

Re-crafting Citizenship in the Postcolonial Moment: A Focus on Southern Africa

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The old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum there arises a great diversity of morbid symptoms.

—Antonio Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*

Contextualising African Feminist Discourse on a Diverse Continent

Southern Africa is experiencing a postcolonial moment. The entire continent of Africa and the South in general is becoming postcolonial in terms of the issues and forms of struggle that working people are adopting and engaging with. In some of my more recent writing, I have tried to expound on what I mean by “becoming postcolonial,” especially for black women on the continent.¹

To go further, I would dare to say that the entire world is moving steadily into a postcolonial phase—whether one uses the ascendancy of a black man to the helm of the world’s most ruthless imperialist state, or if one takes a closer look at how tensions between ruling classes in the South and those of the imperialist North are heightening, as the former begin to assert their autonomy from the North—through populist and or militaristic strategies—or both. Increasingly there has been an acknowledgement that the so-called golden age of capitalism (of boom and unadulterated accumulation on a global scale) is ending with a massive bang. Once again, the world’s working people bear the dire consequences of this greed and impunity.

In this context, I would like to extend the postcolonial definition to encompass societies of the North in order to free it from being mainly about “the Other.” Some literature in the academies of the North—written mainly by radical historians and political scientists, more recently by transnational feminists—reflects this deeper meaning of colonisation (the work of Edward Said comes to mind in this regard)². Nonetheless, the assumption remains that when we use the notions of colonisation, neocolonialism and postcolonialism, we are referring to the societies of the South. This skewed vision is not unexpected—after all, the idea and experience of Europe and of being European is premised fundamentally on this misconception of capitalism’s history of plunder and exclusion.³

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Therefore, I begin by pushing some larger conceptual boundaries, hoping to provoke a newer thinking that goes beyond the conventional analytical frames characterising an encounter between radical scholars in the North and those from the South.⁴ The radical imperative for feminists based in Europe and in the North generally is, in my opinion, to respond to the fundamental challenges posed by systems of privilege and exclusion. These systems, as is well known and theorised within the discourses of the Left, are deeply embedded in the colonial heritage that continue to benefit people in western societies—regardless of their class, race and or sexual orientation. The exception is those who have been completely ejected from these societies, and growing numbers of such communities are visible in these “civilised” spaces as the crisis of social and economic reproduction intensifies.⁵

We are currently witnessing the demystification of capitalism and its liberalist claims of inclusivity, shattering even in the U.S. These are red lights alerting us as *radicals* to reread the script of capitalist history and respond to the imperatives of the moment in order to stop the repetition of capitalism’s boom and bust cycle—and begin to chart new futures for our respective societies.⁶

Critiquing Neocolonialism/Crafting Contemporary Feminism

I turn my discussion to Southern Africa. My discussion of post-colonialism emerges from a total rejection of the neocolonial state and the social systems it perpetuates, which are caricatures of the deeply fascistic and authoritarian colonial system.⁷ I propose a different interpretation of what I call the transitional moment to post-coloniality. I argue in my current work that we are positioned in a moment of transition into a possibly new time on the African continent. As Yashpal Tandon puts it:

The present crisis is not a trade cyclical phenomenon. . . .
At its roots the crisis is deeply embedded in the very fabric of capitalist production and distribution.⁸

Particular opportunities and threats characterize this moment. Therefore, to ensure that we make a real difference for ourselves and for the communities with whom we work, we must craft the conceptual and ideological tools and explanations that will clarify the opportunities of the moment. We must also expose the threats and dangers embedded in these peripheral capitalist societies, because conservative nationalism and globalised neoliberalism are currently re-entrenching and enforcing them. I will focus briefly, then, on two possible conceptual vehicles that might be used to redirect our understanding of the status quo in southern Africa in particular, and how we might begin to infuse these notions with a new and radically different sense of meaning and practice within the academy and with the activism in which women and communities engage.

I have been exploring the idea of crafting a *contemporary feminism* within the context of Southern Africa; a feminism which rereads the script of nationalism as a radical moment for all African

women—considering that black women begin the journey of becoming persons in their own specific ways through involvement in anticolonial struggles and by stepping into the moment of independence as Africans in new and very liberatory ways.⁹ The nationalist moment of independence is often occluded by negative representations of African women being pushed back to the margins of their respective —to a large degree this is what happened everywhere on the continent, especially where women had become significantly visible in the public—Zimbabwe is a case in point.

