

Research Article

An Ethical Critique of the Sexist Mining Myths and the Gender Factor in the Extractive Industry of Southern Africa

Keba Cyril Muko* 

St Bonaventure University College, Catholic University of Zambia, Lusaka, Zambia

Abstract

The extractive industry is an economic venue with enormous potentialities for men and women in Southern Africa particularly, DRC, Zambia, Malawi, Zimbabwe and South Africa. This part of the African Continent is flourishing with mineral resources in which women participate in different capacities. The contrast here is that of the increased number of women in this industry as opposed to the decline of social and economic wellbeing of women on account of gender based violence and many other oppressions against them. These dehumanising activities against women are fuelled by cultural and sexist mining myths from male peers reinforcing gender disparities. Thus, from an ethical perspective, the present study analyses cultural and sexist myths, deconstructing their patriarchal foundation and valorising women's human agency and rights within the extractive industry. It is contended that women can contribute to the economic growth of the mining industry in Southern Africa provided that public institutions insure gender parity in the industry. In different levels, a response will be provided to the question: How can the cultural and sexist mining myths be ethically engaged to valorise women's human agency and rights within the Southern Africa Extractive Industry? In response, this paper critically assesses the cultural basis of sexist myths from a perspective of feminist ethics, proceeding by deconstructing the patriarchal foundation of these myths and affirming women's experience based on their human and economic capabilities. The present study proposes to contribute to the ethical discourse on gender parity, and the pursuit of women's social and economic rights in the Extractive Industry.

Keywords

Mining Sexist Myths, Feminist Ethics, Gender Parity, Extractive Industry, Economic Wellbeing

1. Introduction

The Southern Africa women, especially those in rural and semi urban areas experience multiple forms of socioeconomic exclusions regarding rights to land ownership, participation in most formal works, fair pay for work done, skill training and education [1]. Among the contributing factors to this situation can be mentioned the cultural beliefs and patriarchal dominance of social norms. The Extractive Industry is a typical example of a workplace hostile to women, specifically the

mining industry, where women are faced with enormous challenges in their efforts to make a living. Analyzing their situations in mines, especially in Artisanal and Small Scale Mining (ASM), various interventions have encouraged women to withdraw from mining activities, alleging that it does not offer possibilities for a long-term economic sustainability, and therefore, women should be assisted to engage in alternatives sources of income [2]. Furthermore, to moti-

*Corresponding author: kebamuko@gmail.com (Keba Cyril Muko)**Received:** 5 June 2024; **Accepted:** 1 July 2024; **Published:** 20 August 2024

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vate the urgency and necessity of the exit- solution, protagonists of the 'Mines-Exit' strategy points at sexual abuse suffered by women in mining. The proponents argue that exiting mines will protect women from sexual abuse, reduce the gender factor in the EI, and offer them opportunities for lasting economic solutions in other fields. To my opinion, the 'Mines-Exit' solution implicitly cushions the cultural beliefs of sexual myths that create a fertile ground for gender based violence against women in mining. Arguing in favor of women's integration in the EI, this article explores the ethical implications of the sexist myths and challenges they pose to the participation of women in mining. Key element of the ethical inquiry will be the way in which women are afforded to use their human capabilities to pursue their aspirations for a life that they have reason to value [3]. This article will put up arguments consistent with women's economic agency based on the assumptions of gender justice and freedom of choice that cannot legitimately be overridden by any patriarchal discourse or practice. At the back of our mind is the conception that: "unlike any other social group, relationships between women and men in the family and community are a key site of gender-specific injustice, and therefore any strategy to advance gender justice must focus on power relations in the domestic or 'private' context. [...] The patriarchal mindsets and social relations that are produced in the private sphere are not contained there, but infuse most economic, social and political institutions" [4]. The private sphere of relational dynamics between men and women entangle in power relations that affect all sectors of life from economic, political and social institutions. This article shows that sexist myth is a tool that assists men in this manipulation of power relationships manifested in the economic sector of the Extractive Industry (EI). To expose the sexist myths and deconstruct the supportive discourse, the article firstly explains the power of cultural beliefs as deployed in Southern Africa. Secondly, the article displays how the cultural beliefs affect women in mining. Thirdly, specific sexist mining myths are explained. Fourthly, an ethical response based on gender equality is articulated in an effort to deconstruct the sexist discourse and suggest an enabling environment for women's participation in creating and sharing economic resources necessary for the attainment of women miners' goals.

