

# Re-membering the Dismembered in University 'Politics of Process': Strategies for Women's Empowerment and Inclusivity in Academic Leadership

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**Abstract:** In response to the legacy of Apartheid, South Africa has implemented gender equality policies to address the marginalisation of women in higher education institutions. Despite this liberation movement, the politics of university systems have continually marginalised previously disadvantaged black people, especially women. This is evident in the statistics of black women in positions of authority and academic development in South Africa. Observations and literature confirm that social, cultural, and institutional practices, often called the "politics of process," remain significant obstacles to women's full inclusion in the university leadership system. Therefore, this study aims to deconstruct gender supremacy within university systems from the perspectives of experienced women. It adopts a decoloniality approach, viewed through a transformative lens, which seeks to transform the perceived organisationally "dismembered" women by "re-membering" them into the sphere of equal recognition in university politics. Participatory research (PR) was employed to design the study, involving five women from a public university in South Africa, selected using a convenient sampling method. Unstructured interviews were conducted to gather information from the participants. Thematic Analysis (TA)

was applied to analyse the data. The study found that institutionally induced challenges, women as impediments to themselves, and patriarchy and societal issues are major barriers preventing women from attaining positions of authority. In contrast, institutional support, self-empowerment, and mentoring initiatives represent strategies to re-member the dismembered, forming the basis of the study's recommendations.

**Keywords:** Women, marginalisation, decoloniality, *politics of process*, university system.

## 1. Introduction

The persistence of gender supremacy worldwide is not a new phenomenon; it continues mainly due to various underlying factors that hinder efforts to improve the situation. These factors include cultural disconnections, entrenched gender beliefs, the influence of biblical interpretations, and other external factors that have historically favoured one gender over the other, as noted by researchers like Kinias and Kim (2012), Essien and Ukpong (2012), Makura (2012), and Wood (2019). This imbalance is exemplified by the unequal distribution of burdens and adversities between women and men, a point highlighted by Sen (2001). The issue of gender inequality is not limited to any single region but is a global phenomenon, as evidenced by research on continents like Africa, Asia, America, and Europe, each demonstrating unique aspects of this issue (Deere, 2012; Kanbur, Rhee & Zhuang, 2014; Klasen, & Minasyan, 2017; Bassey & Bubu, 2019; Moyo & Perumal, 2020).

While gender issues manifest differently across various regions, a common thread is that women are predominantly the victims of these inequalities. This does not imply that women are the sole sufferers of gender inequality, but they are disproportionately affected by the majority of its unequal

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outcomes (Lutter, 2015; Asongu & Odhiambo, 2019). However, this study, with a primary focus on Africa, acknowledges the prevalence of a patriarchal system of male headship, where women are often expected or compelled to be submissive in social relationships (Bassey & Bubu, 2019). Therefore, the gender challenges in Africa are intricately linked to the social and cultural values associated with gender roles and expectations.

The rapid and unavoidable economic and technological developments are a key focus of African universities in emancipating historically or previously marginalised groups. However, without a concerted effort to address unethical politics and policies that undermine inclusivity in the system, these advancements could be jeopardised. One notable example of such unethical practices is the lack of gender balance in positions of authority and the continuous marginalisation of women from such roles (Sawyer & Thoroughgood, 2017; Galsanjigmed & Sekiguchi, 2023). The responsibility for creating an inclusive and equal university environment extends to universities and their management systems, which should provide an enabling and less discriminatory platform for potential development (FAWE, 1998; Endeley & Ngaling, 2007), as well as national and provincial governments.

In response to the legacy of Apartheid, the South African government has implemented gender equality policies to counter the marginalisation of women in higher education institutions. These policies include the National Gender Policy Framework approved in 2000, the South African Policy for Women Empowerment and Gender Equality, and the National Development Plan, 2015–2020 (Department of Women, 2020). These policies and empowerment programs indicate that African governments, particularly South Africa, are making efforts to actively involve women in decision-making processes, a significant improvement from the colonial era (Mama, 2003). However, challenges such as implementation, cultural attitudes, and access to education remain significant barriers driving inequality in the workplace (Graven, 2014).

