Feminist Africa

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FEMINISTS ORGANISING – Strategy, Voice, Power

Feminist Africa
is a continental gender studies journal
produced by the community of feminist scholars.
It provides a platform for intellectual and activist
research, dialogue and strategy.
Feminist Africa
attends to the complex and diverse dynamics of creativity and
resistance that have emerged in postcolonial Africa, and
the manner in which these are shaped by the shifting
global, geopolitical configurations of power.
It is currently based at the African Gender Institute in
Cape Town. A full text version of this journal is available on the
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Feminists Organising – Strategy, Voice, Power

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Two issues are produced per annum, in accordance with themes specified in the calls for contributions.

The editorial team can be contacted at agi-feministafrica@uct.ac.za

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The Power of Feminist Pan-African Intellect

Amina Mama

> Keep expanding your horizon, decolonise your mind, and cross over borders. (Kochiyama, 1996)

Introduction

Fifteen years since the launch of the first issue on Intellectual Politics in 2002, this special editorial marks the end of the first stage in *Feminist Africa*'s life. The shared founding principle behind FA is the understanding that building strong and independent feminist movements is necessary for the liberation of our continent. Movement-building demands the mobilisation of multiple energies that work to demystify, resist and overcome the sex- and gender-based oppressions at work in our lives and communities, and in the institutions we inhabit. Conscientisation is a dynamic dialectical relationship between radical thinking and action.[1] It takes integrity and courage to listen across boundaries, to hear and respect the multiple languages of gender and sexuality, marked by the striations of other dimensions of power and status. Unless we link collective organising with coherent feminist consciousness informed by sound theories of gender oppression and change, we easily become subject to an identity politics that will keep us divided. By strengthening feminist consciousness, we strengthen the collective "will to change" that we express through activism.

Feminist writing and publishing is a key route to conscientisation. In the post-independence era, hundreds of thousands of Africans have received advanced levels of education and training, yet our presence in global publishing about Africa remains unsatisfactory, despite the astuteness of our feminist intellectuals. The same can be said for feminist publications. Reviews of African research in gender and women's studies observe that systemic

global inequalities maintain the Western domination of global publishing, and this reaches its extreme with regard to publishing on Africa (Mama, 1996; Lewis, 2002). There has been little change here; although recent years have seen an exciting proliferation of creative writing, non-fiction writing remains undervalued and inadequately supported. What happens to us when we cannot find ourselves, our historical and present-day realities, or our ideas in research on Africa? What happens to us when what we do find is distorted by the perspectives and positionalities of others? The short answer is that we fish endlessly through oceans of indigestible texts, and we either lose sight of our conditions, or we develop an appetite for something different, something feminist that is African too. The appetite of the 1990s soon became the collective hunger that FA seeks to both feed and nurture. Fifteen years further into neoliberal globalisation, it is clear that these conditions are still with us. *Feminist Africa* responds to the hunger that so many of us have felt for so long, but feeding a famine is never easy.

Feminist Africa was initially conceptualised in 2000 as part of a mission to radicalise the field of gender and women's studies scholarship by developing a feminist intellectual community grounded in critical engagements with local conditions and women's movements. The editorial policy (see ii, above) expresses the vision as follows:

> *Feminist Africa* is guided by a profound commitment to transforming gender hierarchies in Africa, and seeks to redress injustice and inequality in its content and design, and by its open-access and continentally-targeted distribution strategy. *Feminist Africa* targets gender researchers, students, educators, women's organisations and feminist activists throughout Africa. It works to develop a feminist intellectual community by promoting and enhancing African women's intellectual work.

Excited by the possibilities of then-new ICT, an early model was for FA not to be centralised, but concurrently co-published at several locations. When this proved hard to realise, the second model was to rotate FA among Africa's leading public universities. The reality has been that FA has remained hosted at the African Gender Institute (AGI), and indeed owes its sustained existence to the AGI, and the sheer endurance of its leadership. Our location on the University of Cape Town (UCT) campus, well known to be one of the most elitist and colonial of Africa's campuses, was never the easiest of places for a

journal that would place emphasis on legitimising the (in that context, novel) idea of feminist intellectual work by and primarily for African audiences. While we savour the fact that FA has reached its 22nd issue, it is time to re-imagine. So much has changed. The institutions and movements that define us have been reconfigured, and the community of feminists across Africa has grown and changed too.

Subverting the Academy

In this Special Editorial, I move from editing back into writing, taking the opportunity to review and reflect on key aspects of the FA experience of the last 15 years, in the hope that these reflections can usefully inform the future of FA, and perhaps other feminist knowledge projects by, on, and for Africa's feminist movements. The first editorial conveyed our initial thinking:

> *Feminist Africa* responds to the heightened salience of gender in African political and intellectual landscapes. It provides a forum for the intellectual activism that has always been intrinsic to feminism… It provides the first continental platform for reflecting on the accumulated wisdom which has matured in the cauldron of post-colonial gender contradictions… In focusing on contemporary post-colonial feminist theories, politics and strategies, *Feminist Africa* makes no apology for valorising feminist academic work and insisting on rigorous analysis. The triumphalist rhetoric of globalisation, the re-marginalisation of women in the new African Union, not to mention the escalation of poverty and outbreaks of conflict, civil and militarism, are all deeply gendered phenomena that demand incisive analysis. (Mama, 2002: 2)[2]

Two years earlier, not long after I assumed my duties at UCT, the Ford Foundation supported a landmark workshop that allowed the AGI to bring together over 30 feminist scholars.[3] Participants at that gathering realised this was an historic event because until then we had not been able to convene at our own behest. Those of us who had occasionally met did so one or two at a time, in venues convened by our Western colleagues, usually overseas. Many of us had also been part of Africa's malestream scholarly networks, where intellectual gatherings remained heavily male-dominated spaces, in which many colleagues were disinterested, some viscerally resistant, to feminist theory and methodology. The rich sharing of ideas that occurred in

Cape Town 2000 ended with a planning process that informed the weaving of the AGI's continental feminist collaborative projects for the years to come. What has since emerged as Africa's feminist intellectual community shares the conviction that feminism is as intellectual as it is practical. We share an understanding of activism as rooted in critical reflection on our historical conditions, and feminist theory as most relevant when it is rooted in activism.

Feminist Africa emerged as one thread in an ambitious multifaceted continental project which treated feminist intellectual work as integral to socio-cultural and political transformation. I found myself in a highly privileged colonial institution that was removed from the continent on whose tip it sat, and as unaware of the world of radical, anti-imperialist ideas as it was obtuse to Africa's intellectual landscape. As I understood it, my job was all about changing this, in the name of gender equality.

The strategy that the AGI devised for radicalising public universities was rooted in bringing university and movement feminisms together in order to strengthen both. We have often referred to this as "linking theory with activism", but we know very well that research, theory and writing are also actions, and that action involves the mind as well as the body. A major task of activists is conscientisation, and this requires us to subvert the boundaries that alienate and fragment knowledge and the pedagogies that reproduce inequalities instead of transforming them.

Because of the academic organisation of knowledge into silos that separate mind (psychology) from body (biology, physiology, anatomy), from society (sociology), from politics (political science), from economics, from humanity (languages, art, music, theatre), feminist methodology embraces trans-disciplinary methodology, in order to subvert these academic disciplinary divisions.[4] Gender oppression may discipline and pacify women, but radical gender analysis cannot be discipline-based, nor can it be pacified.

At a practical level, the AGI worked to convene women from numerous contexts, and to ignite radical conversations. These have taken place in real spaces, filling small rooms with African women's brains and bodies, pioneering uses of still-new e-technologies and creating collective spaces. Groups of visiting associates came first, followed by curriculum working groups, research groups, and by multi-media publishing activities designed to strengthen and re-politicise existing sites for gender and women's studies into fertile places for radical imagination and resistance. E-technology has allowed us to work

beyond bodies in the room, to reach far larger numbers, widen the range of institutions and locations, and to communicate in full colour, using virtual media and new uses of text. By bringing African women, not all of whom identify as feminist thinkers, and their ideas together – across disciplinary, institutional and geographic borders, our work has aimed to make the boundaries between research, pedagogy and activism porous, so that these arenas can become epistemologically coherent. Two core principles have informed all the AGI's work: first, the simple understanding of knowledge production as organic and people-centred; second, a respect for the generative and transformative power of collective processes.

The second paragraph of FA's editorial policy (see above: ii) addresses the practical challenge presented by our political goal of ensuring the journal could be accessed across the African continent:

> To overcome the access and distribution challenges facing conventional academic publications, *Feminist Africa* deploys a dual dissemination strategy, using the Internet as a key tool for knowledge-sharing and communication, while making hard copies available to those based at African institutions.

We invested in both real and virtual publishing and dissemination. Nowadays we are questioned on this, but in 2002 we conducted a survey of Internet usage which informed our position. Even leaving issues of electricity and access to computers aside, we found that most African women were reliant on dial-up modems within insufficient band-width, and usage was largely limited to email.[5] We take pride in the fact that we successfully sustained the two-track dissemination strategy until Issue 19 in 2014, when the lack of funding overcame it.

By the time I decided to leave the AGI, the South African "moment" was over. Zuma had displaced Mbeki at the helm of the ANC; the University of Cape Town had been reformed instead of transformed, and the AGI was being squeezed, despite the prodigious success of the Gender Studies Programmes that it established, and the effective raising of funding for transnational African research and training interventions. The AGI's vision of a continental hub for feminist teaching, research and publishing was irretrievably compromised when the university administration enforced a separation between the AGI's African research, curriculum-strengthening and publishing projects, and its teaching programme. In 2012, the AGI's teaching programme was hived off

to become a conventional department of gender and women's studies, and worse, the teaching faculty were no longer allowed to participate in AGI projects, of which FA was just one. This was to have grave implications for FA. There is a tragic irony that the AGI's transformative work has been impeded at a time of dramatic feminist resurgence, especially visible among a diverse and tech-savvy generation of feminist initiatives across the continent, including in South Africa. Here the #RhodesMustFall student protests began as an anti-colonial protest at UCT, but soon grew into a national mobilisation for the reduction of fees and student debt.

On a personal note, I was not drawn to UCT because it was an "already-liberated" campus. Clearly it was not. However, I had glimpsed the possibilities for transformative feminist work in the historically unique and invigorating political climate that was South Africa at the end of the 1990s. Brimming with pan-African sense of solidarity, I was interested to see if – as Mamphela Ramphele had once opined – the de-racialisation of South Africa could be facilitated by pan-Africanism. Almost two decades later, the deep-but-denied realities of xenophobia have shelved that possibility. In full transparency, I admit that I was also enticed away from Nigeria by the promise of 24/7 electricity, Internet access, and libraries stacked with books and journals. More seriously, who among us had not been gripped by the sight of Mandela walking out of prison beaming, with Winnie on his arm? Two years later, in 1996, my first visit to South Africa was to an embryonic AGI that was setting up its foundational Visiting Associates Programme.[6] I was still breastfeeding the baby I took with me as hand-luggage, to join Hope Chigudu, Rose Mensah-Kutin, Ruth Meena, Athaliah Molokomme, and Nozipho January-Bardill, to design and implement a continent-wide selection process.[7] As guests of the AGI, our small group also witnessed President Mandela install Mamphela Ramphele as the UCT Vice-Chancellor, the first black woman to hold such an office in South Africa. None of us will ever forget Madiba remarking that he would "not hide the special pleasure" he took in the fact that "she is a woman, and black!" Eish! How we ululated that day![8]

What kept us going in an institution that implemented "transformation" by hurtling along a trajectory from white-colonial to global-neoliberal? The answer is simple. As feminists who believe liberation is possible, we were regularly re-fuelled and inspired by the hundreds of African women who came

through the AGI. Some of you came as visiting associates, others as workshop participants, as students, researchers, readers, writers, cyber-feminists and activists working in diverse spaces that were often *not* universities. Connecting the positive energy and brilliance of other African women unleashed a powerful force, and it was this that propelled us forward, emboldening us to pursue an upstream course.

I have no doubt that the success of the AGI and *Feminist Africa* itself is entirely due to the fact that we were able to channel this power – feminist and African – to take up residence in the university just as it came under pressure to transform. We drew rapidly growing numbers of students to the academic programme, but in contrast to university convention, we also drew colleagues from dozens of African countries, young activists and scholars, and older women who had spent decades being overworked and under-published in shamelessly patriarchal institutions that had been further debilitated by economic structural-adjustment programmes. Women would come to write, recuperate and reflect, consult with colleagues, participate in workshops, and use the UCT libraries and servers in the ensuing years. Our small team was also able to get around the continent, to be further inspired by working with colleagues in situ, in Accra, Dakar, Ibadan and Abuja, Harare, Gaborone, Windhoek, Maputo, Nairobi, Kampala, as well as various South African campuses, so that this power was renewed again and again.

A Journal of Our Own[9]

> The insistence from the first issue was that each FA constituted a "curation" of genres – profiles, conversations, standpoints, formal articles (sometimes poems!) – this honoured the idea that an "academic article" is always and everywhere grounded in differently-articulated activisms. (Jane Bennett, personal communication, March 2017)

The design of FA has tried to reflect the principle of resisting the complete separation of academic from activist writing, so it has several sections that do not follow academic conventions requiring citation and cross-referencing to other academics. The "Standpoints" include argued opinions regarding feminist debates; the "Profiles" offered space for documenting feminist interventions in a variety of spaces; and the "In Conversation" section shared exchanges between FA and feminists engaged in diverse modes of kinds of

activism. We worked with an understanding that the best critical thinking and ideas were not necessarily expressed in an academic format, but still deserved to be honoured as radical intellectual production. The "Features" section was a space for more scholarly articles that required authors to engage with feminist theory and/or use gender analysis, to include citations, and were peer-reviewed. However, because we all knew what it meant to be kept out by the gatekeeping of many publications, we kept our own gate by making sure that every feature was reviewed by at least one African feminist, a commitment that added greatly to the building of intellectual community.

Every issue has its own story. Each had to be conceptualised and contributors and peer reviewers identified according to the subject matter. When we embarked on an issue, we had to improvise ways of soliciting contributions in a manageable way, find editorial assistance, and meet the costs of publication. In keeping with the principles of community, and to extend the areas of expertise, we constantly sought ways of involving others, and broadening the FA community of editors, contributors and reviewers as well as readers and users, which we were simultaneously working to build. While the first four Issues were edited in-house, Issue 5, "African Sexualities", was the first to be collaboratively edited. The three features in this issue were drawn from Mapping Sexualities – possibly the first all-African-feminist research project on sexuality – through a three-way research and editorial collaboration with Takyiwaa Manuh for the Institute of African Studies at the University of Ghana, and independent scholar, Charmaine Pereira. The features were drawn from the six research projects carried out by locally-based researchers in South Africa (two projects), Ghana (two projects), Nigeria, and Uganda.

FA 16: *African Feminist Engagements with Film*, which came out eight years later, can also be traced back to the Mapping Sexualities research project.[11] Aware of the need for multimedia teaching in African institutions, I had invited film director Yaba Badoe to join the research team. This was because, many years earlier, we had discussed the witches' camp in Gambaga, near Tamale in Northern Ghana. By that time, over one hundred women accused of witchcraft were living at Gambaga under the protection of a local chief, and hundreds were confined to other camps in the region.[12] It took over six years to complete the production of *The Witches of Gambaga*, partly because mobilising resources for independent, African-directed films poses its own challenges. To make

the documentary that began with Yaba's research, I drew on longstanding personal connections with Ghanaian feminists,[13] and NETRIGHT (Network for Women's Rights). We were therefore able to identify community activists already challenging witchcraft accusations, whose work we wanted to support.[14] *The Witches of Gambaga* was launched at the African Feminist Forum (AFF) in Dakar, 2010, and proceeded to win several international awards, including second place in the best documentary category at Africa's largest film festival, FESPACO. From an activist viewpoint, however, what mattered most was not the acclaim, but the fact that it was given multiple screenings on national television on Ghana, and clearly had an impact on public perceptions and responses. Yaba and I were eventually able to find the resources to travel back to Gambaga camp and screen it for the women, but that is another story. FA16 was therefore co-edited with Yaba Badoe and I, joined by the Ethiopian feminist filmmaker, Salem Mekuria.[15]

FA 12: *Land, Labour and Gendered Livelihoods*, co-edited by Dzodzi Tsikata and Dede-Esi Amanor-Wilks, was significant because it enabled FA to address previously neglected, yet hugely important, terrain. The editors state their intention to:

> explore the interconnections among economic liberalisation policies, land and resource tenures, and labour relations in the structuring of gendered livelihoods in sub-Saharan Africa.... *Feminist Africa* signals its recognition of the enormous significance of production systems and livelihoods, and the social relations undergirding these. (Tsikata and Amanor-Wilks, 2009: 1)

FA 12 came out of a three-way collaborative workshop held in Accra on 26–28 June 2008. Organised by the African Gender Institute, the Institute of Statistical, Social and Economic Research of the University of Ghana, and the African Institute for Agrarian Studies, established by the late Sam Moyo in Harare, it brought together 23 researchers, activists, students, and policy makers working on land and livelihoods in nine countries across East, West and Southern Africa. Rightly critical of what they saw as the over-representation of matters of culture and sexuality in FA, on a continent where the vast majority of women are farmers, the Editors of this special issue underline the importance of:

> developing a pan-African research agenda to rekindle interest in these issues of longstanding concern, which have been neglected by

> contemporary efforts to develop African-centred feminist analysis on women's lives. (Tsikata and Amanor-Wilks, 2009: 1)

Dzodzi Tsikata and Dede-Esi Amanor-Wilks brought new field expertise and different networks which significantly expanded the scope of FA.

One last example of the complex processes that lay behind the conceptualisation of each Issue of FA can be seen in Issue 17: *Researching Sexuality with Young Women: Southern Africa*. Edited by Jane Bennett and Hope Chigudu, both experienced activists in this field, this issue published and disseminated material which arose out of a five-campus project to strengthen the leadership of young women in the challenging field of sexual health and reproductive rights.[16] As the Editors note:

> The project was based on previous work aimed at supporting African feminist writers, researchers and NGO activists in their understanding of the politics of sexuality and gender and in their deployment of different concepts, including that of SRHR,[17] in their own work. We recognised the need to move into work directly engaging the young women who were so frequently the topics of discussion about gender-based violence, the impact of economic stress on options for sexuality, and the meaning of reproductive rights in politically troubled contexts. Because so much of this research assumes that it is poor, rural, or working-class women who should be the focus of exploration, we deliberately chose to work *with* (not "on") young women with largely lower-middle class backgrounds, on higher education campuses, and with very diverse religious and ethnic backgrounds (Bennett and Chigudu, 2012: 5-6. *Emphasis added*)

While the age and class profile of this project echoed that of many of our students (young, lower-middle and middle class, women and gender non-conforming), most of whom also have to do research and writing to graduate, it was important that this was also an African and feminist initiative, one that "foregrounds the research created with young women" in a journal that was, by this time, internationally recognised.

The three examples hint at the complex negotiations, relational practices and networks that lay behind each and every issue. In other words, there was never a single story, and every issue was an experiment, an adventure in uncertainty, until the upload button was pressed, and we could breathe, even as the next issue was already in our heads.[18]

Shifting terrain

What can we learn from FA's experience over the last decade and a half of feminist African intellectual struggle? Our existence raises a number of issues around the meaning of the university, and how we understand feminist knowledge work in Africa.

The first of these is to reconsider if feminist scholarship can realistically be pursued in Africa's universities. Our collective experience is that this has never been easy. However, with several million of the next generation being trained in these institutions, it is imperative that we do not leave this terrain. How can we make feminist scholarship more possible on the African continent today? After all, as various other feminist scholars have done, we were able to carry out the FA work in the shifting cracks and crevices of an institution that had its own problems. There is irony in the fact that the claustrophobic discomfort of working under the shadow of the then-still-standing statue of Cecil Rhodes pushed the AGI to do work that lived largely *outside* our home institution, in order to develop intellectual resources that enhanced teaching *inside* it.[19] Feedback from colleagues confirms that teaching and research were enriched and radicalised on other African campuses too.

Second, there are the problems of resource hunger that have only intensified; so, as is the case for feminist organising in all spheres, we have to find new ways of mobilising resources, of making it possible to give at least some of our labour to the pursuit of the interests and agendas we so clearly define and articulate.

Third, and related, is we have become more aware of the contradictions of our heavy reliance on unpaid, informalised labour, because this reflects the institutional privilege of the highly-skilled minority (like ourselves) who have been able to find ways to participate in the work that is so liberating, and still put bread on the table. It is with hindsight and grey hair that I can only now see the sheer amount of meticulous, time-consuming, multi-skilled work that editing and publishing FA required, and how much this demanded of our editors and writers. The level of editorial work was especially intense because we sought to redress the fact that many contributors had never had the opportunity to be editorially supported by peers, and cultivate what it means to work through the multiple revisions that are required to produce writing that is legible across multiple contexts. However, this capacity-strengthening work raised its own dilemmas. In pushing others to carry out such an

enormous amount of invisible, unpaid labour, were we not reproducing the key exploitative features of "women's work"? Perhaps a certain level of denial was expedient for us. I compare it to the labour of child-bearing in the sense that, if women remembered how hard and painful it was, not many would ever have more than one child! So it was with each issue of FA. Jane Bennett and I will forever appreciate all those who worked with us to take on and share the laborious work of editing FA, without which we may never have grown FA beyond the "single issue" phenomenon that is a feature of African contexts. The labour question must be reflected upon, particularly as formal employment collapses further into informal and consultancy-based work.

Deep desires lie behind all feminist labour. Each time an issue came out, those who worked on it felt hugely gratified. I will refrain from getting poetic about what it means to touch the recycled paper and smell the printer's ink as one leafs through pages full of feminism that is African. Or to read material which speaks through the layers of our multiple identities. Or the delight at watching, sometimes joining, Hilda Ferguson, Karen Flowers and Wardah Daniels, the AGI's indefatigable administrators, stuff copies into envelopes addressed to destinations that stretched from Cape Town to... to other feminists all over the continent! It was a radical kind of pleasure, not less or more than the joys that accrue from awarding degree certificates to unimaginably beautiful students, many of them "women and black". As the #RhodesMustFall protests on the UCT campus so vividly reminded us, there is still much work to be done, perhaps especially in places that are wilfully "still not ready" for radical, pan-African thinking, or the people that might bring it forth.

We are often asked why we have not taken the path of other internationally acclaimed academic feminist journals in the West. *Meridians*, *Feminist Review*, *Signs*, *Agenda*, *Jenda!* and others are now the property of corporate publishing houses who pay some of the editorial assistance costs and can guarantee production. The truth is that several leading houses *have* expressed interest in adding FA to the long list of accredited academic journals they publish, but we have always resisted. Our reasoning lies in the founding mission and purpose of FA. To be acquired by a large corporate house requires us to abandon the very things that motivated us to create FA in the first place. The principle of open-access resource is one. Collective ownership is another. And we would have to purchase out-of-reach subscriptions, or

be affiliated to universities that can afford them. There is discussion to be had over the fact that by remaining free and open access we have retained political and intellectual freedom, but remained precarious. In concrete terms, this translates into FA being able to insist on a particular definition of *peer* review, to mean review by feminist peers, African where possible, because we prefer to keep our own gate, instead of being subjected to the gatekeeping of others. These lie at the centre of insisting on "a journal of our own", surely worth defending?

FA's fate has been inexorably linked to that of the AGI, itself in permanent struggle with the contradictions of working from within larger, patriarchal structures that, as noted above, are still not ready for us. One question for further consideration is whether powerful, feminist intellectual work can still occur in universities, and if so, under what conditions? If we conclude that it cannot, or that what can be done is insufficient, then we must ask ourselves: What kinds of arrangement must we co-create to engage in powerful, potentially transformative, feminist intellectual work?

We – Jane Bennett, myself, and other FA editors – plan to throw this question out again to the complex and argumentative and brilliant and trans-generational community that now forms the readership and support-network of *Feminist Africa*. Issue 22, motivated by the creative and powerful energy renewed at the AFF in Harare 2016 and appropriately produced in partnership with the African Women's Development Fund, will be the last for the next two years. In the forthcoming months, we plan collective conversations through which we hope to formulate a fresh, re-grounded engagement with the future of feminist intellectual writing on the continent. Your participation will be the lifeblood for this re-birthing, so please stay on our listserv. Knowing that each issue of FA is READ, by the very people we yearn for as sisters, allies, neighbours and interlocutors, has made every proofreading and every e-challenged communication possible, and more important, deeply treasured.

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Endnotes

1 Paulo Freire, the Brazilian Marxist and radical educator, uses this term. The Marxist term "praxis" can also be used.

2 *Southern African Feminist Review* (SAFERE), edited by Patricia MacFadden at SARIPS in Harare, was the first scholarly journal to include "feminist" in its name.

3 The workshop title was "Gender and Women's Studies in African Contexts".

4 This is not the same thing as "interdisciplinary", which refers to bringing existing disciplines together, in the same way that "transnational" is not the same as "international".

5 Conducted by Jenny Radloff, one of the AGI's early staff and a pioneer cyber-feminist and member of the Gender in Africa Information Network (GAIN). Jenny edited FA 18: e-spaces, e-politics.

6 Funded for several years by the Rockefeller Foundation.

7 We were hosted by Michelle Friedman, then an AGI programme officer.

8 We also attended a hearing of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) that was dedicated to women – because South African feminists had demanded it.

9 Virginia Woolf's 1929 essay on women intellectuals was titled "A Room of One's Own".

10 Former National Convenor of the Initiative for Women's Studies in Nigeria.

11 I had initially imagined producing a series of six films on the different projects, to facilitate better education and activism on the very challenging politics and cultures of sexuality in African contexts.

12 In fact there were several such camps in which hundreds more ostracised women, most of them elderly, were in refuge from their communities.

13 Dzodzi Tsikata and Rose Mensah-Kutin.

14 Gladys Laraba, Ken Addae, Fatima Alhassan.

15 I worked with Salem Mekuria on another film project intended to explore the gender politics of Sharia in Northern Nigeria in 2012, ten years after the charges of *zina* discussed in Pereira's study in FA 5 (2005). However, the funding challenges and, later, the deterioration of the Boko Haram conflict meant that the project was never completed.

16 Participants came from the Universities of Zimbabwe, Botswana, Witwatersrand, Namibia and Cape Town.

17 Sexual and reproductive health and rights.

18 Issues always took much longer than planned, often several months. Finding time and space to write seriously, or to edit, continues to be an immense challenge for most of us throughout our careers, in or outside educational institutions.

19 We saw the AGI as subsidising the institution by raising large grants, as well as making a significant and transformative intervention that informed teaching African gender studies on the continent and globally, but the institution always saw this the other way round.

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Feminists Organising – Strategy, Voice, Power

Charmaine Pereira

The focus of *Feminist Africa* 22 – "Feminists Organising" – implies a vision, a sense of alternative possibilities of greater social justice alongside the liberation of women from all sources of oppression, and collective feminist energies being mobilised to bring about change in this direction. How have feminists in Africa organised and what are the ends to which feminist organising is directed? What strategies are used to pursue which goals and what trajectories of change are envisaged? How do we effect change within ourselves, even as we strive to change relations and conditions at local, national, regional, and/or global levels? Whose voices are privileged, heard or silenced in the course of feminist organising and in what contexts?

Across the African continent, and from pre-colonial times to the contemporary era, women have organised to further their interests in social, cultural, political and economic domains (see e.g. Daymond et al., 2003; Sutherland-Addy and Diaw, 2005). The fact of women's organising is one of the many motifs featuring in the vast panorama of the *Women Writing Africa* project, a project that set out to retrieve the buried voices of women in their varied responses to the social and political forces in their lives. Such retrievals entail considerable organising and imagination in themselves, involving multiple planes of thought and collective action.

How has contemporary feminist organising in Africa addressed the nexus of strategy, voice and power? A longstanding focus of activism has been feminist engagement with political parties and the state, with a view to increasing women's political participation.[1] Political power is privileged as a zone for amplifying women's access to voice and decision-making. The extent to which women – elected on the platform of political parties very often hostile to women's presence – are able to address feminist priorities in their political careers, is a recurring question. Strategies such as affirmative action for women have been championed with varying degrees of success, pointing to the limits of political representation. Inclusionary, reformist strategies

that target women's political inclusion have been differentiated from radical transformational strategies that challenge power more broadly (Hassim, 2005). Elaine Salo (2005) argues that both inclusionary and transformational strategies are necessary, given the complex character of the struggles involved and the varied texture of gendered movements.

A particularly prominent focus of feminist organising has been the violence targeted at women, including the impact of traditional rites and practices that are deemed harmful. This has gone hand in hand with efforts to promote women's sexual and reproductive health. Mobilising has taken the form of service provision as well as calls for women-centred changes in laws and policies. Whilst violence against women occurs across multiple sites – the home, the office, the street – violence in educational institutions has been a particular focus of mobilising, especially in South Africa and neighbouring countries, with legal and institutional policy reform being the main goals. Research on sexual harassment and sexual violence in higher education institutions has generated new understandings of the complex gender dynamics in the institutions and various forms of abuse.[2] The research process itself has been designed to be a powerful "tool of advocacy, solidarity-building and communication with key members of the university community" (Bennett et al., 2007: 90). Whilst research is often viewed as distinct from activism, the use of participatory action research points to a distinction that is more apparent than real. Activism can only be strengthened by a deeper understanding of the problems with which it grapples.

The widespread social acceptance of gendered and sexual violations is predicated on the prescription of rigid roles concerning gender and sexuality, for women as well as men. This acceptance is manifest in both the normalisation of abuse of women who do not fit accepted constructions of femininity and in the contempt and violence faced by men whose masculinities are considered suspect. Misogyny and homophobia share common foundations. The first organisation to address homophobia and misogyny as interlinked zones for feminist activism was Sister Namibia, beginning in the 1990s. Urgent Action Fund, in Kenya, and more recently, the Coalition of African Lesbians (CAL), have also operated from the same premise. These struggles point to activist recognition of intricate, contextually shaped ties in the relations between gender and sexuality as social categories – sexualities are necessarily gendered, and gender derives much of its force through relations that are sexualised.

The diverse contexts within which feminist organising across the African continent takes place today are still shaped by multiple layers of domination – imperial, colonial, military and/or authoritarian civilian rule. The particular configuration of inequality that manifests in any given context is conditioned by the specificities of historical, political and economic processes embedded in that context. Relations of gender and sexuality are both not only configured by relations with the state but their meanings for women's lives are folded into diverse structures of inequality, particularly class but also race, ethnicity, religion, among others, and not necessarily in similar ways.

Because the resulting social and other divisions exist within as well as beyond movements, building solidarity requires modes of organising that go beyond the representation of multiple constituencies and/or groups defined by identity. The challenge of negotiating diverse and sometimes competing interests demands an engagement with *practice*, such as: What would it mean to create shared visions and agendas? How should we go about collaborating to formulate strategies and plans of action? Negotiating which strategies to adopt in achieving shared objectives is no straightforward matter – those with the loudest voices tend not to even notice which ones have been silenced.

Whether the aim of feminist organising on the continent is to create new possibilities for women and society or to dismantle existing relations of domination,[3] feminist organising inevitably involves engaging with gendered power relations. The Tanzania Gender Networking Programme (TGNP) is one of the few networks on the continent explicitly "committed to a struggle against patriarchy *and* neoliberal globalisation"; their focus is on understanding the operation of gender, class and imperial/race relationships as a prelude to their transformation (Mbilinyi, 2017). In an incisive and illuminating interview, Marjorie Mbilinyi (op. cit.) details the multiple struggles since the late 1970s, out of which the TGNP was eventually forged in 1993. Mbilinyi highlights the significance of a culture of collective decision-making in strengthening the process of collective struggle:

> TGNP Mtandao adopted multiple strategies, including training and consciousness-raising using animation[4] approaches; knowledge generation, dissemination and information through participatory action research, multi-media platforms and policy analysis; advocacy work on strategic issues with strategic government actors/departments, local government authorities, and members of Parliament; and media

> engagement at all levels. Of particular importance is the intensive Movement Building Cycle, combining participatory action research, support for local knowledge centres and linkages with investigative journalists. (Mbilinyi, op. cit.)

Feminist struggles on the continent have often addressed the operations of power in arenas that seem quite distinct from one another. Explicit contestations over resource constraints and unequal global relations, on the one hand, tend to be partitioned from discursive interventions subverting dominant modes of representation in language or visual imagery. The latter appear to share an understanding of power in which "systems of representation that include seeing, speaking and writing are often more sinister, insidious and difficult to dislodge than economic and political forms of oppression" (Lewis, 2007: 24). Yet questions of class are often refracted through representational axes of power to position poor women disadvantageously in current political and economic systems. How, for example, are we to unravel the assumptions underlying notions such as women's sexuality being necessarily/"naturally" bound up with "morality", assumptions often acted upon to legitimate the oppression of women in general and poor women in particular? Relations of power not only structure the material but are embedded in discursive constructions of normativity, whether these are norms around heterosexuality, religion, "culture" or "tradition", too often imposed as the only possible "identity" – or the reinforcing character of these normative constructions when working in concert with one another.

The intellectual and activist work of organising across boundaries of multiple structures of inequality has a long history (see Mama and Abbas, 2015; Boyce Davies, 2014), considerably predating the current use of the term "intersectional" by student protesters in South Africa (and elsewhere on the continent) to articulate identities as "radical, intersectional African feminists" (Gouws, 2017). The descriptive use of "intersectional" as a form of identity may appear to be distinctive but it does not, in itself, provide an analysis of critical questions such as which structural divisions are significant in specific contexts or how these sources of social division are intertwined with one another and exert their effects. Although the term "intersectionality" is generally attributed to Kimberlé Crenshaw, in 1989 in the USA, work on multiple structures of domination was evident much earlier in the transnational and pan-African mobilising of women like Claudia Jones (from the late 1940s) and Funmilayo

Ransome-Kuti (since the early 1960s). This work involved analysis of the operations of multiple dimensions of domination such as class, race and imperialism alongside gender; in the process, it made "connections between nationalism, feminism and earlier communist positions" (Boyce Davies, 2014: 80). The Combahee River Collective (1977), in the USA, added sexual and heterosexual dimensions of oppression in addition to class and race, in their Black Feminist Statement on interlocking systems of oppression.

In the contemporary era, much feminist activism takes place beyond the boundaries of nation-states (cf. Mohanty, 2003). Feminists in Africa have organised on a range of issues within several regional networks. These include the African Women's Development and Communication Network (FEMNET), *Femmes Africa Solidarité* (FAS), Akina Mama wa Africa (AMwA), ABANTU for Development, The Association of African Women for Research and Development/*Association des Femmes Africaines pour la Recherche et le Développement* (AAWORD/AFARD), all of which put pressure on agencies of continental governance to take gender equality seriously through activities such as training, policy advocacy, documentation and publication (Mama and Abbas, 2015). Isis–Women's International Cross-Cultural Exchange (Isis-WICCE) has worked on questions of conflict and the impact on women for decades. Women in Law and Development in Africa (WILDAF) and Women and Law in Southern Africa (WLSA) work to promote respect for women's rights on the continent; WLSA has carried out legal research across the sub-region, which it maintains in an archive. Women in several African countries have organised under the umbrella of the international solidarity network Women Living Under Muslim Laws (WLUML), which operates in countries where laws said to be derived from Islam shape women's lives. WLUML mobilises around struggles to promote women's rights within Islam, and against the political use of religion. The Coalition of African Lesbians (CAL), one of the newer groupings (formed in 2003), is a feminist pan-African network engaging with issues of sexuality and gender, in order to advance freedom, justice and bodily autonomy for all women on the continent.

Deliberate efforts at feminist movement building at the continental level have culminated in the formation of the African Feminist Forum (AFF). The AFF is a regional platform formed by a working group of independent feminist activists. The first meeting was held in Accra, Ghana in November 2006. The aims were: to create an autonomous space for African feminists by organising

Africa-wide meetings on a biennial basis; to agree on a charter of principles for feminist organising in Africa; to produce a body of feminist knowledge; and to engage with other social movements (AFF, 2006: 2). The AFF is run by a secretariat based at the African Women's Development Fund in Ghana, in partnership with whichever national feminist organisation is hosting the biennial regional meeting. As an explicitly feminist formation, all participants at AFF meetings are those who identify publicly as feminists and have committed to the Charter of Feminist Principles. The Charter is a landmark document which "spells out a framework for feminist engagement based on principles of human rights, choice, non-discrimination, and individual and collective accountability" (Horn, 2008).

Since 2006, three other AFF meetings have been convened. In 2008, the second AFF meeting was held in Kampala, Uganda, on the theme of "Feminist Power, Agency and Resistance: New Visions for a Revitalised Continent". The third AFF meeting was held in Dakar, Senegal in 2010. The theme then was "Feminist Connections: Reconnecting with Ourselves and Our Communities". Discussions covered the state of the continent, its gender politics and struggles, whilst participants shared examples of feminist resistance across a range of domains – academic, policy, and the society at large. The fourth AFF meeting, the most recent, was held in Harare in April 2016, on the theme of "African Feminism: Voice, Power and Soul". The meeting aimed to contextualise broad strategic areas of concern around how power could be built as well as destabilised in the arenas of resources and bodily rights. Also addressed were the questions of building feminist capacities and agency with a view to creating a more just Africa.[5] National feminist forums have been formed in Uganda, Nigeria, Ghana, Senegal, Congo Brazzaville, South Africa, Zimbabwe and Liberia.[6]

The use of e-technology is now more likely than ever to accompany face-to-face feminist organising across the continent.[7] The Internet and social media enable greater access to voice and flows of multiple kinds marked by potentially unprecedented speed and spread, to the extent allowed by ability and access to the material conditions underlying connectivity. E-technology shapes new ways of *being* and *doing*, generating change through new forms of connection (online), space (cyberspace) and reality (virtual). In the process, existential border-crossings take place across old and new ways, producing multiple worlds in oscillation with one another, overlapping and diverging

at different points in time. Does the complication of "location" inherent in the inhabiting of multiple worlds inform the gender politics underlying the uses of diverse forms of e-technology, and if so, in which contexts and how? What are the implications of the various border-crossings for the meanings of relationship and action in imagining and crafting feminist strategies for transformation?

The emergence of a younger generation of activists, whose trajectories into feminism emanate from beyond the academy, is a striking feature of contemporary feminism on the continent. The AFF meetings have intentionally brought young women into the fold and worked across generations to strengthen feminist movement-building. Over two decades, the African Women's Leadership Institute (AWLI) has played a transformative role in shaping feminist consciousness among younger activists. The success of publishers such as Cassava Republic Press, and the rise of African literary icons such as Chimamanda Adichie, have contributed to infusing feminism into popular culture and providing new avenues for combining emotional expression and creativity with the articulation of feminist questions and concerns. Moreover, a culture of greater engagement with diverse social media and varied digital platforms among younger women has generated new ways of doing things and connecting with one another, as we see from a number of the contributions to FA22.

This issue of *Feminist Africa* focuses on women who have organised as feminists in a broad range of domains, which spans organisation- and movement-building, policy engagement with the state, social and economic interventions, and destabilising discursive practices. Whilst earlier versions of several of the contributions in this issue were first presented at the fourth AFF meeting, FA22 also includes new writings that were not part of that event.

It is our pleasure to include a range of artwork in this special issue. The cover is a photograph of women displaced from Northern Nigeria, due to the Boko Haram insurgency.[8] The women were working on an art project organised by the Centre for Women and Adolescent Empowerment (CWAE), a feminist organisation based in Yola, Adamawa State, one of the three Northern states hit by the insurgency.[9] Additional artwork appears between the sections of FA22. The first piece, a perspective on feminist organising on the continent, was produced by Kehinde Awofeso. Maku Azu painted several images for the AFF's mural project of visual representations of the social movements within which African feminists have mobilised. These include

movements for sex workers' rights, the rights of women with disabilities, the LBTQ[10] movement and the peace-building movement. FA22 also includes the poem "the revolution is a woman", compiled and written by Toni Stuart at the fourth AFF meeting.

Âurea Mouzinho and Sizaltina Cutaia's feature article draws attention to the significance of context in shaping the power relations which situate feminist organising in Angola and the formation of the *Ondjango Feminista* (Feminist Gathering). The violence of Portuguese colonialism, a protracted civil war after independence and the government's history of repression of dissent have produced political polarisation within the country and isolation from other African countries. The overall climate is one in which CSOs,[11] including women's rights organisations, are reluctant to challenge power structures. *Ondjango Feminista*'s commitment to a transformative feminist agenda is all the more inspiring in view of the numerous challenges they face, including gaining access to feminist resources and threats to their security.

Prompted by Stella Nyanzi's naked protest at Makerere University, Sylvia Tamale's inaugural lecture addresses the nexus of nakedness, law and protest. Tamale does not explore Nyanzi's protest specifically but examines instead a number of broad questions, such as the extent to which naked women's bodies are a source of power, the historical role of African women's collective naked protests, and the role of law in producing negative constructions of such bodies. Drawing on Foucault, Tamale argues that the body is "both a material and a political entity" with multiple and contested inscriptions that have been historically and socially produced by institutions such as law, culture and religion. Distinguishing between nudity, which "presupposes display and sexual connotations", and nakedness, which "asserts agency in the shedding of clothes", Tamale contrasts the power inherent in naked women's protests with its lack in the sexual objectification of nude women. In view of the debates[12] surrounding the lecture, we include the full text, audaciously delivered at the School of Law, Makerere University on 28 October 2016.

The global neoliberal order has given rise to struggles of various kinds on the African continent, very often refracted through the politics of identity in the context of growing militarism, conflict and fundamentalisms. Historical experiences of economic injustice are often transmuted during times of political transition into a reification of singular, static and essentialised

identities, contrary to lived realities marked by pluralism and flux. Exclusivist/fundamentalist interpretations of religion delineate boundaries of different kinds, not only within and among groups, but on and around the bodies of women. Our Conversation section includes a panel discussion convened at the fourth AFF on "Faith, Feminism and Fundamentalisms". The panelists outline the interweaving of religion, culture and politics through the values and norms inherent in laws. They also discuss strategic considerations, such as when or whether to operate within or outside a religious discourse; the need to protect and maintain secular spaces; and the necessity of building feminist solidarity in struggles against fundamentalism/s.

In a world marked by an accelerating pace of change and increasing levels of existential insecurity, the question of what kind of public education is provided by the state and how well it equips its learners to understand and act to transform their contexts becomes ever more pertinent. The need to take Africa's public universities seriously, as key sites of knowledge production and the formation of "cultural norms... which condition the kinds of questions that are asked and the kinds of answers that are then elicited" (Mama and Barnes, 2007: 2), has been a key feature of *Feminist Africa*'s engagement with intellectual politics.[13] Although the ideological import of education is its potential to be emancipatory, our independent states have generally **not** treated education as the practice of liberation. The student protest movements in South Africa – initially against the symbols and practices connoting the living legacies of apartheid and, subsequently, against financial exclusion in the context of a neoliberal economy – are manifestations of the deep revolt triggered by this failure of promise. Kealeboga Ramaru's Standpoint article presents her perspective on the Rhodes Must Fall (#RMF) movement, which began at the University of Cape Town and quickly spread to other universities across South Africa. Within #RMF, the hostility towards Black women in general, and Black feminists and Black queers in particular, showed the depth of the ideological splits regarding gender and sexual politics, and the depth of struggle needed to organise towards feminist transformation of the university.

We also pay tribute to three outstanding feminists, whose work and lives have inspired so many of us. Fatou Sow honours the memory of Aminata Diaw, a scholar-activist whose intellectual work on epistemology, gendered constructions of public space and public order, and the gendering of politics were organically connected to her political activism. Terri Barnes celebrates

the life and work of Elaine Salo, a scholar-activist whose insightful analyses – of women's activism, gendered lives in working-class communities, and the performance of femininities and masculinities – were grounded in political experience and multiple social networks. Vicensia Shule brings to our attention the iconic singer and drummer, Bi Kidude. Not only was she the first woman in Zanzibar to lift the veil while singing in public but Bi Kidude celebrated sexuality and pleasure, rendering both central to her music. May the beacons of these women's lives continue to light our ways.

Feminist Africa 22 includes a new section, Critical Reflections, which is intended to provide greater space for exploring subjectivity in feminists' efforts to change varying configurations of power and knowledge in a range of domains. Through critical, personal reflections, the writer appears overtly within the frame of change – as a subject who is involved in change-making actions. Going beyond a conception of change that locates it predominantly in the external, the aim is to engage with the complexity of feminist efforts to transform conditions and structures whose contradictions live on within us, with all the challenges that such recognition brings.

The essay by Namanzi Choongo Mweene Chinyama takes the remaking of the self as its focus, a transformation that the writer undertakes in the process of building community with Black women within and beyond South Africa. Chinyama recounts her efforts to change her/self, whilst practising feminism in the discursive context of a traditional African religion. The journey towards becoming a Sangoma, or traditional healer, is discussed as one of enabling the integration of healing, or spiritual work, with the political work of advancing the broader transformation that is sought collectively. Given the ubiquitous use of patriarchal interpretations of "tradition" to repress women's mobility and sexuality, Chinyama's feminist reworking of the role of a traditional healer represents an important effort to change accepted norms and practice from within the discourse.

Violent conflict invariably ruptures the prevailing nexus of culture, gender, and sexuality in a given context. In Liberia, armed conflict has bequeathed multiple, iniquitous legacies which pose deep-seated challenges for feminist organising. Korto Williams grapples with these in her discussion of the formation of the Liberian Feminist Forum (LFF). Contemporary Liberia is scarred by the persistence of old social cleavages as well as new, more vitriolic expressions of misogyny. Although the physical checkpoints of the civil conflict may have

disappeared, their symbolic persistence is all the more painful in Liberia's political context, distinguished by the election of the first female president in Africa and the appointment of several women in high public office. The formation of the LFF represents an alternative political project, Williams points out, one that requires a feminist analysis of the inequalities and complexities marking Liberia's contemporary gender politics alongside the use of feminist strategy and collective organising in struggles for change.

If increased female political representation is not synonymous with social transformation, we may well ask what such representation might mean for economic development. The enormous difficulties of trying to disrupt orthodoxies in neoliberal market-oriented thought and practice, from a feminist perspective, are the subject of Fatimah Kelleher's reflections. The current, predatory interest in Africa, on the part of international public and private sector players, is predicated on a conception of the continent as a source of vast natural resources as well as potential markets. This, Kelleher points out, should alert us to the urgency of feminist organising to destabilise economic dogma and neoliberal globalisation.

The potential of e-technology has inspired the formation of new digital platforms, such as *The Wide Margin* (TWM). Varyanne Sika discusses TWM's impetus to create a forum for sharing and discussing critical feminist thought, pointing out that the desire to connect feminists and support the creation of feminist community is underpinned by an imperative to generate new writing. TWM utilised multiple modes of communication – images alongside texts – to create synergetic forms of engagement. Social media supported the impact of the online publication of TWM while physical encounters amplified the scope of virtual conversations. These approaches were used consciously in engaging the politics of writing and of building feminist community.

The truism that technology, in itself, is not sufficient for feminist goals to be realised is clear from the contrasting trajectories of the two online forms of activism discussed in this issue. E-technology was used to different effect in setting up the online community Female in Nigeria (FIN). Ayodele Olofintuade recounts her initial experience of elation when FIN came into being as a space for self-identified feminists to discuss their lived experiences of gender inequality and to connect to resources for potential recovery from trauma. Physical meetings punctuated FIN's exponentially expanding Facebook engagement. Olofintuade's discussion raises the thorny question of how to

create and pursue a coherent feminist vision within a large and dispersed community. Key challenges included ideological divides among members, the tensions of power sharing, and competing perspectives on e-activism.

Feminist organising in the arts has also used diverse strategic approaches. Sionne Neely focuses on solidarity-building and the amplification of voice among women creatives in Ghana today. Historically, cultural workers were central to the anti-colonial struggle and pan-African solidarity and organisation. Today's cultural producers face a general challenge of declining support and isolation. Neely "traces the mark" left by feminist creatives and shows how they have been active in countering a lack of support by developing a sharing economy, drawing on each other's capabilities, and expanding the reach of feminist ideas through writing and digital activism. In the process, feminist creatives enhance the possibilities for innovative and inclusive cultural expression.

At the national level in Ghana and Senegal, feminists have organised around material resources, such as access to land, using strategies that emphasise the creation of synergy among different domains of activism and levels of networking. Akua Britwum's profile describes the formation of NETRIGHT in Ghana, a network of individuals and organisations committed to promoting women's rights and gender justice. One of NETRIGHT's distinctive features is its organisational presence in all ten regions of the country. The network focuses on three key themes: economic justice for women; gender and natural resources; and movement building. Codou Bop, in conversation with Charmaine Pereira, discusses the formation and activities of the *Groupe de Recherche sur les Femmes et les Lois au Senegal*/Research Group on Women and Laws in Senegal (GREFELS), a member organisation of the international solidarity network Women Living Under Muslim Laws (WLUML). GREFELS is a feminist group working on economic issues such as women's access to land; participation in politics; relations to the state, in terms of access to citizenship; violence against women; and religion. Both GREFELS and Ghana's network for women's rights (NETRIGHT) are strategically positioned at the conjuncture of local, national, regional and international feminist organising; in each case, they work to strengthen the links among these different levels of struggle in the pursuit of gender justice.

Internationally, the material conditions of women's labour have been a longstanding focus of feminist organising around women's work and its

relations to production and social reproduction. The insights from this history underpin the conceptualisation of the exchange of sexual services for money as "sex work". In Africa, the oldest sex workers' movements are in South Africa and Kenya, dating back to the 1990s (Mgbako, 2016). In this issue, Ntokozo Yingwana profiles the activism of a group of sex workers in Cape Town, called *AWAKE! Women of Africa*, which grew out of the national movement of sex workers, Sisonke.[14] Yingwana points to the complexities of sex workers' lived realities, involving harms as well as gains. From a position that posits sex workers as facing exclusion from feminism, Yingwana explores *AWAKE!*'s "collective journey of self-exploration to discover what it means for them to be African sex worker feminists, in order to be able to assert their agency in volatile feminist spaces". The essay raises the question of the extent to which such a schism exists, in the context of the need to build solidarity across movements.