However, a tremendously important transformation occurred when African women entered the public—largely through the formation of organisations, through the production of texts and through public activism, which is to say, through the formation of women’s movements—and they began the journey of becoming citizens. All over the continent, the moment of independence is marked dramatically, for black women, by greater access to education, improved livelihoods, and access to primary healthcare as well as spatial and social mobility. While these resources are systematically withdrawn as the neocolonial state entrenches itself under the control of black ruling classes, the shift nonetheless occurs, and it is fundamentally important to acknowledge this.

It is as necessary to recognise that something tremendously important occurs in the identities of African women at the moment of independence, regardless of the inadequacies of nationalism and the re-enforcement of capitalist hegemony in all our societies. This is mainly because the shift in women’s social and political consciousness and the slight changes in the material conditions of life for African women in general signal the possibility of two very important dynamics.

The first is the possibility of establishing a direct relationship with the state, in spite of the state remaining basically colonial in both its expressions of power and its legal, economic and sociocultural infrastructure. For example, black women continued to be put under police surveillance, and accusations of solicitation persist when black women are out in public, especially at night, even after the transition from colonialism.¹⁰

Establishing and maintaining this proximity to the state has been crucial for all groups of working people, and Richard Pithouse reiterates its significance in his analysis of excluded communities’ refusal to vote in present day South Africa’s local elections. Referring to the state’s violent reaction to the “*no land, no vote*,” campaign of the Landless People’s Movement in 2004 and in 2006, he argues that:

Many grassroots activists . . . refuse top down political control by ward councillors and (are determined) to, instead, build up their own organisations to the point where they can bypass ward councillors and negotiate directly with the state.¹¹

For black women, relocating themselves physically and ideologically within “*the view of the state*” has been a crucial strategy in the

struggle for entitlements ever since women entered the public and became a specific political constituency. In Europe and North America, colonialism became the wedge that enabled white women across the class spectrum to shift into the public. Access to education, housing, health care, social upward mobility through migration to the colonies, etc. was made possible largely through the plunder of Africa, Latin America and Asia's resources.¹²

For African women the shift was something engineered and driven largely through women's engagements with neocolonialism and through their insistence that they were entitled to material access and rights from the moment of independence.¹³ In order to continue this struggle to be visible and autonomous of the state and its ancillary institutions, women must therefore find new and more effective ways of being positioned in a direct relationship with the state. This repositioning also offers the possibilities for beginning the process of transforming the state from the instrument of class rule, which it has been for millennia, into a means by which women and their communities can expand and protect their entitlements.

Understanding this political reality is crucial to crafting a radical analysis of our societies and to mobilising the ability to imagine ourselves as being freed from colonialism and capitalist hegemony. The recognition of this political consciousness—clearly reflected in the narratives and texts that African women have produced over the past four decades—is central to the notion of *contemporarity* in African Feminism. It moves the analysis from the dominant colonial claims that Africans cannot change their societies—which still have a deeply paralysing effect on working people especially when combined with “developmentalism” and “humanitarianism”—to a mobilisation of African women's agencies to define their own futures, on and off the continent.¹⁴

The second leg of the conceptual re-orientation I propose relates to the notion of *citizenship* and the need to recraft and resituate this notion, especially as it relates to and is owned by African women. Strategically, citizenship as a notion and as a practice has the deepest and most extensive capacities in terms of its abilities to encompass the most radical ideas and activism. Increasing work on the potential of a radical notion of citizenship, particularly for women in the societies of the South, affirms this position.¹⁵

In a more general sense, we know that the prevalent notion of citizenship in all our societies comes out of established liberal discourses of inclusivity that have failed to meet the expectations and needs of working people everywhere. On the African continent, the rhetoric and political discourses of independence and inclusion are drawn from and tied to those of the west and its definitions and meanings of citizenship. Additionally, capacities of this notion are further hamstrung by the “agreements” that all the African elites enter into with the respective western states: to re-trench and preserve capitalist privilege at the moment of independence. From the most moderate examples of anticolonialism to the most radical ones (Malawi and South Africa in my region) the final outcome is basically the same. Nonetheless, citizenship does provide the “*bridge*” between the people and class elements that occupy and use the

State. For this and other reasons, it is crucial as a conceptual and political idea.