2. The Power of Cultural Beliefs in the Southern Africa

Culture is a symbolic expression of a people, communicating in all its simplicity the multifaceted way of life and relationships of people, towards each other, the living and those in the world of spirits. In this sense, culture is a creation of a group of people, and the creator of the same people. In a sense, the people form a culture, which in turn shapes the people. There is thus a wealth of values to explore in the cultures of people in the south of the African continent. But

sometimes there is difficulty in determining the criteria for choosing the most significant and authentic values for the lives of individuals and an entire society.

2.1. Cultural Richness of Southern African Countries

The Southern African Countries, like other contemporary and modern African nations are proud of their cultural richness that is expressed in the diversity of the ethnic groups. The cultural richness is all the more real and is experienced through the rituals that accompany the antipodal moments of life such as birth and death. Other intermediate times of life are undoubtedly captured in the frequent expressions of traditional rituals of significant steps and the circumstances of life moments. Such are the traditional pre-marriage rituals, for example, the rituals for the birth of twins, the rites of initiation of boys for the passage to the age of adulthood; the rites of preparation of girls for matrimonial responsibilities [5].

It should be said that modernization and westernization have re-shaped the cultural expressions by adding new dimensions in celebrations of events that have become part of the life-cycle, such as religious baptism, or the clan re-naming of children, graduation, and traditional or Christian wedding, along with new holidays, such as Easter, Christmas and New Year. Other celebrations mark international observances such as Labor Day, or national holidays like Martyrs Day and Independence Day, freedom day, the dance of the reeds, the initiation into coming of age for girls and boys [6]. People of Southern Africa share these common cultural traits that shape their beliefs. Southern African Countries have an enormous diversity of traditional knowledge that includes skills; innovations related to biodiversity, agriculture, or health. The cultural expressions are explicit in music, art, designs, symbols, and public performances of beliefs, together with rituals and practices valuing genetic resources in plants, animals, and micro-organisms. These above cultural expressions add to life some dimension that only comes with beliefs and the power generated from the beliefs that something greater, profound and fundamentally existential occur in the symbolic and linguistic expressions of cultural rituals.

Southern Africa is rich with a variety of people and tribes: Angola (Ambo, Bacongo, Chokwe, Kimbundu, Kongo, Luba, Luena, Luimbe, Lunda, Mbangala, Mbukushu, Mbunda, Ngangela, Ovimbundu, Tshokwe), Botswana (Mbukushu, Ngawaketse, Nguni, Palapye, San, Tswana, Yeye), Lesotho (Sotho or Basotho), Malawi (Chewa, Makua, Maravi, Matengo, Ngonde, Ngoni, Nyanja, Tonga, Tumbuka, Yao), Mozambique (the Makua, Tsonga, Makonde, Shangaan, Shona, Sena, Nda, and other indigenous groups. There are approximately 45,000 Europeans, and 15,000 South Asians, constituting less than 2% of the population, as well), South Africa (Nguni (Zulu, Xhosa, Ndebele and Swazi), Sotho, Shangaan-Tsonga and Venda. There are numerous subgroups within these, of which the Zulu and Xhosa (two subgroups of

the Nguni group) are the largest), Eswatini (Swazi), Zambia (the Lozi, the Bemba, the Ngoni, the Tonga, the Luvale, and the Kaonde), Zimbabwe (Karanga, Korekore, Makoni, Matabele, Ndebele, Rotse, Shangaan (Shangana), Shona, Thonga, Venda, Zezeni), DRC (Major cultural clusters today include the Mongo (in the center of the country), the Kongo (west), the Luba (south-central), the Lunda (south), the Bemba (southeast), and the Kasai (southwest). Bantu peoples in the north and northeast include the Ngala, the Buja, the Bira, the Kuumu, and the Lega) [7].

2.2. A Consensus on the Enigmatic Dimension of the Power of Culture and Its Norms

People of different tribes, languages and races in Africa associate a certain power with the symbolic and linguistic expressions of rituals as elements that determine the manner in which the concerned individuals experience in their life some events that demonstrate either the cultural power that can increase life or even can contribute to decrease life [8]. There is a sort of consensus on the enigmatic dimension of the power of culture and its norms.