Our review section addresses several key themes embedded in feminist organising. The failure of the state and society in South Africa to take the normalisation of rape seriously is discussed in Pumla Gqola's book, *Rape: A South African Nightmare*. In *Your Fatwa Does Not Apply Here*, Karima Bennoune focuses on struggles against Muslim fundamentalism that take place *within* Muslim majority societies, stressing the critical need for transnational solidarity in supporting such struggles. Zubeida Jaffer's book, *Beauty of the Heart: The Life and Times of Charlotte Mannya Maxeke*, points to the possibilities that herstories provide of "starting anew" from a perspective that acknowledges the role of women's leadership in the past. Koleka Putuma's poetry collection, *Collective Amnesia*, puts the spotlight on memory and its relationship to the historical and contemporary violence that invades the bodies of black women, particularly lesbians.

The present conjuncture is marked by crises of various kinds: deepening existential insecurity arises from intensified capitalist relations of extraction and exploitation that have left devastation in their wake. Facing the challenges ahead requires renewed determination to craft the theoretical frameworks for deepening our understanding of our varied contexts in order to dismantle existing relations of oppression and domination. As the contributors to this special issue show, creating more liberatory possibilities for African women and societies will necessarily be work-in-progress, drawing on and amplifying the possibilities for inspiration and strength through the building of feminist solidarity and collective action.

Endnotes

1 See *Feminist Africa* 4. Available at http://agi.ac.za/journal/feminist-africa-issue-4-2005-women-mobilised.

2 See *Feminist Africa* 8 (http://agi.ac.za/journal/feminist-africa-issue-8-2007-rethinking-universities) and FA9 (http://agi.ac.za/journal/feminist-africa-issue-9-2007-rethinking-universities-ii).

3 These aims are inter-related and overlap but concrete struggles may vary in their relative emphases.

4 Participatory action research.

5 See http://www.africanfeministforum.com/4th-regional-african-feminist-forum-harare-zimbabwe.

6 See http://www.africanfeministforum.com/national-forum.

7 See *Feminist Africa* 18. Available at http://agi.ac.za/journal/feminist-africa-18-2013-e-spaces-e-politics.

8 "Boko Haram", from a Hausa phrase meaning "education is prohibited", is the name given to an insurgent group that, since 2009, has been engaged in violent conflict against the state and all social groups who do not support them, Muslim and Christian. Whilst Boko Haram came into being as a radical Salafist group, they have since been denounced by several Muslim authority structures (in Nigeria and beyond) on the grounds that their general approach and violence are incompatible with Islam.

9 CWAE engages in a range of projects with displaced women to support their need to recover from the trauma of displacement as well as to generate money for themselves.

10 LBTQ stands for lesbian, bisexual, transgender, queer.

11 Civil society organisations.

12 https://misr.mak.ac.ug/sites/default/files/publications/MISR%20WP%2028%20Bezabeh%20Ossome%20Mamdani_0.pdf.

13 See *Feminist Africa* 1 (http://agi.ac.za/feminist-africa-issue-1-2002-intellectual-politics), FA8 ((http://agi.ac.za/journal/feminist-africa-issue-8-2007-rethinking-universities) and FA9 (http://agi.ac.za/journal/feminist-africa-issue-9-2007-rethinking-universities-ii).

14 Sisonke – isiZulu for "we are together".

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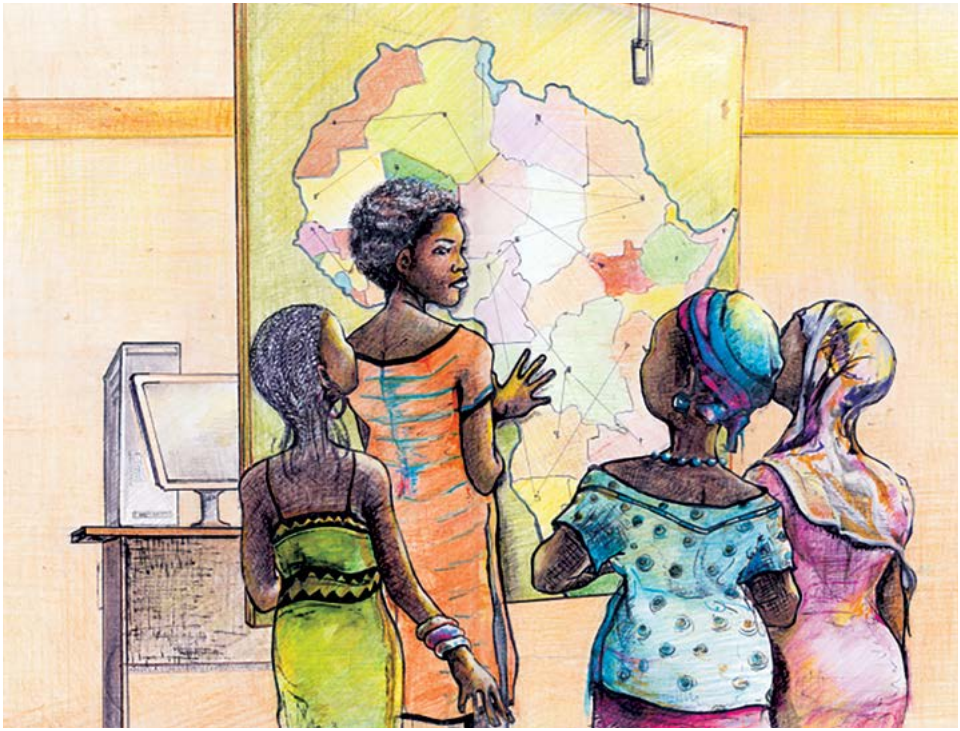

Feminists Organising — Kehinde Awofeso

Reflections on Feminist Organising in Angola*

Âurea Mouzinho and Sizaltina Cutaia

Context

In the contemporary postcolonial history of Africa, Angola is known as the site of one of the most treacherous conflicts that has ravaged the continent. After independence from Portugal in 1975, the 27-year civil war among the three leading liberation movements – the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA), the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA), and the National Liberation Front of Angola (FNLA) – claimed the lives of millions and left thousands of others displaced. Besides the enormous costs to human life, the war resulted in massive destruction of physical infrastructure, erosion of the social fabric, and the establishment of a militaristic and totalitarian state.

Although Angola adopted a multi-party legislature in 1992, the political system remains largely single-party oriented. The MPLA has governed the country since Independence and, following the death of the first president, Agostinho Neto, José Eduardo Dos Santos has been in power as President of the Republic since 1979. Following the approval of a new constitution in 2010, the political system has been presidential, making the presidency the most powerful state entity in the country. As Schubert (2010: 68) argues, the strengthening of Dos Santos' rule through democratic elections was instrumental in consolidating the current power structure which "results in increasingly blurred distinctions between the dominant party, government and the state". The conflation between the state and the ruling MPLA is felt at all levels of political organising, from the national to the lowest local authorities, making it impossible to think of the Angolan government outside of the MPLA. For this reason, we use the terms "government", "state", and "MPLA government" interchangeably. In fact, the influence of the ruling MPLA permeates all aspects of Angolan life.

* This article was written before President José Eduardo Dos Santos retired and was replaced by the former Minister of Defence João Lourenço in the September 2017 elections.

This sphere of control and influence extends to civil society as well. This is manifested by the establishment and support of pro-government civil society organisations (CSOs) on the one hand, and on the other, excessive control and repression of the few nonpartisan institutions and individuals seeking to critically engage on issues of governance and public policy. A prominent example is the case of the 17 youth activists known as "15+2"[1] who were convicted of "preparatory acts of rebellion" and "criminal conspiracy", following their arrest during a meeting where they were discussing peaceful methods of protest against the presidency of Dos Santos. The activists were part of the *Movimento Revolucionário* (Revolutionary Movement) group, which advocates for better social services, less corruption, and an end to nepotism, among other things. They were charged and sentenced to jail terms ranging roughly from two to eight years but were released after nearly one year, following the passage of an amnesty law pardoning crimes of a non-homicidal nature committed up to 11 November 2015. The latest Amnesty International (2017) report on Angola highlights other cases in which the state has used the law, the media, and law enforcement bodies to prosecute dissenting activists and human rights defenders. What this repression has effectively established is a culture of fear which continues to prevent most Angolans from actively advocating for their rights through organised civil society initiatives.

It is in this context that our reflection on feminist organising in Angola is located. We begin by presenting a brief history of women's organising in Angola, starting from the anti-colonial struggle. We note that the social conditions of women in Angola are shaped by a system of two prevalent oppressive powers: the political regime and sexism, which works with other structures of power (class, ethnicity, race and sexuality) to oppress women. This situation creates various barriers for women organising collectively around a feminist agenda. We address these based on our experiences as co-founding members of the *Ondjango Feminista* (Feminist Gathering) and conclude with a reflection on the future of feminist organising in Angola.

A Note on Positionality and Timing

Whilst our membership of the Ondjango Feminista might raise concerns regarding the partiality of some statements made in the paper, it is also true that our insider status positions us uniquely well to provide an account of the challenges to feminist organising in Angola. Our reflections are based

on the ten months in which the Ondjango Feminista has operated. This timeframe has been marked by rapid and significant shifts in key aspects of the movement, such as the size and nature of the constituency, ideology, organisational structure and practice. Because these aspects of movement-building are often defined and consolidated over vast periods of time, the challenges to feminist organising presented in this reflection are limited to the observations that we have made at an incipient phase of the Angolan feminist movement-building process. As the movement matures, the challenges it faces may shift in nature and/or priority.

Women's Organising and the Ondjango Feminista

The official history of women's organising in Angola is conflated with that of the Angolan Women's Organisation (OMA), the women's wing of the MPLA. Created on 2 March 1962 with the objective of mobilising women around the nationalist liberation struggle, OMA was instrumental in ensuring that women were involved at all levels of political organising within the MPLA (Liberato, 2016). OMA carried out important activities that sustained the MPLA's resistance in the liberation struggle. Working as educators, teachers, secretaries, correspondents, campaigners, farmers, and caregivers, its members also provided radio programmes with information about the struggle, distributed pamphlets, and raised funds for the liberation movement (PAANE, 2014). The second of March is celebrated as Angolan Women's Day. OMA women were also actively involved in frontline fighting alongside men, facing the same challenges and suffering the same consequences (Carvalho, 2009). Women from Kamy Battalion were notable in this regard, including Deolinda Rodrigues, who is a leading figure for Angolan feminists.

Women in the other two liberation movements, UNITA and FNLA, also played an important role in the anti-colonial struggle. Like OMA, these women were organised in women's wings of political parties, namely the Angolan Women's League (LIMA) and the Angolan Women's Association, (AMA), respectively. The history of these groups' contribution to the liberation struggle, however, is obliterated by the dominant narrative of the OMA, arguably as a consequence of MPLA's control of the mainstream narrative about the independence struggle.

During the single-party regime from independence in 1975 until 1992, OMA was the main advocate on Angolan women's issues, undertaking various

political, economic, social and cultural actions. This included campaigning to end violence against women and children, and providing social and political assistance to the survivors (OMA, 2017). As the only recognised women's political organisation, OMA also represented the country on international platforms, including the United Nations' Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

The decade that followed the transition to a multiparty system, although marked by a violent outbreak of war between the MPLA and UNITA, was characterised by significant growth and dynamism in civil society. This was facilitated by several positive developments, amongst which Pacheco (2009: 3) highlights the constitutional recognition of pluralism and the freedom to associate; the rapid increase in humanitarian aid to address the needs created by the war; the citizens' movement on behalf of peace and the need to defend human rights; the reduction in state capacity to provide social services and control social forces; and the involvement and influence of the international community, which not only provided resources but also leveraged its power to demand that the state should amplify the space for civil society engagement and should respect human rights.

Although OMA continued to lead the articulation of women's rights in and on behalf of Angola until the late 1990s, this decade saw the emergence of many thematic CSOs focusing on the issues of women. They started engaging with the state on issues pertaining to women's rights, much in line with the global agenda for women's rights at the time (PAANE, 2014). This was the case with *Rede Mulher* (Women's Network), the first women's civil society organisation in the country, founded in 1994 (although only officially registered in 1998) during preparations for Angola's participation in the Fourth UN World Conference on Women. *Rede Mulher* led the conversation around building capacity for women's leadership, focusing on political participation, and produced information on the social conditions of women in Angola.

In the following years, many other women's civil society organisations emerged, working on different thematic areas such as HIV and AIDS (*Rede Mwenho*); economic rights (*Federation of Women Entrepreneurs of Angola* (FMEA)); media freedom and women's representation in media (Forum of Women Journalists for Gender Equality (FMJ)); and others, including the influential Platform for Women's Action (PMA).

Founded in 2005, PMA expanded on the mandate of *Rede Mulher* by targeting issues of social and economic justice for women through budget advocacy, in addition to addressing issues of women's political participation. Unlike *Rede Mulher*, however, which was inspired by women within political parties and was directed towards promoting women's leadership within political parties, PMA sought from the very onset to congregate women from all walks of life (i.e. religions, political parties and civil society) around a common agenda to advocate for a more gender-sensitive national budget.

Rede Mulher's efforts to ensure that parliamentary quotas for women are met, along with PMA's advocacy around gender-just budget allocations and, most recently, the organisations pushing for the domestic violence law, are testament to the critical role that women's CSOs play in maintaining women's issues as a priority in national policy debates. The CSOs have also influenced the enactment of policies and legislation that advance the protection of women's rights. At the same time, however, it is also necessary to recognise the ways in which these organisations are limited either by the government's political agenda and ideology (exogenous factors), or by their own views and understanding of women's rights (endogenous factors).

Nowhere is the influence of government's political ideology clearer than in the case of the Bill on Domestic Violence. One of us, Sizaltina Cutaia, was involved in this process as an independent women's rights activist. The account of the events relating to the Bill is based on her experience and recollection of the time. Following the initial proposal of the Bill in Parliament in 2007, several women's-rights defenders and women's organisations raised two key concerns. First, limiting the Bill to the domestic realm left unaddressed the numerous instances of violence against women that occurred outside of the domestic or familial setting. Second, instead of the Bill defining domestic violence as a public crime, which would allow any witness to denounce the crime and force the state to investigate and charge, it was defined as a semi-public crime, which can only be reported by the victim. This definition ignored victims' general dependence on the perpetrator, which made it very difficult for the victim to report the crime. Activists and women's CSOs therefore advocated for changes in the Bill. Throughout the five years that the Bill remained in discussion in parliament, the activists and women's CSOs organised peaceful marches and protests to draw government's attention to the issues they were raising. In many instances, however, their efforts were

met with violent repression from the state, in terms of disproportionate use of police force and the arrest of activists.

In what many women's rights activists claim to have been a politically motivated attempt to secure the female vote in the upcoming 2012 presidential elections, the Bill on domestic violence was approved in 2011. Some concessions were made: specific instances of domestic violence were declared public crimes, and the scope of the "domestic space" was broadened to include certain spaces outside the familial setting – schools, old-age homes, crèches, hospitals, and asylums. What this example demonstrates is that, although women's CSOs play a critical role in exerting pressure on the process of enacting laws and policies, the final outcome in terms of timing and scope is controlled by the MPLA government's political agendas and ideologies.

Endogenous factors limiting the impact of women's CSOs are linked to the conservative gender ideology that many of them embrace, often underpinned by religious beliefs. This is clearly visible in the CSOs' engagement with issues of women's sexual and reproductive rights, such as the right to free and safe abortions, access to contraception, and sex work. In the case of abortion – which is particularly relevant given the recent approval (in February 2017) of a new penal code that criminalises the practice – women's CSOs have responded either with silence or by addressing the issue as a moral problem as opposed to a women's rights issue.

Also missing is a commitment to politicising the struggle for women's rights. Regarding violence against women, for instance, the narrative advanced by women's CSOs continues to focus on treating abusers as perverse and unstable, at the same time putting the onus on women to prevent themselves from being violated by "dressing well" or being "good wives". In doing this, women's CSOs fail to acknowledge that "violence against women is a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between men and women" and that it is "one of the crucial social mechanisms by which women are forced into a subordinate position compared with men" (United Nations, 1993).

One could argue that women's CSOs' failure to embrace a politicised discourse on women's rights does not necessarily derive from a lack of understanding of the structural and systemic nature of women's oppression and exploitation but rather from fear of subverting the existing social norms that sustain their ideology and practice. A politicised discourse would require them to question and challenge the different power structures in Angolan

society, which include the state as well as the religious, traditional and patriarchal authorities that govern women's public and private lives.

Given the Angolan government's history of repression of dissent, it is not surprising that many women's CSOs strategically adopt a cooperative approach to women's rights advocacy, positioning themselves exclusively as partners as opposed to critics of the government. This strategy has been adopted by many women's CSOs, and can be considered pragmatic because it allows the CSOs to continue doing the important work of defending women's rights, without much opposition from the state. However, it has also resulted in the co-optation of many women by the government, rendering many of them unable to take a stand on issues relating to state corruption, mismanagement of public funds, abuse of power, and other matters of political governance and social life.

It is this lack of political and politicised engagement with the issues of women's rights that prompted the creation of *Ondjango Feminista*. We took the decision after a meeting at the Sixth African Feminist Forum in Harare, in April, 2016. In choosing the name Ondjango Feminista, we conceptualised the creation of a feminist space that represented the traditional values of an *ondjango* – the Umbundu[2] word for the place where the family or community meets to share stories and to solve problems. The traditional values of an *ondjango* are understood to be: respect and freedom (each member gets a turn to speak and the opinion of each person is heard and respected by the others); solidarity (represented by the gathering's honest interest in the wellbeing of each other and the community); equality (since the participants of the *ondjango* traditionally sit around a circle representing the absence of a hierarchy among them); action (i.e. the solving of problems); and empowerment (since an *ondjango* is also a place where knowledge is shared). Moreover, by naming the space the "Ondjango Feminista", we were subverting the tradition that an *ondjango* had to be convened by an elder male person and reclaiming the space for women's agency.

Ondjango Feminista understands itself as "an autonomous movement of Angolan feminists committed to a transformative feminist agenda that advocates for the human rights of women and girls in Angola from the perspective of social justice, solidarity and freedom" (Ondjango Feminista, 2016a). Ondjango Feminista's self-understanding as an "autonomous movement" refers to autonomy from the state and any other existing establishment; it can be understood as a movement whose agendas are set

by its feminist constituents, based on what they perceive to be the priorities of action in their context. Abeysekera (2003, cited in Casimiro, 2011) argues that feminist movements are characterised by a commitment to critique male privilege and women's subordination, eliminate gender inequality, and adopt a transformative perspective on any issue to do with gender relations, thus challenging the way in which gender relations are socially constructed. Relatedly, Gaidzanwa (2006, cited by Wilson, 2011: 5) argues that feminist movements are "often a smaller section within broader women's movements, which tend to have a transformative agenda: going beyond opposition to patriarchy, to critiquing the architecture of oppression and the political struggle necessary to transform rather than reform the structural inequalities at national, regional and international levels".

By expressing a commitment to a "transformative feminist agenda", Ondjango Feminista adopts a clear ideological position. This positioning stems from an understanding that, as the Charter of Feminist Principles for African Feminists (the Charter) puts it, "the work of fighting for women's rights is deeply political" (African Feminist Forum, 2017) and that, by advocating for gender justice, and social justice more broadly, from an African feminist perspective, Ondjango Feminista "place[s] the patriarchal social relations, structures and systems which are embedded in other oppressive and exploitative structures at the centre of [its] analysis" (ibid). In its broader questioning of oppression and exploitation, and commitment to social justice, Ondjango Feminista upholds an African feminist ideology whilst simultaneously holding true to the Third World feminist ideological commitment to critiquing and challenging capitalism, imperialism, colonialism and neo-colonialism, racism, heteronormativity, ableism, class oppression as well as the religious and cultural norms that affect the lives of Angolan women (African Feminist Forum, 2017; Mohanty, 2003).

The key actions of the Ondjango Feminista include consciousness-raising and awareness-building; mobilising and organising the constituency; strategic support; advocacy; and fund-raising. Although Ondjango Feminista is not a legally constituted entity, it is regulated by specific norms – the Charter's principles and the Manifesto of the Ondjango Feminista – as well as structures: the 15-member coordination team and the assembly made up of all women who agreed to the adoption of the Charter and the Manifesto.

The first meeting of the Ondjango Feminista was held in June, 2016. Since then, regular monthly meetings have been held in Luanda (totalling eight by the time this paper was written), and another two *ad hoc* meetings were organised in Lubango, the capital city of the southern-central Huíla province. Attendance at these monthly meetings was initially low in both provinces, with only eight participants at the first meeting in Luanda and five in Lubango. However, attendance increased progressively with each monthly meeting, ranging from 11 to 21 participants for the meetings in 2016. In the first two meetings of 2017, in Luanda, attendance averaged 41 participants, and in Lubango, the second meeting, held in February, had an additional three participants.

The meeting agendas are defined by a coordination team made of 15 volunteer members, and the issues discussed cover a broad span of topics. These range from understanding the ideological underpinnings of African feminism to discussing women's sexual and reproductive rights, civil rights and political participation, feminism and culture, among others. The meetings often comprise a presentation about the topic made by one of the participants with relevant experience or interest in the area, followed by breakaway sessions where the participants work together on specific issues and identify strategies to address them. These discussions are always recorded, and are used to inform the programmes developed by the coordination team. One example of the effectiveness of these monthly meetings is the creation of a bi-annual magazine focusing on the issue of violence against women in Angola. The magazine will seek to provide an alternative narrative to gender-based violence by addressing it from a feminist and multi-disciplinary approach as opposed to the moralistic, conservative and positivist mainstream approach.

In addition to these monthly meetings, a national forum was organised under the theme "Building Bridges of Solidarity" in November 2016, with the assistance of the African Women's Development Fund (AWDF). The forum brought together 60 women from four different provinces and different CSOs to share their views on the lived realities of women in Angola, based on their own personal experiences and their work in civil society.

Ondjango Feminista's overtly subversive agenda has led to some challenges in organising women around a collective feminist movement. We highlight three of these challenges: the prevailing orientations towards feminism, the difficulty in accessing feminist resources, and the struggle to create safe

spaces for feminist engagement. Our discussion focuses on the specific ways in which these challenges manifest themselves and, where possible, the ways in which they are being addressed by the collective.

Orientations Towards Feminism

Besides the political polarisation that separated Angolans along party lines, an important legacy of the civil war was the isolation of the country – politically, culturally and to some extent physically – from other countries on the continent. This isolation, exacerbated by colonially imposed linguistic barriers, manifests itself in various ways, among which is the insulation from certain economic and social processes that were developed in other countries.

With regard to feminism, while women and women's organisations from various countries across Africa have been organising themselves around an African feminist ideology since the early 1990s (Ahikire, 2014; Wilson, 2011), the debate on feminism in Angola only entered the public sphere in the last four or five years. So although the terms "women empowerment", "gender equality", "gender and development" and "gender-based violence" have been widely used since independence and are well integrated in government and civil society discourse, the word "feminism" is still a novelty. Not surprisingly, the idea of an African strand of feminism, conceptualised and advocated by African women with the objective of speaking to the experiences of the women on the continent, is still foreign and continues to raise many questions and doubts.

The process of discussing feminism in the public sphere in Angola has been aided by many factors. Particularly noteworthy is the influence of many young Angolan women who lived or studied outside of Angola, generally but not exclusively in European countries or in Brazil, where feminism and feminist ideologies have been explored substantially over many decades. Using different social media platforms to share ideas and resources, these women are doing the important and ground-breaking work of pushing the debate about feminism into the public sphere, which in the context of Angola is pioneering, albeit not revolutionary.

As observed by a participant at the sixth meeting of the Ondjango Feminista, Angola is a country that promotes individualism, which is still often imported into discussions of feminism (Ondjango Feminista, 2016b). This

individualism is manifested as a focus on each woman's ability to achieve and maintain her equality through her own actions and choices. A stark example of this was recently provided by a presenter on the leading provincial radio station, who claimed during a live programme that "everyone has their own feminism. If [a woman] defends a cause, then that is her own feminism" (Radio Luanda, 2017). None of the programme participants – three women guests and the presenter – distanced themselves from being called "feminists", but although one of the participants continually tried to shift the conversation to a more political level, it was dominated by a focus on the responsibility of each woman to "work hard" and to be "smart" about pursuing equality. Women were thought to be smart when they successfully achieved their goals without challenging their "natural" submissive status in relation to men (ibid).

More significant, however, is the neoliberal ideology advanced by the MPLA government. In his 2016 end-of-year national address, the president reinforced neoliberal discourse by proposing that Angolans should work together to "promote a culture of meritocracy, produce with better results, and in that way, increase national wealth and distribute it more justly" (Dos Santos, 2016). In the same vein, a popular quote by Isabel Dos Santos – oldest daughter of the Angolan president, richest woman in Africa and recently appointed by presidential decree to the top management position at the state-owned oil company, Sonangol – claims that "if you are hardworking and determined, you will make it and that is the bottom line. I don't believe in an easy way through" (Forbes, 2013).

In the context of Angola's wide social and economic inequalities, advancing merit as a way to achieve wellbeing and justice within a capitalist society is, at best, fallacious and, at worst, dangerous. This is because the "market", the underpinning of neoliberal policy, is particularly efficient at reflecting and sustaining the social divisions existing in society in terms of class, race, gender and others (Mate, 2011). Thus, in the neoliberal economy, people with higher incomes and wealth retain economic dominance and are the only ones that can fully exercise choice (ibid). In this setting, ability and effort become irrelevant markers of justice.

Another preoccupying feature of neoliberalism is that it absolves the state from the responsibility of redistributing wealth (Mate, 2011) and advancing social justice through the promotion of progressive and welfare-oriented policies. Additionally, it presents solidarity-based movements such as unions

as "market inefficiencies", thus undermining the role they play in shifting power dynamics and advocating for just social relations (ibid).

The dominant narrative about feminism in Angola tends to hinge on a neoliberal "faux-feminist" (hooks, 2013) praxis. As Casimiro (2014) puts it, this focuses on the achievement of equal rights for women and men within the scope of a capitalist society, without questioning the dominant liberal notions of citizenship or politics, or the ways in which the operations of the global capitalist system contribute to the oppression of women (Mohanty, 2003). This liberal brand of feminism not only ignores the harmful impact that market-oriented developmental and social policies have had on women in lower social and economic classes (such as informal street vendors, sex workers and rural farmers), it also delegitimises those struggles by asserting that these women could be better off if only they "tried harder" or "worked smarter". Many feminist scholars have argued that this idea that one can advocate for women's rights while at the same time negating the need to challenge structures of power and privilege constitutes a hijacking of feminism (hooks, 2013; Mohanty, 2003).

In this context, how does one then mobilise women around a transformative feminist agenda? For Ondjango Feminista, the answer seems to lie in two critical movement-building strategies: raising consciousness and political empowerment. As Wilson (2011: 24) puts it, these activities allow people to move from "a naive awareness of issues that affect them to a critical awareness of the issues when they find themselves asking why, what and how". Political consciousness-raising has become a crucial aspect of activism. This process has been facilitated through the Ondjango Feminista's monthly meetings, where women collectively reflect on and debate the various issues that affect their lives and shape their experience of womanhood from a critical feminist perspective.

After almost a year it is possible to note some changes in the feminist consciousness of regular participants. This shift is evident in the interventions some participants make during the monthly meetings, either through the questions raised after the opening presentations or in the conclusions and actions they identify from the breakaway sessions at each meeting. After the national forum on the theme "Building Bridges of Solidarity", participants' contributions during the various discussions about "Why do women fight?", "Patriarchy and the public spaces of oppression", "Women and access to

healthcare", "Sexuality: a freedom delayed", indicated a growing awareness of the way in which patriarchal structures of oppression are present in various aspects of women's lives, from the most private to the most public. Based on these observations, it seems plausible to expect that, as the Angolan feminist movement grows and matures, and as its members also deepen their understanding of feminism, this understanding will continue to shift towards an ideology that politicises the struggle for women's rights and that locates that struggle within a framework of social justice and solidarity-based collective action.

Accessing Feminist Resources

The limited availability of credible information about the social conditions of women is an important barrier to feminist mobilisation in Angola. Although national news channels report, almost daily, new cases of physical and sexual violence against women, it is still difficult to access gender-disaggregated data that point to the problems facing Angolan women. There are also few critical analyses of structural differences in the experiences of women compared to those of men (Liberato, 2016).

Thus, when Angolan feminists problematise the impacts of certain events or policies on women, the overwhelming response from both society and government officials tends to be that these problems are not specific to women and therefore do not need to be addressed from a gendered, let alone feminist, perspective. Whilst it can be said that these assertions are generally made due to a lack of understanding of feminist issues, they have also been used as a strategy with which to silence feminist discourse.

The case of the criminalisation of street vending is one prominent example. Whereas feminists tend to claim that this restriction poses substantially more challenges for women street vendors, *zungueiras,* critics tend to argue that street vending is not exclusive to women. Indeed, men also carry out such activities. However, the sector is dominated by women, particularly young women (Human Rights Watch, 2013), and a one-day informal observation of the dynamics of police harassment on the streets of Luanda will show that the methods and consequences are different for women relative to men.

The unavailability of relevant statistics becomes even more problematic when the issues at hand are considered taboo, such as abortion and sex work. In the absence of local data that document the burden of the

criminalisation of abortion – e.g. how many clandestine abortions are conducted in Angola, the profile of women seeking such services, where and how they seek those services, the risks they face and the death toll and other perverse impacts of criminalisation – feminist activists often rely on foreign data, mostly from Brazil (because of the common language) and aggregates from sub-Saharan Africa. Although these data might be useful for understanding the global reach of the problem, they cannot speak to the reality of women in Angola. This in turn weakens the legitimacy of the argument for decriminalisation.

There is also a challenge in accessing material on feminist theory locally. Women's and feminist studies are still not given the relevance they deserve, as is clearly attested by the nonexistence of feminist studies departments in local universities. For most women in Angolan academia – even those in social studies departments – feminist studies is still unknown territory.

An encouraging development is that a small but growing number of Angolan women are pursuing women's, gender, or even feminist studies in universities outside of the country. Many of these women are engaging in feminist analysis of the conditions of women in Angola, and are using such means as blogs and conferences to discuss and disseminate their work. This is true of Florita Telo, a founding member of the Ondjango Feminista, who is pursuing a PhD in Women, Gender and Feminist Studies in Brazil and blogs at www.floritatelo.wordpress.com.

Although the Internet is overflowing with feminist resources that can be accessed for free, and despite the growing number of these resources that are available in Portuguese – for which Brazilian feminists must be thanked – data costs remain prohibitively high in Angola. This creates a situation in which access to feminist theory and analysis is differentiated along class lines.

There are, however, reasons to be hopeful. Despite the unavailability of academic and formal content on feminist issues, many young Angolan women have been carrying out their own analyses of the social conditions of women and have been using alternative means such as social media platforms and the Internet to raise consciousness around the agenda. Much debate has been generated on these platforms and, in a context where few other options are available or accessible, this engagement has created a much-needed space for the transfer of feminist knowledge. The monthly meetings organised by the Ondjango Feminista have helped to shift this interaction from a virtual to a

physical presence, and have had an overwhelmingly positive response in terms of attendance and involvement.

Most recently, there has also been a surge in the independent translations of key feminist texts. Much of what is translated and subsequently serves as a reference for new feminists, however, are texts from black women in North America and Brazil, and not necessarily the work of African feminists, which speaks more closely to the experience of Angolan women. This is partly due to a lack of awareness of the rich archive of African feminist scholarship, and is to some extent justified by the language barriers since Angola is Portuguese-speaking and most African feminist work is written in English. In addition, however, there has been a general, and problematic, trend for post-independence Angola to connect more with Western countries than with other African countries.

By adopting the Charter of Feminist Principles for African Feminists as its guideline for feminist ideology and action, the Ondjango Feminista moves away from this trend and charts new ground for feminist engagement in Angola. One of its first actions was to translate the Charter into Portuguese and make it available in print and electronic formats. The translation was done voluntarily by members of the coordination team of the Ondjango Feminista and was subsequently published by AWDF in time to be distributed at the first Ondjango Feminista Forum. With the launch of its website in mid-March 2017[3], Ondjango Feminista plans to regularly translate highly influential texts and analyses by African feminists, and will make them available online for free, with due permission of the authors.

Before the Ondjango Feminista was formed, other platforms were already engaging with Angolan feminists on the need to localise their analysis and practice. A prominent example is the YouTube show, "Women, Rights and Participation". Created by founding members of the Ondjango Feminista – Florita Telo and Sizaltina Cutaia – the show invites women from different fields to discuss various issues affecting women and girls in Angola. To date, it has covered a wide range of topics, from the way women are represented in media to how culture is often used to oppress women, and the need for a feminist approach to the making of public policies, particularly concerning women's rights and choices.

Building solidarity and forging connections with other African feminist organisations and movements will be important in order to address the

challenges of access to feminist resources. Our participation in the last African Feminist Forum in Zimbabwe, 2016, not only inspired the creation of the Ondjango Feminista but also permitted the forging of a relationship with feminists and feminist organisations from other regions of the continent. This heralded a new era in cross-border relations that Angolan feminists are eager to harness.

In October of the same year, Âurea Mouzinho represented the Ondjango Feminista at a conference on political feminism in Maputo, co-organised by the *Fórum Mulher* (Women's Forum), a network of Mozambican associations, unions, grassroots organisations, government institutions, and international organisations, to develop a collective agenda to promote women's rights (Casimiro, 2011). Fórum Mulher, which started in 1993, has developed a wealth of resources on women's rights and feminism in Portuguese, also the official language of Mozambique. Hence Ondjango Feminista's participation in this conference was particularly valuable, given the possibility it opened for Angolan feminists to access these resources and to forge collaborations with various Mozambican feminists.

Creating Safe Spaces

The Angolan government's considerable effort to control and repress non-partisan civil society organising is dedicated towards the surveillance of dissenting voices. This takes many forms, including the hiring of spies and informants, *bofias,* to infiltrate activist circles. The existence of *bofias* is widely known in Angolan society, particularly among civil society organisations, and poses significant challenges to mobilising around any issue. People's fear that they are being spied on limits not only their interest in getting involved in collective action or social movements, but also the extent to which they get involved. This is because the repercussions tend to be greater for those who are, or are thought to be, more vocal about the cause and play key leadership roles.

This dynamic has made it difficult for various activist groups, including the Ondjango Feminista, to create safe spaces for engagement. This constitutes an extra burden in our efforts to mobilise and organise around a feminist agenda. Although progress has been made in terms of expanding the conversations outside of virtual spaces, it remains difficult to get women to participate and commit to collective action in these circumstances. Safe spaces are vital for feminist activists, not only to openly discuss and share their stories, ideas,

feelings and strategies, but also to do so without fear of repercussions or state scrutiny. This is particularly important because there are few spaces like these for women in general and, in many cases, alternatives such as women's homes and families are the very sites where their personhood and bodies are violated.

As the Ondjango Feminista grows and gains more visibility, concerns about ensuring that its spaces are safe are becoming ever more real and will demand a strategic response. It is increasingly clear, however, that creative resistance is the only path. Perhaps doing research and connecting with feminist movements in other parts of the world that deal with the same challenges might shed some light on the possibilities available. What will remain important throughout this process of creating and maintaining safe spaces is that one must take good care not to replicate within the movement the same element of distrust that already exists in society at large. As Ondjango Feminista pursues this aim, it will be important to remain true to its values of action, diversity, inclusion, non-discrimination, non-violence, transparency, justice, freedom and solidarity.

The Future of Feminist Organising in Angola: A Concluding Note

The discussion above has contextualised the formation of the Ondjango Feminista, given the history of women's organising in Angola, and highlighted some of the challenges for feminist organising in the country. Whilst these challenges are important, the future for feminist organising in Angola remains hopeful. For the first time in a long while – at least since Deolinda Rodrigues created OMA – young women are leading the debate around women's rights. The age range of the members of Ondjango Feminista's coordination team is 21- to 38-years-old and as many as 63% of the women who attended the last three monthly meetings of the Ondjango Feminista are between 25 and 35 years old (Ondjango Feminista, 2017).

As the Angolan feminist movement continues to grow, its success or failure will be determined by its ability to continue grappling with the challenges it faces. Success will also be shaped by how well the movement responds to other issues that require attention, such as mobilising outside of the urban areas, the condition of LBTQ women, and among others, the impact of climate change. We remain hopeful for the future not only because those leading the feminist organising in Angola are young but also because the Ondjango Feminista works

in an autonomous, critical feminist, and progressive way, marked by solidarity. Ondjango Feminista members are voluntarily dedicating their time, energy, and intellect to building a just Angolan society for women, free from all forms of patriarchal oppression. They are doing so by building bridges across the divides of class, ethnicity, race and sexual identity, structures which have for a long time been used to keep women oppressed and separated.

Endnotes

1 Among the activists, there were two women, hence the "+2". They were Laurinda Gouveia and Rosa Conde who, after their release from jail, became members of the Ondjango Feminista.

2 Umbundu is an Angolan national language spoken in the southern and central parts of the country by the Ovimbundu people, the largest ethnic group in Angola. *Ondjango* is an abbreviation of the Umbundu phrase "*ondjo y'ohango*", comprising the words "*ondjo*" (home) and "*ohango*" (talk or conversation). *Ondjango* therefore means house or place of conversation.

3 Available at www.ondjangofeminista.com.

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Nudity, Protest and the Law in Uganda

Sylvia Tamale

> The human body is itself a politically inscribed entity, its physiology and morphology shaped by histories and practices of containment and control. Susan Bordo (1993: 21)

> I view law(s) as an authorized discourse – as a language constituted by a series of symbols that is located in not merely the realm of the 'ideal' or the 'real' but a place somewhere in between… as an authorized language of the state. Zillah Eisenstein (1988: 4, 20)

> Where there is power, there is resistance. Michel Foucault (1978: 1)

1 Introduction: "Reading" the Political Body

Naked protests may seem like the most unlikely topic imaginable for a professorial inaugural lecture in law. But, as you well know, the law touches on literally every aspect of our day-to-day lives. Secondly, it is quite surprising that, even though such protests have taken place at many different times and places in African history, there is very little historical, anthropological or sociological analysis of the phenomenon, especially with respect to the case of Uganda. As academics, we have left comment to the journalists, the political pundits and the radio talk-show hosts and hostesses. Finally, although approaching this topic from the perspective of the law, there is no doubt of its resonance across the intellectual landscape.

Allow me to begin with the story that inspired my choice of topic. Around 8:15 on the morning of Monday, April 18, 2016, I was just leaving home to go to work when my cell phone rang. On the line was a friend whose words sounded frantic and desperate: "Sylvia, you're the nearest one; you've got to help… Oh my god! It's on Facebook… Stella has stripped naked at MISR!" Later, she calmed down and explained that a mutual friend – Dr Stella Nyanzi, a research fellow at the Makerere Institute of Social Research (MISR) – was

staging a naked protest against what she considered gross maltreatment by her boss.

It took me less than five minutes to get to the scene of the remonstration. By that time, Stella had put her clothes back on. But as soon as she saw me she stripped again: "Sylvia, I didn't want to burden you with my problems, but I've had enough. I've complained to the authorities, written several letters but no action has been taken. They have left me with no choice; I've had enough of my boss's tyranny at this place". I begged Stella to cover her naked body. I shouted at the reporters to put their video recorders away. She was yelling profanities, obscenities and vulgarities, waving her defiant fists in the air. But what I remember most of all were Nyanzi's eyes as she yelled and shook her naked body in vigorous protest. It is difficult to describe the look in Nyanzi's eyes at the time; they were ignited by some kind of wild emotion, bulging out of their sockets.

There have been numerous reactions to Nyanzi's actions of that day – both specific to her individually and to the wider issues that she raised. It is not my intention to engage in that debate. Instead, I want to briefly reflect on my own reactions to her stripping as a precursor to my analysis. I was shocked and horrified, embarrassed and ashamed. I thought my friend had completely lost it and must confess that I was left traumatised by the incident for several days.

With hindsight, however, I now realise that my emotive response to Nyanzi's protest was in keeping with societal attitudes that associate nakedness – especially the nakedness of a grown woman – with shame, perversity and taboo. When I rushed to MISR to try and remove Stella, I was responding to the impulse of my socialised brain and habits. Society constructs the female naked body as profane, indecent, shameful and sexual, never to be displayed in public. Women must therefore cover their bodies, particularly the areolae, nipples and curves of their breasts, their butts and, especially, the *mons pubis*.

Much of the discourse that attended the Nyanzi incident was both sexualised and sensationalised. It provided considerable cannon-fodder for the tabloid press and, of course – in this era of Facebook, Twitter and Instagram – became one of the highest trending stories on social media this year. Instead of looking at the more dramatic aspects of the incident, and indeed leaving out the reaction of the university and the wider society to what Nyanzi did, I want to use today's lecture to address a number of larger questions, *viz.*:

Have African women's bodies always been viewed as shameful and a source of sin? Historically, what power, if any, did women's naked bodies hold? Have naked bodies been used as a tool of protest in the past? What do women's fecundity and maternal power signify in patriarchal-capitalist societies? What is the role of the law in the negative construction of women's bodies and in maintaining their subordinate status?

Most people are shocked when they learn that there is absolutely no written law in Uganda that prohibits public nudity *per se*; there is no bar against displaying the naked body. When Nyanzi stripped to her knickers, she did not breach any written law.[1] She may have run the risk of crossing established social and religious norms, but she certainly committed no penal offence. Nevertheless, Minister of Ethics and Integrity Father Simon Lokodo's first reaction was an order for Nyanzi's arrest. In the end, the police did not proffer any charge, probably because they had no law to back it up. Nyanzi's lawyer also told Lokodo to "zip [up] his mouth" (New Vision, 2016). But in a legally pluralistic society like ours, where the written law operates side-by-side with customary law and where the principles of religion are deeply embedded in our statutory laws, when does public nakedness become unacceptable, and why? How do we reconcile the fact that Lokodo's own people, the men and women of Karamoja, even today move around naked or semi-naked in public and without sanction, with the fact that Lokodo is the same man attempting to impose punishment for public nakedness?

The written law may not prohibit public nakedness but the "living law" of most Ugandans – including law enforcement agencies – renders it not only "illegal" but also immoral and unethical to exhibit our bodies in this manner. Therefore, any reference to "law" in this lecture should be understood broadly to include codified or written law as well as the unscripted customary and religious laws. Nyanzi's protest might have appeared to be personal; what I want to explore today is whether, and the extent to which, it was also political. To help in this exploration the lecture draws on poststructural feminist theories of gender and embodiment and their application of discourse analysis oriented to the work of the French philosopher, Michel Foucault.[2] In particular, I am guided by the poststructural feminist understanding of the human body as a locus of power and control. I find their approach to the body as an inscriptive surface marked by culture and law quite compelling.

For instance, the fact that women's bodies are "read" through the discourse or narrative of sexuality will have significant implications for how society reacts to naked or semi-clothed protests. The poststructural feminist take on power, derived from Foucault, as both a disabling and enabling force, is also useful in my exploration of the relationship between subjectivity and power relations as manifested through naked protests.

This lecture focuses on the tripartite issues of *nakedness*, *law* and *protest*. I am mainly concerned with what we can refer to as the physical or cultural body bounded by the surface of our skins. I am also concerned with how that body relates to the law, particularly when it is deployed as a tool of protest. I seek to examine the ways in which women use their nakedness as an instrument of power in their everyday lives and how the intersecting narratives are interpreted by society, by the law and by the protesters.

Following this introduction, I set the stage for a feminist analysis of naked protests by looking back at the historical trajectory of naked protests globally in order to understand the context of activism in today's world. The third section discusses the theoretical underpinnings of gender, power and the human body. The conceptual tools for analysing naked protests within the realm of the powerful institution of the law are exposed. I also briefly revisit the place of women's gendered and sexed bodies in nation-building and its implication for naked resistance. Section four then explores the intersections of the law (broadly understood to include legislation, culture and religion) and nudity, critically analysing how relations of power shape and define our bodies, particularly naked protesting bodies. The lecture ends with some brief concluding remarks.

II Publicly Naked Bodies and Protests: A Historical Overview

Historically, the largely consistent warm weather in sub-Saharan Africa did not require a lot of clothing. Prior to colonisation, different cultures on the continent used various simple garments made of bark cloth, animal skin, bird feathers, grass or plant fibre to make aprons for covering the genitals or to be wrapped around their bodies. While external influence has completely changed dress patterns in most of Africa, a few communities still maintain their traditional ways of dressing. Examples from Uganda include the Karamojong, the Batwa and the Bambuti (Otiso, 2006).

The drastic change of stance to the naked or partially-naked body in public throughout tropical Africa coincided with "the civilising mission" which the

colonialists from Victorian Europe employed to legitimise their subjugation of non-European people. Even partial nakedness for them was inimical to "modernisation" and everything that the "superior" Western culture stood for. In Uganda, the colonialists did not waste time in imposing a new dress code:

> Embarrassed by what they considered to be scanty native dressing, European Christian missionaries set out to change that, starting with Buganda, where contact between Western and Ugandan culture commenced in the mid-1800s. The missionaries designed an ankle-length Victorian dress (*gomesi* or *busuti*) for women and a similarly long tunic for men. Over time, the *gomesi* has become a popular national dress, made of bright multicolored cloth with padded shoulders and an equally elaborate sash for tying it around the waist. (Otiso, 2006: 76)

Colonialists employed various methods to acculturate African people to Western beliefs, including religious proselytising, the formal education system and criminalising "immorality". Hence, slowly but surely, where nakedness or half-nakedness had been part of the normal lifestyle of colonised people, they began to completely cover their bodies and to view such acts as a symbol of progress or "modernisation". To date, those African societies that have resisted the Western dress code, such as the Karamojong or the San people of the Kalahari Desert in southern Africa, are viewed as "backward" and "primitive". Aileen Goodson (1991: 155) reports that "naked societies persist as primitive tribes whose members do not wear clothes". The value judgment implicit in describing naked societies as "primitive" corresponds to the trajectory of the attitudes and influence of dominant societies to nakedness.

Several scholars have written about the spiritual and philosophical foundations of nudism in ancient societies, including such practices among the Greek, Egyptians, Indians and Ethiopians (Goodson, 1991; LeValley, 2007). Space does not allow us here to go into the details of gymnosophy[3] and religious nakedness, but suffice to note that this philosophy was adopted by the nudist naturalist movements of 20th-century Europe and North America (Jirasek and Hlavinka, 2010). The strict, uncompromising beliefs about public nudity have their seeds in the European Protestant Reformation movement of the 16th century, led by Martin Luther and John Calvin. After breaking from the Catholic Church for what they perceived as overindulgent opulence and moral laxity, they created doctrines that had a powerful impact on, *inter*

alia, how society viewed the naked body (Goodson, 1991). In particular, their efforts to "purify" the church reinforced the "puritan ethic" of covering up and associating sex and sexuality with shame and embarrassment. Puritanism associated women's bodies with sin, the devil and witchcraft much more than it did the bodies of men (Reis, 1997). The Reformation reinforced the guilt and shame associated with the naked body in religion and set the patterns of morality in Europe and North America. As Goodson notes:

> With the advent of Protestantism came biblical interpretations which stressed, as never before, the impurity and sin inherent in the human body. Also emphasised was devil-fear. While God was mind and spirit, the Devil represented evil and tantalising body sensuality... Shame regarding sexual desires and activities reached such extremes that a woman in the mid-1800s minimised and hid all body parts except her face. She wore layers of petticoats and was enveloped in clothing from high-collared blouse to floor-length bustled skirt, a bonnet completely covering her head and a shawl drawn around the body. (Goodson, 1991: 165)

The Catholic Church later launched a counter-Reformation with new religious orders that were more rigorous and strict in their spirituality (Dickens, 1968). It is this brand of Christianity that was imported to Africa as part of the project of colonisation in the 19th century.

Prior to that, in the 7th century, Islam had spread to many parts of the northern half of Africa, particularly along the trade routes from the Arabian Peninsula. Although this version of Islam was quite different from the "political Islam" of the veiled woman that we know today, Shari'ah laws dictated modesty and non-exposure of the *aurat*[4] and gender segregation at public events (Othman, 2006; Mernissi, 1996). Patriarchal conceptions of gender roles and the female body filtered through the interpretations of religious teachings, further altering the discourse relating to the body. The paradoxes and contradictions created by religions that construct taboos on the "natural" body created an opening for the protesting body (Tamale, 2015).

Given the historical "reading" of the African body, how can we relate it to the naked protesting body? Today, in the "civilised" world of clothed bodies, stripping naked in public is guaranteed to draw immediate attention. The naked body "speaks" the language of spectacle, of rebellion, of subversion. It is a strategy that has been used effectively all over the world where covered

bodies are the norm. From Lady Godiva of 13th-century England to the Doukhobors (Russian pacifists) of early 20th-century Canada to the present-day naked environmental protesters, they always succeed in casting a spotlight on their issues.

In Africa, women have used their bodies to protest extremities; it is usually a weapon of last resort when they find themselves pushed to the edge of the cliff. It is very powerful and always effective in that it draws attention to the issue under dispute. The act of public stripping is even more potent if the women are married and/or mothers. Cultural beliefs about stripping mothers of twins signify double trouble, and Nyanzi – who is a mother of twins (*Nnalongo*) – capitalised on this issue throughout her stunt. The shocking primordial exposure of women's nakedness in public acts of irreverence and parody has proved quite effective. Desiree Lewis (2009) explains that subversion of power through spectacle, such as women enlisting their naked bodies in resistance, signals a form of "politics" beyond formal politics. Such politics undermines the foundations of the hegemony of repressive regimes.

African women's embodied protests predate colonialism and have been effectively deployed every time women have been pushed to the brink (Awe, 1992; Mba, 1982). In the pre-colonial West African Oyo Empire, for example, women of Oyo-Ile protested naked to show their rejection of Bashorun Gaa's savage rule in the 17th and 18th centuries (Oyeniyi, 2015: 150).[5] Among the Igbo in West Africa, there was the custom practiced by women known as "sitting on a man", or *ogu umunwanye*, which was invoked to sanction disrespectful men (Oriji, 2000; Van Allen, 1997; Tamale, 1996). In 1929, women used the same custom in their tens of thousands to challenge British colonialist policies in the now famous "women's war" described by one of the colonial lieutenants thus:

> Some were nearly naked wearing only wreaths of grass round their heads, waist and knees and some were wearing tails made of grass... I [told] the women not to make a noise. They took no notice and told me that I was the son of a pig and not of a woman. (Nigerian Government, 1930: 7)

It is reported that "the women were led by an old and nude woman of great bulk. They acted in a strange manner, some lying on the ground and kicking their legs in the air, and others making obscene gestures" (Ifeker-Moller, 1975: 129). The British colonialists described the uprising as riots; the women called

it *umunwanye*, or war. At the end of the day, the women of eastern Nigeria succeeded in halting the offensive colonial policies and even secured a few seats in the native courts.

