

PRODUCING INCLUSIVE FEMINIST KNOWLEDGE

Positionalities and Discourses
in the Global South

Edited by Akosua Adomako Ampofo
and Josephine Beoku-Betts

ADVANCES IN
GENDER RESEARCH

VOLUME 31

**PRODUCING INCLUSIVE FEMINIST
KNOWLEDGE**

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**PRODUCING INCLUSIVE
FEMINIST KNOWLEDGE:
POSITIONALITIES AND
DISCOURSES IN THE
GLOBAL SOUTH**

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

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SERIES EDITORS' PREFACE

Vasilikie Demos and Marcia Texler Segal

As editors of the Advances in Gender Research series we are pleased to include *Producing Inclusive Feminist Knowledge: Positionalities and Discourses in the Global South*, edited by Akosua Adomako Ampofo and Josephine Beoku-Betts in the series. The idea for this volume grew out of the desire to develop a genuine global feminist scholarship that acknowledges power imbalances, does not oversimplify, recolonize or stereotype, and that incorporates counterdiscourses as well as dominant ones. Discussion for a volume like this one began at the 2016 International Sociological Association (ISA) Forum held in Vienna and continued through the years to the ISA World Congress of Sociology held in Toronto in 2018 and beyond. While a series co-editor (Segal) is one of the contributors and the guest editors are well-known to us, there are new voices here and colleagues we know offer new data and themes. The volume demonstrates the progress in the development of feminist knowledge that has been made since our 2001 volume, (Demos & Segal) *An International Feminist Challenge to Theory*, and how much more there is to accomplish.

Adomako Ampofo and Beoku-Betts have developed a volume based on rigorous scholarly examination and energized by activist commitment and in the process have presented a liberated feminism. Contributing authors identify problems in much existing work beginning with that of terminology and the dual concepts of polar South versus polar North. They use these terms, though they point to issues these concepts raise including the fact that their geographical meaning does not entirely coincide with actual power imbalances. Associated with this issue is the power imbalance represented by feminists of the global North theorizing about global South realities noting that key issues such as the importance of land distribution and use and the role of the state may be missed because they are largely absent from Northern paradigms. They also warn about simplifying the legacy of colonialism and focusing on such practices as Sati, thereby digressing, as well as engaging in voyeuristic attention to the bodies of African women.

Contributing authors use and argue for a variety of methodologies – both qualitative and quantitative – in producing feminist knowledge. These include surveys and interviews and critical content analysis as well historical structural analysis and critical review of literature. The importance of cyber analysis and the examination of social media messages is highlighted.

REFERENCE

Demos, V., & Segal, M. T. (Eds.). (2001). *An international feminist challenge to theory*. Amsterdam: JAI.

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EDITOR PREFACE

Josephine Beoku-Betts and Akosua Adomako Ampofo

This book is in many ways a culmination of the intersection of our personal and professional journeys as Black, African feminist scholars – one of us located in the global South and the other in the global North. Our conversations began in 1994, when we first met at a training workshop on Qualitative Research Methods at the University of Georgia, where Josephine was on the faculty in Sociology and Women’s studies. At the time, Akosua was a Senior Research Fellow at the University of Ghana, and a Ph.D. student in Sociology at Vanderbilt University. Although our professional journeys were dissimilar in some ways (location and trajectory), we found shared points of connection through conversations about our personal and political journeys with feminist scholarship, our relationships with students and the curricular, and our experiences in the academy. Over the years these discussions developed into writing projects, co-authored publications, and co-leadership professional roles.

More specifically, this volume emerged out of two conferences of the International Sociological Association (ISA) held in 2016 (Vienna) and 2018 (Toronto), and has also been shaped by multiple shared opportunities for additional scholarship and reflection since then, including many other feminist gatherings. Around 2004, Margaret Abraham and Esther Ngan-Ling Chow, then co-presidents of the ISA’s Research Committee on Women, Gender and Society (RC32)¹ and both feminist colleagues with whom we had worked closely within Sociologists for Women and Society (SWS), encouraged us to join RC32. They subsequently also encouraged us to run as co-presidents of RC32, which we did successfully in 2012, beginning our term in 2014. One of the most important reasons why we responded to this call to leadership was to further highlight the work of feminist scholars from the global South. Our goal as co-presidents of RC32 was to increase the presence and participation of women and men from Africa specifically, and the global South² more generally.³

During the 2016 ISA Forum held in Vienna and the 2018 World Congress of Sociology held in Toronto, we organized two sessions to discuss feminist epistemology issues in the global South, which eventually went through a long and exhausting labor to give birth to this book. The 2016 session, entitled “Knowledge Production: Feminist Perspectives in the 21st Century,” included Akosua K. Darkwah, Bandana Purkayastha, and Marcia Texler Segal, all of whom have chapters in this volume, as well as presentations by Margaret Abraham and Evangelia Tastsoglou, and Consuelo Corradi and Maria Carmela Agodi. The 2018 session, entitled “Producing Inclusive Feminist Knowledge: Voices from the Global South,” included Manisha Desai, Sue Ann Barratt, Solange Simões, Marlise Matos, and Josephine Beoku-Betts, all of whom have chapters in this

volume. Akosua was the discussant for both sessions, as well as a speaker for the Closing Plenary Session of the 2016 Forum, where her presentation was titled, “Black Lives Matter and the Status of the Africana World.”⁴ At that same Forum, Rhoda Reddock, herself a former president of the RC32, was our selected invited speaker for a common session, where she spoke on “Sociology, Feminisms and the Global South: Back to the Future.”⁵