The consensus equally creates an identity within a value system identified as cultural morality that reinforces the dimension of nationality or ethnicity that cannot be replaced even with the influence of modern and global society. For example, it can be acknowledged that “neither nationalism nor ethnicity is vanishing as part of an obsolete traditional order; both are part of a modern set of categorical identities invoked by elites and other participants in political and social struggles [9]. The concepts of nationality and ethnicity give to the power of culture a communal dimension. It is common in the popular language to hear people admit: ‘I can’t help it; it is our culture. I have to obey it’. This consensus created around a value system articulates that if one is in accord with the powers of their culture, and follows suit in the actions and practice of life, their chances in life will be increased. If they do not obey the powers of culture, the unfortunate fate will follow them in everything they do, life will be constantly filled with bad luck [10]. Therefore, culture determines the right and wrong actions in community and society [11]. Cultural Morality that regulates behaviors and actions is sometimes contradictory to religious beliefs of Christianity and other religions (revealed religions or traditional faith). In this sense, cultural morality regulates how people behave in society, and the way they interact with others following cultural norms of correctness and wrongness.

2.3. The Gender Aspect of Culture

An area of visible expression of the cultural morality is the distribution of gender roles shaped according to cultural beliefs. The role and place of women in society are dependent on cultural morality that determines the acceptable and correct behaviors and actions. Most times cultural morality in matters

of women and marriage is based on a gender role that is clearly prejudiced towards women. In a polygamous marriage, for example, a man is allowed to marry simultaneously two or more women, but the other way around is not imaginable for a woman. In addition, the role of women is pre-determined and fixed as a spouse, a mother and household care-taker. The general perception is that “in the absence of marriage, the woman [is] ostracized” [12]. This vision is highly marked in the cultural beliefs of peoples of most ethnic groups tribes in the Southern Region of Africa, that marriage and motherhood become the defining characteristics of the identity of women in society. In the popular languages for example, when a woman is entering marriage, it is said she is being honored by the man. Likewise, when announcing to friends a date of their marriage, most young women say my fiancé or my husband will honor me on such a date.

This sexist way of defining women in society implicitly entails an idea that a woman is only validated by a man. As a consequence, masculinity becomes the norm of what is right or wrong for women. This tendency of validation through sexist categories negatively contributes to the reality of domestic violence where the blame is paradoxically placed on the woman. Since the husband is seen as the one who honors the woman, he cannot be blamed for any domestic related violence. A study has proved that when men are carried by sexist ideologies, they tend to put the blame on women even in circumstances of sexual violence against women, especially when the cause of what triggered the aggression is not certain. Corroborating this narrative, Inmaculada Valor-Segura, et al. affirm that: “sexist beliefs contribute to blaming victims of domestic violence and exonerating perpetrators. Thus, people with more traditional beliefs show a reaction that tends to legitimize abuse more than others... domestic violence contains certain structural elements based on cultural principles and social customs that have defended and even instilled women's subjugation to men since ancestral times” [13]. Blaming the victims for violence they suffered is another form of oppression inflicted by the power of cultural beliefs directed against women. It follows that men have more power over women, thus they can determine for example, the kind of work that is acceptable for women, and a work regarded as reserved to men. Even within certain categories of works, men determine what position women can hold and cannot aspire to. In this way, women are not expected to participate in any work that requires physicality and special skills such as the mining activities.

3. Women in the Mining Industry in Southern Africa

Southern Africa is a region of Africa which places strategic importance on the mineral resources whose subsoil is endowed with industrial quantities contributing significantly to the world production of important and strategic minerals.

Thus mining contributes to the gross national product of the member states of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and to the creation of jobs and the possibilities of social and economic well-being of the people concerned, among whom are many women.

3.1. Southern African Women as a Working Force to Reckon with

Women in the Southern Africa are a part of the working force in mines. Though reliable statistics are not available, women represent between a good percentage of the workforce in the mining industry, working alongside men in various mining activities [14]. Women engage in mining to earn a living in order to sustain their families. Mostly, women are active in secondary mining activities. For example, “Women perform a range of tasks in the gold extraction process. For example, in the DRC and Zambia copper belt mining sites, women are “twangaises”, or grinders, they manually grind sand and rock in metallic mortars. This largely feminine task is most evident at the Kamituga mine site. In Misisi, the grinding task is carried out by men with crushers that are assisted by the “bongueteuses”, who initially hammer the stone down to more a manageable size. There are “transporteuses”, or women that carry the sand and stone from the extraction site to the crushers at all three sites, as well as “hydrauliques”, who carry water to cool the crushers” [15]. Women’s efforts are evident in the chain of mineral’s extraction.

