

# Feminist Africa

Issue 19 | 2014



Pan-Africanism and Feminism

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*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.

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# Feminist Africa 19

## Pan-Africanism and Feminism

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# Editorial: Feminism and pan-Africanism

Hakima Abbas and Amina Mama

In May 2013, the African Union (AU) officially celebrated its 50th anniversary, adopting 'Pan-Africanism and Renaissance' as their theme. Marked with a lavish gala, the summit brought dignitaries from all over the world, the occasion saw Africa's Heads of State congratulating themselves on rising Gross Domestic Products (GDPs), visibly excited at the prospects of increased foreign investment. Their enthusiasm contrasts starkly with more sobering realities that belie pan-Africanist visions. Instead of the liberation pursued by generations of Africans, the continent has entered the 21<sup>st</sup> century with increasing inequalities and social abjection facing the majority of Africa's peoples, crudely indexed by poor performances on the Millennium Development Goals (2005-2015). Africa's lack of progress on what might be better referred to as the "Minimal Development Goals," reveals the unpalatable scenario of an African continent characterised by the extreme social injustices that economists refer to as "growth without development". The implications for the multiply oppressed majorities of African peoples are dire.

What are the conditions that legitimise a development trajectory that sees social injustices and inequalities – among them those based on gender and sexuality – deepen while GDPs grow? How should feminist movements challenge the yawning gap between the pan-African vision for Africa in the millennium, and grim material, social and political realities? How does this gap relate to the contradictions between rhetoric and reality with regard to the liberation of African women? Issues 19 and 20 of *Feminist Africa* ask: what can a radical pan-African engagement contribute to the transformation of systemic oppressions, including those based on gender, which continue to sustain the under-development of a resource-rich African continent?

Feminists have a responsibility to critically appraise just what half a century of African liberation from colonialism and institutionalised pan-Africanism has delivered to women. Indeed, feminists ask the same question on behalf of all those African peoples who are not part of the global capitalist elite or their local political and military functionaries. Hard struggles have seen women's movements achieve modest legal and policy inroads (on paper at least) and gain some (often problematic) forms of visibility, but the overt oppression and exploitation of most women continue. There is a troubling irony in the sudden "discovery" of African women by the AU, multinational corporations and development agencies, half a century after women actively participated in independence struggles and contributed significantly to African liberation movements. However, the terms of this new-found recognition need to be scrutinised. Some such questioning occurred in the parallel civil society sessions convened by Nkosozana Dlamini Zuma, first woman Chair of the AU, who also set up a panel to speak directly to the Heads of State in a novel attempt to be more inclusive. By way of example, this issue of *Feminist Africa* includes Dzodzi Tsikata's closing statement to the intellectual debate convened by CODESRIA to generate a pan-African research agenda.

In an article revisiting the gender politics of the liberation movement in Guinea Bissau, historian Aliou Ly asks: "Is the recognition, by Africa's Heads of State, of women as agents and equal partners true or is it just a hoax?" Unfortunately the prevailing neoliberal construction of African women as the capitalist world's latest "emerging market" is more than a hoax. It places women in particular relation to corporate-led globalisation, within which Africa remains a source of raw materials essential to the functioning of silicon valleys all over the world, while being further captured as a market from which profits can be made. Neoliberal constructions of "gender equality" set up women – most of whom are still impoverished – as fair game for profit-seeking investors interested in them only as fee-paying consumers of privatised public services. Critical perspectives argue that the current GDP data heralds a renewed scramble for the wealth of Africa. There is evidence of massive land and resource grabs jeopardising communal access to land and water, as the interests of industrialised agri-business corporations prevail to secure monopolies through patents, and create new market dependencies among the impoverished.<sup>1</sup>

Corporate exploitation runs counter to the interests of over a billion African citizens, just as it has since the early encroachments of colonial

mercantilism. Facilitated by neoliberal economic doctrines, the international financial interests that have come to dominate the global economy undermine the capability of states that many women's movements still call on to protect the interests and rights of African peoples. However, with public institutions and services severely weakened (with the problematic exception of the military – discussed in FA Issue 10) – African states are less able than ever to provide basic human security, or protect their lands and peoples against pillage-for-profit. Market-driven development – in which many government functionaries and home-grown profiteers are complicit – thus looks set to put paid to revolutionary pan-African dreams of unity, freedom and justice, dreams which feminists in Africa have consistently embraced.

And yet, African peoples are everywhere resisting these onslaughts. Women are tenaciously organising across colonial borders in unprecedented numbers, enabled by independent networks and technological adeptness. Thus we see women taking part in large-scale popular uprisings such as those in Tunisia and Egypt, as well as leading their own movements to challenge agribusiness and end conflicts. Feminist-led struggles are challenging widespread violence, deepening their solidarity with women in war-zones, working across the class and educational spectrums, as well as with the various gender non-conforming and queer communities who are the latest target of state-orchestrated violences.

This is the context in which FA Issues 19 and 20 provide a platform for critically examining current iterations of pan-Africanism. Our contributors consider which pan-Africanist legacies are being invoked by governments, civil society organisations and social movements, to ask whose interests these invocations are serving. Is today's gender rhetoric informed by women's substantive but neglected contributions to pan-Africanist movements? Contributors to this issue discuss these contributions, exploring past and present engagements between feminist and pan-Africanist discourses to offer a variety of insights on these questions.

The first pan-African liberation movements were the uprisings of African peoples, in the form of armed and unarmed rebellion, resisting colonial occupation and enslavement while pursuing visions of 'Black Republics' that first came to fruition in the Haitian Revolution. As CLR James notes: "The only place where Negroes did not revolt is in the pages of capitalist historians" (CLR James, 1939). Pan-Africanism can therefore be understood

as an insurrectionary discourse that emerged in direct opposition to European capitalism, manifest in the worst forms of human exploitation, and occupation. Women who challenged enslavement and colonisation were thus also in defiance of imperialist patriarchal culture. Feminist pan-Africanism emerges as the visionary ideological frame of its times, to fast become a transnational political movement concerned with nothing less than the complete liberation of all African people.

The pan-African movement spanned the 20<sup>th</sup> century ideological spectrum, ranging from more right-wing, pro-capitalist, race-based nationalism to more revolutionary socialist discourses advanced by men like George Padmore, Walter Rodney, Kwame Nkrumah, Julius Nyerere, Amilcar Cabral, Stephen Bantu Biko and Frantz Fanon, all of whom locate Africa's underdevelopment in capitalism, challenging the class system, racism and in the case of Fanon in particular, race-based nationalism. Yet an accurate historic record must include women like Mable Dove Danquah, Adelaide Caseley-Hayford, Bibi Titi Mohamed, Funmilayo Ransome Kuti, Gambo Sawaba, Muthoni Likimani, Thenjiwe Mtintso, Djamila Bouhired, Charlotte Maxeke, Albertina Sisulu, and the other uncounted numbers of women who mobilised for Africa's liberation. The contributions of Ly, Reddock and Boyce Davies explore women's involvement in anti-imperialist struggles, illustrating the dynamic conjuncture between feminism, nationalism and pan-Africanism in the early to mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, thus interrupting and transforming the hegemonic androcentric narratives of pan-Africanist history that erase women's participation. Boyce Davies provides a compelling discussion of the pan-Africanist antecedents of today's transnational Black feminism, cautioning against the tendency towards identity-based analyses that neglect the material basis of inter-related gender and class exploitations to depict a mythical, pre-colonial Africa devoid of gender contradictions.

It has often been observed that African liberation movements included an understanding of the importance of women's emancipation, at least at the level of discourse. However, the fact that class oppression was often given primacy in the false 'hierarchy of oppressions' points to a level of expediency that may be unsurprising given that nationalist movements pre-date contemporary understanding of the manner in which multiple vectors of oppression interact, to facilitate colonial divide-and-rule. So while there was no material basis for neglecting to challenge the oppression of women,

male domination of Africa's liberation movements commonly foiled women's liberation by treating 'the women question' as divisive. The conservative import of this discourse became evident with the establishment of nation-states that re-institutionalised colonial exclusions of women. The new ruling elites unashamedly re-entrench patriarchal power, so leaving it to feminist movements to pursue the liberatory principles of a pan-Africanist vision of an Africa that works for all African peoples.

The undocumented gender politics of the PAIGC between 1956 and the assassination of Amilcar Cabral by Portuguese secret police in 1974 are discussed by Aliou Ly, who draws on interviews with former freedom fighters that show how women and men in the PAIGC leadership held a range of positions on 'the woman question' rather than a consensus. Two other features trace trajectories that illustrate how women's movements have variously articulated and pursued the unfinished business of liberation for Africa's women in the post-independence period. Josephine Ahikire's article offers critical but reflections on Ugandan feminism, observing how the ruling National Resistance Movement has actively mobilised women to its service creating new contradictions for women to engage. The situation has given women some space, but at a cost, yielding a scenario that is quite different from that of Sudan, explored here by Amira Osman. Osman discusses how women initially organised to redress colonial exclusions of women from education and the formal economy. She proceeds to trace the evolution of the Sudanese women's movement from the early days of the socialist-inspired Sudanese Women's Union, to its banning in the 1980's by the Islamist state, through to the current challenges posed by an ethno-nationalist politicisation of 'Arab' identity and Islam that run counter to any notion of African unity, while manifesting in the systematic repression of women's resistance.

Trinidadian scholar-activist Rhoda Reddock traces the complementary and contradictory relationship between early 20th century diaspora, pan-Africanism and feminism in the British Caribbean colonies. She excavates Amy Ashwood Garvey's substantive intellectual and political contribution to the pan-African movement, providing evidence that many of the more radical pan-African ideas were initiated by women, sometimes in partnership with men. Amy Ashwood Garvey, who was briefly married to Marcus Garvey during the emergence of the Garveyite movement, is only now being credited as its co-founder. Eric McDuffie's book *Sojourning for Freedom* is reviewed

here by Maxine Craig because this too makes new inroads into the history of black feminist contributions to left politics in the West, showing that Amy Ashwood was in the company of other women activists at the centre of early to mid-twentieth century freedom struggles. But how many of us are familiar with the lives and work of Audley “Queen Mother” Moore, Louise Thompson Patterson, Thyra Edwards, Bonita Williams, Williana Burroughs, Claudia Jones, Esther Cooper Jackson, Beulah Richardson, Grace P. Campbell, Charlene Mitchell, Sallye Bell Davis, discussed in this work?

Kenne Mwikya’s standpoint *Unnatural and Un-African*, challenges the heterosexist and homophobic rhetoric of Africa’s present-day political leaders, with a focus on the Ugandan example. He argues that pan-Africanist ideas are selectively invoked as populist tools that appeal to colonial insecurities over African culture in order to re-direct public attention away from economic neo-colonialism. Contributors to Ekiné and Abbas’ seminal edited volume *The Queer African Reader*, reviewed here by Danai Mupotsa, starkly reveal the analytic and strategic challenges posed by the obfuscatory cultural politics of heterosexism and anti-feminism, as do many of the contributors to *Women, Sexuality and the Political Power of Pleasure*, judiciously reviewed here by Nana Sekyiamah.

Pan-Africanism as theory and praxis is in constant dialectic with other African political and intellectual thought including socialism, Black consciousness, Black nationalism, African queer thought and activism, as well as in polemic counter-position with present-day manifestations of imperialism. The feminist movements on the African continent are shaped by pan-Africanist visions, yet they pursue a critical engagement both with the bureaucratic and political structures of the African Union, and with the broad range of political and civil society formations, calling them to account in numerous ways, thus continuing the more progressive possibilities that pan-Africanism offers Africans in contemporary times.

## Endnotes

1. Africa’s lands are being auctioned at alarming rates: with 15 to 20 million hectares of farmland being subjected to negotiations or transactions following the food price crisis of 2008.

## References

C.L.R James Revolution and the Negro, in the *New Internationalist*, 1939.

# African feminism in context: Reflections on the legitimation battles, victories and reversals

Josephine Ahikire

We define and name ourselves publicly as feminists because we celebrate our feminist identities and politics. We recognise that the work of fighting for women's rights is deeply political, and the process of naming is political too. Choosing to name ourselves feminists places us in a clear ideological position. By naming ourselves as feminists we politicise the struggle for women's rights, we question the legitimacy of the structures that keep women subjugated, and we develop tools for transformatory analysis and action. We have multiple and varied identities as African feminists. We are African women – we live here in Africa and even when we live elsewhere, our focus is on the lives of African women on the continent. Our feminist identity is not qualified with "ifs", "buts" or "howevers". We are Feminists. Full stop.<sup>1</sup>

Over two hundred African feminists sitting in Accra in 2006 developed a Charter of Feminist Principles for African Feminists, seeking to re-energise and reaffirm African feminism in its multiple dimensions. The above preamble to the Charter is an audacious positioning of African feminism as an ideological entity in the African body politic. The charter was collectively crafted as a critical movement-building tool, particularly around the desire to affirm commitment to feminist principles and chart a course to strengthen and grow the feminist movement on the continent. In many ways, the Charter set out to reverse the conservative dynamics that work to undermine the critical edge of African feminism, creating a sense of urgency about the need for the feminist movement to re-assert and re-energise itself. The concerns over de-radicalisation re-ignited my own ongoing reflections as an African feminist, pushing me to reflect on the strides, victories and pitfalls that have arisen as women's movements have pursued a broad politics of legitimation. My reading of the general trajectory of African feminist engagement today

is largely informed by the Ugandan context, even as I identify as an African, in keeping with the pan-African spirit informing the continental feminist movement. My interest here is not merely to recount the diverse experiences on the continent, but rather to establish some key features of the feminist imperative in the African region, progressively permeating the very content of pan-Africanism albeit with varying outcomes across the continent.

Feminism in Africa has been a boiling pot of diverse discourses and courses of action. Far from being constructed in simple opposition to Western feminism, feminism on the African continent constitutes a myriad of heterogeneous experiences and points of departure. In this essay I depart from previous essentialising definitions of “African feminism” that spring from the viewpoint of what it is not. The perspective as advanced by US commentator Gwendolyn Mikell, for example, is that:

African feminism owes its origin to different dynamics than those that generated Western feminism. It has largely been shaped by African Women’s resistance to Western hegemony and its legacy within African culture...it does not grow out of bourgeois individualism and the patriarchal control over women within capitalist industrializing societies... The debates in many Western countries about essentialism, the female body, and radical feminism are not characteristic of the new African feminism. Rather the slowly emerging African feminism is distinctively heterosexual, pro-natal, and concerned with many “bread, butter, culture, and power” issues (1997: 4).

In the current period such a perspective on feminism in Africa is not only conservative, but does a disservice to the women’s movements, and to the generations of women that have been dedicated to pursuing more audacious and radical agendas, especially in the fraught arenas of sexuality, culture and religion. It seems to me that Mikell’s outsider definition of “African feminism” actually robs the movement of the critical edge that has—for over three decades now—generated scholarship and activism that speaks to and for the multiplicity of experiences on the continent. Feminism is a myriad of various theoretical perspectives emanating from the complexities and specifics of the different material conditions and identities of women, and informed by the many diverse and creative ways in which we contest power in our private and public lives. In African contexts, feminism is at once philosophical, experiential, and practical. It informs women’s-movement political strategy



and practice on the continent, making it a very complex phenomenon to conceptualise. As a movement, feminism in Africa is made up of multiple currents and undercurrents that defy simple, homogenising descriptions.

At the same time, it is possible—and strategically necessary—to re-conceptualise “African feminism” as an ideological force that poses fundamental challenges to patriarchal orthodoxies of all kinds. The point of departure here is that the feminist struggle on the African continent represents a critical stance against the mainstream of patriarchal power. Yes, it is necessary to treat feminism as part of the general African body politic, to draw out critical moments of success and effectiveness and, in this way, provide ourselves with a space to theorise and appreciate the transformative changes wrought by feminism in Africa.

### **The victories of African feminism: Embracing the legitimisation question**

In the last three decades or so African feminism has seen successive surges of scholarship and activism, and enormous strides have been made in the political, economic and socio-cultural spheres. Perhaps more than any other social struggles, feminist engagement has been able to lodge a claim within the global political and development discourse (Ahikire 2008). In particular, the 1990s opened a wave of rapid change, with women’s movements across the African continent registering gains in various fields; including governance, health, education and domestic relations. In several countries across the continent women’s scholarship and activism has made inroads, for example, into constitution-making processes and broadening the public agenda, making the gender question a remarkably public issue.

This reflection is mainly aimed at fleshing out the capillary effects of African feminism, as opposed to a recounting of the different experiences of activism on the ground. My interest specifically lies at the politics generated by African feminism at the level of knowledge legitimisation. In many ways, concrete feminist struggles have imbued and shaped societal visions, leading to new imaginings of the African Identity – whether on the continent or in the diaspora. This is what I describe as the capillary effect - understood as a direct product of African feminist engagement on various fronts.

My first point is that victories have been registered at the level of feminist theorisation and knowledge production. Mama (1996) documented the

fact that during the early 1990s women's studies in Africa steadily gained strength, as a growing number of indigenous scholars, women in particular, got involved in studies of gender relations. Her field review indicated that despite the fact that the study of gender relations was still largely dominated by philosophical, theoretical and methodological concerns emanating from Western texts, there was a growing body of work that could be seen to indicate progress in the building of feminist knowledge by and for Africa.

Now, almost two decades later, there exists a substantive body of explicitly feminist research in which radical scholars critically engage Africa's historical conditions and processes of change using gender as a key tool of analysis. Feminist scholarship on and from Africa has made important theoretical contributions to the international fields of both feminist studies and African studies, thereby generating robust and productive engagement with knowledge production in and on Africa (Mama, 2005).

The creation of various institutional spaces for teaching and research on women and gender studies has been a boost for African feminism. Academic units specifically created to advance gender and women's studies have been at the forefront of raising the bar on feminist scholarship on the continent in countries as far apart as Uganda, Cameroon, Ghana, South Africa and Senegal. The African Gender Institute (AGI) at the University of Cape Town in particular created a continent-wide space for feminist intellectual life in Africa through a full decade of research, training and academic interventions that include the establishment of the continent's scholarly journal of gender studies, and choosing to explicitly name it *Feminist Africa*. The School of Women and Gender Studies, established as an academic unit at Makerere University in 1991, further illustrates the potential of the field for national university settings. The School has contributed several leaders to the national higher education landscape, and thus both directly and indirectly influenced Uganda's higher education policies and organisational cultures, while generating information that informs university extension work in agriculture and other areas of national policy and development.

Without doubt, the African feminist challenge in the field of knowledge has gained momentum. For example, CODESRIA's all-time bestseller, "Engendering African Social Sciences" was the product of the initial battles for the acceptance of feminist perspectives in a mainstream African social science community that was still strongly resistant to acknowledging its

androcentrism. The editors of that volume took the position that “malestream” social science was illegitimate and biased, or, to put it simply, “men’s studies”. In her introductory essay, Ayesha Imam (1997) discussed the uphill task that faced feminist scholars at the time, when most of their colleagues had great difficulty comprehending the need to take gender analysis as seriously as class, or other aspects of social stratification and anti-imperialism.

Today there is broader, albeit tacit, agreement in political and educational arenas that gender can no longer be ignored. While there is still resistance and at times overt hostility to feminist work in malestream institutions across the region, feminist critique clearly has much greater legitimacy than it did half a century ago. As Pereira rightly argues in the context of Nigeria, while it was considered ‘normal’ that intellectual discourse should remain silent on the experiences, concerns and visions of women, or else address these in stereotypical and restricted ways, such a discourse is likely to be challenged today (Pereira, 2004:1). This change is most evident in progressive intellectual circles like the CODESRIA network, in part because it has always had strong feminists among its membership. If African feminists had to argue their case to justify gender analysis in the CODESRIA community of the early 1990s, today the question has shifted from the ‘why’ question to the ‘how’ question. In other words, the battle of ideas—at least for the idea of gender as an analytic concept—has largely been won. As a result, there are expanded opportunities for contesting male bias in knowledge legitimation and engaging in gender research. Overall it is clear that feminist interventions have generated a great deal of intellectual ferment, and that this has reached across the disciplines.

The capillary effect of African feminist thought becomes even more apparent when mapped onto the general development arena. Feminist activism has generated the strong presence of the gender discourse in African development arenas. This is evident in the fact that some of feminism’s more liberal derivatives—“women in development”, “gender equality” and “gender mainstreaming”—have gained legitimacy and become commonplace in most national governmental arenas. For example, the African Union (AU) policy discourse indicates the efficacy of feminist activism. Instruments such as the African Union (AU) Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa—which includes a commitment to 50:50 gender parity in politics—point to the influence of feminism on this continental body. The AU Protocol addresses a range of things, among these: the elimination of discrimination against women,

women's rights to dignity and security of the person, secure livelihoods, health and reproductive rights, social security and protection by the state. The spirit, the language, and the coverage of the Protocol can be understood as a direct result of African feminist interventions. The Protocol did not just come about by itself, as the official archive might well suggest. Rather, it is a product of multiple and sustained feminist engagements with the AU. The Protocol was achieved, not given, and is now actively utilised by the women's movement to demand accountability. The Protocol therefore reflects the world of the possible and normalises the feminist ideal at the very level of societal visions.

As part of the voice from the South generally, feminism coming out of Africa has given more impetus to questions of development and underdevelopment, being informed by the particular challenges and predicaments that face the African continent. African feminism has been able to bring the key role of gender in African underdevelopment to many international arenas. Gender discourses in international development have only become acceptable as a result of years of painstaking research and activism, challenging male bias in development. Feminist thinkers from Africa have played key roles in the international networks that have driven this change. Notable among these are the South-south network Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN), and the continental Association of African Women in Research and Development (AAWORD), both established in the early 1980s. Despite the failure of many institutions to implement policy commitments to gender equality, the fact is that feminists have succeeded in shifting the discourse in important ways. However, many African governments sign up to international instruments on women's rights and put national gender policies that pledge commitment to gender equality in place, but then do very little when it comes to concrete operationalisation and commitment of resources (Kwesiga, 2004; Ahikire, 2007). I see this discursive shift as a major success of the feminist movement in Africa, as well as the success of African feminists in international arenas. We have pushed demands for gender equality into development discourse and earned this legitimacy. Amina Mama alerts us to the fact that the world of development is a complex one, in which gains and setbacks are the product of complex negotiations within and across the hierarchies of power that constitute and drive the development industry (2005: 97). Even so-called 'lip service' is suggestive of a change in the ethos that we may build on, by fostering greater and more substantive feminist engagement in the years ahead.

The political sphere is another arena in which feminist gains can be counted. We can now say without any doubt that African women constitute a political constituency, within which women's collective interests can potentially be articulated. Although the situation varies widely in the different countries, there is a sense in which women's inclusion into political institutions has expanded the discourse on political participation and the understanding of democracy in Africa. Women have become very much more visible in African politics, where they have set new global precedents in terms of their numbers and—perhaps more arguably—in terms of their impact on public policy agendas. Globally, four out of the first ten countries with the highest numbers of women in national legislatures are African countries, with Rwanda topping the list with 63.8 per cent.<sup>2</sup> In several countries—South Africa, Uganda, Tanzania, Namibia and Burundi among them—women win over 30 per cent of parliamentary seats (Tripp et al., 2009).<sup>3</sup> In a few cases, women have been able to push their way into difficult post-conflict reconstruction processes to articulate demands for inclusion in the processes of re-writing constitutions and reconstituting the political order (Tripp et al., 2009). For example in Uganda, the logic of gender balance has been institutionalised even where there is no legal requirement to do so. To be sure, there are many instances where the concerns for gender balance are cosmetic or even tabled derisively or as something of a joke. It is also true that where political institutions are undemocratic and/or dysfunctional, inclusion of women does not mean much. Yet the impact of the continued presence and relevance of gender in public discourse cannot be underestimated. Women have succeeded in establishing a norm of inclusion in politics, whatever the limits of that inclusion might be.

The process of legitimisation has been achieved through increasingly effective mobilisation over many years. Women across the continent have created numerous platforms – Networks, Forums, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), Community-Based Organisations (CBOs) – through which women's collective interests are voiced. The visibility of gender in the development arena in fields such as education, agriculture and health can, to an extent, be attributed to the ability of women to organise their numbers to highlight their issues and advocate for them.

This steady encroachment can be understood as a quiet revolution in the African social fabric, the result of feminist inroads into public discourse.

We see more and more society-wide engagement with feminism albeit with different levels of success. It is very clear that the feminist practice and discourse has been imbued into the societal discursive processes. In general, more and more people in rural and urban Africa have been exposed to basic concepts of gender and the language of women's rights, gender balance and the girl-child is part and parcel of the local discourse. There is more talk and more contestation around gender identity, in urban and rural areas alike, to the point that we are now compelled to deal with the question of masculinities in crisis, as men wrestle with new realities where femininity is no longer synonymous with dependency and subordination (Meer, 2011).

Hence, it is not business as usual. The multiplicity of women's daily struggles and organisational spaces at local, national and international levels has, in a way, pushed the social boundaries. Without doubt, these struggles have been imbued within what Mkandawire (2005) refers to as the pan-African concept. The moral panic as demonstrated by worries about the family and about women who allegedly want to rule their husbands testifies to this social milieu. But even in this case where gender equality is ridiculed or seen as a threat to society (especially to the institution of the family); it remains a fact that there is great potential in the increased visibility of the gender question. In my view the panic over masculinity has a direct linkage to the ways in which African feminism has destabilised hegemonic discourses. The visibility of gender equality as a public issue has had the effect of placing patriarchal norms and values under relative stress. Relative stress, in a sense that the patriarchal order is compelled to move from the realm of "orthodoxy" to that of "heterodoxy" (Agarwal 1997), as larger numbers of people are likely to encounter the question of gender equality, even in remote/marginalised contexts far from centres of power and politics. Even when there is resistance, conservative reaction or even violent backlash, it still means that women have succeeded in making their issues part and parcel of public debate: they can no longer be dismissed or relegated to the privacy of the home. Indeed, resistance means that society is being forced to engage and in this way, moments for greater transformation could as well be nurtured.