As the capitalist crisis intensifies (having already begun much sooner and more intensely in Africa as a consequence of Structural Adjustment Policies and primitive accumulation), the distance between the working people and those who control our societies' resources widens. Working people have less possibility of holding the state accountable, of demanding their entitlements, and of asserting their rights within state structures. This is true except in situations where the North senses a threat to its own interests—as has been the case with Zimbabwe, where a black ruling class pushed imperialist agencies out and rapidly consolidated its own power over the people and the national resources. In this instance, there was a hue and cry about the repression of Zimbabweans and the lack of access to services, etc. only as a ploy to re-impose a neoliberal regime that is loyal to imperialism.

To quote Stephen Gowans, a rare voice from the western academy, seeking to provide a different analysis on Zimbabwe and on the demonization of Robert Mugabe in particular:

The basis for Mugabe's demonization is the desire of Western powers to change the economic and land redistribution policies Mugabe's government has pursued . . . His lapses from liberal democratic rectitude are, in themselves, of little moment to decision makers in Washington and London; and . . . the ultimate aim of regime change is to replace Mugabe with someone who can be counted on to look after Western interests, and particularly British investments, in Zimbabwe.¹⁶

This is the crux of the matter in Zimbabwe, beyond the right-wing hysteria of the western media and its allies, made up of white settler and new black elites in the various societies of the region.¹⁷ Given these significant neoliberal re-entrenchments within the economic and political landscape of Zimbabwe, it will soon become obvious that the struggle for citizenship by working people has been reversed in deeply problematical ways. Therefore, my proposal is for radical feminists to initiate a discursive re-crafting of citizenship as a notion and a practice, first of all by ideologically disembedding it from liberalist discourses and political rhetoric which perpetuate the status quo of the neocolonial state.

How do we begin to do this?

At the conceptual level, I would like to suggest considering the idea of *contemporarity* within African feminism so as to deepen our understanding of agency as the personal and collective energy of resisting women.¹⁸ Through a process of radical historicising and by critiquing a rapidly expanding right-wing revisionist trend across the academies of Southern Africa in particular, we will be able to challenge the supremacist underpinnings of erasure and silencing that always accompany such projects.¹⁹ We have to develop and translate this energy into ideas, and map it as a political agenda that will reflect a new imaginary around citizenship and entitlements for women and their communities.

The moment is ready for the consideration of a contemporary idea and the development of a contemporary perspective of feminism as the ideology and strategy through which we reposition ourselves in relation to the neocolonial state. The neocolonial state and its various components are being actively restructured and reconfigured to serve the interests of the black ruling classes in more effective and repressive ways.²⁰ These are no longer the societies of half a century ago. A vibrant, class, sociopolitical and military restructuring is happening everywhere on the continent, alerting us to the ways in which the transition to postcoloniality and the making of postcolonial societies is open to one of two routes. It can move in the direction of deeper entrenchment of class rule, through a process driven largely by black ruling classes and their allies (traditionalists and conservative women's groups), in which case we will have to struggle as radicals to create another opportunity for social transformation; or, it can be mobilised as a moment through which a redefinition of the concepts and visions of radical people are more securely positioned in the political and economic spheres of our societies.²¹

However, for these opportunities to become politically relevant, they must be understood and mobilised as expressions of *contemporarity* as a potent intellectual and activist resource for feminist visions. The moment has to be conceptualised and used to define new political and activist agendas and strategies.²² Embracing the need for a more contemporary notion and practice of African feminisms would therefore necessarily require an acknowledgement and committed critique of conformity issues relating to class, race, culture, heteronormativity, homophobia and other expressions of social and material privilege which have eroded and caused a sense of "*im-passe*" within African feminist circles.

