



# Considering Issues of Women's Rights and International Development: Scholarship and Activism to Promote Health in Zimbabwe

Assata Zerai, University of Illinois; Women and Gender in Global Perspective  
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# **HYPERMASCULINITY, STATE VIOLENCE, AND FAMILY WELL-BEING IN ZIMBABWE**

**An Africana  
Feminist  
Analysis of  
Maternal and  
Child Health**



**Assata Zerai**



# Africana Feminism

- A woman-centered perspective
- Creating a safe space for women to occupy on their own terms in male-dominated social structures
- Study of the languages, discourses, problematics, unique perspectives, divergent experiences, and intersecting oppressions and privileges of women's and girls' lives
- Desire to study African women and children from liberating and not oppressive perspectives

# From Pan-Africanism, womanism, black feminism, and post colonial feminisms to Africana Feminism

- Linkages between these perspectives is more important to me than their differences
- Africana Feminisms is an intellectual project grounded in the experiences of working people, laboring women raising their children, toiling to provide for families, struggling to pursue education, organizing in our communities for social change.
- It is from everyday women that Africana feminism is born.

# Africana feminism: the missing link in the struggle to understand society.

- Africana feminism has crucial implication for social *analysis* and *activism*.
- Western researchers often do not incorporate the voices of African and African diaspora women in their research endeavors
- *Epistemic apartheid*, “a process of critical decay within a field or discipline” (Gordon 2006; Rabaka 2010) due to its lack of intellectual diversity.
- Rabaka further describes this process as one “of institutional racism [and] academic colonization and conceptual quarantining of knowledge, anti-imperial thought, and/or radical political praxis produced and presented by . . . ‘especially black’ intellectual-activists” (2010: 16).

# Africana feminism: the missing link in the struggle to understand society.

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- Epistemic apartheid incorporates “institutional racism, [**sexism**, and] academic colonization and conceptual quarantining of knowledge, [antiracist and **Africana feminist**] and anti-imperial thought, and/or radical political praxis produced and presented by . . . ‘especially’ [Africana and other nonwestern *women*] intellectual-activists”.
- I propose an Africana feminist approach to promote intellectual diversity encompassing perspectives from women in Africa and the African diaspora

# Feminism in Zimbabwe

- It is important to foreground scholars from the communities that we study.
- Some prominent African woman centered scholars in (or who have worked in) Zimbabwe are Rudo Gaidzanwa, Patricia McFadden, Tanya Lyons, Makini Campbell, and our own Merle Bowen, and Terri Barnes.
- The works of these scholars and other notable progressive African feminists, such as Amina Mama, Aisha Imam, and others articulate the ultimate goal to affect social, political and economic conditions for the purpose of enhancing the well being of all African families.

# Essential Features of African Feminisms

- Recognize inequality/ oppression as multiplicative and simultaneous
- Principal axes of oppression: **gender, class, ethnicity, neocolonial relations, and heterosexism** (to Gaidzanwa, McFadden, Imam, Mama, Sow, etc)
- Gender analysis highlights the necessity of considering ideology, subjectivity, and consciousness and the role of these “nonmaterial” processes in politics, production relations, democratic processes, and the state.
- Corrupt governments, in-lawism, and fundamentalist religion are distinct experiences among African women (Ogunyemi)
- Role of multinational corporations, the IMF/World Bank, U.S./ E.U. commerce, sanctions and aid that affect African women (Mama)