Evidence indicates that developing leadership skills and becoming a leader is particularly challenging for women, especially in the education sector (Airini et al., 2011; Moyo & Perumal, 2020; Ramsey, 2000). This challenge goes beyond the stereotype of women as the 'weaker vessel,' which hinders organisations from entrusting leadership roles to women (Baker, 2014). The literature also highlights numerous challenges associated with the marginalisation of women within the university system. These challenges include delayed promotions (Tso & Parikh, 2012), an organisational culture that fails to recognise women's talents (Haile, 2016), work-family interfaces for women (Minnotte, 2012), perceptions about "women," "family-friendly policies and other support mechanisms" (Madsen, 2012, p. 136), career aspirations and planning, lack of mentorship, and the compounded discrimination faced by black women due to both gender and race, often referred to as a 'double tragedy' (Mays, 1996).

Similarly, Lansing and Ready (1988) and Thornton (2012) have confirmed that barriers to women's leadership roles, despite significant achievements and meritocracy, include issues related to work-life balance. Hora (2014) argues that women tend to shoulder more domestic responsibilities, which could explain why organisations, including universities, are often inflexible in accommodating women. In some instances, women may choose not to take on additional workplace responsibilities to avoid excessive stress (Frankenhaeuser, Lundberg, & Chesney, 2012), a situation that can be perceived as the unfavourable 'politics of process' against women. This aligns with Aparna's (2014) findings that top management positions are not sufficiently flexible to include women. Furthermore, our observation that social, cultural, and institutional practices, often termed the "politics of process," continue to be major obstacles to women's full inclusion in university systems corroborates the arguments of scholars like Altman and Shortland (2008), Coleman (2010), and Ellison (2011), who suggest that social norms, role responsibilities, and cultural factors hinder women's access to education and leadership positions.

Having explored the challenges faced by some women in university systems, we also recognise that various solutions have been proposed to address these issues. Among these solutions are recommendations for the development and promotion of women to leadership positions by agencies and governments (Kiamba, 2008), investment in women's capacity training to enhance their leadership and working knowledge (Noe, 2009), and empowerment of women for economic benefits (Coleman, 2010), among others. Despite these efforts, the problem persists. For instance, in South African universities, only 27.5 percent of the 2,218 professors and 39.5 percent of the 2,131 associate professors are women (Kele & Pietersen, 2015). The report also indicated that women constituted 45.1 percent of the 4,890 senior lecturers. At the lecturer and junior lecturer levels, they represented 53.3 percent and 56.6 percent, respectively (Kele & Pietersen, 2015). These statistics reveal that while women are adequately represented at lower levels, their presence is below average at higher levels. Based on this, we argue that the problem of inequality, which hinders women from attaining positions of authority, extends beyond the identified challenges and solutions.

We argue that women are often marginalised from attaining positions of authority, requiring their inclusion or "re-memberment." In this study, "de-memberment and/or dismemberment" used interchangeably, refers to the marginalisation of women from leadership roles, while "re-memberment" means the inclusion of women in such positions. This idea is supported by Sesanti (2019) and Futter (2023, who emphasise that decoloniality aims to emancipate dismembered people into the realm of being. Therefore, the role of unethical and societal politics on women's identities cannot be overlooked, underscoring the importance of addressing this issue from a decolonial perspective. Therefore, this study is grounded in a decolonial framework to explore these dynamics further.

## **2. Theoretical Framework**

Decoloniality is the theoretical framework underpinning this study. It is a multifaceted concept often misunderstood and interpreted across various contexts, including economic, epistemological, political, and activist perspectives (Maldonado-Torres, 2011; Zembylas, 2018). Stein and Andreotti (2017) conceptualised it as an effort to resist colonisation and racial distinctions, aiming to transform and enrich the lives of the oppressed. This aligns with Ndlovu-Gatsheni's (2015) view of decoloniality as a movement for the dismembered who need to be re-membered into the world of being. Echoing this sentiment, Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1986), Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013), Moyo (2020), Omodan (2020), and Futter (2023) describe decoloniality as a liberation movement designed to emancipate the marginalised, enabling the "dismembered" to re-enter their own world. This is consistent with Omodan and Dube's (2020) assertion that the decolonial movement seeks to free epistemologically dismembered people from Euro/American-centric perspectives. This perspective supports the need for reoriented teaching, research, administration, epistemological reconstruction, and the re-anchoring of higher education in Southern Africa, including cultural transformations within Southern African universities (Morreira, 2015; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013).