As can be seen women are active in the mining industry alongside of men. But noticeably, they participate in activities that are not the major jobs of mining. Nevertheless, these activities are not without importance in the chain of productivity of the mineral substances until the products are marketed. This means that, women are interested in mining just as men, and their contribution is no less valuable. If given opportunities to excel in other important mining work, women can prove to be reliable workers. Other activities that occupy women in mining include: “The “songeuses”, who prepare the ground-up sand to be washed by wetting it with water to make mud and the “laveuses” who then wash the sand. These can be found at the washing points in small streams. For their part the “bizalu”, recoup the discarded sand that is then re-washed by the “twangaises”, so that the gold that is extracted can be sold. Very few women are “bosses”, or “CEOs”, that is to say owners of gold pits. Those that are, are represented by a man who serves as a manager of the pit. Other women serve as “souteneuses”, that provide support throughout the difficult phase of digging the gold pit, which involves handling fuel, digging equipment, food, and whatever else is necessary to pay the diggers. Very few of these operations possess grinding machines” [16]. The fact that women are workers in the mines of Southern Africa is proving wrong the general perception that the mining work is a male-only career. Women have demonstrated that they have a place in the mines and they

deserve the same consideration as men. However, this quote equally indicates that women are at the lower chain of mining production. For example, the fact that only few women are in managerial positions in mines can be symptomatic of a workplace that is not enabling women to utilise their human agency and capabilities in order to excel in any mining activities of their choice. It can be noted that mining in the Southern Africa region is a highly-discriminated workplace, where roles are sexist and gender-biased. Consequently, within such a patriarchal workplace, it can be said that men would hardly condone a power of authority in the hands of women in the chain of mining work.

3.2. Women Under the Control of Men in Mining

As can be noted, there is to be expected serious implications in the workplace as women are expected to be under the control of men. Such views negatively impact on women exposed to a host of challenges dealing with issues of gender discrimination in mining, extreme poverty, loss of their human agency, and no prospect of access to economic resources. Most southern African countries are counted among places “in the world where women’s employment in ASM is being discouraged and frowned upon, and where female workers in the ASM industry suffer from various forms of marginalization, oppression and exclusion” [17]. It should be added that the Mining legal framework in such countries did not help the situation of women. By way of example, there is no mention of women in the entire mining code of the DRC [18]. This may have been interpreted by many to mean that women are not allowed to take part in mining activities. It seems that such views reinforce cultural and patriarchal negative attitudes and actions towards women in mining, and give rise to sexist myths justifying the exclusion of women in mining sites.

4. Sexist Myths in the Southern African Mining Industry

The influence of cultural beliefs is expressed with severity in the mining sector as regards the participation of women in the mining activities.

4.1. Myths Depicting Women as the Cause of Misfortune in Mining

Animated by negativistic perceptions on the role of women, especially in the continuation of the mechanism to preserve male’s supremacy, African traditions created mythological narratives that sometimes represent the woman as the cause of misfortune that befalls men with whom they relate. Cultural ideologies in support of women’s subjugation plays an important role in the justification of the retrogressive mythological narratives [19].

In South Africa for example, a lot of myths are told around women's menstruation, leading to stigmatization so much so that women in the mines experience the same about menstruation. Menstruation myths say that menstruating women carry diseases that risk affecting others who unfortunately come into contact with them; or again, their menstruation can be used in witchcraft which would endanger the lives of others; menstruation is also interpreted as a sign of a very sexually active woman, which would expose her to the advances and abuse of men in the mines. All these South African menstruation myths are likely to disadvantage women in different sectors of life, but even more so in the mining industry, a highly masculinized sector [20].

Another Southern African Country that carries sexist mining myths is the DRC. By way of illustration, “in the Bisie cassiterite mine and in other mining areas of DRC, traditional authorities do not allow women on the mining sites. After complaints by a number of male miners to the traditional authorities about miners having been bewitched by resident women miners, and on their subsequent inability to find cassiterite, the traditional authorities banned women from entering the mining sites” [21]. Women doing jobs not perceived as appropriate for women are generally considered in the traditional beliefs of Southern African countries, as the holders of evil spirits that can easily harm others through their mystical powers. It is believed that women miners have a magical power of ‘female mining spirit’ that specifically targets male miners to inflict on them a misfortune that can lead to sickness and death. Mining is considered a male career, therefore women in mining are considered to be outside cultural norms, for this reason, it makes them suspicious and in consequence men associated and working with such women are vulnerable and exposed to the destructive mystical power. To protect men miners, traditional authorities ban women from entering mines sites or exercise any economic activities in mining camps.

