

Girls as “warriors”: Gender inequality in turbulent times in South Africa

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Abstract

Gender equality is seen as central to a just world – in the Global North and Global South - yet there is resistance to bring about equality for women and girls from several sides. In South Africa, a developing country in the Global South, equality is carefully scripted into the South African Constitution, yet reflecting on the situation of women and girls in South Africa, it is clear that the complexity of the inequalities has made it difficult to enable an equal society. For girls and women to resist and change traditional gender norms in a patriarchal dominated society, requires women and girls to understand their personal gender inequalities before they can address public gender inequalities which leave them vulnerable. In the example I offer I draw on work with indigenous women university students and schoolgirl students exploring their own awakening to the awareness of the intersectionality of their inequalities and also their potential for being warriors - activists for gender equality - to change the socially constructed gender norms which place them in an unequal position, vulnerable to gender-based violence. In this paper I draw on the participants’ experiences of shifting from seeing themselves as powerless to address gender-violence to warriors in addressing gender-based violence. Turbulent times require warriors – women and girls with great vigor and courage to do the work.