As Zethu Matebeni astutely puts it with regard to the achievements of South African LGBTI activism:

Despite some of these advances, critical work on lesbians or women's same-sex relationships has been minimal in the scholarship in South Africa.²³

African feminists can move ahead ideologically and politically by recognising through more sustained critical analyses that the African women's movement is caught in a moment of immobility and has thus far been unable to respond to the imperatives of the times. This, I think, is due to several key issues, most importantly the problematic of nationalism as a patriarchal, pro-elite ideology and practice.²⁴

One only has to take a closer look at the political character of women's organisations across the continent to see how limited their political agendas have become.²⁵ Whilst there is no doubt that African women have aspired to great heights over the past half century of African independence and have striven to transform their worlds, the reality is that the neocolonial state/societies in which we live and work have almost completely strangled our energies and imaginations. We must, then, develop our own ideological and activist means of struggle, and break from the narrow confines of nationalist inspired identity and political practice.

How we break with nationalism without becoming dis-embedded from the nation and the hegemonic cultural identities defining the meanings of being an African will form key parts of the discourses that we must engage in as radical women, as will the contestations that rage around this issue (relating to race, gender, sexuality and ethnicity in particular).²⁶ The entire trajectory of Africa's liberatory journey is embedded in the nationalist discourses of Africanity and anticolonial, anti-imperialist resistance. How do we become citizens in Africa and beyond, in ways that enable us to continue claiming the entitlements we deserve as black women who resist racism and whose identities are welded to notions and practices of race and racial privilege by the very passage of historical time for us as a people, whilst disrupting the very discourses and ideologies that dominate and despise this identity? Of this I am not sure, even as I grope towards some kind of scholarly and activist resolution. I am hopeful, though, that the process of re-imagining and recrafting—as a conceptual and activist energy and practice—will throw up new possibilities and foster new intellectual and activist sites where we can debate and begin to reposition our identities as Africans.

In this vein, therefore, I am thinking about recrafting as an exercise in theorising and reconnecting with women's resistance experiences in the current moment, without losing the link with our herstories and histories of past resistance in the distant and not so distant past. I imagine that we can use this "historicising energy" to interpolate new ideas into feminist sites—in the academy, in radical women's collectives, within radical women's friendships, and within feminist activist networks—that have become "*quietened*" by the lack or repression of new and energised ideas and discourses.

I am considering the meaning of feminist recrafting as an acknowledgment and celebration of the multiple experiences that have transformed us into radical women. Struggles against colonial and feudal patriarchies must be revisited and revived in the face of a concerted revanchist mobilisation of ancient forms of humiliation, intimidation, public sexual vilification (so-called virginity testing in Southern Africa)—which are wrecking havoc on the intimacies and senses of personal and political confidence among young black women in particular.²⁷ In reconnecting and strengthening our sense of confidence in the knowledge that we know the Patriarchy and we can challenge and reject it, we will be able to resist it and make change—more so now in the face of neoliberalist claims and influences.

I am thinking about recrafting as a mobilisation of radical courage—to be able to step back from the often overwhelming presence of nationalist inspired notions and practices of identity—which essentialise our black female bodies and mark them as the property of males and of the emerging black nations within which we are situated. And I am imagining the notion and practice of recrafting as an expression of the continuation of gains and transformative experiences and consciousness that every African woman has shared, and which enabled the formation of movements, which have run their course in the conjuncture of anticolonialism, and which must be jettisoned for new and stronger ideological visions and more sustainable strategies.

When we (as Africans) acknowledge that nationalism is dépassé in spite of what we have gained from it; that it has become increasingly an ideology for the consolidation of black ruling classes within African state structures; and that we must find new and radical identities and activist vehicles to carry our postcolonial demands into the sites of possibility NOW—before the ruling classes close all the spaces in the public and private spheres of our respective societies—then we will have repositioned ourselves to struggle in ways that lead us towards real transformation. This means that we have to build a radical feminist movement in Africa which challenges both the hegemony and dominance of African and Western patriarchal systems of privilege and exclusion.

In that vein, let me return to the challenge I posed to radical women living and struggling with neoliberalism in Europe. How do we initiate the process of recrafting our citizenship so we rupture it from the continuing neoliberal and neo-imperialist systems that have joined us at the hip, so to speak, in deeply problematical ways? What are our postcolonial imaginaries of living and working within societies that are no longer, for example, colonial and hegemonically militaristic and consumerist? In a recent public forum hosted by *The Nation*, Immanuel Wallerstein proposed the following to the Left in the context of the deepening socioeconomic and political crisis in the societies of the West:

What must the Left do? Promote intellectual clarity about the fundamental choice (of building socialism). Then organise at a thousand levels and in a thousand ways to push things in the right direction.²⁸

What does Yashpal Tandon, whose work I deeply admire, have to say to radicals in the West/North?