4.2. Myths as Tenets of Patriarchal Dominance in Mining

These myths can be interpreted as part of the many tenets of patriarchal dominance aimed to maintain men's supremacy over women and reinforce their subjugation. By way of illustration, “in the diamond mines of Kasai Oriental Province, for instance, women are required to surrender any high-value stones to the male mines owners or diggers and are permitted to keep only low-grade stones” [22]. There is no legitimate explanation from a mining legal point of view that justifies traditional authorities' actions against women. Besides, there is no scientific explanation to support the allegation of this sexist myth. In the absence of any verifiable facts, women are in a position of weakness because protagonists of sexist ideology have the support and protection of traditional authorities, most of whom are men. In their majority, the mining legislation of southern African countries created a vacuum

regarding many issues about women's participation in mining activities. As an existing report from the African Institute of Corporate Citizenship indicates, “At present, no industry strategy for integrating women in to the sector exists – in SADC, or in South Africa in particular” [23]. This in part explains why women face challenges of all sorts in the mining. Their presence in the mines can falsely be deemed illegal.

No doubt that African women have a close interaction with land and natural resources. Seth Appiah-Opoku argues that, “Most women in Africa are directly dependent on land and the local environment for their own and their families' survival. They spend the greater part of their time tending, gathering, conserving, and using natural resources. Yet women's land rights in most African countries have been largely ignored by customary, religious, and statutory institutions” [24]. African customary, religious and statutory institutions have proved patriarchal so much so that they discard women's socio-economic rights that cannot be fulfilled without ownership of land. Sexist myths in the mines are a continuation of the subjugation of women with regards a variety of rights impeded by these institutions. Considered as intruders and without any rights in the mining sites, women are an easy target and a pray to people without morals and the sense of other's rights for the integrity of their body. Such is the case with girls and young women who are sexually violated by men who entertain the ‘Virgin Myth’.

4.3. The Virgin Myth as Basis of Sexual Violence in Mining

It is believed that “though a woman's presence may be blamed if a mine ‘goes bust’ taking a girl's virginity is believed to increase a male miner's chances of striking it rich” [25]. Cultural practices and their narratives elegantly justify such practices. To unpack the virgin narrative, it is believed that, the mining sector is very hazardous as accidents happen on a regular basis, and mostly in the highly superstitious ASM miners. The difficulties of digging minerals expose miners to accidents, therefore extra precautions to avoid accidents require mystical intervention. Thus, taking a woman virginity is such a myth that sustains men's hopes to amass a maximum of luck to be immune from accidents and consequently find minerals of high value and become rich. Cognizant that Virginity is something of value, and a high priced bodily feature for a girl, the superstitious belief of grabbing that possession from the owner is the charm that works wonders for the miners and opening to them the doors of fortunes. As can be noted, no scientific evidence can support this ideology. Like any other superstitious thought, this one cannot be justified and should not be entertained as it violates women's rights.

As can be noted, these two sexist mining myths find resonance in the midst of men who may not understand the true worth of cultural beliefs regarding the positive masculinity which can entail protection and compassion. The normative patriarchy perpetrates a traditional ideology of hegemonic

masculinity which affirms male's power and character not always in positive actions, but negatively in dominance of the vulnerable (even other males) and the women. Thus the "Hegemonic masculinity is 'the masculinity that occupies the hegemonic position in a given pattern of gender relations' [26]. Reference here is made on cultural tendency of norms of dominance in favor of patriarchal conservation of power and control. Hegemonic masculinities are variously expressed in the Southern African mining industry where women are socio-economically disadvantaged. It should be acknowledged the ever-changing face of African masculinities in terms of times and spaces, race and ethnic affiliations [27]. However, there is a persistent cultural construction of men's ascendancy over women, that subtly continues to remain a constant pattern in workplaces and social arrangements. Despite the apparent progress, more efforts are needed to advance the cause of gender parity, and eradicate many other oppressions suffered by women in mining. In a like manner, there is need for more research to further the knowledge of different sexist ideologies and what they do to women's human and economic agencies.

5. What Sexist Mining Myths Do to Women's Human and Economic Empowerment

It has been highlighted that sexist myths degrade women by denying them the opportunities for autonomy and self-determination, especially in the mining sector where women are kept in confinement within the workplace structures not conducive to their human agency.

5.1. Denying Women Opportunities for Economic Well-Being and Self-Determination

Within the Southern African mining sector, women are in between customary governance by traditional authorities and statutory law of the mining code. On one side, the customary law calls women to respect their culturally assigned roles of motherhood, far from masculine work of mines and on the other side, the statutory law of mining code is silent on the participation of women in mining, leaving an open field to any interpretation about the legality of their presence in mining.

