Resisting dominant discourses: implications of indigenous, African feminist theory and methods for gender and education research

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In this paper we explore tensions between Western gender theory and research, and post-colonial and indigenous feminist standpoints, which challenge us to re-define our roles as feminist-activist educators and researchers working with formerly colonised and historically marginalised communities. We discuss how African and Black feminist approaches can enable the construction of context-specific knowledge of African women's power via relational world views of motherhood, family, sisterhood and friendship. In contrast, the application of Western gender theory and policy in Botswana has tended to reduce women and girls' experiences to the categories of 'victim' and 'other'. We illustrate how Western male hegemony enters the school through subjects such as religion and can be typically reinforced through Tswana culture, embodied in language and rituals, generating multiple centres of oppression for girls/women in the education system and the public space. The paper explores ethical and transformative ways of approaching this complexity that can account for how girls and women negotiate and resist patriarchal power. Through analysis of empirical research narratives from several gender- and education-focused studies, we explore strategies for decolonising Euro-Western archival knowledge and challenging dominant, patriarchal, colonial research methodologies. Finally, we outline the role of the activist feminist researcher as transformative healer, who resists dominant research discourses in order to develop processes of social justice and healing in the community.

Keywords: African feminist theory; indigenous feminist methods; feminist healing research methods; decolonizing research methods

Introduction

This paper's theme of gender, regulation, resistance and activism calls on educators and researchers to debate the universal application of a Western gender theory and gender research in the field of education across nations and cultures. The main argument, from the vantage of non-Western feminists, is that hegemonic Western gender theory and gender research 'recreate its own knowledge in distant geographies in its own image' (Fennell and Arnot 2009, 3). These hegemonic forms of knowledge production undermine localised knowledge about education and the school systems and the accumulated literature from scholars writing from post-colonial and indigenous standpoints. We challenge universalised Western gender theory and employ post-colonial, indigenous and

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African feminist approaches to reveal local standpoints that express girls'/women's agency and resistance to often contradictory forms of patriarchal oppressions. We begin with an overview of the debate in gender theory and gender research.

Gender theory and research: indigenous and African feminisms and methodologies

Fennell and Arnot (2009) have outlined four contested themes that emerge from a comparison of gender education theory from Western Europe and America and those from locations within Africa and South Asia. The first theme is an argument by non-Western feminists for a deconstruction of universalisation within gender theory. Scholars are, for instance, expressing their criticism about deficit theories on non-Western societies, omissions of their world views and oral literatures that inform their frames of reference. One of the leading scholars from the so-called third world, Mohatany (1991) points to 'othering' ideologies as a serious constraint to how non-Western people are heard and written about. The term 'othering' was coined by Gayatri Spivak to denote a process through which Western knowledge creates differences between itself as the norm and other knowledge systems as inferior (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 1991). There is, for instance, a discontent among non-Western feminists that some Western feminisms have used Western female-based structures of language, concepts, theories and models of reality and world views as a criteria against which experiences of all non-Western women as well as non-Western men can be known and written about. Fennell and Arnot (2009) note that the result of universalised Western gender theory is that the diversity of experiences of girls/women within formerly colonised and historically marginalised societies, their struggles, negotiations and resistance to different forms of patriarchal oppressions and domination as well as imperial domination, are most likely to go unrecognised. In this article we move out of the cage of universalised Western gender theory and employ postcolonial and indigenous standpoints to reveal local standpoints that express girls/women agency and resistance to patriarchal oppression.

The second theme centres on the denial by Western feminists of African women's power within indigenous relational worlds that celebrate motherhood, sisterhood and friendship. The variety of African feminisms in contrast to other feminisms emphasise the centrality of motherhood in African households and family organisation and the agency and power of mothers as the source of solidarity. Unfortunately, the othering of motherhood and the denial of the importance African relational gender roles, it is argued, relegates the African women to subject/victim and further conceals how girls/women have used the relational gender roles as sites for resistance and sources of empowerment. These perspectives demonstrate the continued need for marginalised feminisms to theorise gender analysis from the perspectives, world views and lived experiences of non-Western women. Mekgwe defines African feminism as a discourse that:

> Takes care to delineate those concerns that are peculiar to the African situation. It also questions features of traditional African cultures without denigrating them, understanding that these might be viewed differently by the different classes of women. (2003, 7)