Another historical example can be found in the areas of the Kom and the Kedjom in modern day Cameroon, where women in their thousands unleashed the age-old tradition of the *anlu*. *Anlu* was a women's network traditionally used to punish those who transgressed social norms. In 1958, the *anlu* women utilised this method to challenge colonial threats to their farmland. In a campaign that lasted almost three years:

> [T]he *anlu* women began to protest with screams, songs, and wild dancing. They were dressed mostly in rags and greenery, although some also wore men's clothing to symbolically claim the power reserved for men, and carried branches over their shoulders in imitation of guns (which women were not allowed to carry)... At some of their protests the women stripped naked and painted themselves in oil and red cam-wood powder before staging public disruptions of meetings. Had men attempted the same sort of disruptions they would have been forcefully removed [by the colonial forces], but officials had no idea of how to deal with naked *anlu* women. (Global Nonviolent Action Database, n/d)

Anlu was extremely successful and spurred social change, including the establishment of a women's court and a "shadow government" that remained in place for one year (Tamale, 1996; Shanklin, 1990). Accompanying naked protesting female bodies with profanities and sexually explicit language deepens the disturbance and disruption of the spectacle, making it more effective.

In more contemporary Africa, women have repeatedly and successfully deployed the weapon of naked protests in various contexts and causes. In 1990, during the transition from apartheid to democracy in South Africa, angry homeless women in Soweto stripped off their clothes as the police moved in to bulldoze their shacks from an illegal settlement in the township of Dobsonville (Meintjes, 2007). In 1992, Kenyan mothers of political prisoners staged a hunger strike and stripped naked in Nairobi's Uhuru (Freedom) Park, demanding the immediate release of their sons. Maria Nzomo described this act of defiance as "the most effective traditional method of cursing the Moi government" (Nzomo, 1993: 68). Nine years later, in 2001, more than

300 Kenyan women stripped again and ran into a nature reserve camp near River Tana. They were demonstrating against the annexation of their land to expand the camp, forcing a group of scientists to flee from the nature reserve (BBC, 2001). In 2002, Nigerian women in the Niger Delta stripped to register their anguish against the environmental pollution by oil companies. Liberian women who wished to see the end of the civil war in 2003 also stripped naked when the talks between President Charles Taylor and the rebel groups stalled in Accra. In 2016, students at Rhodes University in South Africa stripped against sexual violence on their campus.

In Uganda, a group of women political activists stripped to their bras in front of the central police station in Kampala to protest against the sexual assault of female opposition leader Ingrid Turinawe by the police force in 2012.[6] The police arrested and detained them for two hours but did not press any charges. Just one year prior to the Nyanzi saga, in April 2015, women in Amuru district in Northern Uganda stripped naked in protest against what they perceived as the grabbing of their ancestral land by government. Minister of Lands Daudi Migereko and Minister of Internal Affairs Gen. Aronda Nyakairima had travelled to Amuru to try and mediate the situation, only to be confronted by naked protesting women shouting profanities and asking pointed questions: "We were born on this land, where will we, the elderly mothers, go to? Why is the government targeting our land? Why, why?" (Ocungi and Okello, 2015) The ministers ordered the immediate withdrawal of the army and the police that had been camping on the disputed land for two weeks. They also instructed the government officials at the site to abandon their plans to demarcate the land.

Three months later, women in Nakasongola also stripped in front of the office of the resident district commissioner to protest against perceived threats to their land when the adjacent army facility started surveying their customary land. Similar land-related naked protests by women occurred in Bukedea and Lakang. All these women had one thing in common: they had found themselves between the rock of neoliberal market-centred land policies and the hard place of protecting their food security and agro-based livelihoods. As people primarily responsible for household food production, these desperate women used their nakedness to protest power inequalities.

The examples of reported and unreported cases across the continent could go on *ad infinitum*. The strategy is mostly used in groups but also by

single protesters like Stella Nyanzi and Noerina Mubiru. In 1996, Mubiru had been recently widowed. Soon after the burial of her husband, a group of his relatives went to Mubiru's home in Mubende demanding their son's property. The desolate Mubiru stripped naked in front of her property-grabbing in-laws, daring them to first collect the "most-prized" asset (her nakedness) of their relative (the dead husband) before they can touch any other property. The father-in-law who had led the delegation fainted, and the rest fled her home in horror at her "curse" – (Monitor, 1996). The power in all the embodied subversive protests demonstrated above is derived from the reversal of positions where the social superior is subjected to the position of spectator of the naked spectacle put on by the social inferior. It cannot be denied that those spaces of protest have a counter-hegemonic effect on society.

Exposing the nakedness of elderly women and mothers is especially symbolic in most African cultures and is considered the ultimate curse: "The reason is said to be that through pregnancy, childbirth and nurturing, women are the givers of life. By stripping naked in front of men old enough to be her children or grandchildren, a mother is symbolically taking back the life that she gave, and so in a way, pronouncing death upon them"[7] (Mungai, 2016). It is conferring "social death" on those violating their freedoms. It represents a deep traditional curse emanating from women's generative power and a symbolic social execution effected by the "mothers of the nation".

Before discussing the legal aspects of naked protests, and to better understand the potency of women's naked protests, it is important to delve into the theoretical aspects of the body and its links to power in the next section.

III Gendered Meanings of Power and the Body

What is the relationship between power and the body? Specifically, how do both the macro unequal power relations engendered by patriarchy[8] and neoliberal capitalism[9] (negative power) as well as the localised empowerment exercised at the micro-political level by women who seek to disrupt dominant power and to transform society (positive power) operate?

The historical account has provided us with a glimpse of the various ways that protesting women deployed the diffuse power located in their naked bodies to engender social or political transformation. Their actions doubtlessly subverted patriarchal-capitalist power dynamics, but they also

dealt with myriad other issues along the spectrum of discontent with the existing order. There is a manifest duality in the action of stripping in order to secure a political or economic goal. Michel Foucault clarified that "power, after investing itself in the body, finds itself exposed to a counterattack in that same body" (Foucault, 1980: 56). In short, the complexity of power is such that it can operate both as a sword as well as a shield, with immense potential to do considerable good as well as causing significant damage. Power is in constant flux, improvisation and negotiation. Power is a balancing act.

Foucault is arguing that the body is vested with power. Power in the female body is also inscribed with a bold sexual script. In other words, the female body is also considered as a sexual body, much more than that of the male. Throughout history, the female body has been an object of attention, desire, and lust. Indeed, the Bible is full of instances in which the female body is the centre of excessive attraction. In Genesis 12:15, we are told that Pharaoh could not resist the "very fair" Sarai, and he took her into his harem; you also remember the story relayed in Judges 16 of how Samson was so enamoured of Delilah that he revealed the secret power that lay behind his hair. Or the story told in the Second Book of Samuel 11: 2-5, where David was unable to resist Bathsheba after seeing her bathing. While the Qur'an commands both men and women to restrain their gaze and guard their chastity, it only instructs women to cover their (desirable?) bodies (24: 30-31). Given this history, it is of no surprise that women's bodies have become the object of the voyeuristic male gaze and desire. Nude and half-nude female bodies are routinely exhibited on public cinema screens, videos, magazines, advertising billboards and tabloids such as *Red Pepper*. Moreover, these are primarily for the gaze and satisfaction of the male consumer.

The complexities, dilemmas and contradictions that female nakedness throws up have been the subject of scholarly research for years (e.g. Sultana, 2013; Barcan, 2002; Mba, 1982; Ifeka-Moller, 1975). What is clear from all the research in this area is that the protesting naked female body is not viewed in the same way as the male and therein lies the paradox of patriarchal-capitalist societies. Depending on the context, in the same public space, the same naked body will invoke desire and allure while being "read" with the discourse of shame and humiliation (Sutton 2007). Through this ambiguity, the naked protesting body represents what Shirley Ardener (1973: 16) refers to as the "condensed symbols of female power".

A *naked* body is not the same as a *nude* one. There is a significant conceptual distinction between the terms "nudity" and "nakedness". Nudity presupposes display and invites sexual connotations. On the other hand, nakedness asserts agency in the shedding of clothes: "A naked body has to be seen as an object in order to become nude" (Berger, 1972: 54). When women bare their nakedness to the public they are not engaging in sexual provocation. Rather, they are drawing on dominant gender norms, challenging and subverting them, to draw attention to their plight. As powerless people, they mobilise their bodies as a powerful resource, thereby transforming the negative associations of nudity into positive power.

The meanings that society attaches to gendered bodies through culture, law and religion exist in discourse (Tamale, 2015). Historically, various discourses around the world have "inscribed" the naked human body with cultural and legal meanings. Zillah Eisenstein (1988: 11) explains that discourse "is more than language – it moves into the realm of thinking and acting". In other words, discourse is a system of knowing that entails linguistic practices, subtle cultural codes and interpretive processes. It is through discourse that we see and interpret information, categorise people and events and justify power relations. Discourse constructs our world of meaning and experience (Belsey, 1980: 54). And the law is pivotal in such construction. As Eisenstein explains:

> Recognizing law as a discourse calls attention to how law establishes regulations, thoughts, and behavior and institutes expectations of what is legitimate and illegitimate behavior, what is acceptable and unacceptable, what is criminal and legal, what is rational and irrational, what is natural and unnatural. (Eisenstein, 1988: 43)

The legal discourse of the law engraves or inscribes our bodies with particular characteristics and symbols. Indeed, it is the semantic significance of the body that makes it an effective tool of protest. When the body is deployed as an instrument of resistance outside the institutionalised systems of protest, it can be quite effective.

Poststructural feminist analysis allows us to see how dominant discourses drive us to conform to conventional norms. Poststructural theory questions that which is assumed to be normal or common sense. It challenges the idea that individuals exist as essential beings and argues that our "being" is socially constructed. Bronwyn Davies explains that "we speak ourselves into existence within the terms of existing discourses" (Davies, 2000: 55). Hence, we are

subjects of cultural narratives and discourses. In other words, we are not the authors of the ideologies that construct our subjectivity (Barrett, 2005). We have little control of the narratives and meanings attached to our bodies. But as oppressed people, women can mobilise the narrative of "vulnerability" that is written on their bodies into a political tool by rewriting it as "power".

In her essay, "Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power", African-American theorist Audre Lorde writes about how women can reclaim their erotic power. But she does not use the term "erotic" in the usual sense of the word. Rather, she re-conceptualises it by challenging the false dichotomy that separates the erotic from the spiritual and the political. Lorde's notion of the erotic embeds much more than superficial sensations such as pornography and extends beyond sexuality:

> The erotic is a resource within each of us that lies in a deeply female and spiritual plane, firmly rooted in the power of our unexpressed or unrecognized feeling... We have been taught to suspect this resource, vilified, abused, and devalued... Of course, women so empowered are dangerous. So we are taught to separate the erotic from most vital areas of our lives other than sex... I find the erotic such a kernel within myself. When released from its intense and constrained pellet, it flows through and colors my life with a kind of energy that heightens and sensitizes and strengthens all my experience. (Lorde, 1984: 53-56)

When oppressed, women are pushed to the brink with no more options to protect their self-respect and dignity. They will tap into the depth of Lorde's erotic and utilize it even if it means stripping off their clothes. They will use their nakedness to demand for what they believe to be rightfully theirs. Their acts against oppression "become integral with their self, motivated and empowered from within" (ibid: 58). Lorde instructs women on how to access the "creative harmony" of the erotic by emphasising a system of expression instead of oppression (Rashedi, 2011: 2).

The Place of the Body in Relations of Power and Gender

What is the link between the processes of changing the oppressive structures of power and making changes in the self? In other words, how do the subversive bodily actions of oppressed individuals (or groups of individuals) work to alter complex structures of power? To come to grips with these

questions it is necessary to understand that the body should not be simply viewed through the lens of biology. Rather, the body needs to be understood as both a material and a political entity. The "natural" body derives meaning from culture, history and society (Karpin and Mykitiuk, 2011; Sclater, 2002). Michel Foucault saw different markings engraved on our bodies (Foucault, 1977, 1978; also see Giddens, 1991). According to Foucault, the way we view reality and interpret the world is based on a discourse that has been historically, socially and culturally constructed. It is through the discursive or constructed sense of reality that we know anything about our bodies. The nib of the law is instrumental in metaphorically inscribing our bodies and thus lending meaning to them.

When Foucault theorised the body as a medium of communication, i.e. the surface on which the social is inscribed, he flung open the conceptual doors for us to problematise it as discourse. He offered us the analytical tools to deepen our understanding of how history, culture, law, religion and other institutional forces impose rules and regulations upon our bodies. He pushed us to see the body as a site of power struggle, self-expression and of numerous contradictions. If one imagines the naked body to be a blank slate at the time of birth, culture then proceeds to inscribe gendered, racialised, sexualised, and classist hierarchies that give character to that body.[10] The text that culture inscribes on our bodies is a crucial medium for effecting social control. But, most importantly, conceptualising the body as discourse powerfully suggests that our bodies have the capacity to "speak" and to be "read" in particular social and historical contexts.

The markings, engravings or script that Foucault spoke of were not necessarily limited to the visible tattoos or beautiful scarification like those we see on the traditional bodies of the Karamojong or the Masaai. They constitute rules, images, symbols and even hierarchies, all of which give shape and character to male and female bodies. We are "fabricated" onto our bodies by discursive practices and formations. Thus, the plastic surgery industry is one of the most lucrative fields of medicine today. Here at home, shops which sell false "bums" are doing brisk business. In fact, "ideal" body shapes keep evolving along a spectrum, depending on the cultural context. Women in different cultural contexts spend a lot of resources manipulating their bodies to conform to the dominant ideologies to achieve the desired packaged shapes.

The bodies of men and women are represented differently; in other words, the cultural script written on men's bodies is quite different from that which has been inscribed on the bodies of women. They are sexed and gendered bodies. It is also interesting to note the variations across cultures in the way in which the bodies of men and women are perceived. For instance, there is no "ideal" universal or standard sexy female body shape. A well-endowed bust, slim waist, narrow hips and long legs (the Barbie-image) may pass as "beautiful" in Europe. In most parts of Africa the description "beautiful" tends towards a more voluptuous. curvy silhouette, especially in terms of the backside.

An example to demonstrate how the law engraves scripts on men's and women's bodies is the Penal Code of the State of New York which criminalises the exposure of women's breasts but is silent about a similar action with respect to men. This sends out a strong message to the public about the two bodies (Glazer 1993).[11] Barbara Behrmann (2005) writes about the difficulties that mothers in the US face while nursing babies in public spaces, including hiding in bathrooms. This is the same culture where "breasts are used to sell everything from cars to beer; in which deep cleavage dominates the checkout aisle... and in which the number of women who artificially enhance their breasts has increased 533% from 1992 to 2002" (Behrmann, 2005: 190). But it is interesting that a publicly breast-feeding woman in Uganda, as is the case in most of Africa, does not raise any eyebrows. The resilience of that part of African culture is quite intriguing when compared to women in the West. However, through religions such as Christianity and Islam and cultural globalisation, Ugandan dominant culture is being influenced to adopt similar negative views about women's breasts. This illustrates the contradictions and paradoxes that are associated with the body as a site of cultural and political contestation.

Analysing naked protests brings out in bold relief the link between power, the human body and sexuality. Foucault redefined the concept of power beyond the commonly held notion of a negative repressive force exercised in top-down fashion through the instruments of law, taboos and censorship (Foucault, 1978). Power is something that is exercised rather than possessed; power is unfixed and diffuse, permeates all aspects of social life and operates through discourse, knowledge and what Foucault called "regimes of truths" (Foucault, 1977; Rabinow, 1991). This also marked a major theoretical

breakthrough about the concept of power. When we conceive of power as not resting on the external but as incorporated into numerous practices and embedded in everyday relations, it becomes easier for us to comprehend both its negative and positive aspects. The positive potential of power is seen when it is understood to work *through* people rather than *on* them.

This complex re-conceptualisation of power as a relational concept that works through the actions of people at the micro-structural level is extremely useful in analysing the complex link between naked protests and the law. When one understands power as being diffused throughout the social structure, circulating through the entire society, one then begins to appreciate the role of power in the lives of oppressed social groups such as women. Indeed, feminists have adopted the Foucauldian conceptualisation of power and taken it a step further by emphasising the role of subjectivity and agency in this system of power, acknowledging people's ability to determine their own destinies (King, 2004; Balsamo, 1996; Butler 1990; Bordo, 1993; Barrett, 1991). As Anne Balsamo (1996: 39) writes, "Although the female body is subordinated within institutionalised systems of power and knowledge and crisscrossed by incompatible discourses, it is not fully determined by those systems of meaning". In other words, women (and other subordinated groups) transgress and resist the discourses that seek to contain them. Adopting this approach facilitates our clear grasp of the experiences, capacities, self-understanding and subversive actions of those who resist as they attempt to achieve change.

The script written on our bodies is scribbled with the power-infused ink of numerous forms of oppression. The way that society "reads" the body of a youthful married woman is different from how the body of an older unmarried woman or that of a poor disabled woman is read. The subtext of a traditionalist woman "speaks" differently from that of a Muslim woman. To further demonstrate how power is constituted through accepted forms of knowledge or "regimes of truth", I offer some examples from Kiganda culture. The "truth" regime in Kiganda culture orders that a skimpily-dressed woman who exposes her thighs and cleavage in public is dishonorable and deserves no respect. Most Baganda women conform to this "truth" and, as they seek social acceptability, they cover their bodies without giving it a second thought. Such performance gives meaning to social constructions, covering it with the flavour of "reality" and "naturalness" (Goffman, 1969; Butler, 1980). The

non-conformists or deviants who dare to breach and challenge this "truth" face the wrath of the law (written and customary). Deviance highlights the political aspects of performance (Butler, 1990). The same culture also instructs that a naked woman bending over in public represents the ultimate curse. These "truths" among the Baganda are not necessarily "true" in the culture of the Karamojong, where women routinely move about half-naked in public. Through bodily expressions (e.g. gestures, movements and enactments such as kneeling before her elders and husband), a Muganda woman constitutes the illusion of her ethnic self. And only her transgressive acts of performance (say, through naked protests) can lead to social change (Tamale, 2008).

The meaning of "covering up" is as important as the performance of "undressing in public"; both constitute the process by which a bodily norm is accepted or rejected. Each society has its "regimes of truth" but there seems to be a huge global overlap when it comes to the meaning of female naked bodies in public. These "truths" are created and reinforced through systems of formal and informal education, science, religious teachings and the mass media. They are constructed mostly by those that hold structural power. The crucial point here is that all these "truths" are constructed by society for political reasons and hold no essential core. Oppressed groups, through a twist of politics, an alternative performance, can subvert the meanings imposed on their bodies to their own advantage. Humiliated bodies can be "re-signified to humiliate the humiliator" (Sultana, 2013: 35).

Theorising about "public" and "private" spaces is also important when thinking about naked protests. The separation of the personal from the political or speaking of the private/public as dichotomous spheres is an artificial construct designed to support the oppressive status quo (Tamale, 2004; Butler, 1990). The dominant system that accepts naked bodies in "private" but proscribes them in "public" has political motivations. The meaning of the fictitious private/public divide gets especially muddled when it comes to issues of sexuality where we see the same institutional power turning our "private" sexual issues into "public" matters to be regulated and controlled by law. For example, the "private" matter of whom we choose to have sex with as consenting adults is regulated by laws such as those that criminalise sex work and homosexuality (Tamale, 2009b). Even the maternalistic discourse associated with women's domesticated bodies is deployed by patriarchal-capitalist states for political ends, a point demonstrated in the next subsection.

Female Nudity, Cultural Values and the Symbolism of the Motherland

Our knowledge of the body is derived from and mediated through discourse – discourse that is always subject to interpretation. One of the avowed missions of the colonisers who subjugated Africa was to bring "civilisation" and "modernity" to the "dark continent" (McClintock, 1995). The process of changing Africans followed many forms but the most potent came in the shape of religion, education and the law. In Uganda, the effects of proselytisation, enculturation and acculturation were tremendous, including the values, beliefs and meanings that we associated with our bodies.

To fully understand the female body as a symbol of a broader politics, it is important to appreciate the association of that body with nationhood and the motherland. The concept of nationalism invents or imagines nations where they do not exist (Anderson, 1991). As one way of social organisation, the nation is built on the basis of shared language, dialects and culture. For instance, in pre-colonial Africa, the Kingdoms of Buganda, Bunyoro, Ankole and Toro were separate "nations" with centralised political systems. On the other hand, the Alur, Acholi, Langi, Iteso, Karamojong and the Bakiga organised themselves along decentralised, clan-based social and political structures. When the imperial powers met in Berlin in 1884 to divide Africa among themselves, they carved it into different nation-states, paying no attention to any commonalities or shared cultures. Indeed, many "nations" were separated in this process and post-Berlin families and kin found themselves on different sides of national borders. In Uganda, the British colonisers faced the challenge of patching together such diverse "nations" that inhabited the newly-created geographical space baptised "Uganda". The task of nation-building or imbuing a sense of oneness and patriotism among the citizens of the invented country was monumental – one that continues to dog our post-independence governments.

Motherhood is metaphorically important in nation-building as the mother image is a signifier of nationalism (Mostov, 1999; Eisenstein, 1988). This is more true today within the context of globalised neoliberal capitalism than ever before. In its institutionalised form, motherhood includes the nurturing of children and the maintenance of the household (for no pay) – critical aspects in the preservation of patriarchal capitalism. Hence, the "political economy" of the woman's body is highlighted in its value and utility for

shifting needs. As producers and reproducers of gendered members of the national collectives and as transmitters of culture, women are implicated in nationalism (Yuval-Davis and Anthias, 1989). Reference to "our *mother*land", "our *mother* country", "our *mother* tongues" or even "*mama* Africa" and the abundant use of feminine pronouns in nationalist discourse are mainly designed to invoke the sense of love and care for our nation; it serves to salute the nation as a "doting mother" for the ordinary citizen. The cultural power of the motherhood metaphor is clearly mobilised in the service of nation-building.

As the primary caretakers of the family, women are also "construed as the symbolic bearers of the nation" (McClintock, 1993: 62). It is symbolic because it rarely goes beyond political rhetoric and rarely translates into women holding *real* political power. Indeed, motherhood is much more associated with cultural than political citizenship. The "mothercrafting" process of building the nation must involve the valorisation of motherhood as the iconic caregiver and preserver of cultural values. As reproducers, women reinforce national boundaries and are constructed as the source of national pride. Their bodies – representing the motherland – must therefore remain pure, uncontaminated and honourable. The law inscribes the script of decency and modesty on women's bodies. We see this, for example, in the absurd position of our criminal law which only penalises the "indecent assault" or "insulting the modesty" of women but not men's bodies.[12]

After pushing women's bodies through a purifying sieve, they must work hard to maintain these values and not soil this script. Those who try to erase or re-write the script by, for example, asserting their subjective autonomy, are not only held in contempt but also face punitive action. Hence as "mothers of the nation", the naked protesting bodies of women are viewed as polluting the very purity of the nation and undermining its solidarity. In order to deprive it of its radical political content, the protesters are framed through descriptions such as "irrational", "mad", "crazy", or even "primitive".[13] The fact is that the naked bodies of protesting women are reconfiguring nakedness on their own terms, struggling to move away from objectification (Sultana, 2013).

As one of the most important "scribers" of bodily narratives, we turn to the law and how it addresses naked protests. If the body is ultimately an instrument of power, what role does the nib of the law play in engraving our bodies with various scripts? In which ways do the imposed scripts clash

with our self-inscribed narratives? What legal means does the state deploy to try and erase our self-written scripts? And what are the consequences of moulding our own bodily inscriptions through our agency and activities?

IV Law, Culture and Religion on Naked Bodies

Legal orthodoxy presents law as a neutral and objective arbiter. But as we have intimated, nothing can be further from the truth. Law plays a crucial role in inscribing our bodies with rules, symbols, images, meanings and hierarchies. Legal discourse constructs and reinforces the "normal" body and any breach or deviation from the "norm" exposes one to punishment. The constructs of law mirror patriarchal-capitalist social relations and "truths". Eisenstein elaborates:

> [Law] constructs and mirrors patriarchal social relations through its phallocratic interpretations of truth, but there is no one interpretation through the law. The law names reality at the same time that it mystifies reality... Law reflects and impacts the world... Law operates as a political language because it establishes and curtails choices and action. (Eisenstein 1988: 21-22, 46)

There is a diversity of discourses that make up the body of law (Karpin and Mykitiuk, 2011). In other words, statutory law is but one cog of the public administration system which includes several other facets such as policies, culture, religion, social regulation and implementing institutions. Legislators, judges, lawyers and law professors who make, apply, interpret and disseminate the law all contribute to establishing law as a discourse. As a post-colonial country, Uganda operates a pluralistic legal system that embraces both codified statutory law and uncodified customary law mainly rooted in culture. Although it is not stated anywhere that religion has the force of law in Uganda – indeed the Constitution explicitly underscores the secular character of the State[14] – many patriarchal religious principles find expression in the legal codes and are often used to justify and legitimise culture and the law (Tamale, 2014; Nyamu, 2000). Together, all these laws participate in inscribing our bodies. But the fluidity and contingency of our embodied selves always pose the challenge of subverting the dominant script.

This part of the lecture engages with a critical analysis of the law, expanding upon its more nuanced and complex nexus with gender and power and exposing the contradictions that such a relationship entails. The legal discussion is of course linked to naked protests. While the issue of nudity,

indecency and pornography in Uganda has recently emerged as an important one, the jurisprudence on these issues is grossly underdeveloped. This means that much of our analysis has to draw on discussions from elsewhere.

Natural Law Doctrine and the Criminalisation of Sexual Morality

Although positive law dealt a serious blow to natural law theory over two centuries ago and displaced it as the orthodox jurisprudential school of thought, residual influence of natural law endures into the 21st century (Finnis, 1980). The basic tenet of natural law theory is that law is based on morality, and the standards of what is "right" and "wrong" governing human behavior are derived from the command of a supernatural power. Given that one of the "truth" values of natural law theorists is that everything natural is moral, it is ironic that they view "natural" nakedness as immoral.

Rooted in patriarchal religious authority, natural law theorists continue to operate with underlying beliefs espoused by St. Thomas Aquinas who viewed woman as an "imperfect man" or Aristotle who considered women to be "naturally inferior" (De Beauvoir, 1988: 16). Law is structured through the dualism of man/woman, privileging the male as the default human and the female as the "other". The new-fangled natural law schools of thought, such as those espoused by John Finnis (1980), Germain Grisez (1987) and al-Buti (1982), all manifest as a resurgence of Christian and Islamic fundamentalisms which seek to subjugate women through their bodies. The subjugation proceeds along the channels of morality and decency engraved on the surface of women's bodies.

In Uganda, such morality is firmly implanted in the British-designed Penal Code Act (Cap 120) – which came to us via India – in Chapter XIV, "Offences against Morality". The common denominator that links all morality offences in Uganda's law is sexuality, particularly women's sexuality.[15] It is here that we see the law functioning to both name reality and mystify it at the same time, declaring men and women as different while simultaneously obscuring the many similarities that they share (Eisenstein, 1988: 22). Our penal system generally constructs and enacts morality, not so much to protect as to confine and repress particular expressions of sexuality (Tamale, 2009a; Hubbard, 2000). Such legal moralism rests on two problematic assumptions. First, that there exists a moral consensus in what is a pluralistic Ugandan society. Secondly, and more importantly, it assumes that elements of human rights

and democratic freedoms are absent from the law (Bakare-Yusuf, 2011). That same outlook has been given expression much more deeply in some of our more recent laws. Thus, in 2014 the Anti-Pornography Act (APA) was passed to reinforce this "morality framework".[16]

Even where the law appears to protect females, say, from sexual assault, its approach is highly problematic. The offence of rape, for example, revolves around the "lack of consent" and the proof of penetration. However, a sexual-assault victim will not be protected by rape law if she did not consent to having sex with her abusive husband as the law presumes that marriage conveys a woman's consent to sexual relations.[17] Moreover, the only penetration that the law envisaged was penile-vaginal, which means that if a man rapes a woman through the mouth or penetrates her with a gun barrel or a broken bottle, he can only be prosecuted for the lesser offence of indecent assault. When it comes to prostitution, the crime is only restricted to the sellers of sex (mostly women) but not the buyers (the majority being men). Similarly, criminal adultery is restricted to wives and not husbands.[18] This clearly reflects a husband's control over his wife's body, which was viewed as chattel. Indeed, in 1707, English Lord Chief Justice John Holt described adultery as "the highest invasion of property".[19]

Such double standards in the sexual morality of men and women clearly indicate that the aim of the law is not to protect but to regulate and control women's bodies. Wives were viewed as their husband's property or chattel and therefore the crime of rape was taken like any other property crime (Adamo, 1989). The time is overdue for Uganda to overhaul these outdated sexist penal laws. The foundation of such laws was English common law which is rooted in natural law principles. The focus should not be on the *morality* of the sexual offences but rather on the *illegality* of the sexual assaults committed against women. That will help to rewrite the script on women's bodies.

A critical analysis of the morality offences defined under the law exposes not only the means by which dominant structures engrave particular scripts on women's bodies, but also the ways that such scripts are "read" and interpreted by society. In other words, a feminist deconstruction of morality laws gives us an opportunity to sharpen our understanding of the context in which women's naked protests erupt and to assess the response of society to them.

This was made clear with the call by the minister of ethics and integrity for the arrest and prosecution of naked protesters under the Anti-Pornography

Act. However, elements of the offence introduced by this law are restricted to "producing, trafficking in, publishing, broadcasting, procuring, importing, exporting, selling or abetting any form of pornography".[20] Section 2 of the APA defines "pornography" as:

> any representation through publication, exhibition, cinematography, *indecent* show, information technology or by whatever means, of a person engaged in real or stimulated explicit sexual activities or *any representation of the sexual parts of a person for primarily sexual excitement.* [Emphasis added]

Although the phrase "sexual parts" is not defined in the law, we know that the popular understanding of this term differs for men's and women's bodies. While men's sexual parts are normatively restricted to their external genitalia, for women there are many more body parts that are sexualised, including breasts, thighs, buttocks, hips, even hair and lips (Tamale, 2016). Indeed, the draft version of the law had also explicitly banned the depiction of the clearly gendered "sexual parts of a person such as breasts, thighs, buttocks or genitalia".[21] The term "indecent" is not defined in the law either. Failure to provide an explicit definition of this illusive term opens it up to the unsatisfactory I-know-it-when-I-see-it standard.[22] Moreover, it would be stretching the law too far to argue that naked female protesters are exhibiting their bodies primarily for sexual excitement.

The case of *Uganda v. Nabakooza and 9 Others*[23] further illustrates how the law dictates the meaning of the body. Specifically, it demonstrates the contribution made by the law to inscribing sexuality onto women's bodies. On July 6, 2004, several African heads of state were travelling from Entebbe Airport to Kampala for the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) meeting. Jackline Nabakooza and her music troupe were also travelling atop a pick-up truck along the Entebbe Highway for a fete on the same day. They were adorned in skimpy costumes and dancing to amplified music en route. The police arrested them and charged them with being "idle and disorderly" contrary to section 167(d) of the Penal Code.

Finding them guilty of the offence, the chief magistrate held that the women "depicted a high level of moral decadence of the country" to the visiting heads of state and sentenced them to three months in prison. He described their performance as "a shame to the nation", and further ordered that for future deterrence, the women's skimpy dresses be handed to the

police for immediate burning, their big weaves undone and their heads shaven. The sentence he meted out to the young women was harsher than what he gave to their male counterparts. This gendered, morally oriented interpretation of the law by the magistrate and the visiting of shame on the young women's performance was very telling, given that, traditionally, most female dancers around Africa are skimpily dressed. Indeed, on review by the High Court, gender-sensitive Justice Okumu-Wengi set aside the order, holding that destroying their clothing and shaving their heads "smacked of a discriminatory treatment that also demeaned the girls and assailed their dignity as women amounting to them suffering cruel, degrading treatment and punishment".[24]

What needs to be emphasised is that the expressive act of protest is very different from pornographic expression. To interpret the law in that way would amount to denying the protesters agency and power, turning their bodies into passive sexual objects. When women strip in protest, at best they rewrite and overwrite the dominant sexual script associated with their nude bodies. At worst, they render it illegible. It is an insult to undermine their mobilising potential and their ability to rally against oppression. Naked protesting women are stretching the personal to relate it to the political in a dramatic fashion. Society must therefore "read" their naked bodies as powerful icons of defiance and not as the objects of sexual display.

Naked Protesting as a Constitutional Right and Freedom

The 1995 Constitution provides the fundamental principles of law to which all other laws of the land must conform. This premier law recognises the right to peaceful protest and, indeed, such right is integral to any functioning democracy. The basis of this right is preserved in the fundamental freedoms of conscience, expression, assembly and association, all of which are enshrined in the Constitution.[25] If we continue with the "speaking body" metaphor, it is quite clear that individuals are free to use their bodies as a tool of communication. Indeed, an expansive conception of expression has been extended to non-verbal conduct by courts of law.[26] However, the rights which stand as the foundation for protest and resistance come with legal caveats. Specifically, individuals exercising these rights and freedoms must justify them with evidence that their actions are not detrimental to the "public interest". Article 43(1) of the Constitution provides:

> In the enjoyment of the rights and freedoms prescribed in this Chapter, no person shall prejudice the fundamental or other human rights and freedoms of others or the public interest.

In other words, the enjoyment of one's rights is contingent upon one's fulfillment of the public interest duty. But what are the parameters of the concept of "public interest"? The premier law does not delineate the limits beyond the fact that it must not go "beyond what is acceptable and demonstrably justifiable in a free and democratic society, or what is provided in this Constitution".[27]

So, under what circumstances would *expressive* nakedness be acceptable and demonstrably justifiable as per the Constitution? We turn to judicial interpretation for proper guidance on this crucial concept. Unfortunately, Ugandan jurisprudence is yet to clarify and interpret the right to freedom of "expressive" nakedness as protected under Article 43. However, a similarly-worded provision in the New Zealand Bill of Rights Act (1990) was scrutinised in the 2012 public nakedness case of *Pointon v. New Zealand Police*.[28] Pointon was a naturalist who did not believe in covering the natural human body with clothing. When he went jogging in the park wearing nothing but his running shoes, members of the public complained and he was charged and convicted of "behaving offensively" contrary to section 27 of New Zealand's Summary Offences Act. Pointon successfully appealed his conviction, arguing that the charge negated his right to freedom of expression. Pointon's nakedness was distinguished from nudity exhibited in cases such as striptease shows.[29] In fact, *Pointon* represents the current jurisprudence in New Zealand on this issue; that is, that the nakedness of protesters (or naturalists) does not amount to indecent behavior (Lincoln, 2013).

In Uganda, two basic principles developed by the courts of law define the idea of "acceptable and demonstrably justifiable in a free and democratic society": first, that individual rights and freedoms are inherent;[30] secondly, that all organs and agencies of government and all persons must respect, uphold and promote all human rights.[31] Therefore, any limitations imposed on a right guaranteed by the Constitution have to be precise and clear.

The Supreme Court of Uganda in the case of *Onyango Obbo and Another v. Attorney General*,[32] expounded upon the meaning and rationale of the phrase "acceptable and demonstrably justifiable in a free and democratic society". Relying on persuasive authorities from jurisdictions such as South

Africa, the USA and Canada, the court was quite generous when drawing the boundary lines on the right to freedom of expression. It noted that the words "acceptable and justifiable" clearly presuppose the existence of universal values and principles to which every democratic state is committed and underscored the fact that legislation which seeks to limit the enjoyment of fundamental human rights and freedoms is invalid unless it is in accordance with the universal democratic values and principles that every free and democratic society adheres to.[33] The court ruled, "[A]nyone seeking to restrict that freedom must be prepared to show that special and clear circumstances do exist that justify such restriction of the freedom. The task is not insurmountable but it is quite a demanding one".[34] This means that anyone asserting that a naked protest is detrimental to the "public interest" would have to meet the high standard of scrutiny set by the Supreme Court.

So, would Ugandan courts follow the New Zealand judiciary in disqualifying the application of the exceptional criteria on naked protests? One of the key justifications that parliament put forward for enacting the APA was that pornography offends public morality.[35] We have already discussed the problems surrounding the vaguely defined term "pornography". But what *is* "public morality"? Whose morality are we talking about here? When a society employs double standards of morality for men and women, which one counts as public morality? Does the moral wellbeing of the protesting women really matter? Who determines the moral compass of the public and to what ends? Does morality discourse work to obscure hidden interests? Does it make sense to legislate morality and should immoral conduct be criminalised?

As a feminist, the concepts *public* interest and *public* morality always transport me to the uncomfortable terrain where the rigid demarcation between the public and private spheres works as an instrument to reinforce patriarchal-capitalist interests. As we have seen, the deeply gendered distinction relegates women to the so-called "private" sphere, where they gratuitously provide the necessities of productive and reproductive social life (Tamale, 2014, 2004). What is dubbed "private" is in fact very much in the public or the political realm and the complex realities surrounding naked protests overlap both "spaces". Catharine MacKinnon (1989: 191) articulates it better: "The private is public for those for whom the personal is political. In this sense, for women there is no private, either normatively or empirically". Protectionist regulations that are justified with the "public interest" veil are

usually designed to protect the interests of the powerful at the expense of the oppressed and exploited. The script inscribed on the domesticated naked female body and "read" by the public as shameful and embarrassing is only meant to stifle women's self-determination and agency. If it was really about public morality, then the commodified nude or half-nude bodies of women that are routinely displayed on billboards, in the mass media, on screens and stages for the male gaze would be banned. The artificial public/private split also has significant implications for women's citizenship rights as "private" actors asserting themselves in the "public" realm.

It is important to unpack the public/private dichotomy and reveal the power relations behind the distinction. Under patriarchy, men's bodies are constructed as the "benchmark" standard and even equated to the public "body politic" (as opposed to the "body natural" of the woman) (Fineman, 2011: 114). Clustering the term "public" with the vague and ambiguous concepts of "morality" and "interest" operates to juxtapose it against the cluster "private life", which society undervalues and views as unimportant. But the meanings associated with the terms "public" and "private" are much more complex. The classification of "public interest" signifies matters about which the public is or ought to be interested. Ruth Gavison (1992: 7) argues that "the normative sense of public concern may be related to the fact that these matters have direct or indirect effects on the public welfare, or that these are matters which the public constructs or regulates through its norms and culture". In the case of oppressive social structures (based on gender, class, etc.), this normative claim is more likely to mean that the public should seek to change such matters via political processes, including naked protests. To put it simply, deploying the APA or any criminal code against naked demonstrators under the patronising guise of protecting the "public interest" cannot be demonstrably justifiable in a free and democratic society.

V Conclusion: A Case of Women Reclaiming Their Power?

The takeaway from this lecture is that the human body is fraught with politics, influenced by complex effects of power derived from institutions such as law, culture and religion. Such institutions mark the body with meaning and power which can be used either to oppress or liberate. A discussion of naked protests entails a conceptualisation of the body as an instrument of control as well as a source of disruption. The body is a site of

imaging the social structuring of society; it carries the symbols of hierarchies based on gender, sexuality, class, race, ethnicity, (dis)ability, age, etc. Naked female protesting bodies are quite different from lewd nude bodies, as the former represent defiance and agency, while the latter represent sexual objectification.

At the minimum, naked bodies force us to rethink our association of nakedness with shame and debasement. At the maximum, naked bodies make strong political statements that challenge structures of domination or exclusion. They have the capacity to disrupt and, in a spectacular way, turn vulnerability into empowerment. We have discussed the contradictions in portraying women's bodies in the public arena as objects of desire and sex while simultaneously labeling them deviant. The silence of the written law on naked protesting bodies is pregnant with meaning. It is a silence open to interpretation, often reading perversity and hypocrisy on its surface.

Audre Lorde (1984) invited women to reclaim their power through the self-deepening and embodied feeling inherent in the erotic. It is the connection with their erotic life force, experiencing the power of the erotic that drives women to bare their nakedness in public. As I argue elsewhere, "Women will go about their 'feminine' business as usual until a core part of their self-perception is shaken to such threatening proportions as to compel them to take action challenging it; when such a time comes, there is no regression" (Tamale, 1996: 19-20).

We have highlighted the political technology of the body, exposing the role of the law (statutory, customary and religious) in regulating and disciplining the body. The law is an important instrument in shaping and scripting our gendered bodies. Society "reads" women's bodies along the landmarks forged by the law. Female naked protests represent a resistance and subversion of the dominant scripts engraved on women's bodies – scripts of subordination, passivity, sexuality, subservience, vulnerability, etc. Hence, through the process of naked protests, women engage in a re-scripting and reconfiguration of their bodies. African women have employed this strategy against the wielders of power for many generations. The meanings and understandings of these processes are interpreted differently; the custodians of patriarchy view it as a violation of dignity and the law, while the activists perceive it as fighting for embodied justice to preserve their very dignity. Given that at core the law is a political institution, it may appear that there

is little hope for those bodies that stand in the way of those who hold state power. However, there is another type of power that inheres in the self, in solidarity, in self-determination and in disrupting the norm.

Endnotes

1 The offence of "indecent practices" found in section 148 of the Penal Code (Cap 120) only criminalises acts of "gross indecency" committed with another person in public or private places.

2 Feminism is both an ideology and political movement that espouses gender equality, paying particular attention to the workings of power structures that privilege men. Feminism has multiple theories, including liberal, communist, postcolonial and poststructural.

3 Gymnosophy is a philosophy and lifestyle based on the belief that nudity is a natural condition that should be embraced by all human beings (Jirasek and Hlavinka, 2010).

4 *Aurat* is an Arabic term that refers to those parts of the body that are not supposed to be seen by the public. The male *aurat* includes the area between the navel and the knees and the female *aurat* involves the entire body except for the face and hands.

5 The Oyo Empire of the Yoruba covered the area of present-day western and north-central Nigeria as well as eastern Benin.

6 The police officers violently squeezed the breast of an opposition political leader, Ingrid Turinawe, in the process of arresting her (Njoroge, 2012).

7 Ugandans were stunned when General Aronda died five months after the Amuru women stripped before him!

8 The term "patriarchy" refers to men's structural control over political, legal, economic, cultural and religious institutions as well as their domination in both public and private spheres (Goldberg, 1993, cited in Glick and Fiske, 1997).

9 Capitalism generally refers to an economic system where the factors of production (land, raw materials, labour, capital, technology) are privately owned. "Neoliberal capitalism" captures a new model of capitalism that emerged in the 20th century, which promotes liberalisation, deregulation, privatisation, cost-sharing, reduction of subsidies, marginalisation of labour unions, etc. and prioritises markets over people. Neoliberal capitalism arrived in Africa via World Bank- and IMF-prescribed structural adjustment policies (SAPs) in the early 1980s.

10 In fact, there is no such thing as a "pre-cultural" body. The body emerges from the womb as a contested site (Karpin and Mykitiuk, 2011; Sclater, 2002).

11 E.g., see section 245.01 of the New York Penal Code.

12 See Section 128 of the Uganda Penal Code (Cap. 120). Section 147 protects only minor boys under the age of eighteen from indecent assaults.

13 Stella Nyanzi's mental state came under serious scrutiny on social-media platforms and even in the university committee that was set up to investigate the issues surrounding her protest.

14 Article 7 of the 1995 Constitution clearly states, "Uganda shall not adopt a State religion."

15 The offences listed under Chapter XIV include rape, abduction (with intent to marry or to have sexual intercourse), elopement, indecent assault, defilement, child-to-child sex, procuration, detention with sexual intent, prostitution, abortion, unnatural offences (sodomy), indecent practices and incest.

16 See the Anti-Pornography Act of 2014.

17 The common-law jurist Sir Matthew Hale, in his *History of the Pleas of the Crown*, *Vol. 1* (1736: 629), writes, "But the husband cannot be guilty of a rape committed by himself upon his lawful wife, for by their mutual matrimonial consent and contract the wife hath given herself up in this kind unto her husband which she cannot retract."

18 This particular law (section 154 of the Penal Code) was challenged and the Constitutional Court declared it unconstitutional for its gender discrimination. See Law and Advocacy for Women in Uganda v. Attorney General [2007] UGCC 1. However, since that ruling, parliament has done nothing to remove the offending section in the Penal Code.

19 See R. v. Smith (Morgan) [2001] 1AC 146 at 169.

20 See Section 13 of the Anti-Pornography Act, 2014.

21 See Clause 2 of the Anti-Pornography Bill No. 12 of 2011. Reference to explicit body parts was removed after women's rights activists objected to its gendered import.

22 This phrase was famously used by the US Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart decades ago in the case of Jacobellis v. Ohio 387 US 184 (1964).

23 HC Criminal Revision No. 8 of 2004 (Unreported).

24 See Uganda v. Nabakooza Jackline and 9 others, HC Criminal Revision No. 8 of 2004 (Unreported).

25 See Article 29 of the 1995 Constitution of the Republic of Uganda.

26 E.g., see the Canadian Supreme Court judgment in the case of Irwin Toy Ltd v Attorney General (Quebec) [1989] 1 SCR 927 (SCC).

27 See Article 43(2)(c) of the Constitution.

28 [2012] NZHC 3208. See section 5 of the New Zealand Bill of Rights Act.

29 E.g., in the case of Philpott v. Police HC Christchurch AP-138-142, 13 July 1993 (cited in Lincoln 2013: 13).

30 See Article 20(1) of the Constitution.

31 See Article 20(2) of the Constitution.

32 Constitutional Appeal No. 2 of 2002; [2004] UGSC 1 (February 2004).

33 Mark Gova and Anor v. Minister of Home Affairs and Anor S.C.36/2000: Civil Application No. 156/99.

34 Per Twinomujuni, JA in the Onyango-Obbo judgment (note 28) at 24.

35 See Official Hansard, December 19, 2013.

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Photo by Jessica Horn, reprinted with permission

Sex Workers Mural — Maku Azu

Feminist Reflections on the Rhodes Must Fall Movement

Kealeboga Ramaru

The year 2015 was undoubtedly one of the most memorable years for me in post-apartheid South Africa. Just six weeks short of the country's 21st-anniversary celebration of the advent of democracy, a movement that was to have a lasting impact on the history of the University of Cape Town (UCT), and the country, was brewing in the second-floor foyer of the Leslie Social Science Building. South Africa was in the year that marked two decades of a "rainbow nation", a nation that was able to transcend the pain of racial segregation and discrimination to live together in peace and harmony. This was a year in which young people born post-1994 wore the badge of "Born Free" proudly because they were the generation that no longer had to bear the intergenerational pain and trauma of systematic exclusion and oppression. South Africa was "alive with possibilities" that were open to all.

The University of Cape Town is situated in the southwestern part of South Africa. Cape Town is considered one of the least transformed cities in the country, with very little shifting in it since the dawn of democracy. One of the clear indicators of the lack of transformation of the city is the very obvious white minority who occupy the majority in the city centre and industry. Other indicators include the rising levels of gentrification where people of colour are being pushed out of their homes to provide more of the expensive housing and recreational facilities for richer white occupants. Then there is the very prevalent spatial apartheid where Black people have remained within the peripheries of the city in townships that have seen little transformation since the end of apartheid.

So it is no surprise that the University of Cape Town would somehow be a reflection of the city it finds itself in and that it would be the site where calls for decolonisation would ring louder than before 1994. UCT, very much like the city of Cape Town, has lacked real transformation and has never imagined decolonisation as an institution. Higher education has always been a contested space in South Africa, particularly in former white universities. The

latter have played a key historical role in safeguarding colonial and Western education, and have constituted themselves as a place for white men to centre themselves as primary knowledge makers. Under apartheid, the universities took on a different but similar role of being a "creature of the state". Although some fought for their autonomy from the state, the University remained a space that was exploited by the apartheid government as a tool to further its segregation and divisive rule.

Almost 21 years after the start of the journey towards democracy, the calls for a decolonised university and country began growing in the University of Cape Town. Students challenged the University on the number-obsessed transformation agenda that has yielded very little change. Black students spoke of the systematic exclusion that manifested itself through a Eurocentric curriculum, minimal staff transformation – where the majority of academics in senior positions and management were white – and, more shocking, that the University of Cape Town did not have a Black womxn[1] professor in 2015. Students also spoke about the physical and existential exclusion that manifested itself through the culture of the University, which creates comfort for white, middle-class, heterosexual students, and causes great discomfort for students who do not fit the mould. The names of buildings and symbols were also an aspect of exclusion. The statue of Cecil John Rhodes which occupied the centre of the campus was a representation of all of these things to the students and its removal became an important start to the decolonial project.

The story of the Rhodes Must Fall (#RMF) movement is widely contested. Many people believe that #RMF began when a student threw faeces at the Rhodes statue as a form of protest against what the statue represented and how it contributed to the exclusion of Black students. That student was joined by many other students later that day. Many others argue that #RMF is the result of the prior intellectual work of several other students, years before, which finally reached its logical conclusion. The years leading up to the formation of #RMF were marked by students' growing impatience with the University administration for its slow transformation of the University space as well as growing disaffection with the state of South African democracy and how it left many South Africans behind. Students at UCT began to engage with the importance of moving past the "rainbow nation" rhetoric. They argued that there was a need for discussions towards an Africanised, anti-racist and pro-poor South Africa.

In my opinion, #RMF tells the story of Black feminists, Black womxn, and queer people who brought the movement to life. Although many of the Black feminists had differing ideas on what decolonisation entails and on strategies for pursuing it, organising under #RMF gave us an opportunity to have conversations about decolonisation, what it meant to us, and how we could achieve it through our feminist politics. Although we never came to a complete consensus on ways to pursue decolonisation, we were in agreement that intersectionality would be an important part of crafting the praxis for decolonisation.

Historically, Black womxn and queer people have been erased from the history of movement-building and of liberation movements. Womxn have often been spoken of as supporters of the revolution, as nurturers and not as active participants. #RMF was a space where Black feminists, womxn and queer people actively organised, sustained the space, and were clear about being recognised for their very important contributions. We were determined to break the cycle of history silencing the voices of Black womxn, Black feminists and queer people.

On the 11th of March, 2015, the first meeting of the movement, fewer than ten people showed up. This presented an opportunity to come out of our enclaves of safety – to meet in our living rooms, homes and small lecture theatres at the University to reflect on our days, find solace in one another's presence and unite in conversation. The 12th of March was the day that Black students came together to unite around the banner of the Rhodes Must Fall movement. The first call of duty was the removal of the Rhodes statue. The second, and possibly more important, was the decolonisation of the University. Decolonising the University for us at the time meant challenging and ridding the University of its "inner Cecil John Rhodes". It meant confronting the institution on its racism and unapologetic exclusion.