The West (also referred to as the North, depending on the context), is currently in a serious crisis, which it may survive if progressive civil society movements in the North take heed of the gravity of the situation facing them and if they work closely with progressive people and movements in the South.²⁹

Finally, as a momentary gasp for breadth—I think that feminists generally can begin to bring a vision of *contemporarity* to discourses on citizenship by rupturing the deep-seated links that operate at the intersection of private property/class and racial privilege/and the definition and practice of citizenship in all our societies. On the one hand, this intersection is reflective of the essential relationships of political and economic inequality which liberalism generated and continues to perpetuate globally, and which the colonial state was set up to institutionalise in Southern Africa over a period of almost four centuries.

On the other hand, in Africa, particularly in Southern Africa where white settler colonies have normalized this interface of privilege and exclusion, a clearer understanding of how the contemporary moment is both historical and futuristic would benefit substantially from a notion of *feminist contemporarity*.

In Zimbabwe, South Africa, and Namibia in particular, there has been a systematic suppression by the state and a white-dominated academy of any discourse around racial privilege. While there are some expressions of academic resistance to racial silencing, in the main, black scholars who dare to make a critique of racial privilege and exclusion and its re-entrenchment into the neocolonial moment have invariably come under vicious attack by mainly white academics, often with the collusionary silence and isolation of blacks in these institutions.

I am saying, therefore, that not only has the women's movement in all these countries failed to make the connection between issues of private property, white and class privilege and the lack of real citizenship for the majority of people, it has been unable to articulate—thus far—an alternative vision of citizenship beyond a gender-mainstreamed notion of women as citizens.

The challenge here is to ask a different set of questions about women's radical politics when it collides with this intersection of white privilege/private property and citizenship. We know that most white women in southern Africa have some form of private property—either inherited or acquired through better access to education and higher-paying jobs under settler colonialism (and presently). We also know that until recently increasing numbers of black middleclass women (who have either used the women's movement for upward class mobility or have acquired access to resources through education during the moment of independence) were acquiring property. This is mainly immovable property in the form of homes. And we know that property is a relation of power, a medium through which individuals establish direct relationships with the state and a filter for accessing and exercising citizenship (as property rights and as access to other forms of material and social wealth and privilege).

Therefore, private property impinges not only on the class relations between and among women resisting patriarchy (it structures and defines class in particular ways); it also separates women who do not own property and therefore remain outside the parameters of the state as a site of negotiable power from women who have this possibility of negotiating power around the protection of their rights (except in situations of severe social upheavals where such relations are ruptured and women are thrust into flight).

This differentiation based on class and access to resources plays itself out in multiple ways within women's and feminist movements. For feminists, it presents the difficult but necessary discussion around the issues of personal property and the extension of property rights to all women in the society; the issues of property and individual protections for women within personal and professional relationships; the issues of property and shelter for some and the absence of rights of adequate or no shelter for most women and communities.

These are just some of the challenges that arise when we bring the issues of property to feminist discourses around citizenship and emerging postcolonial societies. Moreover, we can only begin to illuminate them by conversations, debates and energized contestations among us—so that we can reframe the discourse and politics of individual and collective property entitlements and initiate the

process of disrupting the hegemony of property in the definition and exercise of citizenship. There has been a limited debate around issues of property and women's bodily integrity in Tanzania, Uganda and Kenya. But these debates are still largely initiated and managed by what are called 'global NGOs'—which have usurped the public political spaces that African women crafted and struggled for over the past few decades. This is another example of how neoliberalism is restructuring our world and influencing the ways in which we resist.

Other issues arise when we speak of a more radical definition of citizenship—issues of violation, militarism, environmentalism, etc. In South Africa, the formation of the Women's Coalition at the moment of independence signalled the death knell of any radical agency and direction within that movement, particularly on issues of privilege and white women's collusion with the apartheid state. This argument can be safely extended to most women's movements. Race, class, heteronormativity and whiteness have been globalised similarly for most women today, even as women continue to resist these systems and practices in their very specific traditions. Where the critique occurs, it expresses the emergence or growth of a feminist movement contesting the "loud voice" of the neocolonial status quo. It supports, nurtures, and defends the emergence of critical discursive sites and resistance voices and texts in that country.