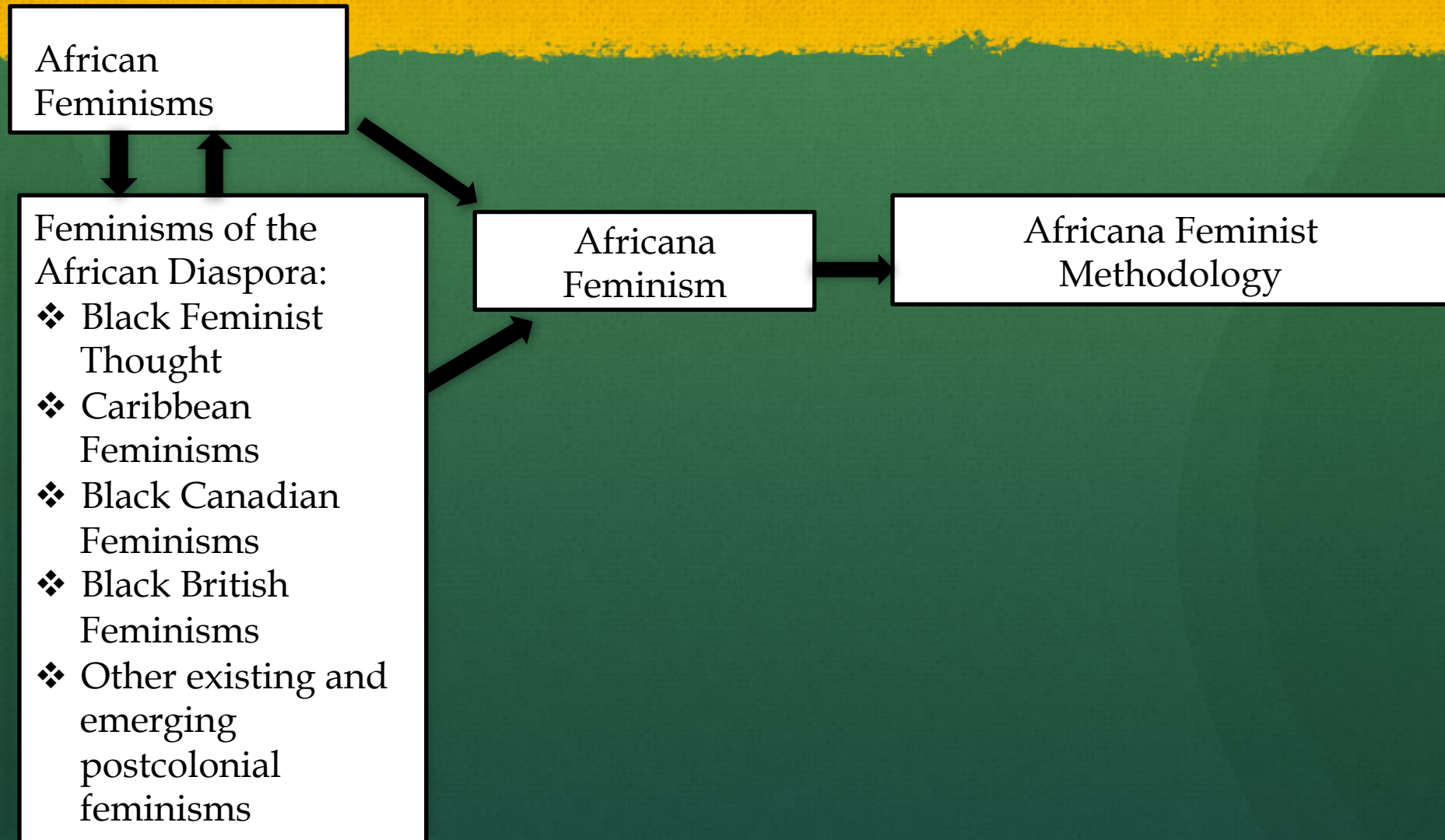
# Influences of the African Diaspora

- In addition to crucial works by women of African descent in Africa, women in the African diaspora express perspectives on gender that are instructive for Africana feminism.
- Black feminism is a perspective offered by the African Diaspora that is consistent with an emerging Africana feminism
  - It is a political project for reconceptualizing oppression and resistance
  - Offers the race, class and gender intersectional framework

# Influences of the African Diaspora

- Features of Intersectionality the guide my analysis:
  - Multiplicative analysis
  - No singular experience of being a woman
  - Analyzes multiple dimensions
  - Analyzes resistance (agency/activism)
  - Relationality in variant experiences of groups based on members' relative social locations

Figure 4.1 The Genealogy of Africana Feminist Methodology



# Ways I Incorporate Africana Feminist Methodology

- Inclusion of all African women in data analyses, centering women who would otherwise be marginalized, identifying multiple and simultaneous oppressions, and recognizing their agency.
- Creating theoretical models that place women's experiences in context by considering macroeconomic, political, and social factors and by identifying relations of power.

