

# CHAPTER FOUR

## Gender and images – a historical perspective

### Key issues

- Images of gender have described our past and help to frame our present in Southern Africa.
- Who makes these images, who the images portray, and who sees them, have played a key role in perceptions of ourselves and of others.
- The history of gender in photographic images in Africa follows the story of colonialism to liberation – from both sides of the divide.
- How we see ourselves, as men and women, is explored through this record.



From Mozambican photo archives, circa 1880, source unknown.

## Introduction

Africa's history of gender imagery in the media has been influenced by who had access to producing media, what kinds of techniques and materials were available, and by the defined audiences for those images. This review of the visual literature over time lays the foundation for our understanding of visual imagery in Southern Africa's media today, and its further development.

Before photography developed, the first published visual images about Africa came from European travellers, drawing their impressions for audiences in Europe. Both the artists and their intended audiences were well aware that these represented the view – often explicitly expressed – of the “civilised” observer of exotic or monstrous life inhabiting “Darkest Africa”. Often, these images were based as much on myth and imagination as representation.

Many of these pictures portrayed issues to do with gender. This image of gender set the stage for stereotypes whose echoes still confront us today.

Photography developed during the late 1800's, during the time of colonial expansion into Africa. The earliest photography on the continent reflected this time. Most recorded the adventures of European travellers, followed by “ethnographic studies” by colonial officials. The first thorough history of photography in Namibia captures this spirit in its title: *The Colonising Camera*.

Another early type of photography of Africa became part of the postcard trade. This trade could be characterised as “been there, seen this” images sent home to less literate families in Europe. Postcard production for Europe from Africa linked (in publishing and distribution companies) to Europe's large near-pornographic postcard trade, commonly available from seaside resorts. Recent studies note that these cards laid the foundations for the “standard” image of African women focusing on glistening bare breasts (actually oiled by the photographer to make them glisten).



Ernst Hecker's studio in South West Africa, reflecting exotic and western influences. The photograph was probably taken for advertising purposes. Picture Source: *The Colonising Camera*, eds. Hartman, Hays, Silvester; UCT Press, Cape Town SA 1998, p.13.

In the 19th century, cameras were cumbersome, requiring large darkrooms, using easily damaged, heavy, gel-coated plates, taking long periods to expose. The earliest pictures therefore had to be “staged” – set-up scenes with posed subjects. Very early photographic portraits required the subject to be held in place by metal braces, so they could not blur the picture made during the minutes-long exposure.

The techniques of photography, and what it could do to make images, shifted dramatically in the early 20th century. Portable and easily stored film replaced gel-covered plates. Exposure times became faster. The process of taking a series of “rapid-fire” images built mechanisms of the newly invented machine gun. A person with a camera could now record ongoing events.

There have been a number of studies on the links between the development of the modern photographic camera and automatic weapons, from the period around the First World War. Conceptions linking guns and cameras also came from their use in big-game hunting expeditions in Southern Africa. Hence, photography is littered with terms like “shooting” a subject. Film “cassettes” mirror bullet cassettes used in machine pistols.

Photography also promoted the other exotic image of Africa – wildlife and safari hunting. The photograph of the courageous male hunter with his foot on the dead lion rapidly became a classic image of “the real man” in the Western world.



*Colonising Cameras*, p.104: original caption: “The white male hunter on top. Cocky Hahn seated atop a dead lioness on the back of a lorry...” Note caption of earlier picture in collection: “Exemplifying masculinity: Cocky Hahn conquering nature” (from *Colonising Camera* p.23).

### Early colonial images of gender in Africa

The Khoisan woman Saartje Baartman was paraded before European audiences in the 1800s, contrasting what was described as her “primitive” figure to that of “civilised” European females. This laid the foundation for stereotyped racial and gender differences that were accepted by so-called “objective western science” into the last few decades. The European (and American) press of the time hailed these scientists as discovering and presenting objective truths. They used these myths about human difference to justify and advance prejudice and discrimination. In April 2002, following complex negotiations with France, Baartman’s remains were finally brought back to South Africa and laid to rest in a series of emotion-filled ceremonies.

#### Exercise: Gender and race – the Saartje Baartman case

Examine the different images of Saartje Baartman in **Handout eight**. These include: 1) Early drawings of Saartje Baartman; 2) Images of Baartman’s cast “coming home” (with her remains) pictured in the *Namibian* and *the Star* and 3) a picture of a fashion designer’s dress in 2003, conceived of to fit his conception of Saartje Baartman.

How does the early (1810) published drawing of Saartje Baartman compare with the plaster caste made from her body after death? In the two pictures of the caste, how are gender issues differently portrayed? What do participants think of the fashion designer’s “dress”?