Given the inequalities in women's progress towards leadership positions in post-apartheid South Africa, it can be argued that the unfavourable politics of the process affecting women are a product of coloniality. Heleta (2016) contends that institutions of higher learning are fraught with structural imbalances, injustices, and inequalities that impede the emancipation of marginalised groups. There is a clear need for deconstruction in South African universities, where disparities exist between men and women. Decoloniality, involving the challenge of inequalities and discrimination based on race or ethnicity that disproportionately affect certain groups (Kubota, 2020; Moyo, 2020), is also relevant to gender inequality. Decolonisation of gender inequality can be understood as actions taken by groups who perceive themselves as colonised in terms of rights or opportunities due to their gender. It involves addressing power relations and cultural practices, such as language, the delayed promotion of women, organisational culture, failure to recognise women's talents, work-family

interface issues, and ensuring career aspirations and planning for women. It encompasses a concerted effort to ensure that women are "re-membered" into the decision-making process of the university system. Thus, the decolonisation of gender inequality in higher education institutions is unequivocally a process to challenge inequalities and discrimination based on gender, especially affecting women (Schiwy, 2007). We argue that if this movement is genuinely implemented in universities, it will enable the "dismembered" (women) to be "re-membered" in positions of authority, thereby deconstructing every iota of stereotypical tendencies that impede women's participation in organisational politics. This is in line with Sesanti's (2019) argument that the essence of decoloniality is to re-member the ideologically, socially, ontologically, and culturally dismembered people into the world of being.

## **2.1 Research question**

To address the problem of the study, the following research question is posed to pilot the study.

- How can the "politics of process" dismembering women's adequate inclusivity in university systems be deconstructed to ensure women's participation?

## **2.2 Research objectives**

To respond to the above research question, the following research objectives were formulated to guide the study:

- The study examines the challenges hindering women from attaining leadership positions in the university system.
- The study offers possible solutions to the challenges hindering women from attaining leadership positions in the university system.

## **3. Methodology**

The study is situated within the Transformative Paradigm (TP), with Participatory Research (PR) adopted as the research design. TP was chosen for the study because it embodies a philosophy of transformation that addresses empowerment, marginalisation, and the emancipation and enlightenment of the oppressed (Mertens, 2007). The adoption of this paradigm is supported by Mertens' (2005) argument that the methodological assumptions of TP reveal the nature of knowledge and the relationship between the evaluator and the participants. This paradigm focuses on how the researcher can establish participatory relationships with individuals facing the issue, involving them as co-producers of knowledge or solutions to their problems.

Based on this rationale, the study adopted Participatory Research (PR) as its research design. This decision is based on the belief that PR allows researchers to actively involve participants in the data generation process (Gallegos et al., 2023). According to Bergold and Thomas (2012), this approach benefits both researchers and participants by ensuring that the knowledge generation process is participatory, thereby minimising power differentials (Pain & Francis, 2003). This aligns with Evans' (2013) perspective that PR aims to collaboratively design, plan, and conduct research with the individuals under study. In this study, we engaged with selected participants who are women from specific universities in South Africa. They actively participated in the process and contributed to producing knowledge aimed at empowering women in the university community.

We adopted a qualitative research approach for this study. Using a qualitative approach is vital because it allows us to focus on exploring complex phenomena within the Transformative Paradigm and Participatory Research framework. By using this method, we are able to examine women's experiences in specific South African universities in a detailed way, which helps us gain a deep understanding of the challenges they face and the contributions they make. This qualitative approach

aligns with our study's objectives, as it enables us to capture diverse perspectives and lived experiences, which are crucial for informing transformative initiatives and contributing to discussions on empowerment and social change.

### **3.1 Participants and the selection of participants**

The study involved five women employed in a selected university in South Africa, including those in professorial, senior lecturer, and junior lecturer positions. These participants were chosen based on their status as ambitious women already in senior roles or aiming to achieve them. They were invited to discuss their experiences related to the study's issue and propose potential solutions in line with the research objectives. The participants were selected using a convenience sampling method, which is considered suitable as it enables researchers to choose easily accessible participants. This approach was preferred because individuals in high-ranking positions within universities are typically busy, especially considering that being women might entail additional domestic responsibilities that could impact their availability for the study.