We wanted to dispute the institutional racism that presented itself through the Eurocentric curriculum, the undervaluing of Black academics and their knowledge. We took this opportunity as Black feminists to contest the single-issue struggle. To us, the statue, and the University by extension, symbolised what bell hooks popularly coined as the "White supremacist capitalist patriarchy". We constantly felt undermined and undervalued because of our Blackness, our womxnness, our class positions and all the other struggles we brought with us. We were also challenged to think beyond limited

understandings of gender, sexuality as well as ableism, and to consider our cisgender privilege, our ableist prejudices and the many other bigoted opinions we held. That is what decolonisation meant: the killing or the purging of colonial ideas or principles that we perpetuated and used to oppress others. Decolonisation needed to be a way of life and not just a buzzword.

It is important to note that Black feminists, Black queer people, and Black womxn did not *ask* to be in the movement. We *started* the movement and, for that reason, the politics that dictated our lives and radicalised our existence had to be a part of the conversation. Being a Black feminist in South Africa and within the movement was never easy. Very often, we had to deal with being told that we are "Black first" and we should leave our gender issues and feminist politics at the door. We were told that feminism is unAfrican and we needed to stop appropriating Western ideals if we were serious about decolonisation. This obviously meant that we constantly had to defend our right to exist within the space, and for Black feminism to be taken seriously in the movement. During the drafting of the founding document on Friday, the 13th of March, with fewer than five womxn in a room littered with men, the discussion on Black feminism as a pillar of the movement was held with great discomfort. There was clear resistance from a group of comrades who had never had to be in a space where feminism was a guiding principle. As much as the discomfort grew, we were determined to educate those present about the importance of Black spaces that accepted Black people as whole human beings who should not have to choose which identity to bring into the movement.

The March 20th occupation of Bremner Building – renamed Azania House – was a radical and important point for the movement, and for us as Black feminists. Azania House was a rare moment; the three weeks of the occupation gave us a sense of what the decolonial project would be like. There were full days of rigorous learning and what felt like understanding. We opened a space for Black academics and intellectuals to come and share knowledge. We had different types of seminars, on subjects such as Black Consciousness, Femininities and Masculinities, Queerness, Black Feminism, and many other subjects. There were long nights of discussions and strategising. We were determined to understand this mighty project. Black feminists were not to be silenced, and we asserted our presence in the space. Black womxn and queer people led the space and the University of Azania became the place of refuge

for the knowledge and discussions rejected by a University that was centered on colonial knowledge and thinking.

One of the most important points in the movement was the formation of the Intersectionality Auditing Committee (IAC). The IAC was formed after a group of Black men left the #RMF space because many of them claimed that they joined the movement to organise against institutional racism, not to be distracted by "petty gender issues". That moment was a cleansing of the movement and it was an important reality check for us. We needed to be honest about the work that still needed to be done but, more importantly, to recommit to educating ourselves about the depth of colonisation and its impact on our understandings of gender, culture, and socialisation. The formation of the IAC was a recommitment to the core values of the movement. As important as the IAC was, however, it unfortunately did not survive for the duration of the movement due to internal differences, including differences among committee members of the IAC. This was an indication of the hard work that lay ahead of us as Black feminists in the space.

The removal of the Rhodes statue was, of course, another critical point in the movement's history. This moment was significant because of the work and effort it represented for many Black womxn and queer people who continuously gave to the movement, physically and intellectually. After many weeks of daily protest, occupations, performances and education, the University finally agreed to remove the statue. This day felt like it would never come and was very surreal. After a protest the night before at the University Council meeting, the institution's highest decision-making body, and the very tense confrontation between students and Council, the announcement of the removal was almost surprising.

On the day the statue fell, 9 April 2015, more than 10,000 people showed up to watch this historic event. They comprised a mix of people who were happy to see the statue go and others who were there to mourn the "destruction of history", as some called it. Many others were just spectators who were on neither side. A few minutes before the statue was lifted, a group of womxn and I stood in front of it, reflecting on the many weeks of organising, of occupation, teaching and learning about an intersectional space and supporting one another even when our ideas were being rejected. This day was a big victory for us all and also forced the world to remember the important work done by Black feminists at the University and in the country.

Apparently, the movement even received an email from Black Panther activist Assata Shakur, but we could never verify the message's authenticity.

The movement grew bigger and inspired the formation of #RhodesMustFall, Oxford, and many other movements like it. The Rhodes Must Fall movement was also very vocal and active in creating awareness around xenophobia, or what we refer to as "Afrophobia". In May 2015, South Africa experienced another wave of Afrophobic attacks. As a movement, we decided to embark on a protest outside the Home Affairs office in Cape Town, demanding a response and action from the Home Affairs minister against the Afrophobic attacks. We were met with hostility and got into a confrontation with the security guards. The Home Affairs officials refused to address us. We proceeded to march to parliament where we continued our day of action. The demonstration was successful in mobilising people and bringing attention to the seriousness of the Afrophobic attacks and the need for a solution. The protest was not easy and soon turned very volatile because of police harassment. The police used stun grenades and physically assaulted us. For many of us, it was the first of many days we would be contending with police brutality.

The many accomplishments of #RMF did not always translate into the movement space being inclusive. As the movement continued organising, the blind spots became more apparent. One of the biggest signs of the growing blind spots and contradictions in the movement was the setting up of the Trans Collective. This is a collective of transgender students who advocate for their safety and for space within the University and society. The Trans Collective's formation was an important point in our organising, because it forced us to reflect on the ways in which our work and organising was potentially excluding trans folks. As a movement that called itself intersectional and claimed to protect and represent all Black people, it was easy for us to claim particular bodies and to tokenise people unknowingly. To me, the formation of the Trans Collective was revolutionary because it challenged our laziness about educating ourselves on trans politics and what it meant to be allies to our comrades. The Collective's existence highlighted the limitations of our feminism and reminded us of the importance of intersectionality in the work we do.

#RMF was the first of what are now referred to as Fallist Movements. #RMF shaped the politics of Fallism and radicalised student politics at UCT. Throughout 2015, we organised around financial exclusions, the university

housing crisis and workers' demands. Two weeks before the start of Fees Must Fall, we organised a campaign called #October6 which was meant to be a day of action in a number of universities. The focus was on issues of outsourcing, worker benefits and the increasing inaccessibility of the University due to fee increases and exclusions. So when comrades at Wits University first organised around Fees Must Fall, it was only logical for us to adopt the programme as part of our organising at UCT.

As the #RMF movement transitioned into the Fees Must Fall (#FMF) movement – which called for free decolonised intersectional education in the country – the movement also transitioned into a more hostile space for Black feminists, Black womxn and queer people. Even with the endless attempts at educating and facilitating safer spaces, it became more and more violent to remain in the space. Black womxn and queer people had to deal with fighting police harassment and police brutality. They also had to contend with their fellow men comrades who refused to think beyond their patriarchy. Even worse, Black womxn and queer people were being sexually assaulted and threatened in the movement by other comrades. One morning at around 5:30 a.m., I received a call from a fellow womxn comrade asking for my help. Another womxn comrade of ours had been raped by a fellow man comrade. That moment was very difficult to deal with because it seemed that all the education and discussions on consent, rape culture and mutual respect meant nothing. By the end of 2015, we had five different womxn who shared their stories of sexual assault and sexual harassment by fellow comrades.

The movement was in crisis, and it became apparent that being part of it required a lot of physical, psychological and emotional labour. We had forgotten the principle of self-care as a vital pillar of our feminist work. This moment was also an indication to Black feminists to start organising and opening our own spaces. We had realised the power of our work and wanted to enact it in spaces that allowed for reflection and rectification.

#RMF was disbanded in mid-2016 after #Shackville, a campaign against the removal of students following the setting up of a shack on campus to symbolise the struggle for student housing and financial exclusions. Students were interdicted, suspended and expelled for actualising decolonisation. The impact that the Rhodes Must Fall movement had had in starting the conversation on decolonisation and symbolism was undeniable.

Even though the #RMF and #FMF movements claimed and still continue to claim intersectionality as a politics, the way the movement space translated into practice was in contradiction to feminist politics. The decay in the movement was often at the expense of Black womxn and queer people. The numerous challenges were valuable lessons to many of us and further asserted the importance of ensuring that the spaces we occupy are inclusive and attuned to the intersectional workings of power.

The revolutionary work of Black feminists who occupied and gave the Rhodes Must Fall movement life will remain in the hearts and minds of those of us whose lives have been changed by their neverending work. I have had the fortune of being a part of this movement; having learned from many feminist leaders, it would be a disservice to them not to honour their great work through writing and conversation. I commit myself to immortalising this revolutionary work and forcing it into the timelines of history through writing and sharing stories of the tremendous feminist activism embodied in the Rhodes Must Fall movement.

Endnotes

1 Womxn is a more inclusive term than "woman" or "women". It is meant to shed light on the prejudices that womxn have to face on a daily basis, which include racism, sexism, transphobia and patriarchy, just to name a few.

Raising the Veil – A Tribute to Bi Kidude (*circa* 1910-2013)

Vicensia Shule

Photo by ScreenStation/Andy Jones, reprinted with permission

We met Bi Kidude in 2003 in Zanzibar, when we were at the planning meeting for the African Feminist Congress. She liked to smoke and drink in public. She liked to sing in public. She also liked to straddle her drum and gyrate her hips as she beat that drum.

She said to the young ones in the room – Jessica Horn, Pumla Gqola and myself – then the babies of the African Feminist Congress, "You must never be afraid of taking pleasure." Bi Kidude told us that we should never be ashamed of becoming old in public.

We honour the life of Bi Kidude, our African feminist percussionist and sexologist who did a session on sexual pleasure and drumming in Zanzibar. Her legacy continues in how the drums beat at every African Feminist Forum. Just as at every forum we discuss sexuality, pleasure and enjoyment of life.

Bella Matambanadzo
4th AFF, Zimbabwe
April 2016

I met her for the first time in 2000, when I attended the Zanzibar International Film Festival (ZIFF). She referred to herself as Fatuma binti Baraka, which means "Fatuma, the daughter of Baraka". We knew her well as Bi Kidude.

No one knows the exact date she was born. Every time you would speak to Bi Kidude, she'd give a different birthdate. In 2005, she was more than 100 years old. Three years later, she was approaching 100. Years later, she was 110.

What we do know is that Bi Kidude was born around 1910 and passed away on 17 April 2013. She performed for over 100 years on many stages, locally and internationally, beating her drum.

Bi Kidude started singing at the age of 10 and was mentored by Siti binti Saad (1880-1950), another iconic woman in Zanzibar who travelled the world with her music. Siti binti Saad was the first woman in East Africa to record an album. She sang Taraab music in Kiswahili – not Arabic, which was the customary practice. Taraab music is the national sound of Zanzibar – a coastal music with elements of Arab, Indian and Indonesian rhythms blended with Kiswahili poetry, melodies and tones. Siti binti Saad's musical career stretched from the time of the Arab slave trade to the stirrings of the independence movement.

Following Saad, Bi Kidude became known as the "Queen of Taarab". Although Zanzibar has a mostly Arab-Muslim population, Bi Kidude became the first woman musician to lift the veil and sing in public. This was a rare occurrence, since women were required to wear a veil to cover themselves.

> "I learned all my songs from Siti binti Saad, the first woman singer from Zanzibar. We both had to cover our faces with a fine cloth. Then she passed away but her voice was still in the air.
>
> She had a very powerful voice, like mine. There was no difference. So people, some of the highest in the land, said, 'You must do something to show who you are' and so I raised the veil".
>
> Bi Kidude
> *As Old As My Tongue: The Myth and Life of Bi Kidude*
> (Directed by Andy Jones, 2006)

Bi Kidude's music was very provocative. She had a deep, wailing voice that would affect your whole body. Pleasure and sexuality were key to her music. One of her famous songs was *Muhogo wa Jang'ombe* (literally, "Cassava of Jang'ombe", a place in Zanzibar) which, as many of her songs did, described men's sexual organs and, at times, decried the violence and sexual abuse that women experienced at the hands of men.

Bi Kidude liked to sing old songs, some from her childhood; she often sang songs that were more than 80 years old. She was quite innovative, always creating different versions of her songs. You never got the same song more than once – that was the beauty of Bi Kidude.

She loved to play music known as *Kidumbak*, a more rhythmic version of Taarab music where lyrics can be improvised depending on the particular social environment. Bi Kidude's kidumbak was often performed with young women. Later in life, she performed with men and musicians from different genres (hip hop, reggae, and rock music, among other styles). She loved to perform with musicians outside her domain.

Bi Kidude also loved her drum, keeping it with her most of the time. She travelled and performed widely in Zanzibar (Unguja and Pemba Island) and mainland Tanzania, as well as throughout East Africa, the Middle East, Asia, Europe and the USA. She performed in the world's most acclaimed music and cultural festivals. Bi Kidude won the WOMEX Award (The World Music Expo) in 2005, for her invaluable contributions to the development of music and culture in Zanzibar.

Bi Kidude was regarded as the oldest woman musician known, mounting stages across the world, years after the age of 100. She was unconcerned about performing as she grew older. When she passed away in 2013, Bi Kidude received a state funeral on the same day.

We are left with many great memories of Bi Kidude. Now, the ZIFF and Sauti za Busara, the international music festival in Zanzibar, are empty without her. She seemed synonymous with these festivals.

Bi Kidude was definitely a feminist. She was very energetic, almost ageless. Unflustered and confident in male-dominated societies, she survived two divorces for not bearing children. She defeated a culture of stigmatisation by being able to stand on the front stage without a veil. Bi Kidude taught and performed with women, especially younger women. She had fun, joyously living her life with cigarettes and alcohol, until her transition.

Bi Kidude showed us what it means to be fearless. In honour of her life, we will continue beating our drums in public.

Note

This tribute to Bi Kidude was given during the 4th African Feminist Forum, convening in Harare, Zimbabwe in April 2016.

Watch Bi Kidude in action at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RMkLMaHWufo&list=RDEMuUWxlE53iWW78ZP6Wh_a_A

Elaine Rosa Salo (1962-2016) – An Appreciation

Terri Barnes

Reprinted with permission from Colin Miller

Everyone and anyone connected to *Feminist Africa* knew Elaine, so although I am typing this alone at my computer, I also feel that I am writing a collective statement about our friend and comrade.

Elaine was not a friend to everyone. She did not suffer racists, fools or hypocrites lightly.

On the other hand, if Elaine was your friend, she was your friend forever. She had a kind and compassionate heart. In her life, she probably gave away a lot of money to people she didn't know very well, and she quietly supported other folks that she did know well. She gave her jewellery away to her friends. She would come to help at a moment's notice. She loved deeply, and with truth.

I lived in Zimbabwe for most of the 1980s, and moved to South Africa in 1991. I met Elaine in the late 1990s at the University of the Western Cape (UWC) in Cape Town. We became friends in the way that parents do when their children are close in age, managing holidays, sick days, birthdays. I was excited to work with the African Gender Institute (AGI) at the University of Cape Town (UCT) in the early 2000s on the "Gender and Institutional Culture in African Universities" project, and thus on several issues of *Feminist Africa*

when Elaine was on the AGI staff. When I relocated to the US in 2008, Elaine's brother Ken and his family were the only people I knew here at the University of Illinois. We are part of a large, transnational, southern-Africa-based personal/professional community, durably connected by bonds of affection, respect, and scholarship. I know that the readers of *Feminist Africa* have their own such networks and that many of them intersected with Elaine.

Elaine lived her feminism. Her scholarship was an extension of her daily life. She researched and wrote with the same passion that powered her teaching, mothering and activism. She threw her home and kitchen open to any and all comers. Her partner, Colin Miller, and their two children, Miles and Jessica, have friends across the continent, and indeed the world, because Elaine and Colin never missed an opportunity to host a spontaneous party complete with Western Cape/Italian cuisine, music, dancing and always the sound, somewhere in the house, of Elaine laughing.

Elaine was born in Kimberley, in the Northern Cape province of South Africa. I got the sense that Elaine and her brothers, Bertram and Ken, came from a careful, conservative community that deeply valued its traditions of faith and survival as well as good food, good music, good dancing and a lot of laughter. Although all three left Kimberley and its conservatism behind, both professionally and intellectually, I always felt that they knew where they came from, and valued their home.

Elaine attended UCT and graduated with a BA in 1984. She then studied for an MA from Clark University in Massachusetts on a Fulbright scholarship. She returned to teach in the UWC Anthropology Department, and served for two years as the head of UWC's Gender Equity Unit. In 2004, she received her PhD in Anthropology from Emory University in the US. She returned to UCT, now at the AGI, teaching AGI and Anthropology courses. After eight years, she became the head of the Women and Gender Studies Institute at the University of Pretoria. Her final move was to the University of Delaware in the US, where, for two years, she was an associate professor in Politics and International Relations.

Elaine was an anthropologist of gender, politics and development in working-class communities in Cape Town. But there is as yet no magnificent book on masculinity and femininity in Manenberg, on the Cape Flats, that bears Elaine's name. She did not finish her book. There are three reasons for this. I think Elaine wrote slowly and carefully because she wanted to

"get it right". Second, in South Africa she just had too much teaching and administration to do. Third, being true to one's principles as a feminist living on the African continent means responding to an endless number of requests, and participating in many, sometimes seemingly tangential, intellectual pursuits. But as gendered identities and inequalities are central to human endeavour, all of Elaine's intellectual work was connected to her passionate concern for social justice. This kind of intellectual reach is wonderful for networking and for developing a breadth of interests. But as one's time is taken up with these things, months and years pass and none of that is good for working on one's book manuscript. The University of Delaware should have been the place where she was finally able to settle in to do that work, even while she continued to collaborate with colleagues on the African continent. But we lost Elaine too soon.

This is not to say that Elaine did not leave behind a substantial body of work. The pages of *Feminist Africa* 4, 6 and 13 bear special witness to this, as do her other journal articles and book chapters. Her CV shows a huge number of invited talks, lectures, workshop presentations and keynote addresses. There are efforts underway to edit her thesis and to collect and publish her other unpublished work so that her critical insights are not lost.

Elaine was also a wonderfully supportive mentor and supervisor of postgraduate students in Cape Town, Pretoria and Delaware. At the AGI, she supervised one PhD and seven MA theses, on topics ranging from women and politics in Mauritius to women's experiences of infertility, the politics of hair, the discourses of rape, and HIV and AIDS. All her students would testify to Elaine's intellectual breadth and generosity as well as her willingness to go the extra mile for them – repeatedly, if necessary.

Elaine was proud to be a feminist of the African continent, and I think nothing gave her greater pleasure than to work with and learn with other like-minded academics and activists. South African academics have a deserved reputation for conducting themselves as if they were disconnected from the African continent. Elaine never partook in that fallacious practice. In a quite devastating critique of one self-proclaimed feminist in South Africa who actually didn't know the slightest thing about African history or feminism, Elaine wrote:

> I continue to draw inspiration from a veritable continent of African feminist thinkers living and writing on a continent that many South

> African scholars located exclusively within the Eurocentric tradition barely know of, or whom they often dismiss… Our students need to be introduced to these diverse traditions of [African intellectual thought] if they are to resolve seemingly intractable problems such as unequal development and inequality; social conflict and weak states; environmental degradation; climate change; the material effects of hate speech; and so on ("Lessons in race and African feminism", *Sunday Independent,* 8 Sept 2013).

At the end of that article, Elaine gave us an ABC of African feminism: "'A' is for Ama Ata Aidoo, Amina Mama, Ayesha Imam, Akosua Ampofu; 'B' is for Bessie Head, Bolanle Awe, Bisi Fayemi" and so on. After a 15-year battle with breast cancer, Elaine passed away in Newark, Delaware, on August 13, 2016. A few months later, her friends and colleagues in Cape Town held a remembrance and reading group in her honour and called it, "'E' is for Elaine" – a very fitting title.

We honour and will remember Elaine's fighting spirit, wit, feminist principles and practices, insightful scholarship, and her love of family, country and continent. *Hamba gatle*, dear Elaine.

Tribute to Aminata Diaw Cissé: 1959-2017

Fatou Sow

Reprinted with permission from Mame Thierno Cisse

Aminata Diaw was our friend. She was my colleague, my sister, my friend.

We became colleagues upon her arrival in 1986 at the University of Dakar. Young and brilliant, with a string of qualifications under her belt, she became one of the first Senegalese women to teach philosophy there. It was still the time to be 'The first woman to...' but Aminata was actually the first in many fields. After a high school diploma obtained with distinction (*Mention Bien*) in Senegal, she enrolled into the selective preparatory classes reserved for a student elite, in France. She completed this cycle by obtaining a Doctorate in Philosophy with a thesis on 'The Political Thought of Jean-Jacques Rousseau', awarded unanimously with the highest distinction, *Très Bien*, from the jury.

We were also colleagues at CODESRIA, an institution of pan-African academic research, where we shared many intellectual adventures. The Gender Institute (2011) on the controversial theme of religious and cultural fundamentalisms raging in Africa was one such instance of intense opportunity.

We were sisters through our family roots, anchored in the city of Saint-Louis, the former capital of Senegal and the cradle of an urban civilisation of *savoir-vivre* and elegance, which sprang from the encounter of old local traditions with colonial culture. Aminata, who was born and raised in this city, bore the marks of this elegance. She had retained the gait, the voice, the restrained courtesy, the dignity and the sensitive humanity, in short, a way of being Saint-Louisan (*Doomu Ndar*). She could comment on Aristotle, Locke, Hobbes, Rousseau, Condorcet or Habermas, discuss women's rights or evoke the transformations of Senegalese society, while maintaining the same firm and calm, demure and elegant voice.

Our friendship was forged by an intellectual complicity nourished, on my part, by sincere respect for her person, and a profound admiration for her keen intelligence, her refined culture and her recognised academic expertise. I felt so much affection for her; I think it was mutual.

Aminata Diaw was both a researcher and an activist who did not feel the need to juggle being one or the other. She was not afraid to appear intellectual, for she *was* an intellectual, making equal demands on herself and others. I admired her ability to use her scientific skills in her political and socio-cultural commitments.

As a teacher, Aminata Diaw succeeded in exuding her passion for philosophy, developed over thirty years, to her students, especially to her female students. She encouraged them to develop their full potential, as attested by former PhD students. She set up the Centre for Philosophical and Epistemological Research (*Centre de Recherches Philosophiques et Épistémologiques* – CEREPHE), which supervised all philosophy theses defended at the Université Cheikh Anta Diop (UCAD) in Dakar. As a political philosopher, she was fascinated and at the same time struck by the fate of African societies, in general, and Senegal, in particular. We had to campaign for the democratisation of our countries. For Aminata, this meant rethinking the state and governance, conducting a critical analysis of the power of intellectual and political elites, of the role of civil society, highlighting the political link between public and private spaces, encouraging ethical conduct in politics, paying close attention to political party alternation (especially its impact on women), redefining the conditions of citizenship, reinventing identities to build a future which makes sense and a political modernity which equally needs to be reinvented. All these questions were at the heart

of her philosophical and political concerns. Aminata's contributions to the publications of Momar Coumba Diop and Mamadou Diouf on the political trajectories of Senegal, her various reflections at CODESRIA, and her articles in regional and international publications are proof of her great contribution to the intellectual output in these fields. Her participation in the National Conference of Senegal (2007-2009) on the renewal of democratic institutions was crucial. Along with the historian Penda Mbow, she fiercely defended the maintenance of secularism in the Constitution. All these issues are critical because they involve discussing and defining the contours of a government that manages populations in general, and women, in particular, including their status, roles and rights.

Aminata was deeply committed to women's causes. Her commitment was feminist: she was uncompromising on women's freedoms and rights. She based her militant action on what she called "a work of intellection". We collaborated in 1999, when I organised the colloquium on Language, Identities and Stakes of Francophone Feminist Research" (*La recherche féministe francophone: Langue, identités et enjeux*) at UCAD. We took the gamble of generating feminist thought and discourse on an African campus that did not care. We won the challenge with her "*Silences du politique et paresse de l'Académie. Plaidoyer pour un recherche feministe* (Silences of politics and laziness in the Academy. Advocacy for feminist research)". In the proceedings, her article invited the [African] academy to break new ground and innovate in the production of knowledge by institutionalising this research. This epistemological break was mandatory in order to describe and understand social realities as gendered realities.

Through numerous national, regional and international seminars, Aminata pursued this reflection on the nature of gender relations, the strengthening of social justice and the citizenship of women. She contributed to other works, discussions and lessons learned in many institutions: African Institute for Democracy, *Rendez-vous de l'histoire de Blois*, DAWN on Globalisation, the African Gender Institute, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, the African Feminist Forum, Women Living Under Muslim Laws (WLUML). The anthology *Women Writing Africa, West Africa and the Sahel* (2005), which Aminata coordinated with Esi Sutherland-Addy (Ghana), was a forceful work of "cultural reconstruction, letting the world hear the voices of African women which have risen over the centuries" (Allan, Busia and Howe, 2005: xviii). During her tenure at

CODESRIA, she raised new issues at the annual Gender Institute and at the Gender Symposium in Cairo.

Aminata's political activism was entrenched in her participation in various women's organisations which she supported with her reflections. As president of the Senegalese Women's Council (COSEF), composed of women from civil society and all Senegalese political parties, she had discussions with these groups on democratisation and the place of women in this process. She contributed, with the crucial collaboration of the Senegalese Lawyers' Association and other groups, to the debate on gender parity. Aminata persisted in this struggle, even during difficult times when several organisations and activists had a frankly hostile attitude. Today, they all take credit for the successful passage of the law on gender parity. Aminata also participated in numerous youth training sessions on important feminist issues: ethics in politics, women's citizenship, women's human rights, critical analysis of provisions related to religion (Shari'a) in the family law, deconstruction of the sources of violence against women.

The task was immense and she put her whole heart into it. Aminata had a heart that shone in her relationships with others, with everyone. Her intellectual qualities would have been almost meaningless if they were not accompanied by such human warmth. We miss her kindness, her sense of friendship, her mischievous humour and her frank smile.

Aminata, we honour your poise, political brilliance and commitment. We owe you every celebration of your life and work.

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Disability Movements Mural — Maku Azu

Finding Spirit in the Work – *Ukuthwasa*

Namanzi Choongo Mweene Chinyama

To think collectively with other feminists about the power of healing and what it might mean for our movement-building and organising is both a privilege and a necessity. As we continue to ask ourselves, "How are women organising across the continent in subversive and radical ways? How are we learning from our own strategies and merging, eclipsing and adapting to our conditions?", moments of reflection are necessary. These questions, along with others, such as the role that healing will play in our organising and subsequent collective liberation, bring me to this piece. I am on a spiritual journey; it had no definitive starting point and I suspect the end will blur with the beginning. As such, I am simply providing some perspective on where I am in this journey and what I hope it might offer a feminist praxis.

I am currently in training, *ukuthwasa*, to become a traditional healer (also known as a *Sangoma*), as practiced in southern Africa, particularly South Africa. My training, particularly intense in the past two years, has been characterised by varying ebbs and flows. The process is life-long: this phase of my training may come to an end, but walking and living the process of being a Sangoma means a commitment to be learning and unlearning constantly. My training as a traditional healer has involved a host of elements, rituals, ceremonies, dream interpretation, working with plants and herbs, divination, the throwing of bones, and much conversation and dialogue. I am currently finalising the last few rituals necessary to "graduate" as a Sangoma. Although the training has sequential elements – certain rituals can only be completed after others are done – it is also necessarily a process of discovery, allowing, dreaming, which is determined by the wishes of my ancestors. These are interpreted and understood by my trainers, spirit mediums, in conversation with me.

Before I delve into what I believe spiritual healing may offer our feminist movements, I will provide some grounding on who I am and how I come to this conversation. I was born in Kitwe, a mining town in north-central Zambia,

close to the DRC border. Both my parents were born and raised in Zambia, though my life trajectory has meant I have called various places home. We spent a few years in Zambia after I was born and then moved to England; this began the journey of learning to define home as more than geographic location. I grew up in London, New York, Gaborone and Johannesburg, with annual visits to Zambia forging my obscure relationship with it as home. I now call South Africa home, as the place I came into my womanhood. Through tales told by grandparents, I have also come to learn that, on my maternal side, my people came from South Africa and migrated to Zambia less than one hundred years ago. I think this knowledge, as well as my own rejection of the prominence of borders and what they have meant in separating us as African people, gave me some ease in wanting to train in a predominantly South African tradition.

Despite the feelings of dislocation and questioning of belonging that I have felt, having not grown up in the place of my ancestral roots, I have come not only to feel South Africa as home but to name it as such. At times, this naming is precarious, which might be primarily due to not speaking a South African language. My tongue is stuck in fear of mispronunciations and, like a scratched record, I have limited my speech to Hellos and How-are-yous. My mother tongue, Tonga, has been relegated to the realm of understanding only. Unable to express myself with the eloquence I dream of, this tongue too is locked in mispronunciations and fear. This lack of an indigenous African language has at times limited my ability to fully understand and connect to certain concepts in my training.

I attended university in Cape Town, South Africa, where both my feminist grounding and spiritual awakenings were happening side by side. I came into my feminist understanding as a young woman studying at the African Gender Institute. I am a descendant of an African feminist tradition. African feminist sisters have paved the way for critical discourse, knowledge production and dissemination that places women, specifically African women, at the centre – these helped me understand that my life experiences and those of my mother and grandmothers mattered as serious substance for knowledge and theory-making. Through rigorous study, reflection and dialogue with other sisters, I began to name myself as an African feminist and to commit to living the principles which I felt were enshrined in this theory and practice. Years later, and after some shedding and re-thinking of identities, I am a queer African

feminist trying to make sense of how to negotiate life, trying not to choke on the confines of capitalism and all the ways it is designed to erase my existence as human and replace it as purely labour. I am also trying to make sense of a black anarchism, which deeply understands my experience as a black woman. I am committed to the study of liberation theories and practices that value black experiences. My activism has been consciously centered on black people's lives, specifically black women's lives. I have been deliberate about building community with other black women across oceans, about meeting with and organising with black women as a means for our critical survival. I have come to understand and appreciate that my own way to navigate the minefields of a world which may not place me at the centre is to create and nurture community with other black folks.

To understand how and why my work as a traditional healer may provide something(s) important for women's organising, I need to provide some detail about what training has meant for me and why I chose and keep choosing to submerge myself in this path. I started training for many reasons. There is perhaps no single moment that launched me into what has become a completely different paradigm of living, one I am yet to fully understand. I think I have made major strides in having this journey feel intertwined in my life (as I work to smash the notion of separate, fragmented components of my life). When I came to know – through various guides, dreams, conversations, thoughts – that I may have a spiritual gift passed on to me, I spent much time wondering how to process this knowledge: What did it mean to have a calling, to need to train, to have a spiritual gift? These were questions without answer, but I was left with a need to pursue this idea and a feeling that it might allow me to do the kind of work I have wanted to do with more purpose and direction. I am still trying to find the words to explain what having or receiving a calling has meant for my own life, let alone what it might mean for others. Initially, I thought of a calling as a directive of sorts from my ancestors, like a command that I should train to be a traditional healer, but had I no substantial understanding of what that meant. Over time, I have come to understand a calling as more like a message from my ancestors informing me that I have been given a gift of healing that is passed down to me through my blood lineage. I understand now that this gift may manifest in many ways and that we all possess spiritual gifts,[1] however these may be expressed in our lives.

Initially, I did not understand what it meant to train as a Sangoma. As with many life-changing experiences, you commit to an idea or practice before you know what it might entail, for the experience of it is the only way to really know. I probably only really committed to the process of training long after I "officially" began training. I did, however, decide consciously to pursue my calling in ways that would allow me to marry both the traditional and more modern elements of my life. One of the feelings that propelled me towards this journey was the desire to understand how to provide soothing, healing counsel and, at times, home, for those who had sought these things in my company. I had been doing this work unconsciously and I wanted to be more conscious and deliberate so that I could understand better how healing could work and why.

As feminist activists, I think that the core of our mandate is to work towards creating a world where people can live freely, without the weight and consequence of intersecting oppressions. To do so we will need to dream and imagine this world into being and I wanted to figure out where I fit in this imagining, particularly as a healer. In a context such as South Africa, heavily steeped in a history of violence, pain and fear, a country that has escalating rates of sexual and physical violence experienced by women, I propose we necessarily require varying modes of healing. Though I may be working in South Africa specifically, I think many similarities can be drawn across the world in terms of the experiences of black women. Histories of violence, oppression and subjugation exist across the world amongst black women and, as such, part of my thinking about liberation and organising involves finding ways to integrate political work and healing work. I am intensely invested in the process of understanding and learning how spiritual healing can be better integrated into our daily lives as a necessary means of survival and resistance. Organisations such as Harriet's Apothecary[2] are working towards interventions such as these, marrying spiritual practices and political organising work.

Much of the work I have been involved in over the years has raised critical questions for me about how we organise as feminists and the myriad ways in which so many women survive daily iterations of violence. This points to themes such as how we address fractures in our lives and the importance of healing in ways that consider what it means to carry our heritage and histories while living in and through moments of modernity. I have worked in various spaces, from marketing and advertising to human rights organisations.

I have also been involved in the arts, performance arts specifically, and have been and continue to be deeply drawn to film, documentaries and fiction. I think we may need multiple approaches, especially those that appreciate our indigenous ways of knowing. Working with young women across Africa has certainly alerted me to the deep necessity for healing. We have experienced multiple forms of trauma that often sit in our bodies, on our skin, and find insidious ways of seeping into our consciousness and contorting how we may think of ourselves. These traumas often occur in our schools, in our homes, in churches. Some of our most intimate spaces are the most dangerous to women and I think one amongst the many resistance tools we have is finding and connecting with our own abilities to heal each other.

I am now beginning to see how the work of a traditional healer is to support and guide the healing of those around us. In order to do that, however, I had to first recognise the healing that I myself needed and bring to light those corners of darkness that do not always paint one in the most flattering light. Training is necessarily a commitment to radical vulnerability, unflinching honesty and a deep and thorough excavation of your insides. I did not know this when I began but have needed to surrender to many processes, to let go of how I thought things should be to allow for how they were meant to be. This has required deep currents of trust, in myself and in celestial beings, some known and some whom I have never met. Training has also required a piercing desire to be well. In the face of resistance to healing, Minnie Ransom asks in *The Salt Eaters*, "Are you sure, sweetheart, that you want to be well?" (Cade Bambara, 1992: 3). I have often asked this question of myself at the most challenging moments of this journey.

Training has compelled me to get comfortable with *not knowing* what will come next and, in a world of project plans, calendar invitations, holiday and work commitments six months in advance, this has been a challenge. Not knowing, however, is a counterbalance to a mechanical way of life and so I welcome and at the same time fear this challenge. This is merely a sliver of the story of my journey as a *thwasa*, to shed light upon what this journey has meant in relation to my feminist politics and what I envision this journey offering feminist organising. For me, spiritual healing is one amongst many important practices in combating the devastating effects of colonialism and neocolonialism in our lives. We have been ripped from our own ways of understanding and healing ourselves, and as women who so often are stripped

from modes of knowing, this is an essential area we need to understand, whether we practice or not. Healing is necessary for all of us.

Although I am following the necessary steps to becoming a Sangoma who can practice as a spiritual healer, I have also been training in unconventional ways. My trainers have taken deliberate choices to allow for a more seamless merging of my life as I know it and the process of training. Much of the training has required unprecedented (at least for me) levels of discipline and conformity at times. There have been many times when I have not always agreed with the messages my ancestors have provided. At times, these messages have directly opposed some of my feminist principles. What to do when you are walking a path that requires you follow requests (from non-material beings) which recall a time when women's roles and responsibilities were far more confining than they are now? About a year ago, I was required to wear only skirts and dresses (which had to be below my knees) and to cover my hair and my shoulders whenever I left the house. I also had to be home/indoors before sunset; this was to be the case indefinitely. Although this requirement may seem simple and banal to many, it represented much more to me. As a young girl, I had spent many years fighting the instruction that girls had to wear dresses. I hung on tightly to my dungarees, jeans and any trousers I could find, directly opposing the idea that, just because I was a girl, I had to dress in particular ways. Dress is far greater than the cloth it is cut from. It represents a level of bodily autonomy: the right to self-determine how you adorn is deeply political.

The greatest challenge along this journey has been perhaps that of autonomy, freedom of choice and agency to do with my life, especially my body, as I choose. No one has explicitly taken this away but, during training, my ability and inability to make choices about how I manoeuvre in the world has caused me much turmoil. Has my autonomy been compromised? To what degree? Am I over-reacting, can I let these beings whom I cannot see and touch dictate how I move my body, what I do with it and when? Is it disrespectful to even be asking these questions? The legacies of being a "good" African daughter linger in my questions and I sometimes cannot navigate myself out of this quandary. No one has forced me into this choice and here I am, back again down the slippery slope of trying to figure out where I stand, forgetting I am whole and one, and cannot be split. At times I've wondered if I might lose my feminist membership card by adhering to some of these ancestral

requests. As though word may get out and other feminists will think less of me for choosing to compromise on some of my beliefs.

Yet there are many ancestral requests to which I do adhere, which makes living as I used to not always possible. Living as I used to, however, was not exactly whole and marvellous. I have come to recognise that, during this time, I am necessarily fasting from many activities as a way of turning inward. So instead of focusing on the restriction, I focus on what it makes possible. The healing work I am to do means I need to connect, hear, understand, interpret, converse on levels I have forgotten existed and, to do so, I may need to shut some things out. Does this explain all the requests? Perhaps not, but here I am toeing the line between obedient *thwasa* and raging feminist, hoping the two will find healing and balance within each other.

I think feminists, activists, academics and organisers have done an excellent job in articulating the political conditions plaguing women's lives and have provided numerous solutions around these conditions. However, I am less confident about our abilities thus far to provide deeper understanding and awareness around the need for healing of our communities and us. I think healing work and political activism have met at certain points, but these meetings do not strike me as seamless and pursued with the urgency we require. In recent years, self-care as a political dimension of our work has grown in popularity and recognition. We understand more and more that at the core of any kind of liberation or revolution will be our individual and collective wellbeing. Unfortunately, however, most of these discussions around self-care are founded on capitalist constructions of the "individual" and prescribe bubble baths and long walks as a way of dealing with the oppressive machinery which requires that we act as robots to survive it.

Given this context, what processes and practices might be necessary for us – as activists, comrades, feminists – that take deep account of our need to be balanced physically and spiritually? How are we surviving this world in ways that understand our spirituality and that also draw upon our collective power? As people of colour, how are we drawing upon our ancestral knowledge in our organising? What might such knowledge inform us about our health, about plants and herbs? What is the effect of lavender and aloe on our bodies, and can we learn about these things without having to go to an organic store that has stolen our knowledge for its own profit? What might understanding the power of blood mean for how we organise? What

happens to how we hold space for young girls when they menstruate, once we deepen our understanding of the power of blood and when it is shed? What does it mean to spill blood, how many thousands of our ancestors have shed blood such that we could live these lives, what kinds of knowledge are found in this blood?

As a queer black woman, I occupy certain marginal spaces and recognise that my liberation is dependent on the liberation of all black women, so I am deeply concerned with our survival in this world. What is the work that it takes for us to be well in a world determined to profit from our dis-ease? How often do we not even realise we are off balance, only to find the elements of our lives imploding before we had the chance to understand why? Our organising needs to take into account our full selves, intellectually, physically and spiritually, whatever that might mean to us and not the fragmented selves we are encouraged to be in a world which assumes private and public are separate. What does queering our lives allow for – as feminist practice and in women's organising?

A core element of my training is to understand energy and the power of energy in our lives, how to shift and harness energy. There are countless methods and ways we can go about working towards our liberation; such a bold task will require all of us to walk in that direction, however we get there, for there is no one path, just our intention, spirit and commitment. My journey is far from over and as I use this moment to reflect and better understand how far I have come and consider where I would like to move towards, I am reminded of agency, power and intention. I am propelled forward by the love of my community and the potential for our collective healing when we understand ourselves and each other better. I am a descendant of many healers and hope I can harness these gifts with humility and love.

Endnotes

1 Much of my learning about spiritual healing has been facilitated through my trainers, Mhkulu Mashini and Gogo Msibi. I reference them here specifically to note that all of this knowledge has been facilitated through their teachings over the years.

2 Harriet's Apothecary – http://www.harrietsapothecary.com.

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Navigating Checkpoints: The Journey of the Liberia Feminist Forum

Korto Williams

In August 1990, I stood at a checkpoint somewhere in Liberia, not ready to die. I was 20. Checkpoints were sad, brutal, dehumanising. This was not the first checkpoint we had navigated, my siblings and I, carrying our paralysed mother in a wheelbarrow. We had walked from one of the neighbourhoods close to a low-cost housing estate built by President Tolbert, who was killed in the military coup in 1990. At the first checkpoint, stories informed by euphoric ignorance about the rebels were shattered. We were heading – in our heads – to a place called safety. At the sight of the fighters and out of fear, I felt my lappa drop to the ground. I had used the lappa to hide the curves of my body, as I was in transition to womanhood; somehow, I sensed that my body would be both an attraction and a menace in ways that would harm my person. The soldiers yelled at me and I pretended not to feel a personal threat. This was not the case fifty checkpoints later, from Dry Rice Market to Johnsonville.

I always say my sister was the oldest in the group, but this is not true. My mother was, but in a wheelbarrow cushioned by quilts and towels to block the heat from the metal frame on her sick body, we tried to make her invisible to the fighters. You see, they had this thing they did. They would ask you if you wanted help with your sick relative and if you said "Yes", they would shoot the person right before your eyes. We heard about that and saw it happen to others, so we protected our mother in a cocoon of used quilts, pillows and towels. My brothers, younger than us, kept repeating the story we all believed. The soldiers would have deep empathy for our situation and help us get a lift to safety. If we were lucky, they would give us money and food. We did not get lucky.

Later, we arrived at another checkpoint after moving for what seemed like ages. The fighters demanded our identity cards this time. The identity cards would confirm the ethnic background of the holder and put one in the category of friend or enemy – it was binary with limited flexibility. According to the fighters, the penalty for not showing an identity card was twenty-five

lashes on one's bare back. We were ready to go through this, because we did not have our cards; but by the time we reached the front, they had beaten so many people, they forgot the order. Then, we thought we had reached a breakthrough. We heard sirens. Charles Taylor was coming. The soldiers shouted: "Major Taylor, our leader! Commando, brave, strong, intelligent!" Chaos. Shooting. We felt a glimmer of hope. Taylor would end the brutality and murder at the checkpoints. He came, saw and drove through like Jesus going into Jerusalem. Damn, we were on our own.

Then we got to the spot – the one where I knew I was not ready to die. We were in a line and the questions were rolling – all within the frame of identity. I did my best. I called my name and the woman soldier confirmed what she thought was my ethnic group. I said, "Yes". She started to speak to me in Kpelle, my father's ethnic group. She said, "Hello". I answered. "What is your name?" I answered. Then she went to the next level, while I was still processing her previous question. This delay irritated her. How could I have problems understanding my mother tongue? Using expletives, she informed me that she was going to kill me. This could not be true. I was almost at Fendell.[1] I could not die. Who would look after my brothers? I also could not die since the war was going to be short and I would reunite with my boyfriend. I was standing in a daze and out walked this young soldier, lanky, dirty and apparently with one thing on his mind. He walked up to me, kissed me on my lips and turned to the woman. "You cannot kill this fine girl," he said. He told me to leave. I could be someone's wife, was his reason for giving me freedom. I was free and would not be killed.

Not every Liberian was set free with a kiss. Young men read pornographic magazines at the checkpoints and raped women and girls or, in most cases, took women and girls to the commanding officer. I saw a man run for his life like a hunted animal chased by predators. His back was carved with a sharp knife every time they got close enough to him. He did not survive. Approximately 250,000 people died during the war and at checkpoints, including my mother.

The transition to normalcy in Liberia was marked by heightened militarisation with significant geographic and military fragmentation, and a resigned acceptance of Taylor's election. There was a Greater Liberia,[2] controlled by Taylor and his forces, and there was Monrovia, the capital, controlled by the ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States)

Peacekeeping Force and an interim government headed by a well-known Liberian academic and politician, Dr Amos C. Sawyer. This context had implications for free movement. Prince Johnson[3] controlled parts of Monrovia. With Liberians in a state of shock and surrounded by mayhem, communities of people returned to their homes to find total destruction or found their property taken over by the fighters. There was a shroud of silence on sexual violence and murders at checkpoints. Most Liberians did not speak about such acts and definitely not about massacres.[4] The normalisation of these violations was reinforced on a daily basis. As they moved back to their villages, some people encountered and recognised fighters who had manned checkpoints. Stories of open fights abounded, such fights being especially likely when the soldier had been a member of the Small Boys Unit (SBU) and no longer had a gun. Warring factions and their members remained loyal to their command structure and continued to wield power in different forms. Peacekeepers from West African countries protected Monrovia, looted properties and conducted routine arrests during curfew – as contradictory as that sounds.

Liberia is a deeply patriarchal country, although its Constitution prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex (cf. Articles 8, 11, and 18). Women and girls are systematically marginalised and discriminated against through patriarchal power relations that combine with other systems of subordinating and exploitative social relations to place them in even more constrained positions than men and boys in the same class, ethnic, age or other relations. With a dual legal system, the Constitution also recognises customary laws "in accordance with the standards enacted by the Legislature" (Article 65). Through the Revised Regulations Governing the Hinterland of Liberia (Customary Law), people in rural areas may be governed by the customary laws of any of the 16 ethnic groups. Whilst these are not identical, they frequently discriminate against women.

Sexual and gender-based violence is a major challenge in Liberia. The narrative that sexual violence in private and public spaces was a new phenomenon that emerged during the 1990 civil crisis ignores the reality that what happened at checkpoints in 1990 was an extension of sexual and other forms of gender-based violence which existed in pre-1990s Liberia. The rape of young indigenous and Americo-Liberian women in family spaces, sometimes linked to incest, was always an unspoken dimension of the broader practice of gender-based violence. Sexual violence only became more public

at the checkpoints and in other public spaces. Rape is the second-most-reported crime in Liberia (UNMIL/OHCHR, 2016).

In 2006, the Rape Law was amended to recognise evolving contexts and issues related to the civil war, for example, gang rape and the use of guns and other objects to rape women. To date, there is limited investment in access to justice for women and the prevention of violence against women and girls. The fundamental clash between dual legal systems – statutory and customary laws – presents an ongoing hurdle to prevention of sexual and other forms of gender-based violence. Public hearings on the recent Domestic Violence Bill in parliament have been marred by this challenge. Similar tensions between statutory and customary laws are also evident in efforts to criminalise female genital mutilation. However, this conjuncture also presents a significant opportunity to engage communities and stakeholders in the process of interrogating and remodelling legal and other power systems towards gender-equality in Liberia.

Women gained the right to vote and the right to stand for elections in 1946. Given the complex history of women's rights, however, a single act of suffrage did not erase the century-long exclusion of women from public space. The political tradition of Liberia at the time also excluded indigenous men from voting, and even with suffrage, women and men had to own property and pay taxes in order to exercise voting rights. Those who did not pay taxes and own property were categorised as "uncivilised". Other trappings of "civilisation" included membership in Christian churches and other fraternities. Political parties formed women's wings to support men's victory, thereby normalising the instrumentalisation of women. This, in our current-day analysis, would amount to women continuing their social reproductive roles but this time in the public space of political parties and social movements, including student movements.

Leadership was a male–dominated space, and the longterm nature of this problem normalised women's exclusion. The century-long spectrum of exclusion spans historical and current violations of women's rights. The consequences are manifested in women's restricted ability to acquire education, the compulsion to undergo female genital mutilation (FGM) as a social demand of communities, teenage pregnancy and forced marriage. Cultural norms and values thus reinforced the exclusion of women from the public space and justified structural barriers that supported violence against

women and girls. The challenges that women have faced in moving beyond the private space are manifested in both urban and rural contexts.

In the wake of the civil war, Liberian women's networks and organisations responded to the ongoing crisis by mobilising around the issue of ending sexual violence and accelerating the peace process. The women's movement, Mass Action for Peace, joined other Liberian networks to call for an end to the suffering, and challenged Taylor and other fighting forces by using sit-in actions and traditional shaming methods to pressure the warring factions. In 2005, Liberians elected Ellen Johnson Sirleaf as president, a celebrated and historic feat in Africa and globally.

Although many women's groups were fighting sexual abuse and violence, the women's movement did not have an ideological framework guiding its actions, given the *ad hoc* way in which it was formed and the fact that it operated during a period of extreme challenges. Nevertheless, some members of the movement who identified as feminist were associated with feminist organisations across Africa, notably Akina Mama wa Afrika.[5] To the best of my knowledge, there had been no formal organising of women under the banner of feminism and no Liberian woman had self-identified as a feminist during that period, prior to the election of Sirleaf. In fact, feminism was considered a derogatory term linked to lesbianism and a disrespect for the socio-cultural configuration of Liberian society. For most people in the women's movement, as well as in Liberian society more generally, gender equality represents a threat to the power and position of men and boys, and thus the social norm that women and girls should be subordinate. This perception has affected the quality of engagement with traditional and other male leaders in Liberian society, as they see programmes and narratives that challenge gender inequality as destabilising to the current context of normalised discrimination. From this perspective, gender equality is a political project aimed at the disempowerment of men and destabilisation of the patriarchal power and positioning inherent in fundamentalist interpretations of politics, religion or culture.[6]

In 2008, three Liberian women attended the African Feminist Forum in Uganda. The mandate to organise country forums was given to participants, and, while we did not have a feminist forum until 2014, the idea of forming a Liberia Feminist Forum was born. In 2013, one of the first concrete steps towards this mobilisation was a two-day training workshop for around

twenty-five Liberian women, organised and led by Sara Mukasa, then of the African Women's Development Fund, and Anu Pillay, a renowned South African and Ugandan feminist working in Liberia. The two women self-identified as feminists. The decision to form the Liberia Feminist Forum was met with resistance from within the women's movement.

An introductory training workshop ended with a significant decision to remove the nomenclature of "feminism", as it was against the Constitution and carried a particular stigma in Liberian society. Limited attention was paid to the sense in which the Liberian Constitution was written for Americo-Liberian men to own resources and control power in a society that did not grant women suffrage until a century after independence. Yet the emphasis within the women's movement was on the attribution of equivalence between feminism and lesbianism, on the one hand, and, on the other, the Constitution's criminalisation of same-sex relationships. Against this backdrop, the prevailing view was that the movement should not be organised around feminism. The preferred name of the forum was Women Civil Society Steering Group.