Consequently, the conflicting traditional and legal approaches of women's mining activities can only exacerbate the already much decried victimization of women as their capabilities to function cannot materialise with lack of support by public institutions. Those women who venture in mining see the opportunities of economic empowerment and well-being evading them due to abuses they face in the mining workplace. The legal governance of mining, which is in the mandate of the public institutions, should ensure conducive environments for women to engage their human agency and

accomplish all that they are able to achieve in the pursuit of well-being. Thus, it is agreeable that "the aim of public policy is the production of combined capabilities. This means promoting the states of the person by providing the necessary education and care; it also means preparing the environment so that it is favorable for the exercise of practical reason and the other major functions" [28]. The present situation of women in the mining industry, moving between customary and statutory laws, is evidence of a lack of support by public policy.

The mining sexist myths take advantage of such vacuum to dominate women in the worse possible ways of sexual violence, deprivation of self-determination, obstruction to access economic resources. There seems to be a strong link between the resource Extractive Industry and sexual violence. A possible explanation of this link is to be found in the need to sustain sexist myths. Indeed, it can be reminded that, sexist myths are a construction of cultural narratives in an effort to keep women away from the resource extractives industry. Logically when women use their sense of practical reason and dismiss such myths by engaging in mining, male ego suffers a blow and they resort to punish women by sexually violating them thus, nourishing and sustaining the myths and creating a vicious circle. Additionally, conflict mineral and post conflict behaviors by men can also explain the recurrence of sexual violence for example in the eastern DRC. In this regard, it can be noted that, "the greatest motive for violence is not the thirst for political power so much as the thirst for the immense potential profit from the DRC's ample mineral wealth. One of the most important minerals, columbite-tantalite, or coltan, is a tar-like substance instrumental in producing capacitors, a key component of virtually all modern electronic equipment" [29]. The worse form of violence in the mineral conflict is sexual violence against women. In this context, sexual violence is strategically used in conflict mineral as a weapon to terrorize the local communities, drive them away, then gain control of mines sites by armed groups [30]. Unfortunately, such sexual violence in mining is also noted in other southern African mining where some men have less regards on women's integrity.

5.2. The Sexist Myths in Combination with Armed Conflict

Already victimized by the sexist myths and caught in the middle of the conflict for the control of mineral wealth, women are not just a casualty of war, but a target for what they represent: caretakers, the pride of a community, and the hope for regeneration of society [31]. The sexual violence on women in mining has also become part of the post war behaviors in Angola, Mozambique and DRC when men take out their frustrations and rages on innocent women, which to them are regarded as casualties of war.

Ultimately the poor living conditions of women, the gendered social and economic vulnerabilities of women expose

them even more to sexual violence in a world of predatory and insatiable search for power and wealth that lead to structural hierarchies and gendered economic injustice. The more women are poor and vulnerable, the more they are controllable in a patriarchal dominance framework. Sexual violence in the mines operates under ideological narratives that keep women vulnerable in order to exploit them [32]. As already explained, “taboo and myth are thus finely manipulated to support both discrimination against and violation of women in artisanal communities” [33]. The persuasive insights of cultural narratives are used to maintain the status quo unless some innovative measures are taken to curb the tendency and reinforce law and order to supplant customary inclination. It can also be argued that, “Culture and rights usually seem at war with each other. They are portrayed as opposites, such that the advance of one means the retreat of the other” [34]. Thus, these authors suggest the integration of human rights narratives into the language of the people. They argue that translating in the vernacular women’s human rights, and other social, political and economic rights, would have the advantage of making them a part of the culture of the ethnic groups concerned that can also be carried through legal framework.

It is evident that the sexist myths in mining are in clear violation of women’s rights as they increase the risk of sexual violence against women, the loss of their autonomy and obstruction of their human agency for the advancement of their human, political, social and economic rights. Jacqui true argues that, “if key rights such as those to land and housing, to transact in one’s own legal name, to equality in marriage, and to freedom of mobility are not secured early enough, then many women who are poor will be denied economic opportunities during the post conflict reconstruction period. Paradoxically, the emphasis on judicial and legal justice for female victims of violence may inadvertently marginalize their basic needs” [35]. It has been demonstrated that in the mineral conflict-zones, women’s basic needs are totally disregarded before, during and after war as they are not catered for by the mining legal framework. In this regard, there is need for a response that can take into account key rights of women in mining. A holistic ethical response seems appropriate in capturing various women’s rights currently jeopardized by the sexist myths and their oppressive expressions.