### **3.2 Instrumentation and ethical consideration**

An unstructured interview was used to gather information from the selected participants. This type of interview was chosen because it allows researchers to discuss issues related to the research problem with participants without a predefined structure. This approach also facilitates a flexible conversation between the researcher and the participants, enabling them to respond freely to the questions based on their feelings (Villanueva, 2019). Depending on the interviewee, this method often leads to probing or follow-up questions, allowing a free-flowing interaction between the two parties (Blackman, 2002). It enabled us to present the objectives of the study through unstructured questions to the participants. Specifically, we asked them to share their thoughts on the challenges hindering women from attaining positions of power in the university system” and “possible solutions to these challenges.

Furthermore, research ethics were rigorously observed to protect the researchers and the researched from potential harm (Gajjar, 2013). We ensured that the participants consented to participate and were informed of their freedom to withdraw at any time should they feel uncomfortable. Their identities were also guaranteed to remain anonymous before, during, and after the study. Consequently, we assigned the participants pseudonyms such as FA1, FA2, FA3, and so on, up to FA5, where 'FA' stands for Female Academic.

### **3.3 Method of data analysis**

Data were collected through unstructured interviews and subjected to Thematic Analysis (TA). Thematic Analysis is a method for analysing qualitative data that involves breaking down the data into relevant themes to make sense of it in units (Clarke & Braun, 2014). This method was particularly relevant to this study because the data were collected based on the study's objectives, which naturally fell into themes. In other words, the objectives formed the major themes, while sub-themes were also generated from the data. The three-step approach to thematic analysis proposed by Thomas and Harden (2008) was adopted for this study. According to them, these steps include coding the text, developing themes, and generating an analysis of these themes. To make sense of our data, we coded it, then developed the themes and sub-themes and finally analysed them. The analysis of the data is presented below.

## **4. Presentation and Analysis of Data**

The data were presented in accordance with the study's objectives, which aimed to identify the challenges that prevent women from attaining positions of power in the university system and explore potential solutions to these challenges. Objective one produced three sub-themes, while objective two also produced three sub-themes. See the analysis below:

#### **4.1 Challenges hindering women from attaining leadership positions**

Our study yielded a plethora of challenges experienced by female academics. These are thematically categorised as stemming from institutional processes and systems; women themselves, patriarchy, and national policies. Before delving into these, we need to sober up and take a cue from one of the participants FA5, who advised and reminded us that:

*"We should always remember that a woman who is always on a mission to prove herself becomes a "ticking time bomb" because she will go to any length to achieve her purpose and, as a result, produce irredeemable burn-out and depression."*

##### **Theme 1: Institutional induced challenges**

It was apparent from the data we generated that university systems and processes were an impediment to academic women's growth and trajectory. A classic lamentation was presented by a female academic FA2 who boldly declared that "[...] exclusionary practices seem to be embedded within the institutional structures and systems – a 'vacuum' that you don't have the privilege to engage with." She went on to give more anecdotal evidence to buttress her assertion:

*In my experience, in advancing to senior positions, I feel that women of colour are generally not acknowledged for the gains and contributions they have made in the academe. You are denied the agency to make a difference in your institution and in society. Although you are suitably qualified and even engage in self-development courses to upskill, it is not a given that you will be afforded the opportunity to occupy such positions. The positions are there, and you are encouraged to apply, however, the opportunities seem to 'disappear' or male counterparts are considered more suitable candidates. These sentiments often emerge in boardrooms; when women engage men (e.g. with innovative ideas), these ideas are not regarded as 'solid' enough and often dismissed and they may be branded emotional, temperamental or irrational thinkers. Then, when they apply for a management position, they are often sidelined.*

Participant FA2's went on to question the sincerity of university systems in advancing women academics' careers *"The question begs, is it worth it to build your career for so many years only to hit the proverbial glass ceiling along the way?"* She was supported in her sentiment by participant FA5 who indicated that female academics experience a *"Lack of support structures, mentors and role models who they can emulate and draw strength from"*