### **The pitfalls**

This reflection raises a critical paradox. And this is around the relative permeation of African feminism into the development arena. The alarm bells

have started ringing loudly, to the effect that this permeation has at the same time generated increased developmentalism and reductionism. In other words, feminism, as a struggle for transformation of gender relations, is increasingly being conscripted into, perhaps even engulfed by, the increasingly neo-liberal development industry, with disturbing consequences. African feminism may be threatened by its own success. Having struggled to get in as a way to intervene more effectively, many feminists now find their politics compromised by the fact that they now dance within the belly of the proverbial beast.

In order to be effective in the global development arena, great effort was put into making feminist change agendas intelligible to bureaucrats and development actors. Re-naming feminist agendas for ending the oppression of women in the more inclusionary terms of “women in development” or “gender equality” has not been without its consequences.

First, let us take the example of gender training. From the 1990s onwards gender training held a promise for actualising the feminist dream of spreading the tentacles of gender development practice into state bureaucracies, development organisations, higher education and other spaces. African feminists both on the African continent and in the diaspora had a big impact on the popularity and legitimacy of gender training not only due to the level of need but also on the basis that African feminism articulated gender relations in a manner that took on the issues of intersectionality at the very material level. And without a doubt, the institutionalisation of gender training in the 1980s and 1990s was an achievement in that it offered a strategy enabling feminist engagement with male-dominated development paradigms. Over time however, gender training quickly became one of the major vehicles for a broader process of de-politicisation, thereby undermining the feminist critical edge (Meer 2011, Mukhopadhyay and Wong, 2007).

This contradictory success of is what I have termed the inherent vulnerability of feminist engagement in Africa, vulnerability that is paradoxically structured within the inroads that African feminism has been able to make in the development discourse (Ahikire, 2008). In this whole trajectory, vulnerability of the feminist engagement is partly embedded within the operationalisation of the Gender and Development (GAD) perspective. The concept of gender evolved within a context of robust feminist debate and promised to provide more impetus to the radical, liberal and Marxist feminist insights, especially within the articulation of socialist feminism. This strength is drawn from

the critical engagement with gender relations as context-specific social and political power relations and extends to addressing complexities in the bid to transform those relations. Given the importance of the development industry in the South generally and to Africa in particular, GAD as an approach quickly gained popularity, understood as holding the potential for translating feminist ideas into concrete practices that would change the lived reality of women. For example, widespread poverty, deprivation, war, displacement, and global marginalisation all make Africa a continent struggling with the problem of development, so to say. GAD, in this sense, offered a handle for feminism, African feminism in particular, to simultaneously speak to the problems of development as well as to its gendered nature.

However, the need to translate this handle on development into actions that make a difference in women's lives took a new turn as African feminists made pragmatic efforts to make their goals and the concepts accessible to development agencies. Consequently, the gender and development discourse has been viciously watered down. GAD has progressively assumed a life of its own, and ultimately become emptied of its basic feminist imperatives. In what seems to be a redirection to more pressing issues of material deprivation, GAD then evolved as a realm of 'problems', largely constructed as a field with no competing discourses, and largely predicated on rhetoric and instrumentalism. The popularity of instrumentalism meant that policy-makers and donors would be easily on board (Win, 2007). Policy-makers were quick to grab the fact that, for example, including women is good for development. The World Bank was also quick to declare that, unless women are considered, full development would remain a futile exercise (World Bank 1993), implying inclusion of women was necessary for efficiency, as opposed to a much more nuanced concern over social justice. This has meant that we are increasingly faced with the popularity of a watered-down concept of gender. The de-politicised application of the concept of gender has progressively made it possible for it to be used and/or abused comfortably, even in anti-feminist circles.

One clear development stemming from the post-Beijing inclination to reporting mechanisms and the whole emphasis on gender mainstreaming is the increased bureaucratisation and professionalisation of the gender equality crusade. I see this as a direct result of the truncated success of the GAD perspective. The Beijing process marked a new era, where feminists around the world were able to crystallise the demand on national governments to



be accountable to women. Gender mainstreaming then became a rallying point. In Africa feminists succeeded in popularising the notion of gender mainstreaming and the whole arena of demanding specific actions within government departments leading to the demand for certain skills. Quickly then the arena of gender knowledge and activism became overly professionalised.

Admittedly, there is a wealth of documentation as a result of this professionalisation. There is more information on the status of women and the gender terrain of different spheres than there ever was. However, this development has, in a sense, retarded the thinking around gender equality. There is a preoccupation with the technical assessment and efficient delivery of pre-defined outputs, referred to as “UN feminism”, a posture far removed from the liberatory concerns of the international women’s movement (Mama, 2004).

Specifically, gender mainstreaming has brought about a bureaucratic discourse in which development actors can hide without necessarily being accountable to women. In many of the cases gender mainstreaming has been translated to mean that gender is a ‘cross-cutting’ issue. What this has meant in reality is that gender remains at the rhetorical level, hanging on that one sentence usually appended onto policy statements (Kwesiga 2003). Gender budgeting, for example, would otherwise bring to the fore the whole philosophy of democratisation, redistribution and transformatory practice. Instead, it is treated in a technical, static manner, devoid of political engagement and, hence, with very limited outcomes.

On the ideological front there is increasing de-politicisation arising out of the false popularity of the term gender. As a result, what Tamale refers to as the “F-word” being increasingly demonised. It is not uncommon to encounter such statements as:

*I am a gender expert but I am not a feminist*

*I am a gender activist but I do not like feminism*

*Feminism is a luxury for the west and not for African women*

*We need a gender consultant who is practical and not abstract* (Ahikire 2007)

Hence, as several scholars have argued, the concept of gender has been taken on in a way that is emptied of its political impetus and is atheoretical—and therefore divorced from feminism. Accordingly:

[w]e avoid the F-word: Feminism. However I personally steer clear of the term gender activist. This is because it lacks the political punch that is central to feminism. In the African context, the term gender activist has had the regrettable tendency to lead to apathetic reluctance, comfortable complacency, dangerous diplomacy and even impotence... we see gravitation towards 'inactive activists' (Tamale, 2006: 39).

The point here is not at all aimed at demeaning the current efforts across the continent. The fact that the terrain of contesting patriarchal power is overly complex has to be kept alive. Rather, this is a contribution to voices articulating the urgent need to address the inherent vulnerabilities, particularly in African feminism, that may end up negating the gains already registered and blocking progress as well.

Clearly, the language employed in the contemporary period is highly de-politicised (Ahikire, 2007, Tamale 2006, Meer 2011). This is the origin of statements such as: "Gender does not mean women only"; "Gender means both men and women"; "Empowering women does not mean excluding men, men have to be brought on board". This also speaks to the origins of the phenomena of male champions and men's organisations for gender equality (Meer 2011). Whereas such phrases look innocent and inclusive at face value, they do threaten to empty feminism of its transformatory imperatives. Pereira alerts us to the fact that such appropriation and dilution of feminist-inspired terms goes beyond "benign changes in meaning to involve differences in intent and political interests" (Pereira 2008: 49). There is an urgent need for feminism in Africa) to re-invent its impetus. Gender, empowerment, gender mainstreaming, are some of the terms in dire need of liberation, as they have now been reduced to a mere game of numbers (Isis-WICCE, 2013). The vagueness in the naming largely animates minimalist agendas.

And so, is it possible to make a connection between the dominance of minimalist gender agendas and rising conservatism? Why, for example, is there a marked upsurge of efforts to create alternative routes within state structures to re-legalise discrimination against African women, which is otherwise outlawed by international instruments and national constitutions? There is an increase in social conservatism and extreme fundamentalisms, especially those arising out of religious machinations but specifically seeking state legitimisation, which I see as a reversal in feminist gains over time. We see this reversal, for example, through retrogressive legislative processes—debates

and actual pieces of legislation. I use three cases, from Namibia, Kenya and Uganda, to explicate this concern.

#### The Debate on Wife-Swapping in Namibia

Wife-swapping among Namibia's nomadic tribes has been practiced for generations, but a legislator's call to enshrine it in the law has stirred debate about women's rights and tradition in modern society.

The practice is more of a gentleman's agreement where friends can have sex with each other's wives with no strings attached...

The wives have little say in the matter, according to those who denounce the custom as both abusive and risky in a country with one of the world's highest HIV rates...

"It is a culture that gives us unity and friendship", said Kazeongere Tjeundo, a law-maker and deputy president of the opposition Democratic Turnhalle Alliance of Namibia...

Tjeundo said he plans to propose a wife-swapping law, following a November legislative poll when he is tipped for re-election.

Known as "*okujepisa okazendu*" - which loosely means "offering a wife to a guest... (Shinovene Immanuel, 2014).

#### Kenya Passes Bill Allowing Polygamy

Polygamy is common among traditional communities in Kenya, as well as among the country's Muslim community.

Kenya's parliament has passed a bill allowing men to marry as many women as they want, prompting furious female MPs to storm out...

The proposed bill had initially given a wife the right to veto the husband's choice, but male members of parliament overcame party divisions to push through a text that dropped this clause.

"When you marry an African women, she must know that the second

one is on the way, and a third wife...this is Africa" MP Junet Mohammed told the house...

Female MPs stormed out of the late night session in fury after a heated debate. "We know that men are afraid of women's tongues more than anything else" female legislator Soipan Tuya told fellow MPs... (*The Guardian* Friday March 21 2014).

### Miniskirts in Uganda

President Yoweri Museveni has signed a law, which criminalises indecency and Promotion of Pornography.

Henceforth, women have been forbidden from wearing clothes like miniskirts and cleavage-revealing blouses ("tops") that supposedly excite sexual cravings in public...

Asked to draw precise indecency lines, the minister (Ethics and Integrity, Fr. Simon Lokodo) said: "If you are dressed in something that irritates the mind and excites other people especially of the opposite sex, you are dressed in wrong attire and please hurry up and change" (*The New Vision* Newspaper, February 28, 2014).

Needless to say, women's movements in Nigeria, Uganda and Zimbabwe, to mention but a few, have mobilised against the various bills attacking their rights and bodily integrity. But the larger picture is one in which while feminists wrestle with the challenges of de-politicisation, a climate of misogynist reaction has formed, justifying itself by defining "African culture" according to the interests articulated by influential but sadly conservative men.

African feminism faces the challenge of rising above reversals of this kind. The context I have outlined highlights several imperatives. We need to re-politicise our concepts, and clarify the difference between liberal and neoliberal appropriations, on the one hand, and male backlash, on the other. To do this we will also need to utilise regional and pan-African spaces and policy instruments to respond to the more deadly manifestations of anti-feminism. The likely spaces may include specific regional blocs such as the East African Community (EAC), Southern African Development Community

(SADC), Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), possibly the Arab Maghreb Union and the pan-African AU.

Many additional and emerging questions beyond the scope of this article require in-depth analysis and engagement. There are a host of questions about the global context in which such extreme divergences arise and take root in some of the world's most marginalised nations. What is it about the current conjuncture that generates such tensions? Why is the backlash around culture and sexuality gaining currency at this particular time? What is the extent and nature of foreign involvement with regard to feminist movements as compared to conservative organisations, notably Christian and Muslim networks and other ostensibly philanthropic associations with ideological agendas?

Women across the continent are resisting these various incursions into their lives in overt and covert ways, thus advancing more radical feminist thinking than that which has manifested in the political and intellectual mainstreams of the continent. Africa's feminist thinkers are once again compelled to document, demystify and subvert these conservative and reactionary forces with a view to holding the line and pursuing the radical and visionary edges of Africa's more liberatory politics.

### **By way of conclusion**

African feminism seems to have made a breakthrough in terms of political and social legitimisation. Yet we risk falling into still another dilemma, where the dynamic of legitimisation has at the same time bred watered-down versions of feminist practice and, in a way, undermined the capacity to address the re-legitimisation of crude anti-feminist conservatism. There is need to re-claim language, for instance, to reverse the tendency of reducing key political concepts into buzzwords. This will require a conscious effort to re-popularise the use of the concepts of power and gender relations. Terms such as "engendering", "gender mainstreaming", "empowerment", "gender-sensitive" all have to be re-problematized, and their use analysed and contextualised. There could well be costs involved in this re-birth. The costs could be in terms of temporary loss of and/or decrease in donor funding as well as the risk of losing support of mainstream policy-makers and -shakers. But this is a cost that African feminists must be ready to bear. African Feminism as an ideological force must of necessity be repositioned effectively to deploy the

African Feminist Forum Charter of feminist principles in such a way that we - as African feminists who define ourselves and our movements on our own terms - are firmly in control of the naming and legitimation process.

## Endnotes

1. Preamble to the Charter of Feminist Principles for African Feminists <http://www.africanfeministforum.com/the-charter-of-feminist-principles-for-african-feminists/>
2. Inter-Parliamentary Union. No date. Women in National Parliaments, <http://www.ipu.org/womn-e/classif.htm>
3. This representation may not directly translate into gender-sensitive policies and legislation, as many feminists have observed (Tamale, 1999, Goetz, 2002). Countries vary in terms of the route to this representation and the impact thereof. However the legitimate presence in these spaces is no mean achievement. It represents the enormous efforts and potential for extending boundaries of the norm.

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# Promise and betrayal: Women fighters and national liberation in Guinea Bissau

Aliou Ly

## Introduction

Guinea Bissau presents an especially clear-cut case in which women's mass participation in the independence struggle was not followed by sustained commitment to women's equality in the post-colonial period. Amílcar Cabral of Guinea Bissau and his party, the *Partido Africano da Independência da Guiné e Cabo Verde* (PAIGC), realised that the national liberation war could not succeed without women's participation, not only as political agents but also as fighters. Cabral also understood, and attempted to convince his male Party members, that a genuine national liberation meant liberation not only from colonialism but also from all the local traditional socio-cultural forces, both pre-colonial and imposed by the Portuguese rulers, that excluded women from decision-making structures at every level of society. Sadly, many of the former women fighters also say that male PAIGC members did not fulfil promises of socio-political, economic and gender equality that were crucial to genuine social transformation. Because women participated in bringing about independence in very dramatic ways, because the Party that came to power actually promised equality, and because the Party then had women return to their traditional subordinate roles, Guinea Bissau provides an especially clear case for exploring the relation in Africa between broken promises to women and the unhappiness reflected in the saying "Africa is growing but not developing".

In May 2013, Africa's Heads of State celebrated the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Organisation of African Unity in a positive mood because of a rising GDP and positive view about African economies. These African leaders were pleased for what they did for African women and were very pleased to "discover" now that African women could be agents and not subjects of development



even though both sexes have been fighting together for a very long time. The general question that needs to be asked is: is the recognition, by Africa's Heads of State, of women as agents and equal partners true or is it just a hoax?

Guinea Bissau is one of the few African nations that gained independence through a long-fought and bitter war. As such, it presents an especially clear-cut case of massive women's participation in the independence struggle. What is the outcome of women's mass participation in the national liberation war since independence in 1974?

I reviewed volumes of 30-year-old literature on Guinea Bissau, in general, its revolution, in particular, and academic works on Guinea Bissau women (mainly by Urdang and Maloka). Most of the early literature romanticised the struggle for independence, in order to emphasise the progressive and forward-looking orientation of the new independent country with regard to women's emancipation and gender equality.

My research materials consist of personal oral histories, personal handwritten notes, photos, and documents of the African Party for the Independence of Guinea Bissau and Cape Verde Islands (PAIGC) collected from 2008 to 2013, in periods of one to two months. During my stays in Guinea Bissau I interviewed former liberation war participants, PAIGC members, activists, civil society members, researchers, and students, with the help of my Bissau Guinean interpreters and guides. We conducted the interviews in French, Creole, Balanta, Fulani and English. I interviewed mostly women, because I wanted to depart from the official narratives or discourses of national liberation struggles given by male participants and the romanticising literatures of the period of independence struggles in Africa. Collecting war-participant interviews allowed me to participate in preserving memories of war participants and to give voice to marginalised war participants.

This article departs from 30-year-old literature of Guinea Bissau and its revolution offering revisions based on new oral history interviews and reflecting on these using gender analysis. Rather than reassessing fully the role of women in the Guinea Bissau liberation war I analyse the gender relations and the questions of women's emancipation, equality and rights in post-independence Guinea Bissau.

What I found is that, in Guinea Bissau, when Amilcar Cabral and the PAIGC fought for independence, what independence meant to them was

freedom from the colonisers and social justice for Guinea Bissau's citizens. But the outcome of independence is a society that remains divided and unjust along gender and ethnic lines. Leaders focus on the abstract goals of the revolution (political and state independence) with the result that the women of Guinea Bissau have seen continued gender oppression, which has remained especially marked for indigenous women, in keeping with the manner in which gender intersects with ethnicity. Independent Guinea Bissau is one of many African states often described as a 'failed state', in part because it has failed to sustain the fight for concrete personal, familial, and regional social and economic improvements. Instead political independence has seen the male-dominated status quo and socio-cultural inequalities that women faced perpetuated without apology. In other words, the newly independent country ignored the material and historical basis of women's mobilisation in the fight for independence, and neglected their political aspirations. The question of whether the PAIGC actually betrayed women's interests is revisited here, along with the conditions under which the liberatory promise of gender equality appears to have fallen from the national political agenda, even while gender equality discourses have gained much ground within regional and international forums.

### **Why women entered the struggle**

The first real involvement of women in the PAIGC came in 1959 with a drive to mobilise the peasants in rural areas. This new tactic came after the failure of a three-year-policy of urban worker mobilisations. Bissau Guinean women who were members of the peasant class became participants. Women not only responded spontaneously and positively to the Party's call but also convinced their husbands to join the movement (Urdang, 1979: 115). Reasons why women entered the struggle were officially put under the umbrella of liberating the colony from Portuguese colonisation. However, they seem to me more complex, presenting several contrasts, such as running from the Portuguese colonial system or from traditional social structures and beliefs. Most of these young women, at the time of their enrolment into the PAIGC, had little political knowledge, but they were old enough to understand death, punishment, hunger, separation and emotional pain (Gomez, 2008). Teodora Gomes, who was interviewed by Urdang, recalled that police intimidation and army exactions made her and her family join the PAIGC (Urdang, 1979:

207–208). Sandé NHaga, another Balanta woman, was born in NXeia in the southern region of Guinea Bissau. She joined the rebellion after the Portuguese killed her brother in NTchalé (NHaga, 2010). There existed cases in which family reunions were occasioned by women joining the liberation movement. Wives joined husbands and mothers joined sons. Carmen Pereira recounted that her husband Umaro Djalo left Bissau for Conakry. Later, she decided to join him with their three children. She left Bissau for Ziguinchor (the southern region of Senegal), where the PAIGC asked her to set up a PAIGC transit house for newly recruited PAIGC members who were on their way to Conakry for military and political training. Mothers joined sons to make sure they were well nourished, and young women joined the guerrilla bases in order to run away from Portuguese harassment and forced labour.

Like Carmen, Fatoumata Diallo, a Fula woman from the Cacheu region, in her eighties, joined the PAIGC by accident in 1964. Her son, Alpha Dabo, was one of the fighters in the Northern and Eastern fronts. “He came to me and told me he had to leave in order to avoid being arrested” (Diallo, 2009). It was a sad moment because Alpha was her only son; she worried about his health and wellbeing. To make sure her son had food, she started taking food to the *maquis* on a weekly basis. She walked through the forest for hours to do so. One day she asked herself, “Why not live with them and cook for them and save myself from the risk of being arrested by the Portuguese army or police?” (Diallo 2009). As she was living with the *maquisards* and listening to their conversations, she became gradually more involved in the Party and the independence movement (Diallo, 2009). It emerges that women participated in wars for many reasons, some radical, and some conforming to women’s ascribed roles as carers and nurturers.

From the period of sabotage (1961–1963) to the declaration of independence, in 1967, female and male fighters lived together in camps and villages. Fatu Turé affirms, “They were cooking and washing clothes for the camp’s members. They all participated in military and political training and all worked for the success of the war” (Turé, 2010). Sandé NHaga confirms this view and said, “We were cooking, washing clothes. We were doing all the womanly tasks because if we as women do not do it who will do it? It was our job to take care of all the women’s tasks. While doing all this work we have to be alert and avoid being located by the Portuguese. In case of attack, our base commander in Ballacounda, Mamady Kamara, ordered us women to run

into the mangrove swamp, the rice field, or in the forest to protect ourselves” (NHaga, 2010).

### **The struggle within the party over women’s participation** *Amilcar Cabral’s position – Fighting colonial and traditional oppression of women*

Certain West African nationalists understood that successful national liberation required female participation but also required fighting against colonial systems and traditional socio-cultural odds that go against women’s emancipation and rights. In Senegal, as early as the 1930s, Lamine Gueye, leader of the Senegalese contingent of the French section of the International Workers Organisation affiliated to the French Socialist Party, recognised the importance of Senegalese women within his political organisation by championing the women’s emancipation question within the French African colonies (*Journal de l’Afrique de L’Ouest Française*, Paris; France, April 1th, 1939). During the Brazzaville conference in 1944, delegates from French African colonies insisted on the need to implement women’s rights, including measures on polygyny and child brides, and acknowledged women’s roles in resistance movements. They also proposed an agenda of equal rights and opportunities between the two sexes. In 1945 Fily Dabo Sissoko of French Sudan reiterated the same appeal for the emancipation of women. As a result, women in the African French colonies were granted the right to vote for the first time in 1945 (Morgenthau, 1964:40). In the French colony of Guinea, by 1953 women showed their ability in mobilising help and defending male strikers and their families. Their roles throughout the 1950s strikes and political turmoil led the Democratic Party of Guinea–African Democratic Assembly (RDG/RDA) to accept women members by 1954 (*Newspaper Liberté* 1956). Women’s participation led to the RDG/RDA successes in the 1956 local elections and the 1958 referendum (Morgenthau, 1964:106, 240).

In Guinea Bissau, Amilcar Cabral and some of the PAIGC executive bureau believed that it would be impossible to build a prosperous and progressive country without liberating African women from the burden of the traditional socio-cultural and economic systems (Urdang, 1979:125–126). Amilcar Cabral declared a true national liberation meant liberation from colonialist, but also from all socio-cultural, forces that made women take a back seat in the socio-political and cultural decision-making structure (Urdang, 1979:

125-126). These feminist ideas led the PAIGC executive bureau to charge women members of the PAIGC with creating a women's organisation in 1961 in Conakry, with the specific task of elevating women's consciousness and political activism (F. Pereira, 2008).

Amilcar Cabral and the PAIGC executive bureau could see the need to emancipate Bissau Guinean women. Cabral and the PAIGC executive members were mostly Cabo Verdeans or people with Cabo Verdean parents, who migrated to Guinea Bissau as colonial administrative workers and Portuguese citizens (Lyon, 1980:157). Most Bissau Guinean women, on the other hand, were indigenous and Portuguese subjects as were most Bissau Guineans generally. The statuses of the two groups were different, as citizens went to Portuguese schools, attained higher education, worked as colonial administration personnel (Forrest, 2003: 138). In other words, they represented the middle class during the colonial period. So, asking for the emancipation of women would not challenge their social and economic status within the national struggle.

### **The imposition of traditional gender hierarchies during the war**

PAIGC male members, mostly indigenous, and some executive political and military cadres, did not follow Amilcar Cabral and the PAIGC's executive bureau in their views of emancipating women in Guinea Bissau (Urdang, 1979: 97, 119-127). Male members often fell back to the old traditional attitudes and replicated the same social, hierarchical, and patriarchal familial behaviours in their relations with female members of the PAIGC. Their male behaviours were reinforced when, as often occurred, some women fighters showed signs of physical weaknesses on the frontlines. Fatimata Sibili's story had heavy consequences in the way in which several PAIGC officers characterised women in combat operations. At the age of sixteen, as the only woman member of a unit of thirty youths, she trained very well with the boys, to the point that she and the trainer felt that she was equal to her comrades. But once actual combat began, Sibili encountered problems (Urdang, 1979: 228). It was very difficult for her to keep up with the speed of marching, so her male comrades helped her carry her equipment. Sibili blamed her physical limitations on her gender, noting later that she was not as strong as the men. Stephanie Urdang's analysis of Sibili's experience concluded that this "account seemed to

corroborate what I was told on various occasions, that PAIGC experience had led them [women and men] to conclude that women could not fare as well in combat as the men. I wondered while listening to Fatimata, however, how much her performance could have been affected by attitudes, rather than her inherent capability” (Urdang, 1979:228)

While Amílcar Cabral and the PAIGC executive bureau saw the question of women’s emancipation and role in the future Guinea Bissau as paramount, male members of the PAIGC saw it as challenging, because it attacked the foundation of the traditional socio-cultural identities that allowed them to be men. Cabral and the PAIGC, as part of the privileged Cabo Verdeans or descended from the Cabo Verdean ethnic group and of the colonial middle class, as well, would not be socially and economically challenged after independence (Mendy, 1999:25). As the educated leaders of the nationalist organisations, they became the leaders and decision-makers of the independent country—in other words, no loss of economic and social privilege. In the case of the PAIGC members who were not Portuguese citizens because from different African ethnic groups and hence considered subjects, and of whom most did not receive schooling or received very basic education through missionary schools—these were left out of the administration system in favour of the Cabo Verdeans and Cabo Verdean descendants. Most of them lived in the countryside, suffered from the colonial system exactions, and did not receive any benefits from the system. The PAIGC executives, by deciding to emancipate women, were attacking one of the basic foundations of the indigenous socio-cultural beliefs. As indigenous males had already lost all their decision-making power through social and economic changes brought about by the colonial system, they saw the PAIGC as attacking their remaining familial power, something they would not accept readily. Indeed, the PAIGC leadership’s insistence on women’s emancipation was one reason why some Bissau Guinean nationalists created political parties along ethnic lines or pro-indigenous groups, rejecting any alliance with Cabo Verdeans and descendants of Cabo Verdeans (Romalho Cissokho, 2008).