6. Ethical Response to the Sexist Myths

The UN recognized the situation of women in the south and eastern DRC as a humanitarian crisis considering the scale and number of women sexually assaulted, not only by armed groups, but also by civilians in mining sites and local communities [36]. Thus, the UN recommended to draw a map of the conflict minerals in the DRC, and this initiative was a search for solution to the plight of women, trying to deal with the root causes of sexual violence in mining areas.

6.1. Reaffirming Women’s Human Autonomy as an Ethical Right

As stated in the previous section, with regards to women, sexual violence was a weapon for the dehumanization of women, the disruption of any opportunities of autonomy and freedom to choose the means and actions towards a flourishing life. In this sense, the article argues that any response to this plight should aim at restituting the human agency of women. It should be recognized that sexual violence by armed groups, and sexist myths by male miners have had a toll on women’s human agency. One of the earliest solutions pursued by the international community was to interrupt the chain for the supply of minerals conflict. Concretely, the US adopted financial laws stipulating that, “any company doing business that involves minerals must disclose annually whether conflict materials [...] were used in the process. This applies not only to electronics companies, but to all publicly traded US firms that use gold, cassiterite, tungsten or coltan in their products. Companies are required to exercise due diligence on the source and chain of custody of these materials, and measures to ensure oversight shall include an independent audit of the report” [37]. This intervention of the US stimulated actions for transparency, accountability in cross-border trade, good governance of Extractive resources, and above all, consideration of human rights of women. Such vision needed to be sustained and supported by the local institutions and communities where these atrocities occur. The sexual violence against women continues in mining sites because of the strong adherence to sexist myths and cultural beliefs fueling the victimization of women. This is an indication that sexual violence, far from being only a weapon of warfare such as in Angola, DRC, and Mozambique, has become a weapon for the control of minerals substances by male miners mostly in Small Scale Mining.

As already indicated above, the intended motives of sexually assaulting women were to subjugate them, and turn them into manipulable objects. The sexist myths reinforce gender stratification, they circumscribe women’s ambitions for economic autonomy, and multiply forms of oppressions. In this regard, ethical response can be more effective if accompanied by legal and strategic actions from a policy point of view. The moral intervention should include, affirming and reinforcing gender parity between men and women, affirming the rights of women to work in mines, de-victimizing the real victims, fostering independent associations of women miners.

6.2. Reinforcing Gender Justice and Parity in Mining

Gender justice is only the starting point in the road to the eradication of all other victimizations suffered by women in mining. By way of explanation, it should be understood that, “for many African women, gender alone does not describe

their oppression, nor is gender equality enough to end such oppression” [38]. For a first step, it is necessary to gain ground on matters of gender equality that will allow to put in place strategies to combat other forms of oppressions. Women in mining need justice, not only for gender parity, but social justice and rights for their participation in the life of their society and communities as active members, taking part in decisions that affect them, and not as a disadvantaged group under the weight of patriarchy.

Parity between men and women is an ethical principle founded on legal category recognizing to men and women same humanity, therefore sharing same rights, responsibilities and obligations in a society that is to treat each fairly by appreciating the legitimate differentiation. Thus, Jaggar Alison bemoans the tendency to treat men and women indistinguishably [39]. From a close and critical look, gender justice should not mean to treat men and women in the same way without distinction. Feminism demands that men and women be treated with same principles and with respect of genuine differences. To argue it differently, “women should be treated as autonomous individuals” [40]. As individuals in mining, for example, women have their needs that might be different from those of men, and they deserve to be treated according to those needs and not necessarily on the measures set by men to suit their thirst for power and control. Recourse to the principle of parity has the advantage to allow women exercise their freedom of choice and develop their human agency and capabilities in a way likely to attain a flourishing life or an economic wellbeing.

Being supported in legal framework, the ethical principle of parity can also contribute to affirm the rights of women to participate in the mining industry not on men’s terms, but with a mark of their autonomy. Additionally, the ethical principle of gender equality should be accompanied by the explicit actions towards ensuring women’s rights of access to economic opportunities. On this topic, the World Bank noticed that, “more must be done to ensure gender equality in access to productive assets and services. Efforts could include providing clean, accessible water to reduce the time burden of domestic work, investing in girls’ education, ensuring gender-neutral land policy and legislation, and building women’s skills and capabilities to reduce their ‘political deficit’ [41]. These range of ethical responses and actions are pertinent in the context of the Southern African women in mining as more access to economic opportunities will prove wrong the sexist myths that continue to keep women under the burden of subjugation and poverty. All the above cannot be sustained outside a good governance system that puts in place all other structures to support the distribution of all the rights, including economic rights of the disadvantaged groups. For this reason, instead of encouraging women to exit the mining industry, governments and the corporates should put in place mining governance institutions that support the rule of law to lessen and eradicate the sexist ideologies that increase women’s vulnerabilities.