As FA5 argues, one of such 'glass ceiling' is evident at the recruitment level where, as FA5 argues, the gender bias manifests. Participant FA5 says:

*Gender bias. Due to the nature of some jobs, women are regarded as "unsuitable" or "unstable" for the jobs even when they can handle the job pressures. Also, women are sometimes seen as not having the right skills and expertise for the job, even if they are more qualified than their male counterparts or even their bosses.*

And when some women get recruited, they confront more institutional challenges. Participants FA2 and F5's sentiments were buttressed by FA3, who bemoaned the lengthy period women take to understand university processes arguing, *"Some join the university without having enough knowledge with regards to how the university system operates and they had to take time to learn and adjust to operations in the new environment."* And, when they do get the opportunity to enter university systems *"Women are not empowered for positions. We are not considered for some positions. There is [are] no clear programmes for even mentoring upcoming women in leaderships"* (FA4). In expatiating this institutional work-related challenge, another woman academic, FA5 raised the gender bias in performance and delivery by academics, arguing:

*Unfair performance expectations/judgements. Oftentimes, unlike their male counterparts, women are not given any margin of failure. If women don't perform at first chance, they are immediately deemed incompetent, and negative criticism will become the order of the day. This is not to say that lower expectations/performance should be condoned because a woman is involved, but judgements should be fair, especially when such expectations are not meted out on men in similar positions.*

### **Theme 2: Women as an impediment to themselves**

Some of the female participants indicated that women academics had the propensity to shoot themselves when it came to career progression. In illustrating the gender stereotypical notion of 'Queen B Syndrome' and its effects, a female academic FA5 argued

*"Queen bee syndrome or the PHD (Pull Her Down) syndrome. A woman up the career echelon may experience multiple antagonisms, especially from other women. This could lead to envy, bitterness and slander, and as a result, she may not get the needed support for a positive performance from her colleagues. This also points to why a good number of women prefer male bosses.*

Participant FA5 cited two other challenges stemming from women themselves. These relate to their confidence and a feeling of inadequacy. The participant narrated: *"Some women lack confidence in themselves and are always afraid to make mistakes. Therefore, they shy away from responsibilities and from positions of authority.* The lack of confidence in what women do appears to be a manifestation of a feeling of inadequacy, as FA5 continues to argue:

*We sometimes are very critical of ourselves and feel we are not qualified for higher positions because we don't satisfy all the conditions of that position. Some women see themselves as not qualified for the job even when they possess the relevant skills. Imposter syndrome?*

The notion of *'we did not satisfy all the conditions...[...]*' appear to be a negative consequence of what FA1 alluded to as an *"Affirmative action/employment equity"* policy. Thus, FA1 sees such policies as the genesis of challenges women face in academia. If the affirmative action policies (meant to emancipate the womenfolk) are regarded as a challenge to the perceived beneficiaries, then the women are creating self-inflicting wounds. This reasoning is aptly demonstrated in FA2's submission, wherein she argued.

*"The real challenge for me is being a role model for female students: If I am struggling to advance in the academe, what example am I setting for my female students? The question begs, is it worth it to build your career for so many years only to hit the proverbial glass ceiling along the way?"*

Unbeknown to FA2 is the fact that whatever academic or professional level she might have attained, she would have, in essence, sent a positive message to other aspiring women. We view self-judging (as demonstrated by FA2) as an impediment to her and other women's advancement. Additionally, another academic, FA3 opined that *"Some women view positions of power as stressful accompanied by overload of work"*. Consequently, some may not apply for advancement *"[...] whilst to others is fear of the unknown"* (FA3). Men will apply, and when they do get appointed, the issue of male dominance or patriarchy ensues.