# Ways I Incorporate Africana Feminist Methodology

- Conducting multilevel analysis that interrogates individual-level variables by exploring analytic constructs and identifying contextual factors such as maternal education levels in the community, health resources available to communities, and military actions in territories.
- Transparency in research perspectives and objectives as well as consistency with national liberation and progressive social change.
- Identifying the subject of study in ways that ring true to women in the setting, so that their interests drive research agendas and research is African-centered and woman-centered.

# Ways I Incorporate Africana Feminist Methodology

- Producing knowledge that has clear policy relevance to improve lives on the ground.
- Working to ensure that new technologies introduced to better the lives of individuals in the community are implemented in a way that considers their impact upon women and children and does not exacerbate existing inequalities.

# This work addresses praxis and sociological literatures, including...

- Sociology of sex and gender (Guillaumin 1995, Risman 2004);
- Race, gender, and class (intersectionality) (Collins 1990, Uttal and Cuadraz 1997, Zerai and Banks 2002);
- Sociology of health and illness – as a branch of medical sociology (Charmaz and Paterniti 1999; Conrad 2003);
- Health activism – related to both social movements and sociology of health and illness (Zerai and Banks 2002, DeLaet and DeLaet 2012, Zerai 2014);
- Methodology (Zerai and Banks 2002; Zerai 2014);
- Sociology of knowledge (Rabaka 2010);
- African (Gaidzanwa 1992, 1993, 1996, 1997, 2006, 2013) and African American sociology (DuBois 1897, 1899, 1903; Cooper 1998; Collins 1990; Rabaka 2010);
- Transdisciplinary **development effectiveness literature** (Brautigam 2012).

# Breaking down barriers and bringing African women's efforts to the fore.

- I aim to help to solve a problem of general sociological importance by creating a database to contribute to intellectual diversity in the above-delineated fields
- The words, theoretical perspectives, research, and political activity of women in African contexts have been obscured from Western researchers
- Their important potential contributions remain inaccessible
- It is our task to break down these barriers and bring African women's academic and activist efforts to promote health and social development to the fore

# AFM and Women's Health Activism in Zimbabwe

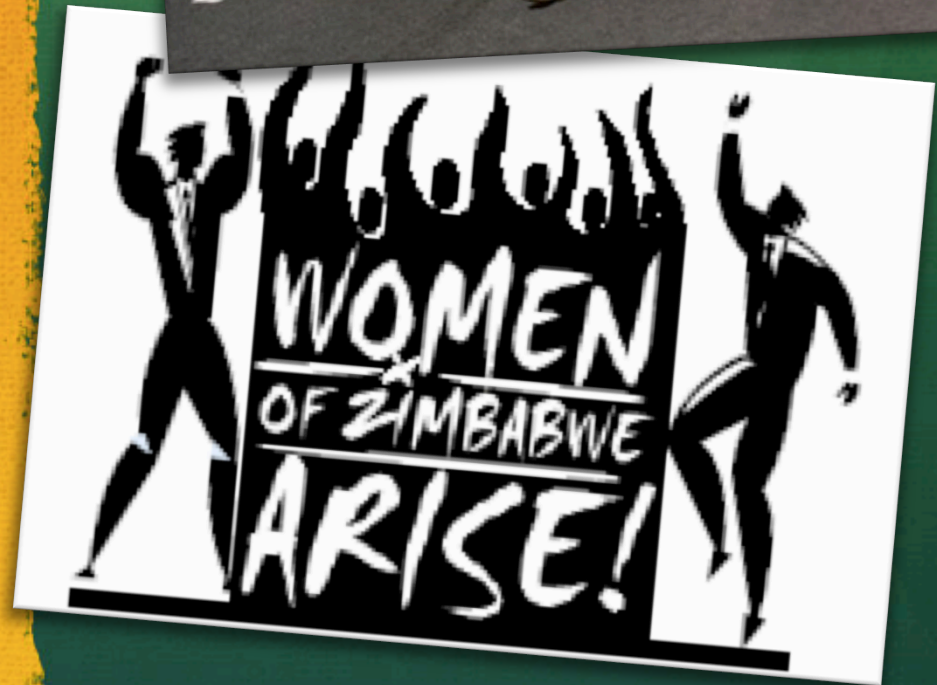
- I created praxis for consulting the work of indigenous scholars in my work.
- Secondary Qualitative Data Analysis: News sources, Scholarly sources, Organizational Newsletters and Websites, any other sources I could find, e.g. 'grey matter' – organizational reports, government documents, etc
- Goal: Gather evidence of health activism in Zimbabwe
- AFM influenced
  - Casting broad net on what constitutes activism to include evidence of women's agency to promote health
  - By historicizing agency/activism to capture what I refer to as 'pre-activism' and to include precolonial, settler colonial, independence movement, as well as current activism/agency