Most male PAIGC members and fighters supported the idea that women had to stay behind the front lines. Each of them had specific explanations about why women should stay behind. Barnaté Sahna said, “Women got scared easily and put always the life of the fighters in danger. They are not suited for combat operations” (Sahna, 2010). Hutna Yala, another Balanta

man and combat veteran, believed that a woman's place was in the home, not fighting against the Portuguese. For him, "men are suited to fight. Women are suited to take care of the family and their husband, not to fight. Women can't carry heavy loads for long distances and they can't stand blood, and killings" (Yala, 2010). For example, one of the maquisards under the command of Osvaldo Vieira, Barnaté Sahna, affirmed his commander never wanted to have women participating in direct combat operations and he never addressed the women's emancipation question to his fighters (Sahna, 2010). Osvaldo was not the only one who had been disturbed by the idea of integrating the women's emancipation question into the liberation war agenda. Luis Cabral was, also, according to Carmen Pereira (2008). Amílcar Cabral recognised that some Party members did whatever they could to prevent women from taking charge (Cabral, 1969:71).

From 1961 to 1974 PAIGC all women participants had charge of so-called "women's tasks", such as cooking, laundry, weapons transport, spying, and nursing care. Throughout different periods of the war and for different reasons, women were assigned "male tasks", such as participating in full combat operations, working as sentinels in guerrilla camps and protecting liberated zones.

From 1967-1972 the PAIGC adopted a policy of explicitly forbidding combat by women. Most PAIGC fighters argue that the Party discontinued women's participation in direct combat operations because of physical weakness and a lack of courage enough to participate in direct combat operations. Alternatively, leaders felt that the female population must be preserved for population reproduction and growth for the post-war period (Urdang, 1979: 226-228). This decision had several implications, such as reinforcing ideas of inequality between the sexes, thus weakening the struggle for women's emancipation. This masculine ideological narrative sought to subordinate women, and it reinforced existing customs and views about women. In doing so, the Party explicitly emphasised gender differences.

Some women challenged the Party's decision to restrict women's participation in direct combat during the period 1967-1972, as they were already exposed to military training and direct combat operation while assuming their "women's tasks". Titina Silla represented women who challenged the gender roles, participating in direct combat operations all along. Titina exemplified the typical woman fighters and refused to face any

restriction regarding participation in direct combat operations, thus serving as an example for other liberation movement participants (Urdang, 1979: 226-228; C. Pereira, 2008). Many unknown or lesser-known women played key roles on the Guinea Bissau battlefields. Theresa NQuamé, a Balanta woman who joined the PAIGC's guerrilla army in 1966, was on the Northern front for two years. She was part of a group of the PAIGC naval corps that was setting land and maritime mines along the rivers and roads of the Northern front. Theresa sank two embarking Portuguese vessels, at the Yado port entrance and at Tchacal, and damaged a third one in Tenkrua. In her group in the Northern region they were two women in a group of men. The second woman was Joana Mai (NQuamé, 2010).

### Limitations of women's political organising

In 1961 the PAIGC central bureau tasked its female members with creating UDEMU (*União Democrática das Mulheres da Guiné*/ Women's Democratic Union of Guinea). The formation of UDEMU and the organisation's history offers a unique perspective on the complicated role of women's issues in the context of African liberation movements. Fighting for national independence and women's issues engages the struggle against colonisers but also against large sectors of the nationalist organisations, as men nationalists also were the oppressors of women in general and women nationalists in particular. While nationalist leaders may have supported the women's agenda, nationalist participants fought against it or refused to play an active role in the social struggle.

The PAIGC made a decision in 1965 to dismantle the UDEMU for lack of results. What caused the women's organisation to fail? The paramount reason for the failure lay in the fact that the idea of the creation of the women's organisation came from the PAIGC's male-dominated executive bureau and that the women's organisation did not receive full support from the leadership. Francisca Pereira stated that in Conakry PAIGC women members and Party headquarters workers regularly faced gender discrimination. Many PAIGC male members considered them as servants and asked services of them that they would ask of their wives on a daily basis (F. Pereira, 2010). Some of these leaders, even though they advocated for gender equality, and changes in gender relations, kept acting as if nothing need to change.



Large numbers of PAIGC women did not push the women's emancipation question, because for most of them it was not the reason why they joined the national liberation struggle. In their reasoning the struggle was against the Portuguese colonial system and not against "their men". These women believed their conditions were the result of external economic exploitation. They did not see the link between their conditions, the socio-cultural inequalities within their societies and the colonial system. Reason for that could be found in the fact that the deterioration of the economic and social environment corresponded with the implementation of the colonial system.

Among all the women participants in the national struggle only two of them, Francisca Pereira and Eva Gomez, saw a correlation between women's socio-cultural conditions and familial economic difficulties. However, Francisca believed no one should go against their own society, and that it was better to accept the gender relations rather than singling out oneself and bringing shame to one's family and oneself.

## **Gender and Cabo Verdean identities in post-colonial Guinea Bissau**

After the war Luis Cabral and most of his followers were not interested in changing the social dynamics of the country, even though laws advocating equality between the sexes and protecting women had been set in place. Instead, they developed new economic and social classes within the Bissau Guinean society, in which those of Cabo Verdean background and guerrilla-military officers were favoured. The dichotomy between Cape Verdean background and indigenes ultimately led to the 1980 military coup under the leadership of Nino Vieira, a Balanta and former southern front commander during the liberation war.

Many former women fighters believe if they had to fight the national liberation war over again, they would not, because Cabral's male followers never respected his promises. One of my interview subjects, Bacar Cassama, explained it this way: "Combatants did liberate the country but they also made mistakes" (Cassama 2008). Instead of fully recognising the roles of women in the war, male fighters called the female participants in direct combat operations heroines to set them above ordinary women. They described the nurses and logistical transport supporters as simply women who had been doing their regular tasks as women. Mary Ann Tetreault argues:

What any group gets after the revolution is at least in part a function of what that group is perceived to have earned by the blood of its members (Tetreault, 1994:19).

Male fighters in the liberation war wanted to see women fighters only as engaged in housekeeping tasks and as occasional, unique or isolated cases of heroism; hence, men left them out of the discourse of the liberation.

Among its other goals, the liberation war sought to emancipate women and establish gender equality. The success of the political revolution masked the failures of the women's emancipation and liberation agenda. Many of the former male fighters kept their old misogynistic and sexist attitudes. Most women refused to challenge old socio-cultural behaviours and laws. Those who were ready to challenge conventions or to implement laws promoting equality faced male resistance.

The necessity of women's equality to true post-independence development is further shown by the intersection between gender and ethnicity. The two liberations always go together. The leaders wanted to maintain their privileges both as Cabo Verdeans and as men. Some scholars, such as Joshua Forrest, look at this discrepancy as an indication of the lack of serious commitment to certain social issues. For him, post-colonial society was unsupportive of women's causes and the Women's Commission was simply a social club centred in Bissau (Forrest, 2003:127). For Bacar Cassama, after Independence PAIGC leaders and government officials referred to women's issues only during meetings and when foreigners were visiting the country (Cassama 2008). Yet the official programme of the PAIGC declared that 'Men and women will have the same status with regard to family, work and public activities' (cited in Lobban and Forrest, 1988:205). Measures to protect women from spousal abuse also became a part of the new constitution (Lobban and Forrest, 1988:279). Furthermore, the new government guaranteed access to land to all men and women who want to farm, either by indigenous systems of land tenure or by government decree (Funk, 1988:33). While some women, mostly those involved in affairs of state, would have positive views regarding the effectiveness of official policies on equality, most of the women I interviewed blamed the Party-run state for abandoning women. As Binetou Nankin Seydi put it,

We as women have never been respected or included in the country policies since independence (Interview 2008).

Only 25 to 30 per cent of primary school children and one-quarter of secondary school students were female, reflecting the families' refusal to release their female children for formal education (Mendes Pereira 1986, 78). Women rarely occupied positions of crucial political leadership in the decades after liberation. Although women were free to run for political office, they have never held many significant political positions. The discrepancy between the official policy of gender equality and the low representation of women in political leadership has inevitably aroused several interpretations and speculation about the seriousness of Guinea Bissau's commitment to gender equality. By 1977 the number of women in top leadership positions remained low. As Urdang points out, the figures were not enhanced by the fact that some women occupied several positions, reducing the absolute total (1979:267, 269).

After independence, the issue of women's liberation gets into the intersecting relationship between women's issues and old social practices, generating new social political hierarchies based on ethnicity and gender, particularly with the persistent grip on authority held by people of Cabo Verdean and/or Portuguese ancestry. According to Fodé Cassama,

The truth is most of the people who profited from the war of liberation were people with Cabo-Verdean or Portuguese family names, because the Portuguese brought a lot of them from the Cabo-Verde islands to run the colonial administration. And because we were autochthones, most of us were not educated or went to the indigenous schools, while Cabo Verdeans went to the "civilised" and missionary schools in Cabo Verde (Cassama, 2010).

In this regard, when the political system chose to mention token women as exceptional heroines, to show they do believe in women's equality, this meant that the privileged heroines would also be Cabo Verdeans, with the exception of the late Titina Silla.

The historical record indicates that this is a correct assessment. In the 1977-1978 Council of State, only Umaro Djalo was not of Cabo Verdean descent (Galli and Jones, 1987:70). The 1977-78 Council of Commissars and ministers of the period were mostly of Cabo Verdean descent except Joao Bernardo Vieira (Nino), and Samba Lamine Mane, two out of 20 ministers (Galli and Jones, 1987:70). Regarding women's representation in State or governmental affairs, in 1977 Francisca Pereira was the only woman. The

same situation was repeated in the women's organisation Udemu and in all the different component sectors of political, economic, and administrative structures. For Mamady Kamara, whom I interviewed in front of a large crowd of PAIGC veterans as they were waiting for their monthly war-participant pension in Bissau, the problem was not that *women* were under-represented in the political and economic structures, but that the *autochthones* were under-represented (2010).

After independence, the PAIGC took up the problems of polygyny and forced marriages, among others, and began to campaign to end them. Ultimately polygyny was made illegal (Tertilt, 2006). However, polygyny has not ended, and its persistence may shed some light on recent experiences in Guinea Bissau. Men make a variety of arguments in favour of polygyny. Some men claimed that polygyny is part of the "African heritage" in contrast to monogamy, but this is mostly men hanging on to their social power over women. Men of higher social classes hang on to their colonial privileges. Men in lower classes hang on to their "African traditional privileges". These go together. How is this explained? Aliu Fadia, an old Muslim man married to a Balanta woman, claimed polygyny was an ancient tradition and part of the African way of life. He claimed that monogamy is a new way of thinking that modern governments are forcing on their citizens (2010).

Many men condemn the government's decision to impose monogamy as the only civil marriage recognised by the state. Diabira Gassama claimed he saw the imposition of monogamy as an institution imported from European culture in an attempt to make women equal to men, which he claims is foreign to Africa. In essence, he argues that the law did not reflect public opinion. For him, it is not unusual for men to resist legal reforms that undermine their authority over matters of marriage (2010).

Although a number of men defended or made reference to polygyny as customary or traditional, most of them also claimed that polygyny was a practical solution to a man's desire for cheap labour in the form of a large family and numerous children (Forde, 1950:250; Sheldon, 2002:10-12). Polygyny was not simply adopted into the society because men preferred having several to having one sexual partner. Polygyny arose directly out of the peasant economy. It was in a household's interest to have more than one wife to share work and to accumulate wealth (Urdang, 1979:202). Many farmers continue to believe in the economic advantages of multiple wives and

children. The urbanised wagedworkers with multiple wives whom I interviewed, favour polygyny for other reasons. Some men argue for polygyny as a way of emotionally controlling wives. For them, a single wife may become demanding and stubborn, because she knows that her husband depends on her alone. Another argument involves seeking social prestige or prestige among men through having many wives.

Men avoid civil marriage in order to avoid the constraint of monogamy. Most of the married men with whom I spoke said they did not contract a civil marriage. Aliu Fadia said:

Even when men were allowed to be polygynous, men rarely contracted a civil marriage, because it is not part of our culture and belief. These are most likely men who refused the new gender relations. They are not willing to make changes that put themselves in question, but want the government to change. Women's liberation is important, because it shows the links between the changes at every level of politics, society and culture. Now, with the constraint of having only one wife, do you think it will encourage us to get a civil marriage certificate with all the laws that may come with? No, I do not think so. (Interview 2010).

With the idea to keep the old behaviours and rejecting any potential challenges to male beliefs, Diabira said, the idea of contracting a civil marriage is not “African”:

Why should we copy the Europeans? You know, our leaders were brainwashed by the Europeans and they want to impose on us a European way of life. If at least they were helping the population to live a decent life and respect the institutions, we can follow them. They do nothing for us and want to impose on us a way of living, [but] it is not going to work. Look, most of the married men I know never contract a civil marriage because nothing comes with this contract. No help (Interview 2010).

Diabira and others see the law as something from outside their country imposed by their government, a government that does not respect tradition or fulfil its duties. Put differently, when it is about gender and women's emancipation, Guinea Bissau males found refuge in the idea of maintaining our culture or tradition to avoid any potential change, but they also forget that African social and cultural practices are dynamic and not inert. African cultures and social practices always adapt to new environments.

## Conclusion

Women in Guinea Bissau struggled to find a place for themselves in the war for independence but failed to change male attitudes toward the role of women in peacetime. As Guinea Bissau developed into an independent nation, women were locked out of meaningful political power. While some elements of a feminist legislative agenda were implemented, for example, a ban on polygyny, these changes again reflected more style than substance. The case of Guinea Bissau, in terms of unequal relationships between men and women politicians and the marginalisation of feminist ideas, was replicated all over Africa in the same manner. After independence African leaders have by and large expected African women to return to their old socio-traditional roles. I have argued that this may be one of the reasons why Africa is said to be “growing but not developing.”

## Interviewee profiles

**Francisca Pereira** was born in 1942. She joined the PAIGC in 1959 in Conakry Republic of Guinea at the age of 17. During the liberation war she represented the PAIGC at the Pan-African Women’s Organisation. After the war she held executive and legislative posts and was also the president of the Udemu in 1977. She is still active in Guinea Bissau politics presently.

**Eva Gomez** was 15 years old when she joined the PAIGC in 1963. She went to Ghana and the Soviet Union for medical training after receiving her military training in Conakry and in the Guinea Bissau liberated zones. Afterward she served in the Southern region. She is presently the president of the Women’s organisation.

**Sandé NHaga** was from NXeia. She joined the PAIGC struggle after witnessing her brother being killed by the Portuguese in NTchalé (1965). She worked as cook and nurse on different battlefronts (Eastern and Northern regions). Now she is a war veteran.

**Carmen Pereira** was the daughter of the first Guinea Bissau lawyer. She joined the PAIGC accidentally in 1962 as she was following her husband Umara Djalo, one of the early PAIGC members. She lived in Senegal before going to the Soviet Union for medical training in 1963. She was deputy President of

Guinea Bissau National Assembly, then Minister of Health and Social Services, before later becoming a member of the Council of State. As President of the National Assembly, she was Acting President of Guinea Bissau from 14 to 16 May 1984. She was politically active until 1992.

**Fatoumata Diallo** a Fula woman from the Cacheu region, in her eighties, joined the PAIGC by accident in 1964. Her son, Alpha Dabo, was one of the fighters in the northern and eastern fronts. Her son and other fighters often used to stop by her house looking for something to eat or to rest after long journeys of marches and fighting. Her son Alpha was a PAIGC sympathiser before he became fully involved in the party in 1962. She decided to become fully involved because the Portuguese police pursued her son and others in Cacheu. It was a sad moment because Alpha was her only son. She worried about her son's health and well-being. To make sure her son had food, she started taking food to the *maquis* on a weekly basis. She walked through the forest for hours to do so. One day she asked herself, "Why not live with them and cook for them and save myself from the risk of being arrested by the Portuguese army or police?" Since then, she stayed in the *maquis*.

**Fatu Turé** is from Gabu. She joined the PAIGC in May, 1963, after being recruited by Cau Sambu. Following military training she participated in the militia group, protecting villages and liberated zones, transporting weapons and military logistics from Guinea Conakry to different battlefronts.

**Mario Romalho Cissokho** was a member of the PAIGC since 1961 and former Director of the INEP (Guinea Bissau's National Institute of Research).

**Barnaté Sahna** joined the PAIGC in January 1963, in the Northern region, at the age of 18. After periods of military and political training, under Osvaldo Vieira's orders, in 1965 he entered the fight as fighter in the Northern front. In Mores he met Amílcar Cabral and Titina Silla. In 1967 he was sent to Nhakara. In 1968 he lost his right eye during a combat operation and was hospitalised in Dakar, Senegal.

**Hutna Yala** was recruited by Marciano Lima on 28 June 1968. He went to the PAIGC pilot school in Conakry before joining the Quitafine sector after

sojourning for two years in Cubucarre. Quitafine was an important zone in the PAIGC strategy, as most of the logistics coming from Guinea Conakry transited through the region before being transported to different sections of the warfront.

**Theresa NQuamé** was a *sapadura* (someone who set mines in water and on land to destroy Portuguese naval embarkations, bridges and roads) during the liberation war. She affirms that in her section in the North region two women were in the groups of men specialised for those tasks.

**Bacar Cassama** was one of the early Bissau Guineans whom Amílcar Cabral talked to about his political goal in the 1950s just as he came back from Lisbon, Portugal. He was working in a factory dedicated to agricultural practices where A. Cabral was sent as agricultural engineer in 1953. He became one of the key mobilisers during the period 1959-1963 and a member of the struggle under Domingo Ramos (Eastern front), 1963-1974. After the war, he was a member of the Council of State, National Assembly and others.

**Binetou Nankin Seydi** was a twelve-year-girl when she witnessed the PAIGC organising what is known as the CASSACA conference in her village Cassaca (South region). One year later the PAIGC recruiters sent her to the Conakry PAIGC pilot school for her education. She learned about the assassination of Amílcar Cabral when she was in La Havana Cuba where she was for secretarial training. She came back to pay respects to her leader and never returned to Cuba. She worked in different ministries as a typist and is now one of the executive members of the women's organisation Udemu.

I interviewed **Fodé Cassama** in his house, in Bairro Luanda at night, a house without electricity, as are most houses in Bissau. He joined the PAIGC in 1962 and went through military and political training in East Germany and the Soviet Union before being sent to the Southern front to join Nino Vieira's forces, and later to the Eastern front to join Osvaldo Vieira. Now in his seventies all his activities since he retired in 1995 revolve around the mosque and his home.



Mamady Kamara joined the PAIGC in 1961, recruited by Osvaldo Vieira. During the sabotage of the Portuguese infrastructures (1961-1963), he was arrested in 1962 and jailed for three months and twenty-seven days while his brother stayed in jail for two years. In 1963 he participated in the opening of the Southern front. He was transferred to the Eastern front under the leadership of Domingo Ramos and Malan Keita in 1965. He took part in the battle in which Domingo Ramos was wounded and died. He returned to the Southern front (Medina Boe) in 1966, as Osvaldo called him to come back. In 1971 again he was sent to the Northern front.

Aliu Fadia was born in 1933 in Boulama. A polygamous Fula man, he was the father of my host in Boulama. During the liberation war in Guinea Bissau he and his family migrated to Ziguinchor, Senegal. They went back to Guinea Bissau in 1974 after the declaration of independence. During his adult years he was a trader but also a seasonal acajou nut collector during the acajou collecting campaign. He passed away on May 21, 2012.

Diabira Gassama is a young Mandinka from the region of Gabu.

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# Beyond the pan-Africanist agenda: Sudanese women's movement, achievements and challenges

Amira Osman

Pan-Africanism has inspired women's movements in Africa and generated debate around many issues such as the role of women in the political process of their countries and the emancipation of women. This paper focuses on the achievements and challenges of Sudanese women's movements in the context of pan-Africanism. In particular, I examine the history and experiences of the Sudanese Women's Union (SWU), the first women's organisation in Sudan. The SWU is considerably the largest and most provocative post-independence women's organisation in Africa. From this position, this paper explores pan-Africanist influences on the Sudanese women's movements. I argue that Sudanese women have politically engaged in the pan-African anti-colonial struggle for liberation, promotion of cooperation, unity, stability and human rights in all African nations, and that they have also actively participated in post-independence national political agendas.

Women in Sudan, like women elsewhere in Africa, perceived liberation from colonialism as a prerequisite for their liberation from illiteracy, poverty, inequality and ignorance, and later, for democracy and national development. From the colonial to post-independence years, women's movements have faced intensifying challenges resulting from a dire national political situation characterised by ongoing conflicts, and the eventual partition of the country in 2011. Women's movements became more visible as they continued to address post-independence challenges which notably include underdevelopment, lack of democracy, poverty and inequality. Moreover, women have developed their own agenda for the promotion of peace and stability, and specifically addressed the issues of violence against women, both in the home during times of peace, and during armed conflicts. Sudanese women have faced many national and local obstacles in the pursuit of the organisational autonomy necessary to pursue these agendas.

## Pan-Africanism

Pan-Africanism demands the unity of all Africans, regardless of social and political differences on the basis that African peoples on the continent and in the diaspora have a common history and destiny. The Organisation of African Unity (OAU) now renamed the African Union (AU), has been advocating for unity and cooperation among African nations since its establishment in 1963. Nevertheless, the instability and conflicts that have shaken many countries, including Sudan, have posed a constant obstacle to Africa's unity and undermined post-independence development. The AU mandate requires it to address conflict and instability in the interest of unity. Measures have included establishing a Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution (MCPMR) and the deployment of African peacekeeping missions to war zones such as Burundi in 2003–2004, and Darfur in 2004. The philosophy and ideology behind this approach is seen as a part of the quest for African approaches to African problems (Francis 2006:126). Unlike the commission that successfully dealt with decolonisation and racism, today's peace and security mission lacks successful stories (Francis 2006:124–125). These missions, I argue, also fail to address gender-based violence with any seriousness.

African development has been an important concern of pan-Africanism since the early 1950s. Pan-Africanist thinkers and philosophers have proposed models of development based on the creation of African institutions to foster political and socio-economic transformation and people-centred democracy (Martin, 2011: 28). Julius Nyerere for example, believed that to develop, Africa needed to depend upon its own resources and to develop policies based on collective self-reliance (Nyerere 2000, cited in Martin 2011:34). Social justice, poverty, illiteracy, ignorance and disease were identified by the philosophers of pan-Africanism, in particular Kwame Nkrumah, as the main challenges to the independent African nations and to the pan-Africanist vision of a liberated continent (Dodoo 2012).

To keep up with Africa's post-independence challenges, new agendas were developed. These are expressed clearly in the AU's new vision which is aiming for "an integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa, driven by its own citizens and representing a dynamic force in the global arena" (AU 2014b). Following the liberation of South Africa from apartheid, and the accelerated globalisation of the late 20th century world economy, the concept of an

African Renaissance was popularised by then-President Thabo Mbeki, who sought to revitalise pan-Africanism, throwing South African support behind regional institutions. The African Renaissance refers to “a period of time when Africa will experience great development in its economy and culture” (Jonas 2012: 83). Pan-Africanist scholars, activists and researchers historicise underdevelopment, attributing it to Africa’s marginalisation through slavery and colonialism, and motivating for a forward-looking platform for change. For instance, the declaration of the AU Commission Consultative Conference of women stakeholders on the topic “Pan-Africanism, Renaissance and Agenda 2063”, held in Addis Ababa in May 2013, which resolved to “eradicate poverty, underdevelopment, inequality, conflict and disease.”

Nowadays it is widely recognised that Africa’s Renaissance will not materialise without the involvement of women in all aspects of the political, economic and social affairs of the continent. Despite the AU gender policy, much more needs to be done to achieve gender equality and women’s empowerment. The marginalisation of African women in the pan-African movement has been denounced by African women’s movements. Francis argues that despite women’s activism against colonialism and apartheid in many African countries, pan-Africanism has remained a male-dominated ideology. Its narratives and discourses give credit to men and ignore women’s contributions (2006: 14). Bineta Diop, founder of *Femmes Africa Solidarité* (FAS), in Senegal notes:

“They created the OAU without having women in the centre of the debate, and as a consequence, women’s issues were not adequately addressed.” (African Union, 2013).

Despite this marginalisation, feminists in Africa assert that the struggle for Africa’s liberation and development go hand in hand with the struggle for women’s liberation and gender equality (Winyi 2013:13). This vision has led to the creation of hundreds of women’s organisations working in a wide range of areas, both locally and regionally. A good example is the African Women’s Development and Communication Network, FEMNET. Established in 1988 to promote pan-African agendas and improve the quality of African women’s lives, FEMNET focuses on improving women’s economic and social status. It also works to strengthen African women’s leadership capacity and facilitate the creativity and communication of their diverse cultural identities and practices (Winyi 2013:13-15).