### **Theme 3: Patriarchy and societal challenges**

It was the considered opinion by some of the participants that patriarchy compounded women's challenges in institutions of higher education. Opportunities are reportedly available but *"male counterparts are considered more suitable candidates* (FA2). And for FA3 *"[...] positions of power are man*

dominated, and some of the women are not keen to enter that space [...]" Hence FA5 contention that "gender bias" was at play in the workplace since "expectations are not meted out on men in similar positions." (FA2). Moreover, a woman academic need to "[...] constantly prove her worth in the workplace irrespective of "whose ox is being gored" may not bait most women to positions of power" (FA5). The all-encompassing role of some women as mother and academic has also been cited as a challenge. The balancing act is often fraught with more trials than tribulations. FA3 argued that

*Balancing work and home fronts. A woman's responsibilities are often enormous especially if she is a wife/partner, mother/caregiver and at the same time a professional/career woman. A good number of women are the breadwinners in their families and the weight of trying to balance and effectively manage both work and family becomes over-bearing. Therefore, she will likely not be interested in climbing the power ladder at work.*

## **4.2 Solutions to the challenges hindering women from attaining leadership Positions**

The preceding section appears to paint a bleak picture regarding women's survival in university systems in South Africa as perceived by themselves. The systems and processes appear to have dismembered the womenfolk. However, each dark cloud has a silver lining. We put it to them what options they would consider as strategies to mitigate the perceived and real challenges confronting them. Broadly, the strategies thematically focus on addressing institutional support, mentoring, and self-empowerment.

### ***Theme 1: Institutional supports***

Most participants gave the impression that higher education institutional structures, processes and cultures acted at cross-purposes regarding women's advancement. Participant FA2 saw the starting point as changing "the ingrained and institutionalised views of women". This could be achieved if institutions could "[...] acknowledge that they [women] are capable so that they can be the role models for their students, the future leaders of our institution(s). After discarding the negative views, institutions would then "...[...] work towards a fair and conducive work environment that is devoid of sexual harassment/favours and negative criticisms" (FA5). Such an environment should offer "Women of colour....[...] opportunities to advance in the academe"FA2]. Following this line of thinking, FA3 suggested that such a conducive environment will usher and increase "More holistic training and development opportunities ....[...] to empower women". Participant FA5 supported the idea and called universities to "...[...]avail skills programmes and motivate them [women] to partake if gaps are identified in their management experience and or leadership competencies".

The idea of training cascaded to FA4, who suggested that "More leadership programmes need [need] to be structured, to assist women with leadership skills". Participant F2 concurred while pleading that "Programmes to develop, re-skill and support women in workplaces should be encouraged" emphasising "...[...]inclusive practices must be exercised and not just paid lip service" This will allow universities to "...[...] mine their knowledge and expertise and don't allow it to go to waste" while at the same time "...[...] advancing their leadership capacity" Commenting on gender biases in the workplace institutions, FA2 proposed that "Prejudice and stereotyping of women should be addressed and women should be afforded equal opportunities to excel in their jobs". To this end, the women thought it was incumbent upon them to pursue self-empowering initiatives.

### ***Theme 2: Self-empowering***

Earlier on, we observed that women were, in certain instances, an impediment to themselves. As a countermeasure, some participants embarked on initiatives meant to liberate themselves. In contributing to the self-empowerment debate, FA5 suggested that:



*“Women should stand up for themselves and project a positive mindset that they are qualified and equal to the task just like their male counterparts. We should take up positions of authority and support one another.*

In this vein, participant FA3 opined, *“Women with leadership qualities should empower themselves and acquire qualifications needed to be able to occupy positions of power.”* But, to realise this aspiration, FA3 suggests a *“more holistic training and development opportunities [meant] to empower women [but warned that] this requires resilience, enough knowledge, and skills.”*

**Theme 3: Mentoring initiatives**

The institutional mechanisms discussed earlier could come in the form of mentors for female academics. Female academics such as FA2, FA4 and FA5 indicated university systems lacked support structures wherein they would thrive to be role models. To mitigate this challenge, FA5 argued, *“We should take up positions of authority and support one another.”* Supporting each other is, in essence, mentoring. Participant FA4 was more direct in this regard *“Women need to be assigned a mentor to guide them with leadership roles.”* She was supported in these sentiments by participant FA3, who submitted that *“Mentorship should be strengthened and applied to assist and support women who are keen to occupy positions of power.”* Regarding institutional support to women, FA2 supplicated universities to *“Mentor and expose them [women] [...] support them in advancing their leadership capacity.* Participant FA5 believes that institutions are not doing in this regard; hence, they need to [...] *recognise the gains and contributions women have made in the academe and support them to advance further in leadership mentoring programmes.”* Through mentoring and instituting other support mechanisms, women *“will be ready to implement and plough back to their faculties [FA2] wherein “Output and performance should be the main indicator” [FA1].*

**5. Discussion of Findings**

This session presents the discussion of findings based on the above data analysis. Findings were presented in accordance with the objectives of the study, which also generated three sub-themes each. All the themes responded to the actualisation of the major research question. See the table below.