**Training tips:** These images raise many questions about how “accurate” and “truthful” a portrait is; and how it can be arranged to “play into” racial or sexist stereotypes. Some points to note may include:

- Stereotyped dress: The animal skin kaross is considered a fundamental part of her “Bushman” identity, even where – on the caste – it appears to be a fake leopard skin. Would she have worn this kind of skin as a young woman resident of Cape Town in 1800, before she was taken to Europe?
- Nudity and cover-ups: How do the different pictures show or expose physical features, including features relating to gender and to race? Compare the way in which *the Star* used this photo versus the way the *Namibian* used it.
- Racial/gender stereotyping/exaggeration: The enlarged backside repeated in the early drawings became a standard stereotype for “Bushman” women. Note that the early drawings shown here were claimed in the newspapers to be “scientific” portrayals.
- In the photographs of the caste, does the different draping of the cloth affect what we see and feel about this woman and her body?
- How are these stereotypes carried forward in modern times through the “award winning” fashion design?

## From captured images to photojournalism

From the 1880s, printing press techniques developed to permit the publication of half-tone photographs (previously, presses were unable to print shades, so all published images had to be line or block drawings). In Southern Africa, the first printing press technology that could publish half-toned photographs was introduced in 1907 in Johannesburg. However, although there was an active black newspaper world, the black press did not have facilities for regularly printing half-tone photographs for several more decades.

The tradition of social documentary photography in Africa began with Eli Weinberg, a trade



Studio photograph, collected by Santu Mofokeng, South Africa published in *Chimurenga*, Biko in Parliament Vol 3.



Photograph of Lilian Ngoye, by Eli Weinberg, *Portrait of a People*, International Defence and Aid Fund, London, 1981, p.177.

unionist and photographer who fled from Eastern Europe to South Africa in 1929. Weinberg photographed the conditions of workers in African townships and factories, until his banning, jail sentence, and eventual exile in 1977. His work throughout this period includes many outstanding representations of women, and especially working women. His portraits of women leaders in the trade unions and the women’s movement in the African National congress (ANC) provide some of the most treasured images of gender-sensitive photographs from this early period.

In the first half of the 20th century, for most inhabitants of the growing towns of Africa the most common photographic image remained the studio portrait. These became the visual

key to family identity and history: the picture of mother and father on the shelf in the living room. For the most part, professional photographers who ran photographic studios in the growing cities took these photographs. These images often recorded best clothes and established social status (including “establishing” the formal marriage). Studio photos played key roles in defining family identity, especially where migrant labour meant the man might often not be present in the home.

## Photojournalism and the Era of Drum

South Africa in the 1950s witnessed growing political resistance to apartheid repression. This reflected in the birth of *Drum* magazine in 1951. *Drum* put social documentary photography in South Africa on the map. The photography department, started by German photographer Jürgen Schadenberg show-cased photographers who became household names throughout Southern Africa: Peter Magubane, Bob Gosani, Alf Kumalo, and G.R. Naidoo. *Drum* produced editions that were read, and viewed, and contributed to, from countries throughout Africa.



Dolly Rathebe showing off a bikini on a mine dump sand dune.

In many ways, *Drum* photojournalism followed the well-established Western model: male photographers created images of women consciously based upon American movies and social life. One famous picture shows singer Dolly Rathebe showing off a bikini on a mine dump sand dune – the Johannesburg version of Hollywood starlet on beach.

But the *Drum* team also produced an unending stream of images of life in the townships; of music and social scenes; of daily strife on the streets; and of the struggle against

apartheid. In *the poster below*, the original photograph shows Violet Hashe addressing a public meeting during the Defiance Campaign in Fordsburg in 1952. Violet Hashe was a blind trade unionist and ANC activist. This *Drum* image of her has inspired and been reproduced as a political rallying call for the women’s struggle within the liberation movement. The words on the poster are from Oliver Tambo’s 1984 speech hailing the ANC-in-exile’s “Year of the Women”.

The pages of *Drum* carried stories about both men and women. Pictures of women in struggle by *Drum* photographers became key images for women’s rights and women’s power today.



...to organise our womenfolk into a powerful, united and active force for revolutionary change. This task falls on men and women alike – all of us as comrades.

**FORWARD WITH THE YEAR OF THE WOMEN!**

### Exercise: Know your past to understand your future

Each country in Southern Africa has its own unique history. If time permits, the training should include a visit to the national archives or museum where participants should view displays of their country's past. How many of these historical photographs are of "important people"? How many are of men? How many are of women? Do participants know of, and can they access, other photographic or image collections that might give a more equitable gender balance?



**Training tip:** This exercise should bring up questions about what people and processes are involved in selecting, recording, and preserving historical images – and what the gender implications of this are. Many historical image sources may be very hard to actually access, and it is important that participants are aware of the fragile physical nature of some historical collections.