In Zimbabwe we have a deafening silence on the issues of feminist discourse and resistance, given that all the political spaces have been taken up by the Zimbabwe African National Union—Patriotic Front (ZANUPF) and the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). A few Zimbabwean feminists have been writing cautiously from the safety of South Africa, but these are still rather timid expressions of distrust about the current neoliberal ruling class alliances orchestrated so effectively by the west. We need a sustained, radical critique of the links between systems of privilege, exclusionary practices, and the perpetuation of women's cultural and political repression in all our societies. Without that, we will not be able to make the necessary shift to a feminist inspired and feminist driven vision of citizenship, one which is antiracist, anti-imperialist, and postcolonial in revolutionary ways.

Let me end with a quotation from Gigi Francisco, of Dawn Southeast Asia, to reinforce the imperative of radical thinking and activism. While she does not make the overt distinction that I make between the women's movement and the feminist movement, her point resonates as powerfully:

The complexities and paradoxes spawned by globalisation has (*sic*) created a crisis of legitimacy for institutions, for the states, and even for the women's movement as currently constituted. Rather the challenge lies in the capacity of feminist interrogation and activism to produce fresh analysis and critique that accounts for the trans-boundary paradoxes opened in the current conjuncture.³⁰

Notes

¹ Patricia McFadden, "Becoming Post-Colonial: African Women Changing the Meaning of Citizenship," *Meridians: Feminism, Race, Transnationalism* 6.1(2005): 1-18.

² Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994).

³ I use the "North/South" terminology to connote historically situated and ongoing unequal relations of privilege and power, particularly around issues of material wealth, racial and class exclusion between societies and regions of the world. See also Yashpal Tandon, "Political, Economic and Climate Crisis of Western Civilisation: Dangers and Opportunities," *Pambazuka News* 426 (April 2009), <http://pambazuka.org/en/category/features/55334>; Dani Nabudere, "The Global Crisis of Capitalism and its Impact," *Pambazuka News* 412, (December 2008), <http://pambazuka.org/en/category/features/52604>; Samir Amin, "Financial Collapse, Systemic Crisis? Illusory answers and necessary answers," *Pambazuka News* 412 (December 2008), <http://pambazuka.org/en/category/features/52617>.

⁴ Here I am referring to the tendency to hear the critiques by radical feminists/activists from the South of their regimes as "peculiar" to the societies of the South, and not to connect these discourses of resistance to a broader conceptualisation of capitalism as being in a crisis of postcolonialism everywhere.

⁵ European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless (FEANSTSA), <http://www.feantsa.org/code/en/hp.asp>. See also a host of (alternative) initiatives around this issue and related issues of immigration and unemployment: European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless, "FEANSTSA members," <http://www.feantsa.org/code/en/pg.asp?Page=22>.

⁶ I use the term "radical" in this and other work as a code to surface long traditions of intersectional resistance to classism, racism, sexism, homophobia, ageism, and all the myriad expressions of patriarchal repression and exclusion. Often I use this term interchangeably with feminism or to accompany my own definition and use of feminism as a subversive ideology and identity.

⁷ The oft-repeated claims by large sections of the Western Political Science academy (who are peculiarly known as "Africanists") that the "African state" (rather than the State in Africa) has been "mismanaged and destroyed by corrupt and inefficient blacks," presumes that the colonial state which such elites inherit at independence is a well-functioning, participatory and inclusive mechanism of governance and social distribution. What could be further from the truth, and why has this conscious, and racist-informed claim remained so extensively unquestioned and challenged in these academies? See Patricia McFadden, "Plunder as Statecraft: Militarism and Resistance in Neocolonial Africa," in *Security Disarmed: Critical Perspectives on Gender, Race and Militarisation*, ed. B. Sutton, S. Morgan and J. Novkov (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2008), 136-156, for a critique.

⁸ Yashpal Tandon, "Political, Economic and Climate Crisis of Western Civilisation: Dangers and Opportunities," *Pambazuka News* 426 (April 2009): xx, <http://pambazuka.org/en/category/features/55334>.