African feminisms critique and reject dominant narratives that generalise and essentialise the condition of African women, men and children and seek awareness of specific

contexts, cultures and peoples. Such an approach requires describing particular national or regional trends, while simultaneously raising awareness of contextual variations within broader trends. African feminisms in addition emphasise the power and agency of African women in particular to theorise from their cultures and lived experiences to produce knowledge that is contextually relevant, builds relationships, heals the self, the community and the larger socio-cultural context. Some African feminists, for instance, prefer the term womanism to feminism, arguing that the term feminism is associated with Western ideologies. From this womanism perspective arose the term Africana womanism to describe the particular experiences of people of African origin, both diasporic and indigenous. Africana womanism, for example, claims that the solutions to gender inequality should be found in African philosophy. Explaining the Africana womanism position Hudson-Weems notes,

> Essentially, the Africana womanism position is that the framework for a world free of oppression already exists within traditional African philosophical world view – if only the Africana woman will claim it. (in Yaa Asantewaa Reed 2001, 175)

The philosophical world view of the Bantu of Southern Africa is that a 'being' is essentially bound with others: 'I am we; I am because we are; we are because I am' (Goduka 2000). A person 'is' through others. This principle is in direct contrast to the Eurocentric view of humanity; 'I think, therefore, I am' (Descartes). The former expresses a concept of self that is individually defined and 'is in tune with a monolithic and one-dimensional construction of humanity' (Goduka 2000, 29). In the principle, 'I am because we are', 'the group has priority over the individual without crushing the individual, but allowing the individual to blossom as a person' (Senghor 1966, 5). *Existence-in-relation* and *being-for-self-and-others* sum up the African conception of life and reality (Oyewumi 1998, 398). Black feminists (Collins 2000; Johnson-Bailey 2006) share similar views about relational existence. For example, in writing about African American women's collective voice and experience, Collins states, 'the voice that I know is both individual and collective, personal and political reflecting the intersection of my unique biography within the larger meaning of my historical times' (2000, vi).

The African philosophical view promotes an ethical framework that emphasises the responsibilities of researcher as transformative healer, working with the community and actively involved in healing, building communities and promoting harmony. A common thread that cuts across African feminisms is the emphasis on healing methods as necessary research tools for life-enriching and transformative experiences as well as spiritual growth for girls/women suffering from multiple oppressions and domination (Dillard 2009). A reflective feminist researcher works with communities, listens with compassion and love to the girls/women stories and makes visible their stories and the healing methods that they employ when they communicate their life experiences. The question of how gender inequality manifests itself in the education system in Botswana and a framework arising from Batswana philosophical world views to address girls/women's oppressions is thus very important.

The third theme explores how non-Western feminists and post-colonial and indigenous feminists have used post-structural deconstruction methods to voice their discontent with the hegemonic intellectual apparatus. These feminists have reworked the underlying concepts of structure and agency to privilege both contextual and

indigenous meanings. Patricia Hill Collins, writing about Black feminism, argues that knowledge is socially situated because it is based on experiences and different situations. This approach is upheld by African feminists who argue that oppressed groups can learn to identify their distinct opportunities to turn their condition of marginalisation into a source of critical insight about how the dominant society thinks and is constructed. If a standpoint is a place from which human beings view the world, we concur with Harding (2004) that all standpoints (Western and the marginalised non-Western) are partial and co-exist.

The last theme centres on how African and Asian feminist and other non-Western feminists aim to move gender research towards post-colonial and indigenous approaches and the construction of knowledge derived from the experiences of girls/women in their specific locations and histories. Non-Western feminisms call for the critique, decolonisation and indigenisation of the literature and theory about the 'other' and Euro-Western methodologies. They propose and describe methodologies of reading literature, employing theory and conducting research that resist all forms of patriarchal and imperial oppression (Dube 2000). They also urge scholars to find and highlight theory and theorising in spaces perhaps not deemed 'theoretical from a Western academic perspective' (Saavedra and Nymark 2008, 258); to employ theoretical frameworks that are eclectic and combine theories and techniques from disparate disciplines and paradigms to construct their own paradigms (Sandoval 2000) and to demonstrate 'what indigenous cultures can offer in terms of concrete ways to read/re-read our current situations in the world' (Dillard 2009, 278).