## The Sudanese Women's Movement

Literature on women's movements in Sudan is scarce, as little has been written on the political role of women during the colonial or pre-colonial era. The few studies that exist ignore pan-Africanism and its influence on women's movements. Furthermore, the gender biases of recorded histories are not particularly helpful for those invested in examining how women and men historically interacted and what roles they played. This poses a major challenge to gender and feminist research and activism in Sudan. Ajoba (2002: 1-2) criticises the writing of Sudanese historians, such as Shibeika (1959) and Said (1965) who not only ignore the role of Sudanese women and their contributions to all major historical events, but also disregard how historical events affected them, thus portraying history as a male domain, where men are the only actors. Moreover, the political environment, in particular since the Islamic military coup in 1989, has become hostile to research on gender relations. The crackdown on women scholars and activists obstructs the study of women's contribution to political processes. In 2004 for example, security officers raided a civil society organisation, the Gender Centre for Research and Training (GCRT), to disrupt a workshop on gender and political participation, arresting the speakers and some of the participants.<sup>1</sup>

Women in Southern Sudan have rarely been the subject of scholarly work, a fact attributable to the many years of war (Fluehr-Lobban 2005). As a result, little is known about them outside their immediate communities. Nevertheless, the limited literature on women in Sudan, while it focuses on the North of the country, is largely by women and about women, (Ibrahim 1966, Badri 2009). However, these scholars have focused on the national context, and have not discussed the Sudanese women's movement from a pan-African perspective. Ibrahim (1966) provides an early analysis of the experience of the SWU from the time of its establishment during the colonial era, its contribution to achieving national independence, and its work to improve women's participation in the socio-economic and political fields. Ibrahim explores how the SWU worked for a democratic society where women would enjoy equal rights and highlights the importance of solidarity among women in Africa and the Arab world. However, Ibrahim's research was carried out in the 1960s and retains a largely national focus.

Badri (2009) uses a historical perspective to highlight the role of different women's organisations in promoting girls' education and how girls benefited

from different educational systems such as adult education, Koranic schools (*khalwa*) and night school clubs. She also discusses how missionary education has been used to spread Christianity, particularly in the Southern part of Sudan (Badri 2009:62). She argues that women embraced education as a great opportunity that would open doors for them to enter employment, especially after the October revolution in 1964 (Badri, 2009:72). However, Badri also remains within a national framework that does not situate Sudanese women's education in a wider African context. This paper seeks to address this gap in the literature.

### **Engagement with pan-Africanism**

Pan-Africanism inspired the Sudanese women's movement during the struggle against colonialism and into the post-independence era. In the last years of colonialism women scaled up their struggle and participated in demonstrations against colonialism and for independence. However, despite such contributions, sectarian political parties such as the Umma and Khatmiyya, excluded women from the political sphere (Hale 1997:83). The Sudanese Communist Party (SCP) was the only party that opened its doors to women. In 1952, at the peak of the independence struggle, women graduates and teachers established the SWU. The first executive committee was composed of Fatima Talib, Khalda Zahir, and Fatima Ahmed Ibrahim. They drew their inspiration from the nationalist struggle, at that time predominantly expressed through an ideology that was both socialist and pan-Africanist. SWU became the first women's organisation to carry out consciousness-raising campaigns and advocate women's emancipation.

The SWU mobilised Sudanese women to show their solidarity with women in Southern Africa and to campaign against apartheid in Zambia, South Africa and Namibia (Al-Gaddal, undated: 28). In the early days of the Abboud dictatorship, the SWU mobilised women who took to the streets to protest against the execution of one of the prominent figures of pan-Africanism; the then elected Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba, to express solidarity with the people of the Republic of Congo (Abdalal nd:15). Women from this movement also presented a memorandum to the Minister of Foreign Affairs criticising the government for allowing planes carrying weapons to pass through Sudan to Congo. The SWU also organised rallies and marched to the French Embassy in Khartoum protesting against the arrest of Djamila Bouhired, the Algerian

freedom fighter against the French occupation and demanded her immediate release. The SWU also showed solidarity with Arab women freedom fighters in many countries including Palestine. In 1954 the SWU joined the Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF) and later the Women's Arab Union (Al-Gaddal nd:28). In 1955 it published *Sawt al-Mara: Women's Voice*, the organisation's magazine. *Women's Voice* provided a forum to lobby and campaign for women's emancipation on both national and continental levels. It also generated debates on women's rights and duties in the social, economic and political development of the newly independent nation of Sudan. The magazine set out to mobilise the masses of women, with some success.

During colonial rule, the SWU opposed a British education system that neglected to educate girls, and campaigned to improve girls' education. Hale (1997:17) points out that this educational system targeted boys exclusively, encouraging a small minority to attend school so they could work in low rank administrative jobs. Some girls benefited from attending *khalwa* where they learnt how to read the Koran and pray. However, like the British, conservative religious leaders opposed girls' education in modern schools, arguing this went against women's role as housewives and would disrupt their reproductive duties.

In 1907 Sheikh Babikar took the initiative to open the first formal school for girls in Rufaa (Badri 2009:52). Formal education of girls was initially opposed by the British administration, and it was not until 1911 that the colonial administration opened five primary schools for girls (Badri 2009: 52). It was to be another thirty years before the first intermediate school was opened in Omdurman in 1948, illustrating the reluctance of the colonial regime with regard to girls' education. Nevertheless, the SWU was able to establish two more intermediate schools for girls in Khartoum and Omdurman in 1953, despite the many obstacles imposed by the colonial administration (Badri 2009: 54). Women not only grasped at the few educational and training opportunities opened for them to be midwives, teachers and nurses, but also demanded more to compete in male-dominated subjects, such as science.

In 1970, the SWU organised an international conference focusing on illiteracy among women and proposing plans to tackle it. The conference was attended by many women's organisations from other African nations, and it offered an opportunity for learning from one another by exchanging



experiences. This conference also served as a platform to bring African women's socio-economic concerns into a common women's agenda under a pan-African banner.<sup>2</sup>

Within the national context, the SWU adopted a country and community level approach. After independence the SWU established evening classes for adult women, including literacy classes alongside the more conventional sewing, cooking and handicraft skills. Women, particularly in rural areas, benefited from these classes, and were able to sell some of their products (Badri 2009:91-93). The SWU understood the importance of health as a welfare indicator and established community classes to teach women public hygiene, child-care and nutrition. It campaigned and encouraged women to seek assistance from a midwife during childbirth and to attend hospital in case of emergency, and demanded provision of mother and child-care services in villages and small town. SWU members also campaigned against under-age and forced marriages, insisting that girls' consent should be sought in the presence of a judge when they got married. It demanded that polygamy be regulated and that the husband should consult his wife before seeking another wife.

Overwhelmed by the work to address women's immediate needs, the SWU tended to fall short of the more strategic and transformative goals of feminism. However, SWU also campaigned for more job opportunities for women as well as equal pay for the same work. In this sense, the SWU was able to address strategic gender interests, because they challenged the unequal sexual division of labour (Molyneux 1985:233). The SWU also addressed the marginalisation of ethnic minorities and gave support to those who were persecuted. For instance, it stood against the Islamic government's forcible removal from the capital of people designated as 'African' and not considered to be of 'Arab' ethnic origin, and demanded that they should be treated as equal citizens. Jacobsen et al (2001:86) argue that the removal of some people outside Khartoum was part of the pan-Islamic agenda adopted by the Islamic state. Thus pan-Islamic ideology displaced pan-Africanism, and developed into a serious threat to national unity, not to mention regional integration.

The SWU regularly challenged the Islamic government's discourse, which depicts African cultures as inferior to the Arab culture, and advocated for a united Sudan. To promote national unity, the SWU, along with other women's organisations, promoted dialogue with women's organisations across the Arab-

African divide, meeting with women from Southern Sudan, Darfur and the Nuba Mountains. The SWU also built transnational networks with women's organisations in other African nations, as I will elaborate later. All of these activities point to a Sudanese women's movement, led by the SWU, which embraces the unifying principles and practices of pan-Africanism with regard to ethnicity and religious diversity as well as socio-economic development, stability and national unity.

Since independence Sudan has experienced many developmental challenges, which include lack of democracy, poverty, poor social services, notably in the fields of education and health, as has been the case in many African countries. The SWU became actively involved in tackling the post-independence challenges by promoting women's access to health and education using a practical approach that responded to women's needs, such as the need for shelter, education and training. All such programs have ceased since the demise of democratic, secular government following the 1989 coup d'état, and the banning of the SWU soon thereafter.

## Gains

The post-independence state in Sudan, as the case in many African countries, did initially promote girls' education, enabling many women to complete secondary school and some, but not many, to go to university. The enrolment of women in studies dominated by men, such as medicine, engineering, science and law, increased. The number of female graduates also increased and many became doctors, engineers, nurses and teachers. Politically, women graduates won the right to vote. After the October revolution in 1964 the right to vote was extended to all women regardless of their literacy status. Women also won the right to stand for election. Fatima Ibrahim, the leader of the SWU, was elected to the Constitutional Assembly as the first woman to win such a position (Fluehr-Lobban 2005:277). The women's movement flourished and women became active in the public arena.

During the 1960s and 1970s campaigns by women's activists including members of the SWU saw women make further gains as significant family law reform took place (Fluehr-Lobban 2005:270). The Constitution of 1973 granted equal rights for all citizens regardless of their gender. Moreover, a moderate state feminist agenda was implemented and many Northern women were given ministerial, judicial and other official jobs. However, women from

the Southern region and other marginalised areas were denied that right (Fluehr-Lobban, 2005:277). The marginalisation of communities of non-Arab people; designated 'African', notably in Southern and Western Sudan had dire effects on women, some of whose husbands, children and extended families spanned this ethnic division. The economic, political and social marginalisation of the South ran counter to pan-Africanism's more unifying democratic values. With the regime identifying itself as 'Arab' in a manner that reactivates the long histories of Arab racism against those ethnic groups they disparage and refer to as 'Africans', as if Sudan were not an African nation itself, and all Sudanese Africans.

During the mid-1980s, in particular after the March-April uprising of 1985, women benefited from the democratic environment, promoting their role and image in the public sphere. They were able, once again, to form autonomous civil society organisations that remain active in many areas that affect women's lives, notably women's human rights, democracy, conflict resolution and peace building. Women also enjoyed greater freedom of movement. Although the new, democratically elected government failed to abolish *Shari'a* (Islamic law), the law was not used to harass women to the same extent as previously.

However, this progressive trend came under threat again in 1989 after the Islamic regime, backed by the National Islamic Front (NIF), took power, ignoring pan-African values in relation to women's rights, stability and democracy as it proceeded to dissolve trade unions, professional associations and women's organisations, including the SWU. The regime intensified assaults on civil society, ethnic minorities, democracy and human rights activists, causing a decline in the number of civil society organisations. Union and civil society membership fell and political activities were made illegal (Osman 2002:39). The *Shari'a* regime contradicted pan-African principles regarding women's emancipation when it introduced *al-Mashru' al-Hadari*, 'The Civilising Programme.'

## Women and Islamisation

The Islamic regime proceeded to oppress women and to limit their role in the public sphere with legislation and policies that contradicted both the Sudanese Constitution and pan-African values. These included the Public Order Act (POA), and the institution of a moral police force to control the

way women dressed and behaved in public. The POA states that all women, regardless of their cultural background, should wear full Islamic dress that covers their bodies, in flagrant suppression of the majority of Sudan's rich cultures and women's rights. The POA provided a pretext for detaining, beating and otherwise humiliating, large numbers of women and girls, particularly those identifiably as "non-Arab", mostly by skin tone and dress. Little of this widespread abuse is reported because of the indignity and shame associated with it (Amnesty International 2010:4). Stoning to death for adultery was also introduced at this time (Doebbler 2001:10). Such measures fly in the face of Africa's cultural diversity, and its relation to security and development at national and regional levels, as proclaimed by African leaders at many AU submits and conferences, including, ironically, the sixth AU submit held in Khartoum in 2006.

Women's freedom of movement has also been targeted and women were prevented from travelling abroad without a *muhrim*, an immediate male relative. In 1990, for instance, a university lecturer was prevented from travelling to attend a conference in Tanzania, at which she was to be the main speaker, ostensibly because she did not have a *muhrim* to accompany her (Fluehr-Lobban 2005: 270). In effect women cannot travel if their husband or other male relative refuses to grant his permission, regardless of her skills, abilities, needs or talents. Women also have to seek permission from their male guardians if they want to work outside their homes, a law which strengthens male power in the domestic sphere (Fluehr-Lobban 2005: 271), and has many implications for gender roles and relations and the degree of social economic autonomy women can exercise. These discriminatory laws limit women's life prospects by constraining their access to training and further education at home or abroad, and restricting their chances of promotion to decision-making and management positions. Overall these developments set back the gains Sudanese women made in the post-independence years, reinforcing women's reproductive roles at the expense of their productive roles and their rights as citizens. To sum up the politics of gender Islamisation has become a threat to women's gains, to the overall gender, ethnic and religious justice principles of pan-Africanism, as well as the commitments to peace and unity enshrined in the AU.

## New trends in Women's Activism

The signing of the CPA and drafting of the transitional Constitution in 2005 provided a marginal democratisation that allows women to reorganise themselves and form new civil society organisations. Women's movements are stimulating public debates and actions on and working to bring related issues such as reconciliation, cultural diversity, gender-based violence and justice for victims of armed conflicts to the fore of the post-conflict policy agenda. Women have been able to rebuild community-level women's organisations seeking justice for women, particularly those who have suffered the worst consequences of conflict.

A new generation of women activists made up of students, human rights defenders, graduates, lawyers, cultural workers, trade unionists, journalists and peace activists has entered the scene. These activists use old and new means of activism, such as demonstrations and street rallies and the use of mobile phones and social media, such as Facebook and online forums to campaign against violations of women's rights and for justice and democracy. This helps Sudanese women activists to make connections with women's organisations across the continent and in the diaspora to draw the attention of the international community to women's oppression in Sudan.

Nowadays, local and regional partnerships and networks link women's organisations together. These networks help women to exchange experiences, learn from each other and set plans for the future. The Women's Movement has become a consistent voice in the demands and agendas for democracy, political participations and peace building. Key local networks are the Sudanese Network for the Abolition of Female Genital Mutilation, the Poverty Network, the Sudanese Women Solidarity Group, the No to Women's Oppression Coalition, and Sudanese Women Empowerment for Peace. Regional networks in which Sudanese women are active include the Network for African Peace Builders (NAPs), and Women in Law and Development in Africa (WILDAF), which advocates for the legal rights of women in Africa by pursuing legal reforms to end discriminatory laws. The Strategic Initiative for Women in the Horn of Africa (SIHA) is a civil society network of organisations from Sudan, South Sudan, Somalia, Somaliland, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Djibouti, and Uganda that addresses women and human rights issues and supports women and girls in war zones. SIHA submitted a statement to the 51st session of the African Commission on Human and People's Rights to expose the gross violations of

women's rights in Sudan under the POA. Sudanese women's organisations have also joined international women's networks, to become active in the Global Network of Women Peacebuilders (GNWP), which on peace and security issues of direct relevance to Sudanese women (GNWP 2013).

Women have also been able to bring violence against women, including rape during war, to public attention. Female activists subjected to sexual abuse and rape also broke their silence and spoke out to expose their suffering and to seek justice. A well-known case is that of Safia Ishaq, a member of the Youth Forum for Social Peace. In February 2011 Safia was kidnapped by the National Intelligence and Security Services (NISS) in Khartoum and taken to a location where she was severely beaten and raped by three men. She was then released and told not to speak about what happened to her. The rape was confirmed after a medical examination in one of the biggest hospitals in Khartoum. When Safia reported the case to the police, she and her family received threats from the NISS who demanded the case be dropped (Gorani, 2011). Instead, Safia went to the public, spoke about her case to journalists and human rights activists, and recalled her arrest, beating, and rape in a video which appeared on YouTube to be seen by thousands all over the world. Safia's case showed how the government used rape as a weapon against female activists. Her courage confirms that new ways of female activism are developing in Sudan. By breaking the taboo that silenced women and prevented them from seeking justice for such crimes, her case encouraged many to speak about their rape experiences.

Women also led gender specific demonstrations. A good example was on Friday 13th July 2012 when Kandaka<sup>3</sup> Friday protests were organised as a beginning of series of an innovative new way of activism, where women activists, young and old, and from across the political spectrum including the SWU and civil society organisations, organised and led protests in many cities in Sudan. This was coupled by similar protests in the diaspora cities including London, Paris, Sydney, Stockholm, Dublin, New York, Nairobi and Cairo. Female youth activists played a leading role in these protests and chanted against the Islamic regime's brutal crackdown on demonstrators and against torturing and abusing of female activists at the hand of the NISS. Apart from the social media, the protests have been reported by TV channels including Alarabia, sky news Arabic, the BBC, CNN and RT TV and newspapers such as the Egyptian newspaper *Alahram*, and *Guardian* from the United Kingdom, as well as coverage on radio all over the world. At the time of writing, recent

crackdowns on civil society seem to be showing another tide of repression including the closure of Salmmah Women's Resource Centre in June 2014.<sup>4</sup>

## Conclusion

This paper has reviewed the experience of the Sudanese women's movements pioneered by the SWU and its commitment to ideals that reflected pan-Africanist principles, as it worked to tackle post-independence challenges and build national unity. While the SWU's leadership role continued until the Islamic military coup of 1989, there were also many other women's civil society organisations entering the political arena and forming networks to pursue gender interests across the social divisions of Sudan, as well as across borders, in a spirit that reflects pan-African ideals.

Women's movements have re-emerged in the Sudanese political landscape as a visible and laudable force, joining other civic and social movements invested in seeking democratic change and gender equality. This has made women's movements a threat to political Islam and its Islamisation agenda. As a result, the regime responded from the 1980's by eroding many post-independence advances, using unconstitutional statements and laws, and violating pan-African commitments to gender equality. Nevertheless women have since been able to develop new modes of organising and activism, lobbying to end gender-based violence, seeking justice for victims of violence, networking to address gender interests, and leading demonstrations, thus demonstrating resilience and the long-term capacity to cope with many challenges to their integrity and autonomy.

The history of activism demonstrated by women's movements in Sudan has always been informed by a pan-African consciousness that has gained currency through the participation of Sudanese feminists in the increasingly numerous national and transnational organisations and networks that have developed across the continent in recent decades. Sudanese women continue to struggle, offering a valuable contribution to a pan-African agenda that boasts its commitments to gender equality.

## Endnotes

1. Interview with a female activist, GCRT, Khartoum 2007.
2. Interview with a female teacher and activist, Khartoum, 2014.

3. Kandaka is a strong queen who ruled during the Nubian civilisation, the pre-Islamic era in Northern Sudan.
4. <http://www.awid.org/Library/Sudan-Closure-of-Salmmah-Women-s-Resource-Centre>

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# The first Mrs Garvey: Pan-Africanism and feminism in the early 20th century British colonial Caribbean

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It is puzzling to most feminist historians of the British colonial Caribbean that histories of pan-Africanism could be written without examining the extensive contribution of women.<sup>1</sup> This concern is echoed by pan-Africanist scholar Horace Campbell when he notes that its ideological history has tended to focus on the contribution of great heroes, mostly males, an approach which denies the link to a broader social movement and the role of women (Campbell, 1994:286). This article examines the complementary and contradictory relationship between pan-Africanism and early feminism in the British Caribbean colonies.

In highlighting the work and life of one pan-Africanist, feminist Caribbean woman, this article does not seek to propose a counter-history of great women. It seeks rather to distinguish the specific contributions made by one woman feminist – among a host of many others – to these social movements in local and international contexts and to explore the reasons why these movements provided such possibilities and the contradictions involved. The focus on Amy Ashwood Garvey highlights not just her individual significance but also allows us to acknowledge the work of countless other women (and men), some mentioned in this text, who have been excluded from the meta-narratives of these early movements. So pervasive is this narrative that Michelle Stephens in a recent review noted:

The discovery of a persistent, structural, never ending, never deviating, masculinist gender politics in the discourse of black internationalism reveals a pattern that one can only explain through a deeper structural analysis of the very gendering of constructions of global blackness. Again, it is the political unconscious that provides the source for and explanation of the limits of a liberatory gender politics in black internationalist discourse (Stephens, 2005:109-110).

In this article, the term pan-Africanism is used in a broad sense: it is used to refer both to the conscious identification with Africa and critique of European domination and racism, as well as to the mutual responsibility of persons of African descent dispersed throughout the world, to each other, wherever they may be located. Campbell notes that, “pan-African identification has taken many forms, but it has been most clearly articulated in the project of achieving the liberation of the continent of Africa and the dignity and self-respect of all Africans” (Campbell, 1994: 205).

Approaches to pan-Africanism have always varied, and the activists presented here present various positionalities. It emerged from the experiences of slavery and colonialism on the continent and the Diaspora and the legacy of racism and discrimination that followed (Lemelle, 1992:12; Campbell, 1994: 285-286). Not surprisingly, therefore, most of the early activists came from the Diaspora, in particular, the Caribbean and the United States; and the early conferences and congresses through which much of the history of the movement is traced, took place outside of continental Africa.

In the last two decades, the scholarship on pan-Africanist women, in particular of the Garvey Movement, has highlighted the contradictions inherent within this patriarchal nationalist movement (Bair, 1992; Ford-Smith, 1988; McPherson, 2003). More recently, Ula Taylor coined the term “communal feminist” to describe Amy Jacques-Garvey, second wife of Marcus Garvey, when she notes:

In essence community feminists are women who may or may not live in male-centred households; either way, their activism is focused on assisting both the men and the women in their lives—whether husbands or sisters, fathers, or mothers, sons or daughters—along with initiating and participating in activities to uplift their communities (Taylor, 2000: 64).

Taylor contends that Jacques-Garvey simultaneously rejected *and* accepted codes of patriarchy. In the Garvey household, she noted, as in most homes during the 1920s, “the parameters for the wife, helpmate, mother, and daughter were based on patriarchal principles” (Taylor, 2000:104, 107) .

This article suggests an alternative trajectory of early 20<sup>th</sup>-century Caribbean pan-Africanist women’s consciousness and organising, one that was unapologetically feminist albeit in the context of that time. It also builds on the assertion of Honor Ford-Smith, that early pan-Africanism, in particular the

Garvey Movement, provided an important training ground, a social and political base for emerging early 20<sup>th</sup>-century feminism in the Caribbean and elsewhere.

In examining this intricate linkage between feminism and early nationalism/internationalism, Kumari Jayawardena argues that the movement towards women's emancipation in Asia and the Middle East was "acted out against a background of nationalist struggles aimed at achieving political independence, asserting national identity and modernizing society" (Jayawardena, 1986: 7). In similar vein, this article identifies an indigenous Caribbean feminism emerging from the racialised and colonial histories of Caribbean peoples, a feminism which was located in the ongoing struggles of its peoples at that time. Despite the colonial and colonising influences which no doubt affected the early women's movement, emergent feminisms were a distinctive response to the specificities of women's subordination within particular social, political and economic contexts.

Among the additional external influences identified by Jayawardena for this emergence were: the development of girls' education; the spread of Western secular thought; the wider context of resistance to imperialism; the expansion of capital and the emergence of a local bourgeoisie; the influence of the Irish struggle<sup>2</sup> and male reformers who wished to conform to Western ideals of "civilisation" (Jayawardena, 1986: 6-12). Both in Asia and in the African Diaspora, nationalist and identity struggles opened spaces for women's consciousness and organising which contributed to the growth of the early feminist movement. Activism by early middle-class and working-class feminists of this region was embedded within their overall concern for the social uplift of their "race" and "nation" and, in the case of the latter, their class.

The terms "feminist" and "feminism" are late 19<sup>th</sup>-century and early 20<sup>th</sup>-century terms, therefore, they were in active use during this period. Many of the women activists of this period called themselves feminist, and when they did not use the term to describe themselves, it was used by their detractors and supporters to describe them. The term "feminist" is understood as someone who manifests an awareness/consciousness of the subordination of women and seeks actively to change it. By this definition it follows that there might be different starting points for conceptualising the causes of this subordination and, by extension, there would be differences in the solutions proposed and acted upon.

Jayawardena, in her book, identifies the role of male reformers and writers in the early feminist struggles of Third World countries. In a context of nationalist struggle, the status of women in a country was often taken as a “popular barometer” of “civilisation”, therefore many reformers agitated for legislative change, especially in the areas of education and freedom of movement (Jayawardena, 1986:12). Despite the overall patriarchal character of the movement some male pan-Africanist leaders could be counted among this group. In some instances women’s empowerment came as a by-product of their actions; while in others it reflected a genuine desire to improve the status of women in the context of a larger nationalist vision.

### **Amy Ashwood Garvey and the UNIA**

The UNIA, according to Honor Ford-Smith, was “unquestionably, the most influential anticolonial organisation in Jamaica prior to 1938” (Ford-Smith, 2004:19). One can even suggest that it was one of the most successful pan-Africanist organisations of all time and certainly the most internationalist. Recent scholarship, in critically evaluating its legacy, has examined the experiences of women members. Garvey historian, Tony Martin has contended that Marcus Garvey’s progressive position on women was reflected in the fact that, unlike those of other black leaders, his two wives (the two Amys) were activists in their own right.<sup>3</sup> Garvey and his movement’s “progressiveness” in relation to women, however, has been severely challenged.

Like most nationalist organisations, the UNIA was organised around a discourse of manhood contextualised by Booker T Washington’s ideology of Black self-reliance. As noted by Barbara Bair, this self-made construction of manhood was translated in the movement into a petty bourgeois ideal with “the ideals of the nuclear family and of a sexual division of labour in which women’s roles were largely privatised”:

UNIA women used the phrase “real manhood” ...emblazoned on their blazers in UNIA parades--but in their usage it meant a code of chivalry, men who were gentlemen and providers, responsible fathers and husbands, who respected black women, supported black children, and did not reject them for white girlfriends and wives (Bair, 1992: 158-159).

Yet despite this over-arching patriarchal ideology, what Bair calls its “dual-sex structure” (1994:131) provided a space for women’s organisation, awakened consciousness and public action. These were the separate but parallel women’s

and men's auxiliaries such as the Black Cross Nurses and the Universal African Legions; separate Ladies Divisions under women's leadership and established women's (or ladies') positions on local executives and the celebration of Women's Day. This "dual-sex" UNIA structure she noted "...afforded women a separate sphere of influence as well as leadership roles within the hierarchy of the women's wings of the divisions" (Bair, 1994:131).