There was a gap in activities until 2013, when the possibility of finding funding for the inception activities became more realistic. After a year of seeking consensus amongst potential members, in 2014 there was an agreement to organise a formal convening and hold the first Liberia Feminist Forum (LFF). Individuals were expected to join voluntarily, based on a commitment to the Charter of Feminist Principles for African Feminists (2017) and an undertaking to abide by these principles. This agreement represented a milestone in women's rights work because the organising of the Liberia Feminist Forum took place outside the sphere of non-governmental organisations, national and international.

Then another huge hurdle began to emerge in the West African sub-region: the Ebola crisis in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea. In July 2014, the Technical Working Group of the LFF convened its first forum, amidst the risk and fears of Ebola. The Zimbabwe Feminist Forum provided technical advice and a sister feminist from amongst them, Bella Matambanadzo, supported facilitation of the meeting. This was despite the fact that international flights were ending their service to Liberia during that period. The African Women's Development Fund and Kvinna til Kvinna[7] (Woman to Woman) funded the convening.

LFF members, who are women from different professional and personal backgrounds, meet every two years, like the African Feminist Forum. Whilst

the LFF has not met or organised an LFF activity between 2014 and 2016, we had a planned convening and other activities in 2016, tied to elections. At the same time, individual LFF members have used their professional and personal platforms to work on the objectives of the LFF. We have had power-analysis dialogues on the need to use feminist analysis and strategy in addressing Liberia's development challenges, with close to 70 persons participating. One member has formed an initiative for first-time women voters to help in aligning their rights with a feminist analysis of the current issues in the country. There is also a feminist poetry reading session held on a monthly basis, called #ResistingtheNarrative. Work on addressing the structural causes of violence against women and girls as well as advocacy on LGBT rights are all part of this context. From the original set of twenty-five women who attended the first convening, the impact of the LFF has definitely increased. This is felt not only in terms of challenging the status quo but also with respect to unlearning patriarchal narratives that have defined women's lives. This emerging movement is the struggle against patriarchal hegemony which reinforces the subjugation of women and girls.

Today, as we prepare for the end of President Sirleaf's tenure and for a new president, the physical checkpoints are no longer present. However, women's and girls' bodies remain the sites of violence cited above. Identity – from the perspectives of gender, sexual orientation, economics, class, ethnicity and geographic context – remains one of the most controversial issues. Like Taylor riding into checkpoints, Sirleaf rides through, leaving her team with the power to act, change or respond to the issues that affect the people.

President Sirleaf's twelve-year rule ultimately represents enormous missed opportunities to prioritise women's rights in a political and sustainable manner. This would have meant recognising and applying gender analysis to the unequal power relations among Liberians as well as providing funding for the necessary changes. The missed opportunities are only reinforced by the emerging backlash against even the limited gains and heightened visibility of women in public spaces. The celebration of fundamentalisms, whether on the basis of culture, religion or politics, frames this backlash. Social media and other forms of media have become toxic, spreading patriarchal, homophobic and violent narratives that devalue the work of human-rights defenders, including defenders of LGBT rights, women's rights and those who champion the need for natural-resource management. Digital security for women human

rights defenders is compromised by ridicule and cyber-bullying, emanating from deeply held patriarchal values by men.

The arts and music not only incorporate misogynistic representations of women's social status but echo the backlash against women's leadership, proclaiming how it has failed Liberians. As *hipco*[8] becomes more significant in the Liberian society and beyond, it is important to highlight the need to support a new generation of progressive women and men who occupy information spaces and for feminist analysis of the patriarchal narratives which form major hindrances to promoting a progressive feminist culture in Liberian society. A recent example of such a hindrance was the launch of a *hipco* song called *I Here*, which won the song of the year award.[9] The song reinforces the downward trend in girls' status and protection. The artist claims otherwise. Yet when he says, "I am the boy who kills your dog", it is clear that the artist is referring to sex in a demeaning as well as violent manner. Sexual intimacy is couched as "killing a dog", influenced largely by post-war language and vocabulary modification in which violence frames how we communicate generally, as well as how we describe sex in Liberian culture. The violence is a carryover from the civil war and from sexual abuse at checkpoints. The widespread acceptance of language that ridicules points to how women and girls are affected by patriarchal and militarised values. It also highlights women's desensitisation to the impact of this acceptance on women's ability to exercise control over their own bodies.

By contrast, the Liberia Feminist Forum and its values serve as a safe space to identify and challenge the erection of checkpoints in Liberia again. The Feminist Forum represents a commitment to interrogate the impact of a woman-led government over the last ten years, one linked to patriarchy and men's artificial sense of privilege and superiority. The LFF enables us to understand our strength as women, deconstructing the myth of male supremacy and the power of patriarchy when combined with other systems of subordinating and exploitative social relations. Our focus is a political project to unlearn old ways and learn new skills of dismantling the checkpoints. A project which presents a clear, political and feminist analysis of Liberia's direction will lift the cover from our eyes – men and women. Addressing inequalities from the perspective of women's collective organising, with a defined political ideology and strategy, will enable

Liberian women to challenge the status quo that subjugates women and girls and the systems of oppression which violate women's rights.

Endnotes

1 The state university situated outside of Monrovia, which catered for agriculture and science majors.

2 Greater Liberia included all political divisions of Liberia (counties) except Montserrado County.

3 Prince Johnson is the warlord who broke away from Taylor's National Patriotic Front of Liberia and killed President Samuel Doe in September 1990.

4 Massacres had occurred across the country with warring factions being held accountable, although there were never formal charges or indictments against any group for atrocities committed in Liberia.

5 Former Gender and Development Minister Varbah Gayflor was among several Liberian women trained by Akina Mama wa Afrika.

6 This assertion is supported by my professional experience of close to 20 years working in Liberia on women's rights and other development issues.

7 Kvinna til Kvinna (Woman to Woman) is a Swedish foundation that supports work on women's rights and peace.

8 *Hipco*, an abbreviation of "hip hop" and "colloquial", is a movement of young Liberian artists using Liberian English and their post-war experience to influence Liberian society.

9 Liberia Entertainment Award, 2017.

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Disrupting Orthodoxies in Economic Development – An African Feminist Perspective

Fatimah Kelleher

In recent years, women's economic empowerment (WEE) has been the focus of perhaps the most intensive spotlight to date within the international development global arena. The creation of the UN High Level Panel on WEE in September 2015, in the wings of the UN General Assembly that ushered in the new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), has led to a plethora of policy dialogue and programming unprecedented since the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.[1] Parallel to this, Africa's overall economic growth over the last decade has created an interest in the continent from both international public and private sector players who now also see the promise of large untapped markets alongside the continent's ubiquitous natural resources and fertile agricultural land (Bashir and Amine, 2016). However, with a growing wealth gap and deepening inequality across the continent (despite a growing middle class), equitable and inclusive growth remains elusive (Zwane, 2015), while structural inequalities and patriarchal norms persist.

I write from the perspective of an African feminist working in the areas of economic empowerment and justice, education and health for the last sixteen years. My work has involved conducting research and providing women's rights technical assistance on policy and programming to civil society organisations, governments, and a variety of international organisations. As a feminist, I view women's economic empowerment and justice as central to the struggle for gender equality and equity. Economic empowerment approaches uphold women's power and agency to make and act on their own economic decisions (either as individuals or as a collective), while economic justice strives to ensure that institutions provide fair and equal opportunities and processes (e.g. decent work conditions, fair pay) without prejudice. Critically, women's economic empowerment alone will not deliver on the feminist goal of gender justice as – taken by itself – its focus on the individual (or even group) is not enough to dismantle systemic gender inequalities and inequities. The inclusion of an economic justice

framework is needed to hold accountable and dismantle the institutions perpetuating the deep-rooted structural inequalities impacting women within patriarchal economic spheres.[2]

In programmatic, research, and policy terms, the arena of women's economic empowerment and justice has presented the greatest challenges by far.[3] And while several decades of advocacy on women's economic empowerment have offered activists influential entry points for engagement in economic development spaces, such advocacy remains fraught with tension when trying to advance economic justice while maintaining a feminist agenda. For Africa, in particular, the current conjuncture is marked by a growing emphasis on big-business and private-sector-led engagement, big-budget economic development programming with high number targets, growing inequality gaps in GDP growth, and a covetous focus on women's productive capacity. Wider global interest in the continent's productive capacity during the SDG era should alert us to the significance of setting and pursuing our own agenda for economic justice for African women. The current international interest in women's economic empowerment has reached that critical point where African feminists either become more vocal on the issues across all areas of engagement, or risk the appropriation of women's economic empowerment by wider global agendas.

Challenging Economic Orthodoxies

Feminist positions on women's economic empowerment and justice traditionally contest the free-market neoliberal orthodoxy that dominates economic development assistance. Redressing women's unpaid care; recognising tax as a feminist issue, due to the acute importance of services like healthcare, education, water, and energy, given the gendered realities of women and girls; and a push for decent jobs over private-sector competition and profit: all challenge that orthodoxy.[4] Scholars and activists of economic justice have for decades been critically exploring the exploitative realities women found themselves in during the establishment of Export Processing Zones (EPZs), where the ideal of economic competitiveness was predicated on low wages for women, minimal to no benefits, and abusive working conditions. Moreover, women were often left out when shifts to higher skilled technological innovations took place as EPZs matured (Edgren, 1984; ILO, 1998; Milberg and Amengual, 2008).

At a purely practical level of engagement in this work, I have found that taking feminist economic convictions into spaces with sectoral influencers such as trade and export policymakers has often been met with scepticism, if not outright resistance. While these tensions have been partly driven by economic ideology, the latent misogyny in what are often male-dominated and masculinised sectors also plays a part. Clear indicators of this are the challenges I have faced when attempting to introduce an interrogation of power and gendered social norms into discussions on gender and economic development. At best, these continue to be largely viewed by economic development practitioners as "not our remit", instead placing all responsibility for addressing gender issues on national women's machineries and civil society.[5] At worst, the issues are ignored on the grounds that economic development is considered a gender-neutral endeavour. In trade policy, trade facilitation, and export promotion, for example, others (Atthill et al., 2007; Jobes, 2010) have pointed out the gender blindness that remains in trade diagnostics and prescriptions, while Viilup (2015) underscores the slow progress towards gender-sensitive response in this area.

Barriers to challenging social norms and gendered power relations play out in other ways, too. Whilst most African women are concentrated in the smallholder-driven cash economy of the rural agricultural sector, 74% of non-agricultural informal employment is also held by women (WIEGO, 2014). Despite this, there remains a lack of commitment to funding the depth of research needed to adequately inform women's economic empowerment and justice initiatives effectively, particularly with the consent and direction of women themselves. For example, where women are economically active in large numbers as smallholder farmers and home-based processors and retailers, many economic development programmes still need convincing that socio-cultural norms must be fully understood if economic barriers are to be addressed. These include norms around divisions of labour, intra-household relationships, and gendered relationships with the market – from negotiating power with middlemen who may have better access to male-dominated market linkages, to lack of land ownership and other assets needed to become growth entrepreneurs. In a national sub-region like northern Nigeria for example, the prevailing narratives focus on Boko Haram and religious fundamentalism. Women from this part of the country are objects of speculation and stereotypical assumption whilst also being among the

least properly researched in global programming (Kelleher, 2014). Despite this, northern Nigeria is currently hosting multimillion-dollar economic programmes targeting hundreds of thousands of women. These programmes are operating from a contextually blind position because adequate budgets have not been committed to fully understanding the gendered realities of women's economic agency.

Defending the Critical Importance of Collective Action Led by African Women

The broad feminist consensus that women from the global south should lead the gender and development discourse is not new. My engagement with agricultural incomes and rural markets programmes over the years has been defined by recognition of the importance of collective action driven by African women. This is essential to the goal of transforming women's economic realities more sustainably. Some international NGOs, like ActionAid and Oxfam, have pioneered work along these lines successfully through direct programming on women's economic empowerment in the form of discrete projects aimed specifically at women in value chains. However, bringing similar collective action into the larger economic and rural development programmes that are currently proliferating has been highly problematic. Market systems programmes (sometimes known as Making Markets Work for the Poor or M4P), that are designed to introduce market linkages for affordable goods and services – and thereby theoretically stimulating a less aid-dependent development process – are the most obvious example of this. Many such programmes have large numbers of women targeted within them, giving them the potential to do both the most good, but also the most damage.

It is not new for women to organise around their economic needs.[6] Within the era of international development, and particularly in the last two decades, microfinancing schemes that offer poor women opportunities to access credit by leveraging group lending guarantees and structures have been utilised extensively with mixed success and much-needed cautionary and critical reviews (Geleta, 2013; van Rooyen et al., 2012) where they have proven problematic.[7] For example, the disbursement of sums of money to groups of women is meaningless if the women are not organised collectively around their economic activities and if, at the same time, their access to markets is not improved. Otherwise, the money simply intensifies competition among

poor women within what are often already crowded economic spaces. What continues to be misunderstood, however, is the difference between organising women around economic assets and production, and collective action driven by women towards a more just economic system.

A recent visit I undertook with rural smallholder women farmers and processors in northern Nigeria illustrates this point concretely. The women's productive organising – bulk farming through collective land leasing, shared processing responsibilities – had certainly improved the quantity and quality of their produce. However, previous development engagement had failed to note that, when the women went to market, they reverted to their individual, atomised units as retailers. This meant that the male buyers who dominated the market space found it easy to control pricing and pit the women against one another by exploiting the differences in their economic resilience: the poorest women would sell at lower prices.

Along with a team of women's rights colleagues, we have managed over the last two years to introduce some hard-won activities that have strengthened women's leadership skills, financial knowledge and their collective action towards maximising their group agency. This led to stronger collective negotiation and positioning at the marketing end of their value chain, with better power relationships and women's economic empowerment outcomes for all. However, rolling out such activities in economic development is challenging. The short-term nature of many programmes, often looking for "quick wins" of increased incomes with big numbers that can be easily quantified before project-end, means that the time and investment needed for this type of transformational change is considered not enough "value for money". Additionally, many orthodox economic programmers still view the idea of collective action within markets as a left-inspired challenge to the individual aspirational and competitive system needed to create the orthodox vision of a dynamic economy.

Battling the Instrumentalist Wave

Instrumentalist approaches to gender equality – approaches that posit women's equality as instrumental for achieving wider development goals, more specifically economic development and growth – have gained a certain orthodoxy in their own right. In 2007, the World Bank coined the phrase "gender equality as smart economics". Providing evidence of the "business

case" has now become the marker of rigour, pragmatism and "value for money" considerations within professional work on gender equality. Chant and Sweetman (2012) highlight the danger of this approach to potentially undermine the feminist goal of removing the more deep-rooted structural discrimination that women face. Instrumentalist moves, such as the turn to "smart economics", are often utilised as a much-needed aid in support of rights-based positions, particularly when working in the more challenging spaces of trade, enterprise, finance and the like. In this context, cautioning against instrumentalism potentially hijacking the women's rights agenda can lead to relegating oneself to the margins of accepted discourse on women's economic empowerment. As a consequence, fissures are created amongst women's rights professionals themselves, which poses a challenge for feminist engagement.

While instrumentalism can be found across all development sectors,[8] in programming on women's economic empowerment the linkage between women's productivity and economic growth/private-sector development is by far the most explicit. My concern is not with highlighting the integral nature of women's contributions to economic development *per se*. However, the reliance on an instrumental premise to win the support of women's rights detractors – in the context of our patriarchal realities and within the private sector in particular – may only continue to dilute and depoliticise an arguably already compromised women's rights agenda. There are erasures and silences within the approach itself; for example, where growth has been accompanied by deepening inequalities or the business case for private-sector engagement is reliant on and exploits women's existing socio-economic marginalisation. This situation is rarely interrogated effectively in the practical world of programming. Highlighting such erasures remains either the preserve of gender and development academics or that of activists who continue to agitate from the margins.

Debunking Those "Silver Bullets"

Gender myths instrumentalising women, exposed over a decade ago by authors such as Bhatliwala and Dhanraj (2007), still circulate today and continue to be treated as a "silver bullet", or panacea, to the problem of gender inequality. One such myth is that giving poor women access to economic resources, such as credit, will necessarily lead to their overall empowerment. In addition, the

myth that women's economic empowerment *automatically* leads to increased voice, decision-making power and overall agency still prevails. Yet financially independent and educated metropolitan women in Africa may be bound as strictly by patriarchal norms as any woman from the rural areas.[9] Myths are more likely to prevail when analysis of the power relations impinging on women's economic empowerment is fundamentally avoided. Intersectional oppressions are typically not addressed, despite the oft-repeated allusion to "taking a holistic approach". Almost invariably, the projected "face" of poverty in the development sector is an impoverished, rural African woman. Women who don't fit that narrow focus are marginalised, as articulated by Everjoice Win in her 2007 article, "Not very poor, powerless or pregnant: The African woman forgotten by development".

The narrowness of focus in women's economic empowerment also unfortunately tends to fit quite well with the largely quantitatively driven monitoring and analysis frameworks of most development programmes. In what can arguably be called the "tyranny of the log-frame", with its big-number goals and mainly number-crunching methodologies, the ease of capturing income increase over a finite period of (often) a few short years as an indicator of women's empowerment is convenient. The need to capture women's individual and collective experiences of changing power and agency through more qualitative indicators and evaluations remains a secondary area within economic development programming.[10]

Future Forward: Understanding and Organising Around the Frontlines

Today, Africa is touted as the future "breadbasket" of a world facing both food and water shortage projections in the 21st century (Thurow, 2010). This "final frontier" of agricultural expansion is a far cry from the "basket case" imagery of two decades ago, but with it comes the march of neo-colonial interests. With African women smallholder farmers and processors now the face of international agricultural programmes and policy roll-outs, there is a disconnect with the reality of large land acquisitions, commercial and industrialised farming and an ever-increasing focus on cash-cropping. The debate on women in agriculture (see *Feminist Africa*, 2009) is integral to programming on women's economic empowerment and justice. As global interest from private and public players increases, African women across all

areas of production are going to be at the coalface of these tensions: as both the recipients of some of development's opportunities and also the burden-bearers of most of its mistakes. This makes women's economic empowerment a critical frontline for African feminists in the coming years.

Feminist positions that can uncompromisingly challenge the status quo and provide alternative solutions – such as eco-feminist activism that offers ground-level truths on climate-smart agriculture and the environment – are rarely engaged with. And, although the key roles of women as custodians of agricultural biodiversity and in community level interactions with ecology and nature (African Bio Diversity Network and the Gaia Foundation, 2015) are now being recognised due to Internet activism, such recognition remains peripheral within development.

Organising African feminist responses to the current international spotlight on women's economic empowerment is needed now more than ever. Such responses *should be tied intrinsically* to economic development's engagement with agricultural expansion on the continent. African feminists working across the formal programmatic spaces of the economic and agricultural development sectors need to be part of this, allying cohesively with both academics and the grassroots activists already engaged in contesting the orthodoxies. We also need more African feminists entering positions of influence within those spaces. Being a "disrupter" in such spaces is not easy, but nonetheless those orthodoxies need to be disrupted more uncompromisingly. It is better to defend African feminist positions and avoid being part of anything that enables a perpetuation of economic injustice or that holds back genuine transformations. This is more reason why *coordinated and globally amplified* African feminist voices on women's economic empowerment and justice can give individuals the collective strength needed to pursue feminist goals.

Endnotes

1 The1995 Beijing Platform for Action provided an agenda for women's empowerment, including a set of comprehensive strategic objectives on women and the economy. This built on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), which had articulated clear measures expected of states and stakeholders regarding women and employment.

2 Although women's economic empowerment is grounded in a rights-based approach, the flaw in taking empowerment alone as the answer to women's economic marginalisations and oppressions lies in its potential to be manipulated

around an individualistic aspirational agenda. Without an economic justice lens, this can undermine the wider structural struggle for all women facing their intersectional challenges.

3 Within these technical areas, engagement with direct project programming has been the most challenging overall. Policy work requires less of a focus on "beneficiary numbers" and expectations of making tangible changes to people's lives within a short period of time.

4 For more on tax as a feminist issue, see Adams (2016).

5 This is a phrase that has been repeated often by team leaders, economic advisors and many others – largely men but also many women – over the last ten to fifteen years or so.

6 Women's organising around economic needs and agency predates development programming globally. Collective systems of savings and loans – like the *osusu* (money banks) schemes women use in northern Nigeria – are culturally embedded and centuries old.

7 The enduring lesson from the many evaluations we now have on microfinance (of which Geleta (2013) and van Rooyen et al. (2012) are only a small sample) is that regional and cultural specificities play a critical role in the success or failure of microfinancing schemes. An example is the differential power dynamics between men and women in different communities and how this impacts on a woman's financial sovereignty and control when it comes to spending and paying back a loan. A further critical lesson is the importance of ensuring that financial literacy training is a standard part of microcredit disbursement – something that many microfinance institutions continue to fall short on.

8 The education sector, for example, has long emphasised the importance of girls' education from an instrumentalist angle, citing all the benefits of girls' education to families and the wider society (improved child and family health, skilled workforce, engaged citizenship). Often this is done before simply stating that education in itself is an inalienable human right, regardless of what it does or does not do for society.

9 One of the most powerful cultural outputs demonstrating this in recent years is a 2013 film by Nigerian director Chika Anadu, "'B' for Boy", which detailed the traumatic and extraordinary lengths that an economically empowered and successful Lagosian businesswoman went to when her marriage and status were threatened because she was approaching middle age and had yet to give birth to a boy.

10 The increasing pressure on donor countries from taxpayers criticising the idea of foreign aid, following austerity cuts in their home nations, has arguably led to a focus on delivering easily quantifiable outcomes based on large numbers that justify the expenditure. This is sometimes without a mind to the quality of these outcomes from a sustainable and genuinely transformative standpoint.

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(Writing) On the Wide Margin

Varyanne Sika

> [F]eminist thought and imagination are permeating the work of some scholars but this influence, among the present generation of scholars, remains relatively rare. (Pereira, 2002: 27)

The Wide Margin (TWM) is a digital journal of feminist thinking on matters thought to be important by its writers, who are of African descent. The journal's focus is nonfiction critical writing, but it allows room for poetry and for illustrations (both artistic representations of essays and a comic strip). *The Wide Margin* is a title inspired by bell hooks' book, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* and its allusion to the fact that women generally form the majority of people living on the margins of society. "Wide" also alludes to the intention of the publication to include as many different voices and ideas on feminism as there are readers of online writing. While contributors to the journal are strictly of African descent, located anywhere in the world, the primary target audiences are young feminists and non-feminists of all genders who are interested in reading feminist thought by contemporary African feminists.

The Wide Margin came into being in October 2014 in Nairobi; its inaugural issue, *Feminist While African*, was published online in July 2015. Our first issue – which comprised six pieces and an editorial – was one of the most fulfilling things I had ever worked on. Publishing it marked not only the first and most difficult step in beginning such a monumental project (to us), it also marked the beginning of a learning process, meeting brilliant feminist writers and readers, and the beginning of an unexpected ripple effect (however tiny the ripples).

The inspiration to create a feminist writing platform came to me a year after I had contributed to a southern African feminist publication, *Buwa!* Having very few friends and not much of a social circle, I had a limited selection of people with whom I could share this idea and work on actualising

the project. At the time, I asked the only two feminist friends I had who I thought demonstrated feminist ways of thinking and speaking. One of them, Sharon Nyaboe, was running a project she cofounded called World's Loudest Library (WLL)[1], and was the only other person I knew who owned a copy of Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* and had it on her bookshelf. It would have been an injustice to the project to exclude her; she is now a contributing editor at TWM. Orem Ochiel, now an assistant editor, was inspired by the vision for TWM and had at the time shown interest in writing critical reviews of African feminist literature.[2] Orem was also interested in supporting TWM with the technical aspects of editing to allow for balance in the editing process, which we learned was not always easy in political projects. Finally, Daniel Muli, an illustrator and band member at the time, joined us later to run the comic strip *Unfemiliar Territory*[3]. Dan brought in ideas about ways in which he would talk to men who were not feminist.

The core team comprised two men and two women, and was supported by the issue illustrator, Naddya Aluoch. Naddya read through all the essays and produced illustrations depicting her interpretation of the essays. During the editing and creation of illustrations for the first issue, Naddya did not particularly identify as feminist, but after several conversations we had about the work she was doing for TWM and after finalising the illustrations and publishing the inaugural issue, she told me that she now identifies as a feminist. This was unexpected and not directly intentional, although consciousness-raising is the main objective of TWM. But it was our first small victory.

The Wide Margin began because we (the editors) found a glaring scarcity of spaces that enable critical feminist discussion and are inclusive. Existing platforms where we hoped and expected to explore feminism did not publish what we were seeking:

> The popular spaces (our national newspapers and dailies, lifestyle magazines, mainstream television) where we could explore feminism are ridden with superficialities, silences, and erasures which perpetuate sexism, or they are inaccessible to those who would reform them. How then should we subvert the popular sexist ways of discussing women and feminism and advance the growing interest in talking and thinking about women beyond gender stereotypes? How should we advance thinking about feminism in Africa? What are the issues with

> which younger feminists are grappling? What new frontiers of African feminism are becoming visible even as the old struggles continue? "Feminist While African" explores how we (Africans) have come to understand feminism, how we are involved (or not) in feminism, how we interact with feminism, and how we have learned and continue to learn about feminism. (Sika, 2015a: 6-7).

So we created what we needed.

Issue 1: Feminist While African

We decided to focus the first issue on introducing ourselves as "feminists while African" because of the prominent argument against feminism on the continent: that feminism is not African. We invited contributors and readers to think about feminism by asking in the editorial:

> What is it that African women and men mean and aspire to when they say "I am a feminist"? What misgivings, and perhaps misunderstandings, about feminism, are revealed when people refuse or reject feminism? (Sika, 2015a: 6)

The response to these questions was a collection of essays ranging from discussions challenging the notion of feminism being unAfrican (Njagi, 2015), to making an argument for a feminist voice consciousness which takes cognisance of subaltern women living in Africa (Okoth, 2015). One essay made a case for feminism as a necessary path to survival (Makiya, 2015); another challenged the notion that there is a right way for an African woman to be (Wendo, 2015). Sara Salem (2015) wrote about the political being personal, stating that she does not see a clear distinction between her personal and political life and I wrote about sisterhood and the importance of naming ourselves as feminists (Sika, 2015b). These writers came from as far away as Australia and Egypt, and closer to home, from Kenya.

Feedback on the first issue was overwhelming and varied. TWM was widely read, cited and shared across various digital platforms. The general reception was encouraging and confirmed to us what we suspected all along – that a platform like this was needed and that more platforms like TWM are needed. Some of the critique we received had a lot to do with the title of the issue, *Feminist While African*. One reader thought the title was an apology for being feminist, another reader argued that the order of the nouns in the title should have been reversed because we are African first before we are anything

else. Other forms of critique involved annoyance at the fact that the TWM website did not have a comments section, which the critic believed would provide a platform for meaningful engagement with the essays. We did not fully respond to these critiques because, at the time, we did not have a system established for responding to such feedback other than replying to emails and to tweets.

The first issue gave way to our forthcoming second, titled *The Black African Body*. After discussing what it meant to be feminist as Africans, we decided that it would be prudent to discuss the site of our politics and being, our bodies. Essays in this issue discuss sex, violence, identity, bodies as resistance, abortion and much more.

Writing Support and Resources

From the beginning, I believed that there were only two possible ways of getting good quality submissions to the first issue of the journal: either through being part of an existing feminist writers' community (I was not part of such a community), or by compensating writers with whatever little amount of money was available. The principle of compensation for work is core to *The Wide Margin*, as it is a crucial feminist issue the world over. There are countless arguments for why writers are not paid on online platforms, some legitimate and others mere excuses, in my thinking. I was determined to ensure the availability of resources, however small, to compensate contributors – it was nearly as important as the writing itself. Thus, there was only one plan, to get resources and to publish.

It was not difficult to explain why we needed more feminist writing to TWM's patron and first supporter. Dr Murunga instructed one of the courses I studied in graduate school at the University of Nairobi. He was also the director at the African Leadership Centre (ALC) in Nairobi. It was serendipitous to find a patron who believed in mentoring and training young Africans to think critically and to make meaningful contributions to their communities; one who almost immediately understood and supported what we were working towards with the publication. Dr Murunga supported us through the African Leadership Centre for two issues and in various other ways, including a launch celebration at the ALC.

We leaned on several feminists who wrote their lives and those who documented their thoughts for us to use as guidance later on, for the online

publication. We braced ourselves for the age-old indictment against writing – that writing is not doing, that theory is not useful in Africa, that what was needed was praxis, and not writing. Sylvia Tamale's words from 2006 ring true to this day, however unfortunate it is that we must still justify why it is important to write:

> Feminists in the African academy and the activist practitioners on the ground tend to operate in separate cocoons... Yet theory leads to informed activism. Theory is about understanding the "what?" the "why?" and the "how?" questions about women's oppression, about power. When feminist theory does not speak to gender activism and when the latter does not inform the former, the unfortunate result is a half-baked and truncated feminism. Under-theorised praxis is comparable to groping in the dark in search of a coffee bean. It leads to obscurantism, hindering clear vision, knowledge, progress and enlightenment. Social transformation can hardly be achieved under such conditions. (Tamale, 2006: 41).

Community, Audience and Ripple Effects

Responses to *The Wide Margin*'s first issue far exceeded our expectations. We knew that online feminism was a new force to be reckoned with in the feminist movement globally. Several sources pointed to this fact, including *Feminist Africa*'s Issue 18 on *e-spaces and e-politics* which acknowledged that feminists in Africa are strategically moving more into the virtual world in their work on visibility for women's rights (Radloff, 2013). In only one month, the website received over ten thousand views, even without a comprehensive distribution and communication plan. The success of the inaugural issue is significantly thanks to social media platforms where we shared links to the different pieces. It is difficult to map out precisely how an online community is built for anyone who only goes in with an intention to share their work. In the case of *Feminist While African*, Facebook and Twitter were the distribution channels. Meeting feminists online who were interested in supporting *The Wide Margin* was as surprising as it was touching. Meeting Tiffany Mugo, who runs HOLAA, a Pan-Africanist queer womanist collective, led to an organic friendship and system of support for both our spheres of work. Tiffany encouraged us to start a hashtag to discuss on Twitter what it meant to be feminist while African. The hashtag

we organised together was our method of creating awareness about the journal and for distributing our first issue.

It is far less convoluted to discuss all the ways we can keep and grow online and offline communities than it is to explain how the community comes about in the first place. It is more often an organic process than not. The power of online feminism to mobilise people across generations to take political action has been documented. Martin and Valenti (2013) note that online feminism has transformed advocacy and action in the feminist movement, although in *ad hoc*, reactive and unsustainable ways. They argue as follows:

> Bloggers and online organizers largely suffer from a psychology of deprivation – a sense that their work will never be rewarded as it deserves to be, that they are in direct competition with one another for the scraps that come from third-party ad companies or other inadequate attempts to bring in revenue. As a result, they are vulnerable, less effective and risk burnout. (Martin and Valenti, 2013: 3)

This report was heavily critiqued at the time.[4] Although US-centric, the argument above rings true, however, for online feminists in Africa, too. How does one go about building and sustaining a community amongst an already existing community of mostly *ad hoc* online feminist activists? We need a map of online feminism in order to know who is doing what work. We also need to be proactive and deliberate in forging partnerships with other online feminists in a way that will allow us to support each other by sharing our resources and expertise. For any of this to be possible, we must also be working towards being sustainable.

The organic nature of community does not, however, imply leaving things to chance. *The Wide Margin*, after the first issue, was deliberate in its online interaction with various feminist writers and projects. Paying attention to what others were doing and taking part in their work, reading and sharing their work has constituted a large portion of our community engagement. Meeting new feminists everywhere online became vital to our work because we were actively learning from as many people as we could, while simultaneously taking note of prospective future contributors to our forthcoming issues. A few months after the first issue, I attended the Fourth African Feminist Forum (AFF) in Harare to talk about writing online. This opportunity afforded me the chance to meet feminists I would otherwise

most likely never have met. Attending the Fourth AFF also led me to contributing to this issue of *Feminist Africa*.

We imagined that because fiction-writing is quite prominent and popular on the continent – due to the existence of various awards, fellowships and writing platforms dedicated to fiction – it would be a challenge to put together nonfiction essays. To our pleasant surprise, we were able to receive submissions to both the first and second issues of TWM, all nonfiction, except for one poem in the forthcoming second issue. We are happy to be struggling to find ways to manage the volume of submissions we receive. It has become increasingly clear to us that there is a considerable demand for critical essays with feminist analysis, based on how many readers we've had so far.

There have been two platforms which have sprouted since TWM, whose founders have written to thank us for inspiring them to start their own platforms. It might not be as a direct result of having started TWM that these two platforms now exist, but it has certainly been some of the fuel added to the fire that led to their creation. One of these platforms is *Fibre of Her Fabric,* which describes itself as an online womanist community and magazine covering a breadth of issues concerning black womanhood. The other is *Clapback Zine,* which describes itself as a woman-centred platform where African youth can be seen and heard.

Beginner's Luck? Our Experience in Writing and Publishing Online

Writing and publishing online has been rewarding, as new as it is to us. We have reached people who write back to us to share their work and to express their gratitude for ours, people who are interested in joining our team, people who are interested in simply meeting and talking about feminism, and people who are interested in helping us in our work. *The Wide Margin* work of editing and publishing feminist thought has taught us that we are capable of more than we limit ourselves to thinking and believing. We read more, think differently, learn from our contributors and from our readers much faster than we did when we were only consuming other people's writing. I have learned patience and compromise from negotiating with contributors and from responding to emails demanding things which we are not able to provide, such as a comments section.

Unfortunately, there are not many people who talk about the pleasures of publishing. I am guilty of not having learned to find or recognise and articulate pleasures in activities such as writing, editing and publishing. I am well aware of their importance and urgency, but until recently, not of the joys of this work. Perhaps this gap in articulating the pleasure in doing this work is because we seldom celebrate or enjoy such work. Perhaps the pleasure lies simply in knowing that we are doing important work? Should we learn how to derive pleasure out of feminist work?

Maybe we acknowledge the importance of effective writing and publishing, and highlight the barriers, rather than discuss the pleasures, because we are constantly working towards more and better. The challenges of publishing are well recognised. As Amina Mama writes:

> There are many who will agree that the act of producing writing is always experienced as a primordial event, no matter how many times it is repeated. However, if the craft of writing is demanding, so too is the act of getting published. (Mama, 2000: 13).

Going into the project of putting together *The Wide Margin*, I knew and expected the writing to be difficult. What nothing could have prepared me for was the process of publishing. Writing and getting published was already demanding in the year 2000, before it became increasingly popular and (debatably) simple to publish one's work online. Publishing is extremely demanding. It is even more demanding when one has to also write and edit while working a fulltime job and while in graduate school at the same time. I bit off more than I could chew, but the work got done and the issue got out. In fact, I published the website one late evening while on a research trip in Kampala. Writing and publishing, if not your day job, is unlikely to be allocated adequate seriousness and time unless one pushes and creates the time. Even though we got support for the first two issues of *The Wide Margin*, there are, generally speaking, not many institutions or structures (outside academia)[5] to support nonfiction feminist writing on the continent.

Despite TWM hitting the ground running with its first issue, it was no mystery to the editors that the second issue would be even more demanding to publish compared to the first. It has taken 17 months to get the second issue ready for publishing. During this time, there were three job changes, the team drifting off to focus their energies on their wage earning jobs, and many weeks of throwing in the towel only to pick it back up the following week.

The fact that this project is not a paying job, that there is no guarantee that there will be resources for the third issue, that there might not be any team with which to work, is enough to send anyone packing. I have packed and left and come back more times than I can count, but in the end I have stayed because *we must write*.

> [W]riting remains a politically vigorous means of constructing visibility, accountability and the meaning of time. (Bennett, 2000: 4)

Endnotes

1 World's Loudest Library is a monthly book swap event/party where loud music is played and participants talk about various social topics, sometimes inspired by books that they have read, and other times inspired by current affairs.

2 Reviews of *Dust* by Yvonne Adhiambo and *Americanah* by Chimamanda Adichie on Open Letters Monthly.

3 The term 'unfemiliar' was derived from the artist's exploration of a subject (feminism) with which he was unfamiliar.

4 Jessica Marie Johnson (2013) discussed some critiques of *#FemFuture: Online Revolutions* on her website, Diaspora Hypertext.

5 Academia, like bureaucratic institutions in general, tends to have various rules and requirements for providing support for projects such as *The Wide Margin*. These rules and requirements tend to lock out more people than they invite in.

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Flipping Prisms: Feminist Creative Synergy Amps Up in Accra

Sionne Rameah Neely

Progressively over the last decade, feminist creative organising in Accra has taken shape through collectives and projects working to amplify visibility and provide affirming space for women and women's stories in public spheres. This rise in visibility and inclusive spaces has taken place through a myriad of cultural events, occurring throughout the city, that are led by women practitioners – independent and community writers, digital activists, academics, media journalists, artists and art programmers. This phenomenon is a departure from traditional organisers of culture, that is, national ministries, local councils, NGOs, foreign embassies and religious institutions.

As a womanist researcher, writer, teacher and multimedia producer born and raised in the United States, I have actively participated in multiple cultural spaces within Accra for the last nine years. As cofounder of ACCRA [dot] ALT, an independent arts network that provides space for African artists to showcase unconventional works and make connections and projects with artists across the continent and diaspora, increasing visibility and storytelling initiatives by women practitioners is principal to our mission. This impetus for us, and for many other cultural practitioners, arose out of a persistent battle for accurate information and sincere knowledge-sharing practices.

Culture is a longstanding battlefield. As it stands, African lives are often turned into narratives by non-African people from places outside of the continent, often by those who speak from privileged and prejudiced positions. Even within Accra, those with capital are capturing international attention as the makers of culture, and they are distorting the narrative and excluding those who have devoted their lives to building cultural spaces of inclusion.[1] Moreover, cultural and religious conservatism around women's public and creative expression is widespread across the country, being expressed in a continuing lack of mobility and flexibility for many women practitioners when carrying out their work, relative to men practitioners. There is also a persistent need for increased capacity-building and resource mobilisation

to sustain the work of women cultural workers. When it comes to women collaborating creatively, these are some of the central challenges feminists are facing head-on in Accra.

In response to this, more and more African artists, and women practitioners, in particular, are actively working to narrativise their own lives with fullness, integrity and freedom of being. Accra's feminist creative activism has also been propelled by resistance to the cultural and religious conservatism that women practitioners face. The momentum of creative energy has been building in gradual and exciting ways with multiple women in key positions of leadership. This is happening on small, localised scales throughout the city, often in silos. Through better connectivity of city and countrywide creative spaces, particularly through digital media and a sharing economy, a network of synergy can be expanded that has the capacity to help amplify the visibility of women and women's stories in the country. It is particularly through feminist cultural expressions that we see this concept activated.[2]

This essay will briefly explore a short history of feminist cultural production within Accra; situate some of the challenges facing women creatives and artists in the current context; and, finally, point to some possible strategies of solidarity that can amplify inclusive spaces where African women innovate cultures of possibility, joy and pleasure openly and publicly.

Speak Their Names: Tracing the Mark of Cultural Feminist Production in Accra

Contemporary creative feminist practices in Ghana cannot be isolated from the work of women cultural producers from the 1950s onward. At that time, there was a groundswell of continental and national activism rooted in anti-colonial and imperial resistance to the West. This proceeded until Dr Kwame Nkrumah's presidential administration in 1957, and thereafter, such activism included the contributions of many women human rights defenders (Azikiwe, 2016).[3] This period embodied a cultural renaissance for the country, with the continent and diaspora looking to Ghana as a model of pan-African solidarity, organisation and creative expression. Artist and writer Maya Angelou, activist and writer Shirley Graham DuBois and photographer and activist Alice Windom (who captured images of Malcolm X's trip to Ghana in 1964) lived in the country for many years. Ghanaian feminists such as Ama Ata Aidoo and Efua Sutherland were also producing radical writings and experimental

theatre about the intimate complexities of Ghanaian women's lives during the 1960s and 1970s.

Ghana has always had a very rich tradition of visual art and mixed-media arts. Women have been central to these practices, both as muses as well as unnamed generators of creative inspiration, particularly in the rural communities of northern Ghana. Between the 1960s and 1990s, the painting and sculpture department of the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) produced a number of women artists who would often collaborate with one another. The artists included Charlotte Hagan (textile artist), Peace Enyonam Akosua Baku (freelance artist), Eva Juliet Campbell (painter), Olivia Aku Glime (textile artist), Vesta Adu-Gyamfi (ceramicist), Dorothy Asukonfu Abaitey (painter and textile artist), Esther Victoria Ulzen-Appiah (textile artist), Joyce Stuber (graphic artist), Dorothy Amenuke (sculptor) and Nana Afia Opoku-Asare (ceramic and textile artist) (Asante, 2009: 45).

With successive military regimes, the food and fuel crisis, and the structural adjustment programmes which began in 1979 and lasted until the mid-1990s, support for the culture industry was not sustained in the way it had been during President Kwame Nkrumah's administration (1957-1966). During the 1980s and 1990s, as funding evaporated from the state, many creative artists left the country, and the creative arts came to be understood only in terms of profit: tourism or entertainment (Neely, 2010). Beginning in the late 1990s, the private sector gave sponsorships often to media houses and event promoters with large-scale audiences, making huge profits.[4] Those creatives and artists who were invested in creating social change through their work were left without financial support, relying on family or communal support. In the absence of family support, it has since become a regular practice for many creatives to approach foreign embassies for grants.[5] Because Ghana lacks a viable infrastructure to support the cultural and arts industries, practitioners tend to work in silos.[6]

Despite these obstacles, women cultural workers have been working in different small-scale contexts at varying times and with varying levels of frequency. This is particularly true of the last decade where much work has been done in creating and publicly expressing different perspectives and new ideas about women's creativity, sexuality, choice and bodily rights. These expressions are also characterised by a fierce feminine solidarity and

a sharing economy. For example, in January 2017, the actress, writer and producer Akosua Hanson and theatre founders, Elisabeth Efua Sutherland and Emelia Asiedu, of the Accra Theatre Workshop, collaborated in launching Hanson's new feminist theatre group, Drama Queens. In February, Hanson joined blogger and activist Nana Darkoa Sekyiamah for The Love Fest event, also featuring Jessica Horn (of The Love Mic), in an evening of readings and poetry to "claim our rights to sexual pleasure, the full recognition of our selves outside of heteronormative, patriarchal restrictions in our society. We also shared how we came to discover what 'good sex' is".[7] Collaborative events such as these have enabled an increase in the visibility of women's creative expressions and an unveiling of a multiplicity of women's stories within public space.[8] These feminist readings and performances create opportunities for deep truth-telling about the consequences of rape, sexual abuse, violence against women, depression and anxiety, sex and sexuality, body shaming and gender conformity.

Feminists like Nana Darkoa have been pioneers in writing and digital media activism, shifting thinking about feminism, gender, sex, sexuality and violence against women, through her blogging site *Adventures from the Bedrooms of African Women*, co-founded with blogger Abena Gyekye. On the genesis of *Adventures*, Nana Darkoa shares: "There are very few safe spaces where African women can discuss, interrogate and learn about their own sexuality. The world in which we currently live tries to control women by circumscribing our sexuality, on one hand, and commercialising our sexuality on the other. Yet there are no spaces for women to learn about their own bodies, and how to derive sexual pleasure for themselves".[9] Nana Darkoa also founded "Fab Fem", a gathering for feminists to meet regularly and have frank and non-judgemental conversations about their life experiences. Similarly, feminist writers such as Nana Nyarko Boateng, Kuukua Dzigbordi Yomekpe, Rita Nketiah and Famia Nkansa as well as Poetra Asantewaa (poet and designer) and Crystal Tetteh (poet, musician and performance artist) produce work along these veins of rerouting the historical and bodily memories of women towards joy, passion, pleasure and creativity.

Indeed, feminist voices are active on digital platforms, using the medium to challenge harmful and limited representations of women and to resound the complex and nuanced narratives of other women, particularly pushing back on social media networks such as Twitter and Facebook. Websites such

as *Asaase Yaa Mma*, with the tagline "Modernising Indigenous Feminism", disrupt notions of traditional culture and history by foregrounding women's experiences, priorities, desires and capacities.[10] The blog's creator Obaa Boni and editor BxShola theorise the specificity of Ghanaian feminism by suggesting:

> Ghanaian feminism ("Ghaminism") is a digital movement aimed at liberating Ghanaians from constricting gender oppression as part of a greater global movement for equity... Ghaminism [is] for everyone, with an emphasis on women, gender-non-binary, androgynous, and transgender persons. Ghaminism, like the greater global feminism, will also make room for men. Ensuring that it attacks the burden that patriarchy imposes on all persons. (Boni and BxShola, n.d.)

This national feminism is aligned with global feminist movements, pursuing unity through the inclusion of women and other marginalised groups to address common structures of inequality and oppression. Another notable space is Nana Ama Agyeman's *Unfiltered* podcast, where this unapologetically feminist radio presenter speaks her mind on a range of issues. She is also a presenter on The Breakfast Show of a leading radio station. Together, these digital platforms are expanding concepts around pleasure, bodily rights, choice, consent, gender and sexuality, and violence against women.[11]

Visual artists such as Maku Azu, Fatric Bewong, Zohra Opoku, Adjo Kisser, Marigold Akuffo-Addo, Yvette Nsiah and Kenturah Davis, and digital artists Sena Ahadji, Awo Tsegah and Nyahan Tachie-Menson are realising self-reflective works, centring the stories of African women and transgressing gender assumptions through various forms of mixed media, humour, surprise, erotic play and environmental design.[12] Filmmaker Anita Anofu has documented Ghana's heyday film industry (1950s-1970s) over a number of years and is working to preserve and restore the country's historical archives. Nana Oforiatta Ayim's work as founder of ANO Institute of Contemporary Arts aims to correct erasures by recentring the narratives of historic women culture-producers. These include Ghana's first woman photographer, Felicia Abban, who at one point was President Nkrumah's official photographer.[13]

In terms of capacity building and mentorship for women artists and cultural producers, Kinna Likimani of Mbassem Foundation has been training feminist writers, alongside The Writers Project, led by women writers such as Mamle Kabu. Bibie Brew, the musician who took Paris by storm, moved

back to Ghana ten years ago to start the New Morning Cafe, a theatre and music performance company. The company mentors young artists, particularly women, in intensive weekly classes in performance etiquette, vocal coaching, script development, costume and set design. The African Women's Development Fund (AWDF), headquartered in Accra, has also partnered with Mbassem Foundation and Golden Baobab, an NGO founded by Deborah Ahenkorah and devoted to the promotion of African children's literature, to host classes in fiction writing and forums for writing development. Faustina Nyaama Nsoh, a painter and textile artist from Northern Ghana, who was trained by her grandmother, is now keeping this tradition alive by training other women through the Sirigu Women Organisation for Pottery and Art (SWOPA). Music and digital artist KEYZUZ provides in-depth training sessions to women musicians through her BeatPhreaks programme.

There are also a number of women in leadership positions in arts management at institutions in Accra that provide crucial space for artists and creatives – particularly women practitioners – to carry out workshop projects, receive generous readings and showcase their work to the public. Adwoa Amoah, co-director of the Foundation for Contemporary Art Ghana (FCA), Odile Tevie, director of Nubuke Foundation, Akwele Suma-Glory, director of the Women's Arts Institute Africa (WAI-Africa), Gifty Anti (producer and presenter of GTV's *StandPoint* and founder, Girls in Need Foundation) and Mardey Ohui Ofoe, executive director of the Foundation for Female Photojournalists are five examples of women-led institutions which have demonstrated capacity to support the work of women artists and cultural workers through mentorship, advocacy and financial investment. Women's organising in this context is also concerned with providing spaces of transparency, public awareness and accountability, platforms of visibility for creative expression and critical analysis between and about women. This contributes to the forward growth of communities through conversations on the intersections of gender and sexuality, race and ethnicity, class and colonisation, identity and representation, history and culture.[14] This visibility in physical event spaces and through digital media provides different examples of women's creative expression that are shifting perceptions and attitudes.

Creative entrepreneurs Dedo Azu (Tea Baa), Franka Andoh (Cuppa Cappuccino) and Stefania Manfreda (Elle Lokko) have multi-functional venues within Accra, which host different cultural events such as book readings, swaps

and discussions; jewellery-making sessions; live poetry, DJ and music lounges; and fashion design and body care boutiques featuring women artisans. Since space is such a critical issue for the visibility of creative women's organising, these venues provide opportunities for women to express themselves, share their work, unwind and connect with others, and make a living from their craft. There are also women practitioners who are committed to women's self-care and developing systems of sustainability and wells of creative action for women living and working in Ghana. Wellness experts in yoga, meditation and environmentalism work in this way, such as Yvette Tetteh, Olivia Asiedu-Ntow and Efua Uhuru (yoga, reiki and sexual health practitioner). Another such practitioner is Dr Sharita, a naturopath who has devoted her life to making communities healthier, particularly with the establishment of the annual African Culture and Wellness Festival.

Over the last seven years, ACCRA [dot] ALT has featured more than fifty women artists and cultural producers from Ghana and beyond, many of whom identify as feminist. Josephine Kuuire debuted a digital art project last March of distorted self-portraits interrogating her internal life, social relationships, and the struggle to resist gender-conforming expectations of religion and tradition. Musician, visual artist and designer Jojo Abot created an exhibition called Na Ma Vo (Let Me Be Free) that looked at the power of the goddess within, spiritual connection and sister synergy as a frequency to restore balance to the world. Ayesha Haruna Attah, with writer Ayi Kwei Armah, led a conversation about translating a set of Kimet texts and their project of creating a new system of alternative African languages built on indigenous codes and symbols. Selassie Djameh, a feminist filmmaker, screened two films, one depicting the fluctuating relationship between sisters and another celebrating her menstrual cycle. Awuor N'yango shared the "Library of Silence", an exhibition of audiovisual imagery that looks at filling the gaps in global knowledge systems by reconfiguring history into herstory (women's cultures of experience). Exchange with African women artists and cultural producers from other countries is also important for growth, and we have hosted Priscilla Azaglo (Ghana/USA), Lhola Amira (South Africa), Afua Taylor (USA), Lindiwe Matshikiza (South Africa), Noluthando Lobese (South Africa), Dean Hutton (South Africa), Alberta Whittle (South Africa), Tawiah (Ghana/UK), Welela Kindred (France), Yinka Esi Graves (Ghana/Spain), Malaika Aminata (USA), Yaba Blay (Ghana/USA),

Lisa Harris (USA), Autumn Knight (USA), Lyric L (Nigeria/UK), Kampire Bahana (Uganda), Darlene Komukama (Uganda), Shanett Dean (USA), Maimouna Jallow (Kenya), Akwaeke Emezi (Nigeria/Trinidad), Rachel Perkins (Australia) and Paula Akugizibwe (Rwanda), among many others, to share their work and creative process.[15]

Beads of Synergy: Opening Spaces Up

The sisters were sprawled about, some spread out on colorful straw mats and throw pillows, others lounging in chairs. The vibe was easy, liquid and electric. Here gathered women musicians, digital media specialists, graphic designers and illustrators, theatre artists, sports and wellness experts, art journalists, documentarians and photographers. Thirty African women creatives from six countries, in Accra for a convening on how to use arts, cultural production and sports as tools for social change and transformative justice. The three-day forum was sponsored by AWDF.

