

A Mixed Legacy: The Institutionalization of the Transnational Gender Equality Agenda in Lesotho: 1966-2005

Abstract

This thesis attempted to examine how the interface between the domestic political context and the articulation of the transnational feminist agenda function to define and shape the place of gender equality issues within mainstream national policy debates and processes in Lesotho. The study identified a number of development actors interacting within this space to claim their place in fighting gender inequalities; it explored how these actors' efforts in their conceptualisation, articulation and prioritisation of the global gender equality agenda have contributed to the marginalisation of women's political advancement. These actors are; the state, political parties, women's feminist organisations, mainstream mixed-sex NGOs, and international development agencies. While political parties may not be visible within most international space ruling parties play an important role especially as their manifestos influence government's policy, hence they have been included for analysis in this study. While this study is not a historical analysis an attempt has been made to periodize the gender equality trajectory so as to understand how the agenda entered the mainstream development debates as well as how different historical moments functioned to shape the institutionalisation of transnational gender equality discourses.

This study has highlighted a number of factors within the domestic context that have interacted with the global feminist agenda to restructure gender equality politics in Lesotho. One of the major findings of the study is that the institutionalisation of liberal feminist issues in this small land-locked country has not been influenced by any significant pressure from either local women's movement or NGOs working on democracy, neither have the issues been necessarily pursued due to political will from government nor political parties. Nonetheless, the study also argues that the internationalisation of feminist issues has not been imposed on Lesotho; this is so because local gender activists within and outside the state have participated in major international and regional forums where global feminist norms and standards are set, in the same manner Lesotho government has acceded to almost all international and regional instruments meant to address gender inequalities. While processes of globalisation have enhanced the spread of these feminist ideas their implementation has been influentially determined by domestic socio-economic and

political dynamics that have produced contradictions and paradoxes that currently characterise the Lesotho gender landscape.

The institutionalisation of the transnational feminist agenda in Lesotho has been characterised by contradictory tendencies that emanate from a narrow domestic political space to claim women's political advancement. Drawing on the political opportunity structures created by transnational feminist activism a number of liberal feminist reforms have been instituted under both democratic and undemocratic regimes. While shifts in the global development discourses have exerted pressure for commitment to feminist demands, the financial incentives that come with the global feminist agenda have restructured the parameters within which gender equality discourses have been articulated. At another level these incentives have perpetuated dependency that has limited feminist consciousness while at the same time the domestic political context has been able to frame terms of engaging the feminist agenda and has narrowed the political space for demanding responsiveness to women's political demands.