concern, with the number of pregnant learners per 1 000 reportedly rising from 51 41 in 2004 to 62 81 in 2008<sup>14</sup>.

A startling 30% of teenage girls are reported pregnant in South Africa<sup>15</sup>. More than a fifth of 18-year-olds have given birth, with 40% having become mothers by the age of 20<sup>16</sup>. The majority of these pregnancies are unplanned, with the highest concentration being in KwaZulu-Natal, Eastern Cape, and Gauteng<sup>17</sup>. Teenage sexual activity in SA is reported to begin at a younger age for rural girls (14.9 years in the Eastern Cape) than urban girls (16.4 years in the Western Cape and Gauteng). The age

11 South African Police Service [SAPS] (2018). *Annual Crime Report*. [https://www.saps.gov.za/about/stratframework/annual\\_report/2016\\_2017/gpw\\_crime\\_stats\\_2017.pdf](https://www.saps.gov.za/about/stratframework/annual_report/2016_2017/gpw_crime_stats_2017.pdf)

12 Jewkes, R.K., Dunkle, K., Nduna, M., & Shai, N. (2010). *Intimate partner violence, relationship power inequity, and incidence of HIV infection in young women in South Africa: A cohort study*. *Lancet*, 376: 41-48.

13 Taylor, M., Jinabhai, C., Dlamini, S., Sathiparsad, R., Eggers, M.S., & De Vries, M. (2014). *Effects of a teenage pregnancy prevention programme in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa*. *Health Care for Women International*, 35: 845-858.

14 Panday, S., Makiwane, M., Ranchod, C., & Letsoalo, T. (2009). *Teenage pregnancy in South Africa – with a specific focus on school-going learners*. *Child, Youth, Family and Social Development*, Human Sciences Research Council. Pretoria: Department of Basic Education.

15 Odimegwu, C.O., Amoo, E.O., & De Wet, N. (2018). *Teenage pregnancy in South Africa: Where are the young men involved?* *South African Journal of Child Health*, 12 (2), Suppl. 1: S44-S50.

16 Grant, M.J. & Hallman, K.K. (2008). *Pregnancy-related school dropout and prior school performance in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa*. *Studies in Family Planning*, 39 (4): 369-382.

17 Panday, S., Makiwane, M., Ranchod, C., & Letsoalo, T. (2009). *Teenage pregnancy in South Africa – with a specific focus on school-going learners*. *Child, Youth, Family and Social Development*, Human Sciences Research Council. Pretoria: Department of Basic Education. Odimegwu, C.O., Amoo, E.O., & De Wet, N. (2018). *Teenage pregnancy in South Africa: Where are the young men involved?* *South African Journal of Child Health*, 12 (2), Suppl. 1: S44-S50.

at which teenagers become sexually active is further differentiated by gender, with boys starting at 13 years and girls at 14. The number of pregnant children in schools is worrisome. More than 50 000 learners per annum were reported pregnant over the last decade. With various fluctuations, the adolescent pregnancy rate of between 23% and 30% led to an adolescent pregnancy contribution rate of more than 10% of registered births in the same years<sup>18</sup>. However, the HSRC reported a declining teenage fertility rate according to number births per 1 000 women, from 78 (1996 census) to 76 (1998 census), to 65 per 1 000 women (2001 census)<sup>19</sup>. However, this is still far higher than the figures for most emerging countries, and requires urgent intervention.

Initiatives to curb and reduce the number of teenage pregnancies must be embarked upon within education. These should involve both young men and women, taking cognizance of societal complexities and the violence in our society. These interventions should further take into account gender inequity in relationships and children's exposure to sexual violence at a young age. Partners who exhibit GBV are associated with high levels of controlling behaviour, and often engage in multiple and concurrent sexual relationships, with devastating resulting levels of HIV infection. The situation is worse in rural areas. Thus, interventions in such areas need to be targeted at young rural women and men in particular, and include a focus on power relations.