⁹ The past two decades saw an explosion of texts chronicling the experiences and journeys that Zimbabwean (and South African) women took towards this moment, and celebrating the performance of such women in transforming their respective societies. See for example the work of Yvonne Vera, *Nehanda* (Harare: Baobab Books, 1999), *Butterfly Burning* (Harare: Baobab Books, 1998); Irene Staunton, *Mothers of the Revolution* (Harare: Baobab Books, 1990); Nomboniso Gasa, ed., *Women in South African History* (Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2007).

¹⁰ Colonial laws and conventions that criminalised women in the public, marking them as prostitutes and allowing police to arrest them on this pre-

text, remained on the books of all the countries of the region, sometimes for decades—and in some cases, have been eroded and or removed by women's movement activists.

¹¹Richard Pithouse, "The Thoroughly Democratic Logic of Refusing to Vote." The South African Civil Society Information Service, (April 2 2009), <http://sacsis.org.za/site/article/258.1>.

¹²Yashpal Tandon, "Political, Economic and Climate Crisis of Western Civilisation: Dangers and Opportunities." *Pambazuka News* 426 (April 2009): xx, <http://pambazuka.org/en/category/features/55334>; Doris Lessing, *Under My Skin* (New York: HarperCollins, 1994).

¹³I use the subjective "we" in this and other pieces of work in order to position/include my own political ideas and activism within the liberation trajectory of the past four decades in Southern Africa as a geopolitical context and experience. I note with interest (and pleasure) that some young radical feminists have also been engaging in this disruptive practice with the South African academy against a rack of exclusionary perceptions and practices. See Danaï S. Mupotsa et al., "This Little Rage of Poetry/Researching Gender and Sexuality," *Feminist Africa* 11. *Researching for Life: Paradigms and Power* (2008): 97-108.

¹⁴Struggles by women and communities of African descent in the Diasporic world are a clear expression of this postcolonial moment, especially in situations of deeply ingrained racial and class violence and exclusion.

¹⁵See Amanda Gouws, "Obstacles for women in leadership positions: the case of South Africa," *Signs* 34.1 (2008): 21-27.

¹⁶Stephen Gowans, "Zimbabwe's Lonely Fight for Justice," posted on March 30, 2007, <http://gowans.wordpress.com/2007/03/30/zimbabwe%E2%80%99s-lonely-fight-for-justice/>. See also a lively debate on politics and land in Zimbabwe between Mahmood Mamdani, "Lessons of Zimbabwe," *London Review of Books* 30.23 (4 December 2008) <http://www.lrb.co.uk/v30/n23/mahmood-mamdani/lessons-of-zimbabwe>; and Sam Moyo with Paris Yeros, "Blowing the lid off Zimbabwe: the debate continues," *Pambazuka News* 419 (February 2009), <http://www.pambazuka.org/en/issue/419> on the one side, and, Patrick Bond et al. on the other side—"Lessons of Zimbabwe," *London Review of Books* 31.1 (January 2009), <http://www.lrb.co.uk/v31/n01/letters#letter2>.

¹⁷The political and socioeconomic implications of the neo-imperialist strategy used against Zimbabwe by the U.S., U.K. and E.U., together with white settler elites in the region of Southern Africa, in order to induce regime change through economic sanctions, require a more sober and deeper scrutiny by radical scholars and activists everywhere. See Stephen Gowans – *ibid*- for parallels with Bosnia and Latin America.

¹⁸Patricia McFadden, "Les limites du nationalisme: citoyenneté et État. Le nationalisme comme idéologie anticoloniale: une contextualisation," trans. Sonia Dayan, *Revue Tumultes* 31 (October 2008): 167-184. The English version was presented at Syracuse University: "Crafting a Postcolonial State in Africa through Feminist Engagement" (public lecture at Syracuse University on November 18, 2009).

¹⁹Patricia McFadden, "Resisting Nationalism, Crafting new Citizenship Identities as African Women" (paper presented at the African Gender Institute Conference on Gender Justice and Body Politics, University of Cape Town, February 4-6, 2009).

²⁰Patricia McFadden, "Plunder as Statecraft: Militarism and Resistance in Neocolonial Africa" in *Security Disarmed: Critical Perspectives on Gender, Race and Militarisation*, ed. B.Sutton, S. Morgan and J. Novkov (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2008).