# Health Activism in Zimbabwe



Women and their families are working toward social change.

When the late Sheba Dube and I in 2002 founded WOZA [Women of Zimbabwe Arise], we recognized that women were bearing the brunt in the current crisis. And we also recognized that with these unjust laws, Zimbabweans were silent, and there was no one to counter the propaganda that everything was okay in Zimbabwe. And so we said that we wanted to go out into the street. We would demand to speak the truth about the situation in Zimbabwe. -Jenni Williams



# Health Pre-Activism

(Terri Barnes and  
Everjoyce Win 1992)

- Basic care given to indigenous workers by African women in Zimbabwe during the settler colonial era
- Women's savings club called Ruwadzano
- A Red Cross movement
- Nurse Edith Opperman Maternity Clinic

“in this situation of enforced deprivation, African women were very important in the provisioning and feeding of Salisbury. Some brought food in from the rural areas. Others made the difference between workers' health and illness as they provided cooked meals for men who otherwise would have been trying to subsist on the cheap empty calories of convenience food. As late as 1953 it was noted that the most popular meal for many men consisted of a bottle of Coca-Cola and white bread” (Barnes 1999, 9).

# Common concerns for women that have strong associations with community health during the colonial era

1. Provisioning for themselves and their children
2. Men going to town to work as migrant laborers sometimes sending remittances and sometimes not.
3. Experiencing divorce or desertion.
4. Men's having "town wives."
5. Health and healing for their children.
6. Seeking independence to bring clean water, sanitation, housing, education, and medical care in addition to better land and jobs.
7. Involvement of some women in organizations and armed struggle.
8. Involvement of virtually all women in national liberation to some degree.
9. Coercion of peasant women and families into guerilla struggle.
10. Creating better lives for futures generations.
11. Creating strategies for provisioning, especially among marginalized women.
12. Masculinity in national liberation and armed struggle, including rape and violence against domestic partners.
13. Men's struggling for dominance and a Victorian household model.
14. Revolutionary men using women to achieve national liberation with no intent to grant women's liberation.
15. Willingness to make personal sacrifices so that children could eat and be cared for.

# HEALTH RESOURCES EMANATING FROM INDIGENOUS CULTURE

- A strategy of the liberation army was to promote Africanization.
- Use of nangas
- Use of traditional birth attendants
- Use of medicinal herbs
- Eschewing domesticity
- Turn to Africanization partly a result of lack of access to Western resources during times of economic and political crisis

# NGOs

Africare	Women of Zimbabwe Arise (WOZA)	Kubereka Ishungu group
Save the Children	Africaid	Life Healthcare
Family AIDS Caring Trust (FACT)	MASO, The Midlands AIDS Service Organisation	Human Rights Watch
Matabeleland AIDS council (MAC)	Zimbabwe Health Training Support	World Health Organization – Zimbabwe
Women and AIDS Support Network (WASN)	Physicians for Human Rights	Women’s Coalition of Zimbabwe
Zimbabwe Aids Network (ZAN)	Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria	Africa Health Organisation
SafAIDS	Upenyu	Social Determinants of Health Working Group
The Africa Health Group	ZimHealth	Centre for Sexual Health, HIV and AIDS Research (CeSHHAR)
The International Crisis Group	The Girl Child Network	Voices and Choices advocacy-research project
Community Working Group on Health (CWGH)		