This structuring of women's involvement in the organisation is usually credited to the early influence of Amy Ashwood Garvey, Garvey's first wife. Amy Ashwood, in her account of "The Birth of the UNIA", claims to be a co-founder of the organisation. Martin, however, rejects this, suggesting that she may have exaggerated her role (A.A. Garvey, 1983). While still a teenager, she and Marcus became the earliest members of the Universal Negro Improvement Association and African Communities League (UNIA) at its formation in 1914.<sup>4</sup> From the age of seventeen, Ashwood worked with Marcus in establishing the early UNIA in Jamaica<sup>5</sup>, becoming its first secretary and member of the Board of Management. She was involved in planning the inaugural meeting in Collegiate Hall in Kingston, helped organise the weekly elocution meetings and fund-raising activities. She also started the Ladies Division, which later developed into the Black Cross Nurses Arm<sup>6</sup>, and was involved in early plans to establish an Industrial School. The UNIA office was established at a house on Charles Street, rented by the Ashwood family (French & Ford-Smith) some members of which were active in the early UNIA.<sup>7</sup> In 1914, the early organisation organised a debate on the question "Is the intellect of a woman as highly developed as that of a man?" (*Daily Chronicle* 1914), while in 1915 the Objects of the organisation included two clauses mentioning "boys and girls" specifically and not the generic "children" (Hill, 1983:117).

In describing the birth of the UNIA, Amy Ashwood reflects romantically on her meeting with Marcus at the age of seventeen, outside the East Queen Street Baptist Church Hall in July, 1914, where she had been involved in a debate. She recalled:

Grandiose schemes would avail naught unless they could be translated into reality. If as he considered he was Napoleon, he would need a Josephine. He had reached the moment in the life of all great men when the testing period between ideas and their execution became more challenging and acute. ... It was at this period that our paths met.

Marcus Garvey and I met for the first time as if by some design of fate and conspiracy of destiny. It was no casual meeting, for its timing was significant for both of us. It changed much of life of each of us. ...The occasion was a simple one. ...On that particular Tuesday evening in the late July of 1914, I had proposed the motion that "Morality does not increase with civilisation ..."

When the meeting had dispersed, I went off to catch the usual tram home. But waiting at the stop was a stocky figure with slightly drooping shoulders. He seemed vaguely familiar, and then I realised that he was the gentleman who had argued so forcibly for my point of view. At closer quarters the stranger arrested my attention. Excitement over the debate had vanished, and I saw clearly that an intense light shone from the eyes of my unknown supporter. In that evening light they were such black twinkling eyes. A world shone from them.

Then followed the greatest surprise of my life. The bold stranger came forward impulsively, and without any invitation addressed me in the most amazing fashion.

"At last", he said in his rich deep voice, "I have found my star of destiny! I have found my Josephine!" (A. A. Garvey, 1983: 220-221).

**This was followed by many exchanges where they shared their concerns for Africa and Africans. Eventually she concluded:**

Our joint love for Africa and our concern for the welfare of our race urged us on to immediate action. Together we talked over the possibilities of forming an organisation to serve the needs of the peoples of African origin. We spent many hours deliberating what exactly our aims should be and what means we should employ to achieve those aims. Out of this lengthy tete-à-tete we finally improvised a policy and formulated a programme for our infant "organisation". In fact the two-member movement was christened the Universal Negro Improvement Association and African Communities Imperial League (A.A. Garvey, 1983: 225).

Amy had been born in Port Antonio, Jamaica, in 1897, and spent many years of her childhood in Panama. At age 11 she returned to Jamaica to attend high school and at age 17 she met Marcus Garvey. This relationship was not approved

of by her parents, who sent her back to Panama in 1916. The relationship continued through letters, although Garvey left for the United States that same year. What was clear from all sources was the way in which in this relationship “personal and racial liberation mingled”. The following extract from a letter from Marcus to Amy reflected this: “Your Napoleon is longing to see you, longing to gaze into your beautiful eyes in fond devotion, let no mother, no father, no brother stand in the way of the redemption of Africa. I will always worship at your shrine. Your devoted Napoleon, Marcus” (Stein, 1986:32).

In 1918 Amy Ashwood joined Garvey in the United States and worked with him as Chief Assistant and as secretary of the New York branch. United States Secret Agents, monitoring the UNIA reported that “Miss Ashwood seems to be Marcus Garvey’s chief assistant, a kind of managing boss” (Hill, 1983: 14-15). In October, 1919, at the time of Garvey’s arrest, an FBI Report recorded Amy Ashwood, Marcus Garvey and Henrietta Vinton Davis as leaders of the UNIA (Hill, 1983: 54). As early editor of the *Negro World*, she also sold it door-to-door. They were married in October, 1919, in a private Catholic ceremony followed by a public reception at Liberty Hall on Christmas Day, 1919. Also in that year, she was made secretary of the Black Star Line and one of its first directors (Shepherd, 1999:181).

Despite the long relationship that preceded it, the marriage was disappointingly short. Some suggest it lasted six months thereafter and ended in controversy. Garvey sought an annulment in early March, 1920, and he claimed to have obtained a divorce in Missouri in July, 1922, but she never recognised it. In June that year, Amy Ashwood suffered a miscarriage soon after Garvey removed his personal effects from their home.<sup>8</sup> Almost immediately, Marcus Garvey remarried Amy Jacques, who had been a maid-of-honour at his first wedding and his constant companion since the end of his marriage. Amy Jacques was also a Jamaican and a UNIA activist. She had replaced the first Amy as his chief aide and personal secretary since 1920. What followed was a messy and controversial affair including legal proceedings, attempts to stave off bad publicity and threats.

In analysing the turn of events, Judith Stein argues that “the clash of two strong wills must have been at the centre of the conflict, which erupted almost immediately after the two returned from their honeymoon” (Stein, 1986:150-151). She noted that Garvey was drawn to strong women who could help him. Clearly the first Amy saw herself as an equal participant in the



movement and the struggle and was not satisfied merely to be his supporter. The second Amy, however, also an attractive and strong woman, Stein argues, “chose to invest her strength and talents in her husband’s career. She defined herself as Garvey’s comforter and surrogate, whereas Amy Ashwood had viewed herself more as an equal” (Stein, 1986: 150).

Barbara Bair supports this view, noting that Ashwood was “an avowed and dedicated feminist”, whose feminist explanation for the failure of her marriage identified “the clash between Garvey’s dominating ways and her own forceful and extroverted personality. She stated her unwillingness to meet Garvey’s expectations of a wife who would sacrifice her own goals to devote herself to the career of her husband” (Bair, 1992:164–165).

Although Amy Ashwood never accepted the legality of her divorce from Garvey, she was able to move on and develop an independent life as a pan-Africanist, politician, cultural activist and feminist, first in the U.S., then in Jamaica and England. Her musical *Hey Hey*, a comedy set in the United States, was produced at the Lafayette Theatre in New York in 1926. She travelled to Europe, the Caribbean and West Africa and settled in London in the mid-1930s. In all this she was supported by her companion Sam Manning, Trinidadian musician and calypsonian.

## The UNIA and Women’s Empowerment

While the UNIA never espoused as radical a position on women as did some contemporaneous organisations such as the Peoples’ Convention, its “dual-sex” structure allowed for the participation of women like no other organisation had before.<sup>9</sup> The ideology of “separation” and “difference” which characterised UNIA philosophy on race was also true of their position on gender. In addition, the distinct male and female divisions assured the representation of women at the highest levels of the organisation (Reddock, 1994: 106). Yet, as noted by Barbara Bair,

... women were “technically” granted an equal share of power based on the division of authority by gender. In practice, however, the organisational pattern of men’s and women’s leadership roles was not separate and equal but separate and hierarchical. The predominant model of gender relations was similar to that of the companionate marriage with wife/woman and husband/man cooperating while asserting authority over separate spheres of influence (Bair, 1994: 155).

The masculinity espoused by the UNIA was also a militarised one, formed in the post-World War I period, 1914 to the 1920s, and influenced by the racism experienced by Afro-Caribbean soldiers during that war. So, for some, the UNIA was a “new manhood movement”, a movement to restore masculine pride, power and self determination to black men. The language of the organisation, the names of its divisions, its uniforms and parades all reflect this militarism, a militarised black masculinity which required for its existence a strong hard-working black “motherhood”. While many women accepted these gender definitions and the related division of labour, some rebelled against them, “creating modified positions of authority for themselves and reconstructing the prevailing views of womanhood and manhood in the process” (Bair, 1994:155). Yet while most scholars would agree that the UNIA was a patriarchal organisation, the visibility which was given to women was unparalleled at that time and among pan-Africanist organisations since then, even at local level. In Toco, Trinidad, for example, the Herskovitses report that the Cumana Branch of the UNIA was referred to as the only “lodge” which both women and men could join (Herskovits, 1947:263). According to Barbara Bair, women were involved in UNIA enterprises; served on boards of the Black Star Line and the *Negro World* and were delegates at the UNIA conventions, which featured women’s days and exhibits of women’s industrial arts and crafts. They participated in rituals, marching in UNIA parades, appearing in UNIA pageants and concerts and were frequent contributors to fund-raising projects and owned stock in the Black Star Line (Bair, 1993).

Ford-Smith argues further that, while the UNIA was patriarchal, it also subverted conventional gender roles of the time. Similarly, although a proletarian organisation, it pursued a middle-class “respectability”, resulting in a space of unstable contradictions within which alternative possibilities could be grasped by active subjects.<sup>10</sup>

In her examination of the case of the middle-class-oriented Black Cross Nurses in Belize, Anne McPherson found that, in the 1920s, Garveyite membership did not result in any feminist consciousness or discourse on black sisterhood. These women, she found, were primarily maternalists, who occasionally addressed issues of women’s equality and rights and were not even anti-colonial (McPherson, 2003). Yet this was not the case in other locations. Both Ford-Smith and Bair agree that the UNIA, despite its contradictions, provided a space for women’s empowerment. Bair notes

that through their involvement in local divisions and women's auxiliaries women learnt "organisational skills and cooperative/empowering patterns of leadership", skills which they ultimately transferred outside the Garvey movement to other causes.<sup>11</sup>

But this was not only the case in Jamaica, this was also the case in other parts of the region and farther away. Sierra Leone feminist and pan-Africanist Adelaide Casley-Hayford, pioneer in girls' education in Africa, for example, was influenced by her membership in the Freetown UNIA. In a 1926-27 trip to the United States to raise funds for her girls' school she became a member of the Black Feminist Circle of Peace and Foreign Relations, the Black Women's Club, the YWCA and the NAACP Suffrage Department and was involved in the Fourth Pan-African Congress, which was organised mainly by women (Bair, 1994). For these women it was impossible to distinguish their womanness from their blackness. The two were intertwined; their struggle, therefore had to take place on all fronts (Ford-Smith, 1988: 80-83; Altink, 2006).

Whatever the assessment of their gains, Ford-Smith concluded that the UNIA was clearly the training ground for black feminists of the 1930s. From its ranks came both the liberals and the working-class women of the early labour movement. It is an example of how political practice often outstrips the theoretical limits of stated philosophy and how study of that practice ultimately leads to wider analysis of the problem under study (Ford-Smith, 1988: 82).

### **Amy Ashwood Garvey – Beyond Marcus**

Much of the later activism of Amy Ashwood outside of the UNIA took place in England. There she was heavily involved in pan-Africanist activities as well as feminist activities through her friendship with Sylvia Pankhurst, Ethiopianist and feminist. One of her earliest activities was the collaboration with Nigerian law student Ladipo Solanke in the formation of the Nigerian Progress Union (Adi: 3; Martin, 2007: 86).

On 17 July 1924, The NPU was formed with thirteen students. At the inaugural meeting, Amy Adeyola Ashwood was given the Yoruba title of "lyalode" (Mother has arrived) "in appreciation of her love, interest and services for the Union as its organiser and in view of her position and future activities on behalf of the Union". According to Adi, the Aims and Objects of the NPU reflected Garveyite ideas on self-reliance and self-help, although

these were also popular ideas in West Africa.<sup>12</sup> After five months however, Amy left Britain for the United States via Jamaica. It was while in the United States during this period that she became an impresario, staging her successful musical.

In 1937 Ashwood joined George Padmore, C.L.R. James and others to form the International African Service Bureau (IASB). This replaced the International African Friends of Abyssinia (IAFA),<sup>13</sup> later IAFE (changed to Ethiopia, formed in 1935 in response to the Italian invasion of Ethiopia (Yelvington, 1993: 215). In London, her West End Florence Mills Nightclub became a regular meeting place for activists, artists and students. Jarrett-Macauley quotes CLR James as stating that this was the place where “the only good food in town was served and if you were lucky, the 78s of Trinidadian Sam Manning, Amy’s partner, spun late into the night” (Jarrett-Macauley, 1998:84; Sherwood, 1995: 135). In 1929 Amy and her companion toured the Caribbean region, visiting Jamaica and Trinidad. In Jamaica *The Gleaner* of 18 June 1929 published an article by Sam Manning with the following headline:

WELL KNOWN COMEDIAN ON WOMEN TODAY:

Sam Manning, Recently Here, Deplores Conditions Affecting Weaker Sex:

LACK OF RESPECT:

Degrading Position in Western World of Many of Them. The Source of Prosperity (sic).

This article reflected Manning’s sensitivity to women’s causes. He asked the question: “What race or group of men could ever amount to anything unless they can cultivate regard and respect for their women?” and called on Negro men to protect their rights and edify them (*The Gleaner*, 1929).

In Trinidad, in July, 1929, *The Labour Leader* announced the “Arrival of Three Popular Negroes” –Mrs Garvey, Sam Manning, Trinidadian comedian and Syd Perrin, musical composer. It was reported that they had come to get in touch with prominent citizens (*Labour Leader*, 1929). Other reports stated that Mrs Garvey had come to collect material for a book and had been interviewed by Captain Cipriani (*Franklin’s Yearbook*, 1929; Reddock, 1994: 107).

During World War II, from 1940 to 1944, Amy Ashwood returned to Jamaica, where she founded a domestic science institute for girls; was active in the movement for self-government<sup>14</sup> and became a candidate for the

Legislature hoping “to use her position to champion the rights of women as well as those of labour”. In 1940 she attended memorial services for Marcus Garvey held at Saint Ann’s Bay after his death.<sup>15</sup> In 1944, while in New York for “medical treatment”, Amy made a number of written requests for women to be included in the US Emergency Farm and War Industries work program of 1943-1945. She hoped to have jobs arranged for 50,000 Jamaican women as domestics in the United States. Her requests were unsuccessful despite, apparently, support from Eleanor Roosevelt (Sherwood, [http://www.basauk.com/aa\\_garvey.htm](http://www.basauk.com/aa_garvey.htm)). According to Fitzroy Baptiste:

[J. Edgar] Hoover went on to advise the State Department that Amy Ashwood Garvey must be stopped. The FBI, he said, had no information to implicate her in ongoing investigations against some Marcus Garvey cohorts “for sedition and conspiracy to commit sedition” in connection with the disposition of funds collected through the United Negro Improvement Association. Still, her influence was such that “any success she may have in causing the importation of these Jamaican workers may be used to advantage by the United Negro Improvement Association as a device to augment their membership and increase its influence upon the members” (Baptiste: 18).

In 1945, back in England, along with George Padmore, T.T. Makkonen, Kwame Nkrumah and Peter Abrahams, Amy Ashwood was involved in organising the historic Fifth Pan-African Congress in Manchester from 13-21 October.<sup>16</sup> This conference, significant to the decolonisation process, was attended by many of the future leaders of independent Africa. Amy Ashwood Garvey who, along with fellow Jamaican Alma La Badie, were the only two women presenters, chaired the opening session during which she called for freedom and self-rule for the British colonies. She also called for the liquidation of racial discrimination and other prejudices (Adi et al 1995: 35-36).

Not until the session on 19 October, however was the issue of women raised. In the first session for that day, Amy Ashwood, in a substantial address, remarked that: “Very much has been written and spoken on the Negro, but for some reason very little has been said about the black woman. She has been shunted to the background to be a child-bearer. This has principally been her lot. ...” In relation to Jamaica, she noted that “The women in the civil service who belong to the intellectual section take no active part whatever in the political development of the country” (Padmore, 1963:52).

On this day Amy and Alma La Badie spoke of the problems facing Jamaican women of various classes and ensured that, in the final conference resolutions on the West Indies, five clauses relevant to women were included. These were on: equal pay for equal work regardless of nationality, creed or race; removal of all disabilities affecting the employment of women, for example the removal of the bar on married women in the government services; modernisation of existing Bastardy Laws, with legal provisions for the registration of fathers with adequate safeguards and the abolition of the “schoolgirl” system in domestic services (Padmore, 1963: 61). Only the resolutions on the West Indies included clauses related to women. Between 1946 and 1950 Ashwood visited West Africa tracing her ancestry to the Ashanti of Ghana, returning to London in 1950, where she opened the Afro-Woman’s Service Bureau (Sherwood, [http://www.basauk.com/aa\\_garvey.htm](http://www.basauk.com/aa_garvey.htm)).

It was with this background that Amy Ashwood embarked on her second Caribbean tour, in 1953. She visited Antigua, Aruba, Barbados, British Guiana, Dominica, Trinidad and Tobago and Suriname. At a time when colonial relations tended to determine contacts the pan-Caribbean character of this tour is significant. On this tour Amy Ashwood tried to reach out to Caribbean women of different ethnic groups despite her pan-African sensibilities. The separatism characteristic of the later Garvey movement was not reflected in Amy’s relationship with other women. Her approach allowed for collaboration and friendships with progressive and feminist women of other “races”. This supports Campbell’s idea of pan-Africanist humanism as part of the struggle for human emancipation (Campbell, 1994: 286).

In Barbados, Ashwood presided over the formation of the Barbados Women’s Alliance comprising representatives of a number of women’s organisations (*Barbados Observer*, 1953) and also had the opportunity to meet some members of Trinidadian women’s organisations visiting Barbados. Gema Ramkeesoon, Indo-Trinidadian women’s activist, for example, chaired the large meeting at the Bridgetown’s Queens Park. Ramkeesoon paid tribute to Marcus Garvey and spoke of the future advancement Africans and Indians could achieve by marching side-by-side. Also addressing the meeting was Violet Thorpe, woman activist and future politician of the predominantly Indo-Trinidadian Democratic Labour Party, who later headed the Garvey welcoming committee for her visit to Trinidad (*Barbados Observer*, 1953).

In Trinidad Amy circulated widely around the women activists and women's organisations of the educated middle-strata, the group she felt most qualified to become actively involved in local politics. The first of her series of lectures took place at the Himalaya Club in San Juan, an Indo-Trinidadian institution,<sup>17</sup> under the patronage of Lady Rance, wife of Governor Hubert Rance. Her subject was "Women as Leaders of World Thought".

Her lecture noted that women in the West Indies were not conscious of the influence which they could exert on world thought; they were not politically conscious. She called on them to become conscious of their responsibilities and their potential to make a significant impact. Like many black nationalists of her time, her vision of progress was shaped by the European experience and this was reflected in her presentations (*Port of Spain Gazette*, 1953).

During her month long visit Amy lectured throughout the country to a range of institutions and on a variety of topics. In addition, on two consecutive Sundays she presided over a conference of women representing a number of women's groups (*Port of Spain Gazette*, 1953). While in Trinidad she published her pamphlet *Liberia: Land of Promise*, with an introduction written by Sylvia Pankhurst (Martin, 1982).<sup>18</sup>

Absent from these activities was Audrey Layne Jeffers, local women's activist and member of the Legislative Council, at that time in London, representing Trinidad and Tobago at the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II. At a dinner organised by her organisation, the Coterie of Social Workers, to mark the coronation, Amy Ashwood raised a toast, congratulating the organisation on its 32-year history and hailed Audrey Jeffers as "a long-standing feminist and politician" and "No. 1 social worker in the West Indies" (*Port of Spain Gazette*, 1953).

Through correspondence with Thelma Rogers, Trinidadian member of the Coterie of Social workers, information on the later years of Amy Ashwood Garvey is available. In 1954 she opened The Afro Woman's Centre<sup>19</sup> and Residential Club, in Ladbroke Grove, London. The Centre, she stated, was established to answer the long-felt need of the coloured woman for spiritual, cultural, social and political advancement. It seems that it was not as successful as envisaged. In July 1954, she wrote: "We are still moving very slowly. I have two white girls in, they are staying together on the top floor, I am trying to get two Indians, then we can say we have a Multi-Racial Centre" (A. A. Garvey, 1954).

But her travelling continued. In 1955 she wrote from Paris and Jamaica, and in 1967 from New York. In 1967 her spirit and concern for her people was still evident, when she wrote:

America has changed so much, I did not know it again. Nothing is the same. However I am glad I can hold on to my memories. Most of my friends are gone but God has provided new ones. God is good my dear. A terrible fight is going on here in this very country. It's between Black and White. It's purely racial.

The Blackman is holding trumps. He has the moral right. A little 14 year old boy the other day stood off across the road and yelled to a big white man... say you, we ain't scared a you no more, and if you don't give us what is ours we gwine bun down the country. That's the answer, and that is what is happening dear (A. A. Garvey, 1967).

Amy Ashwood Garvey died in 1969, leaving two unpublished manuscript drafts of her memoirs of her life with Garvey and the UNIA.

## Conclusions

This article sought to examine the link between early pan-Africanism and feminism. It argued that despite the patriarchal character of early pan-Africanist organisations, they heightened women's consciousness of social justice and provided space for the acquisition of organisational skills which were crucial for an emergent feminist discourse and praxis. The UNIA, with its dual-sex hierarchy, provided a space for women to acquire skills and experience in organising, leadership and cooperation. In focussing on Amy Ashwood Garvey, this paper challenges many of the assumptions about early Caribbean feminism.

Like many other middle-class black women of the period, Amy Ashwood was influenced by the work and teachings of Marcus Garvey, who was able to cross the class barrier in his far-reaching impact. Garvey's ideas of black pride and his recognition of the significance of black women struck a sympathetic chord among women in a context where black womanhood was not always valorised by the factors which in those days valorised womanhood, factors such as "beauty", upwardly mobile marriage, participation in charitable works and visible employment in respectable professions. Amy Bailey, of the Jamaica Women's Liberal Club, for example, acknowledged the influence of Garveyism



in the organisation's stress on "Negro History" and advocacy on behalf of Black women (A. A. Garvey, 1967). This continued a trend started by Henry Sylvester Williams himself, the Trinidadian lawyer usually credited with coining the term "pan-Africanism," and convener of the first pan-African conference—at the dawn of the pan-Africanist movement, where women's emancipation was established as important and necessary to African liberation. At the same time, however, their notions of progress were shaped by their colonised sensibilities.

Another characteristic of Ashwood was her internationalist and regional visions. Her concerns with Africans—at home and abroad—did not preclude her making strategic alliances and friendships with women of other ethnicities and nationalities, especially those who shared her concerns. These international and intra-regional linkages are particularly impressive in an era without modern communications technology. The regional conferences, international and regional tours and attempts to convene regional organisations are all testimony to this. This internationalism, it could be argued, was part of the "black internationalism" identified by Brent Edwards in his book *The Practice of Diaspora* (Stephens, 2005). But, as noted by Jayawardena, it was also part of a feminist internationalism which characterised feminists in the South, as in the North, in the early 20th Century (Jayawardena, 1986:21). The influences of wider international developments on Caribbean developments, therefore, cannot be ignored. Strategic links with other activist men and women—African-descended and otherwise—were used to further their own political ends.

In contrast to the work of Ula Taylor, this article has argued that for early 20<sup>th</sup>-century "race women", "community feminism" was not the only or the most significant option. As the life and work of Amy Ashwood Garvey demonstrate, involvement in these movements created the consciousness and imagination which allowed women to go beyond the parameters of these movements, to challenge patriarchal constructs as they understood them, both in their personal and their public lives as well as in their artistic and literary production.

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## Endnotes

1. LaRay Denzer suggests that one of the reasons why the influential political organizer, educator and journalist of Sierra Leone felt more at home with the League of Coloured Peoples while a student in Britain was the involvement of women in this West Indian dominated organisation. The West African Students Union, on the other hand, she found was ‘totally dominated by men’ (Denzer, 1986).
2. Robert Hill (1983:lxvi) suggests that Garvey in the second, more radical phase of the UNIA, had been influenced by Irish revolutionary nationalism.
3. Personal communication, 1980.
4. In a number of places, Tony Martin suggests that Amy Ashwood may have exaggerated her role in the formation of the UNIA. See for example, Martin, 1983: 219. Similarly, in a letter to the editor of the Jamaica Gleaner Garvey’s son with his second wife Amy Jacques, also supported this, saying “statements that Amy Ashwood was cofounder of the UNIA is an exaggeration in that Marcus Garvey returned from England to Jamaica on July 14 and within 5 days founded the UNIA” (Julius Garvey, [www.raceandhistory.com](http://www.raceandhistory.com)). In spite of this challenge however, most sources refer to her as co-founder of the UNIA in 1914.
5. Early correspondence records her as being: Associate Secretary (August 1914); Associate Secretary, Ladies Division (Oct. 1914); Associate Secretary (January 1915); General Secretary, Ladies Division, (April, 1916).; Associate Secretary (May 1916). (Hill, 1983: Appendix 3).
6. Launched in 1920 and patterned after the Red Cross Nurses of World War 1 (McPherson, 2003:509).
7. See Robert Hill (1983: Vol 1: 112-113; 128; 151-152) for participation by her brother, mother and father.
8. The Yard Collection, 1969 (Hill, 1987: 358-359).
9. Winston James notes, however, that as the organization grew in the United States, the influence of women declined. He reports on a revolt of UNIA women in New York at the 1922 Convention (James, 1998: 138-141).
10. Ford-Smith, 2004. “Unruly Virtues of the Spectacular: Performing Engendered Nationalisms in the UNIA in Jamaica, *interventions* Vol. 6(1) 18–44
11. Examples included: Maymie de Mena, Henrietta Vinton Davis and Amy Ashwood Garvey and Laura Kofey (Bair, 1992: 164).
12. Adi notes that Henry Carr, a former resident of Nigeria and supporter of the NPU,

wrote Du Bois in the US to ask him to help the NPU's fund-raising efforts (Adi: 5-6).