Marshall and Young (2006, 65) argues that we must view gender research as a revolution and that methodology used to investigate gender issues must involve 'assertive question shifting, redefinition of issues, sharp attention to the power of dominant values, and vigilant monitoring to how questions are asked and how research is used'. Chilisa (forthcoming) suggests that when we read the literature and conduct research in formerly colonised countries such as those in the developing world, we need to ask ourselves the following questions:

- Does Western and imperialising literature, theory and research methods expose and show non-Western women's resistance to the multiple patriarchal systems that oppress women and what do alternative theories, literatures and research methodologies offer?
- Does the research demonstrate a genuine search for alternative research methodologies that respects indigenous relational worlds and promotes interdependence between world views, knowledge systems, nations, races, ethnicities, gender and sexual orientations and with what alternative research methodologies does it achieve this objective?
- How does this research employ indigenous knowledge and literature to reject empire and envision alternative methodologies that rename the experiences of non-Western women from their standpoints, and envisions other ways of representing voices of women and other oppressed groups in research reports?
- Is the research 'action-oriented' and 'values-oriented'?

We use these questions as a framework to highlight how Western liberal feminist theory has become dominant and promotes state-led top-down policy initiatives as the primary means of addressing gender inequalities. How do we as feminist researchers for instance, address what Unterhalter (2006) calls 'issues of methodology and the

power entailed in the "colonial gaze", the process by which research participants become "gendered" … and the silencing and erasure of women from many conventional sources of data collection'? We illustrate methodological imperialism by questioning the universal application of confidentiality and anonymity in social science research and argue that in some contexts in the developing world these codes at times protect the individual at the expense of disempowered groups or even the community in general (Chilisa 2005). These research practices in our view are testimony to how the universal application of Euro-Western methods can conceal the oppression of marginalised and oppressed groups such as girls/women. Elabor-Idemudia, expressing a concern about the universal application of Euro-Western methods asks,

> How is it possible to decolonise (social) research in/on the non-Western developing countries to ensure that the people's human condition is not constructed through Western hegemony and ideology? (2002, 231)

What do we as researchers, for instance, do when research participants express their world views in metaphorical language, in praise song, folklore, myth or in symbolic cultural artifacts? Chambers (1994) recommends that indigenous practices and beliefs be noted, and even if they do not fit in with conventional scientific thinking (e.g. practices based on myth or superstition). In an effort to decolonise dominant methodologies it is becoming necessary to analyse local folklore, songs, dance, and poetry to provide insight into the values, history, practices, and beliefs of formerly colonised societies. In support of this view, Elabor-Idemudia notes:

> Oral forms of knowledge, such as ritualistic chants, riddles, songs, folktales, and parables not only articulate, a distinct cultural identity but also give voice to a range of cultural, social and political, aesthetic, and linguistic systems – long muted by centuries of colonialism and cultural imperialism. (2002, 100)

Part of being a feminist activist in a developing world we argue is to recognise sayings, proverbs, rituals and songs from our research respondents as part of the missing literature that has been muted by Euro-Western methodologies largely dominated by male thought. This indigenous knowledge makes visible the spaces of agency ever so present in the life experiences of marginalised feminisms and yet so absent in the academic debate. Listening to the sayings, observing the rituals we argue, makes visible the culture-based ideologies of oppression and how women are resisting the gender order that comes with cultural ideologies as well as reveal women's resistance to conventional research methods in preference for other methods that resonate with their world views. We argue that through these methods contextual-based concepts and frameworks that communicate the experiences of girls/women can become visible to the academic debate on gender inequalities. We also foreground indigenous, African feminisms as a framework to understand and interpret gender, regulation, resistance and activism in education and research. We will begin with an overview of how educational policies, informed by feminist liberal theory in the guise of redressing gender inequalities, reaffirm male power.

Liberal feminism and gender equality policies in Botswana education policy

Liberal feminist theory has strongly influenced 'Women in Development' (WID) policies that have dominated educational policy in Botswana. Liberal feminisms focus on

the subordination of women through unequal opportunities that are institutionalised through the legal, political, social and economic structures. The various versions of liberal feminism insist that women's opportunities should be equal with men's and that policies, legislations and statutes should be put in place to address social injustices between the sexes. It is in the context of this liberal feminist framework that Botswana in 1996 put in place the policy on WID which outlined measures and programmes designed to address, among others, inequalities in the education and training of girls/women. One of the main concerns was that although there were more girls enrolled at primary and junior secondary school, female enrollment decreased at senior secondary school and tertiary institutions. The reasons for these disparities of access were that boys outperformed girls in national examinations that formed the basis for selection for advancement to upper levels of education and that many girls dropped out of school due to pregnancy. There was also a concern that girl/women enrollment in vocational and technical institutions never exceeded 35%. Factors contributing to low enrollment in vocational training and science-related subjects were listed as: (1) gender-biased teaching materials; and (2) gender-biased stereotyping during the socialisation in the family, at school and in the communities in general.