On the first day of the convening, we began with a fun exercise: choosing beads and baubles and stringing together each chosen one into a piece of jewellery – a necklace, earrings, a ring or bracelet. Many of us wore the jewellery throughout our time together. It reminded me that we are building a new universe, one bead at a time. We strung those beads to make a form where we can exist in freedom, peace and security. We linked our forms together into this constellation of being that binds us. The wire holding the beads together is our electricity, our inclusion, our synergy of connection.

I realised that this was the first time I had been together with other women creatives to purposefully discuss linking our individual work into a cohesive transformer to challenge patriarchal injustice and assert sincere narratives about African women's lives. We had worked on this, yes, on a project basis – but not as a constellation of persistent synergy. We left with a plan to help document the work of African women creatives, to boost our practices of citations and to develop databases that could be shared, listing practitioners across various sectors for easier networking and connection. We are able to support each other – individually and collectively – if we are aware of each other's initiatives, challenges, needs and visions. We increase our impact through greater outreach; we can share resources better through an inclusive and integrated network that is visible and can be sincerely felt. By building strategy and increasing access to an evolving and creative African feminist

ecosystem, we also increase visibility. Citations build visibility. Visibility is necessary in the making of history.

In December 2016, the AWDF launched the Young Feminists Gathering (YFG), a monthly meet-up for women between the ages of 18 and 35 who live or work in, or are visiting Ghana. The group is a space of solidarity, creativity and knowledge-sharing engineered by the young staff members at AWDF to stimulate alignment with other women in the region. YFG is the place where young women can gather together to engage women's rights with resource experts, practice African feminism and activate creative projects. As a result of the online promotion of this space, sisters from Zimbabwe and the DRC have contacted the group about sharing strategy, models, information and other resources so that the gathering can be replicated in these countries.

There is an excitement rippling through Accra right now. You can feel it in the air. More and more cultural spots are opening up in the city – often innovated by artists and creatives who are visioning a different kind of city where new possibilities can emerge. By building new prisms of solidarity, respect, acknowledgement, visibility and love, the challenges that feminist creatives and artists experience can shift. By connecting localised creative spaces, feminists can amplify routes towards reflection, planning, retooling, and plugging forward. It is because of this sizzling energy and artists coming together to make these events happen that new women are being propelled to join the fold.

Endnotes

1 Also at issue are Western embassies that dominate the cultural landscape and own these narratives in some way. However, they also provide space, exposure, and sometimes funding for women creatives to host their work. This can be a problematic encounter.

2 For the purposes of this paper, "feminism" is defined as the consciousness and practices among African women that enable respect, recognition and solidarity within cultural and creative spaces. This essay interrogates women's organising as sites and practices of cultural production within the realm of creative artistic expression, particularly writing, poetry, music, visual art, photography and film, digital media arts and the performing arts.

3 In 1960, the Conference of the Women of Africa and African Descent (CWAAD) led to the consolidation of the Convention People's Party (CPP), Ghana Women's League and the National Federation of Ghana Women into a centralised women's movement. Journalist Mabel Ellen Dove Danquah was quite active in writing

about Ghana's independence, pan-African solidarity and women's contributions to this development.

4 Large-scale businesses such as breweries and alcohol companies, telecommunication firms and banks regularly sponsor cultural events. Increasingly now, Christian churches are also sponsoring once-secular events.

5 The foreign embassies that actively support the cultural sector in Accra include Alliance Française, Institut Français, Goethe-Institut and the Netherlands Embassy.

6 There is a national cultural policy but it is not enforced, which demonstrates a massive lack of understanding of how culture can shift the development of the country.

7 Interview with Nana Darkoa Sekyiamah, Accra, 18 February 2017.

8 Musicians Jojo Abot, Meche Korrect, Azizaa, Suga and Wiyaala have individually created powerful music that resists easy categorisation and relies on historical concepts of women as mystics, warriors, visionaries and repositories of knowledge and healing.

9 Interview with Nana Darkoa Sekyiamah, Accra, 18 February 2017.

10 See Assase Yaa Mma: Modernized Indigenous Feminism, https://ghanafeminism.com.

11 Other digital media platforms by Ghanaian feminists include www.nyamewaa.com, @SorayaSpeaks and @KinnaReads (Twitter) and https://mindofmalaka.com. Girls Girls Accra is a space – online and physical – devoted to networking for women in the creative and art industries.

12 *Presence in Absence* is a project by Adjo Kisser in collaboration with FCA Ghana to create a directory of women artists living and working in Ghana, covering their CVs, biographical data, artist statements and portfolios. The project began by documenting the work of Zohra Opoku, Adwoa Amoah, Betty Acquah, Fatric Bewong and Dorothy Amenuke.

13 ANO shares space in the same compound with Stefania Manfreda's mixed design, performance space and body-care boutique, Elle Lokko. This year, ANO launches an award for Ghanaian women artists to receive professional mentorship training from an established black woman artist and residency opportunities with international museums and galleries (www.anoghana.org).

14 There are a number of women practitioners documenting and archiving cultural spaces in Accra, the country and continent. Cultural experts in architecture, urban planning, anthropology, community development and art journalism include Mae-ling Lokko, Namata Serumaga-Musisi, Latifah Idriss, Victoria Okoye, Jacqueline Nsiah, Shari Ankomah-Graham, Chanelle Frazier, Rita Isionam Garglo and Billie McTernan.

15 We have been able to provide space for public processing of what it means to be an African woman today and discuss issues of migration, memory, transatlantic enslaved trade, hair and beauty politics, sisterhood, autonomy, queer identity, mental health, language and translation, bodily rights, metaphysicality and pan-Africanism.

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LBTQ Mural — Maku Azu

Female in Nigeria: Profile

Ayodele Olofintuade

Introduction

In June 2015, the Abuja-based Warmate Bookclub, inspired by Chimamanda Adichie's feminist pamphlet, *We Should All Be Feminists*, started the hashtag #BeingFemaleinNigeria (Edoro, 2015). This not only focused on everyday sexism but also addressed norms, cultural beliefs and practices as well as government policies that have led to the oppression of women in all spheres of national life. According to Twitter Analytics (2015), within the first 19 minutes, 730 twitter users had tweeted at #BeingFemaleinNigeria 1,500 times. The tweets were predominantly from Nigerian women and a sprinkling of Nigerian men. This drew the attention of international media and before the end of the week-long "tweetivism", several international news outlets had featured the story. By the first of July 2015, the hashtag had 54,000 tweets.

About a week after this unprecedented activism on social media for women's rights, Lola Omolola[1] set up a Facebook-based group, Female in Nigeria (FIN), and invited the women in her circles (particularly those who had participated in the activism on Twitter) to the group. These women, in turn, sent out invitations to the women in their own circles. This new group was touted as a space for self-identified feminists and women interested in gender equality and women's rights – a "women only" space that would allow for freedom of expression, free from the trolling by men that is a regular feature of most women-centred campaigns on social media.

Within six weeks of its existence, the platform had over 2,000 members, and the administrators changed the group settings from closed group[2] to secret group.[3] The reason given for this change was the high number of men sending requests to be added to the group.[4] In spite, and maybe because, of the change in the group settings on Facebook, Female in Nigeria was growing exponentially, with a resultant change in the culture of the group and power dynamics. This Profile outlines some of the successes and challenges faced by FIN in the course of these changes.

Context

The Nigeria in which FIN came into existence is a complex, postcolonial, patriarchal country, grappling with terrorism, poverty, high unemployment rates, poor to non-existent health management systems, hyper-religiosity, declining quality of education and short life expectancy. Several studies have highlighted the role of colonialism in shaping the diverse gender inequalities presently experienced in Nigeria. These took on quite varied forms in different parts of the country; my focus here is inevitably selective. Among the Yoruba of South Western Nigeria, for example, where women predominantly engaged in trade, women's relationships to land were deeply affected by changes introduced by colonialism, when "the advent of title deeds made men the sole owners of land. Consequently, women lost access and control of land... their vital role in food production was overshadowed by the more lucrative male-dominated cash crop cultivation for the international market... [C]olonialism brought with it Christianity and a masculine fundamentalism" (Chengu, 2015).

This is not to say, however, that there were no gender inequalities prior to colonialism. For example, although women were members of the Ogboni[5] – since "membership of the Ogboni included sectional and lineage heads, war leaders..., women chiefs and priests" (Oduntan, 2010) – women were not allowed to be members of the policing arm of the Ogboni, the Oro Cult. Various military regimes and nationalist governments that emerged after Nigeria gained independence also contributed to deepening these inequalities and gender gaps in access to resources.

Gender inequality today can be seen in several domains and varies with location. One such domain is education, but the gender disparities are not as great in more urbanised southern states as they are in the northern part of the country (AHI, 2011). Gender inequality is evident, too, in high maternal mortality rates (Index Mundi, 2016) as well as discrimination in the workplace (Bamidele, 2010). Internet access is also differentiated by gender. According to Internet Live Stats, in 2016 there were 86,219,985 million Nigerians who had access to the Internet, comprising 46.1% of the Nigerian population. Out of the 69,086,302 female population, only 33% have Internet access.

Nevertheless, women's organising against inequality has a long history in Nigeria. During the colonial era, when British colonial policies effectively pauperised and disempowered people, women mobilised to push back against

the new regulations. The 1929 Women's War in the South East (Ibibio, Andoni, Ogoni, Bonny and Opobo) erupted when women accused warrant chiefs of overtaxing and restricting the role of women in governance (Zukas, 2009). In the South West of Nigeria, Olufunmilayo Ransome-Kuti, alongside Elizabeth Adekogbe, organised a group called the Abeokuta Women's Union. Primarily set up to bridge the gender gap in Western-styled education, the group eventually morphed into a powerful political tool. Simola (1999) shows how the disruption of the authority structures operating in pre-colonial Abeokuta, particularly the systemic exclusion of women from governance, led to the eventual dethronement of the king by the Abeokuta Women's Union led by Ransome-Kuti. Today, even with much reduced powers, women's groups can still be found all over Nigeria as market women's associations, self-help groups and religious groups.

The advent of social media in the contemporary era has catalysed African women's digital engagement. Activists are blogging, sharing posts on Facebook, tweeting updates from meetings and conferences as well as sharing links to videos, websites and petitions calling for gender equality (Radloff, 2013). By 2015, Nigerian feminists were actively using different social media platforms to promote gender equality. The #BringBackOurGirls (BBOG) campaign is one of the most visible and successful examples of activism around violations of girls' and young women's rights in Nigeria.[6] In Lagos and Ibadan, the feminist-led activism of BBOG is gradually changing the way Nigerians engage with topics such as sexism, rape, child marriage, female genital mutilation (FGM) and other issues that are signposts of gender inequality.

FIN in Action

Against this backdrop, FIN established itself as a place where the usually taboo subjects – like sex, domestic violence, rape and depression – were actively discussed. Lola Omolola, on a gofundme.com page she had created to raise funds to finance a social media site for FIN, described the group as "a movement of... women on Facebook focused on building compassion, providing support and nurturing the power of self-expression in a culture where women are to be seen and not heard" (Omolola, 2016). Almost from the onset, there was an outpouring, as women shared stories of their trauma. On hand were women who had had similar experiences and could empathise, as

there were professionals offering pro-bono services in order to help solve these problems. At the same time, there were women sharing stories of successes in the face of all the odds stacked up against them. They were providing a much-needed positive example of women who were able to triumph by standing their ground.

Due to the support and compassion women were getting on the platform, smaller groups – based mostly on geographical location – started emerging. Friendships were increasingly moving from the official Facebook page to smaller spaces on WhatsApp and other social media networks, and to real-life interactions. By September 2015, FIN members were actively seeking one another out for companionship, and posts about meetings between FIN members, with pictures attached, started appearing on the group's timeline regularly.

In December 2015, the first set of FIN Hangouts was being planned for Lagos, London and Port Harcourt. Hangouts are designed to encourage women to interact without interference from their daily lives, so men, non-FIN members and children are not admitted into venues. Aba, Atlanta, Enugu, Cairo, Houston, Ile-Ife, Johannesburg, Kaduna, Kano, New York, Taraba, Toronto – practically every city around the world that has more than one Nigerian woman inhabitant has held at least one FIN Hangout. And since the first successful event, there has been at least one Hangout happening in a different part of the world every month. Unfortunately, I have been so far unable to attend any of the FIN Hangouts. My account of the Hangouts is based on interviews with participating FIN members and shared pictures as well as videos from the events, posted exclusively on the group page.

According to Ayilara,[7] although there was a lot of excitement amongst the women when the proposal for the first FIN Hangout to be held in Lagos was made, the planning committee did not know what to expect, because "Nigerians are well known to talk game online, but [will] not budge when it's time to act". Participants, with a sense of ownership of both the group and the event, ensured that the Hangout ran as smoothly as possible. Over 200 women attended the first event. The bonding that was happening on a Facebook page translated into real life, as the women ensured that nobody was left out. The best part for Ayilara, however, was what happened when the main event ended: "the women were reluctant to return home... Even after the event-centre management switched off the lights, we sat in the dark and kept talking. It was amazing, the way we bonded".

Between June and December 2015, the group had developed the rules of engagement on the platform. These rules were formed over the first three months of establishment, as a response to the way women were interacting with the posts:

- No screenshots/copy or we shall ban you and all involved.
- Sharing on FIN is a statement of courage: speaking up may require desensitising oneself to unproductive responses.
- Being respectful trumps free speech: if you must comment, be sensitive.
- No judgement / show empathy / be fair / no agenda. Privacy: what happens on FIN stays on FIN.
- You are encouraged to share only when you're ready. We are here to empower you to embrace who you are at all times, even in public.

It is important to note that when the group had been made up predominantly of feminists, there had been no need to make these points, because the women were engaging each other respectfully. As more women joined the group, however, they brought with them platitudes, slut-shaming,[8] homophobia and victim-blaming. At one point, survivors of domestic violence and cheating spouses were asked to watch the film *The War Room*,[9] in which a woman is encouraged to pray for her marriage instead of confronting a cheating husband.

By January 2016, not only was FIN 30,000 women strong but the rules were enforced such that it led to the development of a new kind of culture. This was one that:

- helped women connect on a deeper level
- facilitated global meet-ups and networking
- provided a non-judgemental atmosphere for sharing
- linked women in crisis (domestic violence, sexual assault, depression, contemplating suicide) with therapists, lawyers, physicians and other professionals.

By this time, Lola Omolola had appointed four new administrators and thirteen moderators to oversee recruitment into the group. The powers of administrators include the power to approve or ban members, to moderate comment threads, turn off the threads or remove comments that do not follow rules. Moderators have the power to approve membership but cannot remove people from the group. They can delete comments but cannot turn off comment threads.

The administrative infrastructure helped accelerate the process of admission but this in turn led to politicking, because not all the women were feminists, and new arrivals seemed to have other agendas. With the expansion of the group came an influx of Christians who, through their posts and comments, tried hard to uphold patriarchal values without breaking the rules outright. For example, the approved daily average of posts is 20; recently, 18 of those posts would celebrate family, particularly husbands. This is unlike the early days when there was a mix of diverse voices and the contents of the post were more intimate and honest.

Some of the positive features of FIN's culture are still evident today, giving rise to an astonishing 634,000 members by January 2017. FIN's phenomenal growth in its early days was evidence of women's defiance of prevailing social norms, restrictions and disempowerment, particularly notable since the group is made up of women from different socio-economic backgrounds, of differing sexuality and religious inclinations, and from varied geographical locations.

The rapid growth of Female in Nigeria had not gone unnoticed by Nigerians on social media, especially since a number of women were leaving violent homes and becoming more vocal on their personal social media pages. At the same time, there were also increasing numbers of women removed from the group for persistently breaking the rules. The narrative that emerged over the first six months, on different Facebook posts, was that FIN was a cult of lesbians and devil worshippers out to destroy the sanctity of the Nigerian (Christian) family. Later, this narrative appeared in a blog (Daniel, 2017).

An article by Okolie (2016) dismissed reports concerning the sinister intent of the group. She was dismayed, however, that "even though the founder kept insisting FIN was a 'safe house', where women could come and share their secrets, unburden their minds and receive pats on the back, even when they needed a good telling off", "the group founder made up the rules as she went, and sometimes they were… unrealistic… if you expressed a disagreement, you were deleted for not being empathetic enough".

Okolie went on to describe FIN as "Telemundo central",[10] essentially raising the question of confidentiality within the group. Her major concern was the screen-sharing ("munching") that was rife within the group: "Nothing is ever secret on social media…". All this notwithstanding, by the time Okolie's article was published in June 2016, FIN had grown to 170,000 members.

Conflicts

Apart from the external attacks on FIN, an ideological divide was growing between Lola Omolola and a majority of the feminists who were the foundational members. This process called into question whether FIN was in fact a platform nurturing women's self-expression – as described when feminists were invited to join the group – or just another women's group where the one voice speaking *for* the women was that of the "founder".

In early June 2016, an Abuja-based businesswoman, who identified herself as Chacha Deepdeal Jayn on social media (real name Charity Aiyedogbon), made a series of posts accusing her estranged husband, David Aiyedogbon, of domestic abuse, infidelity and money laundering. A few days after making these posts, she sent another saying that some members had screen-munched her posts and sent them to her husband.

One week after the incident, Charity Aiyedogbon went missing.

According to Ayilara, the feminists on the platform believed that, given FIN's numbers (over 170,000 women at the time), the group should be able to launch a successful search, both online and offline, for Aiyedogbon. Group members started making and sharing posts about the missing woman on their personal social media pages and within the group. Theories about what had happened to Aiyedogbon abounded.

When, in July 2016, a decapitated body believed to be Aiyedogbon's was found, and it appeared that the police were reluctant to conduct further investigations into her disappearance, the feminists on the platform began to agitate for FIN members to share posts demanding for justice. These were to be a prelude to street demonstrations if the online activism did not work. Even before this event, some FIN members already appeared to be preparing themselves for activism beyond the secrecy of the group. According to Lateefat:[11]

> around this time some women were posting about how they rescued children from homes where they are being maltreated, or that they got between a man beating a woman and stopped him. FIN was getting crazier and crazier... There was also one time that a bunch of women travelled from Lagos to Abeokuta to get bail for one woman whose husband had locked her up, accusing her of armed robbery, because she moved out of his house and took everything in the house with her.

Nigerian women on FIN had begun to see themselves as sisters, and this extended beyond group members. Consequently, feminists in FIN had expectations that the group could become a powerful tool to push for a reversal of societal norms as well as a change in the government policies that had brought them to that point. Lola Omolola, in her bid to keep the group under control, however, became openly hostile. She banned all discussion around Aiyedogbon on the platform and dissociated FIN from any online activism or street protests. Her reason was that she lived abroad and would not be able to "monitor" and "control" whatever was happening in Nigeria.

In my opinion, this position is not tenable. It is impossible for one person, or even 17 people (the administrators and moderators) to monitor over 170,000 women. All efforts to ensure that "what happens on FIN, stays on FIN", for example, failed woefully. Women still took screenshots of posts and comments, and shared them amongst the smaller groups that had either broken away from FIN or found new homes on other social media platforms (mostly on WhatsApp).

Living in the diaspora seemed to have dissociated Lola Omolola from the daily experiences of women living in Nigeria. She also did not seem to appreciate that the feminists volunteering to lead the protests were veterans. Most of them were part of the #OccupyNigeria protests which took place in 2012, during which Nigerians were demanding for better governance. They had also organised #BBOG marches in their various cities and have been consistently participating in several online and physical forms of activism concerning women's rights.

Ultimately, women's social experiences of being monitored and controlled were exactly what underpinned the formation of FIN in the first instance. Yet it appeared that the platform itself was now turning into another source of control because it was "owned" and "controlled" by one single person. The initial appearance of power-sharing amongst women as equals was a façade; in the face of resistance, Lola Omolola took on the stance of an authoritarian.

Concluding Thoughts

Having participated in the June 2015 #BeingFemaleinNigeria activism on Twitter, I joined the Facebook-based FIN group with a mixture of excitement and trepidation. Excitement, because I had been invited to the platform by a fellow feminist; trepidation, because I've had to leave several

Facebook groups in the past since they appeared to be an extension of the oppressiveness that constituted my daily life as a Nigerian queer woman and feminist. My perspective, however, is that demands for equality and equity are not practicable without taking on board homophobia, sexism, racism, xenophobia, ableism. FIN initially appeared to be an entirely different world, one that promised such a vision. The women I met in the group and those who subsequently joined us in the early days were willing to be open and follow the rules. The group encouraged me to start a feminist e-zine, an intersectionalist space where diverse feminist voices are documented.

The downside of FIN today is the current size of the group. There are presently so many members that it has become nearly impossible to enforce rules and there is no longer a sense of ownership and sisterhood. In spite of the exit of feminists and the more forward-looking women from the group (and I dare say because of it), FIN has been growing. By 5 April 2017, the number had risen to 815,000. Unlike its beginnings, when there were diverse voices expressing themselves, the dominant voice on FIN today has mutated into the "traditional" Nigerian woman with more conventional viewpoints. The comment threads are full of the kind of advice and opinions that the administrators battled with when the group was newly established.

I had believed that FIN would evolve into a platform where there would be peer education, that actively demanding equal rights and equity for women would in no way impact negatively on your ambitions to reach the pinnacle of being. But towards the end of 2016, I went quiet because hyper-religiosity had seeped back into FIN and there were a large number of women who seemed to have their own agenda, constantly posting subtly religious posts celebrating husbands and marriage, which were approved by the administrators. Although I'm still a member of FIN, I have stopped writing posts or commenting on the threads because I feel like I'm shouting in the wind.

The early FIN still stands as a prototype for feminist organising, particularly in terms of providing safe spaces where feminists could share their trauma and get support. FIN initially provided a zone free of judgement, where women from different socio-economic backgrounds, religious/spiritual leanings and sexuality could rub shoulders as true equals and work together for a more equitable society. Despite the shifts in its culture and power dynamics, FIN represents a possible world where Nigerian women, in all their diversity, could come together and see why feminism is so important, a place where women could learn of their

history, and get to know that even in the face of oppression, there have been women who stood up for justice, for what they believed.

Endnotes

1 Adichie is not a member of the Warmate Bookclub, although she participated in the #BeingFemaleinNigeria activism on Twitter.

2 "Closed group" is the Facebook term for groups that you can join by sending a request to the group administrator. Like public groups, closed groups can be found by search engines.

3 "Secret group" is the Facebook term for groups in which membership is by invitation only. The group cannot be found by search engines.

4. The reason men have tried, and are still trying, to infiltrate FIN is because they are used to being able to enter such spaces without any protest and therefore feel entitled to do so.

5 A traditional civic council, the highest in pre-colonial Yoruba states.

6 On the 14 April 2014, 276 schoolgirls in Chibok, Borno State, Nigeria were abducted from their secondary school hostels by members of the insurgent group, Boko Haram. The Bring Back Our Girls campaign was formed around the rescue and return of the schoolgirls to their families. www.bringbackourgirls.ng

7 Not her real name. Telephone interview with Ayilara, 18 January 2017.

8 Slut-shaming is the act of criticising a woman for her real or presumed sexual activity, or for behaving in ways that someone thinks are associated with her real or presumed sexual activity.

9 *The War Room* is a Christian drama film written by Alex Kendrick and produced in 2015 by Stephen Kendrick. It follows the matrimonial travails of Elizabeth and Tony. A chance meeting with Miss Clara changes the course of their lives when she champions prayer as the solution to Tony's cheating.

10 Telemundo Central is a Spanish-language television network features melodramatic tele-novellas.

11 Not her real name. Interview with Lateefat in Ibadan, 6 February 2017.

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Women Organising in Ghana: The Network for Women's Rights (NETRIGHT) and NGO Networking for Policy Intervention[1]

Akua Britwum

Introduction

Ghanaian women's agitations for economic justice have been a marked feature of their activism since pre-independence nationalist struggles, including the trade blockades of 1917 and 1918. Market traders mobilised resources for party activities and took part in disruptive civil acts that undermined the colonial economy and contributed to making political change possible (Awumbila, 2001; Manuh, 1993; Tsikata, 1989). Ghanaian women also contributed significantly to the success of the Convention People's Party (CPP) in national elections (Tsikata, 1989). Such political actions, however, were propelled by broad national interests and were not directed specifically towards women's rights and gender equality concerns.

During the early post-independence period, two dominant women's organisations – the Ghana Women's League and the Ghana Federation of Women (known earlier as the National Federation of Gold Coast Women) – merged to form the National Council of Ghana Women (NCGW). NCGW's activities were mainly educational policy campaigns, protest against international injustices, talks, demonstrations on nutrition, childcare and charity donations to deprived children (Awumbila, 2001; Tsikata, 1987). Because of its close alignment with the CPP, the NCGW was disbanded by the military junta which overthrew Ghana's first President, Dr Kwame Nkrumah, in 1966. From 1966 onwards, women's groups were mainly charity-oriented professional and religious associations, whose operations hardly questioned women's social status.

Broad-based national women's organisations emerged in the early 1980s: these were the Federation of Ghanaian Women and the 31st December

Women's Movement (DWM). Their interests initially were in presenting alternatives to existing feminine stereotypes. In addition, the International Federation of Women Lawyers (FIDA) brought discussions on women's rights into the public domain. The DWM, dominated by Nana Konadu Agyeman-Rawlings – the wife of the longest serving head of state and president of Ghana – was arguably the most visible of these organisations. Like the NCGW, the DWM suffered its demise when the regime within which it was embedded – the Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC), then the National Democratic Congress – came to an end in 2000. Subsequently, a number of civil society groups working around women's rights emerged. Though their numbers kept growing, it was only FIDA that initially had some visibility and came close to the dominance enjoyed by DWM.

More recently, the Network for Women's Rights in Ghana (NETRIGHT) has played a vital role on the landscape of women's rights work. In 2017, NETRIGHT's membership includes some 81 organisations and 151 individuals across the country. Several of these organisations are representative organs, with members of their own. They include the women's wing of the main national trade union centre, the Trades Union Congress, Ghana, and some of its affiliated unions. This profile outlines how NETRIGHT reached this position, presenting a brief overview of events leading to its formation, its organisational structure, and the challenges and prospects faced by the Network. My perspective is shaped by my experience as the fifth convenor of NETRIGHT, from January 2010 to December 2016.

The Formation of NETRIGHT

The preparations towards the United Nations' Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 raised doubts about the strength of civil society groups as effective organs for the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA). The preparations revealed the presence of numerous women's rights groups that generally worked in isolation and had little occasion to come together to undertake joint projects. They were constrained by their organisational capacity to form joint platforms for carrying out collective actions. In 1999, a study on gender training in Ghana (Acquaye-Baddoo and Tsikata, 2001) by the University of Ghana's Institute for Statistical, Social and Economics Research (ISSER) underscored this concern, noting that, despite the myriad women's rights groups in Ghana, their collective impact was minimal.

Constrained by their localised and uncoordinated approaches, they tended, the report noted, to work separately, offering little chance to harness collective efforts to have an impact on the policy space for women's rights and gender equality work in the country.

The Third World Network-Africa (TWN-Africa) called a meeting in Accra to discuss the findings of the ISSER study. At this meeting were a number of individuals and representatives of organisations working on women's rights and gender equality. They identified with the study's findings on the weak impact of isolated civil society actions and decided that a national body bringing together all groups would magnify their influence. The proposed body was envisaged as a network of organisations and individuals committed to women's rights and gender justice in Ghana.

NETRIGHT was thus formed in 1999. Its founders had in mind a network that would become a forum for sharing development concerns, providing alternative approaches to gender equality work and amplifying the voices of women's rights groups in order to influence national policy discourse. In setting up this unified platform, emphasis was placed on incorporating a human rights discourse into work on women's equality whilst also working towards economic justice for women in national policy-making. To date, the aims of NETRIGHT retain the core principles of its formation.

Organisational Focus

The feminist principles guiding NETRIGHT's organisational focus and operations derive from an understanding of women's experience of subordination as historical and context-specific. These principles place the emphasis on women's organising in order to confront such injustice, viewing this as an important strategy for building gender-equal societies. NETRIGHT's focus is women, an intentional bias deriving from a position that women's experience of gender discrimination lies at the core of all forms of existing disadvantage around the globe. As a network, NETRIGHT believes that years of discrimination and oppression of women inhibit Ghana's efforts at national development. These principles guide NETRIGHT's choice of activities on its key thematic foci: economic justice for women; gender and natural resources; and movement-building.

A core principle of NETRIGHT is to avoid duplication among the activities of its members. With time, diverse constituencies have emerged in the

women's rights space in Ghana, seeking to address critical policy and legal reform vacuums. Such needs have led to the creation of the Domestic Violence (DV) Coalition and the Women's Manifesto Coalition (WMC) for Ghana. NETRIGHT leverages its voice and impact by bringing these national platforms together as the Three-Coalitions Platform.

In fact, NETRIGHT played an active role in the emergence of the DV and WMC coalitions. Key members of NETRIGHT participated vigorously in the production of the Ghana's Women's Manifesto, at the initiative of ABANTU for Development (Mama et al, 2005). The Women's Manifesto is a compilation of demands in ten thematic areas, providing useful documentation for making claims for women's rights in Ghana (The Coalition for the Women's Manifesto for Ghana, 2004). Dzodzi Tsikata, as convenor of NETRIGHT at the time of its production, as well as Patricia Blankson-Akakpo, then a senior programmes officer, served on the drafting committee. Elizabeth Akpalu, a steering-committee member of NETRIGHT, served on the WMC's steering committee. In the Central Region, I organised the consultations providing inputs on content areas of the Manifesto.

Towards the end of 1999, there was a terrible spate of murders of women in Accra and nothing was being done about these crimes. The serial killings of women led to NETRIGHT, together with Sisters' Keepers, organising a series of activities in early 2000. This platform later engaged in actions influencing the passage of the Domestic Violence Bill into law – seven whole years of campaigning later – in 2007. The Domestic Violence Coalition emerged to monitor implementation of the Domestic Violence Act. NETRIGHT used the Three Coalitions platform to engage the national machinery in the Ministry for Women and Children's Affairs, which was later restructured as the Ministry for Gender, Children and Social Protection.

At the regional level, NETRIGHT has organised joint advocacy platforms with the Association of African Women for Research and Development (AAWORD), the Africa Women's Development and Communication Network and WoMin, an African regional platform for gender issues related to natural-resource extractive industries. On the international front, NETRIGHT has, since 1999, held meetings to review the Ghanian government's commitments to the Beijing Platform for Action and feed the outcomes into the five-yearly Shadow Reports presented at the NGO Committee on the Status of Women (NGO/CSW) in New York. NETRIGHT has held side events at a number of CSW

meetings in New York. Other global-level engagements include collaborations with the Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID); Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN); Women in Development Europe+ (WIDE+); *Coordinadora de la Mujer* (Women's Coordinator); Forum of Women NGOs, Kyrgyzstan; and Programme on Women's Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (PWESCR). NETRIGHT is a member of the Women's Major Group; Women's Working Group for Financing for Development; and the Feminist Sector of the CSOs' Partnership for Development Effectiveness (CPDE). Patricia Blankson-Akakpo serves as one of the co-chairs of CPDE.

Geographical Spread in Ghana and Membership Mobilisation

Concerned about its survival and direction, NETRIGHT decided that its member organisations should take turns to host the Network. In the early years, hosting responsibilities included providing office space, administrative and logistic support as well as financial management. The host organisation served as an information clearinghouse, calling and organising meetings, and disseminating the outcomes to members. NETRIGHT's action plans were also implemented by the host organisation. The first organisational host was the Gender Studies and Human Rights Documentation Centre (The Gender Centre). The Third World Network-Africa (TWN-Africa) was next to host NETRIGHT. The rotational hosting ended when TWN-Africa offered NETRIGHT permanent office space: first, a shared office with TWN-Africa's Gender Unit in its main office block and, later, a three-roomed outhouse with independent facilities. NETRIGHT maintains this structure as its permanent office.

Reflecting feminist principles of equality and absence of hierarchies in women's rights activism, NETRIGHT began with a flexible organisational structure, locating core decision-making in the general body of members. The daily implementation of the Network's activities was supervised by a representative of the hosting organisation. The Gender Centre, the Network's first host, provided its first convenor: Dorcas Coker-Appiah. The second convenor was Takyiwaa Manuh, a faculty member at the University of Ghana and a member of the steering committee. Dzodzi Tsikata, a representative of TWN-Africa, was the third to convene NETRIGHT.

As the Network's tasks expanded and its operations became more complex, some organisational re-ordering became necessary. First, there was the need for an independent secretariat to take up implementation of NETRIGHT's

action plans and maintain contact with members. With the acquisition of a permanent office space, the basis for convening had to be delinked from hosting to enhance organisational efficiency. Thus, ABANTU for Development took up the convening of the Network under Rose Mensah-Kutin and the secretariat remained in the permanent office space provided by TWN-Africa. The fourth convenor, Rose Mensah-Kutin, served for six years, during which time she oversaw an institutionalisation process that specified a fixed three-year term, renewable once, for the positions of the convenor, deputy convenor and membership on the steering committee. The convenor and the deputy were to be elected from the steering committee. This arrangement allowed NETRIGHT to benefit from the wide range of its membership in the country and in different locations in the struggle for women's rights. I served as the fifth convenor, bringing an additional dimension to the structure. As a faculty member of the University of Cape Coast, my election meant that convening would now take place beyond the confines of the national capital where the secretariat was located. This further affirmed NETRIGHT's national base. Dorcas Coker-Appiah was the deputy-convenor. The current convenor, its sixth, is Pauline Vande-Pallen of TWN-Africa, with Adwoa Sakyi as the third deputy.

The unique feature of NETRIGHT is its national presence in all of Ghana's ten regions. "Focal points", individual or organisational members in the regions, carry out the regional activities and mobilise members for the Network. There are nine such focal points. The secretariat assumes responsibility for the Greater Accra Region, the national capital, where it is located. To date, the main governing and policy-setting body remains the annual general meeting (AGM), supported by the steering committee which interprets the decisions of the AGM and oversees the work of the secretariat. The latter implements decisions of the Network and works under the daily supervision of the convenor and deputy convenor. The convenors are in turn supported by the steering committee. NETRIGHT maintains a women-led structure, notwithstanding its national spread and diverse membership. Male members cannot take up leadership positions. Some men carry out the day-to-day activities of the Network and intervene in public spaces. However, they are barred from taking up positions within the steering committee or serving as focal points.

The initial structure was informed by two concerns. The first was to enhance members' ownership by avoiding a structured bureaucracy. The

second was to ensure organisational survival and encourage NETRIGHT's organisational independence in setting its own agenda. The latter informed the hosting arrangements, which were also about facilitating cost-sharing among members. Members volunteer their expertise and time to undertake programme activities. Convenorship and deputies, membership of the steering committee as well as focal points are non-remunerated positions.

NETRIGHT's Activities and Organisational Impact

The three key thematic focus areas that underpin NETRIGHT's activities – economic justice for women, gender and natural resources, and movement-building – are outlined in turn below.

i. Economic Justice for Women

NETRIGHT's economic-justice work is geared towards influencing macro-economic and social policies in order to secure and enhance women's livelihoods. NETRIGHT does this through policy dialogue and lobbying, by providing a gendered perspective on development financing and its effectiveness as well as national and local government development policies. The Network also strives to incorporate a gendered dimension into the policies and practices of Ghana's informal economy, particularly cross-border and local trade as well as market spaces.

NETRIGHT's activities that are designed to shape economic policy-making at the national and local government levels include gender analyses of the first and second Ghana Poverty Reduction Strategy (GPRS 1 and 2), district-level development plans as well as the national social-protection schemes. In November 2001, NETRIGHT organised a well-attended seminar on the GPRS Paper, drawing participants from all the ten regions of Ghana. The seminar highlighted the absence of a gender focus in the GPRSP as well as the flaws inherent in its neoliberal agenda for eradicating poverty in Ghana. Using the outcome of the seminar, NETRIGHT made a presentation at a World Bank-sponsored forum on the subject later that year. The occasion was used to restate the Network's position on the inability of the GPRS Paper to deal with the gendered systems and structures underlying women's poverty in Ghana. NETRIGHT refused to endorse the GPRS process, yet documentation on the process states that the Network's members provided technical support.

Other activities within the economic justice thematic focus are gender budgeting initiatives at the local and national government level. NETRIGHT's position is that there is a need to promote and expand the critical engagement of women's rights groups in economic policy-making. Accordingly, NETRIGHT organised an Economic Justice Capacity Building training workshop from 30 May to 6 June 2010 to build the capabilities of members and grassroots women to engage effectively in national, sectoral and local government budget processes.

ii. Gender and Natural Resources

The gender and natural resources thematic area aims at protecting women's livelihoods, with particular emphasis on land access and ownership. This includes monitoring the impact of the extractive industries' land use and acquisitions on women's health and economic and social wellbeing. The activities consist of research and advocacy in the oil and gas and gold-mining sectors. NETRIGHT undertook research on the announcement of Ghana's oil find, documenting women's concerns about the possible effects of oil drilling on health and livelihoods in fringe communities (NETRIGHT, 2004). The findings were used to engage parliamentarians and other actors during the development of legislation to govern Ghana's infant oil and gas industry. NETRIGHT's activities in 2014 led to the formation of women accountability committees in selected districts to engage actors in the oil and gas sector.

iii. Movement-building

Movement-building is a core pillar of NETRIGHT's organisational activity, since it underpins the Network's existence and capacity to engage policy; it is also the basis for NETRIGHT's legitimacy in claiming to promote women's rights. Through mobilising and activism, NETRIGHT works at all times to multiply its organisational platforms in order to expand its reach and enhance impact. Multilevel strategies are adopted, with the choice of activities being directed by the belief that information-sharing, regular membership meetings, partnerships, collaboration and networking with similar-minded organisations will maximise resource utilisation to achieve results. Specific activities include those designed to strengthen the Network's internal capacity; raising the secretarial staff knowledge base; and an expansion of policy engagement platforms.

Beyond its mandatory internal, membership and steering committee meetings, NETRIGHT serves as a broad front for mobilising women. The Network was thus responsible for mobilising women's groups to make inputs into the Constitutional review process, participating in the ongoing discussion of bills related to spousal and property rights in marriage and affirmative action. Moreover, NETRIGHT holds an end-of-year event to present and discuss a review of local, regional and global events affecting women's lives during that year. The 2003 and 2008 reviews have been compiled and published (NETRIGHT, 2009). The events provide a broad forum reaching beyond NETRIGHT's members and expanding the basis for developing focus areas for the following year. This forum has also served as a mobilising platform.

Setting Up for Survival: Challenges and Prospects

One struggle facing NETRIGHT is funding and organisational flexibility in its structure. NETRIGHT was envisaged as a membership-owned network dependent on the internal resources – financial, material and human – of its members, devoid of donor support. This was a decision that founding members felt was necessary in order to maintain NETRIGHT's independence and retain its political focus. The expansion in the focus of the Network and recognition of its role as the lead organ of women's rights and gender equality work in Ghana brought demands that the voluntary approach could not meet. Funds from membership dues were simply inadequate. First were the demands on their time as members advanced in their fulltime careers and assumed senior-level responsibilities. Second was the nature of some demands requiring specialised skills outside the pool of members, a necessity since it was important to maintain the credibility that NETRIGHT had developed over time. Such expertise often had financial implications. An additional challenge was legitimacy within the Ghanaian legal framework for the operation of civil society groups. These demands were a clear signal that some element of structure was important.

The need for a permanent secretariat to manage NETRIGHT's affairs saw the appointment of the first programme officer, hired to take charge of the daily administrative tasks, which had previously been the responsibility of the hosting institution. Patricia Blankson-Akakpo has held the position since the second convenor assumed office. Other programme staff have

been Afua Ansre, Selina Owusu, Ruth Grant Antwi, Joyce Nyame, Amba Mensah-Forson, Cynthia Sunu, Grace Quarshie and Samuel Pappoe. In 2015, as part of wide-ranging institutional reform, the position of executive director was created to take up additional responsibility hived from the role of the convenor, thus reducing the latter's supervisory duties. Patricia Blankson-Akakpo was appointed to this position. Her wealth of institutional memory and political commitment smoothed the transition. The drawback, however, has been a reduction in the direct engagement of members in NETRIGHT's implementation activities. What this portends, in terms of members' connectedness with the Network, remains a question for future events to reveal.

The second thorny issue remains financing, bringing with it an additional requirement, that of formalising NETRIGHT's status within Ghanaian law. In 2004, the question of registration was raised and shelved. Later, however, NETRIGHT was registered as a limited liability organisation. Slowly, the steering committee moved into raising funds from a very select group of funders of women's rights work, such as the African Women's Development Fund. But as opportunities for institutional funding shrink, NETRIGHT has found itself having to pursue project funding. Although the choice has always been selective, focusing on its thematic areas, the demands have sometimes reduced NETRIGHT's spontaneity to act on critical emerging issues on the national landscape. Even more critical has been the health of its member organisations and their ability to hold onto *their* thematic focus in the women's rights space, making additional demands on NETRIGHT to expand its remit.

At the beginning of 2017, there were four paid staff members working for NETRIGHT: the executive director, two part-time officers and one intern. Funding to enable NETRIGHT to maintain its independence and secure its space within the national women's rights front remains a real challenge, which appears difficult to resolve in the short term. The survival of NETRIGHT calls for a re-conceptualisation of women's rights activism in ways that seem to require a bureaucratic structure that retains mobilising possibilities. Right now, the secretariat remains the face of the Network and serves as a pillar in NETRIGHT's survival.

NETRIGHT has a vibrant record of women's organising since the 1990s. Current expectations of the network have expanded, even as the material

base for its work has constricted. NETRIGHT's participatory research with women in communities affected by oil and gas extraction provides an example of how women's voices and change-making potential have been amplified through the formation of structures for engagement with key actors in the oil and gas sector. Addressing NETRIGHT's prospects for the future raises the question of how to organise in a way that creates a balance between structure and broader participation. *How* this strategic balance is to be achieved will call for innovative thinking and deepening our conceptions of appropriate organisational functioning for the collective advancement of women's rights and gender equality.

Endnotes

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"I'm not a feisty bitch, I'm a feminist!" Feminism in *AWAKE! Women of Africa*

Ntokozo Yingwana

Introduction

Although being an *African*, a *sex worker* and a *feminist* are often considered to be incongruent identities, in certain embodiments they intersect and inform each other. This Profile highlights what feminism can learn from analysing sex workers' rights activism among a group of Cape Town-based sex worker feminists called *AWAKE! Women of Africa*. *AWAKE!* organically evolved out of the South African movement of sex workers called Sisonke (meaning "we are together" in isiZulu), when some of its members who self-identified as feminists decided to come together to explore what it meant for them to be African sex worker feminists.

The overarching continental movement of sex workers, to which Sisonke is affiliated, is the African Sex Worker Alliance (ASWA). While Sisonke and ASWA tend to describe their leadership and organising as feminist, *AWAKE!*'s identification of itself as a feminist group is more explicit. The following reflections are informed by research interviews and participant observation with *AWAKE!* I begin by showing how members of the group largely attributed their feminism to their sex workers' rights activism and vice versa. Subsequently, I argue that African sex workers' rights organising is needed to advance feminist politics on the African continent.

As an African feminist and an activist for sex workers' rights, I prefer the phrase *sex work* to *prostitution*, since it is devoid of the moral judgement often attached to the latter (Leigh, 1997). Sex work can simply be understood as the exchange of sex for money, or reward of pecuniary value (Richter, 2012: 63). Following Desiree Lewis, I understand African feminism[1] to be "a shared intellectual commitment to critiquing gender and imperialism coupled with

a collective focus on a continental identity shaped by particular relations of subordination in the world economy and global social and cultural practices" (Lewis 2001: 4).

I employ this definition to evoke a strand of African feminism that is informed by sex workers' political action and intellectual work, which I refer to as African sex work feminism. Indeed, the births of many sex worker movements in Africa were supported by activism on the part of feminist scholars such as Sylvia Tamale, Hope Chigudu and Solome Nakaweesi-Kimbugwe. However, most feminists and women's groups on the continent still fail to take into consideration sex workers' struggles for human rights in their own activism and organising (Mgbako, 2016). Some even go as far as actively excluding sex worker activists from feminist spaces.

Conceptualising Sex Work

Feminist scholarship on sex work is primarily divided into two opposing schools of thought: the *sexual exploitation approach* and the *sex work model* (MacKinnon, 2011: 272). These crudely distinguish between constraint and choice feminists (Krüger, 2004: 140). The sexual exploitation approach views sex work as the "oldest oppression" (MacKinnon, 2011: 273) – an institutionalised form of sex inequality and a direct manifestation of patriarchy. Anti-sex-work feminists such as Andrea Dworkin (1993) and Catharine MacKinnon (2011) argue that sex work is intrinsically exploitative to women and should therefore be abolished. In the opposing camp, there are the pro-sex-work feminists who argue for the sex work model, which considers sex work as a form of labour like any other and (at that) the "oldest profession" (Nagle, 1997; Jeffreys, 2011). These feminists make a clear distinction between voluntary (adult consensual) sex work and forced sexual exploitation. Pro-sex-work feminists argue that criminalisation of this trade is what fuels the violations in the sex work industry, and therefore advocate for its decriminalisation.

The complex realities of selling sex in Africa, however, do not lend themselves neatly to this polarisation, which simply presents sex workers as either victims or agents (Mgbako and Smith, 2011). The anti- and pro-sex-work feminist debate limits the discourse to either force or choice. This is particularly unhelpful when trying to understand the lived experiences of African sex workers. As ASWA Regional Coordinator Daughtie Ogutu explains:

> Our world is not a world of extremes. There are so many grey and pink lines in between and we cross them more often than never... [T]here is so much of our struggle in between addressing violence on sex workers, addressing stigma and discrimination.[2]

So even though most African sex worker feminists will admit to having chosen to sell sex primarily for socio-economic reasons, and acknowledge the dangers encountered in the sex work industry, they do not believe that this gives anti-sex-work feminists the right to strip them of their agency. And while many African sex worker feminists will attest to the economic independence and sexual liberation that sex work has afforded them, they do not necessarily ascribe to the so-called "happy hooker" trope (Mann, 2014: 3) that is often propagated by (predominantly global North-based) pro-sex-work feminists. This is because their realities speak to both the harms and gains of selling sex in Africa. Hence Chi Mgbako and Laura Smith's (2011) call for a far more nuanced approach to the sex work feminism debate, one that transcends the victim-versus-agent dichotomy and acknowledges the complexities of African sex workers' lived experiences.

Criminalisation and Sex-Worker Rights Activism in South Africa

Numerous studies have shown that criminalisation of sex work amounts to structural violence towards sex workers (Doezema, 2001; Tamale, 2011; Marlise, 2012; Mgbako, 2016). A report by ASWA documents violations experienced by sex workers in Africa[3] as ranging from police brutality, discrimination by health care givers, abuse by pimps and brothel managers, violence from clients, and stigma from community members (ASWA, 2011). These human rights violations against sex workers are common in Africa as most countries either fully criminalise sex work or elements of it, such as soliciting, brothel-keeping or pimping.[4] South Africa is one of those countries.

Under the Sexual Offences Act (No. 23 of 1957), a remnant of the apartheid regime's Immorality Act, sex work is criminalised in South Africa. In 2007, the law was amended to include the purchasing of sex work (Krüger, 2004: 149). Therefore, the sex worker, client and anyone living off the earnings of a sex worker are all considered criminals. The majority of sex workers in South Africa are women, most of whom are Black, poor and street-based. According to a 2013 sex worker population size estimate study, there are roughly between 132,000

and 182,000 sex workers in South Africa, with approximately 6,000 transgender women, 7,000 men and 138,000 women (about 0,9% of the country's female population) (South African National AIDS Council, 2013: 4).

The Sex Worker Education and Advocacy Taskforce (SWEAT) is a human rights-based non-governmental organisation (NGO) that advocates for the rights of adult consenting sex workers and the decriminalisation of sex work in South Africa. SWEAT hosts the national movement Sisonke. Sisonke was established at a sex workers' meeting of about 70 members from across the country in 2003. The movement currently has committees in four provinces, and about 800 members across all nine (Buthelezi, 2017). Sisonke's vision is to see sex work recognised as a legitimate form of work in South Africa, "where sex workers' health and human rights are ensured" (Sisonke, 2016).

Sisonke is one of the original members of ASWA (n.d.), which is a pan-African network of 85 sex-worker-led organisations/groups based in 23 countries across the continent. The alliance initially came about through learning-exchange visits between East and Southern African sex workers' rights activists. Citing Africa's political liberation movements as sources of inspiration, the alliance was launched at the first ever African Sex Workers Conference in Johannesburg (South Africa) in February, 2009 (Global Network of Sex Work Projects, n.d.). ASWA advocates for the decriminalisation of sex work, and the recognition of health, labour and general human rights of sex workers on the continent.

African Sex Worker Feminists Unite

AWAKE! was established in 2013 by a group of 12 women and transgender women, Cape Town-based sex workers who were active members of Sisonke and self-identified as feminists. Being largely concerned with sexual- and gender-based violence, the group often engaged in international campaigns such as the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-based Violence and the One Billion Rising/V-Day movement. However, despite *AWAKE!*'s involvement in such women's rights-based campaigns and movements, some local feminists were not so accepting. They felt that the group members of *AWAKE!* needed to be rescued from sex work rather than being recognised as comrades in the struggle for gender and sexual liberation.