### Gender and imagery in the liberation movement

The struggle to liberate Africa from colonialism led to profound changes in how women behaved and were perceived in communities and society as a whole. Where liberation movements mobilised people's armies, women were deliberately portrayed in camouflage uniforms and carrying guns: in Zimbabwe, Mozambique and Angola, in South Africa and Namibia.

The debates around these images remain intriguing. What was real, and what was wishful thinking about the potential role of women in the struggle? One interesting – and endless – debate was whether to show a woman carrying a gun and a baby. Was this ever a "realistic" picture (especially, not deliberately staged) – did it really happen, and if it did, how could the woman carry both functions – childcare and war?

### Exercise: How liberation struggles challenged gender stereotypes

Consider the images of FRELIMO women from the liberation struggle in Mozambique in **Handout nine** and ask the following questions:

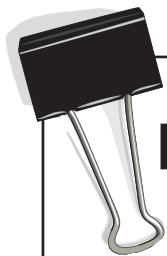
- In what way do these images challenge conventional notions of the role of women?
- In particular, how do participants respond to the image of the woman freedom fighter with a gun in one hand and a baby in another?
- In what way have liberation struggles in Southern Africa helped to advance the cause of gender equality?



**Training tips:** Periods of upheaval, as painful as they may be, are also historically moments when the status quo is thrown into disarray, providing the opportunity to challenge established norms. Liberation struggles in Southern Africa have had race and the overthrow of white minority rule as their dominant theme. But this also opened a space for debate and discussion on gender issues. It is only logical that if one is fighting for fair political representation of all ethnic and racial groups the question should arise of why so few women are found in decision-making. Liberation wars in particular threw traditional roles of women upside down, literally "taking them out of the kitchen". Unfortunately, as we shall see in subsequent sections, this was often short lived.

### Photographing the struggle

Throughout the 70s and 80s, photojournalism took on new dimensions in documenting struggles against colonialism and settler colonialism. Committed photographers in the townships produced image after image of the mass resistance. And, by the eighties, they found outlets for their images in the growing community and grassroots press – newspapers like Grassroots, student newspaper SASPU National, trade union publications, and in progressive, community-oriented photographic news agencies like SouthLight and Afripics.



## handout nine

### Women in struggle in Mozambique



*(Rui Assubuji of the Association of Mozambican Photographers, also a participant in the workshop to develop this manual, collected the above images from Mozambican archives.)*



Many of these images highlighted the oppression of women, and their role in the liberation movement. By the mid-1980s, community photographers in Southern Africa had placed women's issues on the photographic agenda. They also promoted the role of women as the makers of photographic images, beginning a discussion on the way gender perspectives might impact on imagery.

### From the bush to the kitchen?

What has happened to women since the liberation struggles that took place in many Southern African countries? To what extent were liberation struggles just a transient feature in the struggle for gender equality? To what extent did they help to speed up the march towards equality for men and women as well?

### Exercise: Going back home

In small groups, ask participants to jot down names of prominent women in the independence and liberation struggles of whichever country you are in. Where are these women now? If you have access to it, you may want to use the well-known video, made but banned in Zimbabwe, called *Flame*. This documents the lives of two women freedom fighters, including the sexual violence that they experienced (about which very little is ever heard) during the war, and the conventional lives that they returned to after the war. What does this documentary say about the place of gender equality in the struggle for liberation?



Dorothy Nyembe, shortly after her release from prison in 1984, addressing a meeting of the Federation of South African Women in Mamelodi, Pretoria. (Photographer not named); Source: Vukani Makhosikazi; South African Women Speak; London, 1985.



End of the liberation war  
From: Mozambican National Archives



**Training tips:** The “going from the bush to the kitchen” is a painful reality for many women freedom fighters in the region. However, there are also many examples – in Namibia, Angola, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, South Africa and elsewhere – of women who fought for freedom and have gone on to play prominent roles in their countries. Although gender equality took a back seat to national liberation, the latter helped to expose the inconsistency between freedom and democracy at a national level and the continued oppression of women on the ground.

## From Women in Development to Gender and Development

As independence spread across and down Africa, new stakeholders reassessed the role of African women as workers, producers, and citizens involved in – or left out of – the development process. “Women in Development” (WID) became a conscious theme, promoted by donor agencies, small business development schemes, and new governments. But the early approaches continued to see women as an “add on” to development rather than central role-players. The schemes built on the traditional roles of women (sewing, knitting, small livestock etc) and failed to challenge the structural causes of inequality (such as unequal access to land and resources). The schemes also failed to underscore the need for men to change their attitudes and behaviour. The Gender and Development (GAD) approach stresses the need for a fundamental transformation of gender roles and expectations if genuine equality is to be achieved.