Despite policy efforts based on the WID framework, in 2003, Botswana needed a gender equality in education index (GEEI) of 21.79% to reach the adequate GEEI index of 95% (Unterhalter 2006). Critics argue that research informed by the WID framework has failed to adequately address gender inequalities because it interprets equality generally in terms of equal numbers of human and physical resources or equal number of images in textbooks but fails to address the complex gender equality and inequalities in schools, the diversity of experiences of girls and their negotiations and resistance to oppression (Fennell and Arnot 2009; Unterhalter 2006). Despite these shortcomings, research informed by the WID framework continues to shape international gender and education agendas that import liberal individualising models of education and undermine girls/women positions thus aggravating existing gender divisions (Fennell and Arnot 2009; Unterhalter 2006). This is mainly because gender education research is funded by international agencies from the developed world which encourage a one-way traffic of universal gender theory that follows from Northern America and Europe to the South. The current trend by African and Asian feminist and other nonWestern feminists to move gender research towards postcolonial and indigenous approaches propels feminist researchers to revisit gender research and to ask which and whose research is used.

The WID policy was followed by the Gender and Development (GAD) policy. GAD set out as one of its main strategies to mainstream gender into all sections of education to achieve equity in educational access and retention; enhance the quality of the life of students and teachers; enable equal participation of male and female students across subjects and choice of careers; ensure equal participation of female and male teachers in the teaching of all subjects and to implement schooling sexualities that equally empower girls and boys. In addition, Botswana acceded to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in 1995, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women in 1996 and signed the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC) in July 2001. Vision 2016, a long-term plan aimed at improving the lives of Batswana in general and promoting the quality of life of the girl child in particular, informs policy planning and practice in Botswana. The emphasis of vision 2016 is 'gaining empowerment by empowering others', an ideal that resonates with the GAD policy.

In an effort to address gender violence, statutes on the school-age group have been reviewed to protect the girls against defilement, sexual harassment, early marriages and pregnancies (Ministry of Labor and Home Affairs 1998). Defilement defined as sexual intercourse with any girl below the age of 16 carries a maximum of life imprisonment. In practice, however, many men do not serve the full term. For instance, In the Keraetse 1995 court case (Alexanda et al. 2005), a man accused of defilement of a girl between the age of 14 and 15 years had his sentence reduced from five years to three years and then was given a two years suspended sentence on the basis that the man could not be expected to ask the girl to produce a birth certificate in a situation where a girl past puberty invites sexual relations. In the Kgathileng 1993 case (Alexanda et al. 2005), a school teacher convicted of defilement of a 13-year-old pupil had his sentence changed to indecent assault and was sentenced to one year and two months on the argument that there was no vaginal penetration. The implementation of the policies is compromised by contradictory messages sent through tradition, customary law, legislation and policies on the definition of a girl child. The Children's Act (1981), currently under review, defines a child as any person under the age of 18 years while the Disserted Wife's and Children's Protection defines a child as any person below the age of 16 years. The Children in Need of Care Regulations (2005), on the other hand, defines a child as any person under the age of 14 years. Events or development features are also invoked to mark childhood and adulthood. The girl child would mean a young girl and in Setswana this may mean the period before a person has received their first menstrual period, 'go rupa' in Setswana. Marriage is also used as a yard stick to differentiate between a girl child and a woman. Under customary law, the legal age of marriage remains unclear as no age is stipulated. Among some ethnic groups in the country, under customary practice, for instance, a 14-, 15- or 16-year-old girl may get married to an older man (Alexander et al. 2005). These differences in interpretation of a child expose girls to gender violence. It would appear in the Keraetse (1995) court case, for instance, that the judges invoked cultural practice among some ethnic groups that puberty marks a girls entry into womanhood, thus a 14-year-old who has reached puberty would not be protected by the statute. This appears to apply a Western liberal representation of women as 'other' and 'victim' in the developing world that demonises and homogenises indigenous cultures and also assumes that there is no gender justice in these cultures and definitely offered no opportunity to seek out challenges to gender violence in the local cultural practices. We need to ask also, do girl children suffer oppression from the seemingly protective universalised Western liberal thought and its administration of justice that privileges the male voice? How is gender research conducted and used and how is indigenous literature employed to inform empowerment strategies?