In 2016, Josephine was invited as a keynote speaker to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the Centre for Gender Studies and Advocacy (CEGENSA)⁶ at the University of Ghana, where she spoke on the topic “Ghanaian Women Scientists: Innovators and Knowledge Producers for the Nation State.” In 2017, she was an invited panelist at a session organized by the ISA and Criminologists without Borders on “Women’s Empowerment, Sustainable Development, and Strategies to Eliminate Violence against Women and Girls: Sociological Contributions” at the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women NGO Forum in New York. As part of our goal to bring Southern feminist voices to global feminist dialogues in the academy, we initiated the idea for a workshop on publishing in peer reviewed feminist journals at the 2018 ISA Congress in Toronto. The workshop was organized by the editor of *Gender & Society*, Jo Reger, with participation from the editors of *Current Sociology* and the *Canadian Women’s Studies Journal*, and was well received by RC32 members, including several from the global South.

As we reflected on the issues raised by the speakers and session participants in these various sessions and workshops, an important common thread that resonated with us quite forcefully was the politics of knowledge production, especially feminist knowledge in the global South. The following section explains our social location as co-editors of this anthology.

I (Josephine) approach this book and my chapter from a social location as a global South Black feminist immigrant scholar activist based in the United States but with strong and ongoing connections to my West African roots, particularly Sierra Leone. I work from the vantage point of transnational feminist, critical African feminist, and Black feminist epistemologies. All three lenses are interdisciplinary and intersect contextually and they have singularly or on multiple levels informed my scholarship, pedagogy, activism, and engagement in feminist dialogues in both global North and South spaces. In keeping with this commitment, I have taught, developed curricula, and conducted training and Study Abroad in my field in the United States as well as in Sierra Leone and Ghana. I train my students to appreciate that they are meaningful sources of knowledge and must nurture their ability to question and reinterpret conventional knowledge about power structures and social relations, beginning in the classroom. My research is in the field of African feminist studies, and my current work focuses on post-conflict Sierra Leone and women’s mobilizations for rights of full citizenship. I’m interested in how women’s organizations have leveraged political transformations in the state to support capacity building and policy reforms to promote gender equality and women’s rights. I also conduct research on African women in science, examining how women scientists in Africa position themselves in relation to the politics and practice of scientific knowledge production.

While I (Akosua) consider feminist scholarship to be inherently disruptive of hegemonies, I appreciate that not everyone feels the need to bring their scholarship directly into non-academic spaces, something that I seek to do consciously and critically. I consider myself an activist scholar addressing questions of identity and power within families, institutions, political and religious spaces, and the knowledge industry; I aim to bring these conversations into “public spaces” such as pre-university schools and churches, onto radio, TV and other electronic media, and through public lectures for a “lay audience.” I am passionate about knowledge production in and on Global Africa by people of African descent. Decolonizing the academy/curriculum has almost become a catch phrase today; however, guided by my intellectual ancestors and seniors, my commitment to changing inaccurate and damaging narratives about Black and African women through gendered sociological enquiries and coverage of historical accounts by African women was established early in my DNA. I am currently involved in a project with Kate Skinner⁷ conducting filmed oral history interviews with Ghanaian gender activists and “political women” of the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s to create a publicly accessible archive of gender activism in postcolonial Ghana. In my work on black masculinities, I explore the shifting nature of identities among young men in Africa and the diaspora and how this may be associated with (possibilities for) transformations in gender relations.

NOTES

1. 2006–2010.
2. We discuss the politics of naming later in this Introduction.
3. While we cannot claim that the numbers of African members increased significantly during our tenure, we did see a slight increase.
4. The theme for the Forum was “The Futures We Want: Global Sociology and the Struggles for a Better World.”
5. The Common Sessions present distinguished speakers from the ISA’s Research Committees, Working Groups, and Thematic Groups who reflect on the Forum’s common theme.
6. Akosua served as the foundation Director of CEGENSA from 2005 to 2010.
7. University of Birmingham and with funding from the British Academy.

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Most of the chapters in this collection were birthed out of panels of the Research Committee on Women, Gender and Society (RC32) of the International Sociology Association at a Forum (Vienna, 2016) or Congress (Toronto 2018) during our tenure as Co-Presidents. We are extremely grateful for the support of the entire Research Committee, and would like to express our thanks, especially, to former and current Presidents Margaret Abraham, Esther Chow, Evie Tastsoglou, and Melanie Heath for their work on behalf of RC32, and especially for the support and encouragement they extended to the two of us during our term as Co-Presidents. Our work over the years has been strengthened and refined by many other collaborations, and we would like to express our gratitude in particular to Sociologists for Women and Society (SWS), and the Women's Caucus of the African Studies Association for their homes of intellectual sisterhood and friendship. We are grateful for our students over the years – they questioned us, encouraged us, and thus contributed to, as well as validated our work. We also wish to acknowledge our institutions where we found homes in which to nurture our intellectual work – the Institute of African Studies at the University of Ghana, and the Center for Women, Gender and Sexuality Studies at Florida Atlantic university. To the authors whose works are represented here and who either participated in an RC32 panel at an ISA Congress or Forum, or who graciously submitted a paper at our invitation, we say a very big “thank you.” Finally, we thank the series editors of this volume, Marcia Segal and Vicky Demos for entrusting this very pleasurable task to us, for their patience as Covid-19 threw us off-kilter, and for traveling the journey of this volume with us.

– Akosua Adomako Ampofo and Josephine Beoku-Betts