13. Members of the IAFA included CLR James (founder), Jomo Kenyatta, ITA Wallace-Johnson, George Padmore and Amy Ashwood Garvey (Martin, 1983: 25).
14. According to Fitzroy Baptiste, in 1944 Ashwood was president of the largely female JAG. Smith Political Party.
15. *New York Amsterdam News* 4, May 1944 (cited in Hill, 1987b: 359).
16. It is possible that CLR James was also involved in planning this conference. In the conference report prepared by Padmore, Ashwood Garvey's name is excluded from the list of organisers.
17. Violet Thorpe mentions the collaboration of women of the prominent Indo-Trinidadian Ackbarali and Kangalee families of San Juan, Trinidad in her preparatory work for Mrs Garvey's visit.
18. Tony Martin was a nephew of Audrey Jeffers.
19. Apparently she also tried to publish: *Afro Woman's Magazine: An International Monthly* (Schomburg Legacy Exhibition).

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# Pan-Africanism, transnational black feminism and the limits of culturalist analyses in African gender discourses

Carole Boyce Davies

## Living the conjuncture

Feminism and pan-Africanism, as 20<sup>th</sup> century political positions, intersect in various ways but also follow different paths as they challenged entrenched systems of racial and gender domination.<sup>1</sup> Because women have been consistently erased from the history of pan-Africanism, it is important to assert from the outset that there has been a presence of active women from the very start of pan-Africanism. Many of these women explicitly indicated women's rights positions in their work and activism. Pan-Africanists who were feminists, (or feminists who were pan-Africanists), practised the art of navigating a variety of complex positions around race, gender, class, national origin and culture within the larger goal of the liberation of African peoples internationally. These political positions place them easily within current understandings of transnational black feminism.

Early coverage of the 1900 Pan-African Congress reveals delegates, "all eminent in their sphere" who represented the United States, Canada, Ethiopia, Haiti, Liberia, Sierra Leone, the then Gold Coast, most of the islands of the then British West Indies. Importantly, in the powerful US Delegation were: W.E.B. Dubois, Miss Anna Jones (Kansas), and Mrs. Annie Cooper (i.e. Anna Julia Cooper) (Washington, D.C.) (see Adi & Sherwood 2003, for listings). Anna Julia Cooper was by then the author of *A Voice from the South* (1892), one of the first books to put together theoretically race and gender and perhaps one of the reasons she was invited to the 1900 Conference, held six years later. She was also an activist for black and women's rights but has disappeared from definitions of pan-Africanism (see Guy-Sheftall 2007 for additional discussion). It is clear from the orientation of Cooper's work towards race and gender that she could not also follow a masculinised pan-Africanism as

a singular discourse. At one of the subsequent DuBois organised pan-African congresses, Jessie Redmond Fauset serving as an National Association for the Advancement of Colored Peoples delegate provided a reflection titled “Impressions of the 2nd pan-African Congress” which is included in Bonnie Kime Scott’s *Gender in Modernism: New Geographies, Complex Intersections* (2007, 247-252). The fifth Pan-African Congress held in New York in 1927 is identified as being co-sponsored by the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom.<sup>2</sup>

For these transnational black feminists the sense of a conjunction (the “and”) of seemingly disparate political positions (pan-Africanism and feminism) was signified as a co-identification rather than an alternative as indicated by the “or” between pan-Africanism and communism which would come later.<sup>3</sup> Feminism does not of course appear explicitly in many of these formations even though there was an active movement at the time. In my reading though, the fullest manifestation of a conjunction appears via the political orientation of early activist women, i.e. those who were not operating from a separate black feminist movement then, (which would also come later) but an understanding of the simultaneity of political oppressions and therefore of political positions. For example, in discussing the Garvey movement, Honor Ford-Smith provides substantial evidence in her discussion of Cathryn McKenzie, an early Jamaican feminist, and women in the Garvey movement generally, indicating that “[H]istorically, all over the Third World there has been a close connection between the anti-colonial and feminist movements” (Ford-Smith 1991: 73).

The most recent manifestation of a conjuncture though i.e. the simultaneous historical occurrence between these two ideological positions, this time the result of the long work over historical time of these two political positions, occurs interestingly in 2005 via two instruments of international law ushered in by the African Union. Rhoda Reddock in her introduction to *Feminist Africa 7* (2007) draws attention to this linkage in her discussion of diaspora feminisms and the meaning of Africa, putting them in one frame of analysis. She finds it important that the African Protocol on women was passed in 2005 in the same time frame that the African diaspora was recognised officially (Reddock 2007: 1).

It is my contention here that there were always and have continued to be activist women who occupied that position and therefore provide consistent

connections between nationalist, feminist and earlier communist positions. The tendency has been, however, in succeeding years to disarticulate feminist frameworks of analysis as unrelated to pan-Africanist positions and thereby to minimise the work of pan-Africanists who were women. This therefore includes limiting analyses to sometimes very narrow local, culturalist ethnic-based contexts. I am deliberately using “culturalist” as opposed to “cultural” approaches to signify this deterministic tendency to reify culture and render it exclusive from other social formations (see McClendon 2003, for example).

In this regard, it is important also to reference a few women of Africa and the African Diaspora who consistently created those conjunctions or “lived the conjuncture” as Stuart Hall would describe the coming together of different movements in a particular historical moment (2007: 272-273). Mabel Dove Danquah attended the 2nd Pan African Congress. Her husband Joseph Boakye Danquah, himself a major pan-Africanist was one of the African students that Amy Ashwood Garvey nurtured in the West African Students Union in London. According to Tony Martin, upon his return home to Ghana, Joseph Danquah was instrumental in helping Ashwood trace her family lineage and Ashanti origins (Martin 2007). Mabel Dove Danquah is perhaps known only in limited African literary circles for her short stories, which poked fun at old traditional chiefs confused by their own excessive practices of polygamy and by their desire for new wives. In Ghanaian circles, she is known also as a pan-Africanist but deserves, in my view, to be studied separately as a pan-African feminist and located within the frameworks of transnational black feminist practice.

Beverly Guy-Sheftall (2003) also has interesting details about Adelaide Casely Hayford, who married the pan-Africanist J.E. Casely Hayford in 1903 and as a pan-Africanist herself, headed in Freetown the branch of the UNIA after her marriage to Casely Hayford disintegrated. She spent two years in the U.S. studying girls schools, became an associate of U.S. women like Nannie Burroughs, and would later herself develop her own school for girls. In 1927 she attended the fourth Pan-African congress in New York which had been organised by W. E. B. Du Bois. Guy-Sheftall (2003) reveals evidence that these women often worked collaboratively across continents, maintained international friendship and communication.

Left-identified women such as Communist Party U.S.A, theoretician and activist Claudia Jones is documented as attending the same meeting as Mrs. Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti, at the World Congress of Women in the USSR in



1963 (see Jones 1999: 110). And again in Japan in 1964 they both helped to pass a resolution against the proliferation and use of atomic and hydrogen weaponry (see Boyce Davies 2008). They were both affiliated with the Women's International Democratic Forum (WIDF) which has been identified as a leftist women's organisation. In that regard it is important also to place Ransome-Kuti in a much more class-conscious framework than how she has been recently identified mostly as Fela's transcendental mother in the (2008-2012) *On and Off-Broadway* play of the same name (see Odim and Mba 1997, Moore 1982 and Mba 1982).

A few other iconic diasporan figures who lived transnational black feminist lives also demonstrate the connection between these two political positions. In this way, what they offered concretely and theoretically may be revealed as will the intersections we identified at the outset. Amy Ashwood Garvey, the first wife of Marcus Garvey and co-founder of the UNIA who maintained a friendship with both C.L.R. James and George Padmore publicly claimed an identity as a feminist while she lived as an active pan-Africanist strategist, as explored by Rhoda Reddock in this issue. Martin (2007) reports that Amy Ashwood Garvey complied with Jones' request for an essay on Ghana for the premier issue of the *West Indian Gazette* and that "Jones particularly desired Amy's comments on federation and possible independence for the Caribbean and "how (if at all) Ghanaians view this new federation within the context of Nkrumah's plan for a Pan-African Federation" (p.272).

The conjunctions become more apparent when Claudia Jones talks about being influenced by the work done in response to Mussolini's invasion of Abyssinia as the impetus for her political activism. The analyses she cites as clarifying were coming at that time from James, Padmore, Amy Ashwood who were then members of the International Friends of Abyssinia. Claudia had obviously known Amy in New York as well before migrating to London and from all reports, the apartment complex on Edgecombe Road in Harlem in which Claudia lived was known for its pan-Africanist activity. Students like Azikiwe would visit, and even a young Nkrumah is identified as visiting the residence of a range of people from Claudia Jones and Lorraine Hansberry to W.E.B. Du Bois.<sup>4</sup>

Another important conjunction between pan-Africanism and feminism is revealed in the practice of Una Marson, known as a feminist activist and journalist who talked and wrote about Black women's experiences and

facilitated Caribbean Voices for the BBC which would launch the careers of many of the well-known Caribbean writers of today (Jarrett-Macauley 2010). She joined the Women's International League for Peace and other organisations. Confronting racism in England made Una Marson more aware of race equality issues around the world. More significant to this discussion is that she worked as secretary to the League of Coloured Peoples, the first Black-led political organisation in England and became secretary to Haile Selassie and travelled to the League of Nations with him in 1936 to plead for the liberation of Abyssinia. As perhaps the first major woman poet and playwright of the Caribbean she has gained a reputation as a literary pioneer who would focus her writing on the public representation of black women, especially questions of hair, ahead of the contemporary interest, in poems like "Kinky Hair Blues." Besides her work with Haile Selassie, additional pan-Africanist credentials include that she had pleaded the cause of Rastafarians before it became popular to do so. But she is also identified as working with anti-colonial struggles, and assisted Norman Manley in this regard.

Una Marson, like Claudia Jones and Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti, is identified as working transnationally with women's rights organisations like the International Alliance for Women, a global feminist organisation. Allison Donnell has an interesting take on Marson, suggesting that her women's rights positions pre-date her going to London (2003:125). Clear about the simultaneity of oppressions her awareness of pan-African movements ran parallel to her other interests and allowed her to see "the urgency of contesting racial hierarchies." (Donnell 2003: 117) One sees in this formation immediately a series of challenges to "all systems of domination," linked to the development of a full humanity in which political and economic power is shared. This formation, in some ways, recalls the early incarnation of the second wave of Black feminist politics in the U.S. (1980's as well) which had similarly begun an articulation of a feminism that accounted for class and race along with gender (also see the introductory essay in Hull, Scott and Smith 1982).

## The limits of “culturalist” analyses of African women’s rights

Interestingly for both pan-Africanism and feminism, what dominated the discourse as we move towards the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was politics as cultural politics which tended to celebrate or delineate culture and not so much address political systems. This was a necessary move as culture provides one of the critical levers for empowering formerly colonised communities (see Fanon 1961).<sup>5</sup> However, this approach to culture, devoid of analyses which link to other socio-political and historical systems, provides a culturalist orientation which obscures a variety of inter-related forms of oppression. It is here that I want to locate the evasion of class as a critical variable in the recent turns in the study of African gender systems.

The critique of Euro-feminism as an overarching position has already come from a variety of locations, all challenging the assumption that women experience oppression in the same way or have access to power in a unilinear way. European-American cultural formations often assume a certain universality as well as implicit colonial privilege, even within the feminist discourse that developed within this formation. Thus an African feminism was necessarily defined by African thinkers, like Filomina Steady from Sierra Leone. However, such early articulations were very nature/culture-oriented and essentialist even as they called for social transformation (see Steady 1981 and Boyce Davies & Graves 1986).

The definition of gender systems, for women in African and Caribbean contexts, began to take the place of feminist critical studies at the institutional level. This mode of approach linked gender and development studies institutionally, with units named as such, in places like the University of the West Indies. Centres for Gender and Development also became linked to various NGO processes which defended women’s rights, following various UN mandates into a development framework. In terms of scholarship, a series of conceptualisations of the position of women in an African context began also to engage development from a variety of angles. ‘Molara Ogundipe (1984) seemed acutely aware of this issue, even calling titularly for “Another development” as she located women within socio-economic realities. Using deliberately a Maoist “mountain” metaphor, she provided an assessment which illustrated a range of oppressions: colonialism, tradition, neo-colonial realities of underdevelopment and poverty, male power, and race which she divided along class and race lines. Ogundipe’s discussion then presented a line

of reasoning which was involved in a process of analysing African women's realities along a class/gender system basis but articulating how these realities become cultural practices.

A different body of scholarship though, more Afrocentric in nature, took up the critique often levied at feminism as a western import by situating itself within particular ethnic/cultural paradigms. Thus, Ifi Amadiume (1987) used her particular Igbo community to demonstrate that different gender/power dynamics operated which allowed women, if they accessed economic privilege, to have some of the rights which are assumed for men, thus recognising some women's economic activities as an essential basis of their power but also challenging Western gender systems as the most advanced model for emulation. In the subsequent *Re-Inventing Africa: Matriarchy, Religion and Culture*, Amadiume (1998) further clarified her intent to bring back under-represented African epistemologies. Amadiume (1987), which had a major impact on the field of African gender studies, provided the model of using very specific examples from particular ethnic groups to contest overarching definitions of Western unitary understandings of gender. Some Western feminists began to generalise from Amadiume's work to understand this as pertaining to the entire Igbo society and to larger African cultural understandings on issues like marriage and sexuality. Amadiume's later work clarified her position further and interestingly described herself as critiquing developmentalism to advocate a commitment to equity and gender democratisation. However, what she proposes is redemption through the "collectivist, humanist culture of traditional African matriarchal heritage" (Amadiume 2000: 302). Amadiume's work therefore seems to move in two directions: critiquing Western gender assumptions, while returning women to a traditional place in an African cultural heritage.

This allows us to put in context the approach of Oyeronke Oyewumi (1997) which would similarly develop an ethno-cultural argument using her particular ethnic group – Oyo-Yoruba as the basis for a larger critique. Oyewumi (1997) takes this cultural argument further by arguing that gender did not exist in her reading of Yoruba society, but is in fact a western imposition. There are four particular arguments, which appear in *The Invention of Women* (Oyewumi 1997) and repeat themselves in various ways so that the conclusions are unmistakably clear:

- 1) African Studies is Western-dominated and as such its categories are Western categories applied to African realities.

- 2) Western, colonial structures of dominance (knowledge, economics, cultural life, language categories and gender categories), modes of approaching intellectual life and applications to people inform the academy, with the result of a generation of African scholars that too easily applying Western assumptions about patriarchy to African societies.
- 3) Western feminist scholarship has assumed the universal subordination of women and that women are constituted as a group without differentiation; further it is these Western feminist scholars who have made assumptions about all cultures based on gender.
- 4) The major argument however to which the three prior ones lead is the boldly provocative assertion: That Yoruba culture is gender free and that any application of gender categories attaches to Yoruba society a system that did not exist until colonialism.

From my angle of reading these assertions, it seems that in the process Oweyumi (1997) constructed an undifferentiated and static Yoruba society or perhaps an essential Yoruba identity. A large part of her analysis relies on language to conclude that Yoruba is a gender-free, or genderless language (Oweyumi 1997: 175). The attempt to find a path outside of the dominant analytical categories is a laudable activity. Therein, in my view, resides much of the bold-facedness of this book following what was called in Ibadan, the *bolekaja* (come down and fight) approach to intellectual work.<sup>6</sup> In this way Oyewumi finds a weakness in Western feminist work through which she is able to mount a contending argument: “Yoruba social categories were not based on anatomical differences” (1997: 176).

Still, the assumption that Yoruba culture did not have any existing gender systems is an analysis which defies basic logic regarding the nature of humankind, the ways that societies were stratified before and after colonialism. It also assumes an exceptionalism for Yoruba culture without the benefit of deep historical and social research into pre-colonial Yoruba systems of organisation. In this context Bibi Bakari Yusuf’s (2004) analysis of the contributions of this work provides an important revision of the culturalist assertions of the Oyewumi work. Bakare-Yusuf (2004) draws the conclusion that this extreme analytical approach often obliterates class/economic

intersections, noting the intersection between seniority and other power relationships, including those of gender.

The “woman question” according to Oyewumi is a Western question, and not a proper lens for viewing African society. Still, while one can assert that the “woman question” is in its inception Western, it is important to clarify that this naming was generated out of the socialist politics of Clara Zetkin (1934) who debated this position with Lenin in order to put the issue of women on the table in a context when it was not being addressed in basic class analyses (also see Boyce Davies 2007). The “woman question” then comes out of an earlier critique of the erasure of the contributions and participations of women as thinking and acting subjects in a variety of systems. By reverting to this kind of ethnic- specific analysis, Oyewunmi offers a simultaneous inscription of nativism. African gender systems then become loaded with an avoidance of the earlier socio-political and class intent of African feminist articulations that “lived the conjunction” as described at the start of this paper.

The idea of “recovering local epistemologies” is however a compelling one, and in that context the discussion of the role of *iyalode* may provide a kind of model for advancing an available construct transferrable in terms of women’s leadership to someone like Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti. As described above, Ransome-Kuti was a feminist activist in her own right, with international connections to left-oriented women’s groups. She absolutely applied a gender/class praxis in her approach to advancing women’s rights in Nigeria. Oyewumi’s work unfortunately dissolves some of the issue of poor working class women and men into undifferentiated Yoruba people. A class-free position is adopted even as class escapes as an analytical category and is never a frame of this analysis. This is an area begging for further research and which of course will have to use a gender/class analytical approach.

### **Class/gender systems in feminist analysis**

The conjunction between left-thinking and feminism has for the most part been neglected in recent work on African women, and is perhaps the missing aspect in the culturalist feminism being critiqued here. The exploration of class/gender systems as these pertain to African societies clearly needs more attention. A survey of the journal *Feminist Africa* for the last ten years is illustrative. Several issues have been devoted to culture (Issues 2, 5, 6, 16, 17), a few on intellectual politics and the role of the universities (Issues 1, 8, 9)

and on various modes of activism (Issues 4,5, 8, 11, 18), and one dealt with the diaspora (Issue 7). However, the special issue on “Land and Labour and Gendered Livelihoods” (Issue 12) is exemplary in that it pursues the discussion about women’s work in the various modes of production.<sup>7</sup>

Since there is good social science research by African women scholars that addresses the intricacies of class and gender dynamics, particularly as these engage women’s contemporary realities (see Ampofo 2007 for example), it may be that the recent academic popularity of cultural studies has overshadowed the political economy work in which some of these class/gender related questions are inevitably raised. Thus, it may be useful to pose an ongoing research question, regardless of the coming and going of popular discursive fields: what are the class/gender relationships in African societies that position poor women at a disadvantage in contemporary economic systems?

In earlier left studies, the critique levelled by feminist historians like Joan Scott in the face of class-only analyses was that gender was also “a primary way of signifying relationships of power...a primary field by which power is articulated” (1986: 1069) because “within Marxism, the concept of gender has long been treated as the by-product of changing economic structures; gender has no independent analytic status of its own” (Scott 1986: 1061). Wynter’s critique of what transpired was that “in the wake of the sixties, women activists had ceased the earlier “echoing” of Marxist thought and had redefined the Woman Question into an issue that was specific to their own concerns, rather than being, as before a subset of what might be called the Labour Issue” (2003: 312). For her though, it was always the “multiple movements related to these questions that had most forcibly erupted in concrete political and social struggles all over the globe...” (Wynter 2003: 312). Marxist-Feminists in the pre-1960’s period addressed these multiple movements. Yet much earlier during the 1940’s and 1950’s intellectual/activist women like Claudia Jones were already addressing the socio-economic status of working class black women (see Boyce Davies 2007). There is no longer a static sense of gender in scholarship, as black feminist scholarship sought to address power intersectionally for some time. The way that gender and class intersect in an African context continues to be an on-going critical lever of analysis.

By these means we can get to the concrete realities of those who live and operate in a heavily gendered, classed and racialised world which determines

everything from what wages African women will get, whether they will eat, or whether their oil will be exploited and expropriated by a combination of corrupt officials at the local and international level. The women who overtook the Chevron and Exxon companies in Nigeria are testament to this (see Ekine's 2008 feature in FA10).<sup>8</sup> That they were women who carried out this action is significant. While the gains of this activism can be defined as minor in the scheme of things, women are able to get minor concessions such as microcredit for investments and the promises of educating and hiring their children. Class/gender activism in contemporary social and economic realities then still has relevance, even when using some older gendered strategies like the use of the disrobed female body during the Aba Women's Riots of 1926 which returned, for example in Liberian women's peace activism and other examples.

The strength of analyses that link gender to class and race is becoming again a prominent mode of inquiry. Dayo F. Gore (2011) reveals how a generation of activist women, internationally informed, provided the connecting link for class/gender analyses of feminism that originate the race, class and gender framework that activists like Claudia Jones popularised. Repeated concerns were with the super-exploitation of women, especially as this pertains to the black woman's location in society; the effects of war on women's lives and the need to organise generally across a variety of fields; but also to create women's peace organisations and to develop the international connections between women. And the fact that women make up half the world remains as relevant now as it did then (see the essays in Boyce Davies 2011).

### **Transnational black feminism or pan-Africanist feminism**

Today, what is called transnational black feminism brings together the logic of the intersection between pan-Africanism and feminism. According to Julia Sudbury (2005: xviii):

...transnational feminist work functions as part of a wider anti-imperialist, anticapitalist endeavour...Transnational feminist practices parallel antiracist feminists in theorising the intersections of gender with race, class and sexuality... this approach focuses on the linkages that emerge out of transnational networks of economic and social relations."

Jacqui Alexander (2005) offers one of the most detailed articulations of some of the discursive positions that transnational black feminism occupies. Her conclusion is that:



As we recognise that the nation-state matters more to some than to others, we also need to recognise that the borders of the nation-state cannot be positioned as hermetically sealed or epistemically partial. Our knowledge-making projects must therefore move across state-constructed borders to develop frameworks that are simultaneously intersubjective, comparative and relational, yet historically specific and grounded. And because fragmentation is both material and metaphysical, and both epistemic and ontological, these frameworks would need to be attentive to the underbelly of superiority and the psychic economies of its entrails as part of an explicitly political project" (Alexander 2005: 253-4).

A growing body of scholarship, produced by black women and women of colour themselves is systematically addressing the specificities of women's lives in myriad locations, identifying what the particularities of gender, sex, sexuality, race, class and so on mean when looked at with different lenses, or at least when removed from the fixed location of 'under western eyes.' More recently Chandra Mohanty (2003: 2-3) provides an influential discussion of decolonisation, its application to feminist movements, and a contemporary justification for transnational feminist politics, noting new challenges: "while feminist ideas and movements may have grown and matured, the backlash and challenges to feminism have also grown exponentially."

Examining the literature on transnational black feminism, (Boyce-Davies 2008, 2010), I assert that in many ways Claudia Jones's work pre-dates what we define today as transnational black feminism or anti-imperialist black feminism. I concluded that transnational black feminist work recognises that our current geographical locations are products of multiple historical processes, many of which we had no control over, which have produced us as subjects in various 'nation-states' of the world, having to interact with other similarly or differently produced individuals. These displacements are the end product of some very hateful processes: wars of domination, colonialisms, enslavements, holocausts, encampments, dispossession and genocide, modernism, colonialism, and their various enterprises. Claudia Jones had clearly already gestured to this interconnection as early as the 1940s, when she called for internationalising women's peace work, by which she meant building coalitions that work on enhancing people's lives outside of perpetually masculinist war frameworks. The Claudia Jones model reveals a labour-intensive set of activities which link activist work with intellectual work.

Minimally then, analysis that brings feminism and anti-imperialism together engages meta discourses from a variety of locations. Transnational feminism arises from two basic assumptions: that working across borders and cultures is an essential feature of our contemporary world, and that our own specific locations and identities must be part of the bases of our analyses. With this in mind then, any contemporary cultural and political work which wants to move out of fixity and specific imperialistic interpellations has to account for its particular location, articulate its own specificity, and move towards the recognition of the existence of other cultures and political realities in some trans-locational way.

Perhaps the most critical recognition, in doing transnational feminist work is that understanding that the nation states in which we live as subjects have themselves been produced out of specific political imperatives and histories and therefore seek to contain, arbitrarily, a variety of peoples subject to the vagaries of these same nation state enterprises. If those nation-states attain dominance as has happened in the case of the United States, then, unwittingly, even those identities subordinated domestically in those states are implicated in that dominance. The series of persons displaced via global economic processes, who must constantly reconcile themselves to existing emotionally and physically in different spaces, may enter what is popularly referred to now as “diaspora”, a space which resists centring even as it identifies longing, homelands and a myth of origin. Still, there are those who remain outside diaspora, as well as those who live in intersecting or overlapping diasporas.

Since progressive feminist thinking in the context of globalisation, cannot help but be transnational, and a transnational version of black feminism influenced by pan-Africanism has been identified, a more fully relational scholarship and activism allows us to find models which already existed in prior activist/intellectual work. For those of us working in this phase of capitalist globalisation, and in the presence of a phenomenal rise in the distinctions between those with and without access to power and resources, a refined critique of imperialism in its many forms has to be redesigned. It is important nevertheless to note that earlier black communist women also practiced a form of transnational black feminism. Thus one can see some continuities with the internationally-orientated communist/feminist work, which afforded them the ability to assert resisting positions, at the intersection of a variety of positionalities – anti-imperialism and decolonisation struggles,

activism for workers' rights, the critique of appropriation of black women's labour, the challenge to domestic and international racisms, and their links to colonialism. This gave them the ability to articulate transnational black feminism in ways which preceded the contemporary. This ongoing work has significant implications for contemporary articulations of transnational African pan-Africanist/feminist politics.