Children's voices and research methods

Marshall and Young note that

> Research alone, no matter what the methodology, cannot prevent backsliding or fix gender and education challenges unless it is action- and values-oriented, as it challenges hegemony with world-changing findings. (2006, 72)

Our research explored children's voices on experiences of gender violence in Botswana Primary and Junior Secondary schools to question the use of research, the

ethics involved, and the roles and responsibilities of a feminist activist researcher and to reveal the spaces of agency informed by indigenous relational worlds that girls create. Until recently, in conventional research, children were not consulted but spoken for by others (Leach 2006). New research is illustrating the international contexts in which children's voices are foregrounded in research on gendered violence in schools (Leach and Mitchell 2006). We illustrate gender violence through the study, *Telling Their Stories* (UNICEF 2005). The purpose of the project was to record the voices of children between the ages of 10 and 19 attending Primary and Secondary schools. Story telling was the main method for documenting the children's voices. In total 10,771 children were interviewed and 40 stories were collected. The stories and voices from the children show that there is violence in the school. This violence takes the form of sexual harassment by some teachers and community members, verbal abuse in the school and in the home, and physical abuse. The story below from a 14-year-old in a Primary school illustrates sexual harassment by a school head.

> We were in class writing our English compositions and submitted them to the school head. After he completed marking them our books were returned to us, with the corrections that were to be made. My friend and I were then told to go to the office. All of a sudden he decided that he did not want my friend there because her work was fine so she went back to class. After my friend left he told me that he wanted to talk to me and proceeded to tell me to go and fetch my books and school bag. So I went and fetched my bag and books. Upon arrival he wasted no time in caressing my breasts and private area. He then told me not to tell anyone.
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> When I got home I reported my incident to my uncle and he told me that he would go to school and handle the matter. The following day he gave us another composition. To my surprise I was given 1/20, marks that I had not expected at all and again I was summoned to the office. When I got there he held my hand and said,
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> 'O timana dijo, ga nke o tla kwa go nna' (You refuse with food, you never come to see me don't you want me?) I told him that I did not want him and he replied 'letsatsi leno o tsile go lala o mpatlile' (Today you will see me).
>
> He then proceeded to tell me that he knows my family and it did not matter. If he wanted he could even drop me off at home with his car and there would be no problem. Another teacher came by and he pretended as if he was helping me with my work. He then whispered to me that he would drop me at home.
>
> I have on several times told my uncle since the incident. At first he said he would go and see him but now all he says is that I am troubling him with women's issues. I then decided to tell mom and she is yet to come if she does at all. I really cannot concentrate in class and do not perform to the best of my ability, as a result I end up writing nonsense. (UNICEF 2005)

Three similar stories were collected from the same school. What is our role as feminist activist researchers when we come across such stories? In the case above, the sponsor of the research project wanted to take up the issue with the Ministry of Education. However, there were problems arising from the universal application of confidentiality and anonymity in social science research. The researchers promised anonymity and confidentiality on all data gathered through the project. The name of the schools, the teachers, school heads and the children thus remained anonymous and each participant was promised confidentiality. Worse still, there were no ethical guidelines on what to do in the event that the researcher discovered that some children were at risk. The

universal application of confidentiality and anonymity in social science research was upheld. The perpetrator of violence remained nameless, without a face and untouched, while the oppression of the girls remained the same.

Elsewhere Chilisa (2011) notes that researchers in the formerly colonised societies in the developing world have a choice on what identity and ethical stance to adopt. They can operate at the level of coloniser co-opted by the dominant Western discourse on methodology, that uses Euro-Western standards as universal truths against which the 'other' former colonised societies marginalised by globalisation is researched and written about. At another level they can operate as healers, challenging and resisting the dominant Euro-Western application of methodologies across all cultures. At this level they see themselves as either members of the formerly colonised, marginalised and oppressed or as sympathisers, working with the communities to take action against oppression. These positions require knowledge production approaches that are multiple, interconnected, sensitive and engaging the researcher with ethical issues that position the researcher as healer where the healer engages with community to assist others to heal and to build harmony and bring about social transformation. In many ways this approach resonates with feminist action research models (Marshall and Young 2006) at work in Western contexts, but brings in the explicit dimension of post-colonial understandings of implementing Western research technologies. The researcher needs to ask the following questions:

(1) What is my purpose as a researcher?
(2) Do I challenge and resist dominant discourses that marginalise those who suffer oppression?
(3) What needs to be done to bring about social transformation and heal those who are suffering?

Although in the research described above, the researchers were not able to take any action, in research on gender violence in Ghana, Leach (2006) reveals how the researchers worked with the district education authorities and the community to expose a case of serious sexual misconduct. It was revealed that a community event called *durbar* was called where several thousands of people including local elders and district officials attended. During the *durbar* pupils performed a play written by the researcher on a head teacher asking girls for sexual favours. Following the *durbar*, an investigation was launched which confirmed the children's stories. The research illustrates the role of an activist feminist researcher as a transformative healer, resisting dominant research discourses that refuse to name oppression and engineering a process of healing in the community that comes with the knowledge that justice has been done. We look inside the classroom to further reveal gender oppression of girls and their negotiation and resistance power.