²¹The transitions from U.S. supported fascism and authoritarianism to popular/people-led forms of government in several countries of Latin America, and the persistence of Cuba in the face of ongoing embargoes and sanc-

tions, as well as the resilience of the Zapatista movement in Mexico are important signals that the working people of the world continue to believe and struggle for different kinds of societies.

²²See the important work done by feminist scholar/activists in journals such as *Feminist Africa* (<http://www.feministafrica.org>); AGENDA (<http://www.agenda.org.za>). Refer here especially to the bibliography compiled by Desiree Lewis, ed., *African Women's Studies: 1980–2001: A Bibliography* (Cape Town: African Gender Institute, 2003).

²³Zethu Matebeni, "Vela Bambhentele: Intimacies and Complexities in Researching within Black Lesbian Groups in Johannesburg," *Feminist Africa* 11 (2008): 89.

²⁴Anne McClintock, "'No Longer in a Future Heaven': Gender, Race and Nationalism" in *Dangerous Liaisons: Gender, Nation and Postcolonial Perspectives*, ed. A. Mufti and E. Shohat (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997); M. Jacqui Alexander and C. Talpade Mohanty, ed. *Feminist Genealogies, Colonial Legacies, Democratic Futures*. (New York and London: Routledge, 1997); Patricia McFadden, "The Challenges and Prospects for the African Women's Movement in the 21st Century," *Women in Action* 1 (1997), <http://www.hartford-hwp.com/archives/30/152.html>.

²⁵Most have become conflated—ideologically and structurally into United Nations and or Western government agencies and or into political parties in power or which are allied with the Opposition in some way. The African civil society—including the African women's movement—has become barely visible in its own right as a site and as a political expression of independent African views and visions.

²⁶See very interesting ideas on this subject in *Feminist Africa* 11 and in prior issues which are accessible on their websites: www.feministafrica.org; www.uct.ac.za/org/agi; www.gwsafrica.org.

²⁷Once again, as has been with the case of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) over the past three—four decades, certain elements from the Western academy which represent a right-wing feminism within departments of Anthropology and Ethnology (especially in the Scandinavian countries) are flocking to the rural areas of Kwa Zulu Natal, a province of South Africa, to voyeuristically participate in the often public physical and sexual humiliation and violation of the bodily integrity of young black women. It reflects a peculiar racist fascination with the mutilated and or sexually violated black vagina in the name of "scholarship."

²⁸Immanuel Wallerstein, "Follow Brazil's Example. Re-Imagining Socialism: A Nation Forum," *The Nation* (March 23, 2009), xx, <http://www.thenation.com/doc/20090323/wallerstein>.

²⁹Yashpal Tandon, "Political, Economic and Climate Crisis of Western Civilisation: Dangers and Opportunities," *Pambazuka News* 426 (April 2009): xx, <http://pambazuka.org/en/category/features/55334>; Doris Lessing, *Under My Skin* (New York: HarperCollins, 1994).

³⁰Gigi Francisco, "Sighting Paradoxes for Gender in the Social Movements," *DAWN: Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era*. http://www.dawnnet.org/uploads/documents/PAPER_GIGI_Sighting%20Paradoxes%20for%20Gender%20in%20the%20Social%20Movements.pdf.

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IV. Cultural Interventions



Photo of sculpture by Pazia Mannella, *While the World May Seem Grim, Spring Fashion is Not!* New York Times, 2003.
Topps Desert Storm trading cards, ribbon, and rayon.

An approach focusing on neotraditionalism treats seemingly historical institutions, practices, and values as moldable resources, subject to ongoing social and political contestation. Likewise, in southern Africa, historians have shown how the massive migration of men to mines and factories around the turn of the 20th century precipitated new understandings of "traditional" culture, emphasizing women's subordination, powerful elder male chieftaincy, and rigid customary land laws. Although often monopolized by state-level postcolonial elites as legitimating cultural patina, neotraditionalism by definition need not serve authoritarianism nor operate only in the hands of dominant groups. South Africa is a mirror image of regional disaster in the making. The contestation over citizenship and inclusion into the nation-state as a two-fold relationship that raises fundamental issues of property and other entitlements is key to any attempt at explaining what is happening within Southern Africa and on the continent as a whole. Very obviously, rights as historically situated social outcomes are located within and in relation to the key public institutions of any society.