## Endnotes

1. I offered a graduate class on this subject, through Cornell's Africana Studies Centre to begin a process of studying this intersection formally. Conversations with Rhoda Reddock have been one aspect of pursuing this issue from different angles. Rhoda Reddock presented a paper "The First Mrs. Garvey and Others: Pan-Africanism and Feminism in the Early 20th Century British Colonial Caribbean" at the Caribbean Studies Association conference in San Andres. Versions of this paper were also presented at the same CSA, at the University of Legon in Ghana in April, 2010, and at the *Callaloo* conference in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia: "Black Movements: Poetics and Praxis."
2. See "The Pan-African Congresses, 1900-1945" on blackpast.org which includes a photograph from the 1921 Brussels Conference which shows two women on the stage.
3. By the time of one of the major theorists of pan-Africanism, George Padmore, there would be a need to create alternatives, between two political schools of thought as is indicated with his "or" between pan-Africanism and communism.
4. See Reddock's feature in *Feminist Africa* 19 for a detailed discussion of Amy Ashwood Garvey's role in the pan-African movement.
5. Fanon (1961) has one of the most well-known articulations of the importance of national culture, though he was speaking generally and not accounting for women as a separate group, more reflective of the earliest forms of black nationalist politics. The critique of Fanon on his treatment of gender is well known.
6. Oyewumi who was an undergraduate at the University of Ibadan during the late 1970's when I was there in graduate school, would have been oriented in this approach which saw scholarly ideas as contending positions. The *bokelaja* approach which she uses was quite popular then and advanced by some of the intellectuals like Abiodun Jeyifo who was a young professor then.
7. *Feminist Africa* 12(2009) has a wonderful range of essays on various locations from Ghana to Kenya, looking at issues like the gendered politics of farm household production.
8. "Nigerian Women Force Oil Company to Take Corporate Responsibility" [<http://gbgm-umc.org/umw/legislative/oilcompanies.html>] accessed 12 August 2014.

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# Being pan-African: A continental research agenda<sup>1</sup>

Dzodzi Tsikata

It has been a rare pleasure and an inspiration to participate in this event, not just as a researcher on pan-Africanism, but as a committed pan-Africanist, and in my capacity as vice president of Africa's premier, pan-African social science research organisation, the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA). CODESRIA, which is also 40 this year, has been consciously pan-African in its philosophy, politics and practice from the very start. Its commitment to research which promotes the self-determination and development of Africa's peoples; its vast network of African scholars of many social science disciplines; its support for the academic freedom of African intellectuals and African universities; its instruments, such as the multinational working groups and comparative research networks; its promotion of African philosophies, knowledge systems, arts and cultural artifacts; its longstanding and growing relations with African scholars around the world; its relationship with pan-African political institutions all reflect CODESRIA's brand of pan-Africanism.

In agreeing to participate in the present endeavour, CODESRIA was in full agreement with the view expressed in the concept note for this event: that reflection on the roots, evolution, achievements and challenges produced and faced by pan-Africanism was long overdue. Such reflection falls squarely within CODESRIA's mandate, and could generate a new research agenda for CODESRIA and other research organisations in Africa and its diasporas. It pleases me immensely to say that the event did indeed allow reflection and the generation of many interesting insights. It has also offered questions and areas for enquiry which should form the basis of a future research agenda. All of us here are witnesses and contributors to this, and even those not here, whose knowledge and insights we have invoked, have made their

contribution. As Ebrima Sall noted at the beginning of the event, “we need to produce knowledge and develop knowledge systems which are up to the development challenges Africa faces in the next fifty years.” This means that we need to pay attention to the history and historiography of pan-Africanism, but also address current challenges and also think about the future and how we can realise the goals of pan-Africanism.

Our deliberations over the past two days have drawn attention to the multi-dimensional character of pan-Africanism and its multiplicity of concerns and interests. These lie in politics, ideas, institutions, culture, and in the social and economic realms. While there has justifiably been criticism of economic approaches to pan-Africanism, one lesson I would draw from our deliberations is that if the project of pan-Africanism wants to be relevant to the lived experiences and priorities of Africa’s people, it has to attend to all the foregoing dimensions.

Also important is the insight that the pan-Africanist project does not only concern political leaders, but involves intellectuals, civil society organisations, working people, artists, men and women, the youth, rural and urban dwellers, indeed all the peoples of Africa, wherever they may find themselves today.

What can the research community contribute to this long standing and liberatory project? As researchers, our role is to develop interdisciplinary frameworks and methodologies which will enable us to include all aspects of pan-Africanism in our research projects. Such methodologies should enable us to focus on the priorities of Africa’s people and to generate solutions which promote a united and prosperous Africa, and one that delivers meaningful development and lives to its peoples. It is also important that pan-African institutions understand the critical role of knowledge production in different sites and at different levels, and offer unequivocal support. As Pinkie Mekgwe notes in an interesting article on the humanities, gender and the pan-African ideal:

knowledge and skill are intricately linked to global power play. Knowledge and skill are at the core of societal development. History has amply shown how social change has been influenced by the accumulation of ideas, and their application and diffusion (n.d.: 4).

The knowledge base that will support the progressive agenda of pan-Africanism must be inclusive, flexible and offer multiple perspectives, and it must support the aspirations of the oppressed.

I would like to offer to you my personal take on the priority areas which we can consider in thinking about a future research agenda. A possible theme for our research could be “Pan-Africanism and the Priorities for the Development and Emancipation of Africa’s Peoples in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.” I see four broad areas: political questions, socio-cultural questions, economic agendas, and Africa’s peoples and communities.

### **Political questions**

- Developing and disseminating pan-Africanist thought for the 21<sup>st</sup> century – history and current trends.
- What role for federalism and regional integration in the realisation of the pan-Africanist agenda?
- Political liberalisation: peoples participation and the pan-Africanist agenda
- Promoting inclusive and substantive citizenship in the pan-Africanist agenda
- Understanding the roots and manifestations of xenophobia
- Strengthening human rights within pan-African thought and practice
- Militarisation, militarism, foreign interventions in Africa and the pan-Africanist project

### **Socio-cultural questions**

- The arts and cultural artefacts and pan-Africanism
- Language policies and pan-Africanism
- Education and pan-Africanism
- The cultural basis of pan-Africanism

### **Economic questions**

- Globalisation, economic liberalisation and pan-Africanism
- Pan-Africanism and Africa’s survival in the global financial crisis
- Extractive industries, resource control, land grabbing and Africa’s survival
- Towards sustainable livelihoods, equitable production systems and labour relations in Africa and African diasporas



## The people and Pan-Africanism

- Gender and inter-generational relations and the realisation of the pan-Africanist project
- Social movements, including women's movements, and the pan-Africanist project
- The diaspora within pan-Africanism

These are just preliminary ideas, and time does not permit me to expand or justify my proposals. However, please allow me to flag one of these areas as especially important. This is in respect of gender relations in the realisation of the pan-Africanist project.

Gender biases against women and their marginalisation in the historiography, the intellectual outputs and the political practice of pan-Africanism is something that several speakers mentioned over the past two days. We have to move on from lamentations to substantively redress the gender-distortions and gaps in knowledge production. It is well known that women were active in the pan-African movement and in the anti-colonial struggle, that we made substantial contributions and faced many challenges working in male-dominated movements. We have been able to do this in spite of having to survive all the constraints of our male-dominated societies. We need to restore women – those on the continent of Africa as well as the better-known women of the African diaspora – to their rightful place in the pantheon of pan-African leaders. Even more important, we should ensure that our future research agenda promotes gender equity in the knowledge it produces and disseminates. If we fail to do so, all the action we take based on this future knowledge will only reinforce gender injustice, the most intractable of injustices of our times.

I thank you and wish us continued fruitful deliberations.

## Endnotes

1. This is the closing statement presented by Dzodzi Tsikata, Vice President of CODESRIA, and FA Contributor and Advisory Board Member, on behalf of the Council for the Development of Social research in Africa (CODESRIA) at an official side event to the African Union Special Summit, Addis Ababa, 18th May 2013.

# Unnatural and Un-African: Contesting queer-phobia by Africa's political leadership

Kenne Mwikya

I find it extremely outrageous and repugnant to my human conscience that such immoral and repulsive organisations, like those of homosexuals, who offend both against the law of nature and the morals of religious beliefs espoused by our society, should have any advocates in our midst and elsewhere in the world. (Robert Mugabe, in Dunton & Palmberg 1996: 9-10)

Such are the statements one is likely to come across today while canvassing the discourse by Africa's political leaders on the question of LGBTIQ rights. In one swoop, Robert Mugabe's statement manages to effectively link the morality and ideology of past imperialist and racist legacies for its use to censure the public, the international community and local civil society groups against advocating for the rights of queer folk. This seems to be an Africa-wide trend.

Before signing the Anti-Homosexuality Bill into law, Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni insisted that the question of homosexuality be dealt with by a panel of scientists he set up for that purpose (*The Ugandan Monitor*, 26 January 2014). The hope might have been that science would prove once and for all that homosexuality was outside the justification of rational morality. However, when the panel found, among other things, that "homosexuality was not abnormal" Museveni went ahead and signed the bill anyway (BBC News, 24 February 2014). It later emerged that aspects of the report had been falsified and that duplicitous language had been used in the report's conclusion in order to undercut the value of scientific evidence (*Mail & Guardian*, 22 February 2014).

Talk about the 'nature' of certain human behaviour and means of expression inevitably taps into the racist legacy of the European

Enlightenment that sought to prove, by purportedly rational and scientific means, that non-whites were either not part of a predominantly white human race or were an inferior race of humans destined only to serve the interests of the higher white race.

This racial ‘science’ inevitably seeped into elucidations about ‘the African’. African societies, ways of life, gender relations, class systems and social stratification have not been spared from an imperialist and racist rendering that is pervasive to this day. Nowhere is this more pronounced than on the question of sex (see Tamale 2011, for example). In the last five centuries, Africans have been described as either hypersexual or non-sexual, our bodies being of use only for labour and the reproduction of cheap slave labour, our sexual appetites odd or essentially violent and our social structures primitive. In looking at the issue of non-heteronormative sexual and non-binary gender identities, it is this legacy that we inherit and it is this legacy that must be changed.

In Uganda, as in Nigeria and Kenya, among others, “African culture” and “African morals” as well as religious beliefs are used to justify broad and sweeping legislation and the continued criminalisation of LGBTIQ people. The spurious argument that the African way of life rejects completely the notion of non-heteronormative relationships, sexual expression and non-binary gender identities and presentation is a powerful one. On the face of it, it asserts that persons living and loving outside the heterosexual or binary gendered norms did not exist before Africans began interacting with Arabs and Europeans. From this it is concluded that non-heteronormative or binary gendered modes of sexual orientation and gender identity are a remnant of a colonial past and that the recent uptake in LGBTIQ activism is a neo-colonial attempt at cultural imperialism. The latter view is compounded by recent attempts by Western donors to hinge funding on a recipient country’s LGBTIQ rights record, an unprecedented move considering the vulnerability of Africa’s queer movement (see *Daily Mail*, 10 October 2011).

Statements rejecting the existence of queerness before outside contact are merely rhetorical and are most times not backed by any evidence. In an unexpected moment of candour during an interview, President Museveni admitted that “Homosexuals in small numbers have always existed in our part of black Africa ...They were never prosecuted. They were never discriminated” (*Changing Attitude*, 23 February 2014). Though it may seem odd that

someone who uttered these sentiments went ahead to enact a law that would effectively prosecute, persecute and discriminate Ugandan *kuchus*<sup>1</sup> and anyone else perceived to exist outside the heterosexual or binary gendered norms, the incident further demonstrates Museveni's apprehension over the 2016 elections where he is facing stiff competition from within and outside his party (see *The Independent*, 29 April 2012 and *The Independent*, 20 December 2012).

The intervention by scholars on African communities have put to rest, at least within rigorous academic circles, the question of whether non-normative gender identities and sexual orientations existed within these communities: the evidence overwhelmingly suggests that they did before the advent of colonialism. The great benefit of these interventions is not only the rejection of the 'un-African' argument but also the nuance and detail that is expended in documenting the diverse instances of queerness within African societies. Not only did queerness exist in Africa before colonialism but it did so in many variations that reflect the diversity of Africa's cultures and with fluidity: weaving itself in and out of gender norms, social institutions, moral censure and even social utility.

But more interesting is the question of how such evidence has eluded African discourses on sexuality and gender identity for the past fifty years. In *Boy Wives and Female Husbands*, the editors cite the institutionalised erasure of non-heteronormative or binary gendered ways of life from anthropological and historical narratives of African societies (Murray & Roscoe 2001: xii). This is especially pronounced on the question of the existence of woman-woman sexual relationships (ibid). In many ways, the African elite, whether it be religious, cultural or political, has relied on anthropological and historical accounts inflected with broad racist and imperialist generalisations when interacting with the question of the existence of queer Africans before colonialism.

The position of queer Africans in independent African states is often contested through the terms, or claims of history. Yet, the legacies of institutional colonialism and the ways it intentionally placed its subjects in sexed and gendered relations and positions is not fully attended to. As such, it would be a meaningful exercise to examine colonial laws and the processes of their invention in efforts to accommodate the rights of queers in these post-independence states. In most cases, however, the question was never

addressed, at least not until a later date. Just as the colonial governments subjected persons who chose intimate lives outside of the aspirations for heteronormative nuclear family based societies, independence governments would either uphold old laws that 'dealt' with homosexuality and gender identity and expression or simply leave the question unaddressed.

When former President of Kenya Daniel Moi spoke against homosexuality in 1999 amidst the crippling effects of Structural Adjustment, he illustrated the African political elite's intuitiveness to the apprehension within society at the time over the question of cultural imperialism, neo-colonialism and rights based discourses (BBC News, 30 September 1999). For the political elite, the aim of such speech was not to exclusively censure LGBTIQ activism - the Kenyan queer movement being virtually invisible as a concerted social movement demanding rights and recognition in the nineties. For instance, President Moi made jokes about the effeminacy of many perceived homosexual men. The audience, a congregation at a church, laughed (Gay and Lesbian Archives of the Northwest, 30 September 1999). Moi's statements came on the heels of a presidential decree by Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni ordering the arrest of homosexuals while President Mugabe made statements targeting 'gays and lesbians'.

During the onslaught on neoliberalism in Africa at the end of the Cold War, a time that saw massive social unrest in urban areas and dwindling opportunities for development all over the continent, African leaders, as we have seen from statements above came to heavily rely on a mix of violent repression and populist invocations of a shared cultural identity to deflect the focus of social unrest from themselves. This came at a cost to human rights activism in general but women's and sexual minority activism in particular. Statements by Africa's leaders on the question of non-heteronormative sexual and gender identities reveal the ease with which a public statement turns into official policy, practice and ultimately a nation-state's ideology. Uganda's recently passed Anti-Homosexuality Act (AHA), the result of US-based evangelists seizing the opportunity to capitalise on a country rife with fears of a 'homosexual' assault on the integrity of its children as well as its moral fabric, is the culmination of years of callous statements by its leaders about homosexuality (see Kaoma 2009).

But if the AHA illustrates the blurred lines between state policy and the personal views of Uganda's leaders, no matter how widely held, it also shows

the way in which ‘homosexual panic’ can be effectively used by the state, in concert with other means, to police private and intimate spheres. Provisions regarding ‘touching with intent’ to commit a homosexual act, the legal classification of all buildings housing perceived homosexuals as ‘brothels’ and the ban on ‘promotion’ of homosexuality are not only designed to put incredible strain on the lives of queers living in Uganda but also to place the whole Ugandan population in a state of fear and vigilantism since the law fails to provide definition of the threat it was ostensibly meant to target: anyone can be a homosexual.

The passing of the AHA was preceded by two other worrying pieces of legislation: the Anti-Pornography Act and the Public Order Management Act. In the wake of the signing of the three acts, women have been stripped in public and Ugandan LGBTIQ rights organisations are witnessing an unprecedented number of attacks on their constituencies while the violent crack-down of opposition protests has been legalised and normalised (see Oloka-Onyango 2014).

The uprisings in North Africa remain fresh in the minds of many Africans and as governments try to democratise incrementally (or not at all) or stifle dissent, Africans are using the small spaces they already have to demand rights, dignity and social justice. As African peoples demand from their leaders something much more than the adoption of a foreign and overbearing economic regime, the political elite has learnt to respond by restating their power and diverting attention to that domain in which they still possess it. The political climate in Uganda best illustrates this: President Museveni and members of the ruling National Resistance Movement Party have increasingly relied on a clamp down of civil society and protest in responding to social crisis while simultaneously seeking popular support via the rhetoric that finally led to the passage of the Anti-Homosexuality Act as well as the Anti-Pornography Act.

In turn, demands for queer inclusivity are in discordant with the neoliberal turn. In fact, many LGBTIQ organisations in Africa place social justice and social democracy firmly in their agenda. Most organisations draw heavily from the resilience and strength of the independence movements, the African women’s movements as well as the many protest movements that have emerged in Africa over the past fifty years.

So why have scholarly interventions not emboldened activists agitating for LGBTIQ rights to link past cultural realities with present contestations concerning what amounts to “African culture” and, indeed, “Africanness”? One of the reasons may be that the research is not immediately available to individual activists and organisations with minimal funding. In all fairness, most ground-breaking research is presented as having relevance almost exclusively within academia. This inaccessibility limits how far activists and academics can rely and support each other’s work in instances where their interests converge. However, the recent publications of two volumes, *Queer African Reader* (Ekine & Abbas 2013) and *African Sexualities: A Reader* (Tamale 2011) mark the much needed advancement of Africa’s queer or queer-conscious artist, activist and academic knowledge both in these works’ content and presentation. Both publications tap into a rich reservoir of thinkers actively linking the personal and political in their day-to-day lives and work. In addition, these new publications go beyond the implied fixity of queerness in Africa and address current trends and dynamics in what gender, gender identity, sexuality, sexual expression and rights activism mean in light (or even in spite) of the evidence.

A movement is growing, from activists and academics building knowledge and practice to present LGBTIQ struggle in the continent within grassroots movements to agitate for human rights in the context of social justice. Such efforts including those in Uganda, where despite the climate of fear created by the Anti-Homosexuality Act and the Public Order Management Act, brave LGBTIQ individuals and communities have joined together with other activists, academics and even politicians to challenge the AHA in court (Civil Society Coalition for Human Rights, 11 March 2014). I also had the opportunity to work on the drafting and distribution of the Mayibuye Pledge, a collective effort that seeks to enlist the support of Africans in challenging the divisive politics fuelled by political elites that have ravaged the continent for the past 50 years (Mayibuye Collective). This message is made more powerful by the fact that the pledge affirms an intersectional approach that links militarism, the crisis in democracy and neoliberalism with patriarchy, sexism, homophobia and transphobia. Borrowing from the legacy of pan-Africanism, the pledge was initially structured around African Liberation Day on May 25 2014 and affirms an African future in which freedom is not selective.

## Endnotes

1. The word “kuchu” is derived from Swahili and has been taken up in translation and political activism as a term for “queer”. See GayUganda. 2007. Kuchu Identities. 25 October. <http://gayuganda.blogspot.com/2007/10/kuchu-identities.html> accessed 1 August 2014.

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*Sojourning for freedom: Black women, American communism and the making of black left feminism.* By Erik McDuffie. Durham: Duke University Press, 2011

Maxine Craig

Erik S. McDuffie's *Sojourning for freedom: Black women, American communism and the making of black left feminism* is one of those rare books that thoroughly transforms the way we see things. In far too many historic portrayals black radicals are always men, communists are white men, and feminists are white women. McDuffie's *Sojourning for Freedom* makes it clear that from the beginning of the twentieth century, black women were central to radical movements, to American communism and to U.S. and transnational women's movements.

*Sojourning for freedom* conveys the history of black left feminism by showing readers the lives of an extraordinary group of women. Through archival work and oral history McDuffie tells the story of a group of black women, based in New York City's Harlem, who used community level organising, journalism, and international travel to develop innovative politics that were radical, transnational and feminist. We see them travelling, to Harlem from the Caribbean and the U.S. South, and from Harlem to international gatherings of communists in the Soviet Union. They travelled into and out of relationships, remained committed to revolution, and pushed the boundaries of sexual politics and conventional marriage as they raised children with the support of a community of radicals.

McDuffie introduces readers to Audley "Queen Mother" Moore, Louise Thompson Patterson, Thyra Edwards, Bonita Williams, Williana Burroughs, Claudia Jones, Esther Cooper Jackson, Beulah Richardson, Grace P. Campbell, Charlene Mitchell, and Sallye Bell Davis, activists and critical thinkers who reformulated Marxist critiques of capitalism by putting black women at the center of the struggle. Doctrinaire communists believed that the fight against exploitation had to arise from men on the factory floor. Harlem's

black women radicals developed new politics grounded in the experience of black women. While communists focused their movement on industrial male workers, black left feminists identified black women domestic workers as the central figures in their vision of revolution. They formulated a theory of “triple oppression” to explain the position of black women oppressed by race, gender and class. McDuffie describes their politics as “black left feminism.” It is an accurate description though it is not the way these women would have described themselves. Without using the word “feminist,” they wrote about and organised on behalf of the particular exploitation of black women.

McDuffie begins his narrative with the first generation of African American communists, such as Grace P. Campbell, the daughter of a Jamaican immigrant, who ran for public office in New York as a socialist in 1920. He follows the lives of Harlem’s black women radicals into the 1930s, the Communist Party USA’s greatest period of mobilisation. Claudia Jones migrated to the United States from Trinidad as a child. As a young woman she was mobilised into action by the 1935 Italian invasion of Ethiopia. Initially she joined the African Patriotic League, a pan-African organisation. Encountering sexism within the organisation, she turned instead to the Communist Party, in which she saw the possibility for full participation in a transnational, multiracial, anti-imperialist movement.

Louise Thompson was raised by her mother who worked as a domestic servant. Thompson made her way to Harlem where her apartment became the gathering place for New York’s black radical intellectuals and artists. Her involvement with the Communist Party led her to travel to the Soviet Union, remarkably, as part of a group of 21 black men and women invited to take part in a Soviet propaganda film about the dreadful state of race relations in the United States. The film was never made but Thompson and her fellow travelers were inspired by their visit to the new socialist nation. The trip strengthened their vision of an international anti-racist and anti-capitalist movement. Black women’s leadership grew through the 1940s as women like Claudia Jones articulated a transnational feminist political agenda that was often to the left of official party line.

In the 1950s the government sought to eliminate communist thought and activism in the United States through persecution and deportation. Senator Joe McCarthy, whose name has come to stand for the repression of the period, fuelled the flames of anti-communism by making false claims about

the dangers and extent of communist infiltration into the U.S. government. Black left feminists continued to write and organise in the 1950s, but the direction of their writing was affected by a political climate that stifled free speech. They fought anti-communist persecution on the basis of their positions as mothers, a strategy termed “familialism” by historian Deborah Gerson. Nonetheless, it was in this period that Louise Thompson Patterson and others formed the Sojourners for Truth and Justice, a black radical group led by women with a transnational vision that aimed to “fight for peace and freedom in the nation and the world”(177-178). They put the oppression of black women in an international context and allied themselves with South African anti-apartheid activists.

The Sojourners for Truth and Justice did not survive the overwhelming force of anti-communism. McCarthyism crushed radicalism within the United States. Children of communists are known among radicals as “red diaper babies.” I was one of those. I recognised in McDuffie’s account the ways in which communist families, while under attack by the government, formed communities to provide safe and culturally rich spaces in which to raise their children. Families survived but the radical movement was decimated. Members fled radical organisations, Claudia Jones was arrested, jailed and deported. As a result, theoretical positions articulated by black women radicals in the 1950s appeared new to feminists in the 1970s. That such analyses had to be re-discovered is one of the tragic outcomes of the repressions of the McCarthy period in the United States.

McDuffie restores the broken links between earlier and later movements. By focusing on the work of radical black women he rewrites the history of the American Communist Left. He also shows that conventional accounts of women’s movements have missed a foundational chapter.

*Women, Sexuality and the Political Power of Pleasure.*  
 Edited by Andrea Cornwall, Susie Jolly, and Kate  
 Hawkins. London and New York: Zed Books, 2013.

Nana Darkoa Sekyiamah

My copy of *Women, Sexuality and the Political Power of Pleasure* travelled with me from Accra, where I live, via Johannesburg to Cape Town, where I was attending a workshop at the time of writing this review. In all these spaces the book drew attention: its vivid pink colour and its provocative title in particular led people to grab the book out of my hands, quite literally. Clearly the book concerns a subject about which people want to know more.

Edited by Susie Jolly, Andrea Cornwall and Kate Hawkins, the book is a collection of 14 articles, thought pieces and essays on a range of subjects related to women's sexuality and pleasure. That such a collection now exists is a political act. In their introduction to the collection the editors state:

This book shows why we should work with pleasure, and how we can do so in ways that change people's lives, on an individual and collective level. It also shows how pleasure can contribute to empowerment.

Making space for pleasure can contribute to challenging gender and other power relations (2013: 21).

This is the radical focus of the collection. How can the politics of pleasure disrupt gender norms and oppressive power relations? Can this be done in ways that empower women and communities? The contributions in the book state a resounding yes.

The real strength of the book lies in the fact that it includes contributions from women across the world working on various aspects of sex and sexualities. Experiences and lessons are shared from countries as varied as India, Turkey, Nigeria, China, the United Kingdom (UK), Malawi and Uganda. As an African feminist, I was pleased to see a diversity of intellectual contributions from the likes of Bibi Bakare-Yusuf, Dorothy Aken'ova and Sylvia Tamale.