Inside the classroom: the gender order and triple oppression

Separateness, border lines, gender marked spaces, masculinised and feminised subjects also characterise almost all the schools in Botswana (Chilisa 2005; Dunne et al. 2005). This gender order is very often rehashed through traditional ideologies marketed thorough vernacular language, such as proverbs and sayings in a hybrid mix with Western religion taught in subjects like Moral Studies and Religious Knowledge. In almost all the classes in Botswana schools, the seating patterns reveal stark gender

division of space with boys physically distanced from girls (Chilisa et al. 2005; Dunne 2008; Dunne et al. 2005). At school assemblies and in queues for food, boys and girls line up separately. The teachers seem to treat separation of girls' and boys' spaces as common-sense practice. Some teachers invoke their own cultural beliefs that naturalise the boundary between men and women to justify these seating patterns in classrooms. Some teachers invoke the Setswana culture belief that *men who associate with women are supposed to be weaklings* (*ke bo pheramesesing*). They further couple Setswana culture with religion to justify the gender order. One teacher observed as follows:

> A man is of a higher status than a woman. A woman is of the status of a child. Also, a woman is made from a man's rib that's maybe the reason why girls/women would prefer to be closer to boys/men.

Men's attempt to fashion an identity separate from women is not new. Western feminists trace the origin to Plato's theory of mind/body split. According to Plato we all have an immortal soul that knows all. However, what is known is forgotten at birth when our soul inhabits our bodies. According to Plato our bodies cause us to forget, compelling us to spend our lifetime trying to remember what we knew before birth. The argument is that in the Euro-Western philosophy, girl/woman is excluded from the concept of 'human being' through the association of man with mind and therefore reason and rationality and girl/woman with body and irrationality (Thayer-Bacon 2003). The mind/body split, rational/irrational, reason/emotion split cast girl/woman as 'other' defined in relation to boy/man and marginalised and peripheral. Women are cast on the side of body because of their reproductive role and because they menstruate, a condition associated with mood swings and emotional drama. Some male teachers, for instance, even suggested that the clustering of the boys in class was caused by girls' menstrual periods. It was reported (by the teachers) that girls sometimes had their menstruation in class and occasionally would mess up chairs. Boys shunned the girls for this. So they tended to keep a 'safe' distance away from them. During menstruation among some ethnic groups, the girls miss classes. Once they are pregnant, the expectation is that they must stop attending classes with the rest of the learners. When they do they are subjected to ridicule, harassment and isolation by other learners who believe that they make them sleepy (Chilisa 2002). The male teachers' resistance to encourage equality of boys and girls is thus simply an extension of global male stream hegemony constructed along binary opposites of the rational man and the irrational woman reduced to a low social status through the assignment of a sexual body. What comes out clearly is that both boys and teachers invoke both local culture and Western religion to justify the gender order in the school. This illustrates how gender oppression drawn from the hybrid context works together to create gender oppressions, and illustrate the need to challenge oppressive norms coming from each of these roots. This is clearly evident again in data from the following study on gender, sexuality, HIV/AIDS and life skills education (Chilisa et al. 2005, see also Morrell et al. 2009), where for instance, a gender order that placed boys first in their social hierarchy emerged from interviews with moral and education teachers. In some of the interviews the gender order emerged as follows:

> Interview: Is there any difference between what boys and girls say concerning HIV/AIDS and life skills topics?

Teacher:	Mostly, they disagree on topics that concern females and males, for example we had a topic that was on morality and religion, and then asked them about the fact that all religious leaders are males. I was enquiring from them whether that shows a fact of fairness or inequality. The boys said that the females should be at home. The reason being that if God wanted females to be leaders, He could have made the first woman to be a leader. The first person was a man Adam. The woman was made from the rib of Adam. Even Jesus was a male. So, we ought to follow the trend. The girls are saying we can change from that. Again, the people who wrote the Bible are males, so they would portray Jesus as male and not female.
Interviewer:	This idea of male leadership, where do you think it came from?
Teacher:	I feel it comes from home. They even mentioned the Setswana proverb, 'ga dinke di etelellwa ke manamagadi pele' (Men are born leaders, women are followers) … Again they argue that the reason why women cannot lead is because they like bragging and are short-tempered and easily tempted. They gave an example of Eve, who was the first to be tempted and influenced by the devil. They also gave an example of Delilah who tempted Samson. The girls would at the same time disagree. One of them said she was hurt by what the boys were saying and said that women were meant to help men make decisions and not men to make decisions.