**Table 1:** *Thematic representation of findings based on the research question and objectives.*

<i>Research Question: How can “politics of process” dismembering women’s adequate inclusivity in university systems be deconstructed to ensure equal women’ participation?</i>	
<b>Objectives</b>	<b>Findings from objectives</b>
The challenges hindering women from attaining a position of power in the university system.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Institutional induced challenges</li> <li>2. Women as an impediment to themselves</li> <li>3. Patriarchy and societal challenges</li> </ol>
The possible solutions to the challenges hindering women from attaining leadership.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Institutional support</li> <li>2. Self-empowering</li> <li>3. Mentoring initiatives</li> </ol>

**Objective 1, Finding 1:** *Institutional induced challenges*

The data above indicate that institutional challenges hinder women from attaining positions of power. These challenges may be perceived as 'natural', stemming from general and cultural beliefs that women are unfit to hold positions of power. This finding supports Haile's (2016) argument that women's talents are often unrecognised in organisations and that organisational cultures are not conducive to promoting women into leadership positions. It aligns with the exploration by Alcalde and Subramaniam (2020) that higher education's structure and cultural disposition act as stumbling blocks for women, rendering them unproductive or barred from leadership positions. Similarly,

Waheeda and Nishan (2018, p. 8) discovered that women in higher education institutions in the Maldives face challenges such as a lack of career development opportunities, their voices not being heard, and a lack of support. White and Ozkanli (2011) also found that structures, values, norms, and organisational politics are major impediments to the growth and development of women in higher institutions. This finding also validates our argument that women in universities are "de-membered" from attaining positions of authority (Fine & Torre, 2004), necessitating a decolonial solution through their "re-membering". Based on this, the study confirms that one of the major challenges for women in the university system is institutionally induced challenges.

***Objective 1, Finding 2: Women as an impediment to themselves***

Based on the analysis, it was found that women can sometimes be a challenge to themselves. This is connected to the notion that some women lack self-belief and are hesitant to assume positions of authority. Additionally, the analysis suggests that women may engage in a 'pull-her-down' syndrome, which could contribute to the widespread belief that women are incapable of leading, thereby hindering their female colleagues' advancement to leadership positions. This finding supports Kiamba's (2009) opinion that women are often afraid of their own success. This fear might be linked to instances where they exhibit negative attitudes towards their counterparts who are progressing into leadership roles. While this is not exclusively a trait among women, it is also conceptualised in terms of 'kenimani' (the wish that others may not have) and 'kenimaton' (the wish that others may not reach one's status) as organisational practices (Omodan, 2021). Consequently, the study concluded that women can be an impediment to their own progression into leadership positions.

***Objective 1, Finding 2: Patriarchy and societal challenges***

The data analysis revealed that patriarchy and societal challenges are additional factors hindering women from attaining positions of authority in university systems. Patriarchy, in this context, refers to the social, cultural, and religious positioning of men as the head and women as their supporters. Societal challenges stem from the sociology of responsibility culturally placed on women, particularly the struggle of balancing home and work responsibilities. Kolawole (2017) identified this as a significant challenge for female academics in the university system. This finding is consistent with Hora's (2014) observation that excessive domestic responsibilities and patriarchal attitudes doubting women's leadership abilities pose major challenges. These insights support the study's assumption that women in the university system are "de-membered" and must therefore be "re-membered" into positions of authority. The participants' suggestions on how to "re-member" women are presented below.