### Exercise: From WID to GAD

With reference to **Handout ten**, lead a discussion on whether the approach in this story, and the image used, might be regarded as a WID or GAD approach, and why. Compare the image in this story, from a Malawian newspaper, to the images of women and men working together, and to a man carrying a baby on the opposite page. How do they differ? From these examples, ask participants to attempt to define the Women in Development as opposed the Gender and Development approaches.



**Training tips:** The article from the Daily Times of Malawi is a classic example of the Women in Development approach. Jesse Kaunde is said to keep out of the “gender hullabaloo”, choosing instead to better her little patch, “despite her husband being readily available as the family’s sole breadwinner”. Kaunde, “the woman who can make you grin with delight”, is depicted in a docile pose on her farm. The images from Mozambique on the opposite page speak of women and men working together: notice the woman literacy teacher and male students as well as the male and female workers at a shoe factory. The man carrying a baby in a cloth across his shoulder in a rural and traditional setting is a rare and telling example of new approaches – and new images.



# Jesse Kaunde: African Woman Food Farmer

## ...a woman who can make you grin with delight

BY BRIGHT SONANI

ALTHOUGH for several years women the world over have been preaching and striving for equal status with their counterparts-men but up to now, a few women can really stand tall among men and proudly show the world their achievements.

Often the gender hullabaloo and struggle end in boardrooms, workshops and podiums.

But for 46-year-old Jesse Kaunde the story is different.

She is a woman who through practical hard work has achieved bigger than life stardom where most men have failed.

Instead of preaching and getting involved in theoretical gender equality struggle she is a hard working woman who is always on the move to find new ways of improving the living standard of her family despite her husband being readily available as the family's sole bread winner.

Kaunde has turned herself into a real bread winner warranting her to stand tall among other women and leave most men grinning with delight.



**Kaunde: Showing the pride of her farm a kraal of Heifers**

Visiting her humble, modest but self sufficient home along Blantyre-Zomba road in the area of Village Headman Mangwengwe, T/A Malemia one would have no reason to question why this woman was chosen this year's African Woman Food Farmer-an initiative of the Hunger Project.

Her home tells its own story. It boasts of a kraal for heifer

breed of cattle, three big fish ponds and an all season food farming irrigation scheme which produces maize and different kinds of vegetables capable of feeding her family of three children and surrounding households throughout the year.

According to Kaunde all this is a result of her toil and hard work through the years.

"Although I am happily

married I have been working hard for the past four years to supplement whatever my husband does for the family. When it comes to work I even forget that I am a woman in the house, I take myself as an assistant to my husband in fending for the family," said a proud Kaunde when *Malawi News* caught up with her at her home recently.

She adds: "I am now a happy and free woman, not that I have been fighting to be equal to men but because of my hard work. My family relies on me for livelihood. However, my desire to work hard does not end there. Every time I think of how I can develop my activities further."

The most eye catching item on this small farm is a simple and modest irrigation network which only uses gravity force. One cannot imagine that this creativity came from a woman who claims not to have gone far with her education.

Small channels from the high gradient of Chinamwali river water over three hectares of crops and three fish ponds covering 40 square metres each.

Amazingly, with no extra technical means she is able to manually control the flow of water into her garden and the ponds.

"In my ponds I am able to realise over K5,000 during the harvesting season and I harvest each pond three times a year," said Kaunde.

Kaunde said after all her achievements she is free to assist and give advice to those who want to venture into what she is doing.

"I urge my fellow women that now they should wake up and start working hard," she added.

Kaunde has not toiled for nothing.

The Hunger Project has chosen the women as this year's African Woman Food Farmer preceding a Ugandan woman who had the high profiled accolade last year.

"When I heard of my achievement I could not believe it but now I am happy that whatever I have been doing here has been recognised at international level," said Kaunde when asked about the award.

Hunger Project Country

Director Callisto Chimombo said the award is given to disadvantaged African women in recognition of their hard work in quest to feed their families.

"When realised that in Africa it is a woman who toils everyday throughout her life to feed the family but her work is never recognised," she said.

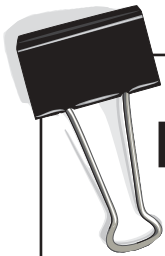
Chimombo said the Hunger Project was running two centres in Malawi at Jali in Zomba and Nchalo in

Chikwawa to teach women in food production and self sustenance as a means of ensuring that hunger is checked.

The projects involves farming, rearing various livestock and small business enterprises.

Kaunde, as a torch bearer for women in the country will receive a torch symbol from the Ugandan woman at a function to be held in the district in presence of President Bakili Muluzi.





# handout ten

## Women in Development versus Gender and Development



Source: Mozambican archives