# AIDS Prevention and Treatment Activism

Family AIDS Caring Trust  
(FACT)

Matabeleland AIDS council  
(MAC)

Women and AIDS Support  
Network

SafAIDS

The Global Fund to Fight  
AIDS

Centre for Sexual Health, HIV  
and AIDS Research  
(CeSHHAR)

Zimbabwe Aids Network  
(ZAN)

Treatment Action Campaign

# WOZA

- Everyday circumstances:
- “Everyday ordinary Zimbabweans who may be just going about their business could just get caught up in the trap of being arrested for catching transport that was maybe was not the right price. Any day [they] could be arrested, for buying illegally sold food. . . . On every road in Zimbabwe, there are police officers and the role for these police officers is to find an unofficial way to get paid, because Mugabe does not have enough money to pay them. And so who do they get paid by? They get paid by harassing and intimidating ordinary Zimbabweans on the street, accusing them, and forcing them to give bribes” (Amnesty International 2008b).
- And so what does WOZA do?
- Fueled by Zimbabwe’s lack of a democratic process, inadequate infrastructure, and widespread hunger, Williams said she and her compatriots “would defy unjust laws. And show Zimbabweans courage and show them a nonviolent way to hold the government accountable”
- “We were not highly educated in many of tactics and strategies and all sorts of things. We just said we wanted to do something to **let love overcome hate**” (Amnesty International 2006b).



# WOZA



# DREAMING OF A NEW ZIMBABWE THE PEOPLE'S CHARTER

*Zimbabweans, united and  
resolute, announce:*

That after 26 years of independence, the freedoms and equal opportunities we were promised have not been fulfilled;

The dreams we had of a good life – of dignity, comfort and security - have become nightmares. Zimbabweans must dream once again and turn their dreams into a living reality.

We must keep in mind, however, that we deserve better and we must not be afraid to believe that we have the right to a brighter future and we have the right to contribute to building it.

And therefore, we, the people of Zimbabwe, women, men and children, of all races, tribes and religions, come together with respect for each other and as equals to adopt this Charter, knowing that united we can deliver its possibilities;

And we undertake to work together with strength, courage and hope, until all Zimbabweans can live in a genuinely democratic country in peace and with dignity.

- The WOZA website explains their process: “Since January 2006, WOZA has carried out consultations on social justice across the country. In 284 meetings, almost 10,000 rural and urban people told us what they want in a new Zimbabwe. We wrote down what they said and the result is the People’s Charter.” The government of Zimbabwe did not respond favorably to the charter. “And for launching that people’s charter, we were battered and bruised and put in jail” (Amnesty International 2008b).

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- WOMEN OF ZIMBABWE ARISE (WOZA)  
Press Release February 15 2003
- All Valentine Day Walkers released
- Women of Zimbabwe Arise wish to advise that all 16 Bulawayo participants who spent the night in Police custody have been released . The group of 15 women included Sheba Dube-Phiri, one of the WOZA founders, Father Nigel Johnson and Ricardo Caprez who was accompanying the walk playing a drum.
- The noon walks were organised to spread the following message:
- "Zimbabweans: learn to love again! Say no to hate and violence in all its forms and yes to love. Love us, respect us and allow us to be women. Love us today and everyday." The walk was conducted in Bulawayo, Harare and Victoria Falls, although many supported the move in spirit, locally, regionally and internationally.

# Solutions: A Recap of Africana Feminist Lessons

- A slew of solutions are offered by the thoughts and actions of women's organizational, strategic, and even academic efforts that support the principles of an Africana Feminist approach. Some of these follow:
  - **Widespread education**, including educational advancement to the completion of secondary education and beyond for girls and boys.
  - A **healthy civil society**, and the freedom for social movements to flourish.
  - A functioning and **vibrant infrastructure** for health care, water, and sanitation.
  - **Economic opportunities** for communities and families.
  - Dialogue about and **redressing of gender inequity**.
  - **Free and fair elections**.

# Suggested Readings: Africana Feminist Social Scientific Research Approaches

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