***Objective 2, Finding 1: Institutional support***

The analysis above has determined that institutional support is a fundamental solution for reintegrating women into the forefront of organisational politics in university systems, free from unethical processes. This conclusion is supported by the participants' recommendation that women need an internal support system to enhance their progress and attainment of leadership positions. This finding aligns with Waheeda and Nishan's (2018) recommendation for professional development programs, support networks, and mentorship programs for women, which could lead to a stronger awareness against sex-based discrimination in the university system. Additionally, this finding mirrors the results of a study conducted in Turkey by Neale and Özkanlı (2010), which found that concerted efforts by top management staff such as Rectors/Vice-Chancellors and other senior managers in the university system are essential in supporting women in academia. This reinforces the idea that institutional support is crucial in reintegrating women into positions of authority. This concept is in line with the principles of decoloniality, which advocate for equality and oppose any

form of emerging discrimination between men and women in universities (Bell, Canham, Dutta, & Fernández, 2020).

***Objective 2, Finding 2: Self-empowering***

Based on the analysis, participants suggested that self-empowerment is a way to address the issue of women's dismemberment in leadership roles within the university system. The study revealed that self-empowerment is a key solution to the challenges hindering women's participation in leadership positions. This is in line with Sohail's (2014) argument that women should acquire a variety of leadership skills to demonstrate their qualifications and capabilities to their male counterparts. Critical strategies for self-empowerment could involve obtaining necessary academic qualifications and training, and engaging in development and professional programs independently. This approach is consistent with Pedler's (1988) conclusion that the practical values of self-development are essential for both personal and organisational development. This underscores the idea that while universities should work to empower women, personal and self-empowerment initiatives are crucial for enhancing women's preparedness to assume positions of authority. This concept is in agreement with Mendez's (2015) argument that women's empowerment is linked to decolonial feminism.

***Objective 2, Finding 3: Mentoring initiatives***

The study showed that mentoring programs for women in universities are an effective strategy for reintegrating women into leadership roles. Participants' feedback highlighted the importance of senior women mentoring their junior colleagues to encourage them to take on leadership positions. This discovery is supported by Sorcinelli and Yun (2007), who emphasise the positive impact of mentoring on women's academic and professional success. Gardiner (2007) also considers mentoring in universities to be beneficial, as it helps mentees stay committed to the institution and motivates them for career advancement. Mentoring can specifically help women align themselves with leadership roles. We contend that this approach is advantageous not only for the women being mentored but also for promoting mentoring programs in universities, which are essential for boosting university performance. Through these mentor-mentee relationships, universities can effectively empower women and prepare them for leadership roles.

## **6. Conclusion and Recommendations**

From the findings, it is evident that the research question was addressed in line with the research objectives, highlighting the challenges that hinder women from attaining positions of power in the university system. The study also proposed possible solutions to alleviate these challenges and facilitate the reintegration of women into positions of authority within a university system. Therefore, the study concludes that institutionally induced challenges, women as impediments to themselves, and patriarchy and societal challenges are the primary barriers preventing women from attaining positions of authority. We further conclude that institutional support, self-empowerment, and mentoring initiatives are key methods for reintegrating the marginalised (women) into university politics and promoting ethical engagement in the politics of the process. Based on these findings, we recommend that:

- University authorities, departments, and committees should devise situational strategies to ensure that female academics are supported with all available resources to achieve their career goals and objectives.
- Women themselves should take the initiative to empower themselves by engaging in developmental activities such as further education, professional courses, and workshops that could enhance their leadership capabilities within the system.
- Mentoring initiatives should be established in the university system to support women and all university stakeholders, thereby promoting university productivity and diversity.

## 7. Implication of the Recommendations on Decoloniality

The recommendations outlined in the study significantly contribute to the decoloniality and emancipation of women in university leadership. These recommendations directly address the systemic and cultural barriers that have historically marginalised women in academic leadership roles by advocating for institutional support, self-empowerment, and mentoring initiatives. Through resources and policy changes, institutional support dismantles the structural impediments rooted in colonial legacies, fostering an environment where women's leadership is valued and promoted. Self-empowerment encourages women to break free from internalised limitations and societal stereotypes, aligning with the de-colonial goal of liberating the mind from oppressive constructs. Mentoring initiatives create networks of support and knowledge transfer, crucial for building the confidence and skills necessary for women to ascend to leadership positions. Collectively, these strategies not only uplift women in academia but also challenge and transform the patriarchal and colonial norms that have long governed university systems, paving the way for a more equitable and diverse leadership landscape.

## 8. Declarations

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