The collection is not divided into particular themes; on the contrary, one gets the impression that the editors tried as much as possible to explore the gamut of sexualities. This, to me, is a real plus. Bibi Bakare-Yusuf's chapter, 'Thinking with Pleasure: Danger, Sexuality and Agency,' offers some useful feminist theoretical underpinnings for the book, critically highlighting the limitations of dominant narratives of sexuality that focus on disease, violence and the absence of bodily integrity. Bakare-Yusuf reminds readers that "Telling stories about female sexual pleasure, agency and power allows us to uncover a tradition and community of powerful, feisty, indomitable women who will not be cowed by oppression or violation" (2013: 37). Telling stories is a central part of Bakare-Yusuf's *raison d'être* in her capacity as a co-founder of Cassava Republic Press, a publishing house based in Abuja, Nigeria. It is for this same reason that her publishing house is compiling a collection of erotic stories by African women.

However, the following words by Bakare-Yusuf gave me cause to pause:

The moment we allow ourselves to see pleasure as preceding violation, it becomes possible to reframe violation into a redemptive discourse or narrative. And once you do so you are taking the sting out of it. So, for example, rather than viewing rape or violation as the dissolution of one's world or as an opportunity to retreat from the world, that experience can be recontextualised in terms of a bigger project of one's life (2013: 39).

This is not an argument that I am comfortable with. Yes, in an ideal world, we could see pleasure as preceding violation, yet we know that too many women and girl's first experience of sex involves violation. How, then, can such violation be redeemed and re-contextualised? In the context of systemic violence against women a reframing of narrative seems far from adequate.

The fact that contributors to the collection came from different backgrounds – academics, activists, people working in non-governmental spaces – means that its pace and tone vary considerably. This is both a strength and a weakness. The second, third and fourth chapters, for example, concern sexuality workshops held in North India, Turkey and Nigeria. These chapters offer many useful lessons to individuals and organisations that may wish to replicate similar training sessions, yet the very nature of workshop reports means that these were not the most scintillating chapters to read.

A real eye-opener for me was the chapter on 'Building a Movement for Sexual Rights and Pleasure' by Xiaopei He of Pink Space, an NGO in China

working on 'Sexual Rights to Pleasure for All.' I was especially interested in the work done with the wives of gay men, who suffer the negative consequences of hetero-normativity and the attendant risks of violence, depression and isolation. Meetings, workshops and training sessions held by Pink Space also brought together different groups of marginalised women – women living positively, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered women, as well as women sex workers – to build solidarity towards the fulfillment of the organisation's mission.

Lorna Couldrick, a health practitioner, educator and researcher, and Alex Cowan, a disability consultant and trainer who is described as using a wheelchair due to multiple sclerosis, wrote 'Enabling Disabled People to Have and Enjoy the Kind of Sexuality They Want.' The strength of this partnership came through in the multi-faceted recommendations and experiences in their chapter on how to support the sexual rights of disabled people. Through multiple methods including interviews with multidisciplinary teams working on health and social care for disabled people, and interrogating policy documents, they clearly demonstrate the failings of the UK health system in supporting the sexual rights of disabled people. They also include personal stories and examples from beyond the UK which can provide some leadership in how these rights can be recognised and bolstered.

The concluding parts of the book include chapters entitled 'Challenging Clitoraid,' 'How Was It for You? Pleasure and Performance in Sex Work,' as well as 'Laughter, the Subversive Body Organ.' A particularly strong chapter in these final accounts is the republication of Sylvia Tamale's 2005 article 'Eroticism, Sensuality and 'Women's Secrets' among the Baganda', initially published in FA 5. Part of the reason this chapter struck me is because, recently, two women in their early 30s asked me if I knew of an older woman who would be willing to share traditional sex tips with a select group of women. The woman who would play such a role among the Baganda of Uganda is called a Ssenga, "a parental aunt (or surrogate versions thereof) whose role is to tutor young women in a range of sexual matters, including pre-menarche (first menstruation) practices, pre-marriage preparation, erotics and reproduction" (2013: 265). As someone who blogs about sex and sexualities, it is clear to me that even in this day and age, women and girls would appreciate advice on all aspects of their sexualities from more experienced women. Particularly interesting in Tamale's chapter is how she shows the evolution of the Ssenga,

including its commercialisation and the subversive ways in which the women create opportunities for radical dialogue on sex, the erotic and pleasure, even within a climate of heteronormativity and state efforts to control women's sexualities.

*Women, Sexuality and the Political Power of Pleasure* is an important contribution to the discourse of 'feminisms and development.' The one area in which I felt the book had a significant weakness was its lack of attention to how feminists are utilising online spaces to facilitate empowering conversations on sexualities. This includes the blog I co-founded, Adventures from the Bedrooms of African Women as well as spaces such as Ms Afropolitan, Black Looks and HOLAAfrica. I hope a subsequent edition will be more inclusive of some of the pioneering work being done in such online spaces.

### Cited websites

[www.adventuresfrom.com](http://www.adventuresfrom.com)

[www.msafropolitan.com](http://www.msafropolitan.com)

[www.blacklooks.org](http://www.blacklooks.org)

[www.holaafrica.org](http://www.holaafrica.org)



*Queer African Reader*. Edited by Sokari Ekine and Hakima Abbas. Dakar, Nairobi & Oxford: Pambazuka Press, 2013

Danai S. Mupotsa

### An encounter

Against a white concrete wall, a projector reflects images of Neo playing. An act of public space claiming, mischief and sheer brilliance, he draws a large crowd of strangers, bystanders towards her, and then him and then her. These are rather ordinary movements. She only has few objects at his disposal – a Masai blanket, some beaded jewellery, a pair of pants, a t-shirt, a sweater – her own body and this small space in a town square. As she dresses and undresses, the movements of her body change only slightly and yet it is clear to the crowd that face him that something rather troubling is at hand. Through change in dress and posture the space changes, the time changes. It was not simply just that sometimes it is masculinity and her body simply and cleanly says “I am a boy,” at other times “I am a man” – it was that sometimes he is a nice rural girl, then a city girl, then a grown woman. And she really has very few objects at her disposal. Through dress and posture, Neo drags us through sex, gender, body, sexualities, pleasure, pain, ambiguity, fixity, process, becomings. We witness a rehearsal of time and space: “traditional,” “the modern,” the “rural,” “the urban.”

I encountered these images at Iranti’s somewhat recent exhibition at the University of Johannesburg. The piece was filmed in Nairobi. A crowd composed mostly of men surround Neo Musangi, bewildered by the transgression of gendered norms. The gaze of the camera turns to these men as they are invited to respond to this scene – and they comment passionately about their discomfort at not being able to fit Neo *in* to a neat category of gender, sex, or sexuality. His/her femininity and masculinity were equally “convincing.” The camera turns to one man and he asks us “Who will marry her?” (Perreira & Musangi 2013).

I return to this encounter because it draws together a range of ideas explored in the volume edited by Sokari Ekine and Hakima Abbas. Ekine and Abbas describe the process of compiling the collection of essays, conversation and testimony as a journey that began as a “muted discussion” (1) that became a process rooted in “queer resistance [... for] the struggle for African liberation and self-determination from the body to the collective” (3). The volume reads as multivalent resistance, full of struggling antagonisms. At the centre of this bundle of wills is an important claim and intervention for those of us invested in reading gender and sexualities in Africa, on how we attend to the political work of “queer.” A part of the project of a volume like this is about making visible the queer personal and political body, yet our interventions through various liberal projects like developmentalism, policy framing, or demands for democratic inclusions in the state often produce a limit to our reading of “queer” as it is neatly meted out to an identity politics. This presents a limit to our imagination as feminists thinking sex, gender, sexuality, time and space; for while we attend to “women” or “lesbians,” we often misrecognise the historical function of compulsory heterosexuality in meting out the contours of gendered experience.

Ekine and Abbas cite the trial of Tiwonge Chimbalanga and her partner Steven Monjeza for the crime of gross indecency as a historic moment in African queer history which prompted this volume. These discussions were muted by a context that wanted to confine the case to one concerned with “gay rights” in Africa, as we witnessed players from the global North framing their interventions through the demand for the release of “two men.” These are not simply limits of the imagination. The editors suggest the turn to “queer’ [denotes] their key political frame: neither a gender identity nor a sexual behaviour, [it is] a perspective that foregrounds sexual plurality and seeks to transform, overhaul and revolutionise African order rather than seek to assimilate into oppressive hetero-patriarchal-capitalist frameworks.” (3) They work attentively at this task, carefully selecting and placing essays, short stories, petitions, poems – utterings in place that consistently interrupt each other.

Our first interruption is poignant: a short essay written by David Kato Kisule, the Ugandan activist who was murdered on 26 January 2011. The essay is a thoughtful reflection on human rights discourse, which he inserts into the larger systems of global governance, asserting that at the core of these interventions lies a deep commitment to some vision of “a traditional

family” that reproduces the very homophobia it purports to confront (6). “Homophobia” and “the family” come to be two important themes in the volume. As a univocal frame, homophobia becomes problematic for activism and thinking (see Ndashe in the *Reader*). In her own essay, Ekine argues that there are two narratives that dominate our discussions of queer African sexualities which fall under this frame: first that queer sexualities are “un-African,” and second that Africa is a “site for obsessive homophobia.” (78) Ekine is persuasive. Applying Simidele Dosekun’s critique of essentialist notions of “authentic Africanness” (2007: 80–1), she further examines the processes of heterosexualisation in many nation-building projects. Through the use of Jacqui Alexander’s notion of “heteropatriarchal recolonisation” that directs us to “the continuity between the “white heterosexual inheritance and Black heteropatriarchy” (1997: 66, cited on pp. 81), Ekine invites us to think about the ways that through “the family” and “homophobia,” heterosexuality is re-ordered and consolidated as the only basis for citizenship. Key to this linking and de-linking of family and homophobia is the work of queer activists attending to multiple voices in/of/on Africa in confrontation and conversation with the global North. Douglas Clarke’s essay attentively pursues these questions as Clarke confronts the “double erasures” of Western queer theory itself: “it is as if Western queer theory attempts to erase both African-ness and African-centred homosexuality” (173).

Keguro Macharia’s essay emphasises Kato Kisule’s point regarding the family, which in processes of heterosexualisation is not only a framing logic for the construction of proper citizenship, but exceeds this in important affective ways. For Macharia, sexual minority rights can only be understood through sexual majority rights as “homosexuality is one of the many imaginary contents, fantasies, or significations (sometimes in the negative, sometimes not) that circulate in the production of African sovereignties and identities and in their representations by Africans and others” (273). Macharia examines the 2009 national policies on culture and heritage in Kenya which include a chapter that defines “the family” in relation to “Kenyan-ness.” For Macharia:

by claiming that the foundation of Kenyan society has *always* been ‘the family,’ this document rewrites and erases Kenya’s urban histories of prostitution, class-based histories embodied in Kenya’s very important trade unions, multi-ethnic coalitions that function outside of kin-based frameworks, disparate groups. Positing this very specific intimate

foundation, the heterosexual family, as the central form through which “Kenyan society” emerged erases the innovative, creative forms of affiliation that were so central to creating and constructing Kenya (original emphasis).

“Always” also erases the temporal markers of Kenya’s emergence as a nation (279).

Macharia invites us to think about the frame of national-time with intimate modernities that mark heterosexual marriage as an authoritative site of citizenship; when desires, arrangements and intimacies that exceed and refuse it have and continue to exist. When Macharia describes the ways that queer intimacies get “implicitly marked as a-cultural, a-modern, a-traditional, contributing nothing to history, to the present, to the future,” (280) time and space come to matter. This argument invites us to question the progressive narrative that privileges heterosexuality and heteronormativity, while simultaneously refusing to read queer erasures and visibilities as a politics tied to a telos that longs for the future. It is an important set of arguments that augments the positions brought forward by Ekine, Clarke, Kato Kisule and many others in this volume.

The *Queer African Reader* attends to the demand for a politics of visibility, representation and recognition in order to confront real and symbolic queer erasures. This demand is not to be taken for granted as self-evident. For instance, Lyn Ossome argues that “one unfortunate causality of this opening up of political spaces has been the diminishing engagement with class analysis” (33). Erasure is a good word, mirrored in Ossome’s text and many others in the collection. The breadth of genres in the collection reads as a gesture of the commitment to confront queer erasures through fiction, testimony, manifesto and autobiographical acts, like the poem written by the late Busisiwe Sigasa, *Remember Me When I am Gone*. Ossome’s critique both disrupts and sustains the commitments made in the *Reader* to the demands for recognition in a context where recognition always already, necessarily has to attend to an intersectional praxis. Portraits run through the text as a good example because they do not simply demand the inclusion of queer bodies into already existing political and analytical frames. The portrait as an object is an interesting metaphor, as it is bound to histories of representing the “properly human” and the production of visual metanarratives about

who or what is not. Yet these portraits not only attempt to re-occupy, to re-territorialise the space of the putatively human, but bear a more radical disruptive potential. I am thinking here of the portraits of “Proudly African and Transgender” produced in collaboration with the sitters by Gabrielle Le Roux. The exhibition cites silence about Transgender Africans: “When the world sees our portraits, they will know that Africa has transgender people and that there is a struggle against injustices on our continent” (54). The portrait is announced as a discourse of struggle that suggests more to me than an oppositional logic made void of its political claim or potential.

As such, a number of essays attend to visual queer activism and, more specifically, to the body of work produced by Zanele Muholi who defines this activism:

I call this method the birth of visual activism: I decided to use it to mark our resistance and existence as black lesbians and gendered persons in our country, because it is important to put a face on each and every issue” (170).

Raél Jero Salley argues that Muholi’s project does not demand integration into dominant structures, but is instead committed to “transforming the basic cultural fabric of hierarchies that allow quotidian experiences of oppression to persist and operate efficiently” (108). Photographs are not simply representations through which we can recognise ourselves; they are documents tied to regimes of truth. As such, they bear the potential to reposition these regimes of authoritative knowledge. Salley thematises Muholi’s project, suggesting the assemblage of “images, icons and indexes” to point us to the processes of signification that inhere in the production and reception of images. For Salley, if “the index refers to a process of signification in which the signifier is bound to the referent not by social convention, not by similarity, but by actual connection in the world” (111), then Muholi’s pictures may be indexical but through a repetitive emphasis on incomplete narratives of black lesbian subjects and communities they emphasise non-iconicity: “a counter-point to over-determined representations of lived experience” (113). Kylie Thomas echoes Salley in some respects, suggesting that Muholi’s work raises the question of how experience that is deemed unspeakable can enter representation: “if lesbian subjectivity is made visible through suspending the structures of recognition, what are the political implications of occupying such an ‘outlaw’ position?” (354).

The placing of Awino Okech's essay at the beginning of the reader speaks to an important desire to foreground a number of threads that run through it. Okech is concerned with the space and place of queer organising in mainstream African feminist spaces and what she recognises as struggle within sites of intellectual and political activism and solidarity. Feminist spaces in particular, as such sites of struggle, intended to be sites of safety, instead conjure isolation amongst sisters. So, Okech asks whether:

the conceptual and ideological tools that feminism offers have been used in ways that are neither homogenising nor essentialising within movement building processes [...] how ready they are to respond to a growing queer movement [?] (11)

The deployment of "gender" as a depoliticised tool fails for Okech, as it orients our efforts towards a politics of inclusion rather than radical transformation. The broader implications for movement building and solidarities come to be framed by "'acceptable' forms of political, social and economic engagement [...] regulated by powerful institutions and individuals [and...] limited by the rules of participation" (13). As a result, it is difficult to define or substantiate the collective", no less the notion of "collective consciousness." For Okech, the divisions of space around which feminist mobilisations occupy matter, specifically in relation to the ways that notions of friendship, sisterhood and solidarity are deployed.

Okech examines the feminist engagement of friendship as both enabling of a challenge to hetero-patriarchy but possibly limiting to the erotics of female same-sex intimacy, arguing that by consequence "same-sex relationships among women are situated as part of a heteronormative continuum [...posing] the erasure of sexuality as part of women's friendships [on one hand and] lesbian sexualities on the other" (21). Positioning sisterhood alongside or perhaps against solidarity, which has been positioned as strategically more powerful and perhaps more practical, Okech argues that in its present usage in African feminist mobilisation, it rests on unconditioned foundations "creating a pre-discursive subject" (ibid.) of and among women, in homorelational friendships confined to a heteronormative framework. While feminist spaces offer a reprieve from heterorelational structures, same-sex relationships remain limited to the "'private' and not the 'public' domain through a 'don't ask don't tell' approach" (23) that limits "the potential for effective solidarity between an emerging queer movement and mainstream autonomous feminist spaces." (26).

Okech's challenge is crucial, demanding a solidarity less premised on building bridges across movements; it is a demand for the destabilising of heteronormativity. The volume pushes this agenda persuasively and draws me back to the encounter with Musangi's embodied rehearsal of a radical queer black African feminist praxis. The political standpoints of "woman" and "lesbian" are productive sites for thinking and acting, but require a more demanding engagement with the processes of subjectivation that make us legible to each other, the state or the market, yet are the very preconditions of our erasure. There is a valuable intellectual and political tension here. Bernadette Muthien asks:

So how should we define lesbian? Many people I associate with define lesbian as the equivalent of gay homosexual, i.e. the opposite of heterosexual. While the construct queer embraces those who are non-heteronormative and includes the inbetween fluids, the construct lesbian does not necessarily include me, because I define myself as beyond binaries, as inbetween and fluid, dynamic and variable. Perhaps some may call me bisexual, but this then too subscribes to a notion of polarity – that I am both poles – when in fact I shift and change positions, not on a static linear continuum, but on an endlessly spiralling ellipse that, not ironically, is ovoid, symbolic of female reproductive power. Is lesbian defined as orientation, or as preference? Are we victims of biology, or active agents with choice? (13)

For Muthien it is the imperative of a racist, capitalist heteropatriarchy that intends to keep us in the boxes of binaried sexuality. I read the collective challenge of the *Queer African Reader* as this and more, demanding that we interrogate our assumptions about the nation, its temporalities and our sustained commitment to a heteronormalising feminist praxis.

Producing an edited volume-as-reader is an arduous task, particularly when the intention is to work through "Africa." The possibilities for silencing and omission are plenty. Osome's critique concerning the politics of recognition echoes such a concern, as in recent years we have seen queer activism most articulated through practices of vision and representation via the use of the portrait-as-method, which bears the possibility of silencing other interlocutors and methods. But I think this criticism would be too final. Other sites of representation are explored in the volume and, read together, offer a persuasive visual, aural and oral set of demands. The demand for recognition

matters in a set of contexts where real and symbolic queer bodies face continued precarities from global bodies, the state, the family and individuals. As such, while offering a critique of thinking queer in/and/of Africa within the logics of developmentalism that want to limit queer to identitarian politics, it is still clear and necessary that this demand for recognition includes the logics of the state, the market, the family, the religious bodies, the development industry and so on that continue to set the conditions for who is “properly human:” who can live, who can die.

In a short discussion on the book, a friend asked what role a volume like this can play in Africa, if the discussion is still framed by liberal, developmental, rights discourses. What is the value of the book to on-going legal interventions on non-heterosexual beings in Africa? The editors are quite intentional in addressing such demands but, of course, this matters little if those of us who write, think and teach in feminist spaces fail to attend to queer politics. Are our teaching practices queering the approach to gender, sex, sexualities, space, time, the nation and the family; or do we simply follow an integrationist pattern of adding-on queer-as-identity, while we continue to frame woman-as-somehow-stable-subject, until we attend to lesbian-also-as-stable-subject or transgender-as-stable-subject?

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*Daughters of the Niger Delta*, Documentary Film (55:30 min). Directed by Ilse van Lamoen, featuring Hannah Tende, Naomi Alaere Ofofi, Rebecca Churchill. Abuja, Nigeria: Media Information Narrative Development (MIND); Nijmegen, the Netherlands: FLL.

Simidele Dosekun

*Daughters of the Niger Delta* is a compelling documentary by and about women of the region. Nine Delta women were equipped with filmmaking skills to make the documentary through a partnership between MIND (Media, Information and Narrative Development), a Nigerian non-governmental organisation that empowers local women to document human rights issues, and FLL, a Dutch organisation that offers training in participatory video. The result is a film described by its makers as a ‘bottom up production’ which sympathetically profiles three local women: Hannah and Rebecca, who live in rural communities in marked poverty, and Naomi, university-educated and a member of the film crew. The documentary focuses on a particular challenge that each of these women faces. In so doing it reveals some of the larger, patriarchal dynamics that produce these challenges and shape the women’s lives. Inevitably the documentary implicates in the women’s troubles the environmental and social degradation caused by crude oil extraction in the Delta. Yet oil is not the central story. By focusing instead on the everyday lives of women, *Daughters of the Niger Delta* offers new angles on some of the pressing issues in the region, illustrating the feminist insight that there is much to be learned from women’s perspectives.

Hannah is a widow struggling to provide for herself and her children, having been ejected from her marital home by her husband’s family after his death. While Hannah invokes ‘culture’ to explain this experience, she recognises clearly that she has suffered an injustice and that, in her community, culture is largely and somewhat arbitrarily defined by men for their benefit. For instance she questions why the cultural injunction against widows’ remarriage does not equally apply to widowers. Rebecca, the second woman in the film, farms on land informally allotted to her by her husband,

to whom she is married by customary rite. In one scene we hear Rebecca say that she cannot be driven from this land because she has children with her husband. The film then cuts to Hannah talking about her experience of just this dispossession. Customary marriage does not guarantee women legal property rights, nor does motherhood guarantee social and economic protection. While I am of the feminist camp that would insist that it is not because women are wives or mothers that they should enjoy their basic rights, the point is that the situation of a woman like Rebecca is a lot more precarious than she seems to assume.

Rebecca's central narrative in the film concerns the harsh realities of childbearing in the Niger Delta. Pregnant again, Rebecca recounts that only six of her eleven children are still alive. Viewers learn that the problem of maternal mortality in the region far outstrips the more media-reported issue of kidnapping. We watch a visibly pregnant Rebecca struggling along with other women in the highly polluted environment to find water that is clean enough to simply bathe their children, much less drink or cook with. Clean water for domestic use is seen as women's concern and so the lack of it becomes their problem and expense. This is just one of several examples in the film revealing how the well-known problem of oil pollution in the Delta has particular gendered effects that are often overlooked in public and even activist discourse. As with the appalling maternal mortality rates in the region, the lack of basic infrastructure that the film starkly evidences is a serious indictment of both the Nigerian government and the multinational oil companies that have reaped fortunes from the Delta for over 50 years now.

The third woman in the documentary, Naomi, has a rather different story. She recounts facing what is now a too-common experience for young women in Nigerian universities: sexual harassment and sexual blackmail by male lecturers. Naomi tells that her refusal to have sex with a particular lecturer, coupled with her lack of both formal and informal recourse within her university, meant that she was punished with a third-class degree. This qualification did not reflect her true academic achievement and also hampered her later search for employment. Naomi's example complicates assumptions within neoliberal economic development discourse that greater access to formal education equals 'women's empowerment.' It shows that deeper and more structural transformations are needed. Naomi provides a telling counterpoint to the two other women in the documentary, too,

especially when we hear them voicing aspirations to educate their daughters as a route out of poverty. By juxtaposing the particular struggles and hopes of its three protagonists, the film is particularly effective in showing how women in different social positions face interlocking and shifting conditions of patriarchal oppression.

*Daughters of the Niger Delta* ends on a hopeful note nonetheless. Naomi finds a good job; Rebecca's husband agrees to consider family planning options; Hannah initiates discussion within her community about the unfairness of certain widowhood practices. One immediately wonders if and how much the women's participation in the film project contributed to these positive developments, through the certain 'consciousness raising' that may come with reflecting upon and articulating one's experiences of injustice. In their writing about the film, the producers claim that the use of a local and all-woman film crew was central to encouraging Hannah, Rebecca and Naomi to speak so openly about their lives; and that the familiar and everyday identities of the crew members allowed them to venture deeper into the Delta's creeks than foreign and even local journalists may go. I imagine, too, that the local positionality of the crew shaped the film's framing of each woman's story, contributing to its certain sense of integrity and nuance.

Thus the participatory, peer-filmmaking model of *Daughters of the Niger Delta* suggests the potential, the new insights and voices that may emerge, if more Africans are enabled to make critical films and documentaries about their communities and local issues. As well as the projects of non-governmental organisations like MIND, there are a number of regional and pan-African initiatives that aim to train and support filmmakers on the continent. These include 'Imagine,' the film school in Ouagadougou founded by the Burkinabe film director, Gaston Kaboré; 'Maisha's Film Lab,' started by the director Mira Nair in Uganda; and 'Nyerai Films' initiated by author and filmmaker, Tsitsi Dangarembga, in Zimbabwe. We need more of such initiatives in Africa, for which it is vital to devise strategies for independent and sustainable fundraising. It is worth noting here that *Daughters of the Niger Delta* was funded by the Dutch government and Dutch international development agencies.

There is the also structural matter of who is likely to have the opportunity to see such films. *Daughters of the Niger Delta* has been screened at more international than Africa-based film festivals, the latter being relatively

few in number. It has been very well-received; it won the award for best documentary at the 2013 Abuja International Film Festival and at the 2013 LA Femme International Film Festival, and the audience award at the 2013 London Feminist Film Festival. According to its producers, the film has also been used in development programming in various sites in Nigeria, including outside the Delta. This last point is important for putting diverse Nigerian communities into critical conversation. Perhaps most significant and encouraging is that an effort has been made to screen the film within the Delta via a grassroots, mobile cinema initiative. The project of advancing critical and activist filmmaking in Africa must be matched with these kinds of creative efforts to reach local audiences – for us as Africans to increasingly frame our own stories.

### **Cited websites**

<http://www.daughtersofthenigerdelta.org/>

<http://www.mindng.org/>

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Cover photograph: Women Demanding the Release of Angela Davis from Prison in Somali capital Xamar (Mogadishu), 1972. Photographer unknown.

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