The highlighted sections show how patriarchal views congealed from Christian and Setswana knowledge bases.

In another ongoing study (Chilisa 2009), boys and girls were asked questions on who makes decisions on boyfriend and girlfriend relationships. Some of the respondents invoked the same proverb to argue that a boy should make decisions all the time. In an effort to determine the frequency of this belief, 107 students were asked to respond to a question in which one of the items required them to strongly agree, agree, disagree or strongly disagree with the proverb. The responses were further collapsed into two columns with strongly agree to agree forming an 'agree' code and agree to strongly disagree forming a 'disagree'. The majority of the boys agreed with the proverb while almost all the girls disagreed.

How does an activist feminist researcher address oppression that comes through religion, and local, African cultural ideologies and the patriarchal privileging of the male voice? African feminism asserts that 'the framework for a world free of oppression already exists within traditional African philosophical world view', which can be used to challenge the patriarchal myths in African cultures. We want to ask what narratives the African philosophical world view offers to counter proverbs like: 'Ga dinke di etelelwa ke e namagadi pele, di ka wela ka le mina' (Women cannot be leaders) and the Western Biblical story of human origin?

The Tswana story of origin offers one alternative (are there more?). According to the Tswana story of origin, the people came from the hill of Lowe. When they came out, men and women were walking side-by-side driving sheep, goats and cattle. This story defies explanations that justify inequalities on the basis of traditions and reveals other ways of viewing gender relations based on tradition. It is an important contribution to knowledge production in the area of gender relations and could be used as an important entry point for a researcher who might be looking for intervention strategies to address the inequalities. We can see how there are important resources in African philosophy to challenge gender oppressions and we need to ask questions about how this can be used methodologically and educationally to challenge gendered violence, for instance.

Listening to voices of resistance and promoting healing methods

There is no doubt that participatory methods that promote social justice and heal girls/women from patriarchal oppressions by religion, culture and their men are essential to the fight against gender oppression. The challenge is to listen to the girls'/women's voices and the indigenous cultures that inform culture-based oppression as well as document the indigenous cultures that name girls/women differently and the indigenous research methods that resonate with women's experiences. Songs are, for instance, used as a feminist research method that reveal cultural ideologies that oppress girls/women, but they can also reveal women's resistance to patriarchy and as a healing strategy for those who suffer oppression, although we have not explored enough the research instances where this is happening. Songs and dance allow women to relive their experiences and to get in their worlds and express their innermost feelings. Singing together also allows them to collectively share the pain of patriarchal oppression and to heal through the knowledge that they collectively resist the dominance. Listening to songs that women sing in research with women is a method that approaches the researched in a comfortable and non-threatening manner, and also allows the researcher to start from the researched point of reference.

In a case study on female leadership and empowerment in Botswana, Ntseane (2009) describes how the women research participants resisted the use of conventional interview method and insisted on the use of songs and utensils to communicate their life experiences. She notes that instead of using the interview guide that the researcher had prepared for data collection, some groups of women requested that the researcher listen to songs about their leader's attributes; stories about the leadership nicknames of female leaders/leadership and traditional words that adequately describes the power of female leadership. A group of women belonging to an opposition political party for example, suggested that they sing a song. This song narrated the story of their female leader and also gave them an opportunity to demonstrate via song her power and authority by acting out how she embodies respect in her dealings with other politicians. The rich and detailed description embedded in the song included this translated quotation: 'when our capable one walks to council for a meeting, you can't miss her humbled confidence and preparedness as demonstrated by her non-verbal communication actions'. The women also insisted on other ways of conducting focus group interviews not common in the literature. The excerpts below illustrate the execution of the methods.

Focus Group and the Use of a Magic Wooden Spoon

> In one of the focus group discussions, the women insisted that they use a wooden spoon to guide the discussions instead of a focus group moderator. The focus group started with one of the women saying: '*to ensure that we all contribute let us use this magic stick to help process our thoughts and contribute when it is appropriate*'. The researcher was also requested to be part of the focus group because as one put it, '*as a woman like us you also have to share the wisdom that you have. The spoon says you have to eat something (no matter how small) from the same pot with us but also put in something even if it is just one fire wood or a drop of water. Everyone is capable of doing something, thus the spoon has to go round and not skip anybody*'. The use of a spoon symbolises collective decision-making (i.e. the idea that no one person can know it all, but several scoops of wisdom from other members help shape and refine an idea to make it a useful decision).