Teen pregnancy is higher amongst black African girls than any other race, with Indian girls a close second. It is interesting to note that the two highest contributors to delayed teenage pregnancy are religious activities and a higher level of education. The negative effects of adolescent pregnancy include lower levels of education and income, compared to women with delayed pregnancy<sup>20</sup>. In a comparative study conducted to ascertain the effectiveness of prevention programmes, researchers found that the use of condoms remained inconsistent, irrespective of education on the matter<sup>21</sup>. This is concerning; although the number of users of condoms has risen, there is a lack of consistent use of condoms amongst the youth.

Placing emphasis on developing mechanisms to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of interventions is a key consideration. The increased incidence of HIV and the high pregnancy rate amongst girls, particularly in rural areas, may be linked to the incidence of GBV. This, however, needs to be tested.

## Recommendations

It is recommended that the Department of Women develop a national gender monitoring framework in liaison with Statistics South Africa. The data gathered in specific areas should include, as an example, variables related to budget expenditure and allocation of resources. The Ministry of the Presidency overseeing the Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation should oversee this process, and assist with the development of mechanisms that will strengthen this role of the Department of Women in meeting gender equality obligations and combating GBV. A GBV index should be developed, together with the appropriate tools and government mechanisms, to measure the incidence of violence and the success of targeted interventions at both a macro- and micro level.

Institutions that should assist in the collection of equity performance data include the National Treasury and the Auditor General. Measuring the effectiveness of key institutions should be done by the state, and the function should preferably be located in the Office of the Presidency or the Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation, to afford it the necessary oversight and hierarchical location to show importance and urgency. The historical action of shifting the Office on the Status of Women from the Ministry of the Presidency without clear mechanisms and frameworks already developed and entrenched to monitor gender equality and GBV indices perhaps weakened the state's ability to ensure the necessary oversight.

The National Treasury has the ability to collect national data on the allocation of expenditure on women and women-owned companies, using the existing supplier chain database. The information should be readily available; however, it needs to be collated into provincial and sectoral levels in order to generate general descriptive statistics to determine trends within economic nodes. In order to address non-reporting, the Auditor General should require gender-related performance indicators for all departments in local and district municipalities, and should encourage voluntary corporate disclosure using similar indicators.

18 Odimegwu, C.O., Amoo, E.O., & De Wet, N. (2018). Teenage pregnancy in South Africa: Where are the young men involved? *South African Journal of Child Health*, 12, (2), Suppl. 1: S44-S50.

19 Panday, S., Makiwane, M., Ranchod, C., & Letsoalo, T. (2009). Teenage pregnancy in South Africa – with a specific focus on school-going learners. *Child, Youth, Family and Social Development*, Human Sciences Research Council. Pretoria: Department of Basic Education.

20 Macleod, C. (2002). The economic security and social science literature on teenage pregnancy in South Africa. *Sociologists for Women in Society*, 16 (5): 647-664.

21 Taylor, M., Jinabhai, C., Dlamini, S., Sathiparsad, R., Eggers, M.S., & De Vries, M. (2014). Effects of a teenage pregnancy prevention programme in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. *Health Care for Women International*, 35: 845-858.

We may need to revisit the data used to measure the incidence of GBV. The failure of the South African Police Service to record the prevalence of GBV and violence against women as a stand-alone crime category is a disabler in this regard. Data collection processes will require urgent revisioning of reporting in measuring the true extent of GBV. The question remains how far the recommendations of the 2014 National Gender Summit towards strengthening gender budgeting and mainstreaming have been implemented. All the recommendations require enforcement and prioritization, and should be assessed by the Ministry of Women.

In December 2018, the President established a 30-member team of experts to assess the status of women in the country, reviewing what the government has done to change the quality of life of women. The current lack of co-ordination and collaboration between the Ministry of Women, the Commission for Gender Equality, and other gender-related institutions (including this newly appointed task team) leads to duplication and overlapping of roles, as well as certain areas not being addressed<sup>22</sup>. Resources should be allocated to finance a team of statisticians and researchers within the Department of Women, working in collaboration with the Auditor General, the Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation, Statistics SA, and the Commission for Gender Equality, to ensure that targets are effectively monitored and that performance is evaluated.