The reluctance by conservative mainstream feminists to believe that anyone would consent to selling sex has resulted in the "active exclusion of

sex workers and their positive experiences of sex work from feminist spaces" (Ditmore et al., 2010: 38). Members of *AWAKE!* routinely experienced this form of exclusion, as they often left feminist dialogues feeling disempowered and disillusioned by what feminist solidarity actually meant. Sisonke national organiser Duduzile Dlamini, one of the founding members of the feminist group *AWAKE!*, recalls the unfriendly reception she often received at feminist spaces:

> What confused me is that when everyone introduced themselves as feminist and we introduced ourselves as sex workers… They were not happy. Not like, you know, when people are happy, they would be like, "Oh wow! Sex workers are feminists"… But it was like ignorance. And at that time, I hadn't learned how to stand up for myself and say, "Yes, we are [feminists]".[5]

Sex worker feminist Jill Nagle argues that mainstream feminists need to work with sex workers to be able to move "beyond analysing how sex work oppresses women, to theorising how feminism reproduces oppression of sex workers" (Nagle, 1997: 13). In response to this feminist oppression, *AWAKE!* embarked on a collective journey of self-exploration to discover what it means for them to be African sex worker feminists, in order to be able to assert their agency in volatile feminist spaces. SWEAT and Sisonke supported the group by providing a venue, transport reimbursement and workshop materials for the group meetings.

Reconciling Sex Work with Feminism

At the time I was working for SWEAT as the Advocacy Officer, so I was permitted to join the group on this adventure. We met weekly to share and discuss literature on the various strands of feminisms and their political implications. We also robustly engaged in contemporary feminist debates, such as the omission of Maya Angelou's sex work past in her obituary, and bell hooks' reference to Beyoncé Knowles as an "anti-feminist – that is a terrorist, especially in terms of the impact on young girls" (Diaz, 2014). As *AWAKE!* grew confident in its self-identification as a feminist group, we started attending public lectures by visiting feminist scholars such as Nivedita Menon[6] and Chandra Mohanty[7].

Through this collective learning, the *AWAKE!* members eventually came to the realisation that being sex workers does not exclude them from feminism.

They expressed the view that it was precisely because they spurned gender and sexual expectations of womanhood that they could self-identify as feminists. As a result, the group repeatedly cited sex work as a contributing factor to their self-identification as feminists. Some even began noticing how claiming their feminist identity started influencing their sex work. According to one of the *AWAKE!* members, Sindisiwe Dlamini:

> [W]hen before I was a feminist, I used [to be] like, "Okay – he pays me. I have to listen to him, what he wants". But now, bull. He pays me, but if I don't wanna do that, I don't wanna do that. Because I am a feminist. So he can rather take his money and *fokof*.[8, 9]

For Sindisiwe Dlamini, the client may have the financial power to seek out her services but she still has the power to negotiate the sexual acts she is willing to perform, and if the client cannot meet her terms then she has the power to refuse. This suggests a nuanced shifting and sharing of power between the (female) sex worker and (male) client. According to Tamale, this "see-saw of power relations during the commercial sex encounter underlies the complexity of gender relations in eroticised situations" (Tamale, 2011: 161). Sindisiwe Dlamini's interaction above with her client thus destabilises traditional notions of gender and sexuality.

Melissa Ditmore et al. (2010: 43) encourage us to consider "female prostitutes [as] gender outlaws who break sexual taboos and may potentially experience sexual liberation". Indeed, some *AWAKE!* members alluded to having gained a sense of sexual liberation through selling sex. At the Decolonising Feminism Conference, *AWAKE!* member Nosipho Vidima[10] (2016) stated: "I use my sexual liberation as my passport out of poverty, which brings me economic independence". *AWAKE!* member Zoé Black,[11] when asked to describe how she reconciled sex work and feminism, responded: "it is a liberation… You can manoeuvre your way through spaces and platforms that were not really open before".[12]

Black also explained how she went about educating other women about their bodies and encouraged them to claim their sexual liberation. After her presentation at a feminist conference, a group of women approached her to learn more about sex and sex work. From how to give a blow job to spotting an STI,[13] the delegates sought Black's advice, since they considered her a sex expert. By sharing knowledge and insights from her experiences in the sex work industry, Black helped expand their perceptions of sex. Consequently, her

fellow feminists started becoming more receptive to sex workers' rights and the problems they faced.[14] This inspired solidarity – demonstrating how "pleasure can also provide energy to fuel political mobilization" (Cornwall et al., 2013: 3).

Forming Solidarities Across Marginalised Sex(ualiti)es

African sex-worker groups have a long history of forming solidarities with LGBTQI[15] movements across the continent (Mgbako, 2016). For instance, the UHAI (meaning "well-being" in Kiswahili) East African Sexual Health and Rights Initiative (EASHRI) is an indigenous fund that supports LGBTQI and sex worker organising and activism across the region (UHAI EASHRI, n.d.). UHAI has close relations with ASWA, given that the regional coordinator of the sex-worker alliance, Daughtie Ogutu, serves on the fund's board.

Sisonke also advocates for the rights of LGBTQI sex workers in South Africa.[16] Four transgender women were occasional participants at *AWAKE!*'s former weekly sessions. Even though the group members tended to associate female bodies with feminism, and patriarchy with male bodies, they accepted transgender women sex workers as fellow feminists. When asked how she reconciled being a transgender woman and a feminist, this is what *AWAKE!* member Priscilla[17] had to say: "I am a woman made in a man's body. So, I also fight patriarchy because of the abuse of women. We also get abused ..."[18] Transgender sex workers are open to abuse on additional fronts because they overtly flout heteronormative ideas about gender, sexuality and sex. Through the activism and solidarity of African sex worker feminists with LGBTQI movements, however, these violations are being challenged by joint interventions, such as the sensitisation training programme with the South African Police Services (SAPS) (Women's Legal Centre, 2014).[19]

Sex Workers' Rights Activism as Feminism in Action

The members of *AWAKE!* all agreed that feminism was not merely a word or an identity, but something one does and lives by. Indeed, they often explained their embodied understanding of feminism in relation to their sex workers' rights activism. This could be partly attributed to the fact that most of the group members had been involved in human rights activism with SWEAT and Sisonke for years, as another member of *AWAKE!*, Roxy,[20] explained:

> Violence – domestic violence, sexual violence, violation of human rights, police harassment, police brutality – it is not working for us!

> And that is our fight together as Sisonke members. We are going to fight for what is right for us as sex workers and as feminists.[21]

Advocating and lobbying for sex workers' rights was often cited as a demonstration of one's activism, and by extension, evidence of one's feminism. For members of *AWAKE!*, thought and action should never be divorced from each other. Their sex workers' rights activism continues to inform their feminist scholarship and vice versa.

Vidima (2016) stresses the need for mainstream feminists to recognise that African sex worker feminists hold feminist values, and we therefore need to work collectively to build solidarities across the movements. Although *AWAKE! Women of Africa* has since evolved from its original form,[22] whenever I meet these powerful African sex worker feminists I marvel at how far we have come in our collective journey of self-discovery and I am reminded of what one of the members, Gabbi,[23] once expressed to me: "I'm not a feisty bitch, I'm a feminist!"[24] However, I do believe that it is precisely this feisty bitchiness that comes with sex workers' rights activism which is needed to transform African feminism.

I propose that African sex work feminism forces us to speak to our nuanced lived experiences and complex realities. It reminds us that feminist scholarship should be informed by our political agendas and result in collective solidarity and activism. It encourages us to destabilise heteronormativity by brazenly flouting gendered expectations. It dares us to explore our sexualities and claim our sexual liberation. Finally, it permits us to unashamedly use our bodies to support our livelihoods. These are some of the lessons that African sex workers' rights organising teaches feminism.

Endnotes

1 While recognising that there are varied strands of African feminisms, for the purposes of this analysis, I draw primarily from Lewis's definition.

2 Interview with Daughtie Ogutu, Nairobi, 19 June 2015.

3 The study included four African countries: Kenya, Uganda, South Africa and Zimbabwe.

4 Institute of Development Studies (IDS) (n.d.) *Global Map of Sex Work Law*. Available at http://spl.ids.ac.uk/sexworklaw.

5 Interview with Duduzile Dlamini, Cape Town, 18 July 2014.

6 After her public lecture, Menon forwarded us an electronic version of her book *Seeing Like a Feminist* to help us with our learning.

7 In April 2014, *AWAKE!* met with Mohanty to discuss the challenges we were encountering in certain local feminist spaces.

8 Meaning "fuck off" in Afrikaans.

9 Interview with Sindisiwe Dlamini, Cape Town, 17 July 2014.

10 Vidima is currently the SWEAT Human Rights and Lobbying Officer.

11 Not her real name. During the study, some of the AWAKE! members opted for pseudonyms.

12 Interview with Zoé Black, Cape Town, 17 July 2014.

13 Sexually transmitted infection.

14 Interview with Zoé Black, Cape Town, 17 July 2014.

15 Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning/queer and intersexed persons.

16 One of the weekly Creative Space support groups – called Sisterhood – is made up of transgender female sex workers.

17 Not her real name.

18 Interview with Priscilla, Cape Town, 17 July 2014.

19 See Women's Legal Centre (2014).

20 Not her real name.

21 Interview with Roxy, Cape Town, 18 July 2014.

22 The current form of *AWAKE!* is called *Feminist Extravaganza*. The group holds gender and sexuality workshops with Sisonke members and is currently organising an exhibition to share photographs taken during these workshops.

23 Not her real name.

24 Interview with Gabbi, Cape Town, 17 July 2014.

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AFF 2016 Programme

Faith, Feminism and Fundamentalisms: *Theo Sowa* in plenary discussion with *Everjoice Win*, *Fatou Sow* and *Musimbi Kanyoro*

This discussion of the nexus of religion, fundamentalisms and feminism on the continent took place at the 4th African Feminist Forum in Harare in April 2016.

Theo Sowa: These topics [the intersections of faith, feminism and fundamentalisms] have really dogged our movement in many ways. We live on a continent where religious fundamentalisms as well as other types of fundamentalism (political, economic, social and cultural) have continued to undermine the achievement of our rights. Yet we have a movement where many women are religious and many are secular. We've even lost feminists on the basis of our inability to discuss and sort out these issues. As Hope Chigudu says in one of her books, today "we're going to discuss the undiscussable". EJ, why is it important to talk about faith and fundamentalisms now?

Everjoice Win: Spiritualism is very important for many of us. Faith is important for many of us. Many of us participate in organised religion. These processes... play different roles in terms of our spiritual and emotional wellbeing. They provide a social support system. I'll share an anecdote from my mother. She says these are the two reasons she goes to church: "One, to simply be reminded to be a good person and two, so that on the day that I die, my family won't have to do a lot of work. One of these women from my church can do it... they will be there for me".

Christianity is the religion I was raised in and the one I know. Increasingly on our continent, more and more churches are playing an economic role with the social safety nets some of us used to have and no longer have because our states are failing us. The church becomes the place you go to fill that gap. For some of us, it's an informed choice – something you were raised in. I don't completely subscribe to Karl Marx's assertion that "religion is the opium of the people". For some people, it serves that purpose (an equivalent to smoking your spliff). For others, it's a matter of spirituality and belief in a greater being. For me, it's a personal choice – a conscious choice I've made as a feminist and as a woman.

However, presently I have found some challenges with organised Christianity, in particular, on our continent. We are seeing a rise in very conservative Christianity – a type we haven't seen for a very long time. Very conservative in so far as going back to some of our old traditional value systems that tell women certain messages about how we should behave, what our place in society is, and these are battles that we thought we had [already] fought. Some of you will remember the Churches' Decade for Solidarity with Women after the Nairobi Conference. So many of us had worked with churches to try and advance women's rights. Now we are seeing this rise of a very conservative brand of Christianity with very negative messages for women.

We are also seeing quite a strong connection between church and state. Increasingly, religious Christian institutions are having an impact on laws, policies, policymakers, behaviours and attitudes. In Zimbabwe, during the constitution-making process, there was an attempt to put in the Constitution a phrase that says "Zimbabwe is a Christian country". What does that mean? It's more than a matter of a phrase. What does that mean in terms of human rights, in terms of who gets included in that phrase, bearing in mind the diversity we have? It would have had quite serious implications for human rights for women and various citizens in the way the state would have implemented that Constitution. Increasingly, around elections, we see how governments use religion as reasons to persecute and prosecute groups of people that they don't like – sex workers, LGBTI persons, single women, single mothers like me. This is how it happens and Christianity gets mobilised, particularly around elections, as a way to identify political parties who have fallen out of favour.

The other thing for me is around prosperity gospel – but prosperity for whom? The message that comes out of this gospel is that, if you are not prospering, it means you are not praying hard enough. What does that mean to a poor woman who is trying her damn hardest to fight against the structural causes of that poverty? We're taking women, in particular, and poor peoples' minds away from the fight they need to fight – to challenge these oppressive systems – by telling them that it is their fault. What happened to the liberation theology of the 1990s that taught us that we can actually use religion as a tool for empowerment? That is one of the key things. The other thing around prosperity gospel is that it is very individualistic and not about the collective good. It's about you as an individual and your household

who shall prosper – to hell with everybody else. This links with the neoliberal capitalist model that says, "You will do it and you will be okay as long as you work hard as an individual. If you don't, that's your problem". That nexus between religion, the economic model and system is concerning, because it is not a tool for liberating people and people's minds.

TS: Musimbi, I've heard you speak before about how Africa is "notoriously" spiritual. How do we as feminists work within – and deal with – religious structures that we know have been discriminatory and oppressive? Over the past few years, religious structures have been behind most of the conservatism on our continent, pushing legislation that we have been fighting against for a long time. How do we navigate that?

Musimbi Kanyoro: I'm very comfortable as a woman of faith in the sense that I believe there is something to religion. I can shape it to make it respond to what I believe in. That's very important for me. I was born in a Quaker family and Quakers don't preach to people. So, I didn't really know what it meant to have people preaching to you until I was in high school and university. That's when I learned the kind of religions we are talking about – those organised around telling people how to behave. Our continent is extremely religious. I have not been to any place where I've found people in masses saying that they didn't believe in something. That brought me to a reality of saying, if I have to deal with liberation, social issues and justice, I will have to find a way to make religion part of it. Religion does not just come from somewhere heavenly but it has everything to do with economics, politics, social fractures and neighbourliness. Religions have not *become* conservative, religions have always been conservative and very little has changed. But every time one experiences that particular religion in a particular way, you discover your own way of defining conservatism. Religious stories frame their messages in terms of making what sounds conservative to one person a value of most importance to another person. For example, the current conservatism will do something – and it's been there for a long time – about defining family. In our societies, families are a very important thing. When religions are organising and defining family, people get attracted to how they're defining that family.

Religions tend to define what they see as morality. As long as people of that generation or locality believe that that's how morality should be defined, they are comfortable with it. But count one or two who actually question that, then you start to see what fundamentalism or conservatism

is. Religions that are fundamentalist believe they are giving the fundamental truth. They define truth based on how they see truth at that particular time for themselves. That's very dangerous, because this means that religions are double-edged swords. I, personally, became a feminist by finding things that I was brought up to believe in as completely unhelpful to my work on justice and feminism. Some things I found helpful were the possibilities of supporting those in struggle. Religions do it really well.

I also found that the very scriptures that people believe in do not bring much dignity to women. Many unnamed women are in the scriptures of the Bible – just like in our society today. We do things, they are not heard. I can raise that and say that the traditions we believe in do exactly the same, modeling what has happened. There is so much violence – rape and incest. There are certain passages in the Bible, things that were not explained to us when we were reading the scriptures. I read these and became more aware of the extreme injustices toward feminist theologians.

Any scripture records the history of a people at a particular time. They can take it as a model or a message being passed down at a particular time. I have to be able to analyse and choose what is important for me and my generation. It is important for feminists not to shun religion and run away from it, because it's going to stay forever. But let's define mechanisms and tools to analyse religions and the holy scripts we receive. That is what governs a majority of the communities because they are told that "your scriptures read this way". The leaders act like military [heads of] state, they say, wholesale, "this is what you have to march and go on". I'm very much in favour of those feminists who subscribe to feminism by using the tools that they made and *not* the master's tools.

TS: Fatou, you've spoken before about the extent to which analysis of religion tends to strengthen women's knowledge of religious texts. Does it fail or succeed? What is your experience?

Fatou Sow: I would like to tell you what my stance is on religion, as the other panelists did. They strongly defined their identities, and stated that they were Christian women and believers and practicing. I am Peul (Fulani), but culturally Wolof, the major ethnic group in Senegal. I am Senegalese. I was born and raised in a Muslim family. I was taught to recite the Qur'an during my childhood. My parents made me take Arabic as a foreign language in high school. They thought reading and speaking the language would help

me to know my religion better. I can say that I am culturally Muslim. I am a feminist sociologist and retired from academia after a four-decade career. I am a wife, I am a mother, whose status and roles are impacted by religious norms said to be "derived" from Islam. All these features strongly make up my identities. So, religion is also a part of my core identity. I use one layer of my identity or the other, depending on the situation I find myself in, when I have to define who I am, and have to think or to act.

If someone were to ask me if I believe in God, I would say that's none of their concern. It's my own business. I make this comment because there is a growing tendency today to be questioned, as a Muslim, about one's personal religious practices, such as the observance of daily prayers, Ramadan, or to manifest openly one's faith, even religious zeal. In Europe also nowadays, because I am Muslim, I am often questioned about the veil, the radicalisation of Muslim groups, about Islam's compatibility with modernity, and so on.

So, for me, faced with organised religion and its discourses, which become more and more widespread in public spaces, I don't begin by playing the role of a Muslim woman. I know that thinking about God might help to create a comfort zone for many peoples, for instance in cases of moral panic, distress or sickness. Being Muslim, without metaphysical anxiety or exaltation, is a comfortable position. "Insha Allah!", we are used to saying.

Now, what about reinterpretation of Islam? This is an extremely important issue. Knowledge about the religious texts helps sustain one's faith. In a country like Senegal, as well as in many societies in Muslim contexts, women are mostly taught basic verses and prayers in Arabic, a language not very many devout Muslims speak and understand. That's all the knowledge they have and use in their beliefs and daily practices. They seem to be quite comfortable with it, until that knowledge starts to be manipulated over time, by various Muslim leaders and groups. Muslim discourses over the past four decades have become more and more conservative and coercive on women's position and rights within society. Muslim women cannot protect themselves against this conservatism or radicalism if they don't know about the religious texts, and cannot detect their mis/interpretation by groups who claim to be knowledgeable. Sometimes, men are more knowledgeable, or women think they are, because leading the prayers is their duty. This gives men the authority to interpret the rules and norms.

This question of interpreting Qur'anic discourses has been a longtime debate within the international solidarity network, Women Living Under Muslim Laws (WLUML). I'm a member, and the current director. If our members are predominantly Muslim, it is because we live predominantly in Muslim contexts or in societies with large Muslim groups. We have members of different faiths, and some who don't claim a faith. The networkers don't need to be of Muslim faith or practicing believers in any faith, because WLUML is not a faith organisation. We came together around the issue of religion and decisions made for women in the name of religion. Those decisions are political within the society, and with state and non-state actors. WLUML started its initiative during the early eighties, with the rise of what has been called "political Islam". As stated in its preamble, WLUML "provides information, support and a collective space for women whose lives are shaped, conditioned or governed by laws and customs said to derive from Islam".[1] I trust that believers, whatever their faith, should have the capacity to know about the religious texts, and understand them in order not to follow religion blindly. For African societies where Islam is the predominant religion, those texts are in Arabic. Their translation and interpretation in local languages are generally done by men, and are often problematic.

When I speak about Islam, I refer mainly to Muslim cultures, not one culture, but the various cultures in which Islam is embedded, and which shape Muslim identities. Our experience of WLUML as a global network within the Muslim world shows that, even if we share the same religion and its grounding principles, we have so many different experiences, behaviours, practices that the concept of Ummah seems more of a dream of a unifying world than a reality. This is a challenge to the construction of a "Muslim woman", which has become an integral part of the construction of "Muslimness" in general. I do not claim to be an exegete of the Qur'an and the hadiths, but I surely can think about the fate of women in the name of Islam. I can also relate to the ways in which various cultures customise religion: this is the background of all our debates.

Religion for me is intimate and personal. It is true that I live in a country where spirituality and religion are present. I agree that there aren't many places in the world where spirituality and religion, although different, don't have some space. Religion should also remain in people's personal space, but when it is factored into politics and affairs of the state, then problems occur. We wonder, in whose interests does organised religion work?

In order to know about my citizen's rights, and exert them, I don't need to refer to any religious book, but to the Constitution and other "secular" sets of laws elaborated, and adopted in parliament, after debates with people. In order to be a good Muslim, I need to know about the Qur'an, its principles, and rituals. I don't need religion to be a committed citizen. It is a big issue to have religion becoming political and using radicalisation to control its followers and seizing (always political) power. What should be taken into consideration isn't so much religion, but the abuses by people who claim to be of the religion and who impose their patronage over individuals and communities. Sometimes, religious leaders control faith to the extent that religion seems to no longer exist, because it has been manipulated, changed, transformed, in order to seize power.

TS: All three of you, in some ways, are talking about religion and people's individual lives but also the danger at the intersections of religion and the state. One of the things we've seen on the continent over the past few years has been the role of religious funding of particular social and political activities. In Ghana, we had a Christian minister who was one of the president's closest advisors. In Uganda, some have been able to trace funding and influence around the promotion of the anti-homosexuality bill directly to conservative churches in the United States. How do we navigate that? How can we say, on the one hand, this is personal, but on the other hand, we're seeing increasingly the power of religion to attempt to change our constitutions and legislation into discriminatory policies?

EW: I agree with Musimbi: most of the organised religions we have on the continent have always been conservative. Let's not forget that Christianity, in particular, came out of the colonial project. It was used to justify colonialism and slavery. That still continues. That's why we are interrogating this as feminists in this current, historical moment to say: What is the place that religion is taking and how is it mobilised in ways that are not empowering, in ways that are taking up space, in ways that are mobilising resources and people to oppress groups?

Many us of have read the work of Jessica Horn in documenting the impact of the US Bible belt on PEPFAR (the US President's Emergency Plan For AIDS Relief) – the funding for HIV/AIDS in Africa – and we have seen and are living the effects of that today. Those are some of the things we are saying as feminists, that we need to have a conversation and challenge this. It is beyond

just saying, "It is my personal choice". To the extent that the personal choice begins to impinge on the collective rights of others, the justice system, the constitutions – for me this is where the issues are. This is how someone put it the other day: Christianity came with the colonial project, but at certain times, it was Christianity that stepped in to provide for the welfare of black African people. Whether it was schools or hospitals – many of us are products of Catholic and Anglican schools. There are hospitals that a lot of those missionaries set up in our countries. But what we have seen, increasingly, is that some of us grew up with the church taking care of people. Now we have people taking care of the church.

How do you justify a pastor driving five Mercedes? One human being leading a congregation of 200,000 people? In a country with the levels of poverty like Nigeria, how do you justify an individual owning a private jet? Yes, it is a personal choice – we can't deny that – but more and more research is showing that actually these churches are attracting poor people who are then using all of their resources to fund individuals.

MK: The religions haven't changed. The players have changed. They are using exactly the same tools of development, schools and health services to bring to our communities that are impoverished. Especially today, we notice more, because there is more disruption and lack of peace. There are a lot of other things that are happening, but the religions themselves haven't changed. They are using the exact same tools.

TS: Fatou, that notion that religion hasn't changed and is using the same tools, we know about that intersection between race, religion, money and imperialism. How do you feel that those intersections are playing out even now?

FS: I would like, first, to respond to some remarks just made, to say that we expect religious missions/associations to be charitable, be they local or international. The church and the mosque have cared for, sustained and taken charge of people. It is part of their moral and religious obligations. Christian missionaries have worked a lot in Muslim contexts in health, education, although in some cases, in the past, it was part of evangelisation, as well as part of the process of colonisation. Many "Muslim" states (where Islam is the religion of the state), for instance Saudi Arabia, Libya, Iran or Turkey, have funded the construction of mosques, Muslim schools, health facilities, as well as their missionary activities. It was about the "Islamisation" of African

societies. We also must remember that many faith-based organisations receive a huge amount of money from governments, religious institutions, private sectors or private donors to carry out their work.

However, I must also say that, in a country like Senegal with a large Muslim population, solidarity is, firstly, family-based. It's in one's family that one finds loyalty. This is crucial. We have various forms and sources of solidarities: village-based solidarity, ethnic-based solidarity and religion-based solidarity. The solid base is a foundation of the family, spiritual, and social – not necessarily religious – solidarity. It's not in the mosques that people will particularly find this support.

Often impoverished families don't have the means to take on their responsibilities towards their children, so they send them to a marabout to provide for their education. They also take the decision because they are attached to their customary and religious cultures. The young *taalibe* are children who attend the Qur'anic school. In the past, they would attend Qur'anic schools after, or during, which they would learn rural, agricultural or artisanal skills or even fishing. Today in capital cities, there is no more training towards any skill. These kids are mostly seen at traffic lights begging for money to bring back to their marabout or feed themselves.

Now, your question about the ways in which the intersection between race, religion, money and imperialism plays out is very complex. Religion, culture and politics are intertwined in their various actions. Their intricacy in values and norms, resulting in laws, has a strong impact on women's bodies, women's health, and civil rights. In countries like Senegal and elsewhere in the region, we have intersections between the marketisation of religion and faith, as well as over-capitalisation, from various sources. This globalised capitalism puts pressure on masses of peoples around the globe.

Feminists have discussed the trends after the fall of the Berlin Wall. That was a milestone in the process of democratisation in various parts of the world, including Africa: restructuring of the world political arena, growth of neoliberal economies as a result of the privatisation of the material and financial resources of the "poorest" countries while (African) states were eroded as managers of their economies, the rise of various forms of fundamentalism and conservative cultural and religious patriarchies, the escalation of "identity" policies... All those features had a strong impact on women. We unfortunately can discuss only a few points.

Religious revival leading to various forms and levels of fundamentalism is widespread in many societies and systems of beliefs. Former US President George W. Bush withdrew financial support to states or international organisations, such as the United Nations Fund for Population [Activities] (UNFPA), because of his neo-conservative religious beliefs. Within the European Union, some member states are still demanding that Christianity should be inscribed as a constitutive dimension of European identity. But we also have the Middle East, which is Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Kuwait – and even Turkey, which was supposed to be a model civil state and was recognised and accepted widely as such. Today, the government in Turkey is less and less a civil state and is more and more religious and uses religion as a tool. Some Muslim states in Northern Nigeria used religion as a political tool, beginning in 2000, when they extended Sharia to include criminal law in Sharia courts. Although such law was said to apply only to Muslims in principle, in practice, it applied to everyone, whatever the faith that the plaintiff professed. These few examples show that religion has never been absent from the political arena, even when it is supposed to be confined to the private sphere. Furthermore, they show the new profile of relationships between religion and politics with the rising radicalisation within religious groups. Those groups are thoroughly imbued with a "mission" to lead society and to transform social contracts, which is based on a very peculiar view of the sacred.

The veil is an issue that requires to be discussed. Senegal isn't a Muslim country, because a land does not have a religion. It is stone and water, but the individuals who live there may have a religion or an ideology that is based on a book. As Muslims, we have the Qur'an, while other faiths have the Bible or the Torah. Some other peoples don't. This is complex and should be seen as such. Senegalese women either wear a scarf or don't. But the so-called Islamic veil, which is a veil that is coming from the Middle East and Asia, is a veil derived from a "cultural" fashion. That is, one dresses according to regional customs and people have Islamised the clothing. We see this in the Islamisation of cultures and culturing of Islam. The culturing of Islam in West Africa and in Senegal has been a centuries-long process. What Muslims are facing in very recent years is an Arabisation of Islam. Young Muslim women didn't cover their hair, even though married women could wear a scarf (*musoor*) on their head, but it was never a veil that covered the neck, the whole body down to the feet, the arms.

As I have said – and I'll have to be a little vulgar here – the veil is supposed to hide long hair, but the kinky hair of black women doesn't always arouse. There are other ways. In Senegal today, groups of young men who studied in the Middle East and returned home, because of their foreign training, they didn't fit in, either in government structures or in the Brotherhood version of Islam that is so particular to Senegal. They thought of reforming local Islamic practices: besides changing rituals, they requested women to cover up. The first people to cover up in Senegal were young girls, especially university students, because it is in the universities that it all began. So Saudi Arabia, with the spread of its Salafist movements, which never asked women to cover up in Senegal before, suddenly made them cover up, even going so far as to make them start wearing the burqa. This represents money and capitalism on the part of Saudi Arabia – it is building wells and spending money on the country in exchange for Islamisation. The greater the number of men or women Islamised, the more money local Muslim organisations could get. So, this combination explains a great many challenges we are facing today. Religious radicalisation comes from all this.

MK: What I seem to be noticing with the funding aspect now is a conversion where the extremists are connected with the security of countries. They are defining international funding. Right now, people are focusing a lot more on terrorism. People begin to define any terrorist activity that happens with Islam. We have to continue with the women's movement to ensure that this doesn't happen. In many places, the most affected people are Muslims. It's not the religion that defines terrorism.

The other extreme religious people – whether they're coming from Christian, Jewish, Muslim faith or another – usually fund services. When they fund services, they become very dear to the people in the areas they work. They get a lot of mass following. We should look at those aspects. This can also include funding agencies that have religion as a base.

What I see in the women's movement is looking to women who are organising to better frame the ways of fundamentalism. Especially those fundamentalisms that attack women. There's no place where religions agree like they do on the question of women. They disagree on everything and then it comes to women's reproductive health and they all agree, and the religious leaders come together. That's what joins us as women of the world. To actually find these unifying things for ourselves and make it our power

for the message, for content and for funding. The connection between the agenda for women and other injustices that are happening in the areas of sexuality – LGBTQI, abortion, choice, deciding not to have a child, dealing with childlessness – it touches the integrity of our bodies. Religions like to define women's bodies because they like to think that they know a lot more about how to define women's sexuality. The religious extremists use media and new technologies really well.

This is an area in the feminist movement where we have to be assertive and responsive to providing solutions which also use tools that will make us form solidarity. If a woman is being attacked by a religious group because of anything – whatsoever that thing is – we have to be able to communicate that message widely so that we can stand in solidarity. What's happening in Egypt today with the closing of space for activists, women around the world are standing in solidarity. We have to use that as a way of finding solutions. We have to research and use proper media to communicate solidarity.

EW: Spirituality and religion are a personal choice. Religion has no space and no place in national legislation or policy. The state should be kept free of all of that. We must fight to protect and preserve secular states. Our movements are getting demoralised by Christian fundamentalism. We have to fight, protect and save our spaces even within the women's movement. I'll tell you my mother's words again, "You don't need religion. Just be a good person".

FS: I think it is very important, of course. Feminists shouldn't be involved in the management of religion. They should leave religion in its terrain (church, mosque and other religious institutions and spaces), but they should help to understand the place religion holds in society, especially in women's lives, and fight against the rise of fundamentalisms. Their goals should be the struggle against discrimination in terms of gender, race, ethnicity, language and faith, and the promotion of secularism (secularisation of the state, and of global politics, secularisation of laws).

The place of religion is in one's heart and personal code of conduct. But where political decisions are taken, where laws are made, where the collective management of the community is done, there is no place for religion. Religious leaders obviously are citizens; they have to respond to the law like any citizen, instead of trying to decide on the laws that govern the country and its institutions. This was stated by the current Senegalese president, Macky Sall, between the two rounds of the 2012 presidential elections. I think

it is important to maintain the separation between religious institutions and the state. We are lucky in our countries to have governments that do not recognise a state religion.

I agree with Ayesha Imam, who put this simply: "Allow people who want to express their spirituality to do so". It doesn't mean that because we assign spirituality to the mosque or the church that we don't have our own spirituality. Spirituality takes on many forms – religious, intellectual and these all go together – but we must create a lay space where everyone has a place.

Endnote

1 See "About WLUML" at www.wluml.org/node/5408.

Women Organising in Senegal: *Charmaine Pereira* speaks with *Codou Bop*

Codou Bop is a longstanding feminist in Senegal, co-founder and coordinator of the organisation GREFELS (*Groupe de Recherche sur les Femmes et les Lois au Senegal*) or Research Group for Women and Laws in Senegal. The conversation below took place between Dakar and Abuja, via Skype, in January 2017. Codou's strategic positioning at the nexus of local, national, and transnational feminist organising highlights the recursive relations among these different levels and ways in which they contribute to the strengthening of synergy among interconnected feminist struggles within Senegal. Whilst deep-rooted obstacles to gender equality remain, particularly at the level of political leadership, new groups of politically mobilised Senegalese women are beginning to change power relations in the society, in rural as well as urban spaces.

Charmaine Pereira: Can you tell us about your organisation and give us some sense of the background to it?
Codou Bop: GREFELS is a member of the international solidarity network Women Living Under Muslim Laws (WLUML), and we work in Senegal on issues that are important to WLUML, all the issues around women and their religion. We are not Muslim feminists, we are feminists, period. Since religion plays an important role in women's lives, so we work on religion. But we work on several other issues, like the new trends in women's migration, we also work on violence against women and the role of religion in violence against women. And these past years, we worked a lot on empowering women to become candidates for elections and also to vote... In the rural areas of Senegal, very often girls don't have birth certificates. If a person does not have a birth certificate, this person has a lot of problems in being registered at school, passing exams, voting or being voted for, so we did a lot of work in rural areas to support women to be registered so that they become full citizens. Without that, you are not a full citizen in Senegal. We have also been working on women's access to land.

CP: How was GREFELS formed? What was the impetus for its formation?
CB: Fatou Sow, me and some other friends, we were involved in WLUML-AME (Women Living Under Muslim Laws – Africa and the Middle East). It was in the mid-1990s and Ayesha (Imam) was in charge of WLUML-AME. Ayesha had raised some money for us before it was time for her to leave Senegal and go back home. She wanted to leave the money to us but we were not organised in a formal structure. In Senegal, it is possible to have official activities without being registered at the ministry of interior. When we got that money and spent it, then we found out that it was easier to work and it was also easier to reach more women and to be involved in women's movements when you do this in a formal manner. So, we decided that we would become an officially registered organisation. I think that we did that in 1999.
CP: How did GREFELS get involved in organising around women's access to land?
CB: In Senegal, it is not just the feminist movement that is involved in women gaining access to land. We have a lot of other organisations, like *ENDA Tiers Monde* (an environment and alternative development NGO), that work on the issue. The female lawyers' organisation also works on this. Access to land is an issue even at the level of the state. I remember that when we were preparing for the Beijing conference, the minister for women's promotion, who was a feminist, was really involved in the struggle for women to get access to land. So, it is not a recent issue. But for GREFELS, it is again through Women Living Under Muslim Laws that we got more involved in this question. We did research to learn more about the obstacles, why women cannot gain access to land. And one of the findings is that we have a law that was passed in the early 1960s. At that time, our government labelled itself as socialist, and this law, which is still ongoing, says that "the land belongs to the state".
CP: It's the same in Nigeria.
CB: If the land belongs to the state, this means that any citizen, regardless of class, gender, whatever, can get access to land. But because of tradition or religion... women cannot access land, and also there are a lot of ideological constructions around owning land. A woman who claims land shames her family, either her father or her husband. It means that she needs something, it means that the family is not able to see to that. Women mobilised on that, and they were able to get land but this land was very far away, difficult to cultivate and very far from the main road, where they cannot have access to

water. So, we had all these kinds of issues and it is still the same situation. We also have a law on decentralisation.

CP: What does the law say in Senegal?

CB: The law says that issues that are important to the population at the local level – land, health – should be dealt with at the local level by local councils. So now the problem is that women are not in the local council, and this is why it was so important for women to get the law on parity, so that, even if they are not promoted by their party, by law, the party is obliged to put them on the list.

CP: So how did this law come about – the law on parity?

CB: This law was passed in 2010, I think, by our former head of state, Abdoulaye Wade. And this also is not a new thing, because Senegalese women got the right to vote in 1945. In the four main cities in Senegal, people were considered French citizens. In France, women got the right to vote, I think it was in 1944. As a consequence, French Senegalese women also got the same rights and it was very important because women were not elected but they played an important role in the Senegalese Socialist Party (the ruling party at that time, led by Senegalese) being voted for and then passing laws that were favourable to Senegalese people, especially to Senegalese women.

The colonial policy was that some Senegalese were considered French citizens, and Senegalese in rural areas were considered French subjects. So, we had two classes of Senegalese: those living in large cities like Dakar, Gorée, Saint-Louis and Rufisque were French citizens and had exactly the same rights as the French in France. But Senegalese who lived in rural areas were not citizens. And women in the rural areas were not allowed to vote. So, it was only after independence that a woman from the rural areas became the first member of parliament; it was in 1963. Even before that, women were in the political arena but were there to cheer the male leaders or to be in the campaign, but they were not themselves considered fit to become candidates and to be members of parliament or to be candidates for presidential election.

CP: Going back to the law on parity, the forces pushing for that law: were they primarily women's movements or was it the Senegalese Socialist Party, or did they come together at some point?

CB: The law, really, is the outcome of women's struggles. But in Senegal, at least, we cannot separate politics from other women's struggles, including the right to education. Both go together. Women couldn't get positive laws

passed without laws on health, for example, reproductive health. I think the Senegalese women's movement and the feminist women are very well aware that you cannot walk on one leg, that some needed to work on legal issues, some needed to focus their struggle on economic issues, others on health issues. And then also there were several networks on women's health, reproductive health, and a network on legal issues... The Penal Code is now being reformed, so there is a mobilisation of women lawyers on several issues related to abortion. The women lawyers carried out studies that showed that about 99% of women who are in custody are there for abortion or because they killed their baby. If abortion becomes free, it means women will not be obliged to commit infanticide. If women have access to family planning and abortion, this means that women won't be in custody anymore. It also means that women will control their bodies and this will have an impact on their economic wellbeing... which will help to change power relations within the family. It is the way I believe that people work here. I'm sure if you ask women lawyers, they will say, "We are not feminists", but the outcome of their struggles will be women's empowerment.

CP: You've raised the very interesting issue of how the Senegalese women's movement and feminist movement work together on these various issues and see them as interconnected. Are there some issues where the feminist movement differs from the position taken by women's movements in Senegal?

CB: I would say that they don't differ, but feminists are forward, the feminist thinking is ahead. What the feminist movement looks for is the power relations, how to change the power relations, and we don't despise very, very, very small outcomes. Even if it is very small, we believe that it changes power relations.

I just want to give you one example that happened when I was doing some training in rural areas on violence against women. The training was about the law (we also have a law on violence against women) and we were defining what violence against women means. Women participating in the training gave their own definitions and then some of them said, "I am not happy with all the definitions we are hearing". And then I said, let me give you the United Nations definition that is in the [Beijing] Declaration, so I wrote down the definition and one woman said, "I am not happy with this definition either". She said that in her village, a guy was married to a young woman who was giving birth... Because of the lack of health facilities, that young woman who

was in labour was transferred to the city to give birth, but unfortunately, she and the baby died. Five days later, the husband took another wife. So, women decided that not only was this violence against the deceased wife, but they were just outraged, and so they banned the guy from the village. They told him, "You are definitely banned from the village, you are not allowed to come back". This happened in early 2016, and the guy never came back again to the village, and his family and his relatives live in the village. To me, living in Senegal, knowing how strong all the family ties, the community ties, are, I see these women have been so bold as to ban a man from a village! This means that they feel that they are powerful enough to do this kind of thing. This kind of story I keep on hearing everywhere I go in Senegal, so to me this is very important.

Even on parity, there are a lot of stories, not like that one, but I mean citizen stories, women who go up to the Supreme Court to push for their rights as citizens. To me, these are the feminists. But these women who go to the Supreme Court, who rallied, who petitioned, who advocated, I am sure they won't consider themselves as feminists but what they have been doing is really changing a lot in Senegal.

CP: It's inspiring. You mentioned a law on violence against women, Codou. Can you just give me some background to that?

CB: This law was voted in January 1990, and is also the outcome of women mobilising. In 1987, during Ramadan, a man who belonged to a very powerful religious family was not fasting, and he ordered his wife to cook a meal for him and his friends. His wife, a very young woman, said, "No", and the guy beat her and killed her. So, women were really outraged. It was a national movement, everywhere, holding rallies and then they went to court. It was not the family of the woman who went to the court, it was women from other organisations who went to court. But it was the first time, so there were steps that we didn't know you have to take if the charge was murder. So, there was no autopsy, there were a lot of things... We didn't have any material proof, but the guy was detained for three months. And even this was really a big victory because he was from a very prominent religious family and he was tried and found not guilty. And then another case appeared, another woman who was beaten... There was a lot of family violence, violence from partners, a lot of rape and also female genital mutilation. It was after Beijing, and here in Senegal, we really prepared for Beijing and, as I was telling you, the minister

for women's promotion was a feminist. So, because of this context, the law was passed, and at that time it was really, I believe, the most advanced law on violence against women. It has a very interesting definition of violence, and also the sentences are very strong, like if there is rape, the sentence is ten years. If it involves a girl below 13, then the fine and everything is doubled. The law has only been really enforced for about five years. It is less enforced now and the sentence depends on how the judge sees women's rights to physical integrity.

CP: When was it passed?

CB: 1990.

CP: How long did it take to get it passed?

CB: Maybe two years, because there was a lot of debate in the parliament, a lot of men who did not agree. But you know, it was just outrageous, so we got the law passed.

CP: And how does it define violence against women?

CB: I think it is the same definition as in the Beijing Plan of Action. A lot of laws that were passed at that time... the sources were the Beijing Plan of Action. It is also the landmark of the Senegalese women's movement. You know, after Beijing, all the Senegalese feminists who attended the conference were summoned by the minister for women's promotion, in order to help in the drafting of a national plan of action for the promotion of Senegalese women. And we drafted a plan of action – the definitions were feminist, the procedure, the steps to reach the outcome, the expected outcome – all these were feminist. But we had elections and a change of regime. This National Plan of Action was then forgotten and never implemented.

Now that the Penal Code is being reformed, the Women Lawyers' Association wants it to encompass a broader definition of violence against women, so that marital rape is included, for example. Marital rape is not included in the existing law on violence against women. So, we hope that the association of women lawyers will continue, because some of them sit on the committee that is working on the reform of the Penal Code. The Association also works with other women's and human rights organisations.

CP: Can you give us the name of that organisation?

CB: Yes, it is *L'Association des Femmes Juristes du Senegal* (Women Lawyers' Association of Senegal).

In the 1990s, the Senegalese government said that it wanted to be trained in gender, what gender means, how to implement a gender policy. So, everybody, except the head of state, was trained in gender mainstreaming.

CP: What informed that? Was it the minister for women's promotion who you said was a feminist?

CB: I am not sure whether it was the minister or maybe it was just the context. And you know Senegal always wants to appear as the first in a lot of things... but they do not really want to make changes. Also at that time, we had a new representative at the World Bank in Senegal; his wife was a Senegalese woman and she was a feminist. So, I think she pressed the World Bank to give funding to a lot of women's issues. Or to force the government to include gender in their policies.

CP: Going back to the Penal Code reform that you mentioned earlier, Codou, who is behind that? What is informing the reform of the Penal Code?

CB: Most articles in our Penal Code are taken from the French penal codes. I don't know how it works in English-speaking countries but in most French-speaking countries, most laws come from the French law that we inherited after independence.

CP: It's very similar in Nigeria.

CB: So, there were a few reforms but now... it really needs to be reformed.

CP: But is it that women are pushing for this, or is it within government that they decided to reform?

CB: No, it is the civil society, the government. It is a national demand for change.

CP: You mentioned earlier how, despite the existence of a law on parity, women who put themselves forward as candidates still face a host of obstacles. Can you say a bit more about that?

CB: When the law was voted, several women's organisations, including GREFELS, did a lot of training in order to enable women to become candidates, so that if they are voted for, they're able to understand what politics means, what a gendered budget means, how to answer to women's needs. In the majority of municipalities, the elected council refused to enforce the law. Although the parties enforced the law, so that when the first on the list is a man, the second should be a woman, or if the first on the list is a woman, next should be a man. You won't believe it, it is now our actual minister of women's promotion who is the most against parity.

CP: Why is that?
CB: She is a mayor in a very big city, Kaolack, and up to now, parity is not enforced there. The mayor decided that she won't enforce it. So, in that city, the elected women filed complaints and they went to the Magistrate's Court. We had two interesting cases. In Kaolack, the court ruled in favour of the ministry of women, which means that parity is not enforced. But in Dakar, parity was enforced; here also, the councillor had refused to enforce parity. Elected women, in Kaolack and in Dakar, went to the Supreme Court. During all that period, before and after the election, and even when these elected women went to the court, the women's movement and the human rights movement supported them a lot. And a committee was created, for parity and the republic. So, it is not just the issue of parity, it is also the issue of citizenship, women being full citizens, period. GREFELS is a member of that committee. So, when women went to the Supreme Court, they organised a very big rally everywhere in Senegal. The Supreme Court ruled in favour of the elected women in Dakar. If there is a ruling by the Supreme Court, it applies to the whole country, so this means that everywhere in Senegal, parity should apply. Yet to date, we still have some councils where parity is not applied.

But what is very interesting is that the women who went to the Supreme Court, they were not highly educated women, not the divas of the women's movement but very, very committed young women. They said, "It is our right to sit in the council, we have been voted by the population so we are going to sit, no matter what happens". And now, in that same city, where the mayor is a woman and is against parity, these young elected female councillors are still very mobilised because the council needs to be renewed for new members to come in.

If this group of women draft a declaration or any paper, they send it to us, in GREFELS, and we read it and we correct or give more substance and then we send it to the Women Lawyers' Association who put in the laws, international agreements, all the instruments signed by Senegal. And we also inform the elected women that if Senegal does not respect its own law, "you can take Senegal to the African Union Court of Human Rights and then you can go to the [UN] CEDAW [Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women] Committee". They know that they can do that, they can report and they are ready to report anyway. This is what I find very interesting. They're in secondary cities so most of them are unknown in Dakar. These young

women belong to women's organisations, and, at the same time, they belong to political parties. What I find very smart of them is that they know that they might not be supported by their party, but they will be supported by the women's movement. So they expect that support from the women's movement and from each category in the women's movement there are things they ask for. For example, they would ask GREFELS to do the writing or research – because they know that we do research. They would ask the lawyers for the laws, for women's rights instruments. But they might ask something else, because there are so many women's networks on so many issues. So, depending on what they want, if they want a national movement... if they organise a rally, they could ask a women's movement that is in the south of Senegal. You know that we have a rebellion in the south of the country, and there is a women's movement in the south against violence against women in the civil war.

CP: Can you say a few words about that rebellion? To put it in context.

CB: In 1980, a group of men and women stood up in Casamance and demanded independence from Senegal. They rallied and the army shot and killed many among them. This is how the civil war started. But the majority of people in Casamance don't want independence. As is the case with most civil wars, women are those who feel the greatest impact, because they are victims of all forms of violence. In this part of Senegal, women are very active, they are in the field; this is the region of Senegal where rice is produced and women are rice producers... These are the most democratic societies in Senegal, so to speak. Women in this region are quite powerful, but because they have been so deeply affected by the conflict, for several years they have been organising to put an end to the conflict, to get their fields back, to be free from violence.

So, to come back to the elected women councillors: if they ask women in Casamance to be part of the movement, to organise a rally for the law on parity to be enforced, women in Casamance would rally for them.

CP: What are GREFELS' plans for the future?

CB: You know, the problem we have with GREFELS is that, although we worked a lot on migration, it's very difficult to get funding from Europe, they don't trust women's organisations. And the other challenge is to get young feminist researchers who are very committed, who would accept to do voluntary jobs. It is very difficult to find that and it is difficult for me now to work in rural areas because it is really hard, the living conditions are quite difficult.

CP: I am wondering whether working on a voluntary basis means unpaid or working in a non-governmental organisation.
CB: It means unpaid.
CP: Do people do research unpaid?
CB: The first research to be done in Senegal on violence against women was by GREFELS and it was not paid. I do training in rural areas, I am not paid for that, it is my contribution. But I understand the young women who don't do that because they have a lot of responsibilities and they don't have jobs, they really need money. So, if you cannot pay them, maybe it is more rewarding for them to work with other organisations.

If there is a need for training, a lot of grassroots groups know that they can call on GREFELS. And if we can make the training, we just go. I go with local transportation and when I am in the village or in the city, then I live with the people and, really, I don't have to pay for anything. And since I am going to retire anyway, I don't need to be paid for that. It is the same for a lot of colleagues who do a lot of voluntary work. I believe that everywhere in Africa, women do that.
CP: That depends a lot on the issues as well, maybe on violence against women you are more likely to get women doing that.
CB: Yeah, I'm sure, I agree with you. But you know... I would love to see some transformation before I die. Like what I was telling you about those women who banned that guy from the village, it feels so good when you hear this kind of story, and there are so many.
CP: When you say there are so many stories, is GREFELS documenting them?
CB: There is a very interesting women's organisation in Kaolack: the name is APROFES, which stands for the Association for the Promotion of Senegalese Women. It was established in 1987, and it is from their struggles that a lot of laws in favour of women were passed. GREFELS is on their board. They have been doing a lot of important things, like working on the environment, access to land, violence against women, housing, and they are feminists. So, what we have in mind is that we would document their experience and also document GREFELS' contribution to their work.

They do something that has caught our attention, which is training the youth. When I talk about youth, I mean youth who are 15 years or sometimes younger, and they train both girls and boys. And on this I have one story, for example. I did the training for girls and boys on violence against girls in

schools. At the end of the training, the boys made this commitment: they decided that every day, two or three boys would stand in front of the toilets to make sure that no girl shall be molested. The toilets are far from the classes and when girls go to the toilet, anybody can step inside and can rape them. So the boys would stand outside, or sometimes they would accompany the girls of their neighbourhood. Every day when they go to school, they make this kind of commitment.

CP: That's really good.

CB: Yeah, so it is important that this kind of work is done. And we hope that we will be able to document it.

CP: Finally, Codou, what lessons would you draw from the experiences you've had and from the varied experiences of women mobilising in struggles in Senegal?

CB: I am very positive because I think that 10 years or 15 years ago, I wouldn't believe what is happening now. That, as I told you, young women who are not highly educated, who stand up for their rights and even if their parents or husbands ask them to leave the matter – "You know it's not a big deal, if you are not a council member, that does not matter" – and these women say, "It is my right". And also, women going to court. But the obstacles that were against the women's movements ten years ago, most of those obstacles are still here, including the lack of political will from the policy makers who still use women as tokens. It means that those women must be very aware of male politics. They also must learn how to strengthen themselves without dreaming that all women are "nice", that they will support us because we are women.