The Use of a Basket

> In another focus group, a woman suggested that the host put a basket in the middle of the focus group. Asked what the role of the basket was, this is how one of the women responded: '*When women commit to coming together it is because they want to collect something that will contribute to the welfare of their children or community. We see your study as giving you, us and the other women in the other three countries participating in the study to contribute to a bigger purpose*'. The basket represents a 'vision or goal' thus to successfully implement the goal, each individual's contribution and participation is required. Having the basket in the middle of the focus group is a reminder and motivation for contribution. In fact, this is how one respondent kept using the basket to encourage the group to think hard about what the issues, '*this basket is half full, or is almost full. We can't take it to other women in Africa not full. What will they think of us and our society?*'

Compared to the use of conventional Western-based and scientifically organised research methods and techniques, the use of context-specific and indigenous methodologies still have to be documented as part of exploring and developing research methodologies. The methods also invite us to reflect on the research techniques we are using in developing contexts we use in the education system to research gender oppression of the girl child. They invite us to move to healing research methods that allow research participants to name and share pain and to collectively envision strategies for resistance, resilience and survival. There is much research experience from this arena to contribute to debates in novel, participatory research methods, action research and feminist research internationally (Fennell and Arnot 2009; Marshall and Young 2006; Nnameka 1997). For instance, in representing the African context, rendering invisible and sometimes denying women's role as mothers, sisters or daughters, and inability to register small acts of resistance that achieve levels of empowerment has been an unfortunate outcome of colonially rooted research accounts (Fennell and Arnot 2009).

Participants in leadership study also requested feedback in the form of dissemination of the study findings in a way that would be useful and meaningful to their people. One participant noted:

> we have learnt a lot from participating in this study but because of the need to continue learning by sharing what we have learnt with other female leaders in the district the country and even internationally we want the results to be disseminated at our big Kgotla (public parliament) where other members of our ethnic group can confirm and expand on what we gave in the report.

Yet another said, 'female leaders from other districts as well as policy members should be invited' (dilo makwati di kwatabolotswa mo go ba bangwe) meaning brilliant ideas are generated from interactions with other people.

The idea of public and collective feedback in the local language was perceived as essential for continued development of female leadership strategy in this context. It is clear that this type of feedback resists the current conventional research feedback of journal articles to the educated elites and research reports to government policy decision makers and donors which use a language foreign to the source of the information. Given the demand for public feedback to the source of research knowledge, the implications for the role of the researcher is that he/she should be an activist and for research to be reciprocal. One respondent noted:

> We are tired of researchers who come here; get our knowledge, experiences and problems only to give to people we don't know. This time we want our own people in the

South East District as well as other Batswana who want to know what we do as female leaders in our part of the country to be invited to the public (Kgotla) dissemination. Then we will feel that our participation in this study had an impact and not a waste of time.

The quote takes us back to the voices from children on gender violence in the school and provokes researchers to think about ways in which we can decolonise research so that it benefits the researched. The women's resistance to the conventional focus group techniques in preference for indigenous approaches is a wakeup call to those who still think other cultures/groups/gender ways of research can continue to be marginalised. We take it that this means that researchers have to be activists as they have to use their research experiences to make a difference in the lives of those researched. In the leadership case study, it is clear that participants were co-researchers because their indigenous methods were found to be the most appropriate in that cultural research context.

Conclusion

In this paper we have explored the ways in which male hegemony is reinforced through Western religion as well as traditional African male-biased constructions of girls/women, embedded in Tswana language and rituals, generating multiple forms of oppression. We have also suggested, however, that some Western liberal informed policies that address gender inequalities and male-dominated Euro-Western methodologies provide little space for addressing the complexities of this male hegemony. We argue we need to develop new strategies for bringing social justice and healing into research that can account for girls' and women's resistances. We have demonstrated girls'/women's resistance to oppression, showing how they are creating local standpoints that promote sharing and working together against gendered oppressions and violences. We also illustrated how women are resisting conventional research methods in preference to socially just methods, in line with other research on feminist action and participatory research (Collins 2000; Johnson-Bailey 2006; Nnameka 1997) that promote listening with respect, love, thinking together and healing. We have also argued that indigenous knowledge rooted in relational world views promotes the thinking and working together and interdependence between men and women that is necessary to address gender inequalities. Decolonising research processes in turn helps envision other ways of theorising the complexity of gender and educational experiences. It is this understanding that will help to build bridges to enable the formation of genuine alliances between indigenous and Western feminisms that are grounded in ethicality and transformative respect and healing.

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