## Conclusion

The justice cluster is faced with numerous challenges in its institutional capacity to finalise trials and improve the conviction rate – currently 1 in 9 – of reported sexual offenses. Targeted interventions towards reducing teenage pregnancy must be revived, focusing on abstinence, encouraging faithfulness to one partner, and promoting condom usage amongst young men and women in rural settings. This should be a priority. The introduction of life orientation skills in education has had little to no effect on the rising number of teenage pregnancies and sexual behaviour. Pregnancy has a negative effect on the development of teenagers, reducing their ability to become economically independent, as dropping out may be their only option in caring for the newborn. This increases the likelihood of state dependency and social protection at a later stage in their life. The incidence of GBV, its linkages with STDs, and its interaction with child pregnancy cannot be ignored, especially with reference to the prevalence thereof in vulnerable low-income societies. It is of utmost importance that we establish both policy and institutional responses to measure and effectively reduce the incidence of GBV, as it affects the very fabric of our society. It is not simply a phenomenon that occurs at home, it leaves traces across society and costs the nation dearly through a loss of productivity, a rise in absenteeism, and social grant dependence.

Further reliance on the state for health care support, policing and judicial resources, social protection, and insurance, places greater demands on already limited state resources. The loss suffered by individual women and children is immeasurable, and not something anyone should be forced to suffer in a civilised society.

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<sup>22</sup> Commission for Gender Equality (2014). *Reviewing the Gains and Challenges Facing Gender Equality After 20 Years of Democracy: National Gender Summit Report*. National Gender Summit, 9–11 April 2014, Ekurhuleni, SA.

## CHAPTER FOUR

## To (queen) bee or not to bee?

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Politics at work in order to gain power and status is as old as mankind. In this regard, sexist behaviour in the workplace is most often blamed on men. However, several studies have found that successful women often play a negative role in the advancement of female subordinates. Based on empirical research, several authors have concluded that women in positions of power are just as guilty as men of standing in the way of the career advancement of other women<sup>1</sup>. These women are often referred to as 'queen bees.'

The first reference in management literature to the construct Queen Bee Syndrome (QBS) dates back to 1973<sup>2</sup>. Since then, evidence of this phenomenon has been found in several studies<sup>3,4</sup>. QBS refers to women in leadership positions who wish to protect their unique position, and will therefore not allow other women to achieve equal career success<sup>4</sup>. Queen bees are perceived to be less supportive of the advancement of other women; express more negative perceptions of women, for example, that women are less committed to their careers; and are less supportive of equal opportunity programmes meant to assist women as they themselves advance in organisations<sup>5</sup>.

Moreover, queen bees are said to be meaner, more critical, and less tolerant of their female co-workers, simply because these co-workers are women<sup>6</sup>. In support of these definitions of QBS, researchers also suggest that women who report to female managers often have significantly higher stress levels, compared to women who report to male managers<sup>7</sup>.

1 Mavin, S. (2008). Queen bees, wannabees and afraid to bees: No more 'best enemies' for women in management? *British Journal of Management*, 19: S75-S84.

2 Staines, G.L., Tavis, C., & Jayaratne, T.E. (1973). The queen bee syndrome. In C. Tavis (Ed.), *The female experience*, 63-66.

3 Dobson, R. & Iredale, W. (2006). Office queen bees hold back women's careers. *The Sunday Times*. <http://www.women-on-top.nl/wp-content/uploads/office-queen-bees-2-jan-07.pdf>

4 Ellemers, N. (2014). Women at work: How organizational features impact career development. *Policy Insights from the Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 1 (1), 46-54. Klemesrud, J. (1981). Women in medicine find a need for support. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/1981/04/13/style/women-in-medicine-find-a-need-for-support.html>

5 Derks, B., Van Laar, C., Ellemers, N., & De Groot, K. (2011). Gender-bias primes elicit queen-bee responses among senior policewomen. *Psychological Science*, 22 (11): 1243-1249.

6 Arvate, P.R., Walczak, G.G., & Todeskati, I. (2018). The queen bee: A myth? The effect of top-level female leadership on subordinate females. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 10.1016/j.leaqua.2018.03.002.

7 Irvine, C. (2008). Women find working for female bosses more stressful. *The Telegraph*. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/3064811/Women-find-working-for-female-bosses-more-stressful.html>

Anecdotal accounts and research evidence suggest that, in the workplace, men often display sexist, discriminatory, and oppressive behaviours. However, the research evidence referred to above is equally persuasive, i.e. that QBS exists in organisations, and that there are many accounts of women who are guilty of sexism in the workplace<sup>8</sup>.