I was telling you that Senegal is a strange country, we never demanded that our country should sign any international or regional instrument. We are among the first to sign anything. We have so many very good laws, but they are not enforced. But I believe also that it depends on the head of state. Wade was elected in March, 2000. He loves to make the kind of statement that he is the best and he will be the best. On the 8 March 2000, women went to talk to him. We went on a march but it was not to fight against anything; we wanted to talk to him, to tell him about the changes we wanted to happen. So, we went to the *Palais de la République*, and he came out and we presented our papers. And he started to tell us about when he was a student, he was in love with three very prominent Senegalese women. So, Wade was there, in March, with all the TV cameras on him, telling us about his love affairs. It was quite

funny. But behind this, it is real that women struggled a lot, they struggled a lot, a lot, a lot. On violence against women, female genital mutilation, all these things. And I believe that there is another thing: civil society and human rights organisations are quite strong in Senegal, so women are not alone when they fight. The first time a woman was killed by her husband and the women were demonstrating, it is our actual minister of justice who was in the forefront. At that time, he was a human rights and women's human rights defender. Sometimes, when it is really difficult, women would go to religious leaders and they could get the support from religious leaders, if they're able to argue on religious grounds, if they can say that Islam gives us this right or this other right and the authorities don't want to enforce it. But then we have the problem that we don't want our issue to be resolved on a religious basis. So that's the other challenge that is very important in Senegal now.

CP: So, there are quite a few areas where navigating the waters is not easy.

CB: Exactly.

CP: Codou, let me thank you once again, it has been very interesting. Thanks so much.

Photo by Jessica Horn, reprinted with permission

Peace-Building Movement Mural — Maku Azu

the revolution is a woman

Toni Stuart

A collective poem compiled and written by Toni Stuart at the 4th African Feminist Forum, 10-12 April 2016, in Harare, Zimbabwe. The poem uses words, phrases, ideas and thoughts shared by the women throughout the forum.

the revolution is a woman
a black, queer, radical,
Azania House-occupying,
sjambok-wielding
Tahir Square-protesting raised fist

pumping, bashing, smashing, tearing
down patriarchs' invisible walls

the revolution is a woman
a hijab-wearing
veil-discarding, veil-reclaiming
church-going, silent-praying, God-denying voice

piercing through the obsidian night
to reach always for the light on the horizon's edge

the revolution is a woman
reworking the histories that have shaped her:
fashioning the steel of a broken arm into a power salute
moulding her violated waist into an unapologetic swerving hip
shattering the chains of a shackled ankle into a defiant dancing leg

clearing the rubble under which her daughter's soul is buried
her relentless fingers scratched and bruised
to let the light sear this seed, turning cement into soil

this work that breaks her heart
this works that feeds her soul

the revolution is a woman
loving a woman in the shadows
so she can love her children with some safety in the light
praying for strength to defend her love against the pulpit
arguing for her right to defend her love against the bench

the revolution is a woman
who speaks not only for herself
hear her sing:
this land is woman's land
this continent is woman's continent
we will never tire
we are proudly queer

teeth biting back at the hand muffling her voice
until she breaks free into a ceaseless whispered prayer for love
and unending ululation for liberation

the revolution is a woman
born into the light of feminist fires
standing in the flames of rage and love
burning tirelessly so her sisters will not die sad

the revolution is a woman
fighting (loving)
fighting (loving)
fighting (loving)
for the soul of Nigeria, Mali, Burkina Faso, Uganda, Ghana, Zimbabwe, Tanzania, Occupied Azania, Benin, Mauritania, Zambia, Mozambique,

Swaziland, Angola, Niger, DRC, Liberia, Sudan, Egypt, Congo Brazzaville, Senegal, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Liberia, Cameroon, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Central African Republic, Kenya, Burundi, Malawi, Rwanda, Guinea, Togo

the revolution is a woman
fighting (loving)
fighting (loving)
fighting (loving)
for the soul of the world

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Rape: A South African Nightmare, by Pumla Dineo Gqola. Johannesburg: MF Books, an imprint of Jacana Media (PTY) Ltd, 2015

Jane Bennett

> I make the assertion that rape is not a moment but a language… and I untangle and decipher the knots and codes of this language, to surface its structure, underline its histories, understand its rules. (Gqola, 2015: 22)

In the two years since the publication of Pumla Gqola's third book, *Rape: A South African Nightmare,* the quotation above is the one most cited in the myriad reviews of her work and in the conversations that the book has inspired in public space. The metaphor – rape as language – draws on notions of the symbolic as communication, and on the idea that a willingness to accept the terms of a language constitutes a powerful route to the fiction of a community. So, argues Gqola, the fiction of a South African nation involves prescribed relationships between sexual violence and citizenship.

At the same time, the questions which intrigue linguists – such as the ways in which languages obscure as much as they are able to facilitate communication and the impossibility of representing embodied intensity (pain, ecstasy) "in" language – are also Gqola's. She is harassed, puzzled, and frustrated by the seeming circularity of discussions about rape – the hopelessness experienced by activists who have been working for decades only to witness the escalation of incidents and the expansion of the forms "rape" might take, the misunderstandings (still) about what constitutes rape, the seeming jocularity about rape from some alleged perpetrators and, perhaps most poignantly, the wariness and disbelief on the faces of those to whom a survivor may confide their story. If "rape [is]… a language" for Gqola, then her book is driven by a passionate conviction that such language tells lies – about

histories, about those who experience rape, and about the "inevitability" of rape. Perhaps, for Gqola, the most egregious lie is exposed in the conversation that she develops across the volume about what it means to live in a country whose daily vision for itself is enshrined in a Constitution full of commitment to freedoms and whose "nightmare" hauls a very particular form of gender-based violence up from the unconscious to terrorise any possibility of safety.

Pumla Gqola is a well-known figure within African feminist critical theory. She has just been appointed as Dean of Research at the University of Fort Hare, in South Africa, an institution which figures as the intellectual home of some of the continent's most distinguished thinkers (Julius Nyerere, Oliver Tambo, Kenneth Kaunda), but she has spent the past decade within the department of African Literature. To introduce her like this is, however, to fly in the face of her own words in an earlier volume on the meaning of the musician, Simphiwe Dana: "I will not be policed and corralled to present in a particular way. I will not be a 'boring' academic who is restrained to think and write in one way. I too will write what I like... I will talk about the condition of black women even if you would prefer not to hear me. Black women are complex and represent in more ways than you would like. Your envy is misplaced. Work on yourself and don't worry about me. Deal with it. *Ndiqondisise! [Recognise me!]"* (Gqola, 2013: 54).

Such recognition demands a reading of Gqola's writing that acknowledges how deeply her writing is fuelled by an integrity that is not simply personal. Instead, it is embodied within a wide and complex network of activisms and engagements through which black women in South Africa (and beyond) continue to fight for acknowledgement as intellectual and imaginative inspirations beyond the mere cipher of homogenising equity legislation around "disadvantaged groups". As I write this review, an image of Pumla Gqola comes to mind. I was co-facilitating, a few years ago, a workshop of the One in Nine Project, a South African activist group born of the desire to fight alongside "Khwezi" as she stood firm, in 2006, in the court case that accused Jacob Zuma of raping her. We were into the second morning, and dealing with difficult material, when a small excited rustling among the participants seated nearest the glass doors open to the garden grew into calls of pleasure, "Sisi!!"

Dozens jumped up to welcome Pumla as she arrived, doing her utmost to be inconspicuous. Many of the workshop participants were young black

lesbians, some were older and dear comrades in the battles against sexual violence, and "Khwezi" and her mother were also present, seated at a back table with tears running down both faces in their delight at seeing her. Pumla shot me a glance and whispered, "Sorry, Jane!" (she has done enough facilitation herself to know what such interruptions can do), but of course there was no need for any kind of apology because the welcome given to Pumla concretised something subterranean already in the room. While the occasion of the workshop was the acknowledgment of the stakes of fighting for worlds free of rape (a sobering and even anguished acknowledgement), no one was in fact merely "anguished". The activists in that room, all familiar with the meaning of rape, knew deeply the pleasure of concrete engagement with strategy, storytelling, and rebellion. Pumla Gqola's arrival allowed that joy to flow. Her feistiness, laughter, and wit settled everyone back into the work of finding a language through which to defy the national statistics on the prevalence of rape.

The enigma of discovering pleasure and hope within serious and experienced activist debates on strategising against rape is replicated in the encounter with *Rape: A South African Nightmare*, published in August 2015. It is a book I assign frequently to Honours students in a postgraduate elective seminar on "Gender and Violence". The curriculum includes (as carefully as possible) material which asks serious questions about that linkage ("Gender *and* Violence"). The seminar participants are always smart, maverick and invested in their work, and yet, there are moments when energies flag, and the weight of the issues makes their shoulder muscles clench. To a reader, however, they relish Gqola's writing, usually reading all 193 pages in one go. Although some have critiques about the singular focus on South African discourses (they come from many different countries, most of them continental), and others long for more engagement with the meaning of counter-heteronormativity for understanding rape, the book remains their favourite: "*I was scared to read it; my sister was raped but I couldn't stop; this is the most important book I have ever read*". I get lambasted, "*Why did I have to wait till my Honours year to read this?*" My own copies disappear. In her acceptance speech on winning the 2016 Alan Paton award for the book, Gqola recalls a family member's riposte, "*Who on earth wants to read about rape, are you insane*?" as she began work on the volume. It turns out that she has, in fact, written a book "about rape"

that not only wins awards but which is popular, accessible, full of energy, and, indeed, a pleasure to read.

The collection of essays in the book is not so much "about rape" as about what one might term the textures of "rape culture" in South Africa. The concept of "rape culture" (long part of feminist vocabularies) arises from the recognition that environments themselves may thrive on prevailing social norms which normalise or trivialise sexual assault. Such an idea moves the question of "perpetration" away from the delinquent or deviant man into the interrogation of how gender itself operates as systemic, and invested, ontological brutality. The book opens with Gqola's memory of watching a recent TV programme in which men "who readily admitted on camera to having raped" were interviewed, and she puzzles over their open discussion of rape as "sex", and "sex" to which they were entitled, despite unwillingness from a partner. She notes their ordinariness as figures ("they could have been anybody's brother, boyfriend, or son") and while stressing that she is not invoking the memory to homogenise a "typical rapist", finds herself stuck on the idea driving the men's talk, that "women's pain is negotiable". The eight chapters that follow, *work* at that idea, worrying it, puzzling over its shape and implications, watching its influence within very public trials of particular rapists, and demanding accountability for its impact on what it is that women who have experienced rape are given permission to say.

The collection of chapters addresses a set of discursive dilemmas, moving from the politics of credibility for the autobiographical narrative of rape to the circulation of "myths" (lies) about who gets raped, by whom, and why (long established by anti-rape activists as key to recognising the meaning of rape). The collection also includes undaunted engagement with some of South Africa's most egregious public moments of "rape consciousness".

The first of these explores the ways in which the charge of rape against (then Deputy-) President Zuma fuelled a nationwide debate on the politics of gender, sex, and violence. Fezeka Khuzwayo (known as "Khwezi" during the very public trail and its aftermath), a 31-year-old lesbian and HIV activist when she laid formal charges against Zuma for raping her, at night in his own home, in late 2005. The trial came to court in May 2006. The court proceedings were highly publicised, and embedded in ferocious political engagements (live, in demonstrations outside the courtroom, within the media, and in all e-spaces) which polarised the country into two basic positions: *Khwezi is a liar*

versus *We believe Khwezi*. Zuma's acquittal was a triumph for the former, a devastation for the latter. The first book to be published immediately after the verdict was Mmatshilo Motsei's *The Kanga and the Kangaroo Court*, in 2007, a profoundly reflective collation of enquiries fuelled by grief and the courage to explore not simply patriarchal power, but religious and "traditional" powers. Motsei was attacked, in many ways, after the publication of the book (despite its welcome in activist, especially feminist, circles), and forced to withdraw from public life for a while. Others have written of the trial since then, but although this is not explicit (Motsei is not cited), I would suggest that it is Gqola who most boldly takes up Motsei's challenge to interrogate the turn taken by South African societies' seeming readiness to displace black women from any form of cultural, political, or indeed, spiritual power. Gqola analyses the discourses of the media and commentators around the trial, and its verdict, suggesting that despite their differences, it was feminists' voices alone which "attempted to unsettle the patriarchal elision of the woman whose life was made a living hell within the public sphere and beyond" (Gqola, 2015: 124). This strikes one as a move towards what it may entail to be "in solidarity" as feminists – the work of such "unsettling" involves being "unsettled", and being ready for what Gqola rightly terms "rage and disregard for personal safety".

It is "rage" which allows Gqola to travel into the second of South Africa's recent "public debates" concerning the meaning of rape. Over the past few years, several cases of "baby- and child-rape" have received enormous publicity. The story of a nine-month-old girl, of white schoolboys raping a black peer, of a white farmer paying nine-year-olds for being raped, and more – Gqola summarises the public facts of the cases, and proceeds to a devastating question: why are such events presented as "the most horrendous forms of rape"? (Gqola, 2015: 141). The assaults are very far from being prosecuted with any extra seriousness, and that may be worth interrogation; what Gqola is asking, however, goes beyond legal outcomes. Her interrogation of the reception of such cases in the media (always, horror) illuminates the notion of a "rape scale", where some forms of "rape" happen to "the innocent" (babies) which must logically mean that others occur to the "less innocent": grown women, older girls, lesbians, transgender people.

Rape: A South African Nightmare is less a book "about rape" than it is about the discourses circulating within one country which Gqola sees as

implicated in the "ordinariness" of the multiple forms of sexual violence experienced. In my seminar discussions with students, challenges to Gqola's approach are raised. What if you are not South African – how will you grasp the references and assumptions? Why is there so very little about counter-heteronormativity and the massive work of queer activism against sexual violence? Why does she not solve the problem? Why...? I understand these responses as the counterpart of the immense faith generated by the book that Gqola knows what she is talking about and the concomitant desire for her to write about everything. For so many of us, rape has been a version of "everything", at one point or another. This book isn't about "everything"; it is perhaps not "everything" that is needed for fierce solidarity on the exigencies of rape cultures; it is courage we need. That the book celebrates, and that the book exudes.

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Your Fatwa Does Not Apply Here: Untold Stories from the Fight Against Muslim Fundamentalism, by Karima Bennoune. New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2015

Charmaine Pereira

In a world marked by the proliferation of violent jihadi groups, what can be done to turn the tide against Muslim fundamentalism? This question lies at the heart of Karima Bennoune's *Your Fatwa Does Not Apply Here: Untold Stories from the Fight Against Muslim Fundamentalism*. Bennoune's award-winning book focuses on the struggles against such extremism *within* Muslim majority societies, "one of the most important – and overlooked – human rights struggles in the world" (3). Fuelled by a vision of ending fundamentalism and its violence, Bennoune aims to amplify the reach of those people whose actions are most critical in the struggle against Muslim fundamentalism, yet whose voices are barely audible in the global arena:

> Whether believers, agnostics, freethinkers, or atheists, they do this by representing some of the Muslim traditions' greatest values – mercy, compassion, peace, tolerance, study, creativity, openness. They do this not by mouthing platitudes about "Islam-religion-of-peace" but in many cases by putting their lives on the line to fight fundamentalism. (Bennoune, 2015: 9)

As a human rights lawyer, Bennoune has, for several decades, "collect[ed] nightmares for a living in order to combat abuse" (27). *Your Fatwa Does Not Apply Here* is based on first-hand witness accounts and conversations with people from 20 countries across Asia, Africa, the Middle East and beyond. Mindful of context, Bennoune provides political analysis whilst simultaneously being sensitive to the pain and emotional intensity that reliving experiences of violence produces in the people she meets. "With this research, I again became the woman who makes people weep" (27). Yet tears are not the sole feature of these encounters; the determination of Bennoune's respondents

to tell their stories spurs her on. She notes that first-hand witness accounts have particular strengths and weaknesses, which she tries to corroborate where necessary and possible. These accounts are interwoven with Bennoune's own profound observations and reflections on her odyssey, not least the starting point of her journey – the early morning pounding by members of the Armed Islamic Group on the door of her father's apartment in Algeria on the 29 June 1993.

It is not Bennoune's aim to convey the full complexity of Muslim fundamentalism in any one country. Instead, she navigates the wide geographic range of her material in eleven chapters that lay out thematic commonalities – fundamentalist efforts to eradicate artists and their work, cultural space, journalists and their writing, women and their freedom – as well as the specificities of particular contexts and phenomena: Algeria, Iran, a Somali community in Minneapolis, Al Qaeda, the Arab Spring and Fall, and northern Mali. Although written with a Western audience primarily in mind, *Your Fatwa Does Not Apply Here* is relevant to many more people in the global South. Bennoune takes care to write about challenges to Muslim fundamentalism in a way that will not be used against Muslims, in view of the widespread lack of knowledge in the West about the diversity of contexts within which Islam is practised and the increasing levels of discrimination against Muslims.

Given the differing relationships of her respondents to Islam as a religion and their varied positioning along a range of social markers, Bennoune eschews the simple term "Muslim" to refer to them all, preferring instead the phrases "people of Muslim heritage or culture" and "Muslim majority societies". These, she observes, afford "more space for… messy lived realities" (11). Such lived realities are brought to light through Bennoune's conversations with witnesses across a wide social spectrum. In addition to artists and cultural workers of different kinds, there are journalists, writers, medical doctors, lawyers, psychologists, trade unionists, workers, drivers, academics, students, imams, women's rights activists, housewives, grandmothers, sexual rights activists, activists in wheelchairs, businesswomen, members of the Muslim Brotherhood and Ennahda, sheiks, bloggers, politicians, former prisoners, former hostages, victims of terrorism, judges, teachers, schoolchildren, community organisers, young and old revolutionaries. Not only are these respondents politically diverse – centrist as well as liberal and left-wing – they also speak in "a Babel

of languages – various dialects of Arabic, Tamazight, Hausa and Zarma/Songhai, Bamanankan, Urdu, Russian, Wolof, Dari, Persian, Pashto, Somali and French, just to name a few" (12).

The title of the book comes from a line in the play *Bulha* by the Pakistani playwright Shahid Nadeem. Bulha Shah, the play's central protagonist, was a renowned Sufi mystic poet who struggled against the mullahs of the early eighteenth century. Declared a heretic in his time, Bulha's open questioning and rejection of the Sharia is transposed onto current events in Pakistan. When Bulha's followers are assaulted by zealots for singing Sufi devotional music that "is against Islam", according to the decree of a religious teacher, one of the followers replies: "Your fatwas do not apply here" (40). The play is one of the theatre company Ajoka's most popular performances. This is just one of the many instances of artistic and creative work discussed by Bennoune. When jihadists declare war on music, theatre, art – expressions of freedom of thought and the ability to create – the not-so-simple act of continuing to produce and perform one's art becomes an act of courage. From Pakistan to Afghanistan to Algeria and beyond, the makers of art and the keepers of cultural spaces work at the interface of politics and creative expression to resist fundamentalism, survive extremism and pursue cultural change.

Central to the totalitarian project of Muslim fundamentalism is the control and subordination of women: their bodies, sexualities, dress, mobility, their very presence. All the activists fighting for women's human rights refer to this obsession with control, and their work challenges it in myriad ways. Women's human rights defenders are thus "one of the most important forces contesting fundamentalism" (82). Contradictions within fundamentalist projects abound. In Algeria, Bennoune points out that there is *no* documentation at all of the rapes of women during the 1990s. She asks why documenting the rapes perpetrated by fundamentalist armed groups in Algeria was considered blasphemy when the rapes themselves were not.

Collective struggles for women's rights take place across and within national boundaries, with "patriarchs, militarists, racists and fundamentalists" as their common foes (91). Zaynab Elsawi, coordinator of Sudanese Women Empowerment for Peace (SuWEP), recounts how women's protests against the flogging sentence given to journalist Lubna Hussein, for daring to wear trousers in public, led to the commuting of her sentence. This happened after the protesters sent messages across the world when they themselves

were arrested and sent to jail. Senegalese human rights activist and novelist Aissatou Cissé is "uncompromising", from her wheelchair, in her campaigns against the stoning of women, against child marriage and in her struggle for the rights of disabled women and girls.

The international solidarity network Women Living Under Muslim Laws (WLUML) was founded in the 1980s by Marieme Hélie-Lucas, a stalwart of the Algerian independence movement. Although an atheist herself, Hélie-Lucas argues that women who argue from a secular perspective should be allies with those who seek to make progressive interpretations within religious discourse, in view of the power of their shared enemy. Fatou Sow, Senegalese professor of sociology, is the current coordinator of WLUML. Sow's concern about her country is the fading away of a secular discourse from which to resist fundamentalism. Although she thinks the choice of strategy for challenging fundamentalism should be contextually determined, she refuses to engage from within a religious discourse in Senegal because, she argues, the struggle is political, not religious.

Violent fundamentalist abuses have fuelled state atrocities. "Neither justifies the other, but to understand what was happening in Algeria, you have to consider both" (317). The antihuman violence of Muslim fundamentalist armed groups goes against international as well as Islamic humanitarian law. States, too, have abused human rights in the name of combating terrorism. Bennoune argues that it is critical to challenge both the atrocities by Muslim fundamentalist armed groups as well as the abusive responses to such atrocities by governments: "we have to combat several forms of suffering simultaneously, rather than tolerating either one in the name of the other" (239). Whilst international human rights organisations often fail to grasp this point, many local human rights defenders are the ones to try and steer a path through this fraught terrain in their challenges to fundamentalism. Bennoune is very clear that her own position is one of support for an "effective and robust political struggle against fundamentalism, but not one that disregards the rule of law" (320).

The multifarious voices expressed in *Your Fatwa Does Not Apply Here* reinforce Bennoune's position that Muslim fundamentalism "is one of the most truly transnational fundamentalisms, notable for the ubiquity of its adherents and the sophistication and reach of its vicious armed groups" (14). The violence of Algerian fundamentalists began when the first Algerians

returned from Afghanistan. Similar transnational movements of ideologies, resources and practices took place elsewhere in Africa, including Somalia and northern Nigeria. Whilst Algerian jihadists misapplied the writings of Ibn Taymiyya, the 13th century Islamic scholar, his work has also been appropriated by other extremists such as Mohammed Yusuf, a key figure in the formation of Boko Haram.

Saudi Arabia and Saudi funding remain a key aspect of the growth of fundamentalism throughout the Middle East, North Africa and beyond. In all the places she visited, Bennoune emphasises, the people whom she met made this point. Wahhabi influence is felt across the world, a shift that began after the Iranian Revolution and the Gulf War in 1991. And yet, Saudi Arabia remains a key ally of the USA and of Britain. Economic interests in the supply of oil combine with military interests in the sale of arms. Between 2011 and 2015, Britain sold more arms to Saudi Arabia than to any other country[1] and the USA, under the Obama administration, sold the kingdom weapons worth $112 billion, to be paid over a period of eight years.[2] Supplying Saudi Arabia with arms compounds the endorsement of its brutal regime that is already provided by both the USA and British governments turning a blind eye to its export of Wahhabi ideology across the globe. In the Afterword to the 2013 publication of *Your Fatwa Does Not Apply Here*, Bennoune writes of her conviction that turning the tide against Muslim fundamentalism everywhere requires its defeat in Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Iran. "We must staunch the flow of oil dollars from the Gulf to would-be emirs and ayatollahs everywhere" (Bennoune, 2015: 345).

Cherifa Kheddar, one of Algeria's foremost human rights advocates, stresses that "instead of just battling terrorism, you must fight fundamentalism. Fundamentalism makes the bed of terrorism... They will not lack recruits, as long as there are young people indoctrinated..." (175). Societies impoverished by unequal global relations, neoliberal economic policies as well as corrupt and unjust governance at home will continue to provide the disenfranchised young men and women who join jihadi movements. Moreover, fundamentalists have been quick to capitalise on popular uprisings they did not start, as was the case in Egypt when the Muslim Brotherhood won the elections after the overthrow of President Hosni Mubarak in 2011. In northern Mali, a revolt by Tuareg separatists was followed by the takeover of fundamentalist groups that had been infiltrating the region since the 1990s: Al Qaeda in the Islamic

Maghreb (AQIM), MUJAO (the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa) and Ansar Dine (Defenders of the Faith) (299-301). French intervention in the Malian case raises the fraught question of the risks of international intervention relative to non-intervention.

The transnational solidarity that is critical for challenging Muslim fundamentalism will require, at the very least, making an effort to understand the complexities of specific contexts in which Muslim fundamentalism prevails. Bennoune's odyssey shows just how central anti-fundamentalist voices *within* those contexts are, "but they are rarely the ones with the loudspeakers" (334). Changing this dynamic means recognising and supporting those voices in the first place. At the heart of this struggle lies the pursuit of women's rights: "one must be absolutely committed to women's full equality and not tolerant of an exemption for 'Muslim women' from the human category that includes everyone else" (340). *Your Fatwa Does Not Apply Here* is a compelling and inspirational book, one that will remain important for a long time to come.

Endnotes

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Beauty of the Heart: The Life and Times of Charlotte Mannya Maxeke by Zubeida Jaffer. Cape Town: ZJ Books, 2016

Gabeba Baderoon

Questions of lineage mark much contemporary writing by Black women, from Nomboniso Gasa's *Women in South African History* (2007) to Koleka Putuma's *Collective Amnesia* (2017), signaling a longing for beginnings and continuity in the face of the vast silences and abrupt severing which mar so much of South African history. In *Beauty of the Heart: The Life and Times of Charlotte Mannya Maxeke*, the journalist and anti-apartheid activist Zubeida Jaffer uses her biographical pen to place a singular woman at the heart of anticolonial and antiapartheid struggles and, in doing so, claims for women the authority to shape the kind of country we are creating today.

Today, South African politics are in ferment, and the country is suffering from increasing structural and interpersonal violence, a stark divide in political views, deepening inequality, and a growing despair about the project of post-apartheid liberation. Amid an escalating sense of crisis, there is nonetheless the sense that *ideas* hold a real power to shape our vision for the future of the country. One idea that is finally attaining national consensus is that the relentless violence toward women in the contemporary period is the central social crisis of the country. Both the scale and intensifying forms of violence have helped to bring attention to the phenomenon but feminists have long argued that destructive gender relations have afflicted the country from the colonial to post-apartheid periods and have resulted in grave levels of aggression against women. To change this reality means to unlearn the ideas about gender that have made contemporary South Africa a deadly place for women and imagine a new way to live together.

It is in this terrain of making the self, of unlearning toxic models of gender, of seeing our beginnings anew – terrain in which the stakes are

extraordinarily high – that I believe *Beauty of the Heart* makes an important contribution. The book portrays the life of a singular woman, Charlotte Maxeke (1871-1939), the first Black woman in South Africa to earn a university degree, a BSc from Wilberforce University in Ohio. She was among a generation of intellectuals, Christian women and anti-colonial activists who, at the turn of the twentieth century, tenaciously resisted colonial laws and embodied a new vision of African leadership and liberation. *Beauty of the Heart* reclaims Maxeke, who is little-known today, as a foundational figure for women activists, intellectuals and leaders in South Africa and beyond, and creates a lineage of women's political leadership that reaches back to the nineteenth century.

Women's absence from central moments in South African history, especially in the area we most venerate – leadership in the struggle against colonialism and apartheid – has grave consequences for our current conception of women's roles. Jaffer's biographies of two notable women, Charlotte Maxeke and Bibi Dawood, as well as Jaffer's autobiography, are interventions in ideas about gender and the erasure of women from South Africa's past. Jaffer has therefore been engaged in an important archival quest – to claim women's proper place in South African history and consequently to reshape the ways we conceive of our present.

In *Beauty of the Heart*, we learn about Maxeke's life through her own words, recovered from the archives of newspapers like *Abantu-Batho* and *Umteteli wa Bantu*, as well as admiring essays written by Sol Plaatjie and A.B. Xuma. We also learn about organisations in which Maxeke played a formative role, such as the African Methodist Episcopalian (AME) Church in South Africa and the Bantu Women's League. Jaffer also drew on Thozama April's recent doctoral thesis on Maxeke and the words of Maxeke's beloved sister Katie Makanya, who was the subject of a "collaborative autobiography" published by Margaret McCord in 1995, based on several long interviews the latter conducted with Makanya in 1954. Jaffer, a writer-in-residence at the University of Free State, was assisted by several student researchers in conducting her careful, thoughtful account of Maxeke's life. The resulting book illuminates the narrative of a remarkable woman whose life spanned the late-nineteenth and mid-twentieth centuries, a crucial period in South African history.

Combing the archives, meeting with Maxeke's descendants, visiting her home in Kliptown, even fortuitously conversing with Gogo Hilda Seete, a

106-year-old woman who had met Maxeke in person, Jaffer has created a rich and empathetic portrayal of Maxeke's life. Jaffer includes many details of interest to feminist readers, such as the insistence by John Mannya and Anna Manci that their daughters as well as sons should pursue an education; the way Charlotte's gifts in singing gave her the chance to study further; the tender relationship between Charlotte and her sister Katie, two gifted women who pursued different choices and whose lives illuminate our understanding of their times. We learn how Anna taught Charlotte and Katie how to find grasses to create pads to use during menstruation.

Born in 1871, Maxeke's life straddled two centuries and many worlds. She faced the violence of colonial wars and the devastation of the Native Land Act, as well as the new wage economies that critically shaped the lives of Black South Africans. In the face of these intensifying efforts to reduce Black people's rights and freedoms, Maxeke responded with undaunted and farsighted forms of resistance. She was the eldest child and the second generation of her family to receive missionary education: in her case, primary school in Uitenhage and upper school in Port Elizabeth. Illustrating the constraints she encountered, she had to enter domestic service in order to receive further education in Port Elizabeth. Charlotte flourished as a student, and, in 1890, the Mannya family moved to Kimberley, where Charlotte became a teacher.

Jaffer succeeds as biographer in weaving Maxeke's life story into a compelling narrative by finding the quotations that illuminate the character of this gifted woman. Facing the "constant tension" of navigating between tradition, the promise of Christianity and the reality of life under colonialism, the Mannya family debated how to reconcile the word of God brought by missionaries with the actions of white people who flagrantly transgressed Christian beliefs.

> "How can you tell which of the white people are really Christians and which are Satan's messengers?" asked her sister Katie.
> "By prayer", said her mother.
> "By study", said Charlotte. (Jaffer, 2016: 24)

Charlotte's resolute faith in education indicated by this answer was reflected in her unprecedented intellectual accomplishments. Maxeke's personal gifts as a singer and scholar, her educational achievements, her role as a teacher and social worker, her church work and her activism are her lasting legacies. In all the arenas in which she was active, she insisted on the significance of women's

roles. She tirelessly advanced women's place in the church and in politics. In fact, she carefully nurtured the independence of women's organisations, such as the Bantu Women's League, which she was instrumental in founding in 1918, so that they could critique weaknesses where they found them and initiate political action themselves. At the same time, Maxeke worked effectively in solidarity with dominantly male political organisations such as the South African Native National Congress (later, the African National Congress). She understood acutely the power of collective work. Jaffer quotes members of the US-based AME Church on the prolific efforts of South African women in raising funds for schools, who despite the challenges facing them, exceeded the donations from the US-based church. Maxeke reflected the intense commitment of this generation of Black women to education as a path of individual and political advancement.

How does Jaffer deal with the complexities of Maxeke's life? Respectability, devout though critical Christianity, transnational religious solidarity and an investment in Black-white alliances formed a significant part of Maxeke's work. These are strategies that some today regard with ambivalence, and even find conservative. But to judge Maxeke in this anachronous way is to profoundly misunderstand the strategic insight and nuance with which she confronted the challenges that she encountered, and the effectiveness of her strategies.

Three examples provide evidence of this. In 1913, Maxeke led outspoken protests against the violent and much-feared pass laws, which were first introduced under colonial rule in 1779, with dire effects on Black people's mobility and freedom. Later, the pass laws exemplified the cruelty of apartheid. Maxeke recognised their danger and, in 1918, led a Bantu Women's League delegation to petition Prime Minister Louis Botha against the application of the pass laws to women in the Orange Free State. She pointedly argued that these laws were the same ones used to terrorise Black people under slavery. "The pass system today was but an improvement from the pass that was introduced by the slave master years ago" (123). As Jaffer notes, the BWL meeting with Botha "resulted in some relaxation of the laws for a while", but the continuing impact of the law meant that Maxeke "doggedly continued to keep her focus on this issue" to the end of her life. She worked with men in the anti-pass struggle, but insisted on the need for independent political action by women. "How can men liberate women from the pass laws", she asked, "when they themselves are subjected to them?" (117). Always

navigating the need for cross-gender solidarity while protecting the rights of women as political agents on their own, she advocated, "Let men and women cooperate against these pernicious laws", yet also insisted that "in this building up of the nation, women must lead" (ibid.).

A second example of Maxeke's strategic insight concerns the vote for women. The cause of women's franchise had been close to Maxeke's heart from the turn of the century, but she and the BWL refused to support the proposal by Prime Minister General J.B.M. Hertzog to grant the vote to white women in 1921. This decision was the result of careful analysis. Maxeke understood all too clearly the intent behind the Bill – after realising that white men would utterly resist giving the vote to Black women, white women's organisations shifted from calling for the vote for all women at the turn of the century to white women only. As a result, Maxeke and the BWL reacted with "very grave alarm" at the proposed bill to extend the suffrage to white women in 1921, "fear[ing] that the added women's franchise and influence would… seriously jeopardise Bantu interests" (139). Maxeke's insight regarding white women's abandonment of the universal franchise meant that the BWL could not support extending the vote to white women only, and instead they chose to protect the limited franchise available to Black men. History showed that Maxeke and her compatriots were right. The granting of the vote to white women in 1930 was followed in 1936 by the removal of the qualified franchise from African and coloured men at the Cape.

My last example is about Maxeke's relationship with Christianity. Like the great poet Nontsizi Mgqwetho, Maxeke was a devout Christian, but she also criticised the contradictions of white Christians and the limited opportunities available for Black women in the church. In 1925, Maxeke gave a powerful talk about Black people's experience of Christianity, noting that old-time missionaries had lived amongst Black people. However, she pointed out, "when people visited missionaries now and knocked on the front doors, someone told them to 'go to the kitchen'" (144). Maxeke emphasised this painful point. "Well, as a matter of fact we did not want to 'go to the kitchen'"… Don't you think it is a shame for missionaries to come out of the kitchen door to see one of his members instead of inviting him inside?" (144). As she noted, "your 'go around to the kitchen' drives [Black people] still further away…, do you wonder that our people… call this Christianity a 'white man's Christianity' and not theirs?" (144). Maxeke argued that Africans held a profound spirituality even before the arrival

of Christianity, proclaiming at the Women's Mite Conference of the AME in the US in 1928, that "we were not godless people when the missionaries came; we were worshiping God in our way" (147).

Jaffer's biography places Maxeke among a wider network of educated Christian Africans whose achievements and writing shaped Black people's views of the future. These include Tiya Soga, the first Black South African to earn a university degree and Nontsizi Mgqwetho, the great woman poet who wrote poems in Xhosa about Maxeke, weaving together the strands of this broader lineage into a denser, richer skein of history. Maxeke's achievements, set within these networks, fill in the bleak absences of our history and make for a vivid and evocative biography.

Despite facing extraordinary barriers, Maxeke forged a life of unparalleled achievements and a consistently moral and courageous political struggle. After recounting a life of unimaginable attainment, the biography turns toward an ending that was sad and heartbreaking. After her husband died, Maxeke could not receive a salary from the church because its rules prevented women from becoming elders or ministers, and she faced increasing financial pressure toward the end of her life. Jaffer's biography has moments of agonised contemplation. Reflecting on Maxeke's visionary work in the church, as a teacher, social worker and political activist, Jaffer wonders what might have been if...? What might our history have looked like if...?

Both Maxeke's unequalled achievements and the neglect and lack of support she faced towards the end of her life hold lessons about the possibilities for women in the world. Envisioning the world differently is at the core of *Beauty of the Heart* and Jaffer dedicates the book to "all the young women of South Africa". Maxeke's extraordinary achievements at a time when almost all educational paths were foreclosed for Black women points to her enormous symbolic meaning for South Africa. Through her we see a different set of possibilities in our own times. And yet, despite her highly visible role in the leadership of anti-colonial resistance by Africans and in advancing the cause of women in twentieth-century South Africa, Maxeke is little known today. *Beauty of the Heart* will help to overcome the contemporary neglect of Maxeke's life.

Collective Amnesia, by Koleka Putuma. Cape Town: Uhlanga, 2017

Uhuru Phalafala

The release of Koleka Putuma's debut collection *Collective Amnesia* officially positions her within an ongoing global feminist dialogue with black female poets who utilise poetry as a vehicle to confront their particularised oppressions as womxn[1] of colour. These young writers, be it Somalian Warsan Shire, Indian Rupi Kaur, Sudanese Safia Elhillo, or Jamaican Yrsa Daley-Ward, create new worlds using the magical power of language. Whether it's Rupi Kaur speaking our truth in her poem "Women of Colour", which proclaims: "our backs tell stories no books have the spine to carry"; or Warsan Shire's "In love and In war", which forewarns: "To my daughter I will say, 'when the men come, set yourself on fire'", their searing words give us courage to attend to our own wounds.

Putuma and company, like surgeons, operate on existing discourses around femininity, queer identities, and blackness. The prognosis is unanimous: the world is designed to make invisible the struggles of blackness, of womxnhood, and of queerhood. The pathology is identified: modernity itself is structured on conquest and domination, inherently violent in its natural state, creating hierarchical societies that place the white, male, capitalist, Christian, hetero-patriarch as the supreme default citizen. Everyone else who departs from that identity is an aberration. Putuma's collection examines these aberrations which attend black queer femalehood and its attendant "corrective" violence, with a mathematical precision only lived experience can qualify.

Collective Amnesia is structured in three sections: "Inherited Memory", "Buried Memory", and "Postmemory". These centralise memory as a sum total of complex historical processes under colonial Christianity and apartheid, embodied by folk in the lineage, and finding continuity through seemingly

innocuous everyday practices. Putuma positions herself as heir to the traumas that were, in the struggle for survival throughout the ages, consciously or involuntarily unattended and stashed away. This is central to the title of her collection, implying a deficit in memory caused by psychological trauma. In essence, when we experience trauma, our psyches adapt coping mechanisms for our survival. At times, this means the mind has to repress traumatic events, successfully burying them deep in the subconscious. However, these memories are never really obliterated, as the collection shows; they lie latent and tend to surface when triggered by certain life events.

Putuma suggests very explicitly that our amnesia is collective, on the level of the nuclear and extended family, as well as on a national level. The family becomes a microcosm of South Africa, and her body becomes the national body. The poem "Hand-Me-Downs" creates these stark links:

> I have inherited a lineage of hand-me-downs.
> It has made me a mechanic and magician.
> It has made my bank account a bucket with a hole.
> Black tax is the water.
> I have learnt how to say my glass is half-full even when it's broken.
> I also know how to clone myself.
> Give, even when there is nothing left.
> I have my grandparents' leftovers in my habits.

At a literal level, the poem itself celebrates the innocence of childhood in a black family in apartheid South Africa, where even today many of us may be able to recount a "happy childhood": communal living, sharing and playing with cousins, imagining and inhabiting complex worlds, and "not too poor to afford a *What if*?" It is the sheer audacity and capacity for loving and dreaming in a time of war that is a gift handed down by our foremothers. In celebrating these inherited gifts, Putuma simultaneously examines their shadow side: grandmother's "machete mouth" that the mirror spits back at you; or the fact that "the first man/ you are taught to revere/ is a white man"; or black queerhood being cloaked by violence and silence, and characterised by hoarding skeletons, duct-taping your screams, holding corpses in your throat, and dying with your hands up and legs open. All the while, for the sake of peace, pain is preferred to a scab of healing because "scabs make people ask questions".

However, Putuma is not interested in honouring the oath of silence signed with the blood of black womxn. Her poetry exhumes these buried memories,

soothes and embalms them with healing, divines peace over them and lays them to eternal rest, as an act of birthing a new selfhood. The section "Buried Memories" is exacting in addressing the internal workings of unresolved inherited traumas; unlike clothes, they cannot be unadorned, but it is also the determination of the poet not to hand them down any further. The task of this generation, as the poet seems to gesture, is sitting in this generational pain, and remedying it. The identified symptoms of our collective maladies are insomnia, panic attacks, depression, suffocation, self-mutilation, limbo-status, and suicidal thoughts – tantamount to living "inside a mortuary with a welcome mat that says 'joy'". Another black lesbian is murdered, you bury yourself with their coffin, "your head [is] hung and sand clenched in your fist/ surrounded by men who do not cry/ and womxn who toss themselves about in the sand/ with no one holding them". Silence is order at the cemetery.

Putuma's act of speaking out is thus a disruption to the accepted order. She speaks out at the cemetery of black female bodies to resurrect herself and her kind, because "I grew tired of being the coffin in the room".

The final act of the triptych, "Postmemory", is a conscious act of addressing those traumas that lie latent in the personal and national subconscious. It is an act of unlearning; of relearning and remaking a new language that is not implicitly violent to her kind – "*writing* (n): a doctrine used to deliver one from the ills of silencing". She reimagines this language from the lives and work of cited womxn of colour who have thrown her a "lifeline". Writing this collection therefore becomes an act of resurrecting self, or moving from silence to expression. It is an act of breathing, for "not everyone can afford to breathe for a living". This assigns breathing, speaking, and being (also understood as taking space unapologetically), as political acts.

Moving to a place of "postmemory" must necessarily take the effort of the nation, of its men, of cis-gendered folk, of whites, and of blacks in South Africa. For, as she states in "Resurrection",

> The graves are bleeding trauma
> The memories say, *let me out*
> The massacres say, *remember me*
> The graves say, *it still hurts*
> The skeletons point to where it does.

The personal is political, for Putuma centralises the black female body as a site of national trauma: a grave. Historically, the graves of black people executed

by colonialism and apartheid's brutal forces continue to bleed today; they are not at rest. The massacres bleed throughout history into our today. Their restlessness troubles our collective memories which we seek to lay to rest, as a nation misfortunately invested in the "forgive and forget" creed post-1994. But it still hurts, and the national body is pained, whilst the national psyche is a haunted grave. On a personal level, the graves of black female and queer bodies also bleed trauma. Inhabited by men who do not cry, the nation's infection spills over and exerts its rancid fury on black womxn. We bear the brunt of hundreds of violent years of white supremacy, of colonial capitalism, of hetero-patriarchy, and of Christian fundamentalism. This is why we must speak and take space. This is why Putuma points and speaks to where it hurts. Because our "tongues are burning in our mouths. When we talk about history, we put the fire out".

Endnote

1 A term that avoids the use of the suffixes "-man" and "-men", whilst showing inclusivity of cis-gender women (whose assigned sex at birth matches the sex they identify with) and transgender women.

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Maku Azu is a contemporary artist best known for her emotive and jarring portraits made from unconventional materials, such as heavily textured construction materials, spraypaints, rubbed-off acrylics and found metals; there are no boundaries. Self-taught, she is influenced by human life and emotion. She is also a sculptor who enjoys creating sensually engaging, organic, semi abstracted figures. Maku believes that art should be an everyday experience, one that continually inspires us to step out of the ordinary. With every piece she creates, she hopes to inspire a private and sacred space, where she connects with each viewer mentally, emotionally and spiritually.

Gabeba Baderoon is the author of *Regarding Muslims: From Slavery to Post-apartheid* (awarded the 2017 National Institute for the Humanities and Social Sciences Best Non-fiction Monograph Award) and the poetry collections *The Dream in the Next Body* and *A Hundred Silences*. She is a Fellow of the Stellenbosch Institute for Advanced Study, a member of the editorial board of the African Poetry Book Fund, and an Extraordinary Professor of English at Stellenbosch University. Gabeba is an Associate Professor of Women's, Gender and Sexuality Studies and African Studies at Pennsylvania State University, where she co-directs the African Feminist Initiative with Alicia Decker.

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Musimbi Kanyoro, Ph.D. is president and CEO of Global Fund for Women. She is an activist for women's and girls' health and human rights, and passionate about using philanthropy and technology to drive social change. During her time at the Global Fund for Women, Musimbi has seen the organisation surpass $100 million in grant-making and spearheaded a successful merger with another non-profit. Musimbi serves on the Aspen Leaders Council, the CARE Board, the UN High Level Taskforce for Reproductive Health, UN Women Civil Society Advisory Board, and on the US President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR)'s Scientific Advisory Board.

Fatimah Kelleher is an international women's rights and social development consultant with more than fifteen years' experience working with a variety of international, regional and national stakeholders in Africa, South Asia and the Caribbean. With multi-disciplinary expertise in research, project design, programming, monitoring and evaluation, and policy advocacy, Fatimah specialises in women's economic empowerment and justice, education, and health. Her experience within the arena of women's economic empowerment

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Amina Mama is founding editor of *Feminist Africa*, researcher, scholar and feminist. She has worked in various European, African and US tertiary institutions, developing transformative research and teaching methodologies. She authored *Beyond the Masks: Race, Gender and Subjectivity* (Routledge 1995), many articles, and co-edited *Engendering African Social Sciences* (CODESRIA, 1997). Following ten years as the University of Cape Town's first Chair in Gender Studies (1999-2009), she was the first Barbara Lee Distinguished Chair at Mills College (2007-2009). She is currently Professor in Women and Gender Studies and Director of the Feminist Research Institute at University of California, Davis. Key teaching and research areas are feminist theory and methodology, colonialism, militarism, globalisation, and women's movements.

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Kealeboga Ramaru is a 23-year-old black queer South African woman who is currently based in Cape Town, South Africa. She joined Equal Education in 2016 and is the co-deputy head of the Western Cape office at Equal Education. She recently completed her Honours degree in Gender and Transformation at the University of Cape Town. Her activism is located within the South African Young Feminist Activists organisation and in black feminist spaces that promote intersectionality and working towards dismantling White Supremacist Capitalist Patriarchy. Her interests include black feminist thought

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Fatou Sow is a Senegalese researcher and teacher in Sociology who was attached both to the Institut Fondamental d'Afrique Noire (IFAN), University Cheikh Anta Diop, Dakar (Senegal) and to SEDET/CNRS, University Paris-Denis Diderot, Paris (France). She has taught at various academic institutions in Senegal, in France, and overseas, mainly in the US and Canada. She holds a Doctorate in Sociology (University Paris Sorbonne, France) and a Research Director Habilitation in Sociology (University Paris Diderot, France). She is a member of various feminist organisations, among which are DAWN, the African Feminist Forum and WLUML (UK), which she is currently directing.

Theo Sowa is an independent advisor and consultant, specialising in international social development with a particular emphasis on children's rights and protection issues. She is currently the CEO of the African Women's Development Fund. Her work includes advisory roles to African and other international women and children's rights activists and leaders, plus policy development and advocacy with a variety of international agencies and organisations. Theo is a board member of various national and international civil society organisations and grant making foundations, including being a trustee of Comic Relief (a multimillion-dollar grant-making foundation) and a board member of the Graça Machel Trust. Theo was awarded a CBE in June 2010.

Toni Stuart is a South African poet, performer and spoken word educator. Her work has been published in anthologies, journals and non-fiction books locally and abroad. In 2014, she was part of the Scottish Poetry Library's Commonwealth Poets United exchange and in 2013, was named in the Mail and Guardian's list of 200 inspiring Young South Africans. She has an MA Writer/Teacher (Distinction) from Goldsmiths, University of London, where she was a 2014/2015 Chevening Scholar. She is one half of the international poetry/music duo, Gertrude & Jemima, with UK poet/drummer Remi Graves.

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Korto Williams is a Liberian feminist, contributing to shaping political discourse on women's rights and feminism. She is a member of the Liberia Feminist and African Feminist Forums and serves on the boards of Urgent Action Fund (Africa) and LEGAL (Liberia). Her academic research on feminism and women rights, *Beyond Mass Action: A Study of Collective Organizing among Liberian Women Using Feminist Movement Perspectives,* has provided a critical framework to shift and redistribute power from a feminist perspective. She has more than 18 years of professional experience in Liberia and in programme development across Africa, the Middle East and the Americas.

Everjoice J. Win has been active in feminist and social justice movements on the African continent and globally. She started her development career in Zimbabwe, designing and implementing popular education and community-based development programmes as well as policy advocacy campaigns. Everjoice was part of the first feminist leadership institute held at the Center for Women's Global Leadership, which conceptualised the 16 Days of Activism against Gender Based Violence. Everjoice is currently ActionAid International's

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Ntokozo S. Yingwana is a researcher and PhD candidate at the African Centre for Migration and Society at the University of the Witwatersrand. She self-identifies as an African feminist and scholar-activist. Her main passions lie in gender, sexuality and sex worker rights' activism in Africa. Ntokozo has worked for the Sex Worker Education and Advocacy Taskforce (SWEAT), and consulted for the African Sex Worker Alliance (ASWA) and the Global Network of Sex Work Projects (NSWP). She has nearly eight years of experience advocating for sex workers' rights and currently serves on the SWEAT board.

28th Sept. 2017

Dear Feminist African Community,

As many of you know, *Feminist Africa* (FA) is a collective project, with a mission and editorial direction that were defined in accordance with the mandate of the continental workshop 'Strengthening Gender and Women's Studies in African Contexts', held in Cape Town in 2000. The African Gender Institute (AGI), which convened the workshop, subsequently initiated the 'Strengthening Gender and Women's Studies for Africa's Transformation' Programme' (GWSA), in defiance of the Western domination of global knowledge production. With colleagues from across the continent, we set out to radicalise the then-growing number of university-based gender and women's studies units by bringing these into dialogue with the rising tide of feminist activism, taking advantage of the new possibilities of then-new ICTs. Activities comprised a series of collaborative, pan-African research, training and publishing projects, including *Feminist Africa*.

FA was launched in 2002, as the first online, open access, peer-reviewed journal of feminist research and activism published on the African continent. Its success indexes the strengthening of a feminist intellectual community of editors, contributors, copy editors, artists and of course, the dedicated users: readers, teachers, researchers and activists.

Fifteen years later, many changes have taken place in both institutional spaces and on the global landscapes, but the challenges of publishing the feminist work of Africans have not diminished. Sustaining the journal, even with the minimal editorial structure and budget behind FA, has become more difficult, yet the global usage has increased exponentially. It is in response to these circumstances that we take space to re-envisage and re-launch *Feminist Africa*. We planned to do this after FA 21: The Politics of Beauty. However, the organisers of the African Feminist Forum in Harare 2016, prevailed upon us to produce Issue 22. We are especially grateful to Dr. Charmaine Pereira for editing this issue, and to our sisters at the AWDF for sponsoring its publication. Most of all we thank the community of feminist Africans who are adamant that FA will be continued!

In sisterhood and solidarity,

Amina Mama (FA Editor)

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