



CODESRIA



CODESRIA

13

ḡmḡ

Assemblée générale

General Assembly

Assembleia Geral

الجمع العام الثالث عشر

L'Afrique et les défis du XXIème siècle
Africa and the Challenges of the Twenty First Century
A África e os desafios do Século XXI

إفريقيا وتحديات القرن الواحد والعشرين

**'Undoing', not doing Patriarchal Gender Relations in 21st Century Africa:
An analysis of the 2011 Malawi Women and Girls Data Sheet**

Jessie Kabwila Kapasula

5 - 9 / 12 / 2011

Rabat Maroc / Morocco

The woman question is one of the key problems that Africa (like the rest of the world), has entered the 21st century battling to resolve. Despite the various strategies that African governments, non governmental organisations, scholars and critics have employed to end this problem, evidence abounds that gender relations remain dangerously skewed against women (McFadden 1996, 2003, 2006). The anticipated change in the lives of women has not taken place (Forna 2006). For example, if one is to ask what position women occupy in the Malawi of 2011, the headline of Malawi News April 23-29 2011 would not only provide an answer but evidence how futile strategies to develop the position of women have been so far: 'Malawian women vulnerable to illness and diseases-report' (Tizifa 2001, Chirwa 1996). The question that stares one in the face is why, when so much local, regional, continental and international efforts have been poured into improving the woman condition in Malawi? This paper attributes this problem to three spinal reasons. Firstly, an acute deficiency in the decolonisation of strategies employed to define and employ the category woman as a research tool. This is seen in the consistent failure to call out the patriarchy of western organised religion and education. More often than not, they are even defined and prescribed as remedies rather than vehicles and enablers of gender inequality. Furthermore, it is usually the educated African women, a group that is not only a colonial product, but one whose very existence depends on the perpetuation of colonial products, who are the main players in conceptualising, implementing and evaluating efforts to 'transform' gender inequality. Expecting and depending on this group of Africans to transform gender relations in Africa, is like expecting a round cake from a square baking tin. It actually amounts to 'doing' (Butler 1990) instead of 'undoing' gender (Deutsch 2007, Oyewumi 2006, Nzegwu 2003, McFadden 1996,2009). Taking off from a critical analysis of the gender relations in Chimamanda Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* (2003), Seffi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come* (2009), Tsitsi Dangarembga (2003) and Aminatta Forna's *Ancestor Stones* (2006), this paper engages the Malawi section in World's Women and Girls 2011 data Sheet of 2011 Malawi, constructing a literary argument, arguing that gender relations in Africa of the 21st century can be transformed by using strategies that are class inclusive and diverse, methods that radically deconstruct the patriarchy of western organised religion and education.