It would seem that, according to popular press articles and academic literature, both genders are to blame for the continued discrimination and oppression of women in the workplace. Some researchers even suggest that, within the context of gender-based discrimination in the workplace, women might be their own worst enemies<sup>9</sup>. This argument is used by several authors to explain, and even legitimise, the widespread under-representation of women in management and leadership positions<sup>10</sup>.

As suggested above, there is compelling support for the notion that QBS exists, which explains the widespread belief that many women in managerial positions are queen bees. Moreover, there is a belief that women, of their own volition, choose to be queen bees. The resulting binary classification of women in management as either good (i.e. women who are actively involved in supporting other women) or bad (i.e. women who have achieved a management position by turning on other women) neglects to acknowledge within-group variation amongst different female managers, as well as alternative explanations for this behaviour, and, as a result, stereotyping is rife<sup>11</sup>.

Any use of stereotypes, generalisation, and over-simplification of complex human behaviour, however, runs the risk of creating absolutes in people's minds, as seems to be the case here. In support of this thinking, several authors have argued that, while QBS is prevalent, it may not be as prevalent as it is presumed to be – particularly the absolute belief that 'all women are like that.' Moreover, setting oneself apart from other women has proven to be a successful strategy to improve one's career prospects, and may be seen by some women as a legitimate manner to get ahead. This strategy to get ahead is, however, no different to what is generally acceptable behaviour for men in the workplace. Rather, QBS has provided a scapegoat for sexism in the workplace, one that men who are sexist

and often responsible for gender discrimination in the workplace are quick to cite in order to shift the blame.

More recently though, an alternative view has begun to emerge, suggesting that, while QBS does exist as a form of female sexism in the workplace, it is the result of gender bias within the workplace that, in turn, produces gender disparities in career outcomes. In other words, it is argued that QBS, as the result of the social context, is both a cause and a consequence of gender discrimination in the workplace<sup>12</sup>. In support of this thinking, it has been found that women who find themselves in workplaces where they experience high levels of gender discrimination are more likely to perpetuate the same gender stereotypes when they deal with other women. Research evidence for an alternative understanding of social context as a cause of QBS represents a fundamental shift in thinking and places a fork in the road. It instils a sense of doubt, bringing all the previously established research on QBS into question, and so opens the door for further studies to attempt to, once again, find conceptual and theoretical clarity regarding this phenomenon.

Another consideration in understanding the phenomenon is that an extraneous variable (e.g., the stereotype or generalisation that all women in management positions are queen bees) could confound the findings by spuriously creating a correlation with the dependent variable (e.g., widespread perceived queen bee behaviour in all women in managerial positions). Simply put, if participants in a study perceive a relationship between the variables because the question infers it, their perception instantly, to some extent, becomes biased in favour of the proposed relationship – even when it was never there in the first place. Unless researchers mitigate and account for confounding variables, the outcomes of such research could be skewed.

Following the reasoning above, conducting research into QBS represents a conundrum. As argued, on the one hand, there is evidence that QBS is a cause of gender discrimination – women discriminating against other women. On the other hand, there is evidence that QBS is a consequence of a social context where women are being discriminated against by men. Asking women in a workplace about their beliefs, attitudes towards, or perceptions of QBS may therefore elicit any one of the two scenarios described above, and perhaps even a combination of the two. This results in a situation where several possible confounding biases could negatively affect the existence and findings of QBS research. As

8 McGregor, J. (2015). The stereotype of the 'queen bee' female executive is losing its sting. *The Washington Post*. [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/on-leadership/wp/2015/06/09/the-idea-of-queen-bee-female-executives-is-losing-its-sting/?noredirect=on&utm\\_term=.70eac0e417c4](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/on-leadership/wp/2015/06/09/the-idea-of-queen-bee-female-executives-is-losing-its-sting/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.70eac0e417c4)

9 Mavin, S. (2008). Queen bees, wannabees and afraid to bees: No more 'best enemies' for women in management? *British Journal of Management*, 19: S75-S84.