6.3. Adhering to the Ethics of Ubuntu

Ubuntu (the humanness) is a concept in African ethics which entails the sense of relatedness and otherness of individual human beings, in the sense that, a person is a human only in relatedness with others. This implies that in terms of social living, well-being is attainable through our dependence on each other since our existence is possible because of the existence of others with whom we maintain our relatedness, and in whom our humanness is revealed and exalted. The ethics of Ubuntu suggests the imperative of a humane, respectful and polite treatment of others because in their existence is revealed one’s own humanness [42]. This should mean that in the mining industry, all involved must adhere to this ethical framework which is also part of the Southern African people’s cultural heritage.

Cultural beliefs and values will always be a part of the African existential socialization. Otherwise the African person may no longer find his/her ground in a world of many contradictory values. For this reason, it is imperative to stimulate reflection on ways to move away from destructive cultural beliefs carried by mining sexist myths that discriminate and disadvantage a portion of society (women in particular). In the context of the Mining industry, it is evident that other cultural values can be insisted upon so as to transform the extractive industry, and free it from the grips of a blind capitalism formed on greed and dehumanization of other people, especially women. With Barbara Nussbaum, it can be formulated the idea of “an Ubuntu-based company”. In concrete terms, an idea of an Ubuntu-based Mining industry in the Southern Africa Region, can mean that, “Firstly, that Ubuntu would help to foster the human qualities of humility over arrogance, co-operation over domination and generosity over greed, not only within but between companies and in their relationships with stakeholders in other countries. Secondly, that Ubuntu would help to place inclusive dialogue and discussion at the heart of political, economic and other agendas” [43].

The sexist myths have revealed the sense of arrogance of men who distort women’s autonomy and rule over them not only in households, but in the division of labor roles. Such arrogance leads to the domination of women by excluding them from decision making processes, and from participation in the mining industry. In the contrary, the notion of Ubuntu can reintroduce in mining, a sense of humanity that can be emphasized upon, and instead of exclusion, the Ubuntu principle of dialogue can facilitate a real cooperation between men and women in key mining activities, each contributing towards a better productivity. Concerted efforts towards productivity should also mean to foster Ubuntu ideals of sharing the resources commonly obtained. Ubuntu as a value system, “regulates the exercise of rights by the emphasis it lays on sharing and co-responsibility and the mutual enjoyment of rights by all” [44]. Such a vision can unite men and women miners in a common purpose of collaboration in the resource extractive industry based on ethical norms that correct the sexist mining myths. Equal rights for all, should be negotiated and advocated for by women and feminist activists, and

disseminated by researchers.

7. Conclusion

Sexist mining myths against women is an aspect of cultural beliefs that has negatively affected the participation of women in mining activities in some Southern African Countries. Blaming women for not finding minerals, or blaming them for any sickness of male miners, amount to women's oppression. This article argued that the sexist mining myths are an invention of the patriarchal system in need of control and dominance strategies, thus manipulating a sector traditionally viewed as a male-dominated work, in order to exclude women from opportunities of access to economic resources.

Women can contribute to the economic growth of the mining industry in Southern Africa. This means a deliberate move by public institutions to enable the participation of women into the industry. To this effect, it can be said that "one way to assist the creation of an enabling environment would be by making a more direct link between economic and social rights and economic policies, rather than treating economic growth as the intermediary" [45]. Prioritizing economic growth in EI has proved damageable to women human agency and freedom. It is time to clearly understand that on a policymaking point of view, instead of strategizing for women's exit from mines, public institutions and advocacy groups should aim at obtaining improvement of social and economic rights of women. For this reason, economic policies should clearly facilitate the transformation of capitalism for socioeconomic development and the transformation of patriarchal practices against women in mining for concerted efforts for the reduction of poverty among women. It has been demonstrated that no justifiable reasons can sustain the influence of customary leadership based on sexist myths to impose on women unfair restrictions into an economic sector otherwise open to all competent citizens. The extractive industry is a place of opportunities for women provided that they are afforded freedom and opportunities to function to the best of their human agency.

Abbreviations

ASM	Artisanal and Small Scale Mining
EI	Extractive Industry
DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo
SADC	Southern Africa Development Community

Author Contributions

Keba Cyril Muko is the sole author. The author read and approved the final manuscript.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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