10 Derks, B., Van Laar, C., Ellemers, N., & De Groot, K. (2011). Gender-bias primes elicit queen-bee responses among senior policewomen. *Psychological Science*, 22 (11): 1243-1249.

11 Mavin, S. (2008). Queen bees, wannabees and afraid to bees: No more 'best enemies' for women in management? *British Journal of Management*, 19: S75-S84.

12 Derks, B., Van Laar, C., Ellemers, N., & De Groot, K. (2011). Gender-bias primes elicit queen-bee responses among senior policewomen. *Psychological Science*, 22 (11): 1243-1249.

a result, researchers in the field of QBS need to utilise approaches that mitigate confounding biases. This has not been done to date in QBS studies.

The aim of the present study was, therefore, to investigate the notion that all women in managerial positions display queen bee behaviour of their own volition, using an approach that mitigates confounding bias. It was hoped that the findings of the study would provide a better understanding of QBS and address the gap in the current literature described above.

## Research design and approaches

To address possible confounding biases, two approaches were utilised. First, it was decided to utilise qualitative research. Qualitative research allows participants an unconstrained opportunity to provide their own narratives and insights, rather than being asked to validate the theorising of researchers.

Second, instead of studying QBS by directly asking participants to describe their attitudes and experiences related to QBS, they were asked to describe their experiences of support, first in general and without reference to women, and then with particular reference to women in the workplace – the antithesis of QBS. By inviting women to share stories about, e.g., "...those individuals who contributed most to their success" and "...who posed the most challenges for them," one would expect that, if the QBS definitions described above held true, women's life stories would be accounts of other women trying to sabotage and hinder their career development. Furthermore, it was reasoned that, if the traditional definitions of QBS held true when women were asked to describe their experiences of women standing in solidarity, supporting one another in the workplace, it could be expected that participants would not report such instances and, instead, describe QBS-like experiences.

Given time and cost constraints, a convenient sample of women of all ages in leadership, management, and middle-management positions across South Africa was invited to share stories of their life journeys, and were asked to describe their successes and the challenges they had faced. An electronic questionnaire was designed for this purpose, and data were collected anonymously. Participants were requested to share only basic demographic information, including the year in which they were born, their home language, and the area from which they hailed. Participants were further requested to answer four open-ended items designed for the purposes of the present study. They were asked to share stories about their life and career journeys as these pertained to each of the following four items:

*I1: Who contributed most to the successes you have achieved?*

*I2: Who made your life journey difficult?*

*I3: Tell us about a woman (or women) who contributed most to your successes.*

*I4: In what ways can women support each other better?*

A sample of 42 responses was obtained, of which 21 responses were fully completed and were analysed. Participants were between 28 and 66 years of age, and most of them indicated their home language as English, followed by Zulu, Sotho, and Afrikaans.

The responses obtained were analysed, and themes were identified and coded. The themes that were identified are discussed below, supported by excerpts from some of the responses.

## Results and findings

### I1: Who contributed most to the successes you have achieved?

All 21 participants indicated that their parents were the main contributors to their success in life. In addition, several participants referred to their spouses, siblings, and grandparents. The quotes below are some examples that support this theme:

*"My husband's believing in me before I believed in myself" (English-speaking woman, 36, Port Elizabeth).*

*"My parents. I believe that the values, ethics, and leadership qualities I have were passed on from them" (English-speaking woman, 45, Cape Town).*

### I2: Who made your life journey difficult?

In the responses obtained from participants for the above question, most pointed to a specific parent or family member(s), as indicated in the examples quoted below:

*"My mother. I don't think she has the ability to love truly. I don't know why anyone could ever be so twisted in life. I am grateful for all the hard lessons she taught me" (Sotho-speaking woman, 43, Pretoria).*

*"My father. He was a strict father. Nothing was ever easy with him. My whole childhood, it was about me pleasing him" (Zulu-speaking woman, 30, Cape Town).*

One participant made specific reference to co-workers who had bullied her, but did not mention their gender.

*"Negative individuals who lacked emotional intelligence, societal intelligence, and who were selfishly allowing individuals to remain boxed. These behaviours are toxic and observed over time, socially and within the*

*workplace. Limitation sets one back and also silently breaks your confidence, raising doubt consistently (English-speaking woman, 41, Cape Town).*

One participant suggested that her previous male boss had posed a problem for her.

*"A previous manager. He was always blocking all possible successes and took credit for all things done in his team. Always his idea when it was a good idea (English-speaking woman, 43, Cape Town).*

**I3: Tell us about a woman (or women) who contributed most to your successes.**

In the responses obtained from participants who shared their stories related to the item above, it was found that almost half of the participants mentioned their mother first:

*"My mother. She gave me a loving and stable home to grow up in. She always encouraged me to reach my potential" (Afrikaans-speaking woman, 38, Cape Town).*

Of the women who made up the sample of the study, 12 also identified a female co-worker as a person who had contributed to their success. Some of the responses received are provided below.

*"I have been blessed to work with incredible women who developed me in my career. They believed in me; they saw potential and invested in me. My career could have never grown if they had not made time to show me the way" (Sotho-speaking woman, 43, Pretoria).*

*"There are a few ... a programme manager... She taught me the street smarts, strategy, and the bigger picture of the profession, unveiling my purpose" (English-speaking woman, 58, Knysna).*

*"Women confident in their skin, who enjoyed the growth of others and who openly shared their challenges despite their portrayal of confidence, strength, and happiness have been the light in dark times. These women did not judge and were not afraid to share vulnerability" (Afrikaans-speaking woman, 32, Pretoria).*

**I4: In what ways can women support each other better?**

The responses to the question above seemed to indicate that the women welcomed and were calling for greater solidarity amongst women, as suggested in their responses, some of which are provided below.

*"Have the conversations people are too afraid to have – the role of gender, marriage, sexuality, children, work-life career balance, but in a way that deals with today's world, not those dictated and still enforced as norms in society from an era gone by" (English-speaking woman, 36, Port Elizabeth).*

*"Being less judgmental of another woman's journey. Instead, appreciate the arrival. Respect the choices another woman has to make, because we don't know*

*how many she's caring for" (Afrikaans/English-speaking woman, 41, Cape Town).*

*"By lifting others up or 'fixing another's crown'" (English-speaking woman, 34, Mossel Bay).*

**Conclusion**

The findings derived from the data suggest that, contrary to the notion that is put forth by QBS theory, women tend to support each other in their career progression. Moreover, none of the participants provided any suggestion of the presence of QBS in their workplace, nor of managers who seemed to act in such a manner. It would seem that their stories are more indicative of, not only a sense of solidarity amongst working women, but that it is often the reason behind their success.

The findings of the present study seem to support those of a 2015 study by researchers at the Columbia Business School. They investigated employee behaviours in 1 500 companies over a 20-year period. Their results revealed that, where women had been appointed to the most senior roles in an organisation, other women were far more likely to be placed in other senior positions. However, when a woman was given a senior role but a man still held the top position, the likelihood of other women rising to senior positions fell by more than 50%. They concluded that, rather than it being the queen bee holding subordinates back, it was male executives who were window-dressing and blocking other women from also reaching the top, and so keeping the (im)balance intact<sup>13</sup>. Based on the latter and the findings of the present study, it would therefore seem that QBS is not nearly as prevalent as it has been held out to be, and that it is indeed a rare phenomenon.

**Take home**

Statistics suggest that an increase in the number of women in a country's workforce could make a substantial contribution to economic growth<sup>14</sup>. The term queen bee, stereotypes not only women in leadership positions, but all working women, hurting women in organisations and, ultimately, the economy. As with all stereotypes, it shows ignorance and limited thinking, and people who use this label should be called out for advancing such negative gender ideology. Women can and want to do great things, both by themselves and in solidarity with other women.

<sup>13</sup> Heggie, A. (2017). Queen bee syndrome: Fact or fiction? <https://blogs.kent.ac.uk/ice-p/2017/10/27/queen-bee-syndrome-fact-or-fiction/#>

<sup>14</sup> OECD (2018). Summary brief – is the last mile the longest? Economic gains from gender equality in Nordic countries. <https://www.oecd.org/publications/is-the-last-mile-the-longest-economic-gains-from-gender-equality-in-nordic-countries-9789264300040-en.htm>

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